Self Advocacy and Learning Disabilities
EPSE 526
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Self-Advocacy

What is it?
"Self-advocacy is the act of speaking out on one's own behalf and is considered to be at the core of all types of activism. Self-advocates assert their right to make decisions about matters that affect their lives." (Hourston, 2011)
Why is it important?

- Self-advocacy skills allow us to get what we want and need to reach our full potential.
- Many people with LD who have not learned to self-advocate have difficulty attaining their goals.
Over one-quarter of Canadians with LD aged 22 to 29 (28.3%) report less than a high school certificate as their highest academic achievement, compared to 14.9% of the general population. (LDAC 2007; p.2 in Hourston, 2011)

Only 25% of students with learning disabilities go on to post secondary education after high school. Completion of a college degree dropped from 19% to 12% between 1986 and 2001. (Wagner et. al., in Getzel & Thoma, 2006)
Learning disabilities also have an impact on employment opportunities. In a pattern that remains constant throughout their lifetimes, just over half of adults with LD aged 30 to 44 (51%) reported being employed the week prior to the 2001 census, compared to 89.1% of the total population in the same age group. (LDAC, p.5)

Canadians with learning disabilities are also two to three times more likely to report high levels of distress, depression, anxiety disorders, suicidal thoughts, and visits to a mental health professional and poorer overall mental and physical health compared to the general population (LDAC, p.6).

(LDAC in Hourston, 2011)
Self-advocacy is part of self-determination.
Self-determination is defined as "acting as the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence or interference"

(Wehmeyer, 1996 in Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997)
Lack of self-determination skills
Learning Disabilities and Self-Determination

- A meta-analysis of the literature on self-advocacy and self-determination curricula showed positive outcomes for the transition to adult life

- Malian & Levin, 2002
Research

* Most of the research has been on the effects of self-advocacy during the transition from high school to post-secondary education

* Many students enter college either not wanting to disclose their disability and/or with no knowledge of how to access services on campus. They need to identify themselves to the university's disability office and be able to describe and give proof of their profile and identify the accommodations and supports they need.

(Getzel & Thoma, 2008)
Wehmeyer & Schwartz (1997) studied 80 grade 12 students with "mental retardation" and learning disabilities (50/50) and found correlations between self-determination and success.

Phillips (2001) studied 15 students who were taught self-advocacy skills and applied them in a high school setting with positive results.

Durlak, Rose & Bursuck (1994) studied 8 high school students in a self-advocacy training program that required students to rehearse and then apply skills such as asking a teacher for accommodations.
Problems

- Study sizes were small
- Program delivery was short-term; will it be retained?
- Most studies used self-report scales; these were written or scribed
- Mostly white, middle class students
- In Durlak, et. al. (1994), two of the 8 students did not complete the task of asking a teacher for accommodations
Test et al. (2005) reviewed 20 data-based intervention studies and took input from stakeholders: "researchers, teachers, parents, adults with disabilities, and curriculum developers in the areas of self-determination and self-advocacy." (p. 45) and created a Conceptual Framework for creating self-advocacy programs.
Research Based Programs to Promote SD

- 4 key concepts:
  - self-awareness
  - knowledge of rights
  - communication
  - leadership
Research Based Programs to Promote SD

- Getzel & Thoma interviewed 34 college students who were identified by the faculty and the DDS office as having self-determination about the characteristics they thought most important for surviving in post-secondary education.

- They identified 7 crucial areas
What the Students Said

- Self-awareness
- Problem solving
- Goal setting
- Self-management
- Seeking services
- Developing relationships with professors
- Developing support systems
Research Based Programs to Support SD

- Brinckerhoff (1994) describes a program designed as a summer course for pre-entry to Boston University.
- Excellent, well-written, for teachers.
- Comprehensive in scope.
Sessions consisted of:

1. What is Your Learning Disability in Plain Language?
2. Understanding Legal Rights under IDEA
3. Self-Advocacy Basics
4. Determining Reasonable Accommodations in the Classroom
5. Independence Versus Dependence Issues
6. The I-Plan Strategy (an acronym for strategy to plan and participate in conferences) and Role-Playing
7. Putting Self-Advocacy to Work
Problems

- Variety of emphasis and complexity of frameworks and programs
- Very little research or programs about elementary or middle school students, although researchers did highlight a need for this
- Full-scale advocacy programs are not delivered by most of us
- What is our role?
The IEP

- I use student's IEPs as tools for developing self-advocacy
- IEPs can help students understand themselves and to develop advocacy skills
Resources


References


So What Do You or Can You Do to Encourage Self-Advocacy in Your Students?