



Findings/Fall 2004

Decision Making and Responsibility Taking

A Community-Based Assessment of Transition Strengths for SOS Interns

*A report on Rival Hypotheses,
Options, and Outcomes
from the CARNEGIE MELLON
COMMUNITY THINK TANK*

This Think Tank will lay the foundation for building a community-based, functional assessment of the transition strength of students with a learning disability

- recognizing both success stories and growth-point and challenge stories
- helping students and supervisors conduct their own data-based assessment of workplace strengths

The Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank
Carnegie Mellon University
in collaboration with
The Start On Success Transition Program
Pittsburgh Public Schools
The Community House Learning Center

*Intercultural Problem Solving for Learning
And the Transition to Working Lives*

The Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank

Creates an intercultural dialogue among problem solvers—students and adults from Pittsburgh’s urban schools and community, from business, regional development, social services, and education.

Seeks workable solutions to the problems of teaching and learning, and the transition to meaningful working lives for students of aspiration dealing with learning disabilities.

The Think Tank’s structured, solution-oriented process:

- ◆ Opens a cross-age, intercultural dialogue in which students, teachers, parents, school administrators, workplace managers, social service and development professionals, educators, trainers, researchers, and community supporters meet as collaborators
- ◆ Structures this talk into a problem-solving search for diverse perspectives, rival hypotheses, and collaborative solutions
- ◆ Draws out untapped levels of expertise in youth and the urban community to build more comprehensive intercultural understanding of problems and to construct community-tested options for action
- ◆ Builds a scaffold for Local Action Think Tanks in individual schools and workplaces



Please visit our web site to explore the 2003 Findings from Naming the LD Difference, as well as research on intercultural problem solving, and our guide for developing your own dialogues as an educator, human resource developer, or community group. www.cmu.edu/outreach/thinktank

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Welcome to the Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank

On Decision Making and Responsibility Taking *A Community-Based Assessment of Transition Strengths of SOS Interns* Carnegie Mellon November 13, 2004

This volume of the Think Tank Findings documents the on-going search for more equitable and accurate assessment of students with learning disabilities. At the center of this dilemma is the need to balance the measurement of academic skills (good at showing what students with an LD can not do) with a more functional assessment of real world performance. How can we recognize the strengths and achievements of people who, rather than *being* disabled, *cope* with a disability?

This Think Tank is part of an on-going dialogue among educators, social supporters, employers and students. Our Findings invite you to enter that discussion by listening to the stories and options, the problems and possibilities raised by the diverse voices in this Think Tank. And then to use this document as a springboard for your own *local action dialogues*, exploring options for you in your setting.

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The Community Think Tank Process

Building a Working Definition of Decision Making & Responsibility Taking

The Question

What does it mean to make a good decision or take responsibility when you are a Start On Success Intern? What *form can* it take when you are a high school student working in an entry-level job? In particular, what kind of decisions do students have to make to deal with a learning disability, to learn the expectations of their workplace, or to negotiate the new culture of work?

The assessment of internship performance and student growth in a community needs to be based on data. The Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank is one step in documenting and discussing some of the forms of decision making and responsibility taking that actually take place in the workplace experience of Start On Success Interns.



The “Critical Incident” Discovery Process



The Think Tank discovery process began with doing what are called “critical incident interviews.” That is, we asked 25 Interns, Supervisors, and Educators to describe actual, specific instances in which an Intern took responsibility or made a decision. We probed these “critical incidents” to find out what happened, why, how different people interpreted it, and what made it a significant incident for workplace performance or for the people involved.

And from this data we constructed an inventory of Strengths and Struggles and the three Problem Scenarios (see below), which the members of the Think Tank used to begin their dialogue.

Success Stories and Growth Stories

Some significant and surprising themes emerged from the critical incident data. With the help of our Start On Success partners and the literature in community-based assessment, our analysis began to name these themes and map their key features.

As we expected, many of these workplace accounts of decision making and responsibility taking were *success stories*. The inquiry documented *strengths*—examples of reflective decision making and mature choices that may often go unnoticed. We saw strengths that are most certainly ignored by conventional school-based assessments.

