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The Perceptions of Students With Mild Mental Retardation Regarding Their Present Program and Preparation for Future Employment

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Running head: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

Abstract

Two programs for students with mild mental retardation, a school-based program, and a community-based instruction program were compared. The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover the perceptions of high school students with mild mental retardation about their present educational experiences and their preparation for future employment. Interviews of four students were obtained and examined to determine common themes among students and across programs.

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A current topic of special education research centers around the post-school status of students in these programs. Studies suggest there are several problems concerning the high dropout rate and employment status among these children (Edgar, 1987). Edgar (1987) and others attempted to evaluate programs associated with this dilemma. Follow-up studies and assessing programs may be ways to determine the success rates of children identified as having a wide range of learning problems.

Studies Of Outcomes For Special Education Students

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1983) notes 50 to 75 percent of adults with disabilities are not employed. Hasazi, Gordon, and Roe (1985) state "Since no single agency has the responsibility for following the progress of these former students, it is important for researchers to begin building a body of knowledge to meet this need"(p.456). Hasazi (Hasazi et al., 1985), and her colleagues examined a sample of 462

students who had received special education services and had dropped out between the years of 1979 and 1983. Information about each individual was obtained through school records and interviews. School records provided such information as handicapping conditions, placement, gender, and age. Additional information was discovered through interviews with students, parents, and others close to the student (Hasazi et al., 1985).

Regarding employment status, 55 percent had paying jobs, with only 67 percent of those earning a wage in full-time positions. Almost all (i.e., 99 percent) had non-subsidized jobs. Most (i.e., 83 percent) of the former students found their job through a "self-family-friend" network, leaving only 17 percent who had received help from an institutional service. "For those students who had vocational education, 61% were currently employed compared with only 45% of those who had no vocational education" (Hasazi et al., p.460). "Of those students who had no summer jobs, only 37% were employed, versus employment rates of 46% for those who had subsidized summer jobs and 69% for those who had non subsidized jobs. . .Of students who held part time outside jobs during high school, 70% were

currently employed against 41% of those not holding such jobs" (Hasazi et al., 1985, p.460).

Another interesting finding was that 65 to 69 percent of the individuals had reported an absence of contact with agencies after high school. Clearly, many more studies need to be conducted to guide educators to improve student outcomes (Hasazi et al., 1985).

Levin, Zigmond, and Birch (1985) conducted a four year follow-up study of 52 late adolescents who were identified learning disabled to observe the outcomes of students from the ninth grade to graduation. Levin, Zigmond, and Birch (1985) found that after four years, sixteen of the students received special educational services and seven attended regular educational classes. Almost half (N=24) had dropped out, and the balance were unable to be found. Of the 24 who had left school, 11 were questioned about their 50-reasons for exit and many stated that they had experienced problems with academics and behavior. Thirty-four of the fifty-two students were also tested and results showed positive academic progress, especially from the first year. Unfortunately, those who left school did not benefit from the extra years of social experience

and the acquisition of survival skills. More research
is needed to assess whether students who are identified
as learning disabled and stay in school have a better
chance of finding employment (Levin et al., 1985).

In Vermont, studies conducted by Hasazi, Gordon,
Roe, Hull, Finck, and Salembier (1985) reviewed the
status of former students (N=243) identified as
"mentally retarded". School records were obtained
along with interviews over the telephone to examine the
individuals' employment positions and living situations
in the years from 1981-1983. Researchers discovered
that most of the sample had found their jobs through
friends, family, or on their own, rather than with the
help of special services. The author noted that only
23 percent of the females within the group were
employed, whereas 56 percent of the males were
employed. The marital status of females seemed to have
no effect on the low rate of employment as the rates of
married and single females were similar. Data also
revealed that those individuals who had previous summer
jobs or part-time jobs had a better chance of being
employed as opposed to those who had just participated
in experience programs. The investigators believe that

the results from this follow-up and others are important to examine when developing and assessing programs (Hasazi et al., 1985).

