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EMSTAC Extra

Answering the question.....

What attributes are important in the development and implementation of an early career awareness and career development program?

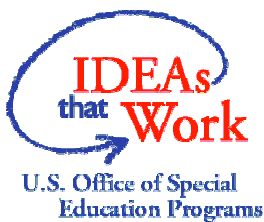
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Early Career Awareness and Development for Students with Disabilities in Elementary and Middle Schools

An Overview of Early Career and Transition Programs

The Merriam-Webster dictionary includes a definition of transition as a “passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another.”

In the world of education, transition has many different meanings and applications. There are a number of transitions that students go through, such as from preschool to elementary school, from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school, and from high school to various post-high school programs or work. This *EMSTAC Extra* will focus on the topic of preparing elementary and middle school students with disabilities for their transition to post-school activities, with an emphasis on career outcomes.

This paper address questions related to why early career awareness and development is important – including what are the implications for student learning and teacher pedagogy? We will provide an overview of attributes that appear to be pervasive among early career awareness and development programs. Finally, we will offer some examples of national, state, and locally administered early career development programs and will also provide information about several commercially available curriculums that can be used in the elementary and middle school grade levels. This *EMSTAC Extra* will conclude with resources and references that will provide you with resources through which you can extend your learning.

This paper was written from the perspective that career awareness and career development instruction are provided to students with disabilities in general education settings. Much of the content of this *EMSTAC Extra* assumes that the vocationally oriented material is infused in academic curriculum – that career development is not taught as a separate class. It is the tenet of this paper that career awareness and development is an integral component of the education curriculum and should be included in daily instruction.

The Importance of Early Career Awareness and Career Development Programs

- Exposing children to career possibilities enables students to see the connections between what they are learning in school (their academic skills) and what people are doing in the “real world.” Increasing a student’s awareness of the types of skills needed for potential future jobs will make his/her learning purposeful and will help students realize the future applicability of academic topics they are exposed to in early educational experiences. Additionally, research has demonstrated that

connecting academics to real-life situations can positively impact student performance.

- Career awareness and development helps students see themselves as part of the job force and the future of the world. Vocational learning can empower students to want to develop certain skill sets that will help them contribute to a future society. Career exploration and the simultaneous development of work skills reinforce the importance of early learning as the foundation for future contributions.
- Vocational awareness activities enable educators to introduce functional skill development into academic content areas. Instead of teaching math or reading as abstract concepts, a demonstration of how these skill sets are used in real-life occupations may heighten a student's ability to learn and apply the academic material. A learning exercise through which an educator can demonstrate how a scientist uses arithmetic or a nurse must read a prescription – even allowing the student to role-play the occupation-- enhances the usability and functionality of the academic content.

In IDEA '97, the term “Transition Services” is defined as:
A coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that:

1. Is designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.
2. Is based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (Storms, O'Leary, & Willimas, 2000).

An important component of the transition definition mandated by IDEA '97 (see inset box), includes outcomes consistent with student needs and preferences. This legislation reinforces the notion of student involvement in the vocational decision making process - a process that begins in a student's early stages of career awareness and development. The consideration of student choice in early career programming will help to

engage and empower the child throughout the later stages of vocational decision making. This attention toward self-determination can help ensure that career programs and interventions are consistent with the needs and preferences of the student.

The Importance of Incorporating Opportunities for Student Self-Determination

Early career awareness programs should include opportunities for students to enhance their self-determination skills. Self-determination is an

integral skill in youth's personal and professional growth and development and is defined as the ability to identify and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself (Field & Hoffman, 1994). A self-determined person acts "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, 1992, p.304). When an individual becomes aware of their personal command, intrinsic motivation for personal and professional development often occurs. This knowledge coupled with other integral skills (see inset box) is essential for the development of self-determination. Some ways in which teachers can promote these behaviors is through explicitly teaching goal setting and attainment strategies, present students with real-life problems to solve, or including students in the IEP process.

