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A SURVEY OF EMPLOYERS OF PERSONS WITH  
MODERATE MENTAL RETARDATION AND  
REVIEW OF A VOCATIONAL CURRICULUM

by  
Nancy A Armbruster

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division  
of Rowan College  
April 28, 1997

Approved by

Date Approved April 21, 1997

## **ABSTRACT**

Nancy A Armbruster

A Survey of Employers of Persons with

Moderate Mental Retardation and

Review of a Vocational Curriculum

1997, Dr. Stan Urban

Learning Disabilities

The purpose of this project was to determine the vocational skills employers of persons with moderate mental retardation required for successful employment and to evaluate the vocational curriculum at Burlington County Special Services School to determine if those same skills were being implemented. There was wide agreement regarding the importance of vocational education and the need for employers to provide information concerning skills needed for successful employment.

The methodology employed in this project consisted of interviewing five employer of individuals with moderate mental retardation. A questionnaire was administered to determine the skills employers felt were important for schools to teach. A review of the vocational curriculum used by Burlington County Special Services was also completed for comparison of skills needed to skills being taught.

From the information obtained from these employers and the curriculum reviewed, the research questions were answered. It was determined that the skills employers felt most

important were: communication skills, social skills, employability skills, listening skills, direction following and good work habits. These same skills were included in the vocational curriculum reviewed with the exception of social skills and communication skills. Although these two skills were taught during the day it would be helpful to include them in vocational lessons as well.

## **MINI-ABSTRACT**

**Nancy A Armbruster**

### **A Survey of Employers of Persons with Moderate Mental Retardation and Review of a Vocational Curriculum**

The purpose of this project was to determine the vocational skills employers of persons with moderate mental retardation required for successful employment and to evaluate the vocational curriculum of Burlington County Special Services School to determine if those same skills are being taught.

The information obtained from the employers and the curriculum review determined that the skills employers required were included in the vocational curriculum with two exceptions. Those exceptions were being taught but not in the vocational setting.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

#### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

What are the specific vocational skills that employers feel are needed for the successful employment of moderately handicapped individuals? Are the current skills being taught at Burlington County Special Services School adequate to the needs of past and potential employers?

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

This thesis project investigates the vocational skills being taught at Burlington County Special Services School District, the skills that past and potential employers require, and whether or not the students are receiving adequate training to meet employers needs. Donn E. Brolin, author of several books concerning vocational education, stresses the importance of vocational and career education at both the high school level and junior high level. He mentions that providing the proper training during the students "formative years" increases their chances of gaining confidence and vocational skills needed for future employment.

Transitional planning has not received the attention it should. It wasn't until the mid 1980's that studies started to examine the importance of formally preparing students for adult life and employment. It was felt that if students had the knowledge, skills and services that they needed they would live more satisfying and successful lives.(Blalock & Patton, 1996)

## **NEED FOR THE STUDY**

Vocational education is of major importance for persons with moderate levels of mental retardation and handicaps. It is also important that the vocational training received be as relevant and appropriate as possible to insure job placement and success.(Brolin, 1982)

The best source of information concerning skills needed for successful job placement comes from the employers themselves. Communication from school to business has been seen as a problem. It has been felt that improved communication could result in improved programs for students in special education.(Moran,1983) The cooperation and sharing of information from employers can be crucial to the success of transitional services because the employer is the final link in the chain of school-to-work.(Johnson, 1993)

Transition from school to work has always been an important issue for the staff at Burlington County Special Services School District. It is the researchers hope that this theses project will improve the area of transition by graduating students better prepared for the work force.

## VALUE OF THE STUDY

This study could reveal valuable information for the staff and administrators at Burlington County Special Services School District. Approximately fifteen (15) students graduate from the "Life Skills" Program each school year. Many of these students are never employed but instead spend their days in adult activity centers. Still others become employed just to lose their jobs a short time later.

Our "Life Skills" Program currently has four vocational training shops. The Janitorial Services shop is designed to train our students to clean offices and other public buildings. The students dust, empty trash, clean windows, vacuum, fill paper towel holders, wipe tables and chairs. They also learn to wear safety gear such as gloves, goggles and aprons. The students are evaluated on how independent they are in each skill area.

The Workskills Center is another shop we use to train students for assembling, sorting and packaging jobs. A workshop is set up with varying levels of difficulty for packaging, sorting and assembling. Students are evaluated on speed and accuracy.

