St. Cloud State University

The Repository at St. Cloud State

6-2022

Work-based Learning Programs for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Trista Kleinsteuber

Work-based Learning Programs for Students with Intellectual and

Developmental Disabilities

by

Trista Kleinsteuber

A Starred Paper

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Science

in Special Education

June, 2022

Starred Paper Committee:
Bradley Kaffar, Chairperson
J. Michael Pickle

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Work-based learning (WBL) is a model of education that allows students to apply their classroom-based learnings in vocational environments as a purposeful component of the curriculum (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2003). In the model, classroom courses and vocational courses are designed to meet the individual interests and aptitudes of students. WBL allows students to explore careers and to develop work related skills in an environment supported by educators and by employers (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2003). WBL provides opportunities for students with all levels of skills, regardless of their individual ability or background. The model has been used for students who have disabilities and for students who do not have disabilities. This paper examines work-based learning for students who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Background of the Topic

Work-based learning has myriad historical and conceptual antecedents. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 included the creation of work-study programs (Campus Compact, 2019). The legislation gave individuals opportunities to contribute as working members of society. The Act also created the Job Corps, a program that prepares young people, ages 18-21 years, for useful work experiences and vocational training. Post-secondary institutions were also used to develop vocational skills and to allow for career exploration. The Higher Education Act of 1965, revised in 1972, included a Community Service-Learning Program. Participants provided service to the community, learned vocational skills, and expanded their education. As a result of the *A Nation at Risk* report, work-based learning experiences increased in the 1980s. In addition to improving academic outcomes, the document also argued for more advanced vocational programs. Work related training and experiences were seen as important components

of education and not stand-alone activities. In 1994, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act was passed. The legislation encouraged communities to teach real-life skills to students through employment and to make connections between academic learning and careers. In 2002, School-to-Work contributed to career preparation and taught positive work behaviors and self-advocacy skills. Ancillary benefits included improved student attendance, grades, and graduation rates. Today, our young people continue to need opportunities to explore career options and learn appropriate work skills as students in order to be productive citizens in their adult life.

Over time, education and work partnership programs included students who had disabilities and their non-disabled peers. Despite the efforts of inclusion, individuals with IDD are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than their peers who do not have disabilities. The annual and lifetime earnings of people with disabilities are significantly less than that of their peers. Successful work-based learning programs may ameliorate some of these inequities.

Problem Statement

A number of legislative acts have been passed with foci on offering work-based learning services for individuals with disabilities. Even with these mandates, the potential of work-based learning has not been completely achieved for students with disabilities. Vocational experiences for students with disabilities who are of transition age, 18-21 years, have not been fully instantiated in society. This paper examines work-based learning practices and benefits of program participation from the 1980s to present day. Three foci guide the review. First, the best practices associated with work-based learning will be reviewed. Second, the benefits for participants in WBL will be examined. Lastly, obstacles to implementing WBL will be discussed. The specific focus for this review is students who have intellectual and developmental

disabilities. Based on my experiences as an educator, I believe students who participate in work-based learning experiences will be more likely to be gainfully employed.

Rationale

An element of the review is identifying the best practices associated with WBL. Understanding best practices may improve current models of WBL. Thus, the findings of this review may yield a number of applied outcomes, and myriad groups may benefit directly and indirectly from the results. These groups include students, parents, schools, and employers, and the potential benefits for these stakeholders from incorporating the findings of this analysis into classroom practice are described.

Students

Students will benefit directly from including WBL into classroom practice. First, students who participate in work-based learning programs often improve their academic achievement and may explore various career options. Such programs can increase positive work behaviors such as working cooperatively with others and learning to take initiative. Second, students may build relationships with adult role models, and such relationships may foster increased career success. In addition, students who expand their vocational repertoire also increase self-confidence and work-readiness skills. They associate the connection between academics and employment.