Integral Self-Determination Skills:

- Self-development
- Self-realization
- Behavioral autonomy
- Self-regulated behavior
- Self-advocacy
- Life skills

(Ward & Kohler, 1996; Wehmeyer, 1995)

Attributes of Elementary and Middle School Career Awareness Programs

Through a review of related literature and internet-based resources, we compiled a list of attributes and characteristics of early career awareness and development programs. These attributes are not intended to be a description of "best practices," since each educator must make an informed decision about what works best in his or her own setting. Rather, it is hoped that a description of characteristics pervasive among early career programs will provide professionals with an array of program characteristics (a checklist of choices) that can be considered as they develop career programs for elementary and middle school students. As with any program component, its effectiveness and appropriateness for a specific venue is highly contingent upon the needs and characteristics of that setting. We have also provided links to resources through which more information about a specific attribute can be obtained.

A Checklist of Attributes

- ❑ **Make Available Career Awareness Opportunities:** Professional members of the community can visit classrooms and schools for career talks, career fairs and career days, thus, enabling young students to hear the experiences of various professionals first-hand. It is valuable for students with disabilities to learn from adults with disabilities who have been successful in their careers
- ❑ **Provide Students with Real-life and Practical Experiences:** These real-world experiences serve as a way for students to build relationships with those in the surrounding/local communities. Educators can arrange field trips to local

workplaces, such as offices, hospitals, factories, and farms where students can learn first-hand the demands of various occupations, including the types of accommodations that may be necessary in a specific job.

- ❑ **Ensure the Program Addresses Work Readiness Skills:** It can be helpful for young students to learn the realities of workplace etiquette and routine early in their education, since these traits are important in all settings. Such things as being on time, working with managers, supervisors, and coworkers, and the consequences of high performance and quality work, can help a student even in the secondary school years. A program that uses many different teaching and learning strategies with “career discovery” as the theme can help to heighten work readiness skills.
- ❑ **Introduce Students to Information about the Job Market:** Early career programs can include information about national and local job markets and the potential for future employment within specific jobs. This is important to ensure that students' developing goals are consistent with the realities of the workplace and the demands of the labor market.
- ❑ **Provide Students with Opportunities to Incorporate Career Information in Academic Areas and Curriculum:** This component enhances the functional nature of teaching and makes academic material tangible and real to the student. By tying academic content such as reading or math to specific occupations, a student can realize the link between learning and practice.
- ❑ **Ensure your Program is Culturally Responsive:** We live in a world rich with diversity and the cultural experiences that these differences bring to everyday roles, including our jobs. Infusing culturally relevant information into early career awareness programs will facilitate the appropriateness and meaningfulness of this information for all students. Understanding the cultural norms that characterize the students in your class can help to ensure a culturally responsive program that truly aligns with the student’s needs and preferences. Further, the infusion of culturally responsive content and materials into early career programs can help young students learn and benefit from the cultural heterogeneity that exists in our everyday lives.
- ❑ **Ensure Family Involvement:** Family members and those people who typically influence a young person’s life are important to support student career goals. People outside of the school setting can serve as role models and advocates for the student and can support the development of realistic post-school goals.
- ❑ **Invite Interdisciplinary Involvement and Support:** In many early career programs, the program and curriculum is endorsed by everyone involved as meeting the school district’s goals, including the local administrator(s). Professionals from various disciplines including academic and non-academic

educators, general and special educators, school psychologists, and administrators are involved in the planning and delivery of early career programs.

- ❑ **Implement a Flexible Program:** An early career program does not have to target specific disability groups or students within one age range. Rather, it is beneficial for a program to be flexible enough to be used for a range of grades, and a range of students with various disabilities. A discussion of job accommodations, if appropriate, can address the varying needs of students.
- ❑ **Use Well Trained and Dedicated Staff:** Career programs should include staff who have high expectations for students and present high expectations for their potential to contribute to our society as a working adult. The professionals who develop and implement early career programs should be trained in this area. There are many professional development opportunities available to educators that focus on vocational topics. Contact local or national professional associations such as the Council for Exceptional Children’s Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT).
- ❑ **Promote Individuality in your Program:** Not every student in an early career awareness and development program has to have the same post-school goals. Many early career development programs encourage students to consider occupations outside of what is expected and gain exposure to careers that are atypical. Career development and especially post-school goals should not reflect a “one size fits all approach.” Instead, allow students to be creative as they begin to explore the wonders of the adult world and its vocational component.
- ❑ **Incorporate Technology in your Program:** Increasingly, our society is relying on the use of adaptive equipment and assistive technology to enhance success in the workplace. These technologies should be introduced early in a student’s career development program and should become commonplace in terms of career instruction. Adaptive equipment and assistive devices should be viewed as supporting the student’s post-school goals and should facilitate access to opportunities.