In a study conducted by Fardig, Algozzine, Schwartz, Hensel, and Westling (1985), data on the academic backgrounds and present employment status of students (N=13) with mild handicaps were collected to determine if certain variables were predictive of occupational status. When the interviews of the students or parents were completed, results indicated that 50 of the students were employed full time. The mean total of prevocational and vocational credits was 4.4. Research suggests that more involvement in these programs might help a student obtain and maintain employment at a higher success rate (Fardig et al., 1985).

Schalock, Wolzen, Ross, Elliot, Werbel, and Peterson (1986) present the results of a follow-up study of the post-school status of students (N=108) with disabilities. The employment and living status were evaluated for students who had graduated from schools providing community based job skills. The students classified as educable mentally handicapped

and those with mental retardation were less likely to
be employed than were those with specific learning
disabilities. Of those evaluated, 22 percent were
living independently and 61 percent were employed
(Schalock et al., 1986). Students who have involved
parents proved to have had more successful job
placement outcomes than those with uninvolved parents.
During the study, students were placed in job sites
related to their interest. Findings indicated that
males worked twice as hard as females and as many hours
than females each week; however, males earned almost
twice as much as females. Those students with a
greater family involvement tended to work more and earn
more. The increased number of hours involved in
vocational education was related to job success
(Schalock et al., 1986).

Benz and Halpern's (1987) findings on Oregon's
post-secondary programs for individuals with mild
disabilities describe a dissatisfaction with the
services provided. To describe perspectives, a sample
of local educational agency personnel, teachers, and
parents was chosen. Results suggest that a small
percentage of districts used formal written agreements

to involve community agencies in support of students needing transition services. The majority of teachers and administrators believed that the person most responsible for a district's transition service is the special education teacher. Many (i.e., 44 percent) of the teachers interviewed agreed that more parental involvement is needed in the classroom to help students with transitional issues. Unfortunately, 57 percent of the parents stated that they did not have contact with the teacher more than once. Benz and Halpern believe that follow-up studies are extremely useful in evaluating effective programs and found that only 38 percent of the districts had gathered information from previous studies. This research is considered imperative and more is needed to ensure student success (Benz & Halpern, 1987).

Similarly, interviews conducted by Hasazi, Johnson, Hasazi, Gordon, and Hull (1989) compared the employment status of youth with and without disabilities and their outcomes after high school. Data was collected about students' jobs, training history, utilization of service, and residential status. Other information such as age and educational

experiences were reviewed in school records. These factors were compared between the two groups and results suggest vocational experience proved to be more successful for non-handicapped students than for students with handicaps after high school. Further results suggest that non-handicapped students have twice the chance of receiving full-time employment than do their peers with disabilities. Differences within the gender groups were particularly found among females. Female non-handicapped students were twice as likely to be employed and three times as likely to have a job after the second year out of school than were females without disabilities. Comparing students with and without handicaps proves to be useful in observing their positions of employment, including both similarities and differences.

Information on the employment of individuals with mild disabilities is presented by Neubert, Tilson, and Ianacone (1989). Data including occupational positions and the number employed were recorded for those who participated in a post-secondary program. Also described were job characteristics such as full or part time status and what benefits, if any, were included.

Results indicated that 73 percent of the individuals were placed in the areas of sales and service (Neubert et al., 1989). The average pay per hour was $4.40, and half did not receive any benefits because the majority of participants only worked part-time. Included as benefits were health or medical insurance. Results indicated an 83 percent decrease in time that workers received support from the first week to the fourth week. Further, problems were found as 92 percent experienced job task-related difficulties and 71 percent had trouble with work adjustment skills. Conclusions of this study suggest there is a definite need for observing and recording the employment patterns of individuals with disabilities to meet individuals' transition needs (Neubert et al., 1989).

In a follow-up study by Fourqurean and LaCourt (1990) of former special education students in a Texas school district, concerns and opinions about school experiences and adulthood transitions were evaluated. These responses from the students and parents were gathered by way of telephone interview (Fourqurean & LaCourt, 1990). Questions asked of the young adults and parents (N=215) focused not only on independence

and job success, but also on acceptance and self-esteem. Interviews in this qualitative study lasted from 8 to 36 minutes (Fourqurean & LaCourt, 1990).