Parents

When the best practices of WBL are instantiated in curricula, parents and guardians may become partners and collaborate with team members to provide support for their student's vocational success. They can help guide their child in making informed career choices based on work-based learning experiences. Involved parents can assist in promoting work expectations,

self-management skills, and self-advocacy on the job. Parents also can assist their child in understanding budgeting and financial decisions.

Schools

A number of tangible benefits for schools accrue from work-based learning. WBL improves academic achievement of participating students (Rodriguez et al., 2016). The students' rate of attendance and graduation are improved by the motivation they have in the program. School and community relationships are enhanced by working together. "Schools can be active learning environments and the curricula at school and work should be designed so they reinforce one another" (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2003).

Employers

Although often perceived as a school program, WBL benefits employers by building positive relationships with students, parents, and schools. They help create better prepared employees who exhibit positive work behaviors. Employers also have reduced recruitment and training costs and better employee retention when the school works with them as a team. Combining school and employer workplace expectations is valuable for the competitive employment market. It also creates favorable visibility between the school and community partnership.

Glossary

A number of terms are used in this paper that are uniquely defined or have delineated clinical definitions. These terms are included in this glossary. The terms are arranged alphabetically.

Customized employment is the negotiation of job tasks or duties designed to meet the identified business or economic need, interest, and strengths of the individual (Martinez, 2013).

A developmental disability is a severe, chronic disability of an individual that can be cognitive, physical, or both, and will last indefinitely (NICHCY, 2011).

Integrated employment is work paid directly by employers at the greater of minimum or prevailing wages with commensurate benefits, occurring in a typical work setting where the employee with a disability interacts or has the opportunity to interact continuously with co-workers without disabilities. The employee has an opportunity for advancement and job mobility. Full time work is preferred (Martinez, 2013).

An *intellectual disability* is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning, viz., reasoning, learning, problem solving, and in adaptive behavior, a range of everyday social and practical skills. The disability manifests before the individual attains age of 22 years (NICHCY, 2011).

Self-determination involves having the abilities and opportunities to steer one's life in a direction that contributes to a personally satisfying life. Equipping students with the skills, the attitudes, and the opportunities to play an active role in their learning and in determining their future is now considered a best practice in the field of special education (Cabeza et al., 2013).

Supported employment provides individuals with disabilities the appropriate, ongoing support, i.e., vocational assessments, job coaches, job skills training, that are necessary for success in a competitive work environment (Wehman et al., 2018).

Transition services are a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed within an outcome-oriented process and that promotes movement from school to post-school activities including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services independent

living, or community participation (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2003).

A *work-based learning coordinator* is a licensed teacher with a work-experience coordinator's license or a teacher/coordinator of work-based learning endorsement who oversees components of a work-based learning program including school-based learning, work-based learning, and connecting activities (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2003).

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Work-based learning programs often contribute to the academic and vocational development of students and young adults. These experiences can be of particular importance to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The programs can affect their vocational paths, successes, and behavioral attitudes. This paper examines the effects of work-based learning program opportunities for 18-21-year-old students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The best practices and the benefits of participants as well as obstacles encountered when implementing work-based learning programs are examined.

Organization Scheme

This paper is arranged topically. The principal foci are best practices, benefits for all participants, and associated obstacles in work-based learning (WBL). A best practice is a process that has been proven to work well and produce productive outcomes. Benefits for all participants constitute helpful results or effects. Obstacles are difficulties that impede progress and require changes to be made in order to overcome them.

Scope of Review

A number of procedures were used to locate the resources used in this analysis. I searched the Academic Premier database, the ERIC database, and the Teacher Reference Center database computationally. I used the following descriptors to locate studies. First, I searched the Academic Premier database using "work-based learning" as a search term. This search yielded 3,094 studies. To reduce the number of retrieved materials, I conducted a subsequent search using "work-based learning" and "intellectual and developmental disabilities" as combined search terms. This search yielded four studies. Then, I searched the Academic Premier database using "employment partnerships" as a search term. This search yielded 241 studies. To reduce

the number of retrieved materials, I conducted a subsequent search using "employment partnerships" and "youth" as combined search terms. This search yielded 28 studies. Next, I searched the ERIC database using "work-based learning" as a search term. This search yielded 23,546 studies. To reduce the number of retrieved materials, I conducted a subsequent search using "work-based learning" and "School to Work Opportunities Act 1994" as combined search terms. This search yielded 76 studies. Finally, I searched the Teacher Reference Center database using "work-based learning" as a search term. This search yielded 701 studies. To reduce the number of retrieved materials, I conducted a subsequent search using "work-based learning" and "school to work programs" as combined search terms. This search yielded 22 studies.

