Exploring the self-disclosure process in peer mentoring relationships for transition-age youth with developmental disabilities

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EXPLORING THE SELF-DISCLOSURE PROCESS IN PEER MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS FOR TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

by

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ABSTRACT

Limited involvement of youth with developmental disabilities (DD) in mentoring programs has resulted in limited knowledge about the quality and impact of these relationships. The self-disclosure process has been identified as one factor impacting relationship development (Reis & Shaver, 1988). We proposed a theoretical model to examine the role of the self-disclosure process as a mechanism in peer mentoring relationship development for transition-age youth with DD by determining if self-disclosure occurred, the type of information shared, how peer mentors responded, and if the process differed by perceived relationship quality. This retrospective, observational study purposefully selected nine peer mentoring dyads from a problem-solving intervention with a peer mentoring component to examine relationships judged by the researchers, peer mentors, and peer mentor supporters to be of variable quality (strong, moderate, weak), including 9 youth and 5 peer mentors with DD. Peer mentoring included 8 structured calls each with specific objectives. Phone call recordings were coded and dyads were grouped by perceived quality to determine how the self-disclosure process differed by relationship quality. The findings indicated self-disclosure occurred in each relationship at high rates (59%) and peer mentors responded to almost all self-disclosures (98%). A higher quantity of self-disclosure and more frequent disclosure of
emotions were found in relationships of higher quality. Peer mentors in higher quality relationships more frequently responded to self-disclosure with advice or their own self-disclosure. Implications of findings and use of the self-disclosure process as a mechanism for promoting high quality peer mentoring relationships are discussed.
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Introduction

With the increasing popularity of mentoring programs comes the growing need to understand the development of mentoring relationships and the factors that impact relationship quality (Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005). The effectiveness of mentoring programs in supporting positive development has been repeatedly demonstrated (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Eby et al., 2013; Spencer, 2006). Previous research has explored mentoring relationship quality as an indicator of the degree of success in these relationships. Quality has been consistently linked to positive outcomes with higher quality relationships leading to a greater impact across outcomes, such as increased problem-solving skills, goal achievement, and identity development (Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike, & Larose, 2006; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Rhodes & Lowe, 2009). Yet, much remains unknown about the specific processes that lead to higher quality mentoring relationships.

A mentoring relationship can be defined as a dyadic relationship in which one individual, who is frequently older and more experienced, offers support and guidance to a less experienced individual (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001). Peer-mentoring relationships involve two individuals who share a common characteristic or similar level of experience, where one individual provides support to the other (Balcazar, Kelly, Keys, & Belfanz-Vertiz, 2011). Mentoring programs utilize mentoring relationships as a means of promoting positive outcomes for a wide range of ages and for many specific populations (Britner et al., 2006; Eby et al., 2013; Ensher et al., 2001; Shpigelman & Gill, 2012; Sipe, 2002). These populations often include at-risk youth, college students, and
new employees.

One population that historically has had limited participation in mentoring programs is individuals with disabilities, resulting in relatively few studies on the impact of mentoring for this population (Ahrens, Dubois, Lozano, & Richardson, 2010; Bell, 2012; Britner et al., 2006; Shpigelman & Gill, 2012; Stumbo, Blegen, Lindahl-Lewis, 2008). An exception is the growing recognition of the benefits of peer support for individuals with psychiatric disabilities, including increased self-advocacy and quality of life (Chinman, et al., 2014; Gidugu et al., 2014). This recognition, combined with the limited, yet positive evidence for the population as a whole, indicates that the impact of mentoring for individuals with disabilities is consistent with the larger body of work on mentoring (Ahrens et al., 2010; Bell, 2012; Britner et al., 2006; Rhodes & Lowe, 2009).

Within the population of individuals with disabilities, studies on the participation of individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (DD) and more specifically transition-age youth with DD in mentoring relationships are almost nonexistent. Considering these individuals often report decreased rates of social participation and employment (Bedell et al., 2013; Harris Interactive, 2010; Shattuck, Orsmond, Wagner, & Cooper, 2011), the potential benefits of mentoring could be particularly salient for this population. A few studies have examined the impact of peers with DD and showed these individuals were successful as peer tutors in promoting skill development (Bobroff & Sax, 2010; Hibbert, Kostinas, & Luiselli, 2002). Although there has been limited involvement of individuals with DD in a mentoring role, consistency in the benefits of mentoring across populations, suggests there could be a positive impact
for transition-age youth with DD (Britner et al., 2006; Chinman et al., 2014; Rhodes & Lowe, 2009).

Because of limited research on mentoring relationships for youth with DD there are many questions about the development, quality, and effectiveness of mentoring relationships for transition-age youth with DD. Rhodes and Lowe (2009) indicated that mentoring relationships for these individuals may differ from others, particularly in the need for greater structure. Thus there is a need to examine mentoring relationships for transition-age youth with DD to understand the nature of these relationships.

To determine why some mentoring relationships are of greater quality than others, it is necessary to first identify and evaluate components of these relationships that could contribute to quality. However, evaluating quality of mentoring relationships, as with any type of relationship, presents a challenge due to the number and complexity of factors involved in development and maintenance of these relationships. Deutsch and Spencer (2009) provided a framework for evaluating the quality of mentoring relationships. They defined four dimensions of quality: duration, consistency and frequency, mentor approach, and connection. Each of these dimensions was proposed to influence the overall quality of the mentoring relationship. In addition to considering the impact of each individual dimension, it is likely that relationships exist among these dimensions.

The dimensions of duration and consistency and frequency account for structural elements of mentoring relationships. Duration was defined as the length of the relationship (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Consistency and frequency were combined to form the second dimension and include the reliability of contact between the mentor and
mentee in addition to the quantity of contact. A greater amount of contact and greater consistency across the relationship may offer the opportunity for further relationship development and greater benefits (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Mentor and mentee expectations for the amount of contact were also identified as important as unmet expectations are likely to negatively impact perceived relationship quality.