Results suggest that 65 percent of the subjects lived at home or attended college (Fourqurean & LaCourt, 1990). Homemakers made up 3 percent of the sample, students 19 percent, and those with jobs 24 percent. Most of the former students described similar problems with their employment such as getting along with others and ability to do the actual job. Problems most prevalent among the college students were difficulties with academics and socially relating to others. When the former students were asked what was most beneficial for them in high school, many reported that vocational courses such as auto mechanics, general education, and classes such as math and business were helpful. Other students and parents found special education work study programs prepared them for later employment. Also aid in social development seemed to be greatly appreciated. Views of other individuals suggested that additional techniques which might have been beneficial ranged from obtaining more job-finding skills to a deeper development of self-advocacy. There

also seemed to be a need for more guidance and encouragement. The findings of this study point to a need for improvement in teaching more vocationally-oriented life skills (Fourqurean & LaCourt, 1990).

A follow-up study of special education graduates by Haring and Lovett (1990) examined former students' (N=129) present community adjustment. A telephone interview was conducted involving a questionnaire for the graduates, parents, and other special service providers (Haring & Lovett, 1990). The group was chosen from the graduating classes of 1983 and 1985, and of those, they had all received at least three years of self-contained classroom instruction. Some had been involved in community-based instruction. Only 48 percent of the females, and 75 percent of the males had work-related placements, including only 33 percent with competitive employment (Haring & Lovett, 1990). The majority (i.e., 70 percent) were living at home, 12 percent on their own, 15 percent in a group home setting, and 3 percent in institutions (Haring & Lovett, 1990).

The investigators give several suggestions for providing students with an easy transition from school

to adulthood (Haring & Lovett, 1990). Such examples
are for educators to work with other educators, as well
as parents with students, places of employment, and
others in the community. Another suggestion is to
improve funding for programs and services which provide
guidance for students after graduation. Caretakers
should also be aware of services that may help
individuals lead more independent lifestyles. If these
issues are not addressed, the success of these youth
may not increase (Haring & Lovett, 1990).

In another follow-up study, questionnaires were
given in person and through telephone conversations to
individuals (N=64) with learning disabilities (Haring,
Lovett, & Smith, 1990). Of these, Haring, Lovett, and
Smith (1990) found that 38 were involved in competitive
employment. Very few received any aid or had been
given agency or community support since high school and
most still lived with their families. "More research
of a longitudinal nature is necessary to achieve a
clear description of the adult development of persons
with learning disabilities"(Haring et al., 1990,
p.112). The students did receive a large amount of
school support which led to a lower level of later

adjustment because of the absence of vocational training (Haring et al., 1990. "Perhaps the major problem faced by the young adults studied was their limited financial and residential independence"(Haring et al., 1990, p.112).

During a study conducted by Lichtenstein (1993), interviews were developed for four students with learning disabilities over a two year period. These students, who had withdrawn from school, reported little involvement in their vocational assessment, their individualized educational programs, and adult services (Lichtenstein, 1993). Transcripts and student records were included in the case studies. The four students were all diverse in their school to adulthood transition but their lack of involvement in their own education seemed to be a theme throughout. The results support the belief that there is a need for providing more transitional services to help ease transition and increase post-school success (Lichtenstein, 1993).

Transition Programs and Requirements

Edgar (1987) and his colleagues state that the reason graduates and dropouts do not obtain adequate job success is because "Secondary special education

programs appear to have little impact on students'
adjustment to community life" (p.555). Conclusions
from past research seem to suggest a need for well-
planned programs which coincide with the post-school
environment and meet individual needs. One reoccurring
theme which appears as a major problem is the low
salary which former students of special education
receive. How can these students be expected to live
independently when they are not being paid the means to
do so (Edgar, 1987)?

Another alarming trend which shows how imperative
it is that programs be assessed is the extreme drop-out
rate (Edgar, 1987). Because of what we know from
previous research, our educational programs are not
adequately meeting the needs of the population who
receive special services. Edgar and other educators
found that there are significant differences between
the various groups of individuals enrolled in special
education programs. Significant differences may be
seen "in gender breakdowns (MR 51% male, LD/BD 75%
male), in employment rate (MR 13%, LD/BD 60%), and in
the engagement rate (working or going to school)(MR
41%, LD/BD 84%). Comparing dropout rates we have 18%

dropout for MR and 24% for LD/BD"(Edgar, 1987, p.358-9). These students are different and should be trained so, but changes are desperately needed in secondary programs for all these students (Edgar, 1987).