Other incidents, however, revealed *stories of struggle and growth*. They documented sites of *struggle* where students were facing challenges—learning workplace expectations, achieving only partial success, or learning to deal with a failure.



Such struggles are often growth points in which students are working through the demands of workplace decision making and responsibility taking. And for educators, these sites of challenge and struggle are of special importance because they are the places where learning is taking place.

Getting the Story-Behind-the-Story



A community-based assessment needs working definitions of *decision making* and *responsibility taking* that are not only grounded in actual practice, but are also able to represent the perspectives of *all* the participants. So in the final phase of this 2004 Think Tank, supervisors and co-workers, teachers, counselors and community supporters *and* students set down to think together. The Think Tank helps people develop these working definitions by creating a structured problem-solving inquiry designed to uncover the Story-Behind-the-Story.

Its intercultural, cross-age, cross-hierarchy dialogue draws on the expertise and local knowledge of all its diverse participants. Dialogue in a Community Think Tank session starts by analyzing a problem scenario—a representative case constructed from our data. Participants use their diverse perspectives to deepen our understanding of how these actions actually play out in Internships. Table leaders posed the question: What is the story-behind-the-story in this frequently encountered situation? What is the problem? Whose problem is it? And how might different people in this event be interpreting what is happening? Then each table turned to the preliminary inventory of strengths and struggles created by the CMU & SOS team and worked to create both elaborations and good rivals.

The Findings

Following the November 2004 Think Tank session, the CMU team reviewed the taped discussions from each table and from a general discussion in which each group shared their key conclusions. The Findings that follow are not a comprehensive answer or a conclusion.



Rather, they identify some specific, significant strengths and sites of growth and struggle. They help us see what an abstract strength like decision-making actually looks like for high-school Interns in real workplaces. And they capture the multiple perspectives, the rival hypothesis, and the diverse stories-behind-the-story that make up the complex reality of student performance and transition.

Putting the Findings to Use

We hope teachers and counselors will be able to use these Findings to start problem-solving dialogues of their own with students and supervisors. The Scenarios are designed to be a springboard to discussing the Story-Behind-the-Story and alternative ways of dealing with a workplace decision.



The Strengths and Struggles sections invite teams to pose their own Examples and Good Moves and to propose—and develop—new Strengths based on the group’s experience. The results of this Think Tank were also being used by Carnegie Mellon Decision Makers, the Community House Learning Center, and Start on Success, in consultation with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, to develop a new tool for a community-based assessment of transition strengths. This transition assessment will allow students to take an active role in documenting their own “critical incidents” and representing their strengths in multi-media profiles.

SOS Interns

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Dorian Gibbs
James Rattenni
Jamie Galvin
Joe Kleppick
Kevin Lynch

Khandice Hager
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CMU

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Think Tank Participants

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Kelly Simpson..... | Community House Learning Center |
| Ed Frey..... | Office of Vocational Rehabilitation |
| Marci Katona..... | Office of Vocational Rehabilitation |
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Decision Making

Strengths and Struggles

Preface

We arrived at the following conclusions through analysis of interviews with SOS interns, counselors, and supervisors. By comparing the overlaps in the data, we identified common and important issues that arose in the work environment.

Three key areas emerged where interns had the opportunity to take action and make decisions: 1) ability to assess consequences, 2) proactive moves, and 3) communication. Under each of the three themes, we determined several good moves interns had made, as well as areas where there might be room for improvement. Finally, we created a fourth category, Notes on Awareness and Understanding, for important data that did not fit easily under the three main categories.

1. Ability to Assess Consequences

Interns possess the ability to assess the consequences of their actions and can see the “big picture.” However, to do this, they need a clear understanding of their role and the hierarchy in the workplace. Students also have to be given the appropriate amount of tasks, and they have to understand why they are doing the tasks.

For Example



An intern is told to pull several hundred files off the shelves and prepare them to be mailed, resulting in the intern becoming bored and unmotivated. If the intern is instead told that the files have to be pulled and mailed because the company will be charged a heavy fine for every missing file, the intern has been given the knowledge that his job is important and can attain the motivation to do the task well and quickly.

