

Running head: PROGRAM WITHOUT WALLS

*Adult Transition Program Without Walls*

Eric Moberg

Monterey Adult School

Abstract

Best practices in adult transition special education for moderate to severe students suggest student-centered planning that maximizes independence in adult life. Based on the above sources, school districts and governing boards would best serve moderate to severe transition special education students with increasing integration into the community and decreasing time in the classroom on the campuses. A gradual transition would allow for an orderly solution of logistics problems, such as re-routing transportation, re-training staff, outreach to students and parents, re-writing individualized education programs, and arranging for storage of supplies and equipment. Such initiatives would require no additional funds from districts if implemented as described and would free classrooms for other programs on campus. Thus, districts would save overhead, such as energy costs of lighting and heating, by moving 18 to 22-year old special education students into the community.

Keywords: Special Education, Adult Special Education, Transition, Adult School, Vocational Special Education, Classrooms Without Walls, Deaf Education, Blind Education

## Adult Transition Program Without Walls: A Proposal

Social justice suggests, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Reauthorization of 2004 requires, transition plans for special education students over the age of 16 (Pub. L. No. 108-446, 20 USC §1400 et seq.). The transition plan of the “IEP must...include a statement about necessary transition services...that will help [each student] develop the skill necessary to meet his or her vocational, academic, or independent living skills plans for the future (after high school ends)” advises special education attorney Lawrence M. Siegel (2009, p. 124). These services are available to special education students up to the age of 22.

What are best practices in adult transition special education for moderate to severe students, and what delivery model is most conducive to these best practices for Monterey Peninsula Unified School District (MPUSD)? Mezirow's (1991) premise reflection, calls for the “critique of premises or presuppositions...to problem *posing* as distinct from problem *solving*. Problem posing involves making a taken-for-granted situation problematic, and raising questions regarding its validity" (p. 105). Based on the theoretical model of Malcolm Knowles (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998, p. 35-72), the research action project of Hartman (1996), and over a dozen other sources, the author proposes to the MPUSD administration and governing board that the Monterey Adult Transitions Program (MATP) would better serve its students with increasing integration into the community and decreasing time in the classroom on the Monterey Adult School (MAS) campus. In place of time in the MAS classroom, the Room 6 MATP students would better use their instructional time in the community at work sites, developing the Bistro Project and Greenhouse Project and on the Monterey Peninsula College (MPC) campus in

© January 1, 2010

classes, activities, and clubs (Moberg, 2009),. The specific ultimate goal would be to move Room 6 of the MATP from 50% community-based currently to 70% community-based in spring 2010, 90 % community-based beginning in fall 2010, and 100% community-based by the beginning of the 2011/2012 school year.

### *The Monterey Adult Transition Program*

MPUSD began directly serving approximately twenty moderate to severe adult special education students hosted at the MAS Casa Verde campus beginning in the 2009/2010 school year. Two credentialed special educators and seven classified instructional assistants staff the MATP. Students range from 18 to 22 years of age and include such special education eligibility categories as autism and other pervasive developmental disorders, Down's syndrome, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, dandy walker syndrome, orthopedically impaired, visually impaired, and hearing impaired. MATP has historically included a vocational training component primarily categorically funded by a Workability I Grant award (Kilty, 2009). MATP components added or proposed during the 2009/2010 school year include (a) the Bistro Project, (b) the Young and Able Club, and (c) the Greenhouse Project, all as part of a new micro business special education curriculum (Moberg, 2009).

### Special Andragogy and Experiential Learning

In Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998, p. 35-72), learning changes as students become adults. Adult educators should assume more self direction from their students and provide more relevance to adult students' current lives according to Knowles. Volkmar and Wiesner (2009) apply andragogy to students with autism, and urge that "Independent living skills should be explicitly targeted" (p. 293) during transition years after high school. A proper adult transition program should include more self-actualization

© January 1, 2010

and more opportunities for transformation and rely much less on lecturing and textbooks (Hartman, 2009).

The World Bank (Johanson & Adams, 2004, p. 109) stresses experiential learning in Africa in its “enterprise based training” for Sub-Saharan youth, who have high unemployment and poverty rates. Similarly, for students with pervasive development disorders, who also have high unemployment rates, many tasks and concepts are difficult to simulate, and are best learned by direct experience (Grandon, 2008).

The University of Portland Micro Business Marketing Project (Peterson & Albertson, 2006) sends marketing students out into the world to start their own micro business as a class project, also building on direct experience as genuine learning. The new MATP micro business special education intends to emulate this community-based entrepreneurship model (Moberg, 2009).

Claus’ (1989) report, “Renegotiating Vocational Instruction,” recommends including entrepreneurship in vocational training programs as a means of delivering education by experience. Both the Bistro Project and the Greenhouse Project of the MATP micro business special education curriculum are entrepreneurial by design and in practice (Moberg, 2009).

Hayes’ (1969) symposium presentation, “Work Experience Programs: Innovations in the Junior College Curricula,” describes the value of having young adults leave campus for community vocational training opportunities. The micro business special education curriculum of the MATP proposes to move the Bistro Project and Greenhouse Project off the MAS campus and out into the community over the next two school years to improve the independence of MATP students (Moberg, 2009).

Bishton’s (1958) article, “Why Experience is the Key to Learning,” applies Dewey’s

© January 1, 2010

concept of experiential learning to special education. “All genuine education comes about from experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 13). The thrust of the MATP micro business special education curriculum and the current proposal is to move from abstract learning environments to more experiential learning opportunities (Moberg, 2009).

