

Special Education vs Vocational Training

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Regarding the state of our special education system, I could give little more than biased opinion. I am the program manager for a vocational center. We work with developmentally disabled adults. My contact with the school district and special education departments arise out of this position. The vocational center is a fairly complete one. We offer a variety of paid tasks from a variety of contract work. This allows us to teach a wide variety of job skills. Likewise, this also allows us to "asses" vocational skills.

On occasion the local school district will contract with us to do an assessment of a high school student. The assessments are usually 30 days in length. What we are able to do then is observe the individuals current abilities. We have a list of 75 "worker behavior characteristics" which we use for the assessment. The worker characteristics cover a wide variety of areas that include such areas as the individuals ability to work and perform tasks as well as how they interact with co-workers and supervisors, work safety and "break time" behavior, etc.

Not only do we assess current abilities, but we teach these worker characteristics as well. During this time the student is working at the vocational center and earning money for the paid tasks performed. In my community, we do not have special schools at the public level. We have a special education department within the local school districts. There are special education classes with in the public schools themselves. The curriculum of public special education is where my biases begin.

I feel that facilities such as mine are often at odds with the special education systems. That our goals are fundamentally different. Because of this, vocational centers may have to do "retraining" of the individual by the time he/she reaches us. It is almost as though, the education system is training the individual to go in one direction and we are training to go in a separate direction. This lack of consistency and communication does cause frustration for all three parties (schools, individuals, and qualified rehabilitation facilities). I am not a qualified educator and I am not trying to attack the education system. But in my opinion there is a "wall" between the educational systems and training facilities.

You mentioned something interesting, "But in Japan, at present many problems occur because of so much controlled educational system by the government." Our special education department is part of the "public" education system. In my limited experience most vocational centers or qualified rehabilitation facilities are privately owned by non profit organizations. Perhaps this is where my problem lies.

I thank you for responding to my inquiries. I hope the information I have provided is helpful.