Creating a Plan for Engaging Neurodiverse Students

Team Leader: Ali Jensen
Jacque Hoeft,
Katie Schremp, & George Theotokatos

Western Illinois University

Terms and Definitions

→ **Neurodiversity:** the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population.

→ **Universal Design:** refers to broad-spectrum ideas meant to produce buildings, products and environments that are inherently accessible to all people.

Assumptions

➔ New to school- limited institutional knowledge
➔ Creating a program outline
➔ Budget is coming from income funds
➔ Disability Resource Center provides advocacy
➔ Other offices focus on inclusion, integration, education
➔ Orientation is a part of transitional programming
➔ Change is a slow process

The Process

1. Identify Stakeholders - people who have a vested interest in the outcome of the program
2. Ask stakeholders a question to get their input: "What do you want participants to get out of or learn from this program?"
3. Create learning outcomes based off themes from conversations with stakeholders
4. Bring learning outcomes to stakeholders and ask for feedback or verification of statements being written out correctly
5. Consider relevant theories and research while developing a learning environment/program that can achieve the learning outcomes
6. More follow up- bring model to all stakeholders and present it ask for more feedback
7. After finalization of the model, develop formative and summative assessment

Stakeholders

➔ Students with autism
➔ Students who interact with students with autism
➔ Students who have no interaction with students with autism
➔ Faculty
➔ Director of Disability Services
➔ Residence Life
➔ Office of Student Activities
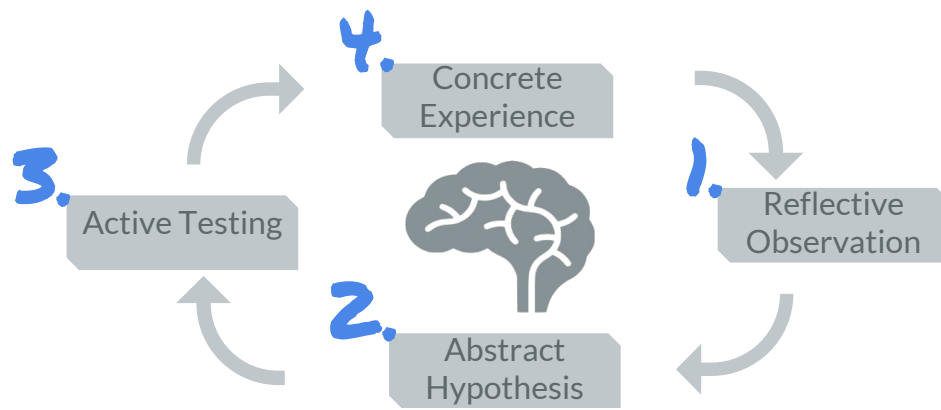➔ Mental Health Services

Learning Outcomes

Students who participate in the full program will be able to…

…express and advocate for their academic (support) needs to professors and peers.

…interact and foster meaningful relationships with each other.

