

## CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 7-16-2024

### Participants in Attendance

- Alex Newson (WestEd)
- Amy Tavares (Carnegie Mellon University)
- Andrea Haas
- Andrea Philleo
- Ava Gurba (Drexel University)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (University of Arkansas | College Autism Network)
- Danielle Flores (Triton College)
- Erin Hopkins (Augustana College)
- J Edelstein (Berklee College of Music and Boston Conservatory)
- Jeff Callahan
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- Jodi Duke (George Mason University)
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Laura Graham Holmes (CUNY Hunter College)
- Lauren Baczewski (Children's National Hospital)
- Lauren Collier (UMass Amherst)
- Lauren Lestremou Allen (SUNY Empire State University)
- Liam Whitney
- Madeline Mueller (Columbia University)
- Mary Baker-Ericzen (San Diego State University)
- Natasha Vance (Marshall University)
- Sasha Zeedyk (Cal State Fullerton)
- Sierra Hicks
- TC Waisman (Autism Training Academy)

### I. 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](mailto: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](#) (Oct 13-16)
    - a. Proposal notifications have just gone out
- **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. Ken Gobbo mentioned he and Solvegi Shmulsky's new article that debuted in [Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability](#).

## **Presentation Details**

**Presenters:** Alex Newson, PhD (University of Oregon), Erin Hopkins PhD (Case Western Reserve University), Lauren Collier, MA (Associate Director for Disability Services at University of Massachusetts Amherst), Liam Whitney, MS Ed., (COMS, VRT), and Madeline Mueller (MSSW/MPH Candidate at Columbia University)

**Presentation Title:** Cultivating Community through Research: A Participatory Project Exploring the Experiences of Autistic Burnout and Educator Burnout for Autistic Educators in the United States

### **Notes**

- This presentation focused on how to cultivate community through participatory research. In particular, this project centered on the experiences of autistic and educator burnout for autistic educators in the United States. The Autism Intervention Research Network on Physical Health (AIR-P) supported this effort.
- Alex shared how the team drew on a checklist from Bottema-Beutel on identity-first language.
- Team members include 12 people, five of whom are five autistic community partners, as well as seven autistic, neurodivergent, and/or disabled researchers.
- 3.5% of those working in K-12 education are disabled, but this may not account for people who have not been formally diagnosed or disclosed.
- Many disabled teaching candidates may have challenges in getting the right supports.
- A number of barriers (e.g., sensory needs not being met, being in ableist systems) and facilitators (e.g., leveraging special interests, connecting with neurodivergent and disabled students) exist for autistic educators.
- Research shows how autistic individuals have higher rates of co-occurring mental health needs than allistic peers.
- The team aims to focus as much as possible on autistic flourishing and thriving.
- This project featured multiple aims:
  - “Promote the inclusion and participation of ACPs by co-creating and co-producing research through emancipatory participatory research design
  - Explore Autistic educators’ experiences with Autistic burnout, and Autistic flourishing to understand the interaction and interconnection of the phenomena on mental health and wellbeing
  - Determine a set of recommendations to support Autistic educators’ mental health and wellbeing through preventing and reducing the negative impacts of Autistic and educator burnout while promoting Autistic flourishing”
- This endeavor started in September 2023 as part of Alex’s dissertation work. The team met bi-weekly via Zoom. Dissertation reviewed five of the 17 autistic educator interview and survey responses.
- Autistic community partners (ACPs) entailed five being selected from the United States.
- ACPs had an onboarding packet that featured the project overview, context on how to offer feedback, a preferences survey, an availability survey, and a proposed expectation agreement.
- All phases occurred online.

- The team drew on community-based participatory action research in collaboration with the autistic community to help design the research. This work was supported by the AIR-P and mentorship.
- ACPs were involved in all components of the research, from the trainings to data analysis, to distributing the work. Autistic educators, meanwhile, were the participants who engaged in surveys and interviews.
- ACP team meetings met twice a month and went through the Quality Indicator Questionnaire to on a few occasions to figure out how to make improvements. They later engaged in informal check-ins.
- Research trainings were developed with assistance from Dr. Jackie Ryan. Team members engaged in three online modules to focus on topics like ethics and implementation of participatory action research.
- Procedures during Phase 1 entailed co-developing the interview questions and then ultimately engaging in them. Interviews averaged one hour long.
- Phase 1 analysis involved team members engaging in reflexive and template thematic analysis, in which they read transcripts, memoed and coded, generated themes, brought examples to the group, and reviewed feedback.
- Alex brought the research forward, drafted some potential definitions,
- No one definition of autistic flourishing exists, though more recently work has emerged on it. Autistic flourishing often focuses on highlighting autistic autonomy, acknowledging context, and working in partnership with autistic individuals and their community members, among other concepts. Ultimately, the team felt it could be viewed as an “experience of positive physical and psychological wellbeing. Individually defined by the Autistic person but encapsulates an overall quality of life where an Autistic person can thrive and feel supported, safe, and secure within their environment.”
- Team members contributed to figuring out what the framework should look like in light of the original proposed idea.
- Themes were shared with autistic educators, and then they gave feedback on if those themes resonated with them.
- Liam shared lessons learned. For one, collaboration improved study quality. Because ACPs had lived experiences in teaching and dealing with autistic and/or educator burnout, there was a greater sense of authenticity and attentiveness to participants’ and researchers’ needs.
- ACPs reported gaining knowledge and skills, such as interviewing others, creating a survey, and engaging in collaborative problem solving. The research training was very helpful in gleaning context on the process.
- The team expressed how necessary it was to have accessible meetings, such as recording meetings, providing agendas and summaries, and offering clear descriptions of roles, expectations, and timelines.
- Formal and informal feedback options enabled team members to express themselves in a variety of ways. For example, some opted for individual meetings with Alex.