Good Moves

- 🗨 Interns complete their work, even if they don't enjoy the work they're doing. They know the consequences of not completing their work or doing it badly.
- 🗨 If interns are doing repetitive tasks and becoming bored, they can go to the boss and inquire about how the job fits into the overall goals of the workplace. Interns can take the initiative to gain an understanding of the consequences of their job in the workplace.
- 🗨 The interns understand they have a reputation to uphold; even in a difficult situation, if they come to work and prove themselves, they know this will pay off and they will be seen as good employees.
- 🗨 Sometimes a situation arises where the employee has a lot of opportunity to “work the system”; in other words, the supervisor is rarely around, so it is easy for the intern to look like a good employee without putting forth a lot of effort. One intern in this situation asked permission to work in other departments when he ran out of work in his assigned area, because he did not want to be perceived as a slacker even though he could have probably gotten away with it.
- 🗨 Interns prioritize among the tasks they are assigned, knowing which are the most important and should be done first.

- 🗨️ Interns double-check their actions to make sure they are performing their tasks properly.

Things to Work On

- 🗨️ If an intern is continually assigned dull or repetitive tasks without being given the reason these tasks are important, the intern might just accept that he has a boring job and stop caring about the work. When interns lack the motivation to do their jobs well, their work will suffer.

2. Proactive Moves

There are two key aspects of being proactive: interns take the initiative to find work to do on their own, and interns speak up if they have questions about their work.

For Example



The supervisor is busy doing a task with a tight deadline, and the intern finishes the assignment the supervisor had given her. Instead of sitting and waiting for the supervisor to come and assign her more work, she finds something that needs to be done around the workplace and proactively completes the task.

Good Moves

- 🗨️ Interns ask the supervisor to explain how the interns' work is significant within the department or company. Even if the interns do not enjoy their work, if they can find out that their effort is meaningful, they are more likely to be self-motivated.

Things to Work On

- 🗨️ If an intern sits and looks bored instead of going to the supervisor when he has completed all his tasks, the supervisor will often give the employee even less responsibility in the future and assign what is obviously busy work. The intern then gets even more frustrated, and the cycle is repeated with neither the supervisor nor the employee trusting each other.

3. Communication

Communication is essential in building good relationships and trust in the workplace. Supervisors should treat their employees like peers and communicate in a respectful way. Interns should be able to speak up, ask questions of their supervisors, and talk to them about concerns they have on the job.

For Example



An intern has been given a new task to perform, and on her first day doing the task, she makes several errors. The supervisor tells the intern about the errors and asks what happened. The intern apologizes for the errors but says that the task had not been fully explained to her, and asks for further instructions. The intern and supervisor have a rapport that allows them to communicate respectfully to each other while still expressing their own concerns.

Good Moves

- Treating everyone with respect often strengthens the rapport among co-workers as well as the amount of respect people receive in return. Something as simple as asking how someone's day has been can create a comfortable working environment.
- When interns do have an issue that they need to address with their supervisors, a polite, professional inquiry is a good place to start.
- Projecting a positive attitude can make communication easier. One intern is known for always having a smile on her face when someone walks in the room.
- Interns are aware of their own body language. Looking people in the eye and not shutting down when someone else is talking are both important workplace skills.
- The intern and the supervisor can work together to understand the intern's work style. Some interns prefer to be given explicit instructions, while others prefer to have only the general goals outlined for them. On the other side of this issue, the intern can get to know the supervisor's work style. If the supervisor typically does not give detailed instructions but also dislikes being interrupted for clarification, the intern can adapt by asking questions when the task is first assigned.

Things to Work On

- When the employer comes to the intern with a concern, the intern, instead of responding to the employer, just gives him a "look." This shuts down communication and makes the employer less likely to listen when the intern comes to him with a concern.

4. Notes on Awareness and Understanding

This category includes ideas and rivals that do not fit easily into the other themes presented. These include suggestions as varied as what makes a good workplace or important considerations in assessing an intern's performance

Good Moves

- Through several different in-school approaches such as lectures and role-playing with teachers or counselors, interns can learn the importance of understanding their roles in the workplace.
- Interns can act to defuse a confrontation even if they are being antagonized or are not directly involved in the situation.
- In terms of assessing an intern's performance, it is important to note that an intern's personality and work ethic are not the same things.
- If interns' LDs are getting in the way of their ability to complete their work, they can go to the boss confidentially and ask for any accommodations they need.