Descriptions of Early Career Awareness and Career Development Programs

There are a number of different types of elementary and middle school programs that prepare and introduce students to post-high school career choices. These programs are developed and implemented at various levels, including those programs sponsored by a particular state, district or local government agency, a non-profit organization or a commercial vendor. It can be helpful to learn about what others are doing regarding early career development as a means of furthering ones understanding of program characteristics. This information was gathered from various articles and websites and includes a brief description of the program’s major characteristics.

National and State Level Programs:

1. **KAPOW: Kids and the Power of Work**, a program of the National Child Labor Committee “seeks to inspire and educate elementary school children about work and working through partnerships among businesses, communities and schools.”

Contact Information:

1501 Broadway, Suite 403
 New York, New York 10036
 Phone: (212) 840-1801
 Fax: (212) 768-0963
 Email: ncckapow@aol.com
<http://www.kapow.org/>

The site provides illustrations of school – community partnerships that serve to raise career awareness for elementary school students:

A fourth grade class in Miami-Dade County Public Schools implemented the KAPOW program, where they partnered with three local radio stations. Radio station staff volunteered to be involved in the project, where they, along with the KAPOW staff, provided lesson goal plans and objectives. The lessons included topics in career awareness, a site visit to a radio station, self-awareness, decision making, and overcoming bias and stereotyping. The students learned about skills directly connected to the radio broadcasting field, as well as other more generic skills that are applicable to any workplace. The radio station used videos, sample commercials, and other projects to make these lessons more interesting for the students. For more info, go to <http://www.stw.ed.gov/factsht/bul0197D.htm>

2. **Junior Achievement.** “Junior Achievement (JA) is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to educate and inspire young people to value free enterprise, business, and economics to improve the quality of their lives. Since it’s founding in 1919, JA has contributed to the business and economics education of young people in the United States and throughout the world. JA’s mission is to ensure that every child in America has a fundamental understanding of the free enterprise system.”

National Headquarters and Service Center
 One Education Way
 Colorado Springs, CO 80906
 Phone: (719) 540-8000
 Fax: (719) 540-6299
<http://www.ja.org/newja/index.html>

3. **Tennessee State Department of Education** (<http://www.state.tn.us/education/eexpchcr.htm>) has resources online for students and teachers the purpose of career awareness with the goal of helping students see the connection between what they learn in school and what they might do when they work. The site includes suggestions for educators regarding various activities in which to engage students, such as field trips to local work places, career fairs, and career days.
4. **In North Carolina, the Department of Public Instruction, Instructional and Guidance Services Section, the Job Ready Office and the State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee** prepared a comprehensive document titled, “Elementary Career Awareness Guide: A Resource for Elementary School Counselors and Teachers”, available online at <http://sol1.esc.state.nc.us/soicc/online/page5.htm>. This resource includes specific career development activities that are specific to grade level and subject area (such as Music, Health, Language Arts, Social Studies, and Mathematics).
5. **The Georgia State Department of Education** has a web page (<http://www.glc.k12.ga.us/qstd-int/ancill/guidance/schoices/sc-d27.htm>) that includes “The Career Guidance Curriculum”. This publication includes reasons why career awareness is important even at an early age.