## Questions

- The research training will hopefully be open access in nature.
- Brett asked for the team to elaborate more on the themes

- SPACEE is the acronym that encompassed the topics.
- Sensory experiences recognizes the variety of senses that manifest, including sounds from the classroom and surrounding spaces.
- People and interactions entailed, among other topics, making sense of supports.
- Agency centers on the teacher feeling like they can communicate their needs.
- Climate and culture recognizes the vibes at different levels, including in the school and wider society. Many participants featured diverse gender identities, and often accounted for their intersectional needs.
- Environmental factors accounted for what needs educators expressed, such as one wanting to have walls in their working space.
- Embodied autistic identities allowed for understanding how participants made sense of their autistic beings.
- Lauren B. was wondering how receptive schools were to receive findings.
  - Alex said receiving accommodations is very difficult for educators. Therefore, more are seeking out affinity groups, Changes are happening, albeit slowly at times. Alex sees opportunities for schools to reflect on the models their organizations operate under. Knowing that autistic people are present in spaces can make a big difference for changes to occur. Team members are developing materials that will feature recommendations for specific groups. Jodi added that many neurodivergent students she works with are struggling in their clinical work because of the lack of support. Alex added that many neurodivergent educators are not able to persist in their programming, too, because of these barriers.
- Mary: “I am wondering if it was discussed with educators about whether they disclosed their autism identity to their students and facilitators or barriers to doing that.”
  - Lauren Collier addressed this in the chat: “Great question! I don't believe that the topic of disclosing specifically to students came up. If I recall correctly, the 5 educators we focused on mostly worked with Kindergarten and younger age groups. The conversations were more focused on whether they disclosed to employers. Alex would likely have more info to share though!”
  - Madeline Mueller also offered a response: “Great question! This did come up quite a bit in interviews. A number of educators brought up that they first disclosed their identity with students and parents, particularly those who shared autistic identity. There were a range of experiences with this, of course.”
  - Alex said that some autistic educators disclosed to their students.
- Brett asked about materials and next steps the team is developing.
  - Many autistic educators cannot stay in the school system. They are eager to learn about those who stay in the field and create coping mechanisms. The larger group of 17 participants features those with more diverse racial identities, which will allow for learning more about those distinct experiences.
  - Accounting for Universal Design for Learning practices emerged in their conversations with participants. Autistic educators are seeking reasonable asks, but unfortunately they have often been denied.
- Lauren was wondering if participants shared about being a model for students about their autistic, queer, or neurodivergent identities.
  - Alex shared participants illustrated the value of multiple ways of communicating information and adapting spaces.

- Many educator participants did not share their queer identities to students.
- Autistic flourishing was not necessarily experienced by many participants. Feeling some sense of regulation – or in a flow state, where they were in tune with everything – represented some manifestations of flourishing. It was hard to articulate autistic flourishing when it was experienced firsthand.

### **Future Meetings**

**Date:** Fri, August 9 at 12pm EST

**Presenter:** Natalie Libster (Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Vanderbilt University Medical Center)

**Presentation Title:** Predictors of Sexual Victimization Among Autistic and Non-Autistic College Students

**Presentation Description:** Sexual victimization is a critical and prevalent issue on college campuses, and undergraduate students with certain disabilities are more likely than students without disabilities to be sexually victimized. The current study examined whether autistic college students are more likely than non-autistic students to experience unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault, controlling for co-occurring diagnoses. This study further examined whether students with other disabilities, specifically ADHD, learning disability (LD), and psychological disorders, are more likely than students without these disabilities to experience unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault.

**Date:** Fri, Sept 13 at 2pm EST

**Presenter:** Dana Kanhai (PhD Higher, Adult & Lifelong Education from Michigan State University; Talent Development Specialist)

**Presentation Title:** Faculty response to autistic college students: Faculty supportive behaviors and beliefs

**Presentation Description:** I'll share some key findings from my dissertation research which explored faculty perceptions of their supportive behaviors towards autistic college students and faculty beliefs about their behaviors. Using the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) as a theoretical framework to guide this qualitative research, I interviewed 15 faculty who shared how they supported students in different aspects of their work. I'll share some of the behaviors identified by faculty, some of their beliefs about the benefits of their behaviors, important referents who provided approval or acted as role models, and supports that bolstered faculty resolve to act in supportive ways towards autistic students.