

Research Article

Reading Disability and Transition Programs

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Abstract

To transition through high school and into adulthood is a complicated and overwhelming process even for students of typical development. For students with disabilities, there is added concern about the intellectual, neurological, and or physical barriers they also need to overcome. Employed adults with a Reading Disability often have low wages and they are housed in low-rent areas. Low rent areas often have more crime and there is more exposure to drugs. A person who has a Reading Disability is more apt to be subject to negative peer influences and has more of a likelihood to succumb to substance abuse. Those who have a Reading Disability are also more apt to be victims of a crime, or commit more crimes themselves due to socio-economics. Because of their living conditions or socio-economic status, these people may also feel alienation and emotional complications [1] which can lead to further disability. The importance of this paper is to highlight the significance of reading ability to quality of life, address the need for further research and development of effective intervention transition programs, and explore potential programs. A successful transition plan is necessary to effectively move a student with Reading Disability into adulthood.

Reading Disability and Transition Programs

Reading Disability is a neurological condition in which a person experiences difficulty with any part of reading such as difficulty reading quickly, trouble with handwriting, and difficulty understanding the written word [2]. Those with reading disabilities also have difficulty making connections between the written and the spoken word [3]. While traditional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) provides high resolution images which contrasts different tissues, the Functional Magnetic Resonance Image (fMRI) reports brain activity as well as the physical aspects of the brain [4]. The fMRI allows us to view the parts of the brain that are active during cognitive processes by measuring the change in blood flow in the brain when the brain is directed to a new task. Landi et al (2013) [5] performed neurological studies of word reading and reading comprehension. They determined that when learning new words, there are three regions of the brain involved: the temporoparietal, occipitotemporal, and anterior. These three regions of the brain, in conjunction, allow skilled word reading. Landi et al found that as reading skill increased, the circuitry shifted from predominantly dorsal reading circuitry to predominantly ventral. Their study also found that there is overlapping of the circuitry for reading comprehension and single word comprehension. Syntactic processing, semantic processing, working memory and inferential

processing all work together, but cognitively they activate different areas of the brain. The superior parietal lobe is activated during working memory [5].

The ability to read is an important element to education for all learners. When a reading disability impedes learning and comprehension, the effects are lifelong. When reading ability is limited, learning is limited, and that ultimately limits opportunities and affects quality of life. Because our level of education may dictate the quality of life we lead, it is important to address the factors that lead to a limited education. The true root of the concern is to eradicate Reading Disability. When Reading Disability cannot be overcome, transitioning those with the disability into adulthood becomes important. While many people with disabilities have the capability to live independently, often there are economic factors that prevent people with learning disabilities from doing so. Although there are other factors, but using employment and income as a lifestyle indicator, the following statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics demonstrate a compromised lifestyle for someone with a Reading Disability.

In 2016, 17.9 percent of persons with a disability were employed. In contrast, the employment-population ratio for those without a disability was 65.3 percent. The unemployment rate

for persons with a disability, at 10.5 percent, was little changed from the previous year, while the rate for those without a disability declined to 4.6 percent. Persons with a disability are less likely to have completed a bachelor's degree or higher than those with no disability. Among both groups, those who had attained higher levels of education were more likely to be employed than those with less education. Across all levels of education in 2016, persons with a disability were much less likely to be employed than were their counterparts with no disability [1]. There are not only higher unemployment rates for people with disabilities, but there is also an inequality in the average income between people with disabilities and people without. People with disabilities have less health insurance, lower annual household income, they are less educated, their poverty rate is higher, and annually they earn less money than people without disabilities [1].

As students transition from high school into adulthood, this period occurs at a time before executive function is fully developed. Besides the neurological aspects during transition, there are other aspects that must be taken into account as well. During this time students are becoming more self-aware, they are understanding their own identities, and they are learning the skills of self-assessment [6]. Effective transition programs are most important for students with disabilities to not only ensure they get the most education and preparation for adulthood, but also that they become activists for their disabilities and advocates for themselves. Lee et al. (2011) [7] studied 168 students between the ages of 12 and 16 with reading impairments in junior high and high school. They implemented a training conducted by teachers called Whose Future Is It Anyway? (WFA) which is a student centered approach to transition planning. The program's aim was to introduce students to the concept of, "transition and transition planning and enabling them to self-direct learning related to (a) having self-awareness and disability awareness, (b) decision making about transition-related outcomes, (c) identifying and securing community resources to support transition services, (d) writing and evaluating goals and objectives, (e) communicating effectively in small groups, and (f) developing skills to become an effective team member, leader, or self-advocate" [7]. The purpose of the program is to empower the students with knowledge and self-awareness and in effect make them become more self-determined and take a more vested interest in their future. The study determined that the WFA intervention enhanced self-determination, transition planning knowledge, and self-efficacy and outcome expectations for educational planning for these students with reading deficiencies. Teacher comments on this intervention included praise for getting students, especially middle school students, involved in the preparation of their own IEPs and students became more active participants in their education process. This type of program allows and empowers students early on to be part of their own education process.

One way to transitions students from high school is to

motivate them to become activists. A program called Public Achievement began in 1990 [8] and it was made up of college students who coached and became project leaders for students in elementary through high school. Boyte determined that these service learning projects instilled values in the students such as "community, responsibility and concern for the common good" [8-11]. This project resulted in the students continuing the role of public servant and encouraging students to be a part of their community and develop skills. Activism and involvement are important elements to creating a sense of community. Although this program did not specifically target students with disabilities, this project could translate into a transition program for students with disabilities and enabling them to a smoother transition into the community while employing the community in efforts to remove the alienation and stigma of disabilities.

When a Reading Disability cannot be overcome, those affected sometimes have difficulties. They do not get the supports needed to prosper and successfully complete an educational, occupational, or vocational program, and they are not always able to find and keep gainful employment. The inability to read or comprehend written language in contracts and on employment forms causes a person to be vulnerable to fraud and abuse. Sellers, employers, or other dishonest individuals may take advantage of individuals with Reading Disabilities and deny them of something they are deserving or embezzle something they already have. There are limits in life choices for a person with a Reading Disability. People with Reading Disabilities do not have the same access to education as the others often do due to the fault of their disability. The field is lacking in research-based interventions to practice in schools, which leads to adults who pass through the system with Reading Disabilities. Future implications of this paper point to continued research focused on interventions to extinguish Reading Disability. Until this is complete, there needs to be protections in place for students transitioning into adulthood.

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