Facilitating School-Based Employment for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Intellectual Disability

Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; 2004) mandates transition requirements—and a growing body of research supports effective transition planning for learners with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and intellectual disability (ID; Gerhardt, 2007), many adults with these significant disabilities are unemployed or under-employed (Migliore & Domin, 2011). Among adolescents with ASD, 76% of teenagers over the age of 16 have never applied for a job, and 79% of adults with ASD live at home (Seltzer & Krauss, 2002). Likewise, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 documented that only 26% of transition-age youth with ID were working for compensation; within this comparatively small group, 43% were working in settings made up almost entirely of individuals with disabilities, including enclaves, mobile crews, or sheltered workshops for sub-minimum wage (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012). With restricted employment prospects, these young adults often live lives of isolation, are dependent on others, and possess limited opportunities to improve their quality of life (Gerhardt, 2007).

Meaningful integrated employment has been cited as a critical goal for youth with disabilities because it is associated with greater social and community inclusion, economic self-sufficiency, and personal life satisfaction (Migliore & Dommin, 2011). Moreover, enrollment in vocational education or employment-related programs in high school improves the post-secondary employment attainment for students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2012). This article describes eight research-based, practical steps for teachers seeking to build and implement high-quality, inclusive employment training programs for students with ASD and ID.

Step 1. Observe Other Programs and Collaborate with District Teachers

Collaboration is an essential element of developing effective employment training and overall quality transition programming for adolescents with disabilities. Ensuring that school personnel establish collaborative partnerships and network within and across other model school and community settings can greatly inform educators regarding best practices (Noonan, Morningstar, & Erikson, 2008). Many schools have a transition coordinator whose job is to build interagency collaborations; this person can link you to other model school and community-based programs. Collaborate with other teachers in your district and analyze areas such as copy centers, mail delivery, and recycling that have been used to create successful inclusive programs in vocational training.

Step 2. Align Your Program with Core Academic State Standards

Compliance with federal law requires that transition goals, including those associated with employment, be linked to specific academic experiences (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002). In addition, academic instruction in vocational education must be functional and outcomes oriented to be successful (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Shogren 2013). For example, for a vocational program such as a classroom restaurant, teachers can look at the core curriculum standards for academic achievement as well as the alternate standards for special education related to daily living, job skills, health, and fitness.

Step 3. Involve Your Students in the Planning Process in a Meaningful Way

Career and vocational development begins with the student. Utilizing a student-directed approach requires consideration of student preferences and interests (Turnbull et al., 2013). By giving students the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the curriculum, teachers can help their students develop the
President’s Message

E. Amanda Boutot

It’s hard to believe that the year is almost half over. By the time this message is in print, we will have had both the DADD conference in Clearwater Beach, Florida, and CEC convention in Philadelphia! Both events offered diverse and exciting groups of papers and poster sessions by some very respected presenters. I want to thank everyone who submitted proposals. This year, the CEC convention saw a large number of highly qualified proposal submissions for a wide range of important topic areas. The reviewers had a very difficult decision in determining which of so many excellent proposals would be accepted. The end result was a nice selection of papers covering such topics as transition, academics, social skills, communication, and evidence-based practices.

I would encourage everyone who is thinking about presenting at next year’s convention to submit a proposal. We especially would like to see teachers present the good work you are doing in your classrooms; we would also like to see students presenting their research! Remember, we have student researcher and practitioner awards, which we give out every year at the DADD Business Meeting held at the convention. We hope to see your name on the list of nominees next year!

One of the important presentations at this year’s CEC convention was the DADD Showcase Session. Several experts from around the country came together to provide a summary of the research on currently popular treatments for autism as well as a summary of the most recent National Professional Development Center review of evidence-based practices. The panel’s task was neither to promote nor criticize any particular treatment; panel members were to present the most up-to-date scientific research and to explain the difference between science and pseudoscience.

Today more than ever, practitioners must have the most current understanding of the science behind the treatments available to them and the families they serve. Teachers and other professionals should be consumers of science: in other words, they must be able to sift through the many treatment options and select the one that is most appropriate and that conforms to legislative mandates as evidence-based. It is all too easy for a “fad” treatment to emerge, sometimes with a host of anecdotal supports and testimonials but with little supporting research. Before any treatment can be labeled as evidence-based, it must demonstrate effectiveness through sound research, with many participants, and repeated replication of findings.

Pseudoscience, on the other hand, is a practice that is presented as research-based but has not undergone rigorous scientific inquiry. Pseudoscience practices often involve unproven claims that research fails to support. Our goal in presenting this showcase session was to assist practitioners and families in differentiating science from pseudoscience so that treatment choices can be made based on research, which IDEA mandates, rather than anecdote.