The Vocational Training Center is the third shop placement in the "Life Skills" program. Student are required to complete clerical jobs, depending on their abilities. Some students deliver mail to teachers, collate, alphabetize, transfer records to microfiche, count and wrap coins, etc. There is also a component of this shop for crafts. Crafts are made and sold to staff or placed in the school store. The fourth shop is the Daily Living Center. Students are educated



in simple cooking, housekeeping, laundry care and hygiene.

Parents, concerned that their adult children will live unproductive lives, contact the schools post secondary program. This program has been used as a last resort for many families and space is quite limited. An investigation of the work and vocational skills that employers feel graduates with moderate mental handicaps lack may help to strengthen the program at Burlington County Special Services.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Limitations pertained to employers willingness or unwillingness to take sufficient time for answering questions. Even though appointments were made for interviews the researcher felt rushed on one occasion. This limitation could effect the results of this project. One limitation of this study was that the researcher was reliant upon the employers for honest answers to the questions asked during the interviews.

### **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Transition: New Jersey Special Education Code on Transition (NJAC 6:28) definition :

"Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a pupil with educational

disabilities, 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”

School-to-work- This term describes the specific transition of going from a structured, sheltered, highly supervised environment to that of the “real world”. The environment at school is very supported and safe while in the work place you are expected to make more decisions, are less supervised and failure could result in losing your job.(Feichtner, 1989)

Employability Skills: Very simply, skills that are required or desired to acquire or retain a job. These skills were considered to be mainly vocational in nature, in the past, however, they are now considered to include basic or foundational academics, attitudes about work and work habits. Interpersonal skills, problem solving, communication and job-specific skills are all considered to be skills that are necessary to maintain employment. (Lankard, 1990)

Moderately Mentally Retarded: According to Cohen, Swerdlik and Smith, in Psychological Testing and Assessment, the group of individuals labeled as moderately mentally retarded have a Wechsler Scale IQ range of 54-40. By school age (6-21) they can learn functional academic skills at approximately the fourth-grade level. This group can also manage

some degree of "self-maintenance" in a sheltered employment. They require supervision and guidance for both employment and living.

Life Skills: the skills or tasks that contribute to the successful independent functioning of an individual in adulthood. Some examples of "life skills" are functional academics, independent living skills, survival skills and daily living skills. (Cronin & Patton 1996)

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following is a critical review of several journal articles and a book related to vocational training, needs, trends and employability. Although some of the articles and books are directly related to moderately mentally retarded individuals while others refer to different levels of ability, the information applies to most of the population studied in this theses paper.

The article written by Cronin & Patton, entitled "Life Skills Curricula for Students with Learning Disabilities: A Review of the Literature", touches on the importance of vocational training in a life skills setting. The author explains that by teaching vocational skills along with life skills the student will be better able to apply what he or she learns. Cronin also felt that on-the-job training in the community was important for job success. Another crucial issue discussed was life skills training and how it should be addressed in every day instruction. Many students with disabilities continue to need help with generalizing beyond the school setting. Transition planning was also shown to be important. The National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) of Special Education Students was one of the most important studies conducted in the area of transition according to Cronin. The study was conducted by Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, Hebbeler, & Newman in 1993. "It provided the most comprehensive investigation to date of young adults who were formerly in special education."

The results of this study provided information for educators to help plan and develop better life skills programs.

Cronin mentions at the end of the article that she feels that more studies need to be conducted for the meaning of "best practices" to be standardized. A focus on life skills and transition in the classroom will help prepare young adults for adulthood.

Evers, in the Journal of Learning Disabilities dealt with the issue of transition and presented research to support the use of vocational programs to improve the success of students as they transition from school to employment. Evers discusses the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 as it "mandates the provision of transition services for all secondary students who have an Individual Education Program". The article goes on to describe a number of studies conducted between 1985 and 1995 that examined vocational programs and adult employment. A high correlation was found between students who had vocational training and later held more successful jobs than those without vocational training.

School-to-Work programs have been studied and were found to be helpful in obtaining "high employment placement" according to Camilia Anne Czubaj. She examined a study of 198 students that took part in a special "School-to-Work" program. The program offered numerous types of vocational shops including auto body repair, building maintenance, culinary arts, floral design, landscape technology and more. Upon completion of this program 98 percent of the students were surveyed and reported that 80 percent had obtained employment. However, only 44 percent had obtained jobs in the field in which they had been trained. Czubaj speculated that

the students hired for unrelated jobs were successful because they learned good employment skills and work ethics.