Literature Review

Best Practices Associated with Work-based Learning

Review of literature in the best practices section examines services that can be implemented in work-based learning programs that are essential for post-school outcomes. Examples of programs are derived from The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) and The Rehabilitation Act (1992), emphasizing the importance of goal setting activities. Overall partnerships are identified in all aspects of successful programming involving students, parents, schools, and outside agencies.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) requires schools to implement transition services that are "results-oriented" for students with disabilities (Riesen & Oertle, 2019). Students' educational plans should focus on post-school desires according to federal policy. This consists of many coordinated activities to benefit future outcomes. Involving students in their future planning results in more success in achieving goals (Kohler & Field, 2003). Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) discovered that one year after school completion,

graduates of special education programs are more likely to be successfully employed with higher wages if they had high self-determination scores. Bridges (Fabian et al., 1998) is an example of a well-articulated vocational program that serves students in special education programs their last year of high school. It provides pre-vocational orientation and goal setting activities, pre-vocational preparation, and intern placement and support (Fabian et al., 1998).

The Rehabilitation Act (1992) concurs with IDEA that partnerships between Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and education should occur early for career development success (Riesen & Oertle, 2019). Research suggests that family involvement is a key factor in transition planning (Butterworth et al., 2017). Gilson et al. (2018) made it clear that employers should develop close family connections and express interest in hiring people with disabilities. Partnerships with VR and community agencies support students and families to address transition needs with summer programming. Future research is needed to identify the most effective partnerships (Carter et al., 2009).

Involvement in career development experiences in school and beyond is crucial in transition preparedness; it is a direct pathway to post-school employment (Blustein et al., 2016). In a review of literature (Riesen & Oertle, 2019), IDEA emphasizes post-school planning to transition into adulthood. This includes students with intellectual and developmental disabilities working in integrated settings. Individuals should be able to channel interest and abilities into a job or a career they enjoy. Programs, e.g., Ticket to Work (Martinez, 2013) and Employment First (Martinez, 2013), legislative policies, and funding encourage positive integrated employment outcomes (Martinez, 2013). Additional career development activities to support best practices in employment phases include getting to know the job seeker, job development, training and support, and job retention services (Wehman et al., 2018).

Identifying effective ways to connect youth with IDD to community jobs include understanding their experiences, factors influencing employment outcomes, and designing programs with transition teams to overcome barriers for successful employment (Carter et al., 2009). Best practices include developing strong soft skills within school communities of general education peers. This is important, as the workforce highly values positive social skills for employment (Wehman et al., 2018). Research (Jorgensen Smith et al, 2015) shows that Face to Face Discovery programs are more successful than online pilot programs. Providing direct supervisor services to job seekers creates more motivation in coursework completion (Jorgensen Smith et al., 2015). Developing best practices leads to benefits for all participants in work-based learning programs.

Benefits for All Participants in Work-based Learning

Review of literature in the benefits section examines programs and activities necessary to meet individual work-based learning needs. It identifies the importance of social skill development and connections with employers, coworkers, and community resources. This section also includes benefits that are essential to improve and maintain positive outcomes.

High school students with intellectual and developmental disabilities whose parents expected post-school work are more than three times likely to have paid employment within two years of leaving high school compared to parents who did not have those expectations (Carter et al., 2012). For example, outcomes from the Bridges program show 71% of students accepted a job offer after completion and 80% of students were competitively employed or in school after a 6-month follow-up assessment (Fabian et al., 1998). Several benefits for students with IDD who participate in work-based learning programs accrue. Riesen and Oertle (2019) found that 37.84% of employers who participated in their study provided employment training opportunities to

students with disabilities. The majority seemed to believe that creating training opportunities provides social benefits for both the employer and student (Riesen & Oertle, 2019).