Because post-secondary programs are not as adequate as they should be, the next step is restructuring programs (Kortering & Elrod, 1991). One model suggested contains three components, utilitarian roles, social roles, and personal roles, which lead to successful development to adulthood. The fact that certain knowledge is needed for a fulfilling transition is demonstrated by the utilitarian strand. The second part of the model is to change social situations to include individuals who need these experiences most. Also imperative is to improve students' personal roles. This may be accomplished by providing opportunities which would help individuals gain a better understanding of themselves and a more positive attitude towards their self-worth. A well-prepared person may adjust more easily to the environment and new programs may contribute to opportunities to lead fulfilling lives and be productive members of society (Kortering & Elrod, 1991).

According to the "Individuals With Disabilities Education Act," (IDEA), transition services may be defined as "a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation" (IDEA, 1990). Activities chosen for the student should be based not only on the student's needs but also on his/her interests. The set of activities shall include: "instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation" (IDEA 1990). This mandate is a positive addition to IDEA as this is critical to the future success of individuals with disabilities.

Teacher and Employer Perceptions

Roessler, Brolin, and Johnson (1990) examined the dissatisfaction of special educators and parents with the programs which schools provide for student

preparation for work or post-secondary education.
Following a survey, these researchers reported that 80
percent of those interviewed desired a need for
improvement in these areas. Their concerns stem from
the fact that the majority of special education
students are either jobless or underemployed. Even
when these students obtain jobs, they lack benefits and
advantages other employees receive. Also, they
reported that most students who still live at home are
not benefitting from services of social or
rehabilitation agencies. Suggestions given are that
schools need to develop a formal strategy to provide
students with the vocational training they need along
with on the job training support and sponsoring by
adult employment services as mandated by IDEA in 1990
(Roessler et al., 1990).

Although once students exit high school they are
expected to become independent, employed community
members, not all students are able to take advantage of
the benefits of employment (McCrea, 1991). Individuals
encounter a spectrum of difficulties in the pursuit of
a job, with the lack of services, job skills, and
attitudes towards performance that may affect success.

Because some individuals also experience problems maintaining jobs due to lack of social and/or vocational skills, research suggests that the problem lies in effective programs for preparation (McCrea, 1991).

Questions raised by McCrea (1991) involve inquiry about whether students with disabilities are adequately prepared by finding out what skills employers expect and how these are related to what skills educators view as important for job success. Questionnaires were assigned and completed by 87 special educators and 100 employers. Educators viewed work-related, social, communication, and personal skills as most important while employers seemed to believe more critical areas were in the following order: work-related, communication, personal, and social. The majority of educators were female and the majority of the employers were male. The two groups had some differing views as to what job-related skills were important; however, their opinions were closely related. Because there is evidence that employer views of importance and job skills are similar to those of educators, it is critical that educators present those skills to help

students secure employment and career success (McCrea, 1991).

Effective Programs

Because the effectiveness of secondary special education programs have been questioned, more research is being conducted and more programs are being funded (Wehman, 1990). The preceding studies mentioned have forced educators to evaluate existing programs. Wehman gives suggestions for improving programs and describes elements needed for successful programs. Meaningful transition activities must be planned within the local community and have the support of funding from social service agencies. Also there is a need for student input; therefore, the individuals and their families should be made aware of their options and how they may benefit from their choices. Because no one agency can provide the entire funding, agencies must work together to help community programs become successful. Vocational rehabilitation counselors may contribute to a positive community transition by sharing the responsibility of implementing these programs. Local businesses, as well, should be willing to be involved by providing training sites and help

with job placement. A need exists for increased communication between the student and the community as this is a beneficial link to successful transition. Education of life skills and community based instruction may be seen as necessary for positive adjustment in the community, as they are favorable programs for youth with disabilities (Wehman, 1990).

