Supporting Occupational Performance of Undergraduate Students with Learning and Attention Disorders Through Formal Mentorship: Preliminary Analysis

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BACKGROUND

• Students with disabilities (SWD) have lower college completion rates than those without (Newman et al., 2011).
• Mentorships are commonplace supports on college campuses; objectives range from classroom success and career development to providing social support or role models.
• College SWD face occupational performance needs in managing and accessing supports that are compounded by disability-related considerations.
• Research is needed to develop and test supportive interventions for SWD transitioning to and engaging in college activities.
• We examined mentorship experiences of students with learning and attention disorders (L/AD) who received formal mentorship targeting professional and academic development as part of a larger program to support both academics and health/wellness.

METHODS

Design & Setting:

• Qualitative data analysis completed as part of a multi-level four-year study 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 consisting of trainings in topic areas related to L/AD followed by focused group discussions with shared personal experiences and strategies.
• Undergraduates met individually on a bimonthly basis with a graduate student mentor who also received support for L/AD.

Participants:

• Undergraduate participants (N=52) were recruited through the campus disability office (CDO) with eligibility criteria including undergraduate status and eligibility for L/AD accommodations. Analysis draws from data contributed by the first 29 participants enrolled in the study.

Analysis:

• Transcripts and field notes from 15 group meetings held throughout the first two year period of data collection were coded into descriptive categories. Nine transcripts contained data regarding mentorship. Nineteen of 29 participants who were enrolled at that time contributed to discussions regarding mentorship.
• First cycle coding included identification of data relevant to mentorship experiences. Data were further coded to summarize shorter passages without L/AD having a mentor
• Undergraduates spoke about ways that mentors helped them organize their lives and supported them in nonacademic areas including health and wellness routines.
• Structured mentorship programs are viable avenues for supporting occupational performance and needs of students with L/AD within college settings.

Meaningfulness in Mentorships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matter of Time</th>
<th>Albeit Surface Understanding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td>Mentor’s understanding and knowledge of L/AD</td>
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<td>Prioritizing</td>
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DISCUSSION

• Undergraduates described both academic and emotional benefits that supported their occupational performance.
• Undergraduates spoke about ways that mentors helped them organize their lives and supported them in nonacademic areas including health and wellness routines.
• While the mentorship was originally designed for professional development, undergraduates also gained a source of emotional support with some attributing achievement of personal successes to the support of their mentor.

CONCLUSIONS / IMPLICATIONS

• Structured mentorship programs are viable avenues for supporting occupational performance and needs of students with L/AD within college settings.
• Findings contribute knowledge that can be used in guiding the development of mentorship interventions for college students with L/AD.

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes &amp; Sub-themes</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support to Milestones</td>
<td>The types and benefits of mentor supports</td>
<td>Mentor] gave me some insight as too … about [a] Ph.D… I still don’t know exactly what I wanted to do but he gave me some information about where I am headed. And I did community service with him which was cool. And …we are just like hanging out talking about life… it’s just cool to have someone to talk to who is a good listener, understanding and older, so a little bit more wise and all that than my typical friends.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaningfulness in Mentorships</td>
<td>Valuation of the mentorship from the undergraduates’ perspectives</td>
<td>…I think that my relationship with my mentor is just really, really unique in terms of just how well, basically, we just became very close … I guess mitigating weaknesses that come from L/AD…</td>
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Support → Milestones

• Organizational supports
• Academic supports
• Professional supports
• Emotional supports

Meaningfulness in Mentorships

• Matter of Time
• Albeit Surface Understanding

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