



The Barriers during Transition of Individuals with Disabilities from School to Work

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Abstract

People with disabilities are likely to encounter great difficulties in obtaining and maintaining employment. This state is due to performance of their duties, communicative and behavioural deficits associated with their disabilities, and social issues, such as, problems with co-workers, supervisors, or customers. It is difficult for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) to obtain and keep a job, due to their social impairment, even for those with normal intelligence. Many of them have to rely on support from their families to find a job. Although the job opportunities for individuals with severe disabilities have increased, there are still other considerations about what kind of individual disabilities would be employed. The results showed that school, as a strong foundation, has a limited contribution in assisting individuals to prepare well for employment. Furthermore, the employment sector puts forward health factors as reasons for unemployment. In terms of social and personal relationship, some people with disabilities are still afraid to express themselves and to interact with fellow workers and their supervisors, due to fears of negative impacts.

Keywords: *transitions, disabilities, school, work, social and personal relationship*



Introduction

Transition from educational institutions to the workplace, for individuals with special needs, is one of the most important transitions that they make in their lives (Flexer, Simmons, Luft, & Baer, 2013). This transition could be said to be more difficult because of the striking difference between the academic world and the workplace, where people with special needs move from a familiar environment to a situation that is largely new and not clear to them (Madaus, 2006). Furthermore, people who are diagnosed with special needs are likely to encounter great difficulties in obtaining and maintaining employment. This state is due to their performance of their duties, communicative and behavioural deficits associated with their difficulties, and social issues, such as, problems with co-workers, supervisors, or customers (Van Wieren, Reid, & McMahon, 2008). According to Hillier et al. (2007), it is difficult for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) to obtain and keep a job due to their social impairment, even for those with normal intelligence. Many of them have to rely on support from their families to find a job. This statement is reinforced by the research that has been done by Butterworth, Hagner, Helm, and Whelley (2000) who showed that, although the job opportunities for individuals with severe disabilities have increased, there are still other considerations about what kind of individual disabilities would be employed. Therefore, strong social support networks, such as their high school foundation, the workplace culture, as well as family, peer and supervisors' support, are major contributors to job satisfaction and job longevity for individuals with disabilities (Burgstahler, 2001).

Based on the case above, there are several challenges faced by individual with disabilities during their progression from school to workplace. This essay, thus, will examine the question about the barriers experienced during the transition from school to workplace, of individuals with disabilities, in terms of high school foundation, workplace or employment factors, and social and personal relationships.

Literature review

Definition of Disabilities

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines disability in three terms, firstly as a disorder, defined as one or more abnormalities both psychologically, physiologically and anatomically. Secondly as a disability, caused by an inability to perform certain activities due to the weakening conditions. Thirdly, the difficulties in personal, family, and community life, both in the social, economic and psychological fields ,experienced by anyone caused by abnormalities (Merdiassi, 2013). According to Law No. 4 of 1997 article 1, individuals with physical disabilities are individuals who have physical or mental disorders that can interfere and become obstacles in performance of proper activities. These individuals are physically handicapped persons, mentally handicapped and disabled people; physically and mentally.

Transition defined

Transition is an important part of normal life that must be passed by each individual (Flexer et al., 2013). Individuals must adapt when experiencing a change in roles, or relationships, and this is done with more or less disruption or stress. The transition from school to working life includes a variety of options, such as choice of career, living arrangements, social life, and economic objectives associated with lifelong consequences (Test et al., 2009). For individuals with disabilities, this transition is not easy because of the limitations that can be imposed by others' perceptions of their disabilities. On the other hand, this transition becomes difficult because of the complexity of the service arrangements that are intended to help individuals adjust.

The transition from school to the workplace is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and, the opportunities and risks of entering adult life. This bridge



must be strong and solid; stretched from end to end. Some of the things that need to be underlined in this transition are the preparations made in high school, adequate support at the time of leaving school, as well as the opportunities and services that provide safety in adult situations (Madaus, 2006). This definition emphasizes the shared responsibility of all parties for the success of the transition, and the quality and services in every field corresponding to the individual. So the challenges faced by individuals, during the transition from school to the working world, can be seen from three perspectives; high school foundation, employment, and social and personal relationships.

High school foundation

Secondary special education, either vocational schools or other school-based services, continue to provide programs such as foundation skills, attitudes, personal relationships, and even frequent employer contacts, that can determine the success of the transition of individuals with disabilities in the future. Learning procedures and curriculum offered will greatly affect the success of the transition (Newman et al., 2011). Thus, the curriculum is expected to meet the needs of students who are able and of students with various disabilities. Students with special needs benefit from these programs.