I wish to personally thank the panel of experts who graciously participated in this session: Dr. Gardner Umbarger, Dr. Matt Tincani, Dr. Jason Travers, Dr. Kara Hume, and Dr. Tanya Davis. I’m looking forward to next year’s Showcase Session to see what fabulous new information we will learn!

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Executive Director’s Corner

Teresa Taber Doughty

As a former special education teacher to middle and high school students who experienced autism and/or intellectual and developmental disabilities, I was aware of the need to prepare my students for real life. They needed to be ready to live independently, advocate for themselves, maintain a job, and develop strong relationships with members of the community. In the early 1980s, I was the new “life skills teacher” and aware that my instruction must focus on functional and real-world skills to prepare my students for life after school. While many of my first students had previously participated in a traditional academic curriculum, by high school many lacked the most basic life skills. Most were unable to advocate for themselves (e.g., make choices, express wants and needs with authority figures), complete daily living skills without direct support (e.g., follow recipes, shop for groceries, budget, use work-related social skills), or even engage in socially appropriate interactions with their same-age peers. There was much work to be done.

I spent my first two years introducing students to real-world skills at every opportunity. We used the home economics lab to learn basic food prep, cooking, and kitchen safety skills. We started a woodworking group and learned to use household screwdrivers and hammers. We learned to make repairs to our clothing (e.g., sew on buttons, repair a hem). Although community-based instruction (CBI) did not yet officially exist, with parent permission I took students into the community on weekends to shop, eat out, and participate in recreational activities. It was great fun, and I observed my students gaining life skills very quickly.
By the end of the decade, I was teaching high school students with low-incidence disabilities as transition planning, CBI, and inclusion models were introduced. I was also fortunate to work in a new school with general education teachers who welcomed all students in their classrooms. My students were included in history, economics, and biology classes; Latin and French classes; and marching band and ROTC. These students also received instruction in self-contained and community settings, including vocational sites. While including students across all settings was an occasional logistical challenge, they received an educational benefit in every setting. We began graduating students into real community jobs with plans and supports in place that enabled increasingly independent community living and participation. My best day at the high school was visiting the lunchroom and not being able to locate any of my students because they were seated with their friends throughout the room and blended in with the rest of the teenagers!

Now that it’s 2014, we are quickly approaching 40 years since the passage of P.L. 94-142. As I reflect on my own history in special education that began only a few years after this groundbreaking law was passed, I realize that I was a front row witness (and participant) to the progress we’ve made. We’ve introduced innovative and effective instructional practices, expanded the use of technologies, debated the LRE and philosophy of full inclusion, focused on student self-advocacy and community participation, and supported expanded opportunities for our students. Today, we serve students across all settings. Some of our graduates are attending college, working in competitive employment, engaging in meaningful relationships with friends, and living outside their family home as contributing members of their communities. Yet, much work remains. Too many remain unemployed. Tax dollars previously allocated to community support agencies are rapidly disappearing, resulting in fewer available post-school services for our graduates. Today we may be hindered by shrinking budgets, preoccupied with high stakes testing, and distracted in meeting Common Core State Standards. However, we must remain focused on the final goal. As a profession, we need to occasionally remind ourselves of the historical journey we’ve traveled so that we never go backwards and may continue to advocate for our students and their families.

skills necessary to be proactive and self-determined members of society (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). If the students’ preferences, interests, and strengths do not significantly influence your decisions as part of the planning process, students may be unlikely to employ the skills they have acquired (Turnbull et al., 2013).

Step 4. Connect the Program to Real-World Experiences

The overall goal of any inclusive vocational program is to teach job skills that will transfer to a supported, integrated employment setting in the community (Migliore & Domin, 2011). A critical step is to give students the opportunity to gain experience that will logically lead after high school to jobs in a variety of settings. Among the many barriers that make it difficult for schools to implement community-based instruction are funding, transportation, personnel, and the school’s location relative to possible job placement sites. Despite these barriers, the school still offers pathways to many realistic job opportunities.

Researchers have spent decades documenting the effects of classroom instruction in simulated settings and their positive impact on skills such as ordering meals (Pol et al., 1981), shopping (McDonnell, Horner, & Williams, 1984), using public transportation (Neef, Iwata, & Page, 1978), and engaging in domestic and vocational skills (Bates, Cuvo, Miner, & Korabek, 2001). Through collaboration with local community businesses and integration of your program into the school community, your classroom can capitalize on the beneficial components that community-based instruction offers.

Step 5. Create Training Materials and Prevocational Tasks That Mimic Real-World Processes

To achieve an authentic connection to community job settings, teachers and staff must treat the vocational training setting as a prerequisite to community job placement. Part of this process includes creating the training materials necessary for a vocational setting and ensuring that the process is as realistic as possible. Dress codes, employee manuals, and training checklists can be created to use with students prior to beginning employment in a vocational setting. These training materials should also be based on scientifically validated practices (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB; 2002]). Students can also be trained to complete applications for potential classroom positions and engage in role-play activities that mimic the interview process, focusing on functional communication and proper hygiene, dress, and behavioral conduct.

