Abstract

Mentoring students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in post-secondary education settings can provide beneficial and efficient support for enhancing their educational and social experiences. This study provides an in-depth understanding of a university mentorship program using a grounded theory approach to determine how the Autism Mentorship Initiative (AMI), a mentorship program designed for students with ASD, was experienced by its participants. Participants were undergraduate and graduate university students attending Simon Fraser University (SFU). Data was collected from semi-structured interviews with both mentees (SFU students with ASD) and mentors (SFU students without ASD); as well as other AMI documents, in order to identify common themes that emerged throughout the mentoring process. By using a grounded theory method, the following five broad themes were identified and interrelated under the core theme of A Mentee-centered Approach. These broad themes include: (1) The Natural Progression of the Relationship, (2) The Versatile Mentor, (3) The Meeting Process, (4) Identifying and Implementing Goals, and (5) Learning Together. Subthemes also emerged within the broader themes that further explained how each theme emerged from the “ground” up. This study provides insight into the experiences of the participants in AMI in order to provide an exploration of a mentorship program that has potential to inform support services and practices for students with ASD in higher education. The dual-perspective approach (of considering the experiences of both mentees and mentors) gives a rich description and explanation into what comprises mentorship for students with ASD.

Keywords: autism spectrum disorder; mentorship, mentor; mentee; self-advocacy; academic skills; social skills