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FACTORS WHICH ENHANCE THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO
ADULT LIFE OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Interdisciplinary Studies

by
Gregory Walter Legutki


June 1993

FACTORS WHICH ENHANCE THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO
ADULT LIFE OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

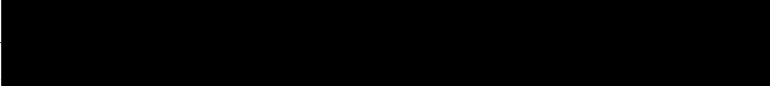
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ABSTRACT

This paper is a description of the results of a survey of high school graduates with special needs identified as SED (severe emotional disturbance). Twenty-eight high school graduates were surveyed to determine which factors had had influence on post-graduation success in adult life. Success was defined as 1) being employed; 2) living alone; 3) paying some or all of one's living expenses; and 4) being involved in leisure time activities. Findings of the survey show that while at school students with special needs do not interact with their non-handicapped peers. And after graduation, these students tend to work fewer hours than full time at jobs at or below minimum wage, tend to live at home with their parents, and do not participate in leisure time activities.

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CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Mercer (1979) writes:

Essentially, [education] focuses upon the individual in an attempt to identify abnormalities. This identification is a careful process of cataloging relevant variables (taking the "history" and various biological and psychological tests) and establishing causal relationships among the variables. Once an etiology or relationship is identified, a treatment plan is designed, implemented, and evaluated. (p. 122).

Since educators tend to follow this medical model, they have always set a course to develop a program with an ultimate goal. Analyzing where the student is, determining where the student should go, then prescribing a course to get there by using a program that has previously been shown to have some effect in moving toward that goal.

Will (1984) described transition as:

An outcome-oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment. Transition is a period that includes high school, the point of graduation, additional postsecondary education or adult services, and the initial years in employment. Transition is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and the opportunities and risks of adult life. Any bridge requires both a solid span and a secure foundation at either end. The transition from school to work and adult life requires sound preparation in the secondary school, adequate support at the point of school leaving, and secure opportunities and services, if needed, in adult situations. (p. 2).

Students with special needs require extra help in making this transition to adult life. Educators take on the task of

assisting these students to transition successfully. However, to move the student through this transition, educators want to find out what works. Using the medical illustration, what "treatment" (program) will effect a "cure" (successful transition)?

Ferguson, Ferguson & James (1988) describe three different types of transitions: (a) bureaucratic transitions; (b) family life transitions; and (c) adult status transitions. Bureaucratic transition is the change from the education system to the adult service system. During bureaucratic transition, the student leaves the school system where for up to twelve years the teacher has been the student's foremost advocate. Now, the student must self-advocate in order to access adult services which are available and entitled. Both the student and the teacher must let go of the security of the school system so that the student can become familiar as well as comfortable with the adult services system.

Family life transition involves the changes and disruptions in the routines and responsibilities within the family. With family life transition, more demands may be placed on the resources of the family to accommodate the needs of the student. As an example, where in the past the student had been at one school site to which school district bussing was available, there is now the possibility that there may be a school site and/or work site to which the student may need to be transported. Family members may be

called upon to rearrange their schedule to provide these transportation services.

Status transition is the process by which the status of a son or a daughter changes from child to adult. Parents and other family members must now look at the child as a grown adult, many times with new responsibilities and expectations on the child. Parents may also need to allow their child more independence in living and decision making during this process.

This paper will look at factors which research has found to have more of an effect on the outcomes of transition from school to adult life.

Transition Success

The first step in the transition process is to define the term "successful" as it relates to transition. In their description of "success," Sitlington and Frank (1990) included (a) being employed; being a homemaker, student, or involved in job training; (b) purchasing a home, living independently, with a friend, or with a parent or relative; (c) paying at least a portion of one's living expenses; and (d) being involved in leisure activities. Successful special education transition programs prepare students to be successful in these areas - having a job, living independently, paying living expenses, and being involved in leisure activities - as they move into adult life. As transition is the outcome of a process, educators look to see

what interventions result in the best outcome.