Mentor approach is the third dimension of quality defined by Deutsch and Spencer (2009). This dimension encompasses both the overall view the mentor has of the relationship and the specific ways in which the mentor interacts with the mentee. Higher quality relationships are more likely to develop when mentors use a developmental approach and value mutuality within the relationship (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). A developmental approach focuses on establishing a relationship and emphasizes the mentee’s goals and expectations as opposed to the mentor’s (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Relationships where mentors value mutuality and collaboration are likely to be of higher quality as well, such as those where mentors collaborate with mentees to solve problems (Spencer, 2006).

Connection, the fourth dimension of relationship quality, may be the most significant as it is consistently cited throughout the literature in relation to mentoring relationship quality (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Rhodes & Lowe, 2009, Shpigelman & Gill, 2012). This connection includes the sense of trust and overall bond developed between the mentor and mentee. In some ways, the connection can be described as the core of the relationship, which then impacts other aspects of the relationship including the three dimensions of quality described previously. The three other dimensions can also
reciprocally impact the development of a connection (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Rhodes & Lowe, 2009). Consistent with the other dimensions, the development of a connection has implications for the overall quality of the relationship, as a perceived connection is related to higher relationship quality (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Yet operationalizing and measuring connection in the context of a mentoring relationship can be challenging.

Self-disclosure is one process that can be examined to better understand the development of a connection in intimate relationships (Reis & Shaver, 1988). This process can be defined as “the disclosure of inner feelings and experiences to another person” which “fosters liking, caring, and trust, thereby facilitating the deepening of close relationships” (Reis & Shaver, 1988, p. 372). Recently, self-disclosure has been considered in mentoring relationships (Thomson & Zand, 2009; Wanberg, Welsh, & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007). Thomson and Zand (2009) showed a predictive relationship between youths’ self-disclosure to adults and reported mentoring relationship quality. In a corporate work context, mentee self-disclosure was positively related to mentee satisfaction in the relationship (Wanberg et al., 2007). One approach to understanding the process of self-disclosure is applying The Model of the Intimacy Process, proposed by Reis and Shaver (1988), to individual interactions within mentoring relationships. The Model of the Intimacy Process describes a dynamic interaction between two individuals that includes self-disclosure, response to self-disclosure, and interpretation of the response (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Although the process of self-disclosure has begun to be examined in mentoring relationships, self-disclosure has not been examined in the context of mentoring relationships including individuals with disabilities.
The occurrence of self-disclosure alone is influenced by many factors that are difficult to measure, including the individual’s motives and overall willingness to share (Reis & Shaver, 1988; Rhodes & Lowe, 2009). The content of self-disclosure can also vary greatly from descriptive information, including personal facts, to evaluative information in the form of feelings, judgments, and opinions (Laurenceau, Barrett & Pietromonaco, 1998; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Evaluative self-disclosures can be further expanded to distinguish between positive and negative emotions. Howell and Conway (1990) showed that positive emotions are often judged to be more appropriate to self-disclose to all individuals while negative emotions are considered to be more intimate and more appropriate for close relationships. The content of self-disclosure, in terms of perceived intimacy, can influence the degree of connection developed in the relationship (Howell & Conway, 1990; Laurenceau et al., 1998). Specifically, the potential degree of impact of evaluative self-disclosures on relationship development is greater than descriptive self-disclosures. When applied to mentoring relationships, a greater connection may develop when the mentor and mentee are not only willing to share descriptive personal information, but also willing to self-disclose emotions (Laurenceau et al., 1998).

The mentor’s response to self-disclosure is a significant aspect of relationship development that should be explored (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Both Social Exchange Theory and Equity Theory (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001; Reis & Shaver, 1988) propose similar ideas that a greater connection should form when the content of the response from the mentor is equivalent to the content of the self-disclosure by the
mentee. The mentor’s response can be described as either “conversational” or “relational”. Conversational responses are defined as responses to disclosure “through which the recipient indicates interest in and understanding of that communication” (Berg, 1987, p. 102). Relational responses are defined as responses that “indicate that he or she is concerned with and taking account of another’s outcomes or needs” (Berg, 1987, p. 103). Overall, these types of responses differ in terms of the degree of concern they may demonstrate to the discloser. A relational response demonstrates a greater degree of concern and may be a driver of relationship quality. Both Social Exchange Theory and Equity Theory suggest the need for a balance in the exchange of resources such as knowledge and support for positive relationship formation (Ensher et al., 2001; Reis & Shaver, 1988). This need for balance is consistent with the importance of mutuality in mentoring relationship quality (Spencer, 2006). When considering balance in the exchange and mutuality, relational responses may facilitate greater development of a connection, as they may have a greater potential to reciprocate the intimacy of a disclosure, particularly a highly intimate disclosure.

To further understand how the process of self-disclosure may influence mentoring relationship quality, the authors propose a theoretical model (Figure 1), which situates the self-disclosure process (Reis & Shaver, 1988) within the four dimensions of relationship quality described previously (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). Specifically, this model conceptualizes the process of self-disclosure as a direct influence on the dimension of connection and a possible indirect influence on the remaining three dimensions. As shown in Figure 1, the self-disclosure process begins with self-disclosure of descriptive
or evaluative information by the mentee (Laurenceau et al., 1998). Following disclosure, the mentor has the opportunity to respond, which may take various forms including conversational and relational responses (Berg, 1987). The process then shifts back to the mentee who interprets the mentor’s response based on the degree to which the response fulfills the mentee’s needs and expectations. In turn, this interpretation potentially impacts the development of a connection between the mentee and peer mentor, the likelihood that the mentee will disclose again, and the overall quality of the relationship. This model proposes the process of self-disclosure as a mechanism for the development of a connection and a quality mentoring relationship.