Step 6. Use Research-Based Training Methods

The NCLB Act requires that curricular and instructional methods within education settings be derived from scientifically

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Following is a sampling of the many highlights from the conference:

♦ **Focused training:** Pre-conference training institutes on ASD, mental health & challenging behaviors, and ASD & technology

♦ **Inspirational self-advocate speakers:** Christina Judd Campbell opened the conference with her address, “Just Give Me the Chance!” along with her rhythmic gymnastics performance, and Patricia Moody closed the conference with her address, “My Life with Down Syndrome.”

♦ **Global presence:** Delegates and presenters came from around the world, including Turkey, Sweden, Saudi Arabia, Guam, Africa, Bahamas, Egypt, and Canada.

♦ **Program diversity:** The conference program featured more than 100 lecture and poster presentations on a myriad of topics, focusing on research to practice.

♦ **2014 Dolly Gray Children's Literature Award:** Presented to Shirley Reva Vernick, author of Remember Dippy, and Matthew Dicks, author of Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend

♦ **Continuing Education Credits (CEUs):** From CEC and BCBA

Delegates, presenters, and exhibitors at DADD’s 15th International Conference on Autism, Intellectual Disability & Developmental Disabilities enjoyed an energizing professional learning opportunity in sunny Clearwater Beach, Florida, this past January.


Mark your calendar for the 16th International DADD Conference, which returns to Clearwater Beach in January 2015, and please consider submitting a proposal in response to the Call for Papers, included in this issue of the Express.

Cindy Perras
Conference Coordinator
DADD Call for Nominations

Each year, the Nominations/Elections Committee is charged with the responsibility of soliciting from the DADD membership a listing of nominations for vacancies on the Board of Directors. Nominees must be (a) members at the time of nomination and election and throughout their terms of office, (b) willing to participate for their entire term of office, and (c) willing to serve as a chair of a committee as needed. Vacancies are:

**Vice President** (4-year term)
*Responsibilities*: The Vice President acts in the place of the President-Elect with his or her authority in case of absence or disability of the president-elect and shall act in the place of the president with his or her authority in case of absence or disability of both the president and the president-elect. He or she also serves as the division’s representative for advance program planning for the Annual Convention, which will take place during his or her term as President-Elect, and serves as co-chair with the president-elect for future special conferences sponsored by the division.

**Canadian Representative** (3-year term)
*Responsibilities*: Serves as a regional representative, assists in developing and supporting subdivisions in the represented region, participates in all Board Meetings, and resides in one of the provinces of Canada.

**Student Governor** (1- or 2-year term)
*Responsibilities*: Serves as a student representative, participates in all Board Meetings, and is a full-time student during term of office.

Nominations must be received by June 30, 2014. The nominator and the nominee must be members of CEC-DADD. A brief bio of the nominee should accompany the nomination, which should be sent to Nikki Murdick (murdickn@slu.edu).

Watch for online voting. Please contact Nikki if you would like a paper ballot.

Diversity Committee News

**Debra Cote**
*Chairperson*

The Diversity Committee met in Philadelphia at the 2014 CEC Convention. The committee reviewed evidence-based practices and the classification of such for persons with autism and developmental disabilities, in particular, culturally and linguistically diverse student participants. Past Chairperson Dr. Elizabeth West, committee members, and myself reviewed and discussed the Strategic Plan. For information regarding the work of the Diversity Committee, please contact me (dcote@fullerton.edu).
Several awards were presented at the annual CEC convention in Philadelphia, and we wanted to acknowledge and congratulate all of the award recipients for their hard work and dedication. We will be accepting nominations for next year’s awards very soon; please see future newsletters for more details. I may be contacted via email (dagny@mchsi.com).

Dagny Fidler
Awards Committee Chairperson
Preparing Teachers at the Graduate and Undergraduate Levels to Infuse Technology into Literacy Instruction

As doctoral students, you may be asked to prepare a teaching presentation as a part of a campus interview for a tenure-track position. I recently presented the following information to a group of bright, articulate students in a master’s degree program. This information was well-received, and it occurred to me that it is relevant for all special education teachers who work to improve the lives of individuals with autism and intellectual disability. For students pursuing a doctoral, these strategies are current and useful for teacher preparation. For students pursuing an undergraduate or graduate degree, these strategies might provide ideas for augmenting classroom planning and instruction. There is a shared onus on teachers at both the higher education and classroom levels to be proficient in current technologies. The following outline describes a method for embedding technology into rigorous literacy lessons for students with developmental disabilities.

