Undergraduate Students with Learning and Attention Disorders: Perceptions and Experiences Regarding Teachers’ Supports and Impacts on Students’ Participation in the Classroom Setting

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Background

Students with disabilities (SWD) have lower college completion rates than their peers in the general population (Newman et al., 2011). Success and retention for SWD in postsecondary programs has been shown to be related to receiving appropriate academic supports and accommodations (Newman et al., 2011, Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). SWD in a postsecondary setting face occupational performance needs in managing and accessing supports related to academic, health and wellness, daily living, social participation and campus life expectations that are compounded by disability-related considerations (Kreider, Bendsen & Lutz, 2015). In particular, supports from teachers impact students’ participation and success in classroom settings. Further research is needed in order to develop and test supportive interventions for successful transition to and participation in postsecondary educational programs for SWD.

Methods

Design & Setting: Qualitative data analysis completed as part of a holistic multi-level four-year study designed to develop, refine and test a model of support for undergraduate students with learning and attention disorders (L/AD) at a research intensive university. Undergraduates participated in monthly group meetings on campus and met individually on a bimonthly basis with a graduate student mentor in their field of study. Undergraduate group meetings consisted of trainings in topic areas related to L/AD followed by focused group discussions with shared personal experiences and strategies. Graduate mentors also received support for L/AD.

Participants: Undergraduate participants (N=46) were recruited through the campus disability office (CDO) with eligibility criteria including undergraduate status, registration with the CDO and eligibility for accommodations.

Analysis: Meeting transcripts and field notes from undergraduate group meetings (n=23) held throughout a three year period were coded into descriptive categories. Discussions related to teacher supports were described (n=15) with undergraduate participants (n=32) contributing to the body of data. Further coding, categorization, and analytic reflection followed resulting in the emergence of themes. To strengthen the rigor of the study, the researchers engaged in triangulation utilizing multiple methods of data collection and data analysis including researchers’ attendance in undergraduate meetings, audio recordings and multiple coders (Golafshani, 2003).

Results

Data from the study reinforces previous research findings that supports from teachers impact students’ participation and success in classroom settings. Findings of the study contribute to understanding factors that influence occupational performance of undergraduate students with L/AD with respect to their participation in a postsecondary educational program.

Discussion

• Collaboration and support from teachers contributes to the level of participation and success of a student with a learning and attention disorder (L/AD) at the postsecondary level.
• Current results support a need for continued research in the development of a model of support at both the secondary and postsecondary levels related to transition, accommodations, and self-advocacy for students with L/AD.
• An overview of teaching styles and methods, environmental and classroom design, and disability awareness is recommended through a multidisciplinary effort.

Conclusions / Implications for Practice

• Students’ perceptions of the accommodations they are afforded and their perceived understanding of teachers’ roles regarding the teachers’ roles and responses regarding the students’ accommodations.

• Students’ perceptions of teachers’ teaching styles in the classroom setting.

• Students’ perceptions of teachers’ reactions toward the students in situations related to their disability.

• Students’ Level of Awareness and Knowledge.

• Students’ perception of teachers’ level of awareness and knowledge related to L/AD and what the students “wished” the teachers knew.

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References