This study is part of a larger project examining the effectiveness of Project TEAM (Teens making Environment and Activity Modifications), a program for transition-age youth with developmental disabilities. A component of Project TEAM is a peer mentoring relationship between a mentee, referred to as a Project TEAM trainee, and a mentor, both of whom have a developmental disability. The purpose of this study is to explore self-disclosure in peer mentoring relationships with transition-age youth and young adults with developmental disabilities.

*Research Questions:*

1. How do youth with developmental disabilities self-disclose in structured peer mentoring relationships?

   1a. If self-disclosure occurs, what type of information do youth with developmental disabilities disclose?

2. How do peer mentors with developmental disabilities respond to self-disclosure?
3. How are patterns in self-disclosure and response related to perceived quality of peer mentoring relationships for youth with developmental disabilities?

*Peer Mentoring and Project TEAM*

Project TEAM is a problem-solving intervention for transition-age youth with disabilities that aims to promote participation in desired activities by teaching youth to address environmental barriers. Project TEAM trainees are taught to identify parts of their environment that limit participation, utilize strategies to modify these barriers, and request accommodations. The intervention consists of 8 modules taught across 16 group sessions. Over the course of the intervention, trainees are taught the “Game Plan”, which uses a goal-plan-do-check approach to resolve physical and social environmental barriers to participation (Kramer, Roemer, Liljenquist, Shin, & Hart, 2014). The goal-plan-do-check approach is practiced by trainees each week over the course of the intervention and applied to an individualized Project TEAM participation goal each trainee identified at the start of the intervention. Project TEAM has been implemented in two metropolitan areas in the Midwest and New England (NE).

One component of the Project TEAM intervention is a peer mentoring relationship in which young adults, ages 18 to 36, with DD who are familiar with Project TEAM (e.g., through previous completion of the intervention) are employed as peer mentors. Matches of mentors and trainees are based on the schedule of the mentor and trainee as well as a shared interest or expertise related to the trainee’s goal. Peer mentors receive a 2-hour training on the role of a peer mentor and the purpose of the peer
mentoring phone calls. This mentoring relationship is structured with a total duration of 12 weeks. Within these 12 weeks, the frequency of contact includes 8 mentoring phone calls, 1 to 2 face-to-face contacts (dependent upon the peer mentor’s availability to attend the first and last group sessions), and attending one community outing related to the trainee’s goal. The consistency of contact is about once a week for most dyads.

The structure of peer mentoring phone calls is consistent across each call. The 8 phone calls include an introduction, an opportunity to learn more about each other, discussion of progress towards the trainee’s Project TEAM goal, review of the content of the week’s module, practice of the steps of the Game Plan, an opportunity to ask questions, and a reminder to complete the week’s practice activity. Each call is divided into 7 objectives based on this structure and focuses on a theme such as favorite restaurants, outdoor activities, and travel. Calls become progressively longer; each week, as each new Game Plan step is taught (Goal, Plan, Do, Check), the mentor and trainee practice more steps of the Game Plan by applying it to activities of interest based on call theme (Kramer et al., 2013).

In order to facilitate the success of the peer mentoring relationship, a variety of supports are provided for the peer mentor. First, mentors use a script to achieve each of the 7 objectives. For each objective, the script provides questions and responses that can be used verbatim by the mentor as well as questions that offer additional support or clues if the trainee needs clarification or assistance. Scripts are designed to be easy to follow and use symbols, images, and colors to distinguish sections of the script. The script provides suggestions for how the mentor could approach the relationship by offering
assurances, asking follow-up questions, and providing opportunities for the peer mentor to disclose. For example, when identifying a practice goal the script includes a response of “That’s a great goal! Can you tell me more about it?” These features in the script may promote mutuality in the relationship.

A peer mentor supporter provides the second type of support to peer mentors. These supporters are available before, during, and after each call to assist the mentor by reviewing the call objectives, providing examples, offering alternative explanations, and helping the mentor to identify an optimal response to the trainee’s questions or disclosures. Peer mentor supporters avoid direct interaction with trainees. The intensity of the use of supports including the script and peer mentor supporter is determined by the mentor’s needs and preferences.

Methods

This study used a retrospective observational design to examine self-disclosure. Nine peer mentor dyads (Table 1) and 64 of a possible 72 calls were analyzed for this study. Missing calls were due to trainee absences for scheduled calls. Dyads included 6 from NE (2 for each quality level) and 3 dyads from the Midwest (1 for each quality level). More dyads were selected in NE as more study participants were enrolled in NE and more peer mentors were hired in NE. Dyads selected represented 2 of 2 cohorts in the Midwest and 2 of 5 in NE due to availability of data. In the NE location, 4 young adults with a variety of developmental disabilities participated as peer mentors and all peer mentors attended the first and/or last group session. In the Midwest location, one individual with a developmental disability served as mentor for all trainees and attended
every group session as a co-leader. Selected mentors varied in their level of experience. Peer mentors had 0 to 6 previous mentoring relationships for each dyad included in this study (Table 1). Peer mentor supporters, who were graduate occupational therapy students and a social worker, completed a Project TEAM training, were required to pass a test of intervention concepts at 90% or higher, and were supervised by the study’s primary investigator (PI). Each phone call was audio recorded by the peer mentor or the peer mentor supporter. In addition, the peer mentor or peer mentor supporter recorded notes about call attendance and information shared during the call.