Benefits Arising from Individualization

Individualization of job-related supports, employer supports, and individual desire to work should be factored into the process of work-based learning (Gilson et al, 2018), and such processes yield practical benefits. First, supported employment is cost effective and produces positive vocational outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Second, the job seekers' interests are considered during job development and training (Wehman et al., 2018). Third, integrated employment is cost effective and yields financial remuneration at the level of minimum wage or higher (Martinez, 2013). Finally, customized employment increases employment rates of individuals with disabilities. The success of this person-centered approach for job seekers also lessens reliance on support from Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or other public assistance (Martinez, 2013).

Benefits of Participating in WBL

A number of benefits arise from participation in WBL. Studies by Kohler and Field (2003) indicate positive outcomes if students participate in vocational education, complete paid work experiences, and have an involved vocational support team that includes parents or guardians. To ensure long term outcomes are maintained, transition-focused education should direct adult outcomes. The focus for academic, career, and extracurricular activities should emerge from students' abilities, options, and self-determination (Kohler & Field, 2003). The benefits of these emphases include improved post-school employment outcomes.

Benefits of Ancillary Elements of WBL: Extracurricular and Extended School Year

Extracurricular and extended school year training may be an element of WBL. Because of lower participation rates, little is known about students with disabilities who complete summer work programs (Kohler & Field, 2003), but such ancillary training programs may yield continuing benefits through new skill mastery and through the maintenance of extant skills. Summer programs offer exploratory experiences where students can learn appropriate work habits and behaviors, discover preferences and interests, and develop relationships with others (Kohler & Field, 2003).

Benefits of Ancillary Elements of WBL: Related Services

IDEA (2004) emphasizes the importance of furthering education, employment, and independent living for students who have disabilities. However, minimal progress has been made toward integrated community employment opportunities expansion (Butterworth et al., 2015). There are several plans that benefit work-based learning programs. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs consist of post-secondary education, training, employment, and career development services. They include a focus on developing social skills, independent living skills, and self-advocacy skills (Riesen & Oertle, 2019). Discovery provides a foundation for employment planning. It uses strengths, talents, and conditions for employment through natural environment interactions with individuals with disabilities and familiar persons. Benefits include translating discovered talents into work settings conducive to individual community placements (Jorgensen Smith et al., 2015). As previously indicated, families are essential supports for adults with disabilities. Parents and guardians recognize job success for their child with disabilities to include job satisfaction, interests, and opportunities to interact with others to develop friendships.

Work-based Learning Obstacles

Gilson et al. (2018) report that there is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach for employment success. Programs with benefits and best practices still encounter systemic variables that impede work-based learning implementation. Transition programs are not individualized, are described in broad, nonspecific fashion, and are evaluated at single program sites (Fabian et al., 1998), and thus, the results may not be generalized. According to Rutkowski et al. (2006), variables that further confound the generalization of results include a lack of trained professionals, insufficient collaboration, mandates focusing on academics and testing, and inadequate resources including transportation. An additional obstacle of work-based learning is the lack of knowledge about how to engage, network, and build relationships with employers (Riesen & Oertle, 2019).

Unemployment and Underemployment

Blustein et al. (2016) surveyed 1,065 parents and caregivers of a child with disabilities about the importance of part-time or full-time community employment after high school. The gap between importance and likelihood of employment outcomes showed 79.7% (importance) versus 61.7% (likelihood) for full-time and 63% (importance) versus 44.4% (likelihood) for part-time. This gap can be attributed to limited vocational options and supports that reduce opportunities for work. Additional research is needed to identify these possibilities (Blustein et al., 2016). Only 4% of students with disabilities, ages 18-21, are employed in integrated jobs, along with low wages and minimal hours. Students with IDD are often discouraged from community employment during transition years, and instead, they work in sheltered employment settings. This usually occurs due to poor collaboration between school and family, to a limited emphasis on integrated employment, and to a lack of family participation (Butterworth et al., 2017).