The purpose of the paper "Individuals with Mild Mental Retardation: Postsecondary Outcomes and Implications for Educational Policy"(Clark et al., 1996) was to discuss the goals of special education and identify obstacles. One of the key outcome areas discussed was employment. The outcome goal was very simply paid, competitive employment and non-paid volunteer activities that were meaningful to the individual. More people with varying levels of mental retardation are now working in integrated settings. Opportunities for increased skills have been allowed by numerous vocational training programs. Sheltered workshops have been decreasing while the supported employment and transitional programs have increased.

Supported employment was discussed in another article entitled "Paid Co-worker Support for Individuals with Severe and Multiple Disabilities".(Ascher, 1983) This paper outlined a method that allowed two individuals with multiple disabilities to obtain competitive employment. They hired skilled and experienced job coaches to set up the environment for the special employees. The same job coach trained the two new employees and continued on as their job coach to provide ongoing support when needed. The results of this study found that with the support of the paid co-worker, persons with multiple and severe disabilities can successfully hold a job.

There appears to be a communication gap between schools and employers.. A digested article created by The Educational Resource Information Center or ERIC, related how business executives and educators disagree on what skills are necessary for successful

employment. According to the survey by the Center for Public Resources(Henry & Raymond, 1982), the employers feel that employees need a general knowledge of math and science for successful employment while school personnel feel this knowledge is not needed. Also, educators were reported to believe their students were receiving adequate training in basic skills, with the exception of writing. Company executives felt that students were lacking skills in reading, reasoning, speaking and listening, math and science. Both parties agreed that writing skills were deficient in most students.(Ascher, 1983)

The skills that employers want was discussed in another digested article created by ERIC. This article, authored by Susan Imel (1989 ),spoke of a range of skills that employers expected and how they have changed during the year's. The article stated that employers continue to be interested in hiring individuals with "occupationally specific training" they also want employees with skills in communication, listening, interpersonal skills, and ability-to-learn skills. Traditional work ethics was also an important need according to Imel.

"Complying with the ADA" was a book that detailed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), mainly title I on employment. The author defines being disabled as having a "physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities". Mental retardation was included in a list of examples of impairments.(Allen, 1993) This book was written for small businesses as a guide to employing people with disabilities.

Title I of the ADA has a reasonable accommodations requirement that includes topics such as job restructuring, modified work schedules, modification of training materials and

equipment and more. Each topic is described so that employers know what they are required by law to provide for their employees. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) also recommends provision of a job coach to assist in training.(Allen, 1993)

The final chapter of "Complying with the ADA" includes an extensive list of resources that employers may find useful. Included in this resource chapter are contact, phone numbers and address of agencies and organizations that will provide information on devices, Disabilities Rights Education, specific disabilities and much more.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES**

#### **SAMPLE**

The sample for this project were individuals with moderate mental retardation between the ages of 17 and 21, who attend Burlington County Special Services School and were enrolled in the life skills program. The vocational aspect of this program was the specific concern of this study.

Questions related to skills employers were looking for in their employees were presented to five individuals, in management positions, working for a warehouse, landscaper, restraint, grocery store and a State operated training center. These five individuals were employers who were chosen because they have hired individuals with moderate mental retardation in the past. Three of the employers still currently employ graduates of the life skills program at Burlington County Special Services School while the other two do not.

#### **INSTRUMENTATION**

A questionnaire was used to gain information from the five employers included in this study. The questionnaire included 8 items, however, five items contained if/then variables so

in some cases the manager were not required to answer items in numerical order.

The questionnaire was completed in an interview fashion. The five employers were questioned either in person or by telephone.

Below is a sample of the format contained in the questionnaire.

### **EMPLOYER QUESTIONNAIRE FORM**

1. Do you currently employ any people with a physical and/or mental handicap? yes or no

-if yes GOTO item #2

-if no GOTO item #8

2. What type of disabilities do they have? Please describe.

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3. What type of job(s) do they perform? Please explain.

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4. Do you train these special employees for specific jobs?

Yes or no

-if yes GOTO item #5

-if no end interview

5. What type of training do you provide? Please describe.

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6. Do you feel schools could better prepare their graduates for employment?

yes or no

-if yes goto #7

-if no end interview

7. Please describe how schools could better prepare graduates for employment.

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end interview

8. Have you ever hired an employee with special needs?

yes or no

-if yes goto #2

-if no end interview

## COLLECTION OF DATA

The first interview conducted was with Employer #1. It was brought to the researchers attention that this employer once employed a moderately mentally retarded individual. The manager was contacted to answer questionnaire items by phone and at that time informed the researcher that he was with a new company.