Dyads were purposefully selected to include relationships of variable quality (strong, moderate, weak). Reflections of the peer mentor and peer mentor supporter at the conclusion of the relationship and perceptions of the PI were used to determine the degree of quality of each relationship. Three dyads were selected for each quality level (Table 2). Weak relationships were characterized by: a peer mentor’s self-reported feelings of frustration throughout the peer mentoring process; a peer mentor supporter’s identification of frustration throughout the peer mentoring process by both the trainee and the peer mentor; and/or dyads in which the mentee ended calls without completing all objectives (i.e., hung up, asked to stop the call). Moderate relationships were characterized by: a peer mentor’s self-reported feelings of an ‘ok’ relationship; and peer mentor supporter’s assessment that the mentor and/or the mentee were engaged but with occasional frustration or engaged but did not consistently demonstrate enthusiasm for the relationship. Strong relationships were characterized by: a peer mentor’s self-reported feelings of excitement about the experience of mentoring a trainee; and a peer mentor’s
assessment that both the mentor and mentee appeared engaged and enthusiastic consistently throughout the peer mentoring process. We chose not to use trainees’ perceptions to categorize and identify relationships; previous research suggests mentored individuals report positive aspects of relationships with little variability among mentoring dyads (Rhodes et al., 2005).

A coding scheme was developed to analyze audio recordings of the peer mentoring phone calls (Table 3). The theoretical model of the role of self-disclosure guided the development and structure of the coding scheme, specifically the inclusion of codes describing trainee self-disclosure and peer mentor response. In addition, a mentoring relationship quality questionnaire (Rhodes et al., 2005) informed the development of codes for distinct types of “relational” responses. This questionnaire includes items that assess a mentor’s use of advice and empathy to measure relationship quality from the mentee’s perspective. Therefore, these types of responses were included in the coding scheme as possible indicators of quality.

Three graduate occupational therapy students served as coders, with two coders independently rating the audio recordings of each call. All calls were coded by the first author, who was not involved in the implementation of Project TEAM. The remaining two coders were graduate students who had previously implemented the Project TEAM intervention; one coder assisted at group sessions, and a second coder was a peer mentor supporter for one of the dyads investigated. The educational and experiential background of the coders likely impacted the coding process (Primeau, 2003), as the coders were educated with the philosophy that all individuals can be successful in any type of task
when given appropriate support. The raters’ perceptions of the youths’ success in participating in the peer mentoring relationship may have been impacted by this philosophy. Awareness of the purpose of the study to examine self-disclosure potentially influenced the degree to which data was considered self-disclosure. The coders were also aware of the predicted strength of each relationship prior to coding phone calls, which may have influenced the interpretation.

After independently rating each call, the coders met to compare codes and reach consensus. Consensus for rating discrepancies was achieved by identifying discrepancies in coding files, jointly listening to specific objectives of the phone calls in which the discrepancy occurred, and discussing components of the data that best matched each code definition. Specific coding decisions were documented and referred to throughout the coding process to promote consistency in coding. The PI of Project TEAM served as an additional coder to resolve discrepancies as needed.

**Data Analysis**

For all research questions, frequencies and/or percentages for codes were calculated for each call for each peer mentoring dyad. For each described code, an additional code defined as an absence of the described code was utilized during coding procedures but was not part of data analysis. These frequencies and percentages of self-disclosure, content of self-disclosure, mentor response, and type of response were examined across the 8 calls for patterns (increasing/decreasing trends, etc.) to determine if the peer mentoring relationship changed over time. Missed calls were considered missing data and excluded from data analysis. However, calls where the trainee ended the
call prematurely by hanging up were considered a missed opportunity for disclosure and included in data analysis.

For research Question 1 and 1a, each objective/section of the peer mentor call was conceptualized as a separate opportunity to self-disclose. Due to the structure of the calls, the total opportunities to self-disclose varied by call; calls occurring later in the intervention had more opportunities (more steps of the Game Plan were completed with each call). Thus, we report percentages of opportunities to self-disclose for each dyad to enable a comparison of self-disclosure patterns across calls and across dyads. Frequencies of codes were calculated and transformed into percentages by dividing the frequency of the code by the number of opportunities for the code to occur. There were a total of 81 opportunities for the trainee to disclose across the 8 calls with individual calls providing 7 to 14 opportunities to disclose.

To address Question 2, rate of mentor response to self-disclosure and response type was analyzed using percentages. Coding of mentor response was dependent on the occurrence of self-disclosure by the mentee and thus opportunities to respond were defined as the frequency of mentee self-disclosure. Percentages were used to account for variability in the number of opportunities to respond across dyads. These percentages were calculated by dividing the frequency of each code by the frequency of mentee self-disclosure.

Question 3 was examined by first grouping dyads by perceived relationship quality (strong, moderate, weak). Mean percentages were calculated within each group. Means were then compared across quality groupings across calls.
Findings

Across the 9 dyads, call attendance ranged from 75 to 100%, with all trainees attending at least 6 of the 8 calls. Call attendance rates were similar across strong, moderate, and weak relationships (88 to 92%). Because there was a wide range in frequencies by individual dyads, frequency ranges are presented for individual dyad in Table 4 and 5. Self-disclosure by the trainee occurred 14% to 79% (M= 59%) of opportunities, with the majority of self-disclosures including a fact (84%). As shown in Figure 2, across the 8 calls for all dyads frequency of overall self-disclosure showed: a slight decrease across the first 4 calls, stable across calls 5 to 7, and an increase in call 8 which had the highest rate of overall self-disclosure (70%). When examining specific content of disclosure, disclosure of facts across the 8 calls for all dyads was variable with no clear trend (61 to 85%). Self-disclosure of all emotions showed an increasing trend from call 2 (29%) to call 6 (62%). Trends in self-disclosure of positive emotions were variable with an overall slight decreasing trend. Disclosure of negative emotions was also variable with an increasing trend from call 2 (17%) to call 6 (61%; Figure 3).

