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A COMPARISON OF CAREER AWARENESS DEVELOPMENT IN DEAF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL STUDENTS AND NON-DISABLED PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Children with severe physical disabilities, such as blindness, deafness or orthopedic problems, often live in a restricted environment. Restrictions are imposed by a variety of factors, including mobility and communication limitations, institutional rigidity and regimentation, and exclusionist or protective attitudes of parents, professionals, and the public in general. This restricted environment results in a dearth of real world experiences. Especially notable is diminished exposure to the world of work. Further, children with disabilities are sometimes subject to "labeling" and "stereotyping", which also may direct and narrow experiences or learning opportunities. When these conditions prevail, the long-term consequences may range from social immaturity to total dependency. One specific and critical result is that these combined factors leave the children with relatively few career options when they reach adulthood (Harrington, 1982; Career Planning and Placement Center, 1981). Few career avenues are open to individuals with deficient educational backgrounds or, perhaps, a lack of basic social skills essential to job retention. In sum, consequences of the restricted world experience may contribute to a lack of motivation to seek employment, dissatisfaction with feasible employment, erratic work history, unemployment, and a general waste of human potential.

Problems attributable to limited work related knowledge and experiences are well documented with regard to persons who have been prelingually deaf. For example, the issues of vocational immaturity (McHugh, 1975), lack of job preparedness (Bolton, 1975), and lowered career aspirations (Farrugia, 1982) have all been addressed with regard to this population. The implications are that much remedial programming is required to deal with these problems (Moccia, 1981) and that such problems may be preventable by implementing enriched career

education and guidance programming for youngsters who are deaf (Lerman, 1976). This remedy would seem straight forward were it not for the lack of research delineating exactly when and how to proceed. Although most vocational theorists, e.g., Super (1953), subscribe to a developmental model of vocational adjustment and choice, little has been said or documented about the interaction of a severe disability with that developmental process (Conte, 1983). Until more information is available, it will be difficult to be certain that ameliorative programs are optimally appropriate and effective. This situation has given impetus to initiating the following study of career awareness development in children who are prelingually deaf.

METHODOLOGY

Since a review of related literature has revealed no commonly accepted definition of career awareness, for this study it is understood to consist of knowledge of jobs, vocations, occupations, and careers, and the ability to relate this information to one's aspirations, interests, abilities, the prevailing environment, and social roles. As such, career awareness is only one aspect of the broadly encompassing process of vocational development. Since it is part of a developmental process which, according to theorists such as Super, begins at an early age, it was decided to design a study with a time focus. Subsequently, a four group research paradigm was designed which would enable a comparison of career awareness development in deaf and nondisabled school students in the second and eighth grades. Deafness was defined as prelingual hearing loss of sufficient magnitude to preclude the understanding of speech through ear alone, with or without the use of a hearing aid (usually a loss of 70db or greater). The second grade was chosen as the lower age limit to insure that the children had a grasp of

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basic quantitative concepts and social concepts such as work. The eighth grade was selected because it is usually at this point that students are confronted with their first major career decision. This is when "tracking" often begins, e.g., college preparation and vocational education, and to contribute meaningfully to the decision, the student must have some fundamental career related knowledge and insight.

Because of the limited education and cognitive abilities of second grade students, it was necessary to focus the study on relatively simple and concrete concepts. From several hypotheses about the interaction of severe disability and career awareness, those relating to variables thought to be applicable to persons at the second grade level were incorporated into the study. These variables included expressed career aspirations, confidence in attaining one's aspiration, the magnitude of the world of work, and the awareness of specific jobs. Specifically, a questionnaire and structured interview format were developed which included the following items:

1. What would you most like to do or be if you could do anything you wanted when you are grown up?
2. Do you think you will really do that? (yes/no)
3. How many different kinds of jobs do you think there are for people to work at: about 10, 100, 1000, or 1,000,000?
4. Name as many different jobs as you can think of.

The deaf students selected for inclusion in the study were enrolled in a residential school and comprised the entire second and eighth grade classes ($n = 7$ and $n = 22$, respectively). The small size of the second grade class is a reflection of ongoing phaseout of the school concomitant with the increased emphasis on mainstreaming. Matched samples of nondisabled students enrolled in public schools in the vicinity of the residential school were created using a random selection procedure with pools of students categorized by grade, age, sex, and race. No students determined to be mentally retarded or having any other handicap were in any of the groups, nor were there any classified as gifted.