In the transition process, educators team with the student and parents to create a transition plan. This transition plan is a program of classes and work experience based on the needs and interests of each individual student. The transition plan is outcome oriented in that the ultimate goal of the plan is to assist the student to access adult life outcomes as described by Sitlington and Frank (1990) above. This plan is implemented during the time the student is enrolled in a secondary education program. As the student nears graduation, the plan is modified to include adult service agencies which will help the student in post graduation areas.

Although there are four areas of concern, three of them, independent living, paying one's living expenses, and being involved with leisure activities are basically dependent on the first - being employed. One needs to have a steady income to participate fully in the other three. Therefore, this paper will focus on how the outcomes affect and are affected by employment.

Employment

One major impact on the student's success in the area of employment during the transition process is the self-family-friends network (Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985). In securing employment, the student uses home based resources. Either the student goes out to seek employment on one's own, or the

aid of family or friends is enlisted. A sibling, parent, or other family member/relative assists in securing a job, perhaps at their own place of employment. A family owned business may be the perfect place for the student looking for a job. Or, in the case of the friend, the student is made aware of a job opening where a friend is the employer or already employed when something comes available. The friend has some first hand knowledge of the job, working conditions and may give some on the job support to the student. The friend can also act as a reference vouching for the dependability of the out-of-work student. This network is often described as being a significant factor in students obtaining employment during their transitional years (Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985; Kortering & Edgar, 1988; Haring & Lovett, 1990, Sitlington & Frank, 1990; Thornton & Zigmond, 1988).

Unfortunately, however, current research shows the following outcomes for students with disabilities:

1. Most students with special needs live at home at least five years after graduation from high school (Haring & Lovett, 1990; McDonnell, Wilcox & Boles, 1986; Sitlington & Frank, 1990).

2. Salaries for working young adults with special needs are at or below minimum wage. Jobs tend to be of the low status type. Females earn on the average \$1.00 less per hour, and, as a whole, tend to be less employed than males. (Haring & Lovett, 1990; Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985; Kortering & Edgar, 1988; Sitlington & Frank, 1990.)

3. Most students with special needs have little social contact. (Haring & Lovett, 1990)

Educational Factors

Where, then, is education going wrong? High school educators expect that sound vocational programs provide students with knowledge for the world of work, yet 30-50% of students with special needs drop out of school (deBettencourt, Zigmond & Thornton, 1989; Edgar, 1987; Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985; Levin, Zigmond & Birch, 1985). Surprisingly, some of the research shows that graduates are no better off than dropouts in terms of employment and salary levels (Edgar, 1987; Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985; Levin, Zigmond & Birch, 1985; Thornton & Zigmond, 1988). In their study, deBettencourt, Zigmond & Thornton, (1989) found that LD (Learning Disabled) students who had dropped out of high school were more employed (88%) as those LD students who had stayed and finished their high school program (80%). When compared to their non-handicapped peers, little difference was found in employed vs. non-employed in relation to high school completion. Some indications are that special education and vocational education programs are not giving the students a reason to stay in school (Edgar, 1988; Sitlington & Frank, 1990).

One study (deBettencourt, Zigmond & Thornton, 1989) also noted that students who failed the ninth grade (the first year in high school) were shown to be overwhelmingly the ones

who ended up dropping out of high school and being unemployed, and indicated that "grade retention at middle or high school had a devastating effect on LD students." (p. 46). Therefore, secondary educators and administrators should be extremely careful when considering retention with first year high school students.

While in school, identified students tend not to be progressing in academic areas while in their special programs, yet much time is used trying to keep students academically equal with their non-handicapped peers rather than developing vocational skills (Edgar, 1988; Everson & Moon, 1987; Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985; Schalock, Wolzen, Ross, Elliott, Werbel & Peterson, 1986; Thornton & Zigmond, 1988). Levin, Zigmond & Birch (1985) show that there is an average of only four months growth per year in high school for students with special needs.

These three factors, career preparation/vocational training, retention, and emphasis in academic growth, should indicate a need for some changes in the educational delivery system. That is, there should be more emphasis on programs which prepare students with special needs for above minimum wage employment; a rethinking of local policy regarding retention, especially in the first year of high school; and, finally, the development of programs for secondary school completion which focus more on vocational aspects rather than the typical academic requirements mandated by local school districts.

Planning the Transition

What is being done to change this picture? The federal government has mandated that transition planning must begin well before the student with special needs leaves the school program (PL 99-457). Others say the transition period may last as long as eight to ten years and therefore should begin at a younger age (Everson & Moon, 1987). Still others see transition as a threefold process: sending, receiving, and the event/process of the handoff (or bridge) (Edgar, 1988). Edgar (1988) indicates that the sending process begins at the secondary school level. The high school must work hand-in-hand with the receiving agency or agencies to make the handoff successful. Edgar adds that secondary education must make the focus of the curriculum more in the areas of functional, vocational and independent living skills rather than in academics. Students with special needs must have the skills necessary to access the adult services that are available to them (McDonnell, Wilcox, Boles & Bellamy, 1985).

Adult service agencies such as the Department of Rehabilitation and Habilitation are the most likely agencies to be involved with students with special needs who are transitioning from school to adult life and the world of work (Haring & Lovett, 1990). As the receiving agencies, they should be involved before the handoff so that when the transition bridge is being crossed, there has already been communication between the senders and the receivers (Everson & Moon, 1987). This early involvement moves the student more

comfortably from one service delivery system to the next (Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985).

Receiving involves the adult agency who must dialog with the school to make sure that the student does not become "lost in the cracks." Case management and communication between agencies is the bridge of the successful transition (Rusch & Phelps, 1987). As adult services are stretched over more clients as funding is reduced, it is important that students are aware of access and are capable of seeking out services to which they are entitled (Thornton & Zigmond, 1988). The bridge, or send-off, must be as smooth as possible. By easing the student into the adult services systems over a period of time, the bridge/transition is smoothed out as much as possible, easing an already stressful situation for the student (Szymanski, Hanley-Maxwell & Asselin, 1990).

Case Management

Another issue potentially impacting employment is advocacy/case management. Who will best represent the student in the transition process? Ideally, the student will act as a self-advocate. In reality, a case manager must be available to assist the student in the transition process (Szymanski, Hanley-Maxwell & Asselin, 1990). The case manager acts as an advocate for the student/client, so that the transition continues on a progression toward the goals written in the ITP. The transition plan should include

instruction so that the student learns to operate on his/her own behalf as much as possible to receive all entitled services. Others who may have a great influence in the transition process are the parents, teacher, and rehabilitation counselor. In determining who will act as case manager for the student, many questions arise as to who will best serve the needs of the student. Who is the most logical yet who is the most capable?

Is the student capable of self-advocacy? If so, then self-advocacy should be facilitated across the high school transition program. Should the high school special education teacher act as case manager? For the student who has spent the transition years with the teacher, is it realistic to expect that the teacher would take on this role. On the other hand, once the student has left school, the teacher would not be expected to carry on the case manager role. As many of the students with special needs do qualify for the adult services provided for by the Department of Rehabilitation, one could look at the rehabilitation counselor acting as the advocate for the student in the year prior to and the years following graduation. As the receiver, the rehabilitation counselor is aware of what is available in the world of work (McDonnell, Wilcox & Boles, 1986). At this point in the process the rehabilitation counselor is the logical choice for case manager.

Another option for the task of case manager is the student's parent(s). Although they would have much important

first hand knowledge of the student, they would need to be well versed in all of the areas in which their child will be involved after graduation (Ferguson, Ferguson & Jones, 1988; McDonnell et al., 1985). However, can parents be expected to become knowledgeable in all of the areas important for success of the student's transition (McNair & Rusch, 1987)?

It can be seen that transition must be an interagency process with the student, the parents, the school and the adult service providers all doing a collective contributing part (Everson & Moon, 1987). No one agent can, nor should be expected to act as case manager over the entire transition period. Many persons should interact over time, each contributing their own expertise when that knowledge can best serve the needs of the student. Also, when appropriate, each contributor should assist in transitioning the student to the next support system with as much ease as possible (Szymanski, Hanley-Maxwell & Asselin, 1990). The handoff from one service delivery system to the next should be as smooth as possible. By handing off smoothly, students are less apt to be lost by the adult service systems and as adults, will feel more comfortable with dealing with the system.

Factors Associated with Successful Employment

What then are the factors which contribute to a successful transition to employment? The following indicators tend to result in a transition to adult life

characterized by the favorable aspects of adult life mentioned earlier: working, living independently, paying their own way, and social integration (Sitlington & Frank, 1990).

Vocational education classes taken during high school tend to help students understand what is expected of them when they move into the world of work and have some effect on salary and work status (Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985; Schalock et al., 1986). A second factor which has been shown repeatedly to have significant influence on success in adult life is having a paid job while in high school (Edgar, 1988; Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985; Sitlington & Frank, 1990). Students who were employed in a non-subsidized part time job during the school year were the most successful. Less significant were a non-subsidized paid summer job, subsidized work, and finally vocational classes with no work.

Other contributing factors include parent involvement and the student's academic ability (Schalock et al., 1986). It has been shown that parents assume one of three roles in the transition process: Facilitator, minimal participant-non participant, or obstructor (McNair & Rusch, 1987). Further, parental involvement during transition has a positive influence on knowledge of adult service providers and options for post school plan for their child (McNair & Rusch, 1988).

It would logically follow that the more academically capable student tends to be much better off in the areas that are considered to be indicators of a successful adult life.

Students who scored higher on academic tests tended to be those who were less involved with special education programs. These students were either in resource classrooms or special day classrooms where there was more interaction with non-handicapped peers. These students were found to be working more hours, moving more toward independent living by either living alone, with friends or a spouse, and spending more leisure time in community-based activities (Sitlington & Frank, 1990)

Conclusion

Successful transition to adult life relates to a student's ability to interact with what life has to offer. Employment which gives more hours and a higher salary results in a person being able to take advantage of more of life's opportunities.

Transition for a student with special needs is a process that moves that student from the school system to an adult service system. Transition for these students also includes self growth into an adult as well as the perception of that person as a functioning adult by other adults, especially family members.

Many factors work together to result in a successful transition for students with special needs. Especially notable are pre-graduation paid employment, academic ability and parental involvement. Less influential are secondary academic programs where little or no vocational training is

included.

Foremost in a successful transition plan is a case manager who works closely with the student/client. This case manager can, and should, change over time depending on the current needs of the student/client. These needs vary depending on where the student is along the transition continuum. Working together as a team, the student, family, teacher, and adult service workers can provide the best opportunities for the student/client as he/she transitions to adult life, even for the most severely involved student with special needs.

CHAPTER TWO

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

Within the past five years there has been much activity in the area of transition. With the passing of PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Act, in 1975, 1987 became the year in which students could have theoretically spent their entire educational experience in special classes. However, many students who had been served in these special classes were being graduated from high school unable to be successful in adult life.

PL 99-457 updates PL 94-142 had added the aspect of transition from school to adult life as part of the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) process. Much like the IEP, the ITP (Individualized Transition Plan) looks at aspects of adult life which are to become the focus of the academic planning of students with special needs. The years in high school would combine the regular academic program with an additional life skills and vocational skills program. These life skills varied from school to school, district to district, student to student. However, there was one common thread. The ITP, as the IEP, was developed with the long term needs of the student as the main focus.

As time passed, it was found that some students appeared to be better prepared for adult life than others. Obviously there were some factors, programs, or situations which fostered success. In their quest to "cure" as in the medical model, educators look for those factors which enhance this

transition. This paper is a survey of students to determine if those factors had a positive influence on these students.

CHAPTER THREE

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Twenty-eight severely involved students were surveyed. Subjects ranged in age from 20 to 26 years. These students were identified as SED (serious emotional disturbance). By definition, SED entails a condition which reveals consistent age-inappropriate behavior leading to social conflict, personal unhappiness, and school failure (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989, p. 398). The term behavior disorder has come to be used interchangeably with the term serious emotional disorder (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989, p. 399). Of these 28 students, 22 were placed in RSP (Resource Specialist Program) and 6 in SDC (Special Day Class). All 22 RSP students were identified as having a Specific Learning Disability. SDC students were identified as having Mental Retardation (n=4), Multiple Handicaps (n=1), Specific Learning Disabilities (n=1) (see Table 1). Due to the small numbers in this study, responses for RSP and SDC students were combined when discussing the results. Questions regarding only RSP or SDC students are so noted.

Data Collection

The data was collected using the Follow-Along Questionnaire developed by Riverside County (CA) Department of Education (see appendix A) (Burton, Peterson, Towner & Wojciehowski). The Follow-Along Questionnaire consisted of

three parts: Form A, Form B, and the Exit Questionnaire. Students were surveyed regarding programs in which they had participated while attending school.