Peer mentors responded to self-disclosure in 94 to 100% of opportunities (Table 5). Mentor responses included a conversational response 92% of the time and/or a relational response 78% of the time (responses could contain both types of responses). The frequency of conversational responses was variable with no clear trend and a range of 78 to 93% across the 8 calls for all dyads. The frequency of relational responses for all dyads showed a decreasing trend across the first 4 calls (87 to 66%), was consistently high in calls 5 through 7 (87 to 89%), and sharply declined in call 8 (52%). The most
common type of relational response used was a question while the least common type was advice. Two notable trends in relational response types were the decreasing trend of empathy from call 2 to call 6 and the increasing trend of advice from call 5 to call 8 (Figure 3). There were no clear trends over time in the frequency of questions or self-disclosure by the peer mentor. The majority of conversational and relational responses were supported by the peer mentoring script; peer mentors responded using the peer mentoring script or the script in combination with his or her own additions 89% of the time.

Comparison across the three qualities of relationships (strong, moderate, weak), showed overall self-disclosure by the trainee occurred in relationships categorized as strong (63%) and moderate (64%) at a similar frequency. However, the frequency of overall self-disclosure was reduced in relationships categorized as weak (50%). The content of the disclosure did appear to have larger differences between the three qualities of relationships (Figure 4). When considering the number of facts disclosed for each opportunity, trainees disclosed multiple facts related to Project TEAM most frequently in relationships categorized as strong (62%) and least frequently in relationships categorized as weak (46%). However when unrelated facts were disclosed, trainees shared more than one fact at similar frequencies in relationships categorized as strong (87%) and moderate (88%).

Self-disclosure of emotions occurred most frequently in relationships perceived as strong (38%) while frequencies were similar for relationships perceived as moderate (30%) and weak (31%). The types of emotions disclosed were similar for strong and
weak relationships with the majority being positive emotions, 73% and 75% respectively. Conversely, trainees in moderate relationships disclosed negative emotions (69%) much more frequently than positive emotions (30%). Consistent with trends in overall self-disclosure of emotions, trainees in strong relationships more frequently disclosed multiple emotions (17%) when compared to moderate and weak relationships (10%).

Peer mentors responded to self-disclosure at equivalent frequencies across strong (99%), moderate (98%), and weak relationships (97%). The type of response varied slightly across relationships of varying quality. Frequencies of conversational responses suggest these types of responses may occur slightly more frequently in higher quality relationships (Strong: 95%, Moderate: 93%, Weak: 89%). Relational responses were used slightly more frequently in relationships categorized as moderate (80%) compared to strong (78%) and weak (76%). The specific type of relational response varied across strong, moderate, and weak relationships, with mentors in strong relationships providing advice and their own self-disclosure at higher frequencies than in moderate and weak relationships (Figure 5). However, empathy was highest in relationships categorized as moderate. The peer mentors responded to disclosure with a question at similar frequencies across the relationships (92% (Strong), 91% (Moderate), 89% (Weak)).

Finally, the theoretical model was used to interpret the data and understand the impact of its proposed mechanisms. Although examples of trainee self-disclosure and peer mentor responses are presented in Tables 4 and 5, the model demonstrates the importance of examining the trainee’s self-disclosure paired with the peer mentor’s response; it is these individual exchanges which may have implications for the
development of a connection and mentoring relationship quality. Two examples, one from a relationship categorized as strong and one from a relationship categorized as weak, are presented to illustrate the variability found within trainee self-disclosure and mentor response and the potential link to mentoring relationship quality.

The first example is from a relationship categorized as strong (Dyad 5). The trainee disclosed a related fact as her practice goal to use during the call and positive emotions when talking about wanting to be part of drama club at school: “I would love to be back stage and do the makeup and interview the people”. The peer mentor then responded with a relational response including advice by saying “That would be good for you because you’re a talkative person. It would be awesome.” This relational response conveyed recognition of the trainee’s disclosure and potentially validated the trainee’s personal strengths. A second example is from a relationship categorized as weak (Dyad 7). When talking about the call theme of going to a restaurant and favorite foods, the trainee shared: “kids meal, I go with my mom.” The peer mentor then responded with a conversational response by saying “ok”, which conveyed recognition of self-disclosure. However, without additions such as follow up questions about the kids meal or going with her mom or the mentor sharing her favorite food or who she goes out to eat with, this response likely conveyed limited interest in what the trainee disclosed.

These two examples differ in both the content of disclosure and the type of response used by the peer mentor. When applied to the theoretical model, these differences may have had implications for the trainee’s interpretation of the response and thus the impact of this exchange on the development of a connection between the trainee
and peer mentor and the overall quality of the relationship. Differences in the peer mentor’s response may also indicate differences in the mentor’s approach to the relationship, another dimension of mentoring relationship quality. These examples demonstrate how the self-disclosure process may influence mentoring relationship quality and how the model may be used in understanding the self-disclosure process as a mechanism in the development of a connection and quality mentoring relationships.

Discussion

The findings indicate that self-disclosure by trainees frequently occurred during peer mentoring phone calls and that this self-disclosure included descriptive (e.g., related and unrelated facts) and evaluative (e.g., emotions) information. The literature related to self-disclosure and relationship development suggests higher quantities of self-disclosure could be indicative of more positive and higher quality relationships (Reis & Shaver, 1988; Thomson & Zand, 2009). The findings presented in this study are congruent with Reis and Shaver (1988) as trainees and peer mentors appeared to be successful in developing relatively positive relationships; there were relatively high frequencies of self-disclosure across all the relationships. Differences in quantities of self-disclosure were also found across categorized relationship quality. The occurrence of the highest frequencies of self-disclosure in strong and moderate relationships and the highest quantity of self-disclosure in strong relationships supports the association between self-disclosure and positive relationship development (Thomson & Zand, 2009; Wanberg et al., 2007). An additional influence on overall self-disclosure may be age. Trainees in weak relationships were slightly younger than trainees in higher quality relationships.
Younger trainees may have had fewer experiences to draw upon during mentoring calls or had more difficulty connecting with older peer mentors, possibly influencing self-disclosure.

