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Rencontres FOCUS: A Support Program for University Students with ADHD

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This article features results from
a research project aimed at assessing
a program to reinforce study strategies
among students living with attention
deficit disorder.

For further details, please consult:
Paquette, R. (2022). *Évaluation
d'un programme de renforcement
de stratégies d'étude pour les étudiants
ayant un trouble du déficit de l'attention
avec ou sans hyperactivité à l'université*
[doctoral essay, Université du Québec
à Montréal]. Archipel.

Background

Challenges and Resources Available for Students with ADHD in Québec Universities

Representing 38% of students with disabilities receiving services at the university level in the province of Québec (Association québécoise interuniversitaire des conseillers aux étudiants en situation de handicap, 2021–2022), students with ADHD (attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity) are believed to experience more difficulties than their peers when it comes to getting organized, self-regulating, concentrating and avoiding procrastination (Dalpé, Goupil & Landry, 2022; Sedgwick, 2018). To adapt to university, students must adopt effective study and learning strategies for both their academic work and everyday life. To assist them, universities offer a range of support services, from group workshops to individual consultations with professional support staff.

To support its student population, the Université du Québec à Montréal organizes the Rencontres Focus, a series of group workshops providing information, tools, strategies as well as a meeting place for people with ADHD. The Rencontres Focus (see Table 1) grew out of a doctoral essay centred on the development of a program to reinforce study strategies for university students with ADHD (Landry, 2012). Students were first evaluated in a qualitative study (Dalpé, Landry & Goupil, 2019), which indicated that participants benefit from psychological education on ADHD, exchanges and group exercises. More recently, Paquette's doctoral essay (2022), which is the subject of this article, aimed to deepen the scope of the intervention using both quantitative measures on study and learning strategies as well as qualitative measures based on the perceptions of the individuals who took part in the Rencontres Focus.

Looking at the results from the evaluation of group interventions such as the Rencontres Focus contributes to the development of knowledge on existing resources for students with ADHD. Assessing this type of intervention also makes it possible to ensure its relevance and to propose recommendations for university support services that wish to better accompany the students concerned.

Table 1.
Topics Covered During the Six Rencontres Focus

Meeting	Content
1	Self-knowledge: Understanding the diagnosis of ADHD, impact of the diagnosis on identity, description of the difficulties associated with university studies and of the requirements of academic functioning.
2	Relationship with time and planning. Planning the university semester: quarterly, weekly or targeted.
3	Regulating attention: optimal conditions for maintaining it. Organizing school material and taking notes in class..
4	Study strategies: mind mapping, reading and writing strategies, preparation for examinations.
5	Stress and anxiety are linked to ADHD. The triad: thoughts, behaviours and sensations. Healthy lifestyle and attentive presence.
6	Motivation and change. Taking action, maintaining strategies and career paths.

Note. Adapted from Landry (2012) & Paquette (2022).

The main dimensions of the intervention during the Rencontres Focus include the teaching of study strategies, psychological education on ADHD and stress, exchanges and discussions among participants and, finally, the creation of a space conducive to such interactions.

Key Concept

What are Learning and Study Strategies?

Study and learning strategies are designed to help students cope more effectively with the workload of university studies. According to Weinstein, Acee and Jung (2010), technical skills are just as necessary as attitudes toward studies and the regulation of motivation or stress. Consequently, reading complex texts effectively, synthesizing material for term papers or using mnemonic strategies when studying are tools just as important as keeping motivated during more difficult periods, regulating stress and anxiety in the run-up to exams and organizing one's time so as to maintain a balance between studies and personal life.

Method

A questionnaire and interviews to fully understand the experience lived by participants

-  **Type of research:** mixed (quantitative and qualitative)
-  **Participants:** 13 people, including six male and seven female undergraduate students with a diagnosis of ADHD, who participated as a group in the six Rencontres Focus led by a psychologist and a doctoral student in psychology.
-  **Place and period of research:** Université du Québec à Montréal, in 2017–2018

The individuals who took part in the Rencontre Focus completed the LASSI (Learning and Study Strategies Inventory) questionnaire (Weinstein & Palmer, 2002) before and at the end of the six-meeting series. The LASSI questionnaire assesses ten study and learning strategies, each corresponding to a scale on the questionnaire. The results of the LASSI questionnaire, for each of the ten scales, are then transformed into percentiles.

Individual interviews were conducted to gather information on the effects perceived by participants at the end of the Rencontres Focus.

Results

Learning and Study strategies and perceptions of the Rencontres Focus

1

The results of the questionnaire indicate two significant differences related to a decrease in anxiety and an improvement in concentration before and after the series of meetings.

The *t-test*¹ used to compare pre- and post-intervention means – that is the Rencontres Focus – reveals that two strategies differ significantly between these two measurement times, namely reduced anxiety and increased concentration. Although the percentiles associated with the other study and learning strategies (scales) have increased, these changes remain statistically insignificant (see Table 2). In addition, several study and learning strategies (scales) below the average 50th percentile indicate that participants still need support with learning strategies at the end of the meetings.

¹ *Student's t-test* is a type of statistical analysis used to compare the mean of two groups and determine whether the differences are statistically significant, meaning they are not due to chance alone.

Table 2.
LASSI Questionnaire Scores Before and After the Series of Meetings

LASSI Scale	Pre-Intervention Before the Rencontres Focus		Post-intervention After the Rencontres Focus		Student's t-Test Value
	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	
● Anxiety	29,8	29,0	44,8	32,2	2,95**
Attitude	19,7	17,6	23,2	19,0	0,72
● Concentration	18,8	17,3	32,9	29,7	3,28**
Information processing	58,5	31,9	59,7	31,8	0,32
Motivation	26,0	27,8	30,6	27,3	0,60
Self-evaluation	23,1	21,5	32,1	29,9	1,57
Selection of main ideas	28,5	28,8	32,5	28,8	0,85
Resources	41,2	26,8	49,9	30,7	1,65
Time management	20,9	20,4	28,2	30,8	1,55
Assessment strategies	33,7	24,8	43,2	29,5	1,55

**P<0.1 indicating a significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean

Note. Adapted from Paquette (2022, p. 31)

2

The participants (N=13) perceive several academic benefits from the meetings.