1. Select a text: When selecting a text for a lesson, consider available online supports that will help students (a) activate prior knowledge, (b) visualize as they read, and (c) make connections as they read. Examples of online supports include YouTube videos, TeacherTube, BrainPOP, Google Maps, Discovery Education, Flocabulary, and Thinking Reader.

2. Adapt (or do not adapt) text: Many e-texts available online are already supported with text-to-speech capabilities, embedded vocabulary definitions, pictures, and highlighting features. Examples of supported text websites include Discovery Education, Barnes & Noble online story time, and Project Gutenberg. Sometimes it may be necessary to fully adapt a text by rewriting the text itself to a lower text complexity. CAST Book Builder is an online site where teachers can create and share adapted books, complete with embedded audio. SMART Board™ has an app that can be used for creating adapted materials on an iPad that can later be displayed on the SMART Board. GoTalk NOW is a communication app from Attainment Company that can be used to create adapted texts. When adapting texts, remember to search the Internet for abridged versions and collaborate with others to create a shared network of resources. The Lexile Analyzer is a free online service that will report a Lexile measurement of text complexity (https://www.lexile.com/analyzer/results/2371673/).

3. Create the lesson: A complete literacy lesson will most likely combine (a) vocabulary instruction, (b) repeated readings, (c) graphic organizers, (d) comprehension questions, and (e) a writing component. Apps for supporting vocabulary instruction include Quizlet, GoTalk NOW, and Educreations. Students can learn to access and navigate e-texts independently. Teaching students the skills to navigate texts will allow them to independently replay text to search for answers as needed. Graphic organizers can be created using the Kidspiration app or the SMART Board app or software. Technology can also be used to create response options for comprehension questions (e.g., GoTalk NOW, SMART Board app, Quizlet app). Finally, technology can be used to assist in writing projects. The Write About This app gives students writing prompts and embeds several supports for creating a permanent product.

Many thanks to Jenny Root, a doctoral student at UNC Charlotte, who contributed to the development of this information. If you have ideas to share or articles you would like to see written on topics relevant to DADD student members, please email me (algermel@uncc.edu).

Editor’s Note

Ginevra Courtade

This issue celebrates highlights from the DADD conference in Clearwater, Florida, and the CEC conference in Philadelphia. Thank you to all of the wonderful contributors! Also included in this issue is a call for proposals for the 16th International DADD Conference. Please submit a proposal by the June 1 deadline.

Do you have a great idea for teachers in the field? Every issue of DADD Express includes a Teachers’ Corner article. If you would like to contribute information that would be beneficial to teachers, please contact me with ideas or questions (g.courtade@louisville.edu). We are also looking forward to more submissions for our Evidence-based Practices section. Enjoy your summer!
based strategies. Use of social scripts is an evidence-based strategy for teaching a variety of social and conversational skills that are useful in the job setting, such as asking for items, initiating, and turn taking (Ganz, Kaylor, Bourgeois, & Hadden, 2008). Moreover, visual supports may include checklists to (a) correctly engage the steps of a specific routine and (b) understand the behavioral expectations for the task and setting. Video modeling is another evidence-based approach that has been shown to increase a range of social and vocational skills (MacDonald, Clark, Garrigan, & Vangala, 2005) and participation in the academic curriculum (Hart & Whalon, 2012).

Step 7. Integrate Your Program Within the School Community

Connecting your students to the school community is a means to challenge them in a naturalistic setting that a typical job would provide. Furthermore, communicating with school personnel in a business setting has many benefits. First, students in self-contained settings often become accustomed to communicating only with other self-contained students and classroom teachers and staff (Carter, Hughes, Guth, & Copeland, 2005). By expanding the program to personnel outside of the self-contained setting, you are facilitating the expansion of students’ language. Second, providing a service that is not only tangible but also visible within the school setting provides natural reinforcers that a contrived setting is simply unable to offer.

Step 8. Use Authentic Real-World Reinforcement

People go to work for a variety of reasons. Individuals who stay at their jobs and perform to the best of their ability do so partly due to a level of pride they take in their work. This level of satisfaction should be no different for students who work in an inclusive vocational setting. Motivating factors that are naturally reinforcing, such as social praise for a job well done, can increase generalization of learned skills (Aspy & Grossman, 2011). Establishing a vocational setting with natural maintaining contingencies, such as payment and evaluation systems similar to those used in everyday work settings, can reinforce appropriate work ethics and behavior.

Conclusion

Programs employing the steps described herein can create opportunities for individuals with ASD and ID that may have otherwise been nonexistent. They can also open doors that were previously closed to students educated in more segregated settings. Using a collaborative approach with other key school professionals; integrating students’ skill sets, preferences, and interests as part of the planning; and employing evidence-based training materials and methods can result in employment opportunities that promote positive, long-term results for our students.

References