Increasing trends in the frequency of self-disclosure over time as an indicator of connection and positive relationship development has also been reported in the literature (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Although an overall stable pattern in the frequency of self-disclosure was found, this may reflect the structure of the peer mentoring script. The script provided distinct opportunities for self-disclosure that increased in number across the 8 calls. The consistency seen in the percentages of self-disclosure demonstrates that trainees continued to self-disclose at the same rate during these additional opportunities and therefore the total quantity of self-disclosure increased across the relationship. This increase in the quantity of disclosure is consistent with the literature on the development of a connection and positive relationships (Reis & Shaver, 1988).

Trends in the content of self-disclosure further demonstrate the role of self-disclosure in the development of connection within peer mentoring relationships. The most frequent type of self-disclosure across all relationships was facts related to Project TEAM, which reflects the main purpose of the peer mentoring to review and support understanding of the intervention content. However, the findings indicate that the frequency of related and unrelated facts disclosed differed across relationships of variable quality. Frequencies in disclosure of facts in strong relationships suggest that trainees in these relationships were highly engaged in working with their peer mentor to apply the Project TEAM concepts to their everyday lives in addition to talking about other aspects
of their lives. In comparison, although trainees self-disclosed at a similar rate in relationships categorized as moderate, self-disclosure was more frequently related to Project TEAM. The frequency of related facts indicates that although engagement in applying the concepts of Project TEAM may facilitate relationship development, the degree of development may be diminished when the content of conversations is more restricted to the intervention content. Finally in relationships categorized as weak, there was the lowest frequency of self-disclosure, trainees less frequently self-disclosed about Project TEAM, and more frequently self-disclosed about topics unrelated to Project TEAM compared to strong and moderate relationships. Although unrelated self-disclosure likely contributed to some positive relationship development, it may have negatively impacted completion of call objectives, leading to peer mentor frustration and thus a more negative perception of relationship quality. Overall, these patterns in content of self-disclosure indicate that trainees in relationships perceived as strong may have had a more ideal balance of self-disclosure of facts related to Project TEAM as well as other aspects of their lives.

In addition, the findings indicate that self-disclosure of evaluative information, in the form of emotions, may support the development of connection and relationship quality. The frequency of evaluative information, considered more intimate than descriptive information (Laurenceau et al., 1998), increased across the 8 calls for all dyads. This increasing trend indicates that as the calls progressed, so did the development of a relationship, leading to an increased willingness of the trainee to further self-disclose emotions. A higher frequency of evaluative disclosure was also noted in relationships
categorized as strong, which supports the importance of this type of disclosure for connection and higher quality relationship development (Laurenceau et al., 1998).

Likewise, the increasing trend seen in the frequency of self-disclosure of negative emotions from call 2 to call 6 across all relationships is indicative of positive relationship development. In comparison to positive emotions, negative emotions are considered to convey a greater level of intimacy and to be more socially appropriate to disclose in close relationships (Howell & Conway, 1990). The increasing trend in the frequency of negative emotions noted during these calls again suggests that the trainees and peer mentors were successful in developing relationships over time; trainees may have become more comfortable sharing their confusion about Project TEAM content or talking about activities that were difficult for them as the relationship progressed. One unexpected finding was the higher frequency of negative emotions in relationships perceived as moderate. A possible explanation is that trainees in these relationships may have had more difficulty applying the concepts of Project TEAM and these trainees were willing to disclose emotions related to this difficulty. However, consistent frequencies of self-disclosure of negative emotions across all calls in moderate relationships, as opposed to the increasing trend seen across all relationships, may indicate premature disclosure of negative emotions. This type of disclosure may have occurred at too high a frequency before a close relationship could be developed, thus negatively impacting relationship development (Howell & Conway, 1990).

The data also demonstrate that all peer mentors recognized self-disclosure by the trainee and responded in variety of ways. Responses ranged from conversational
responses to highly relational responses and differed in the degree to which they relayed interest and concern for the trainee. Although conversational responses were used most often, overall they were frequently combined with a relational response. This is likely due to the structure of the script as scripted responses frequently included a conversational aspect, such as “That’s a great goal”, in addition to a question. Related to this finding is the high frequency of questions in the peer mentors’ responses compared to other types of relational responses. The peer mentoring script frequently provided a question for the mentor to ask following disclosure by the trainee. This finding is reflected across relationship qualities as well. In terms of explicit empathetic responses, overall peer mentors more frequently used this type of response in earlier calls as a possible means of creating a connection with the trainee and promoting relationship development. The overall decrease in empathetic responses in later calls may have resulted from the peer mentor becoming more familiar with the trainee and the trainee’s abilities and using empathy, as a way of supporting the trainee, less often. The higher frequency of empathy in relationships categorized as moderate may have been the result of the higher frequency of negative emotions self-disclosed by the trainee in these relationships. This finding indicates that although trainees may have disclosed negative emotions prematurely, peer mentors recognized the trainee’s need for support and responded accordingly, positively impacting the development of a connection and relationship quality.