The study was carried out during May 1984, near the end of the school year. Data were first obtained from the two groups of students who

were deaf. The second graders were interviewed individually by their regular teacher, who served as the interpreter, accompanied by a research assistant, who recorded the children's responses and observations of the procedure. The children were questioned by the teacher using simultaneous modes of communication, which was standard practice at the school. No time limits were imposed. The eighth grade students were interviewed in groups of four or five. The purpose of the study was explained by the teacher and the students were instructed to write their responses on the questionnaire sheets. Assistance in spelling was given, as well as explanations when requested, but the students were required to keep their answers "secret" during the interviewing procedure. The same procedures were used with the groups of matched nondisabled public school students except that communication was oral-aural.

FINDINGS

A notable unexpected difficulty emerged during the sessions with the deaf students. Almost immediately it became apparent that the second graders had difficulty in distinguishing between what is work and what is play. The deaf students frequently were not able to respond spontaneously, but rather, required constant, subtle direction and prompting from the interviewer as well as considerable explanation of what work is. Although apparently limited in precisely "naming" jobs, through the use of mime and gestures, they were usually able to make themselves understood by both the interviewer and research assistant. Subsequently, the same difficulties were experienced by the deaf eighth grade students. On the other hand, the interviews were carried out in a straightforward manner with the nondisabled public school students who readily gave appropriate responses to the questions and appeared to be quite confident of their performances. In sum, compared to the nondisabled students, the deaf students at both grade levels gave a considerable number of inappropriate responses stemming from limited ability to distinguish between work, recreation, and workplace.

The responses to the first question, i.e. "What would you most like to do . . .", are graphically presented in Figures 1 and 2. The profiles were created using job classifications

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from the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)* first digit codes (U.S. Department of Labor, 1977). As can be seen in Figure 1, the profiles for both the deaf and nondisabled second graders are similar, with the largest response grouping falling in the professional, technical, and managerial category. However, a comparison of the profiles of the two eighth grade groups (Figure 2) reveals a different picture.

FIGURE 1
Profiles of the Expressed Career Aspirations of 2nd-Grade Groups

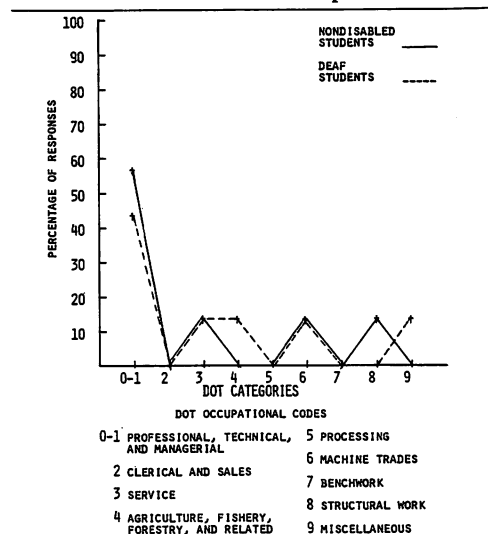
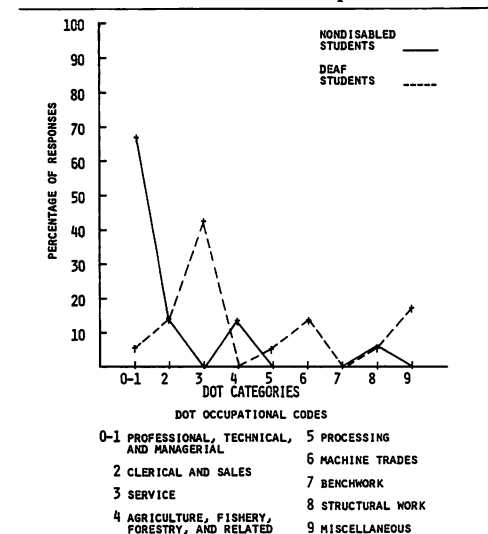


FIGURE 2
Profiles of the Expressed Career Aspirations of 8th-Grade Groups



Although the profile of the nondisabled group remains substantially the same as that of its second grade counterpart, a significantly different pattern was produced by the responses of the deaf eighth graders. For this group, expressed aspirations in the professional, technical, managerial category were minimal, while jobs in the service occupations were predominant.

Responses to the second question, which asked whether the students expected to attain their expressed career aspiration, were similar for all four groups. Eighty-two to 100 percent of the groups responded affirmatively and this relatively small variation does not approach statistical significance.

The second grade group estimates of the number of different kinds of jobs (item 3) were similar for both the deaf and nondisabled students. Approximately 50 percent of the students in each of these groups indicated 100 or less and the other half chose 1,000 or more, but the breakdown of responses by the deaf eighth graders was identical to that of the second grade groups.