Beck, Broers, Hogue, Shipstead, and Knowlton (1994) reviewed the effective strategies for community-based instruction for children with mental retardation and found that experiences within the community provide students with the opportunity to use the skills they have learned for problem-solving. Effects of the program observed by Beck and others were positive responses from the students and parents (Beck, 1994). This becomes valuable as community-based instruction increases motivation and presents information which may be used directly in real-life situations. "Experiences in the community are imperative for students with mental retardation because of the opportunity to learn skills these students will need as adults" (Beck, et al., 1994, p.45). These programs may prove to be useful in obtaining skills needed to find a job;

however, students were not asked how confident they felt about obtaining a job.

One study of the perceptions of former students with mental retardation regarding their education was presented in 1972 (Gozali, 1972). The perceptions of former students (N=56) were reviewed in interviews. The majority of the interviewees viewed their program to be useless. Many of the students responded that they did not learn much in school and did not have the opportunity to perform jobs in which they held interest. The purpose of this study was to discover the value students placed on their education and the opinions about their former class. Unfortunately, most of the students had negative attitudes resulting in a suggestion by the author that a change was needed (Gozali, 1972).

Statement of Purpose

Researchers have conducted studies; however, we do not know much about how the students feel about their progress and their confidence in finding a job. The purpose of this study is to find out more about the students' actual perceptions of their abilities which are directly related to employment. Information

regarding employment decisions, support of employment, and other post graduation plans is beneficial to helping students plan their future.

Method

This study is qualitative in nature. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggest the researcher gather descriptive information in a natural setting which becomes the direct source of data. This information is recorded and later analyzed for recurring themes.

Subjects

Subjects included two students with mild mental retardation (i.e., educable mentally retarded) each from separate high schools in two different rural school divisions. All four subjects were within two years of exiting high school.

Procedures

A special education director or mental retardation specialist was contacted by telephone interview in order to determine appropriate classrooms (i.e., one with a community based instruction program and one in a school-based setting). Once appropriate classrooms were determined, permission was then obtained from appropriate school division administrators to make contact with those classroom teachers.

Once contact with the teachers was made, selection of the two students meeting the criteria took place.

Parental permission was obtained (See Appendix A) prior to the interviewing process. All necessary assurances of privacy, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and anonymity were made.

Interview and Observation Procedure

Private interviews arranged with the special education teacher and other willing faculty and staff members (e.g. mainstreamed teachers, teacher aids, principal, guidance counselors, etc.) were conducted with the same assurances of confidentiality. A variety of questions were used to determine each professional's perceptions regarding the students' level of skills which may or may not have an impact on the students' ability to obtain a job (See Appendix B). The students were also asked to respond to a set of questions (See Appendix C). All responses of the subjects were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. However, subjects did receive an opportunity to review the recording and subjects had the right to edit information. Additional follow-up questions were required; however, no questions of a sensitive nature were asked. Any responses that were of sensitive matter, and which were not relevant to this study, were

omitted. Subjects were then assured that the recordings were to be destroyed when the study was completed. The students were observed in appropriate situations. Only fictional names are included in the research.

Data Analysis

Because this is a qualitative study, no statistics are required. The researcher, however, has analyzed the transcripts to determine any themes occurring as a result of the responses given by the subjects in both settings.

Results

School-Based Interviews

The school-based program (Program A) observed, involves teaching students basic life skills. General school subjects are covered within this program. Life skills are incorporated into lessons; however, no specific job skills are taught. In this classroom setting, there is an emphasis on the recognition of sight words and the familiarization of math survival words. Skills such as counting money, making change, and writing checks are acquired. Also included is the comprehension of current events.

Students receive the opportunity to explore employment options at a vocational technology center during allotted periods throughout the day. Each student may choose to enroll in a variety of exploratory courses or a specific class of interest. Examples of such classes include food services, auto mechanics, building trade/shop, and child care.

Two students, "Ginny" and "Eddie" participated in the school-based program. "Ginny" is a high functioning senior. She has a low reading level, but is described by her teacher as highly motivated. Her

teacher explains that she gets along well with others, follows directions, and asks appropriate questions. Although absenteeism has been a problem area in the past, this student has a great desire to learn. For example, in order to improve her math abilities, "Ginny" asked for a math tutor on her own.