The overall increasing frequency seen in the use of advice in later calls may have been the result of peer mentors recognizing the relationships would be ending soon and offering more advice that could continue to benefit the trainee after the relationship had
ended. In relationships of perceived higher quality, advice occurred more frequently, which indicates the importance of peer mentors offering suggestions to the trainees for relationship development. This finding supports the mentor’s use of advice as an indicator of relationship quality and its inclusion in mentoring relationship quality assessments (Rhodes et al., 2005). Self-disclosure by the peer mentor also occurred more frequently in strong relationships suggesting this is another important type of response for connection and higher quality relationship development. These findings are consistent with Social Exchange Theory and Equity Theory perspectives (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Advice and self-disclosure by the peer mentor are response types that may reciprocate the intimacy of the trainee’s self-disclosure more effectively, thereby promoting relationship development. Differences in prior experience of the peer mentor may have impacted these findings as peer mentors in weak relationships had on average a slightly lower number of prior mentoring relationships. Experience likely provides a greater number of opportunities to recognize how to best support a trainee and reciprocate intimacy through the use of responses such as advice and self-disclosure.

Support for the self-disclosure process as a mechanism for promoting mentoring relationship quality (Figure 1) and the mentors’ use of the peer mentoring script suggest the self-disclosure process may have potential use in guiding revisions to the script to promote development of positive mentoring relationships for all dyads. As inferred by the results and model, incorporating greater opportunities for the trainee to share about their lives outside of Project TEAM could promote relationship development. Peer mentors
could also be provided with additional examples of relational responses, such as advice and self-disclosure to better reflect the mentor approach seen in strong relationships. Such revisions could replicate characteristics of higher quality relationships found in this study. Overall, the mechanisms in the theoretical model may be effective in guiding changes to the peer mentoring component of Project TEAM to further promote positive peer mentoring relationships.

An additional consideration when interpreting the findings is the characteristics of the peer mentor and trainee across relationship quality. Relationships categorized as strong included dyads with trainees and peer mentors of the same gender. In comparison to relationships of lower quality where most dyads included different genders, this similarity may have positively contributed to relationship quality, as trainees may have been more willing to self-disclose to a peer mentor of the same gender. In addition, differences in gender across the 9 dyads indicate female trainees potentially had higher quality relationships. The literature related to the role of gender in mentoring relationships is somewhat inconclusive (Darling, Bogat, Cavell, Murphy, & Sanchez, 2006; Keating, Tomishima, Foster, & Alessandri, 2002), however the findings of this study suggest gender may be related to the frequency of self-disclosure and subsequently relationship quality. Further research on the role of self-disclosure could enhance understanding of differences in mentoring across genders (Darling et al., 2006).

This study had several limitations. Coding of audio recordings did not account for nonverbal communication such as laughter or tone of voice, which may have been part of the self-disclosure process. This study purposely chose to explore the occurrence of self-
disclosure, which was broadly defined. However, each self-disclosure likely differed in personal meaning for the trainees; future studies could explore the impact of intimate self-disclosure on relationship quality from the trainee’s perspective. Similarly, the trainee’s interpretation of the peer mentor’s response could not be directly examined. Research aimed at understanding this interpretation is needed to further validate the theoretical model.

As with any relationship, peer mentoring relationships are complex, dynamic, and impacted by numerous factors. Examining self-disclosure may be used to understand mentoring relationships and differentiate between varying qualities of relationships. Most importantly, the results of this study indicate that, with structure, transition-age youth with developmental disabilities can successfully initiate and respond to self-disclosure as a means of developing positive peer mentoring relationships.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Mentor</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Peer Mentor Experience*</th>
<th>Dyad**</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 (Mod)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Autism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Anxiety/Depression</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 (Weak)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Autism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Dubowitz Syndrome</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (Weak)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Intellectual Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6 (Mod)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Cerebral Palsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (Weak)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Intellectual Disability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Peer mentor’s number of prior mentoring relationships
**Quality of relationship
Table 2
Demographics across relationship qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Weak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trainee</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>16–20, M=17.3</td>
<td>16–19, M=17</td>
<td>15–18, M=16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>2 F, 1 M</td>
<td>1 F, 2 M</td>
<td>1 F, 2 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>Down Syndrome (2),</td>
<td>ASD (2), Cerebral Palsy</td>
<td>Intellectual Disability (2), ASD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cerebral Palsy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer Mentor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18–33, M=23.7</td>
<td>21–36, M=30</td>
<td>20–36, M=29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>2 F, 1 M</td>
<td>2 F, 1 M</td>
<td>3 F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>Anxiety/ Depression,</td>
<td>Down Syndrome (3)</td>
<td>Down Syndrome (2),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dubowitz Syndrome,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dubowitz Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Experience*</td>
<td>1–5, M=2.7</td>
<td>0–5, M=3.3</td>
<td>0–6, M=2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Peer mentor’s number of prior peer mentoring relationships
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Self-disclosure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure of Facts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts Related to Project TEAM</td>
<td>Trainee shares a fact related to Project TEAM content or participation goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosed Multiple Facts Related to Project TEAM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts Unrelated to Project TEAM</td>
<td>Trainee shares a fact unrelated to Project TEAM content or participation goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosed Multiple Facts Unrelated to Project TEAM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure of Emotions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>Trainee expresses a positive emotion, such as happy, excited, proud, awesome, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotions</td>
<td>Trainee expresses a negative emotion, such as angry, sad, frustrated, nervous, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosed Multiple Emotions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor Response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational Response</td>
<td>Mentor responds to trainee's self-disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Response</td>
<td>Response acknowledges disclosure by trainee and moves conversation forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>Response indicates interest and recognition of trainee's needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Response includes suggestions or ideas about what the trainee could do or say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response includes assurance and understanding of trainee's emotions and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-disclosure by Mentor</td>
<td>Response includes self-generated questions asking trainee to share more information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Code definitions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-disclosure by trainees (n=9)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Range*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Self-disclosure</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>14 to 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure of Facts</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>38 to 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts Related to Project TEAM</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>29 to 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My goal is to travel to the Museum of Science using public transportation” (Dyad 3), “signs and information helps me know what is on the menu” (Dyad 9), “change the rules so more time to relax before my homework” (Dyad 1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosed Multiple Facts</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>33 to 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to Project TEAM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts Unrelated to Project TEAM</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12 to 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’ve been playing chess since I was like 6.” (Dyad 2), “I buy makeup and clothes with my mom or my aunt.” (Dyad 5), “I like dancing and prom. I will ask a boy to prom.” (Dyad 8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosed Multiple Facts</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>68 to 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated to Project TEAM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure of Emotions</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4 to 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotions</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0 to 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s my dream to go to Spain. I would love it.” (Dyad 3), “I can do good” (Dyad 7), and “watch awesome shows, Spiderman” (Dyad 4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Emotions</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0 to 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sorry for being distracted. I’m a bit unfocused” (Dyad 1), “I need help” (Dyad 6), and “I’m afraid of flying over the ocean” (Dyad 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosed Multiple Emotions</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0 to 29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Range is reported by individual dyad
Table 5
Mentor response when trainee self-disclosed (n=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Range*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational Response</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>94 to 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“That’s a great answer”</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>75 to 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Script)</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Those are great examples” (Script)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Ok” (Multiple)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Response</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>63 to 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0 to 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“If you don’t get it, you can’t give up. You can do it.” (Dyad 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0 to 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“That was a tough one.” (Dyad 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>75 to 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Can you tell me more about it?” (Script)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-disclosure by mentor</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0 to 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I don’t have the job thing figured out either.” (Dyad 5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Range is reported by individual dyad
Figure 1: Theoretical Model of the role of the self-disclosure process as a mechanism in relationship development.
Figure 2: Trainees’ overall self-disclosure across calls. Percentages reflect disclosure opportunities to ensure comparability across calls.