“The defining task of the late teens and the early twenties is to move into the adult world and become accepted on its terms” (Daloz, 1999, p. 53). Proper adult transition curriculum should strive to transform students from a self-centered perspective, as defined by Kegan’s (1994) second order of consciousness, and into Kegan’s third order of consciousness of “mutuality in relationships” (p.28).

#### Classrooms Without Walls

In a recent issue of *Teaching Exceptional Children*, Hartman (2009) presented community-based transition programs (CBTPs) as the best service delivery model for preparing 18 to 22 year old moderate to severe special education students for adult life. The typical elements of a CBTP include (a) connections with adult service providers, (b) functional skill development in the community, (c) self-advocacy training, (d) community college opportunities, and (e) vocational training on the job (p. 6). Each of these five elements is either easier to provide, or as easy to provide, in the community as compared to in the classroom.

In a survey of modern businesses, employers preferred collaboration skills, work ethic, teamwork, and problem solving to reading, writing, and math skills in entry level employees (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). The former skills are better learned in the community, the latter in the classroom.

Bourquin and Sauerburger (2006) and the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults continue to recommend and facilitate community training to promote

independence for deaf and blind students. Deaf and blind students learn to negotiate and navigate in the community best out in the actual community. Many deaf students even prefer to leave their family homes after high school to study at boarding schools so as to increase their independence (Spradley & Spradley, 1987, p. 281).

Chalk et al. (2004) found that students with moderate cognitive disabilities learned targeted independent living skills in fewer sessions with community based instruction than by simulated instruction in the classroom. The classroom cannot simulate all of the eventualities possible in the community. MATP students have more and better opportunities to learn independent living skills off MAS campus than on campus.

In 1990, Belle Fourche, South Dakota, high school students collaborated with local businesses to map the town for the 1990 census, write articles for the local paper, record public announcements for the local radio station, and list the town with the governor's directory for national business recruitment (Higbee, 1990). These on-the-job training opportunities are simply not available anywhere other than on-the-job for mainstream or special education students. The California Department of Education recognizes the value of on-the-job training and requires that ...”project WorkAbility...provides instruction and experiences...and shall include...students wages for try-out employment [that promote] quality adult life” (California Education Code § 56470 et seq.)

### Conclusion

Best practices in adult transition special education for moderate to severe students suggest student-centered planning that maximizes independence in adult life. Based on the above sources, the MPUSD administration and governing board would best serve the Room 6 MATP students with increasing integration into the community and decreasing time in the classroom on

the MAS campus as described above. This gradual transition would allow for an orderly solution of logistics problems, such as re-routing transportation, re-training staff, outreach to students and parents, re-writing individualized education programs, and arranging for storage of supplies and equipment. This initiative would require no additional funds from MPUSD and would free one classroom at the MAS Casa Verde campus. Thus, MPUSD would save overhead, such as energy costs of lighting and heating, by moving the MATP into the community.

#### References:

- Bishton, R. C. (1958). Why experience is the key to learning. *Exceptional Children* 22, 191-213.
- Bourquin, E., & Sauerburger, D. (2005). Teaching deaf-blind people to communicate and interact with the public: Critical issues for travelers who are deaf-blind. *Rehabilitation Education for Blindness and Visual Impairment*, 37, 109-116. Retrieved from ERIC database.
- Casner-Lotto, J., & Barrington, L. (2006). *Are they really ready to work? Employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st Century U.S. workforce*. Washington D.C.: The Conference Board
- Chalk, D., Alberto, P., Kessler, K., & Taber, T. (2004). An investigation of instructional scheduling arrangements for community-based instruction. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 25(1), 67-88.
- Daloz, L. A. (1999). *Mentor: Guiding the journey of adult learners* (Rev. ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Collier Books
- Grandon, T. (2008) *The way I see it*. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons.
- Hartman, M. (2009). Step by step: Creating a community-based transition program for students with intellectual disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 41(6), 6-11. Retrieved from ERIC database.
- Higbee, P.S. (1990). *Rural experiment. How three South Dakota schools are opening doors to their communities...Exploring business partnerships, professional alliances, functional building designs, and expanded learning environments for the information age*. Sturgis,

© January 1, 2010

- South Dakota: Black Hills Special Services Cooperative. Retrieved from ERIC database
- Johanson, R. K. & Adams, A. V. (2004). *Skills development in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Report No. 10053619). Washington D. C.: World Bank Publications
- Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kilty, A. (2009). *Workability I grant proposal*. (2009/2010 school year edition). Monterey, California: Monterey Peninsula Unified School District.
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. G., & Swanson, R. A. (1998). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resources development*. Houston, TX: Gulf Publishing Company.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Moberg, E. M., (2009). *The Monterey model for micro business special education*. Monterey Peninsula Unified School District. (Unpublished report)
- Siegel, L. M. (2009) *The complete IEP guide: How to advocate for your special ed child, 6<sup>th</sup> edition*. Berkeley, California: Nolo
- Spradley, T. S., & Spradley, J. P. (1987). *Deaf like me*. Washington, D. C.: Gallaudet University Press
- Steen, O. (2009). International field studies in Norwegian teacher training courses: perspectives and experiences. *International Research in Geographical & Environmental Education*, 18(3), 199-209.
- Volkmar, F. R. & Wiesner, L. A. (2009) *A practical guide to autism: What every parent, family member, and teacher needs to know*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons.