

NEW PROSPECTS FOR DISABILITY MANAGEMENT FOR TEENAGERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITY

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Background and Research Questions

Young people with learning disabilities, educated in special needs schools, have great problems to succeed in the transition from school to work. Only a small percentage (<5%) achieves to enter the first labor market (Niehaus, Hauser, Dreja & Förster 2008). Employers complain a lack of maturity to start and complete a vocational training (Ehrenthal, Eberhard, & Ulrich 2007). Many programs are implemented to prepare vocational training for this target group in Germany. But against the intention, the success of these programs is disappointing. They show little (Niehaus, Hauser, Dreja & Förster 2008) or even contrary effects. Taking part in the transition program turns out to be a disadvantage to begin a vocational training (BIBB 2009, Ginnold 2008), leading to a higher risk of unemployment and dependence on public support. Thus, learning disability appears to have a critical impact on the whole lifespan. Against this and according to their 20 year longitudinal study, Goldberg and colleagues (2003) pointed out certain predictors for a successful life in individuals with learning disabilities. Defining success as the existence of employment, education, independence, social relations and health, they identified the following factors as constituents contributing to success: self-awareness, pro-activity, perseverance, emotional stability, appropriate goal-setting, and the use of the social support system. Such aspects are not yet in the main focus of the vocational preparation training. But correspondingly to Goldman, it could be argued that Disability Management and Disability Managers should take into account promoting these personal and social aspects.

It is assumed that drama in teaching provides to be a quite innovative approach to support the skills requested (TransCen. Inc. 2006, Hentschel 2008). Few studies have been conducted in this field sustaining the impact of drama on the self concept and social behavior (Domkowski 2008a, Domkowski 2009b, Wright 2006). This research examines a drama project dealing with the topic of work-life in six schools for special needs in Cologne, Germany. Effects on certain social and vocational skills as well as the self concept are presumed.

Methods

A multidimensional approach including quasi experimental design is applied. We use questionnaire, semi-standardized interview and behavioral monitoring. The monitoring of the students during the project is complemented with their self-estimation before and after the project, whereas special attention is directed towards social competence, work ethic and self

concept. Also, the class teachers were interviewed. The sustainability of the project has been investigated half a year after the drama intervention by interrogating the students again.

Sample

Altogether 204 students and 10 teachers participated in the study. 139 students were included into this analysis. Out of these, 39 students in the experimental group could be observed by monitoring. Concerning the questioning, 60 students belonged to the experimental group, 57 to the control group and 22 to a comparison group which participated in job application training. In addition we conducted interviews with 15 students and 10 teachers of the experimental group.

Results

Overall, it can be shown that the students involved in the drama-project develop work ethic and social competence, e.g. endurance, responsibility and assertiveness. They improve in the course of the project, girls more than boys. Additionally, they report benefit on a personal basis, in this respect, boys more than girls. In contrast, the girls report more success on competence level. The comparison group profits from their intervention too, but in a different way. They gain in their vocational self-concept, yet rivalry arises between the classmates. Finally there is qualitative evidence for the drama intervention to support self awareness and utility for vocational career.

Conclusion

Drama can be seen as one innovative means to encourage students` vocational and social skills as well as self awareness. This might offer new perspectives for Disability Managers, assisting students with learning disabilities.

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