Follow-Along Questionnaire Form A was administered to SDC students. Follow-Along Questionnaire Form B was administered to RSP students. All students completed the Exit Questionnaire when the student exited the school program. RSP students by definition are less involved in special education programs. RSP students spend 49% or less of their academic day in a special education classroom. SDC students are more involved and spend more than 49% of their academic day in special needs classrooms.

Both Form A & Form B consisted of basically the same questions. However, there were differences in presentation, and some questions did not include all response categories. Two additional Form A questions were directed toward the programming needs of the more involved student. This study looked at questions which were common to both forms.

Data Treatment Procedures

The data was collected as part of a TPP (Transition Partnership Program) in San Bernardino County (CA). The students surveyed were from three high schools in three suburban towns surrounding the city of San Bernardino.

The twenty eight students completed the survey themselves (21%) or had assistance from their high school special education teacher (46%), a classroom special

education instructional assistant (7%) or parent (4%). Six students (21%) did not indicate if there was any assistance in completing the form.

The SAS System (1991) was used to generate cross tabulation tables which are the source of the descriptions from the surveys. Because of the small sample size, results in this study are descriptive rather than based on confidence testing such as chi square analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Classroom Integration

Of the subjects in this survey, students in SDC classes tended not to be included with their non-handicapped peers for classes other than PE. RSP students were included in a variety of classes, however, the majority tended to be in the more academic areas: English/Literature (100%), Math (91%), Social Science (96%), Science (91%). Some RSP students were included in other areas: Art/Music (32%), PE (32%), Foreign Language (9%), Health (9%), and Family Life (9%).

With regard to the SDC respondents, all spent time with non-handicapped peers at their school site. However, none spent time in academic activities. The SDC students averaged one hour per day in non-specified social/recreational activity. They spent an average of 2.5 hours per day in vocational activities both on and off campus. Off campus, the SDC students averaged less than one hour per day in recreation/leisure activities with non-handicapped peers.

Vocational Education Programs (RSP Only)

RSP students who participated in vocational education programs tended to be employed at the time of the survey (66.6%). (see Table 2). RSP students who were involved with vocational programs such as Workability (66.6%), ROP (88.8%), and JTPA (40.9%) while in high school tended to be more employed than those who had not. (see Table 3). Those with

competitive employment and work experience were very likely to be employed (see Table 4).

Students who participated in off-campus vocational programs were twice as likely to be employed (64%) than those who were not (36%). Off campus vocational programs in which students participated included: Maintenance/Construction (15.38%), Warehouse/Stocking (38.46%), Food Service/Restaurant (30.76%), Groundskeeping/Gardening (30.76%), Merchandising/Retail (23.07%), and Industrial/Technical (7.69%).

Living Arrangements

Students tended to live with parents (78.57%), although there was one living with a relative, one living alone, one living with a friend/spouse, one non-specified other, and two non responses.

Personal Happiness

When asked about personal happiness, 89% answered that they were happy or happy now and then. The 11% surveyed who responded that they were not very happy were employed RSP students.

Leisure Time Activities (SDC Only)

Only SDC students were asked about participating in after school activities. Students were able to select up to three of the following: sports activities (n=1); community

recreation (n=0); visiting with friends and relatives (n=1); home entertainment (n=0); religious activities (n=0); club/association activities (n=0); and hobbies (n=0).

Decision Making Assistance

In seeking assistance in decision making or problem solving, parents (64%) and friends (39%) ranked highest. Sibling (14%) and current or former teacher (18%) and religious leaders also were those sought after for advice.

Current Employment

The 17 subjects who had been employed at the time of the survey were asked to give current or most recent job title. Of these, 6 were clerking in some type of retail position, 4 in food service and 3 in stocking, one each in sales, housekeeping, moving, and one who worked as an attendant at a water slide. All of these could be considered at the lower end of the career desirability level (Duncan, 1961).

Service Agency Involvement

In looking at service agencies or programs, of all respondents who received services (59%), only 50% were working. However, students who had not received services (41%), 82% were employed. Involved service Agencies were: Regional Center (n=8), Department of Rehabilitation (n=7), JTPA (n=4), Workability (n=3), Department of Mental Health (n=2), and Habilitation (n=2).