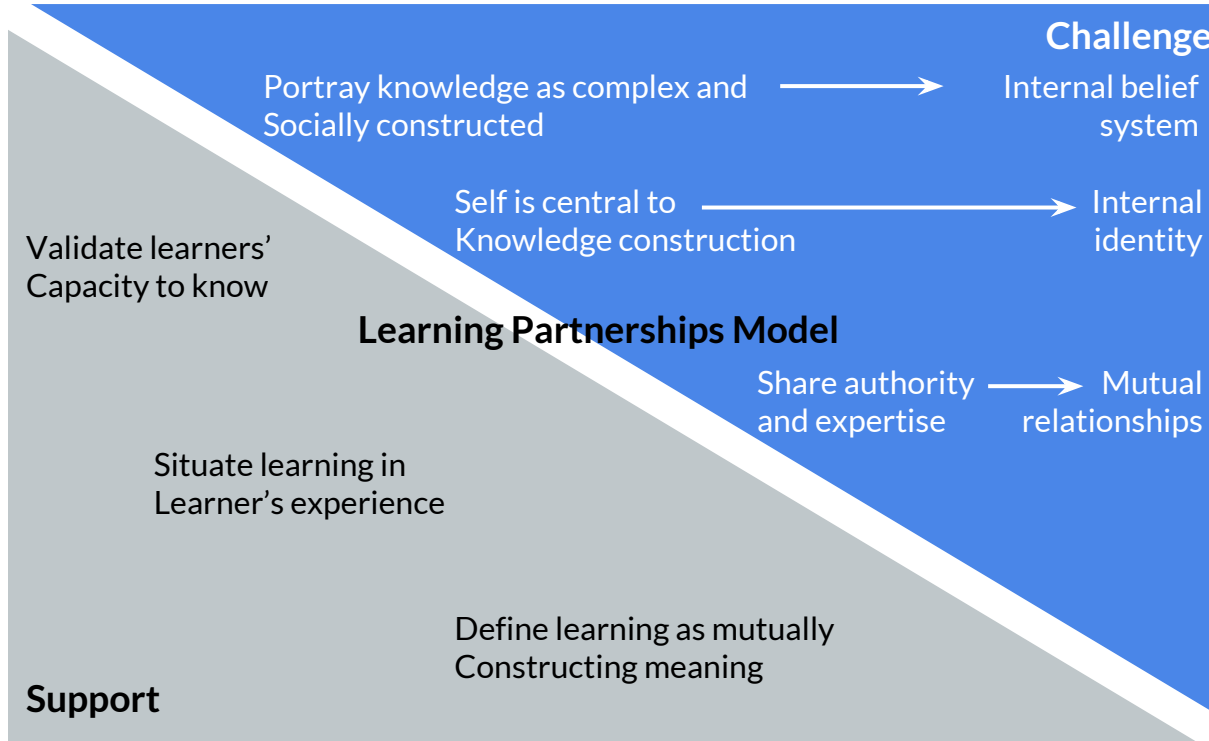…recognize their value and importance to the campus community.
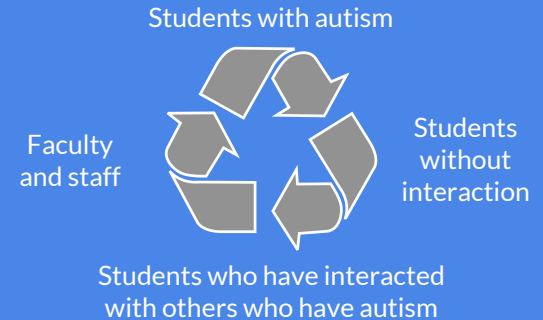
Theory: The Learning Cycle

1. **Reflective Observation:** a. Stereotypes b. Previous lived experience c. Media
2. **Abstract Hypothesis:** a. Idea of how program will go
3. **Active Testing:** a. Participating in the program
4. **Concrete Experience:** a. What participants learned from the program

Zull, J. E. (2002). *The art of changing the brain.* Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Theory: Learning Partnerships Model

Challenge

Portray knowledge as complex and Socially constructed → Internal belief system

Validate learners' Capacity to know

Self is central to Knowledge construction → Internal identity

Learning Partnerships Model

Share authority and expertise → Mutual relationships

Situate learning in Learner's experience
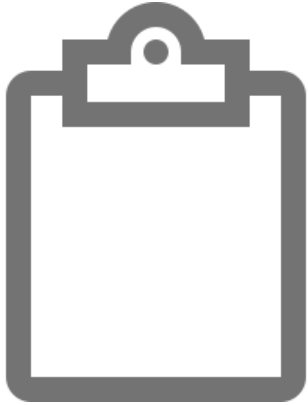
Define learning as mutually Constructing meaning

Support

- Challenge and Support
- Validation of knowledge
- Share experiences
- Everyone is a learner
- Everyone is a knower

Students with autism

Faculty and staff

Students without interaction

Students who have interacted with others who have autism

Baxter Magolda, M.B. (2004). Learning partnerships model: A framework for promoting self-authorship. In M.B. Baxter Magolda & P.M. King (Eds.), *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship* (pp. 37-62). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Research to Take Into Consideration

➜ On average, students with disabilities take more than 6 years to graduate

➜ Living on campus is a significant indicator of retention for students with disabilities

➜ Students with disabilities with some level of social engagement are 10% more likely to be retained

➜ Over half of students with disabilities are dissatisfied with their current involvement

➜ Mentoring programs have been identified as useful way to aid in success and retention for students with disabilities

➜ Students with disabilities more often lack self-advocacy skills - identified as "crucial" to student success

➜ Many students with disabilities struggle with transition

Quaye, S. J., Harper, S. R. (2015) *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations.* New York, NY: Rutledge.