Speaking Up

Problem Scenario

The Decision Makers

Johnny.....A new intern working in a library

Jan.....Johnny's boss in the library

Karen..... Another intern, has been there longer than Johnny

Bored on the Job

Scene 1

Johnny has been given the task of re-shelving returned books on the 1st and 2nd floors of the library. He has finished early and still has a few hours left. He is sitting at a table in the library.

Johnny

(to himself) Man, this is boring.

Karen

(running by) Hey, Johnny. Whatcha doing?

Johnny

Nothing. I finished putting all the books away.

Karen

Wow, already?

Johnny

Yeah, all they give me is this same thing to do over and over. It doesn't really take a lot of time and anybody could do it. I'm really getting bored.

Karen

(struggling with a stack of papers) Yeah, well, just wait. After I was here for a few weeks they started loading me down with work. Some of which I really have to go finish right now. See you later, Johnny.

Johnny

See you.

(Johnny, not having anything to do, sits and stares into space. After a minute, Jan comes by.)

Jan

Johnny, don't you have anything to do?

Johnny

Uh, not really. I finished putting all the books away. You got anything else for me to do?

Jan

Why don't you start re-shelving the books for the third and fourth floors?

Johnny

(with a little hesitation) Okay

Scene 2

(The next day Johnny has re-shelved the books for 4 floors and still has time left on his shift.

Johnny sees Jan walking toward him.)

Johnny

(thinks) Oh man, I better look busy. Otherwise she'll give me more stupid re-shelving to do.

(He pulls some books off the shelves and pretends to be re-shelving them.)

Jan

How's it coming, Johnny?

Johnny

Ummmm....



Speaking Up

The Story Behind the Story

What is happening here?

- 🗨️ *An SOS counselor says:* The intern knows how he should've treated the situation, because we do role-playing and practice that kind of situation a lot. Maybe something else was disturbing him badly. The intern and supervisor should've communicated better.

Should an intern ask for more work/different work?

- 🗨️ *One student says:* If you've already done days worth of work, then you deserve a rest –It's natural to pretend to be busy for a little while in order to take a break.
- 🗨️ *Another student says:* I would just tell the supervisor that the job isn't satisfying. Or tell the supervisor that I'd like something else in addition to what I'm already doing.
- 🗨️ *Another student says:* Depends on the workplace. If there are different types of work to be done, sure. If there's only one type of work, asking for different work would mean transferring jobs or getting fired.
- 🗨️ *A supervisor says:* He has to have self-esteem to come back to you and ask for more work, and that's up to the supervisor or manager to give them that self-esteem, to make them feel comfortable that they can come into your office at any time.

Should an intern have a say in what kind of work he/she gets?

- 🗨️ *A student says:* He should have a say. He's working there. If it's not something he wants to do, he shouldn't have to do it.
- 🗨️ *An SOS counselor says:* When students are bored, it's hard for them to motivate themselves. They have a right to know the reason they're being asked to do something, and the supervisor needs to explain the reason for a task.



Following Directions and Asking for Help

Problem Scenario

The Decision Makers

Kevin.....Intern in a college bookstore

Joe.....Kevin's supervisor

Incomplete Directions

Scene 1

Joe

Hey, Kevin, I've got a job for you to do.

Kevin

Sure, what is it?

Joe

I just got 500 new textbooks in today, and they all need these barcode stickers put on them. They'll need to be put out on the shelves by the end of the day, so let me know when you're done, okay?

Kevin

Okay.

(Kevin puts stickers on all 500 books. He calls Joe over to show him that the job is finished.)

Kevin

All the books have stickers on them. Do you want me to put them on the shelves?

Joe

Uh-oh. These stickers are in the wrong place.

Kevin

What do you mean?

Joe

The stickers have to go on the top right-hand corner of the back of the book. It's a

security issue. All the books in the bookstore have to have the stickers in the same place.