Burgstahler (2001) states that, unfortunately, many school-to-work programs in high school, and cooperation between education and internship programs in college, do not fully include students with disabilities. Therefore, many of them are entering the workforce with less preparation and cannot meet the demands of the job. There are issues which particularly relate to services for students with disabilities, such as transport; accommodation strategies, adaptive equipment, safety, support services, communication strategies, and career advising. This situation can be counted as one of the barriers facing people with disabilities during the transition. They



are lacking skills in the workplace due to insufficient programs and support during their time in high schools and when they progress their living from the school to work.

According to Brock et al. (2014) evidence suggests prevailing approaches for training and professional development may be insufficient for preparing practitioners to implement evidence based practices for students with disabilities, such as ASD. Many teachers leave pre-service less prepared to meet the needs of students with special needs, which are complex. Even some educators report that they lack instruction on evidence-based practices for students with special needs during their pre-service preparation for continued life, such as entering the world of work (Brock et al., 2014). However, the public school system (most notably special education) is not totally responsible for the success, or lack of success, of its school leavers. Instead, successful transition from school to adulthood is the responsibility of many, including educators, administrators, parents, and the person with a disability, adult service agencies, and employers.

Employment

Earning a wage, being promoted to a higher level, and interacting with co-workers are the many expectations society holds for youth, after they graduate from high school (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000). However, employment outcomes among youth with disabilities are worse than for youths without disabilities. They have no chance to obtain full-time employment after graduation, and many of them are underemployed. Some implications and suggestions were offered by (Butterworth J, et al, 2000), aimed at assisting individuals with disabilities and their work environment to adapt to each other, so as to prevent discrimination. Long-term transition planning for children and/or young adults with disabilities should include the consideration of avenues by which such individuals can obtain introductory work experience (such as part-time jobs, internship/practicum-style experiences, etc) prior to the point where they will be expected to move permanently into the adult workforce. Furthermore, the world of



work is a social system which generally does not have a lot of knowledge about disability issues. Hence, negative perceptions and misinformation are rampant (Madaus, 2006) and makes individuals with disabilities achieve less attention, from supervisors or employers, when they are entering the workforce.

On the other hand, according to Schur (2003) workers with disabilities are more likely than those without disabilities to be in contingent or part-time jobs. This is because people with disabilities often have a health-related issue or their mobility is restricted so that they need to choose a job with a more flexible schedule or shorter working hours, that make fewer demands on their time or energy. Further, employer discrimination may limit access to permanent full-time jobs among people with disabilities, channelling those who want to work into contingent or part-time jobs (Lindstrom & Benz, 2002). For example, one worker experienced discrimination, in the form of harassment by co-workers, and the lack of response from the supervisor at full-time work, caused the disabled person to look for a part-time job which would provide less stress (Lindstrom & Benz, 2002).

Social and personal relations

The third challenge experienced at the point of transition from school to work, is social and interpersonal relationships of individuals with disabilities. This adjustment typically receives less attention, but lately has become a topic of interest because of several factors considered. First, to interact and make friends with others is one of the most valuable aspects of the lives of disabled people. Secondly, social interaction triggers the formation of friendships, social support, and job satisfaction. Last, inappropriately, social display has been associated with placement in a residential setting which is more stringent and also dismissal from work. Problems that can be experienced by individuals with disabilities, when interacting in the community during the transition period, are that their involvement in the work place is often associated with



discrimination and even dangerous experiences, and a lack of supervision (Rueda, Monzo, Shapiro, Gomez, & Blacher, 2005).

Another example is given by Madaus, Gerber, and Price (2008) which revealed that limitations impact on an individual's relations in various ways, such as self-disclosure in a job setting. Many individual with disabilities did not self-disclose because of fear of negative impacts on relationships with co-workers, supervisors, or clients. Therefore, much needs to be done to more fully understand the dynamic of a hidden disability and the workplace. A study was conducted by Rusch, Rusch, and O'Reilly (1991) which showed that employers value certain social skills, and those social skills which are common in the workplace. Generally, individuals who show a lack of social skills or inappropriately display them may experience job terminations. Consequently, these capabilities are very important and appreciated in the employment setting, and need to be taught to everyone, including individuals with disabilities.

Based on the above findings, individuals with disabilities, in making the transition from school to the workplace, are under-prepared in terms of the foundation given in schools, employment readiness and social and personal relationships. Only a few are able to live independently, many are not well integrated in their communities, and some get lonely. Overall, people with disabilities are confronted by an uncertain future and limited opportunities as they age.