"Ginny" has a job in the school as a Teacher Assistant (TA) during first period. Specific criteria had to be met for this job. Certain duties involved include making copies, delivering messages, and checking mail. "Ginny" is enrolled in a child care program at the vocational center. Her teacher states that she displays a great interest in children. Responsibilities include developing activities for three and four year old children, making bulletin boards, and baking. "Ginny's" long term dream is to open her own child care facility one day, but she realizes she will need further education to accomplish this goal. Her teacher agrees that it may be a large responsibility, but states that this student can do just about anything she sets her mind to do.

"Ginny" is interested in joining a school club involving child care, in hopes that her participation

and the help of her parents will help her get a job. According to the student, she will have to travel in order to get a job which meets her needs because she plans to live at home for a period of time after graduation. Presently, she babysits for her parents' friends and knows she will be working with children in her future. Her teacher explains that she will do well with this type of job, but may possibly need a mentor for support and guidance. She also states that when "Ginny's" desire is there, she is successful.

"Ginny's" teacher describes "Ginny" as a person who wants to share her educational experiences with other students. "Ginny" was somewhat nervous during the interview and became upset when describing her experiences. She is frustrated by the fact that she was not involved in the development of her Individualized Education Program. She feels that information concerning her type of diploma was not explained thoroughly to her parents. Because her family makes decisions together, they feel they should have had the opportunity to decide on the type of diploma "Ginny" will receive. She is not only frustrated, but also is worried that an IEP diploma

will effect her ability to get a job. "Ginny" has
decided to express her concerns in hopes that this will
not happen to other students.

"Eddie", is described as a junior who has a desire
to learn, but who becomes frustrated when he can not
keep up with other students. At times, he has
difficulty controlling his temper. His teacher
explains that if he controls this, he performs well.
His teacher notes that he has no problems with
attendance or tardiness and follows directions
appropriately. He frequently asks for responsibilities
and has a class job as behavior monitor. He believes
he has this job because his teacher has described him
as a role model.

Although he does not have any specific jobs
outside school, he plans to apply for a summer job. He
would like to obtain a maintenance job at a nearby
university campus cleaning rooms because he has a
relative who will help him get this job. His family
will help him obtain employment later as well.

Presently, "Eddie" is enrolled in exploratory
courses at the vocational center. He takes a class in
auto mechanics, a career in which he is interested. He

will be in shop class later taking building trades and believes he will enjoy this as well. He likes marketing because this class helps him budget, and he previously took food services so he could learn how to cook. His interests for employment include any jobs involving work with the hands. He desires to live at home for a short while after graduation and attend a trade school to learn about bricklaying or landscaping. He is also interested in working for the United Postal Service because he has a relative who does this.

"Eddie" does not believe he will have a problem getting a job because he knows people who will help him. His teacher agrees with this assessment because he is a hard worker. She states that he does have self-doubt which may effect his performance; however, he is extremely determined. Because he has difficulty with criticism, the teacher believes he will need an understanding supervisor who can phrase criticism carefully. She predicts he will be successful but may need support from a positive role model.

Community-Based Program Interviews

The community-based instruction program (Program B) observed involves several components. Students are

required to perform jobs throughout the school such as cleaning the cafeteria and putting together sporting event programs. The students, however, also perform jobs for people in the community such as constructing church newsletters. Most students are involved in a recycling program for which they receive a check each month to be used on a shopping trip to purchase items of their choice.

Life skills are taught in the classroom setting where students have access to both a kitchen and office equipment. The teacher provides lessons on shopping, cleaning, laundry, cooking, and money management. The students learn how to use calculators, typewriters, and computers. The teacher also tries to mainstream the students as much as possible.

Previously, this program involved community job training. Students had the opportunity to work in grocery stores stocking and in restaurants performing cleaning duties. The teacher believes these opportunities benefitted the students and promoted community member awareness , as employers were quite optimistic about the capabilities of student employees. Because certain arrangements for the program still need

to be planned, this community-based instruction program had not taken place yet this year; however, the plan will exist again in the future.

The instructor of this program describes "Bobby" as a hard worker who is highly motivated. He has no difficulty with absenteeism or tardiness. He follows directions and asks appropriate questions when he does not understand. According to his teacher, "Bobby" is always prepared for class and tries to do his best work. "Bobby" is shy when he first meets a person, but he gets along well with others.