The manager was very helpful for most of the interview. When the questionnaire was completed he was asked if he had hired any persons with disabilities at his new location. He became somewhat defensive and said "Not Yet, Why?" He explained that because of the problems with the past employee he was reluctant to hire someone with a mental handicap. He expressed safety concerns and went into some detail regarding how the past employee was frequently in danger and sometimes injured. He also added that he hasn't had to make a decision concerning hiring a disabled person because none had applied for jobs at his new location.

The second interview was completed in person with the manager of Employer #2 in Mt Holly, New Jersey. She was very helpful and pleased that someone from the school was interested in finding ways to improve the vocational program. She conducted a tour for the interviewer and another teacher. A follow-up was being performed on a current student of Burlington County Special Services School who was being evaluated for a position with Employer #2.

The student was the focus of attention when the questionnaire items were being asked and answered.

The third employer questioned was the manager of Employer #3 in Lumberton, New Jersey. He went into some detail regarding the problems and pleasures of working with Jason. Jason is a graduate of the life skills program at Burlington County Special Services School. He has Down Syndrome and functions at the moderately mentally retarded range.

This third interview was conducted by telephone and the gentleman interviewed seemed rushed.

The fourth to be interviewed was a manager at Employer #4 in Mt Laurel, New Jersey was interviewed by telephone. She remembered two past employees of which one she described as moderately mentally retarded and the other was possibly severely mentally retarded. Neither employee currently works for this restaurant and it was not revealed to the interviewer as to why they were no longer employed.

After the interview was completed the manager was asked if she would again hire an employee with mental retardation. She very quickly replied that she would and proceeded to give information regarding a person to contact to set up tours for the students at Burlington County Special Services School. She explained that along with the tour the students would be given information about her restaurant to see if they would like to work there after graduation. The teachers would be told the training methods and even given materials to prepare students for a job with Employer #4.

Finally, a manager for Employer #5, a grocery store in Mt Laurel, New Jersey was given the questionnaire in person. A graduate of Burlington County Special Services School was

currently employed to load groceries into customers vehicles. He was also required to collect shopping carts in the parking lot. The employer appeared reluctant to say anything negative about the employee with Downs Syndrome. However, Employer #5 did mention difficulties regarding the employee with special needs after the interview questions were completed.

The second part of the data collection involved reviewing the vocational curriculum of Burlington County Special Services School. The document included a "Scope and Sequence" consisting of Sorting Skills, Assembly Skills, Packaging Skills, Basic Hand Tools, Basic Equipment and Machinery, Clean-Up Procedures and Work Behaviors and Attitudes. The section titled "Work Behaviors and Attitudes" included the skills noted by the employers interviewed as being important. The objectives in this section of curriculum included "Attending", specific objectives include : he student will enter room appropriately; The student will sit quietly and wait for direction; The student will attempt task; The student will attend to assigned task; The student will return attention to task after interruption or distraction; and, The student will attend to task in presence of distractions. "Directions" was the second objective category mentioned and it included: The student will follow one direction given by supervisor; The student will follow a set of directions given; The student will carry out task on a daily schedule when given a direction; and, The student will carry out task on a weekly schedule when given a direction. The third objective "Work Production and Accuracy" included specific objectives: The student will procure needed materials and return them to work station; The student will set up materials accurately for required task; The student will initiate tasks after given instruction and/or demonstration; The student will complete task given with no set time

limit; The student will complete task within set time limit; The student will recognize and correct error in task; The student will maintain consistent level of production and accuracy; The student will procure additional materials as needed to maintain production; The student will signal for assistance when encountering a problem with task; The student will work with one or more persons to complete a task; The student will return materials to designated location and clean work area after work session. The final area of objective is classified "Work Attitudes" and includes: The student will respond to authority figures appropriately; The student will follow established rules; The student will demonstrate respect for equipment, materials, tools, etc; The student will respond appropriately to supervisor; and, The student will adjust to changes in work routine.



## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

The following chapter presents the results of the data collected which was used to answer the following research questions:

Question 1. What are the specific vocational skills that employers feel are needed for the successful employment of moderately handicapped individuals?

Question 2. Are the current skills being taught at Burlington County Special Services School adequate to the needs of past and potential employers?

Of the five employers interviewed, three answered "yes" to the following questions. "Do you currently employ any people with a physical and/or mental handicap?". The other two employers responded "No" to this question.

Item number two was then put to these employers. The response to the question, "What type of disabilities do they have? Please describe.", ranged from "various levels of mental retardation and physical disabilities" to "Downs Syndrome".