Discussion

Based on the literature review, it is clearly seen that the school, as a provider of a strong foundation to help individuals with disabilities to be able to face the transition to the workplace or when leaving school to continue life, gives a limited contribution to assist individuals to prepare well. Although the school is supported with a programs based practice (Meadows, 2014) to prepare people for a part-time job or full-time workers, it has not met its potential yet, so



people with disabilities enter the workforce with less preparation, uncertainty, and confusion (Brock et al., 2014). In addition, teachers that are expected to be able to provide training for people with disabilities also feel that they lack proper instructions on how to deal with pre-service training. Therefore, the lack of school support, both in terms of programs offered as well as teaching staff, makes individuals less successful through a period of transition to the workplace.

However, the success or failure of the transition of the individual is not merely the school's responsibility, but there are also other parties who contribute, such as the employment sector (Schur, 2003). There are still many people with disabilities who have to work at a part-time job. Some of the reasons put forward, such as health factors that impede the mobility of persons with disabilities are relevant, but there are also other things that are less plainly experienced by individuals with disabilities, for example, being discriminated against by a supervisor in the workplace. This can motivate individual to stop working and migrate towards working part-time.

Other barriers experienced by the individual are social and interpersonal relationships related to the transition from school to work. There are still some workplaces that do not understand the issues faced by people with disabilities (Madaus, 2006) although they would appreciate social relationships. However, some people with disabilities are still afraid to express themselves and interact with fellow workers and their supervisors due to fears of negative impacts. This condition may result in termination of employment (Madaus et al., 2008).

Clearly, the education community has to focus on the matter of ensuring learning by all students, with particular attention to the skills and knowledge required to be successful beyond school (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). They should be prepared while in school, so that when they leave school, they already have provisions to face adult life. A much larger number of adolescents with disabilities will be approaching high school graduation from year to year.



Specialized programs and services will need to be developed, evaluated, and prepared for this influx, including those to provide assistance in obtaining employment (Hillier et al., 2007).

According to Carothers and Taylor (2004), schools and the parents of children with disabilities can work together to teach functional daily life skills. Some techniques, such as providing videotape modelling, photographic or pictorial activity schedules, and peer tutoring are valuable. In peer tutoring, peers without disabilities are enlisted as models in teaching functional community-based skills to students with disabilities. This technique has been successfully used in schools and benefits students with a variety of disabilities because it can fulfil individual needs to live independently and successfully as an adult. Similarly, Morningstar, Turnbull, and Turnbull (1996) stated that assisting students to master self-management skills and to learn about self-advocacy skills, can lead to positive outcomes for young adults with disabilities. Moreover, the primary focus is on skill development which are needed when they are in the job market or another context outside of school (Schall, 2010).

Conclusion

This essay has explained that there are still significant barriers impeding transition for individuals with disabilities, from school to work; despite the fact that more adolescents with disabilities will be approaching high school graduation from year to year (Hillier et al., 2007). The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study, that the high school foundation is still needed to be improved in many aspects. Similarly, according to Phelps and Hanley-Maxwell (1997), schools have to focus on skills and knowledge after leaving school, especially the skills needed by workers as they enter and stay in the job market. Obviously, teachers or educators have to pay more attention to students' transition planning, in order to assist them to pass the challenges (Meadows, Davies, & Beamish, 2014).



Other barriers that are obvious can be found in the work-force and social and interpersonal relationships. When individuals with disabilities are discriminated in their employment setting, then other problems are created, such as job termination and unemployment (Rusch et al., 1991). Although individuals with disabilities might be having communication problems, some work places have little information about those issues. Whereas, frequently social interaction occurs in the work place (Madaus et al., 2008) and coworkers possess a lack of understanding of people with disabilities. This can lead to the same problems as barriers in the workforce. However, if individuals obtain adequate preparation and skill, they will be able to face the challenges in their transition from school to work well (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997).

Another aspect which needs to be taken into account is how an inclusive school prepares training for transition planning. Although some schools have programs based practice and professional trainers, schools do not necessarily coordinate school inclusion programs. Specifically, in order to deal with student transition to the next stage of life, the curriculum designed has to fulfil individual needs, especially when they are going to enter employment. It is recommended that further research be conducted in the following area: how the curriculum in an inclusive school can meet the needs of individuals with disabilities in terms of their transition from school to the work place.

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International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change. www.ijicc.net

Volume 5, Issue 3, 2019 Special Edition: *Science, Applied Science, Teaching and Education*

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