Currently, "Bobby" is enrolled in the recycling program, but he reports that he does not want a future job related to this. He has also participated in community job training at a grocery store and a restaurant. He did not enjoy dusting, sweeping, and mopping. He explains that he can see himself working in a factory, loading at a tobacco plant, working in a construction site, or operating a printing press at a location in close proximity to where he lives. "Bobby's" teacher realizes that he has a wide range of interests and believes he will get a job easily. Because he will only need minimal support, she can see

him in competitive employment and predicts successful performance.

Although "Bobby" does not have a formal job, he completes chores at home and receives an allowance each week. He enjoys outside chores such as cutting the grass. "Bobby" believes he will stay home for a short period of time and get a job after graduation. He does not think getting a job will be too difficult and assumes his family and teacher will help him find an employment opportunity in which he is interested.

"Richard", is described as a junior who needs to be directed frequently, as he is often not on-task. Although he comes to class on time and prepared, he often does not follow directions. His teacher knows he can follow directions, but states that he often chooses not to complete his work. He frequently makes excuses to avoid class participation. "Richard's" teacher thinks he is more interested in fantasy such as television cartoons and daydreams about super heroes.

"Richard" is enrolled in the recycling program, but admits that he is not interested in this job. He has no specific behavior problems, but must be constantly reminded to complete specific tasks. His

teacher believes he will need supportive employment
because he lacks confidence. According to his teacher,
"Richard" did fairly well during his participation in
the community job training program. She hopes he will
have the opportunity to explore more jobs in the
future.

When interviewed, "Richard" discussed his family
in great depth. He stated that he will live with them
for a time after graduation and close to them in the
future. He feels he should sample different jobs in
order to ascertain his interests. He enjoys
photography, but would also like to become a police
officer or a disc jockey. He seemed to enjoy working
in the restaurant because it is "easy work" for him.
"Richard" says he does not like stocking or recycling
and would prefer a different job. He firmly believes
that when he has to get a job, he will be the one to
decide where he will work. Although he knows he will
need assistance in this area, his family or teacher
will not make the final decision, rather he will.

At this time, "Richard" has decided to think about
his job interests and worry about employment when he is
forced to in the future. He explains that he is given

money from his parents for feeding the dog and storing

hay. He does not do any other chores because they are

not of interest to him.

Themes Within Programs

Two themes were found across the two students in

the school-based program (Program A). Both students

expressed their concerns about finding a job outside

the area. They realize travel will be necessary due to

their rural location. Because both students have

specific interests and jobs in mind, they have an idea

of the travel involved in pursuit of their employment

and they both have specific location options to

consider.

Also found among both students was a display of

self-advocacy. Because "Ginny" has difficulties with

math, she asked for a math tutor on her own. She has

decided to join a club which may help her obtain future

employment as well. Similarly, "Eddie" wanted a job

within the classroom which is not required in this

program. His teacher explains that he asks for

additional responsibility in the class. By performing

behavior monitoring duties, he frequently displays

leadership quality and acceptance of responsibility.

In the past, he has chosen classes from which he felt he would benefit such as food services.

Themes discovered among the two students in the community-based program (Program B) varied from those seen in Program A. Location was not perceived as a problem for either student, as there are a variety of employment opportunities suiting their specific interests available within the area. Both students reported that they would be able to find a job which they would enjoy near their present location.

As opposed to the students enrolled in Program A, the two students involved in Program B mentioned their teacher as a source to help them find a job. Both students have particular interests in mind, but realize they will need assistance from family, friends, and/or their teacher. Unlike the first two students described in Program A, school support is an option for them.

Themes Across School Programs

Three themes were discovered across the two programs. All four students mentioned the family/friends network as the primary source to assist them in job acquisition. Although the two students enrolled in Program B reported that their teacher may

help them find a job, they believed their family and friends would also play a major role. Not one of the four students mentioned community or agency support.

Although all students realized some support would be needed for employment placement, each student had specific interests in mind. Only one student knows exactly what job she would like to have, but the rest do have certain basic ideas. Ultimately, all students agreed that their final employment decision would be their choice.