Kevin

You never told me where to put them.

Joe

Well, never mind that, the point is that they need to get shelved tonight so you'll have to redo them all before you leave.

Possible Response #1

Kevin

(starts to get angry but then calms down and grumbles) All right, I understand. They'll get done.

(Kevin works for a while but then realizes he will not be able to complete the task by the time his shift is over.)

Kevin

Oh man, there's no way this is getting done, and I can't stay late tonight. What do I do? Should I ask Joe to get someone to help me? Will he understand? Or will he get mad...?

Possible Response #2

Kevin

I'm not doing that all over again just because you gave me bad directions! *(He walks out.)*



Following Directions and Asking for Help

The Story Behind the Story

Should the intern redo the task?

- 🗨️ *One student says:* I wouldn't do it. It's the supervisor's fault.
- 🗨️ *Another student says:* If the supervisor had apologized I would probably do it, just because I don't want to lose my job. But I would rather he got someone else to do it.
- 🗨️ *A supervisor says:* Why should I tell him everything step by step? I don't have time and they can figure it out for themselves.
- 🗨️ *Another student says:* I just want someone to tell me what he needs.

Should interns speak up if they need help?

- 🗨️ One student says: Sure, it's better not to mess up.
- 🗨️ Another student says: Depends on the boss, most understand and would rather you do it right.
- 🗨️ *A supervisor says:* I should try to build the working environment more open and communicative, so that interns can just come in and talk to me whenever they have something to say.



Taking Responsibility

Strengths and Struggles

1. Taking Ownership

The intern takes the initiative and goes beyond what they're told to do.

For Example



The intern volunteers more ideas, takes on an extra or new task, or an intern tells the supervisor when the intern has exceeded the supervisor's expectations.

Reasons and Rivals



A supervisor says: an intern who takes responsibility beyond their assigned tasks should be recognized and rewarded.



A supervisor says: When an intern steps up to go beyond their assigned tasks, sometimes the intern does not know everything that the task requires.



An intern says: sticking your neck out to do something can get you in a lot of trouble. If I do something extra, I make sure I know how to do it first.

The intern seeks assignments that are valuable to them and their personal goals.

For Example



The intern asks for permission to work on cars in the workplace in order to follow a personal interest in them.



An intern designs a plan and lays electrical wire in a room with minimal supervision, in a task not defined in the job description, in part because they want to pursue a career as an electrician.

Reasons and Rivals



A supervisor says: Sometimes the work is just boring and needs to be done. Tasks related to the student's personal interest aren't available.



A supervisor says: Giving assignments to students takes up a lot of my time.



A teacher says: You have to let students know how they fit into the big picture. If they understand the reason for why they're doing what they're doing, they're more apt to do the task.



An intern says: I ask for work that I'm interested in when I'm done with the boring stuff.

Supervisor Actions



Supervisor assigns appropriate tasks for what interns can do well and can't do well.



Supervisor understands values of the interns and motivates consistently by showing importance of work.

2. Recognizing Opportunities To Take Responsibility

The intern takes the initiative to understand which responsibilities/tasks are associated with advancement.

For Example



The intern requests a meeting with his/her supervisor to discuss expectations of the job and develop an action plan for the internship.



The intern seeks feedback regarding his/her performance on a regular basis.



The intern asks for responsibility that may be outside the current (expected) job responsibilities.

Reasons and Rivals



An intern thinks: My boss should know what I'm doing. He sees me working every day. I should not have to worry about checking in all the time. Can't he see how hard I'm working?



The supervisor thinks: I wonder how the intern is working out. No news is good news, I guess, but there better not be any performance surprises.

The intern takes pride in his/her performance on the job.

For Example



The intern completes tasks on time and in a thorough manner. The intern double-checks work to avoid mistakes and meets deadlines.



The intern makes sure that the direction provided is clear and asks questions to make sure that the work being done is correct.



The intern notices a better, easier way to complete a task that saves time for the department and takes the initiative to develop a solution to a problem.

Reasons and Rivals



A supervisor thinks: This person is reliable. This is an intern that knows exactly what to do. The work is good, and I don't have to worry about him/her.



The intern thinks: This is the real world. I'm on my own to show what I am capable of doing.

Supervisor Actions



Supervisor rewards good performance with a bonus or a promotion.



Supervisor clearly explains opportunities or methods for advancement in the workplace.



Supervisor takes pride in his or her job and leads by example.

3. Balancing Personal Values With Perceived Expectations

The intern views responsibility taking as a matter of conscience. Before taking action, the intern consults both his/her body of personal values as well as the ethical values of the workplace.

For Example



An intern decides to take responsibility for a mistake she makes on the job. She does so because it aligns with her personal set of morals.

Reasons and Rivals



An intern says: I don't put up with it if I'm disrespected.



The Think Tank says: If, while admitting to a mistake, the intern feels disrespected by the other party, he/she will defend his dignity by calling the other party on it. While the intern complies with the value of taking responsibility for one's actions in the workplace, the intern does not dismiss his/her own set of personal values.

The intern resists peer pressure during work hours.

For Example



When there is an opportunity for the intern to slack off with his/her fellow interns, the intern chooses to find work to do instead.

Reasons and Rivals



The Think Tank says: The intern does not want to compromise his personal beliefs in proper workplace conduct under extreme pressure from fellow employees.

The intern shows enthusiasm for his/her job because the assigned tasks align with his/her personal interests and possible career goals.

For Example



An intern often goes to work early and stays for extra hours because she really wants to work in the field of educational administration in the future. She wants to get as much experience as she can in this job.

Supervisor Actions



Supervisor gets to know interns personally and the interns' social network at work.

4. Negotiating Conflict Situations

The intern forms a good rapport with co-workers and supervisors to prevent future conflict and to increase understanding of others.

For Example



An intern who is accused of incorrectly shelving books tries to relax the conflict by making a joke about how nice the display looks.

The intern does not allow himself/herself to get caught up in a conflict; rather they wait for the conflict to work itself out and then address the situation.

For Example



Intern is asked to go home after an incident and told his/her teacher (SOS supervisor) would be contacted. By leaving without fighting, intern diffuses the situation rather than causing it to escalate.

Reasons and Rivals



An intern thinks: You need to address the situation immediately so people will respect you. Otherwise, people may try to take advantage of you.

When conflict occurs the intern controls his or her emotions instead of reacting unprofessionally and looks for a solution that will benefit others as well as himself/herself.

For Example



An intern falsely accused of smoking pot on the job explains to his supervisor that he would never do drugs instead of reacting to the accusation with anger.

Reasons and Rivals



An intern thinks: I'm not a kid. I don't want to be treated like a kid. This is my chance to show people I'm not in school anymore.



A supervisor thinks: I try to think of interns as regular employees. But because I put more work into creating assignments they are different to a certain extent. Their behavior will decide their treatment in the end.

Supervisor Actions



Supervisor instructs interns on workplace etiquette and what is acceptable in your workplace situation.



Supervisor is respectful and not accusatory when confronting interns about mistakes or situations.



Supervisor gives interns the benefit of the doubt and does not jump to conclusions.



Supervisor is willing to compromise during situations of conflict to show intern respect and a sense of equality.



The “Retail Store Confrontation”

Problem Scenario

The Responsibility Takers

Joel.....SOS Intern who is accused of stealing

KevinThe manager of the store

In a Real Work Situation

Scene 1

It is 7AM before the store has opened. The manager and the intern are getting things ready for the open hours.

Kevin

(holding a clipboard, checking off items on an inventory) Did you restock the display?

Joel

Yeah.

Kevin

Why?

Joel

I saw that there weren't enough shirts on display, so I moved them from the back. You were busy on the phone, so I didn't ask you about that.

Kevin

There were 25 shirts in the backroom. There're only 24 out front. You took responsibility for stocking, so where's the missing shirt?

Joel

It should be out on display.

Kevin

Well it's not there, so where did you put it?

Joel

I was just trying to do something useful, and you're accusing me of stealing.

(Three Possible Endings)

Ending #1

Joel

Well, maybe I mixed it up with the shirts in another display. Let me check.

Kevin

I've already looked into everything. I am sure it's missing.

Joel

Look I would never steal!

Kevin

Ok, I'm going to ask you to go home. I'll be calling your teacher later today.

Ending #2

Kevin

I am saying that a shirt is missing and since you are the one who put it out, you would be the main person to ask about it.

Joel

I am sorry, but I don't know where it is.

Kevin

Well that is not good enough.

Joel

Fine. I will pay for the shirt since I was the one responsible for bringing it out of inventory.

Ending #3

Kevin

I know you took it. Just confess.

Joel

But I didn't take it. I can't believe you're accusing me!

Kevin

Believe it. Who else could be responsible?

Joel

Forget this. I don't have to deal with this bull. (Joel storms out of the store.)



The Story Behind the Story

What is Joel thinking?

- 🗨️ *A supervisor says:* The intern isn't following instructions when he takes on the new task. It's hard to supervise someone who doesn't ask questions and consult with me before he does something new.
- 🗨️ *A student says:* I don't think that intern is going to take initiative like that anymore. He was trying to do something good and he gets accused because he made a mistake. I also think he's being treated like a kid, not like an adult employee; the manager may have been waiting to get him in trouble over something.
- 🗨️ *A student says:* The supervisor seems to be suspicious of the intern. I get the feeling that there have been problems with stock before.
- 🗨️ *A supervisor says:* The manager may be insulted when the intern said that he took the initiative to restock because the manager was busy on the phone. He may feel that the intern is criticizing his ability to oversee all aspects of store operations.
- 🗨️ *A teacher says:* The intern is probably feeling underappreciated. He went out of his way to move the shirts and as a consequence is suspected of stealing.

Fact Sheet on LD and Assessment

Education and Employment Gaps

Nationally

- 26 % of youth with disabilities (all types) graduate with a high school diploma(Benz)
- 29% of Americans with disabilities aged 18 to 64 are working, compared to 79% of Americans without disabilities in this age category. (NOD)

Pittsburgh

- 43% of Black/ 26% of White students below basic reading in 2002
- Oliver H.S.; 18% receive special education

Start on Success (SOS) Student averages

- 100% graduating HS
- 100% employed or enrolled 6 mos after graduation (vs. 75% prior to SOS)

Predictors of Difficulty and Success

Having one of more of the following variables predicts which students will be at-risk (Benz)

SOS groups typically average 2 or more.

| | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Female | Minority | Learning disability | Emotional disability |
| No transportation | Unstable/difficult living situation | Needs independent living skills | Needs social skill instruction |
| No job experience | Unable to maintain job | Absenteeism/suspension | Parenting |
| Prior arrest | Substance abuse | HS drop out | Mental retardation |

The Benz study of students with disabilities in a transition program documents the odds for success:

| Out of 10 students, if students | Will graduate HS | Will fail to graduate |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|
| Have one or more risk predictors | 2+ | 7 |
| Are at risk <u>but</u> meet their at-risk transition goals | 6 | 3.5 |
| Have 2+ jobs (at-risk + other disabled students) | 7 | 3 |

Standards-based school reform (focused on increasing rigor and test results in core academic classes) may have undesirable consequences by limiting curricular options needed to meet “comprehensive educational needs” for the 50% of HS students (with and without disabilities) whose instructional needs go beyond core academic classes. “Comprehensive” embraces academic, career, life-skill and affective domains (Benz)

Labels

LD: *learning disability/ learning difference.*

Normal to above IQ but not achieving in selected areas. Often a “hidden” disability—hard to see or understand—and solutions are individual. May involve problems in dealing with information: getting it (reading/listening), understanding, recalling, or producing it (writing). And problems with planning and organization, study skills, problem-solving, social skills and self-esteem.

ADD & ADHD: *Attention deficit disorder & attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder*

Often associated with LD, but a medical diagnosis, not automatically special ed.. Problems paying attention to key aspects or over time. Seems inattentive (distractible, forgetful, avoids sustained effort activities); impulsive (blurts out or interrupts); hyperactive (fidgets and talks).

BD or ED: *Behavior disorder or Emotional disturbance*

Behavior interferes with ability to learn and achieve in the classroom. Problems include social maladjustment (poor attendance, not accepted, indifferent), withdrawal (in relations, self expression), aggression (defensive, resents authority), volatility, excessive shyness. (PPS)

“Categories and labels are powerful instruments for social regulation and control, and are often employed of obscure, covert, or hurtful purposes: to degrade people, to deny their access to opportunity, to exclude “undesirables’ whose presence in some way offends, disturbs familiar customs, or demands extraordinary effort” (Hobbs)

Students placed in Special Education tracks are likely to receive stigmatizing labels, isolation from peers, and patronizing teachers in classes that are less effective than general education classes. African Americans are dramatically overrepresented in Special Ed and mentally retarded classifications, often based on teachers judgment of “deviant” behavior and contested psychometric measures (Obiakor)

Learning Differences

Research on “multiple intelligences” defines 8 modes of representation that define intelligence. These different ways of processing information call for alternative learning styles including tactile & kinesthetic, verbal, visual & spatial, and project based.

Predictors of Success—20 Years Later

The variables that did NOT predict life success included

- IQ, academic achievement, life stressors, age, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity
- The powerful predictors of positive life outcomes (happy, satisfied, and productive members of society) were
- Self-awareness, proactivity, perseverance, goal-setting, support systems, emotional stability (Raskind)

Assessment Plays a Critical Role in School Outcomes

- The high-stakes assessment of No Child Left Behind legislation uses standardized tests to make important (high-stakes) decisions about children, teachers, and/or school districts.
- Schools in danger may urge low scorers to transfer or drop out or may shift focus to students most likely to bring up the scores (who are less likely to be minority, poor or learning disabled)
- Standardized testing does not make accommodations for learning disabled students.

Assessment Shapes Opportunities for Work and College

- The 1990/1997 IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) was a watershed moment, mandating “free appropriate public education,” meaning special education *and* transition services for students with disabilities, offered in “the least restrictive environment.” Disability is defined by school achievement tests as a severe discrepancy between IQ (average to high) and performance in a specific area, such as reading, math, writing, speaking, or listening.
- The 1998 Rehabilitation Act, on the other hand, is focused on employment, economic self-sufficiency, inclusion & integration into society. While the IDEA is an entitlement program for all in need, VR (vocational rehabilitation) for disabled persons, however, depends on eligibility based on assessments. (Dowdy & McCue)
- The VR assessment process is focused on what an individual can and can not do, that is on “specific functional impediments” and the impact the disability will have on “attaining employment outcomes.”
- VR uses standard psychological assessments of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional functioning. However “traditional approaches are not effective at detailing how [the effects of learning disabilities] might interact with task and environmental demands to impact individuals functioning in real-life situations” (Dowdy & McCue, p 68)
- A truly *functional* assessment of performance in everyday life needs to tap “direct information from the individual ... family members and others” through interviews, rating scales, and observations of performance. It needs to “understand the problem-solving capacities of the individual,” that goes beyond performance on a task to the *reasons* and *conditions* for success and failure. (Dowdy & McCue, p 69)

LD Websites

LD OnLine) www.ldonline.org (A rich source—from personal stories to legal briefs)

All Kinds of Minds (www.allkindsofminds.org) (Mel Levine’s work)

Job Accommodation Network (<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/>) (good examples of accommodations)

Transition Research Institute (<http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/sped/tri/institute.html>)

Learning Disabilities Association of America (<http://ldaamerica.org/>) (examples of self advocacy)

Misunderstood minds (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/misunderstoodminds/resources.html>)

National Center for Learning Disabilities <http://www.nclld.org/>

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities <http://www.nichcy.org/>

N.Y. Times Online forum on Learning Problems in School-Age Children <http://forums.nytimes.com/comment/>

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/>

Inside the Teenage Brain." Frontline. PBS <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/>

Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (<http://www.pattan.k12.pa.us>)

National Organization on Disability (www.nod.org)

What Works in Pennsylvania. (<http://www.pattan.k12.pa.us>) Go to What Works?/Secondary Transition/Pittsburgh Public SchoolsStartOnSuccess