Figure 3: Trainees’ self-disclosure of emotions across calls.
Figure 4: Peer mentor response of advice and empathy across calls.

Figure 5: Content of trainees’ self-disclosure by categorized relationship quality.
Figure 6: Peer mentor relational response types by perceived relationship quality.
References


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EDUCATION
Boston University
Master of Science in Occupational Therapy, expected graduation January 2016
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  Honors Thesis: Disability Literacy and Attitudes Towards Autism Spectrum Disorders, Faculty Advisor: Anne F. Farrell, Ph.D.

WORK EXPERIENCE
Research Assistant, Fall 2014 to Present, Boston University Department of Occupational Therapy
  -Working in the Youth & Young Adults Empowerment, Leadership, and Learning Lab under the direction of Dr. Jessica Kramer
  -Assist in tasks related to the development of the PEDI-CAT Self-report and determining the effectiveness of Project TEAM

Graduate Assistant, September 2013 to Present, Boston University Department of Occupational Therapy
  -Working under the direction of Dr. Karen Jacobs
  -Complete tasks related to research including implementing study methodology, creation of online survey, conducting and transcribing interview narratives, and data analysis

Assistant Group Leader, Summer 2014, Aspire Summer Camp, Lexington, MA
  -Co-led group of 7 children, age 11 to 14, diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and multiple co-occurring conditions including OCD, ADHD, Tourette’s Syndrome
  -Implemented Social Thinking Curriculum integrated into day camp activities at Hale Reservation in Westwood, MA
  -Completed weekly phone calls with parents and supervision sessions with camp directors

Colchester Alternative School-Age Total Learning Experience (CASTLE), Colchester, CT
Before and After School Program, Full-time summer program, June 2007 to August 2013
- Positions of increasing responsibility from Assistant Group Leader to Senior Program Group Leader, grades kindergarten through 8th
Student Employee, August 2009 to May 2010, UCONN Child Development Lab, Storrs, CT
- Assisted classroom teachers in execution of lesson plans

INTERNSHIP AND FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE
Level I Fieldwork, Spring 2015, Boston University’s Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston, MA
- Mental health setting, co-led Community Service class for adults with serious mental illness
Level I Fieldwork, Fall 2014, Tobin Montessori School, Cambridge, MA
- Public school, preschool to fifth grade, observed occupational therapist
Level I Fieldwork, Spring 2014, Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, Boston, MA
- Outpatient setting for individuals with low vision, included home visits
- Observed occupational therapists and other professionals
Level I Fieldwork, Fall 2013, The Stone Institute, Newton, MA
- Long-term care facility for older adults, observed occupational therapist

Internship, January 2013 to May 2013, EASTCONN Birth to Three Program, Hampton, CT
- Participated in home visits for children age birth to three with various developmental delays and disabilities
Internship, August 2012 to December 2012, St. Joseph Living Center, Windham, CT
- Assisted in Recreational Therapy and Occupational Therapy departments
- Interviewed residents for Recreational Therapy and led Arthritis Therapy Program

OTHER EXPERIENCE
Greater Boston Citizen Advisory Board member- October 2013 to present, meet monthly with self-advocates, family members, DDS directors, and community members to promote advocacy for individuals with developmental disabilities
Student Initiative Team- Fall 2014 to Spring 2015, student representative for communicating with MSOT Program Director
Summer Interdisciplinary Intensive Stroke Program- June 2014, BU Aphasia Resource Center, planned and implemented group and individual occupational therapy interventions for adults with aphasia
Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong- New Freedom Project volunteer, Fall 2013 to Spring 2014

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2015 OT Program Graduate Student Leadership Award
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Dean’s List- Fall/Spring 2009 to 2013
Babbidge Scholar- March 2010, March 2012
New England Scholar- March 2011
Alpha Lambda Delta
Psi Chi

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Student Member AOTA since 2013

PUBLICATIONS