Becoming Self-Determined: Improving Self-Determination Skills in College Students with Disabilities

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Background

★Larger & Situated Context

○ Students with disabilities are entering higher education institutions with little to no transition planning to support them in navigating their new environments. Address the disconnect between K-12 Special Education and the transition to the college environment.

★Problem of Practice

○ College students with disabilities at UNLV are often lacking the skills needed to persist in their new environments. Supporting students in building their goal-setting and self-advocacy skills lead to improved levels of self-determination that will help ease their transition to higher education and beyond.

★Role of the Researcher

○ Associate Director of UNLV Disability Resource Center
Theoretical Framework & Related Literature

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985)
- Competence
- Autonomy
- Relatedness

Executive Functioning Coaching

Coaching as Learning (Spence & Oades, 2011)

Group Collaboration

Development of SDCS

Coaching

Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1987)
SELF-Determination for College Success (SDCS) Innovation

Model for Self-Determination reprinted with permission (Field & Hoffman, 1994, 2015).
Know yourself

Students took SDAi to understand SD Levels. Explored their strengths, weaknesses, & disability impacts.

Plan

Students explored their dreams and the impact their disability. Developed long & short-term goals for the semester.

Act

Students developed a plan to measure and track their goal progress. Tracked the steps completed to reach short-term goals.

Experience Outcomes

Students discussed their outcomes and collaborated on strategies for future goal-setting opportunities.

IZ=Individual
GZ=Group
Research questions

RQ 1
What happens to students' self-determination across the Self-Determination for College Success (SDCS) innovation?

RQ 2
What are students' perceptions of the social benefits and/or drawbacks to innovation participation?
Methods

Qualitative action research

- Research in an education setting (Ivankova, 2015)
- Flexible & cyclical to allow for increased knowledge of issues in current practice (Mertler, 2017)

Participants

- Convenience Sampling ($n=4$)
  - Freshmen with ADHD
- Three males & one female
  - Three true freshmen & one 2nd year freshmen
  - Two Las Vegas locals & two out-of-state students
- Three diagnosed in ES & one diagnosed in HS
- One declared major & three still exploring

Setting

- UNLV Disability Resource Center
- All meetings were conducted virtually on Zoom
- Implemented during Spring 2021 semester for 13 weeks
Methods

★ Data Collection
  ○ Self-Determination Assessment *Internet* (SDAi; Hoffman et al., 2015)
  ○ Video-recorded Sessions
    ■ Group \(n=5\)
    ■ Individual \(n=25\)
  ○ Semi-structured Interviews \(n=3\)
  ○ Researcher Journal
  ○ SD Notebook (Discontinued)
Data Analysis

**Initial Phases of Analysis**
In Vivo Coding was done simultaneously during the innovation to find literal codes from student observations and interviews used to develop themes.

**Second Phase of Analysis**
Transitioned from In Vivo Coding to Focused Coding to identify frequent or significant Codes from the initial phase of analysis develop into salient categories.

**Final Phase of Analysis**
Used Theoretical Coding to develop five themes from the data analysis. From these themes, theme-related components and theoretical propositions were developed.
Theoretical Propositions

Building Confidence through competence

Empowerment through self-advocacy

The value of struggle

Student Development throughout the SDCS
Theoretical Propositions

Building Confidence through competence

- Student's self-image & confidence was impacted from high school
- Students navigated their strengths & weaknesses through the lens of their disability
- Students took ownership of their learning & outcomes

Empowerment through self-advocacy

The value of struggle

Student Development throughout the SDCS

The value of struggle
Theoretical Propositions

Building Confidence through competence

Empowerment through self-advocacy
- Students were not empowered to make their own decisions
- Students recognized their responsibility in guiding their education
- Students celebrated their voices and became stronger self-advocates

The value of struggle

Student Development throughout the SDCS
Theoretical Propositions

Student Development throughout the SDCS

Building Confidence through competence

Empowerment through self-advocacy

The value of struggle

- Students *struggled* to understand their disability and uniqueness
- Students *identified* barriers they had experienced during the transition to college
- Students *appreciated* their struggles as learning experiences
Theoretical Propositions

Coaching & Community Building

The Role of the Coach in Building a community

Relationship building through open & honest dialog to support students in overcoming barriers

Implemented coaching strategies to create an environment of empowerment and guided learning

Strengthened sense of community by interacting with students with similar lived experiences and struggles

Developed meaningful relationships and explore different realms of self-exploration with each other

Community of Supportive Relationships
Discussion

- Examined strengths & weaknesses
- License to take control of their lives
- Built self-advocacy skills

- Improved confidence in decision making
- Created their own paths
- Increased confidence in ability to thrive in new environments

- Bonded through mutual experiences
- Identified a common thread that created trusting relationships
- Created their own community

Coaching as Learning (Spence & Oades, 2011)
- Facilitated space to share information
- Adjusted techniques to support student need
- Created meaningful connections

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985)
- Competence
- Autonomy
- Relatedness
- Coaching

ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978)
Research questions

RQ 1

What happens to students’ self-determination across the Self-Determination for College Success (SDCS) innovation?

RQ 2

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Limitations

- Student engagement with DRC
- Spring implementation of the study
Implications for Practice & Research

**P1**

STudent Retention & Support

DRC and Campus Wide

**R1**

Year-long implementation

True Freshmen

**P2**

Implement sdc's across campuses

AHEAD & Coaching Community

**R2**

Spring Semester

Off-Cycle Freshmen

**P3**

Collaborate

Dr. Sharon Field

steps + SDCS

Bridging from HS to College
Future Conversations

- How can we improve collaboration with transition counselors and disability professionals?
- How can empower disability professionals and administrators to continue discussions that support student retention and access to campus resources?
Thank you for your time today. I invite any questions and/or comments you may have about my study.
Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory.* (2nd ed.). SAGE.