The response pattern for the fourth item, which required students to name as many different kinds of jobs as they could think of, is shown in Figure 3. All responses were coded using

FIGURE 3
Comparison of the Number of Different Jobs Named by Each Group

	2nd Grade	8th Grade
Deaf Students	38	37
Nondisabled Students	54	83

the *DOT* classification system, and the number of different jobs named by each group were tabulated, that is, if two or more students in the same group named the same job, it was only counted once. Thus, "variety" was the focus of this analysis. Statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference were determined to exist between the second and eighth grade nondisabled students and between the eighth grade nondisabled and eighth grade deaf groups using McNemar's test for correlated proportions (Everitt, 1977). Although the number of different responses generated by the nondisabled second graders seems to be larger than that of the deaf second graders, a statistically significant difference is not supported by statistical test. The average total number of responses by

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students in each of the four groups was also calculated and the same proportional relationship displayed in the above analysis was retained. In sum, the number of different responses, as well as the average total number of responses, for both second grade groups were similar. The eighth grade nondisabled students responded with greater variety and frequency than both of the second grade groups and the eighth grade deaf group.

An additional analysis was performed on the data acquired from the fourth item. The different responses were classified according to the DOT schemata, and profiles created in the manner used for Figures 1 and 2. Essentially the same profiles resulted. That is, the majority of responses from both second grade groups fell in the professional, technical, and managerial category and a notable difference in the profile of the deaf eighth grade group reflected a preponderance of responses in the service category and few in the professional, technical, and managerial category.

DISCUSSION

It is cautioned that the conclusions and generalizability of the findings from this study are limited because of the limited sample sizes and because the samples were drawn from local, and, therefore, unique settings. Further, no attempt was made to discriminate the impact of deafness *per se*, that is, the communication handicap, from the impact of restrictions which may have been imposed by institutional factors. The consistency of the findings is, nevertheless, compelling. With regard to an awareness of the world of work, the second graders in both the deaf and nondisabled groups appeared to be on nearly the same level. The term "nearly" is used emphatically. With regard to the formally collected data, the second grade students were, in fact, similar in all respects, e.g., the general nature of their career aspirations, knowledge of different kinds of jobs, and perception of the magnitude of the world of work. However, as alluded to previously, the deaf children had considerable difficulty in responding because they did not seem to have yet acquired a good grasp of the basic concepts of "work" and "job". There was no such difficulty noted with the nondisabled second grade students who responded appropriately, without hesitation and exuding confidence. This limitation would seem

to portend problems in later years. Although the nondisabled second graders may not have acquired substantially more specific career related knowledge at this point, a more solid grasp of the underlying concepts of work and job provides them with a psychological set which may focus their attention on related matters, thereby facilitating acquisition of relevant information during ensuing years. This set may be critical in precipitating and sustaining the "exploratory" stage of vocational development described by Super (1953). Overall, the analysis of the data is consistent with this hypothesis. The nondisabled eighth graders clearly had acquired knowledge of a greater number of jobs, as well as an expanded awareness of the world of work in general. In contrast, the deaf eighth grade students performed at the same level as their second grade counterparts. Differences of a more subtle nature did exist, however, between the second and eighth grade deaf students. Familiarity with service occupations was heightened in the eighth grade deaf group, while the percentage of responses in the professional, technical and managerial category was small compared to the second graders. This pattern is consistent with the findings of others, such as Joiner, Erickson, and Crittenden (1968). There is nothing in this study which suggests a possible cause for this difference. On the basis of the data from this study, the areas of familiarity correlate highly with the area of expressed career aspiration.

It does seem safe to conclude that the experiential differences of the deaf residential school students played a significant role insofar as limiting the development of their career awareness and leaving them disadvantaged compared to their nondisabled peers. This conclusion is not new and is consistent with earlier reports, such as that of Lerman and Guilfoyle (1970). What is significant is that by the time they reach the second grade, deaf children already manifest evidence of underdeveloped vocational awareness. Without intervention at an early point in the residential school setting, one would expect an even greater widening of the gap by adulthood and the literature pertaining to the vocational status of prelingually deaf adults seems to support this. Based on the relatively limited understanding of concept of "work" exhibited by the second grade deaf students in this study, this may be the critical point

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at which to start. Failure to develop the necessary foundation at this point may well preclude the likelihood of ever catching up completely.

Equally important to these findings, however, is what the study has not done. Since the study was not focused on determining specific causal factors, the findings do not provide much guidance with regard to the nature of ameliorative programming. For example, no indications as to whether particular emphasis should be given conceptual, informational, or institutional

issues are apparent. These questions may be answered by pursuing similar studies with other disability groups and in other settings, for example, mainstreamed deaf students. In conclusion, it seems imperative that more developmentally focused studies be conducted in order that information critical to the design of appropriate and effective career education and guidance programs for persons who are prelingually deaf is obtained.

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