Carter et al. (2009) found that work experiences are more restrictive for students with a disability and minimal skills can be a factor in finding summer employment. Students with nominal career development and vocational experiences may find it difficult to locate and maintain a summer job. Limited external support at summer jobs can contribute to difficulties locating work (Carter et al., 2009). Martinez (2013) identifies misrepresentation, stigmatizing, and underestimating work skills of a person with disabilities as continued challenges to move forward with integrated employment. Martinez reports the principal factors driving these challenges as lack of knowledge, capacity, and resources to facilitate change.

Program studies indicate work-based learning continually encounters obstacles. For example, if students had not participated in the previously described Bridges program, their job opportunities may have been more limited in the competitive market (Fabian et al., 1998). With regards to competitive and integrated employment, individuals with disabilities are employed at community paid jobs of less than 10% with segregated work settings on the rise. From 1999-2015, there was a 33.8% increase in these segregated programs (Wehman et al., 2018). Based on a study by Kohler and Field (2003), original ideas of "transition services" represents a narrow interpretation of the concept and focuses on services as the process of transition planning. They found that transition planning was previously viewed as an add-on activity for students, when in fact it should be a fundamental basis of educational development.

Chapter III: Summary and Implications

The literature suggests that most students with intellectual and developmental disabilities fare poorly in comparison to their peers who do not have disabilities regarding employment. Even though work opportunities have been in place for decades, individuals with IDD are most likely to be unemployed or underemployed (Riesen & Oertle, 2019). According to the study (Gilsonet al., 2018), best practice emphasizes family involvement as a key component to successful work-based learning outcomes. When skills are introduced in high school and individualized programming of interests is determined, greater opportunities to develop positive work behaviors and employment skills result (Riesen & Oertle, 2019). The literature also suggests that outside supports, viz., supported, integrated, and customized employment, contribute to post-secondary job placement and retention. Several studies (Carter et al., 2009; Jorgensen Smith et al., 2015; Wehman et al., 2018) indicate that obstacles continue to reduce opportunities for students with IDD. When programs are not individualized nor staffed by trained professionals, skill development may be impeded. Additional studies need to be conducted to ensure that appropriate instruments and methods are used to assess individual interests, strengths, and desires.

Implications

The constitution of transition teams affects the efficacy of transition planning. Family involvement is a recurrent theme across the reviewed studies. An integrated transition team is needed to develop and carry out a plan that supports individuals from high school to adulthood. The continued involvement of agencies such as VR is essential to evaluate and reevaluate worker progress, goals, and adjustments that may be needed. Transition development plans should start early in high school to hone in on student interests and opportunities to try unpaid and paid

experiences that can be observed and monitored by trained school personnel and employers. Developing programs with ample feedback and that address work behavior skills and social skills will assist in supporting future job and career successes for workers with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Students should understand the connection between academics and careers to expand their repertoire of skills, aptitudes, self-advocacy and soft skills.

Further Research and Study

Myriad issues related to WBL require further investigation. First, transition services and work-based learning are often narrowly defined. Studies that have broader foci are needed to ensure a complete understanding of best practices. Second, students do not always see a relationship or connection between what they learn in school and what they will do when they graduate. The means for helping students transfer school-based learning to vocational settings need to be examined. Third, the literature suggests that career development is an important component in school curriculums. Goals, objectives, and activities for work-based learning of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities must be modified for each student according to their individual abilities and needs. Formative assessment, continuous monitoring, and iterative adjustments of transition services need further investigation. Further research should be completed to support individual worker interests, work readiness skills, and customized employment.