Program Outline

Foundation of program is the implementation of universal design into transitional programs.

1. Orientation
   a. Add a session to new student orientation that address how students can self-advocate
   b. This program should be created with universal design in mind
2. Training
   a. Training for mentors that prepares them for supporting neurodiverse students (universal design)
3. Mentorship
   a. Mentorship program should not be limited to serving a specific population, rather a mentoring program will be open to all students (universal design)
   b. Mentorship should begin in first year
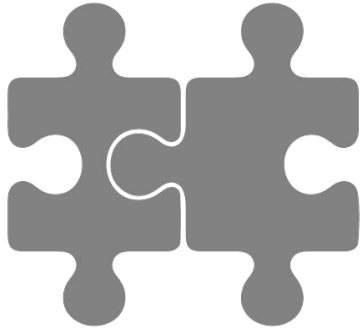
Integration of Theory and Research

→ Learning Cycle creates transformative learning opportunities for students

→ Learning partnerships create a shared experience for all participants

→ Mentoring programs have been identified as useful way to aid in success and retention for students with disabilities

→ Students with disabilities more often lack self-advocacy skills - identified as "crucial" to student success

◆ It has been found that mentoring programs can help develop this skill

→ Many students with disabilities struggle with transition

Strategy for Meeting Learning Outcomes

1 ...express and advocate for their academic (support) needs to professors and peers.

➔ Learn this during orientation session and through interactions with mentors.

2 ...interact and foster meaningful relationships with each other.

➔ Learn through mentorship program.
➔ Emphasis on universal design.

3 ...recognize their value and importance to the campus community.

➔ Mentors learn during training process and through interactions with students
➔ Students learn via interactions with mentors

Assessment

➜ Two types of assessment:
  ◆ Formative-along the way
  ◆ Summative-at the end
➜ Created to assess learning outcomes
➜ Member checking for feedback and follow-up
➜ Focus groups could be created to assess the learning that is occurring during the program that is created and the feedback from the focus groups could be implemented in the program to make it better
➜ Creation of a task force made up of students, faculty, and staff to assess universal design in orientation, mentorship program, and other departments on campus

Budget: Where Do We Get The Money?

→ Roughly 4 pots of money at each institution

  ◆ Amount in each pot various by type of school (public vs. private; large vs. mid size vs. small; etc.)

→ Disability Services should not be taking in money

  ◆ Not an auxiliary - no money from auxiliaries

→ That leaves: Income Fund, Endowment, and Grants

  ◆ Grants take a while to obtain - will delay process of program

→ Money should come from Income Fund or Endowment depending on financial situation of institution

Income Fund:
Tuition
Some Student Fees
State Appropriations
Cannot be used for Auxiliaries

Auxiliaries:
Some student fees
Can only be used to fund Auxiliaries

Endowment/ Foundation:
Donations
Can be used for anything

Grants:
Can be used for department that applies for grant

*Money does not necessarily need to come from Disability Services because this program is about implementing universal design across the university, which is not Disability Services's responsibility.

Budget: What Will We Need?

Things to Consider:

➔ Staff compensation
➔ Supplies needed
➔ Space/catering costs
➔ Advertisment

Disadvantages

→ May take more manpower than what has already been established

→ Will need cross-campus buy-in to make the program effective

→ Orientation session will need to be engaging enough to reach students will different abilities/learning styles

◆ May require additional training for presenters

Advantages

- ➔ Universal design creates an environment that is inclusive of everyone
  - ◆ This program could reach more than just students with autism
- ➔ Minimal changes/additions to programs that may already be in place
- ➔ This program is built for longevity in order to help students persist
- ➔ Potential for minimal budgetary needs

References

- Baxter Magolda, M.B. (2004). Learning partnerships model: A framework for promoting self-authorship. In M.B. Baxter Magolda & P.M. King (Eds.), *Learning partnerships: Theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship* (pp. 37-62). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1989). *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. P. 236-243.
- Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Pearson Education
- Zull, J. E. (2002). *The art of changing the brain*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Quaye, S. J., Harper, S. R. (2015) *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations*. New York, NY: Rutledge.