Local and Regional School District Level Programs:

1. **Silver Spring Elementary School, a school in the Milwaukee Public School system** implemented a program called “Career Immersion” associated with the University of Minnesota School-to-Work Outreach Project. The website (<http://ici.umn.edu/schooltowork/immersion.html>) includes a list of characteristics that the District indicated made the program successful.
2. **Thoreau Elementary School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin** created a mini-society where the students are introduced to the concepts of businesses and employees. The students also use “Thoreau Bucks” that they earn as “employees” in businesses run in part by the students. Examples of such businesses include a General Store, a Plant Shop, and a Popcorn Factory. Students also work in more traditional settings such as the library, cafeteria, computer lab, and school newspaper. These “Thoreau Bucks” can be used at the General Store and the Camp Thoreau Novelty Store.
For more info, go to <http://www.stw.ed.gov/factsht/bul0197D.htm>
3. **The Miami-Dade County Public Schools District Comprehensive School-to-Career Plan** for the years 2001-2005, is a comprehensive document stating what the district is doing with regard to School-to-Career issues.
<http://www.dade.k12.fl.us/schoolreform/schooltocareer.htm>

4. **Burlington County Institute of Technology** (a public vocational technical school district.) Their website (<http://www.bcit.tec.nj.us/childcareer/default.htm>) has a document titled, “Kids and Careers, an On-Line Manual: Teaching Elementary School Children about the World of Work, A Guide for Elementary School Teachers & Parents.” This manual includes information on career awareness, and gives examples of questions to spark discussion in the elementary school environment.

Commercial Programs: Considerations for Choosing Commercially available Early Career Development Programs and Program Examples

If you will be using a commercially available program, it is important to consider a variety of product characteristics before selecting a specific product and potentially investing a lot of time and money into a program that is inconsistent with your needs. You may want to consider the following program attributes:

- Appropriateness for your population of students – what kinds of setting have used the program? Can the developer supply references?
- Availability of data demonstrating the impact of the program on student outcomes.
- Ease of implementation – how much training and school resources will be needed to implement the program? Are there hidden costs associated with the program’s implementation?
- How much flexibility do you have in implementing the program? Will changing the program features alter its effectiveness as a learning tool?
- Will the developer provide ongoing support if necessary? What will the cost of this support be?
- How do you know whether the intervention is effective in achieving its purpose? Are there evaluation tools that assess student learning? What do students think about the program?

The following is a description of some commercially available programs:

1. Wintergreen/Orchard House - college and career guidance products Riverside Publishing (A Houghton Mifflin Company)

425 Spring Lake Drive

Itasca, IL 60143

Tel: (800) 323-9540

Email: rpcwebmaster@hmco.com

<http://www.wgoh.com/catalog/index.html>

The Company offers a variety of career exploration and career awareness products for students in grades 3-6. In Wintergreen Orchard House’s **Next Generation Career Series™** Curriculum, software and supporting materials provide students with interactive forums for career awareness and vocational exploration.

Among the products available through the **Next Generation Career Series™** are workbooks for the elementary and intermediate grades that serve to

enhance career awareness such as **Career Adventures™** and **Career Caravan™**, reference materials and promotional materials such as **People at Work™** and the **Meet Dez Poster™** and an interactive board game, **Winning the Career Game™** that helps students learn about occupations and job functions. Support materials for teachers are available with many of these products.

In the **Next Generation Career Series™** Product, **Career O Roma™**, students learn about specific occupations by hearing personal narratives from professionals in various occupations. The CD Rom version uses cartoons and animated graphics to detail specific skills required within a profession, the salary information, and the occupational outlook for this profession. The students are able to determine their own course of learning in this interactive version.

Career-O-Roma™ includes a quiz to assess student knowledge about the job duties related to various occupations. The student is provided with immediate feedback following their answer. An individualized career search assessment tool is included in **Career-O-Rom-A™** that matches occupational areas to the student's interests.

The Wintergreen/Orchard House Company also produces the **Gains I™: A Pre-Test/Post-Test for measuring Career Development Competency Progress for grades 4-7**. This is a diagnostic tool, which identifies what students know before and after receiving career development instruction.