References

Blustein, C. L., Carter, E. W., & McMillan, E. D. (2016). The voices of parents: Post-high school

expectations, priorities, and concerns for children with intellectual and developmental

disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education*, *50*(3), 164-177.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466916641381

Butterworth, J., Christensen, J., & Flippo, K. (2017). Partnerships in employment: Building

strong coalitions to facilitate systems change for youth and young adults. *Journal of

Vocational Rehabilitation*, *47*(3), 265-276. https://doi.org/10.3233/jvr-170901

Butterworth, J., Winsor, J., Smith, F. A., Migliore, A., Domin, D., Timmons, J., & Hall, A. C.

(2015). *StateData: The national report on employment services and outcomes*. Boston,

MA: Institute for Community Inclusion.

Cabeza, B., Magill, L., Jenkins, A., Carter, E. W., Greiner, S., Bell, L., & Lane, K. L. (2013).

Promoting self-determination among students with disabilities: A guide for Tennessee

educators. *Project Support & Include at Vanderbilt University*, pp. 1-14.

Campus Compact. (2019). *A brief history of the federal work-study program*. Retrieved from

https://compact.org/initiatives/federal-work-study/brief-history/

Carter, E. W., Austin, D., & Trainor, A. A. (2012). Predictors of postschool employment

outcomes for young adults with severe disabilities. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies,

23,* 50-63. https://doi:10.1177/1044207311414680

Carter, E. W., Trainor, A. A., Ditchman, N., Swedeen, B., & Owens, L. (2009). Community-

based summer work experiences of adolescents with high-incidence disabilities. *The

Journal of Special Education*, *45*(2), 89-103. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466909353204

Fabian, E. S., Lent, R. W., & Willis, S. P. (1998). Predicting work transition outcomes for

    students with disabilities: Implications for counselors. *Journal of Counseling &*

    Development, *76*(3), 311-316. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1998.tb02547.x

Gilson, C. B., Carter, E. W., Bumble, J. L., & McMillan, E. D. (2018). Family perspectives on

    integrated employment for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

    Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, *43*(1), 20-37.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796917751134

Jorgensen Smith, T., Dillahunt-Aspillaga, C., & Kenney, C. (2015). Integrating customized

    employment practices within the vocational rehabilitation system. *Journal of Vocational*

    Rehabilitation, *42*(3), 201-208. https://doi.org/10.3233/jvr-150740

Kohler, P. D., & Field, S. (2003). Transition-focused education: Foundation for the future. *The*

    Journal of Special Education, *37*(3), 174-183. https://doi.org/10.1177/

    00224669030370030701

Martinez, K. (2013). Integrated employment, employment first, and U.S. federal policy. *Journal*

    of Vocational Rehabilitation, *38*(3), 165-168. https://doi.org/10.3233/jvr-130631

Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning. (2003). *Connecting youth to work-*

    based learning. Minnesota: Author.

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY). (2011). *NICHCY fact*

    sheets on specific disabilities. Retrieved from https://www.parentcenterhub.org/

    disability-landing/

Riesen, T., & Oertle , K. M. (2019). Developing work-based learning experiences for students

    with intellectual and developmental disabilities: A preliminary study of employers'

    perspectives. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, *85*(2), 27-36.

Rodriguez, J., Fox, H., & McCambly, H. (2016). Work-based learning as a pathway to

    postsecondary and career success. *Insights on Equity and Outcomes*, (18), 1-8.

Rutkowski, S., Daston, M., Van Kuiken, D. & Riehle, E. (2006) Project search: A demand-side

    model of high school transition. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *25*, 85-96.

Wehman, P., Taylor, J., Brooke, V., Avellone, L., Whittenburg, H., Ham, W., … & Carr, S.

    (2018). Toward competitive employment for persons with intellectual and developmental

    disabilities: What progress have we made and where do we need to go. *Research and*

    Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, *43*(3), 131-144.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796918777730

Wehmeyer, M., & Schwartz, M. (1997). Self-determination and positive adult outcomes: A

    follow-up study of youth with mental retardation or learning disabilities. *Exceptional*

    Children, *63*, 245-255.