



## EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

Topic: Employment Skills for Students  
Transitioning to Adult Life

This issue reviews three articles that analyze the benefits of employment instruction for students who plan to work after high school. Each article concludes that students who are transitioning to adult life need to be taught specific employment skills to be successful in future careers.

### Literature Reviews

**Farley, R. C., & Johnson, V. A. (1999). Enhancing the career exploration and job-seeking skills of secondary students with disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 22(1), 43-54.**

This report reviews research findings regarding the outcomes of employment preparation instruction for young adults with disabilities. The students involved in the study were enrolled in special education programs in secondary school settings. Previous studies have shown that students with disabilities have difficulty finding and maintaining employment after high school. The instruction delivered to students in this study consisted of two components: career exploration and the development of job-seeking skills. The first component was designed to strengthen students' skills in determining employment interests, aptitudes, and abilities. This instruction consisted of activities targeted to develop vocational self-awareness, work knowledge, and career planning behavior. The second program component was designed to help students with the job-seeking skills needed throughout the employment process. Students received instruction on presentation skills, writing to request job applications, and interview techniques. One unique requirement was having a student evaluate already prepared job applications and resumes and decide whether to interview or screen out hypothetical applicants. The authors theorized that students who received instruction in career exploration and job-seeking skills would perform better on job applications and interviews and have more confidence in their ability to make vocational decisions. The results of this study support the authors' position that students in special education programs will benefit from instruction in career exploration and job-seeking skills.

**Lueking, R. G., & Fabian, E. S. (2000). Paid internships and employment success for youth in transition. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 23(2), 205-221.**

This report reviews data collected over a five-year period from the Marriott Foundation's Bridges...School to Work internship program. The Bridges program provides students with opportunities for paid employment as well as training in career awareness, job-readiness, and job searching. The authors reviewed follow-up data to determine the post-school outcomes of adolescents who participated in the internship program during their last year of high school. The data was collected during the students' enrollment in the Bridges program and at six-, twelve-, and eighteen-month intervals following completion of the program. The research results showed that students who successfully completed the internship were "four times more likely to be employed" at six months and "two times more likely to be employed" at twelve months. The rate of employment at the 18-month interval was better for students who had suc-

### Classroom Implications

- Provide instruction in career exploration including employment interests, aptitudes, and abilities (e.g., vocational self-awareness, skills required to get and keep a job, and strategies required to plan a career). Allow a student to "try-out" a variety of jobs for a short period of time. Examples might include four weeks in a pizza store, three weeks in a full-scale restaurant, and six weeks in a college cafeteria. This provides an opportunity to make employment decisions without a long-term commitment to a specific employer.
- Provide instruction in job-seeking skills. Have students call or write to potential employers to request job applications. Help students to practice writing cover letters to send with them. Teach students how to present themselves during interviews using role-playing, videotaping, and class discussion to present the content.
- Schools should explore ways to provide structured work experiences such as internships that include training in career awareness, job-readiness, and job searching skills. Providing credit for these work experiences will allow students to complete their high school programs with the added benefit of community instruction.
- Teach students employment behaviors in actual work settings. Simulated work situations cannot duplicate challenges encountered in the community. If a student needs to improve task completion, have him track the jobs he finishes on his job site.

successfully completed the internship. The authors conclude that structured work experiences such as internship programs increase the rate of employment success for students with disabilities. They suggest that teachers work collaboratively with employers to provide opportunities for students to develop appropriate employment behaviors in real work experiences that will lead to lifelong employment success.

**Agran, M. , Swaner, J., & Snow, K. (1998). Work safety skills: A neglected curricular area. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 21(1), 33-44.**

Previous studies have shown that almost one-third of workers with disabilities in supported employment programs sustain injuries on the job. The authors of this report suggest that work safety skills are one of the most important, yet most neglected, areas of employment skills programs. This study used a survey questionnaire to seek information from middle and secondary level special education teachers, transition specialists, administrators, and other related school personnel regarding the type and frequency of safety skills instruction present in their transition training programs. For the purpose of this study, safety skills included three major skill areas: identifying unsafe conditions, practicing safe work behaviors, and responding appropriately to an accident. Survey responses revealed that very few programs provided routine safety skills instruction, despite the fact that respondents reported that they view safety skills instruction as an important aspect of employment skills training. The authors conclude that, given the reported frequency of injuries for workers with disabilities, educators must routinely provide safety skills training to students as part of their transition program. They suggest that educators and employers take responsibility for providing safety skills training during classroom instruction and on-the-job training.

- Educators must instruct students in safety issues in both classroom and on-the-job settings.
- Have students practice materials handling, lifting, and reading labels.
- Teach students to avoid horseplay and other behaviors which might cause workers to become distracted and exposed to danger on the job.
- Teach students to examine the work environment for safety hazards such as spills or clutter.
- Provide instruction in storing equipment properly and responding appropriately to accidents.

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