2. Education Associates

340 Crab Orchard Rd.
P. O. Box 4290
Frankfort, KY 40604
Tel: (800) 626-2950
Email: stw@e-a-i.com

Education Associate's ***Careers in Action: Elementary Career Awareness System*** consists of 10 hands-on kits that integrate academic subjects, such as Math, Science, and Language Arts, as well as community/parent involvement, in the following areas: Construction; Creative Arts; Engineering Technology; Human Services; Mechanics, Installers and Repairers; Medical Careers; Nature's Resources; Public Services; Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality; and The World of Business. The curriculum is focused on Pre-school through grade 5 and involves individual and group instruction and is intended to help students gain awareness of career clusters, typical jobs within clusters, the tasks and duties of these jobs and the tools, materials and training required to be successful in these jobs.

The ***American School Counselor Association selected the Careers in Action System as a National Exemplary Career Guidance & Counseling Program***. In the promotional material offered by the company, testimonials from schools using

the curriculum describe the benefits of the program including gains in state administered student standardized test schools, a decrease in disciplinary referrals, a decrease in school vandalism, and an increase in parental and community involvement. Additional documentation provided by Education Associates, provides data related to the positive impact and effectiveness of the *Careers in Action* kits on student test scores. For more information about the *Careers in Action* visit the company's website at <http://www.educationassociates.com/elementary.html>

3. **Bridges.com Inc.**
808 Commerce Park Drive
Ogdensburg, NY 13669
Tel.: (800) 281-1168
Fax: (888) 349-3437

Paws in Jobland is a Multimedia CD-ROM career awareness program that includes lesson plans, an interest survey, worksheets, exploration of 20 work environments, and a game-style quiz. For more information about Paws in Jobland visit the Bridges website at <http://www.careerware.com/products/us/paws.htm>

4. **Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.**
Post Office Box 10624
Baltimore, Maryland 2185-0624

Teaching Self-Determination to Students with Disabilities: Basic Skills for Successful Transition (1998) by Michael L. Wehmeyer, Martin Agran, and Carolyn Hughes provides educators with an in-depth look at research and practical instructional methodologies regarding self-determination skills. Beyond an overview of self-determination, specific skills addressed include areas such as autonomous behavior, decision-making, problem solving, self-advocacy, self-management, self-awareness, goal setting, assertiveness, leadership, and psychological empowerment. Material is presented in a user-friendly manner that can easily be applied in the classroom. Numerous activities are provided in addition to reviews of commercially available programs.

5. **Council for Exceptional Children**
1110 North Glebe Road, Suite 300,
Arlington, VA 22201-5704
Toll-free: 1-888-CEC-SPED
Local: 703-620-3660
TTY: (text only) 703-264-9446
Fax: 703-264-9494
<http://www.cec.sped.org/bk/catalog2/iep.html>

Student-Led IEPs: A Guide to Student Involvement (2001) by Marcy McGahee, Christine Mason, Teri Wallace, and Bonnie Jones provides educators with a structured means of enabling students to become more independent and self-directed through increased involvement in the IEP process. A step-by-step process of starting student-led IEPs is outlined including, overview of relevant research, specific lesson plans, sample forms, and suggestions for school-wide implementation.

6. **MicroSociety**

“In the MicroSociety program, students collaborate with parents, community members, and teachers to build a miniature community in the school and establish a center of commerce and governance in which every child and adult participates. Children create and manage business ventures that produce goods and services. They also run agencies that handle governmental functions and lay the groundwork for organized accountability.

K-8 students spend one class period each day at their jobs. They assume management or employee responsibilities in businesses, agencies, and nonprofits. In their work places, students apply technology, think critically about authentic crises, prepare and analyze budgets, resolve ethical issues, and develop cultural sensitivities. These experiences often raise profound issues such as the fairness of democracy, the rewards of entrepreneurship, cultural differences and similarities, the role of law in society, how to humanize institutions, and how much tax an individual should pay.

When fully implemented, the MicroSociety has six strands: technology, economy, academy, citizenship and government, humanities and arts, and heart (volunteerism and the ethical aspects of society). The MicroSociety also has 12 essential elements: an internal currency; a retail labor market; private property; public property; organizations such as ventures, agencies, and nonprofits; agreement on a common purpose; definition of personal goals by teachers and students; meaningful contact with parents; meaningful contact with community partners; teacher planning time for the program; and a technology strand.”