Of all 28 students with special needs, only 17.85% responded that they had an ITP written. However, of those who did have an ITP, 80.00% were working (n=4). Only 54.54% of those who did not have a plan were working. (see Table 5).

CHAPTER FIVE

LIMITATIONS OF THE DESIGN

This study may have been limited as data was collected at only one time. Future studies might be better served by follow-up(s) at certain points in time, perhaps at 2-, 3- or 5-year intervals. A three- and/or five-year follow-up of these students could more accurately describe which factors had a greater influence in the long term outcomes of their high school programs.

The survey itself should be modified to more accurately correspond to those factors which past research has shown to have influence on those outcomes which are considered when discussing successful transition to adult life: employment, independent living, paying one's own way, and involvement in leisure time activities. The results of a survey using this modified instrument could better determine those factors which, if put into use during the high school program, would have a more significant impact on successful transition and post-school employment. It would be advantageous to list those factors which are shown to have more effect than others when planning a student's ITP.

Due to the small sample size (n=28), it was difficult to draw conclusions based on the questions in this survey. Limitations of time and funding prevented a more extensive sample size.

The reliability of the responses from the survey may be questionable. Any one of a number of persons may have

responded on the survey, from the student to the special education teacher. This may have resulted in unreliable responses from survey to survey. It was noted that one small group (n=3) of surveys from one teacher had repeating responses indicating that either all three students were receiving the same program or it was more convenient for the teacher to respond to all surveys in like manner. It would have been more valid if trained surveyors conducted individual interviews with each subject. Again, time and money limited use of trained surveyors.

Transition issues cross the spectrum of disabilities. Therefore, it may have been more appropriate to use one form for both placements, SDC and RSP, rather than the two forms, Form A and Form B. With a common data base, it would have been easier to make comparisons between post-school outcomes and in-school factors - vocational classes and training programs both on- and off-campus, social interaction opportunities with non-handicapped peers, and training in leisure time activities.

Finally, further questioning into responses which may have significance to successful outcomes. As an example, regarding the question about current living situation, further questioning as to why the subject is in that situation: no job, low income, incapable of living alone, etc. This more in-depth information could give a better indication of the subject's potential for future success.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

At the School Site

The findings indicate that at the school site, only those students who are identified as RSP students interact with non-handicapped peers in any academic activities. Only two SDC students in this survey indicated they had non-handicapped peer interaction at the classroom level, and that being in PE. Since the majority of life experiences are interaction with non-handicapped individuals, students with special needs must be integrated more with non-handicapped peers while at the secondary school level. Without this socialization, both students with special needs and their non-handicapped peers will have difficulty in relating to each other as adults. With more interaction at younger ages, both groups can become more aware of each other's needs, desires and capabilities as they transition into adults.

Further, the findings indicate that SDC students are only involved with non-handicapped students for a short time in social/recreational activities. This short time could be taken to indicate a lunch period. Even at this level, it is most likely that although the SDC students spend this time with non-handicapped peers, they are not interacting but merely there.

Only RSP students received diplomas at the conclusion of their programs. No SDC student who completed the program was issued a diploma. With no diploma upon completing the high

school program, what would the incentive be for an SDC student to continue school? With as much concern over the high drop out rates of students with special needs, a much greater emphasis should be placed on the recognition of their academic endeavors. This recognition and the hard work associated with it, evidenced by the issuance of a diploma, is being discounted by the educational system.

Further, it is disheartening to think that SDC students by nature of their educational placement will never be able to secure a job requiring a high-school diploma. What incentive does a student have to stay in school if all the hard academic work results in a dead-end job? Concern over a diploma or certificate of completion should be an issue addressed early in the transition process.

The findings of this study indicate that those subjects who were involved in a vocational education program while in school had a slight edge (62%) at being employed than those who had not participated in such a program (57%). It has been repeatedly shown in the research that working while in high school is a significant factor for adult life employment. This translates into success. Thus, vocational education developing into actual paid work experience as soon as possible should be foremost in the development of the ITP. As early as possible, students should be directed to career education and employment so that they can reap the benefits of self-satisfaction that are associated with work.