The benefits reported concerned: the personal aspect ($n=12$), strategy development ($n=11$), attitudes toward studying ($n=6$) as well as better knowledge about ADHD and available support ($n=4$). Strategy development focused mainly on time and study planning, stress management and the use of strategies such as technology and mind mapping to help participants better manage their tasks.

3

The group intervention fosters acceptance and understanding of ADHD among participants.

Participants say they appreciate the reciprocity offered by the exchanges among people with similar difficulties, which enabled them to talk about their situation, their challenges and their thoughts on ADHD. They describe a reduction in their feelings of loneliness, as well as a beneficial effect on their motivation and confidence in their academic abilities.

What Can we Learn from our Results?

Essential intervention dimensions revealed through the Rencontres Focus

- 1** Participants felt they were better able to manage their stress and anxiety.

Although anxiety is indirectly associated with ADHD, reducing its level could foster better use of attentional skills as well as of study and learning strategies among students.

- 2** Participants reported adopting more effective strategies to improve their attention and concentration.

Reflection and discussion activities concerning the conditions for optimizing moments of attention and concentration seem to bring about changes in participants' study strategies.

- 3** While the meetings help develop the coping strategies essential to success, they are not a comprehensive solution to all the challenges associated with ADHD.

These meetings should be integrated into a wide range of support services (e.g., remedial teaching, psychoeducation, success counselling) and tools (e.g., task planners, text-to-speech software) to keep these strategies active throughout university.

4

The meetings, in the context of a group, provide the opportunity for people who face similar challenges to exchange ideas, gain a better understanding of their diagnosis, and improve the methods they use for studying and learning.

The group seems to enable mutual identification, distinction of individual experiences and validation of the emotions experienced. The caring support aspect of the Rencontres Focus is seen by participants as an essential part of the experience.

One participant commented on the importance of exchanges as part of a group:

.....
"Discussions make you learn more about yourself.
When others tell you about something and you've been
through the same thing, it's a validation. The fact that
it comes from the group supports the theory."
.....



Courses of Action

For professionals who work with students with ADHD

- ✓ Explain how attentional processes and ADHD can affect academic success at the university level and other spheres of personal life to foster understanding and acceptance of the ADHD diagnosis.
- ✓ Clarify the relationship between attentional processes and anxiety in order to identify the strategies to be favoured in a learning context.
- ✓ Promote metacognitive strategies that enable reflection on the process and that foster self-regulation.
 - For example, collaborate with students to establish a structuring framework that includes timelines, technological tools and human resources (remedial teaching, psychoeducation, psychotherapy, tutoring, peer support, etc.).
- ✓ Propose group discussions and personal reflection activities to learn about the specific conditions that foster learning and to identify the challenges and obstacles that hinder learning.
- ✓ Highlight an individual's strengths and reinforce the concept of a growth mindset to increase feelings of self-efficacy, self-esteem and, in general, to foster academic fulfillment.

Lines of Research

- 🔍 Develop and evaluate tools to help students remember and maintain the study and learning strategies identified subsequent to the Rencontres Focus.
- 🔍 Analyze the effect of peer support, tutoring and coaching in maintaining the skills required for organizing, planning and managing academic tasks at the university level.
- 🔍 Design a mechanism to detect adaptive challenges during university transitions.
- 🔍 Examine how interventions designed to foster a sense of competence and self-esteem can vary depending on the time of diagnosis (childhood, adolescence or adulthood).
- 🔍 Identify and evaluate pedagogical methods to maximize the potential of people living with ADHD in post-secondary education.

For Further Reading

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Biographical Notes



France Landry (Ph.D. and Psy.D.) holds a Research Doctorate in Experimental Psychology from the University of Ottawa and a Professional Doctorate in Psychology from the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). She is an Educational Psychologist and has worked at UQAM's Services à la réussite et à la vie étudiante (SRVE) for 17 years. Her areas of interest include the psychological health of graduate students, performance anxiety, attentional strategies, ADHD and psychological health following social upheavals.



Rachel Paquette (Psy. D.) is a Clinical Psychologist. She has been practicing psychotherapy at the Centre de santé et de consultation psychologique de l'Université de Montréal since 2018 with a student population and in private practice since 2021 with a general adult population. During her doctoral training at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), she took an interest in university students with ADHD, notably in her doctoral essay on the assessment of a support program intended for them. During her career, she has also coached students and offered success support workshops for UQAM's Student Life Services.



Georgette Goupil (Ph. D.) has conducted numerous studies among students with learning difficulties and people with disabilities. She has also produced a number of audiovisual documents on this subject, as well as on learning at the kindergarten level. Author of several books, including *Le plan d'intervention personnalisé en milieu scolaire*, *Observation en classe*, *Communications et relations entre l'école et la famille*, *Apprentissage et enseignement*, she received the prix de la ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur in 2022 for the fifth edition of *Élèves en difficulté d'adaptation et d'apprentissage*. She has also taken on a number of academic responsibilities, and was responsible for developing the specialized graduate diploma (DESS) in behavioral intervention for people with autism spectrum disorders. She has supervised numerous master's and doctoral students and published several articles in scientific journals. She is currently Professor Emeritus at the Department of Psychology of the Université du Québec à Montréal.



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