The third theme was found in the post-graduation living status among all four students. Each student reported that he/she will live at home, at least for a period of time following graduation. The two students from Program A both plan to pursue their employment careers as soon as they graduate. The two students from Program B are also beginning to explore their options. Again all students plan to live at home, but would eventually like to move out of their homes.

Discussion

Both the school-based and community-based programs provided appropriate experiences for the students. All four students appear to be benefitting from their educational program in the area of job exploration. The two students enrolled in the school-based program have the opportunity to receive training and experience at the vocational center involving jobs of their interest. Similarly, the community-based instruction model provides students with a wide variety of job experiences.

One problem in comparing the two programs may be seen as a result of differences in student functioning. The two students attending vocational classes were higher functioning, as compared to those interviewed from the community-based program. This may account for each programs' ability to meet individual student's needs. In other words, one might question how well each student's needs would have been met if they been placed in opposite programs.

Another question which may be raised concerns location and travel. For example, the students enrolled in the community-based program may have had no

need to travel because their job exploration and experience was within the community. On the other hand, the students who attended vocational classes felt they had to travel to find jobs of interest. These students may have wanted to acquire jobs within their area had they had the opportunity to discover these other options.

The decision of all four students to live at home after graduation is consistently portrayed in the research literature. Although many students enrolled in special education live with their families after graduation, a large number of "normal" graduates live at home as well. All four students planned to move out of their homes eventually. This desire may be no different than that of students enrolled in regular education. Maybe this is just a typical young adult plan for the future to find successful employment before leaving home.

Variables which may have affected the information obtained during the interview process include the ability of each student to convey the answers clearly and to set realistic goals. The two students from Program A were higher functioning students who gave a

greater amount of detail when answering questions.
Both were willing to share their educational
experiences. One student from Program B was somewhat
shy and did not discuss his answers in depth. In
addition, the other student in Program B may have had
unrealistic job expectations.

Furthermore, "Ginny" demonstrated an emotional
frustration during her interview. She had a great
desire to express her concerns about her educational
experience. She stressed the importance of involving
students in the IEP development process. Clearly, all
four students interviewed want to be informed about
their future so that they may make the final decisions
for their choice of employment.

Finally, time was a limiting factor with this
study. It may be beneficial to interview more
students, many different teachers, and several schools
in a variety of locations. An interesting avenue for
further research may be to compare student, teacher,
and employer perceptions across school-based and
community-based programs.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Longwood College
Consent for Participation in
Social and Behavioral Research

I, _____, consent to
participate (or to allow my child or legal subject to
participate) in the research entitled:

_____

_____

I acknowledge that the purpose of this study, the
procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of
my participation have been explained to me. Possible
benefits of this project have also been described to
me.

I understand that my (or my child's or legal
subject's) participation in this research is voluntary.
No information will be presented which will identify me
(or my child or legal subject), as privacy and
confidentiality have been assured.

I understand that if I have concerns or complaints
about my (or my child's or legal subject's) treatment
in this study, I am encouraged to contact the Office of
Academic Affairs at Longwood College at (804) 395-2010.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully
understand the consent form. I sign it freely and
voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: _____   Signed: _____
                                    (Participant)

Date: _____   Signed: _____
                                    (Parent or Guardian)

Appendix B

Sample Interview Questions

of Faculty and Staff

How well does the student work and get along with others?

How is the student's ability to follow directions?

Does the student come to class daily?

Does the student have any problems with tardiness?

Does the student ask for help appropriately when needed?

Does the student appropriately prepare for class?

How would you describe the student's confidence?

What can you tell me about the students's level of motivation?

What is your opinion about the student's ability to get a job?

If the student has a job, what do you know about his/her abilities to perform?

Appendix C
Sample Interview Questions
for Student

Tell me about your school.

What do you do in class?

Do you come to school everyday?

Are you ever late for class?

Do you have any jobs around school?
Describe.

Is there a job you would like to have around school?
Why?

Do you like your job? Why?

Do you have any jobs after school?

Is there anything you do not like about your job?

What kind of job would you like when you graduate?

What do you think you will be doing when you graduate?

Biography of Author

Shirl Carwile plans to complete the requirements for a Masters of Science Degree in Special Education from Longwood College. She hopes to explore a variety of teaching experiences in the future. Other goals include further education.