As most students are still living with their parents,

the ramifications of this situation must be further investigated. Since most of those surveyed are working in low-end and low-paying jobs, along with working less than full time, one may suppose that those surveyed are financially incapable of one of the indicators of a successful transition to adult life, living alone. Again, does the system program students to non-success (failure) by not providing a sufficient support system through the secondary school years to enable these students to attain higher than minimum levels of employment following their school years? Further investigation of this situation is recommended.

RSP students who were involved with in-school vocational education programs and/or those who had competitive employment or work experience were those most likely to be employed. Likewise, students who participated in off-campus vocational programs were more likely to be employed.

It is encouraging to report that students for the most part were happy in their personal life. When asked to respond as to how they felt or appeared to feel about their life in general, in school, and at home, 89% of the respondents stated that they were either happy or happy now and then. 11% responded that they were not very happy. We may be able to conclude that those 11% RSP students who were employed but not very happy were so due to a low-paying job with little hope of advancement. Further questioning could have given us great insight into what contributes to non-

happiness with one's personal life situation.

As expected, decisions and problem solving were a team effort with family and friends. However, there could be some concern regarding the ability or lack thereof to consult some professional in decision making or problem solving. Perhaps more knowledge of working with the adult service system could generate a broader range of advisors.

Post Graduation

The results of this survey further confirm the sad truth that the jobs held by students with special needs stay at the low end, low paying level. These jobs tend not to afford one much opportunity for advancement. Being at the low end of the salary scales, many of those outcomes listed earlier (Sitlington & Frank, 1990) are not attainable: living independently, paying a portion of one's living expenses, and being involved in community-based leisure activities.

In the area of independent living, 79% of the subjects were living with their parents. Of those living with their parents, 68% were employed. This indicates that even though working, the subjects' financial situation due to either low pay and/or less than full time employment precludes independent living. When, if ever, will the personal satisfaction of independent living be allowed to develop? In the area of leisure time activities, only 33% of those responding participated in community based leisure time activities.

With these outcomes, students with special needs will not even be able to attain the basic levels of success mentioned earlier. Seeing this in their future, many students may experience lowered self-esteem as they move through young adulthood to middle age.

Finally, in looking at service agency involvement, it was interesting to note that those who had no involvement with adult service agencies were more likely to be employed. One could incorrectly jump to the conclusion that one is better off not being involved with adult service agencies. However, a true examination of those surveyed would more probably result in the conclusion that those who are employed have little need for adult service agencies, and those who are not employed would seek the assistance of adult agencies in the hope of securing employment.

Summary

In conclusion, it would be safe to say that a good balance of independence and self-advocacy on the part of the student, concerned and informed involvement on the part of the parent, and support and information dissemination on the part of the school and adult service agencies all contribute to a successful transition. A start in transition planning well before graduation should result in long-term success as the transition process moves the student with special needs into adult life.

APPENDIX A

Table 1

Student Sample (n=28)

Ethnicity	Placement		
	RSP	SDC	Total
Black	0	1	1
White	18	3	21
Hispanic	4	2	6

Handicapping Condition	Placement		
	RSP	SDC	Total
MR	0	4	4
MH	0	1	1
SLD	22	1	23

Table 2

Participation in Vocational Education Programs as a Function
of Employment Status (n=22 RSP Only)

		Employment status					
		Not employed		Employed		Total	
Participation		n	%	n	%	n	%
no		2	9.09	2	9.09	4	18.18
yes		6	27.27	12	54.55	18	81.82

Table 3

Type of Vocational Program as a Function of Employment Status

(n=18 RSP Only)

Program	Employment status					
	Not employed		Employed		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
ROP	5	33.33	10	66.67	15	83.33
Workability	4	30.77	9	69.23	13	72.22
JTPA	3	33.33	6	66.67	9	0.50
TPP	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00

Table 4

Paid Work Experience as a Function of Post-School Employment Status

Program	Employment status					
	Not employed		Employed		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Work Experience	1	16.67	5	83.33	6	33.33
Competitive Employment	0	0.00	2	100.00	2	11.11

Table 5

Written ITP as a Function of Employment Status

ITP	Employment status				
	Not employed		Employed		Total
	n	%	n	%	n
no	10	45.45	12	54.54	22
yes	1	20.00	4	80.00	5

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