Katherine Primus, Director of Business Development

MICROSOCIETY

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E-mail: kprimus@microsociety.com

Web site: <http://www.microsociety.org>

Also see <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/catalog/ModelDetails.asp?ModelID=21> for more info.

Free Resources and Support Organizations

- A. Middle Matters, Published to serve principals of children ages 9 through 14 by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Fall, 2001.
<http://www.naesp.org/comm/mmf01.htm>
 Contents include various programs such as **College Preparation in the Middle Grades: It's More than SATs, Involving Middle Grades in Career Planning, It's Never Too Early to Start Planning for College, Peer Tutoring: Creating an In-School Career**, and, **Career Planning at the Middle Level**
- B. National School-to-Work Learning and Information Center. *School-to-Work in Elementary Schools*. Washington: National School-to-Work Learning and Information Center, 1997.
<http://www.stw.ed.gov/factsht/bul0197D.htm>
 “This resource bulletin describes how to involve elementary school children in the STW effort. At this level, the key factors are making sure that students are well grounded in basic skills (reading, writing, mathematics, speaking, listening, thinking and good interpersonal skills), and giving them some early career awareness. Career awareness may be built by connecting classroom learning with the world of work, exposing children to the workplace through field trips and guest lecturers, and helping them see themselves as part of the future workforce. The bulletin includes examples of effective practices.”
- C. Schwartz, Wendy. *Preparing Middle School Students for a Career*. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, 1996.
<http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/guides/pg15.html>
 Also available in Spanish, at <http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/guides/pg15-s.html>
- D. *School-to-Work and Elementary Education, Practice Application Brief No. 5*, by Bettina Lankard Brown, 1999
<http://icdl.uncg.edu/ft/092100-03.html>
- E. *Career Development Guide: A Comprehensive Guide for Middle Level Schools from Planning through Implementation of Career Development*. Illinois State Board of Education & the Association of Illinois Middle-Level Schools, 2000.
 The Association of Illinois Middle-Level Schools
 P.O. Box 11076
 Champaign, IL 61826-1076
 Tel: (217) 333-7104; Fax: (217) 333-2440
- F. State grantees, the National School-to-Work Office, and MPR Associates developed this glossary. It provides definitions to commonly used words and terms within School-to-Work.
<http://www.stw.ed.gov/factsht/glossary.pdf>
 It is also available in HTML format at
<http://www.stw.ed.gov/products/download/html/glossary.htm>.

- G. National Center for Research in Vocational Education: 1988-1999 at the University of California, Berkeley
<http://vocserve.berkeley.edu/> – Old website, but there is still relevant information on this site.
<http://ncrve.berkeley.edu/nccte.html> – New website directing viewers to the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education
- H. National Research Center for Career and Technical Education
 University of Minnesota, Twin Cities
 1954 Buford Ave.
 St. Paul, MN 55108
 URL: <http://www.nccte.com>
 email: nrccte@tc.umn.edu
 Phone: (800) 322-9664 or (612) 624-3000; Fax: (612) 623-7757
- I. National Dissemination Center for Career and Technical Education
 Ohio State University
 1900 Kenney Rd.
 Columbus, OH 43210-1090
 URL: <http://www.nccte.com>
 email: ndccte@osu.edu
 Phone: (800) 848-4815 or (614) 292-9931; Fax: (614) 292-1260
- J. [New Hampshire Developmental Disabilities Services System](http://nhdds.org/programs/osd)
 State Office Park South
 105 Pleasant Street
 Concord, NH 03301
 url: <http://nhdds.org/programs/osd>
 Phone: (603) 271-555; fax: (603) 271-5166

This web site offers advocacy and professional resources, including a free publication entitled *Transition: A Manual for Young People with Disabilities and Their Family Members*.

- K. Division on Career Development & Transition (DCDT)
 A professional association for professional at all levels who are involved the provision of vocational and career services to students with disabilities. Through DCDT meetings, publications, and professional networks, practitioners, administrators, and researchers can share information regarding strategies and programs related to career awareness and career development for students with disabilities.
www.cec.sped.org/divisions

VIII. References

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