When asked "What type of job(s) do they perform?" the answers contained numerous tasks. Some employers claimed their employee was trained on one specific job. Other employers trained for various tasks to be completed during the work day. These tasks included stocking shelves, sorting, custodial or janitorial services, loading groceries into cars, collecting

carts and making biscuits from start to clean-up.

The three employers that currently employed persons with moderate disabilities answered "Yes", unanimously, to item number four of the questionnaire which inquired "Do you train these special employees for specific jobs?". One employer went on to explain that he felt schools should teach students general skills related to being a good employee and citizen instead of specific vocational skills. He explained that he trains all of his employees for each job, not just employees with special needs. This manager required specific criteria and wanted work completed "my way". Therefore, any training the schools gave for specific jobs was going to be altered to fit his criteria. For example, Employer #3 retrained the graduate of Burlington County Special Services School to wash tables. Even though this skill was taught by vocational educators while the employee was a student, the manager had his own specific cleaning products and procedures that seemed different to the employee with special needs. Employer #3 felt that this was related to the employees inability to generalize.

The managers were then asked, "Do you feel schools could better prepare their graduates for employment?". The three employers that currently employed adults with special needs agreed that schools could better prepare students for the work force. One manager felt that her employee lacked independence. She claimed her experiences with Special Services graduates revealed employees that were unable to signal job or task completion and unsure of what to do when they ran out of materials needed to complete a job. She felt that teachers should stress direction following and how to follow a schedule. Employer #3 also noted direction following and listening skills as being in need of additional training with his employee. He suggested including more lessons on improving employability skills.

Along those same lines, a third employer sighted work skills, improved communication skills and appropriate social interaction as areas schools should emphasize.

The two employers that responded "No" to item number one were then directed to questionnaire item number eight, "Have you ever hired an employee with special needs?". Both employer #1 and employer #4 answered "Yes". This affirmative response then required them to address question number two.

The employers that no longer employed persons with special needs explained the type of disabilities their previous employees demonstrated. One manager described the disability his employee exhibited as moderate mental retardation. The employee was able to follow verbal directions with demonstrations given but unable to read anything other than his own name. The other employer claimed her ex-employee had Down's syndrome with severe mental retardation. She was non-verbal and could do one, fairly involved, job but required weeks to learn this one job.

When asked what type of jobs the employees performed the manager or Employer #1 responded that his employee performed several tasks. He raked paths, weeded flower bed areas, swept the workshop and assisted in general cleaning in the office. Employer #4 had a completely different response because her previous employee performed one detailed job. She made breakfast biscuits and cleaned up her materials when the job was complete.

The two employers both admitted that they trained their employees for the specific jobs required. They explained that their previous employees required a great deal of individual instruction. Employer #4 stated that one manager was acting as a job coach for her employee with special needs. The job coach worked one on one to train through demonstration and

modeling. The entire process took several weeks. The job coach was then slowly withdrawn until the women was able to work independently. There was always a manager on site to occasionally check on the employee, as they do all their employees.

When asked if “schools could better prepare their graduates for employment”, one employer responded “No”. He explained that he felt his employee had learned everything he was going to be able to learn. He felt you can’t teach a person to have common sense and that was what his employees needed. The other employer responded “Yes” to questionnaire item number six. She explained that communication skills need to be stressed in school. She also felt that schools should teach students when and how to ask their boss for help or clarification on directions. Research question number one dealt with determining the specific vocational skills that employers felt were needed for the success of employment. These responses were varied and included such skills as communication skills, social skills, employability skills, listening skills, direction following skills and general work skills or improved work habits.

In general, the five employers involved in this project felt that knowledge of specific vocational skills was not as important as possessing good work habits. They agreed that providing their own training on the job was sufficient for vocational education. Employability skills such as those mentioned above requires years of training and reviewing and should be stressed in school.

Research question number two compared the vocational curriculum of Burlington County Special Services School with the specific skills employers noted as important. This assessment was completed in order to determine if the curriculum needed amendments or additions. Upon review of the curriculum it was noted that Unit VII: Work Behaviors and

Attitude included direction following, attending skills, work attitude (responding to the boss), listening skills, and accuracy and error analysis. The areas in which this curriculum was lacking were communication skills and social skills. These areas are taught during affective education and language periods but could easily be incorporated into the vocational setting.

**TABLE I**  
**Summary of Employer's Responses to Questionnaire Items**

| Questionnaire Items   | Employer #1   | Employer #2   | Employer #3   | Employer #4   | Employer #5  |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1. Do you currently employ any people with a physical or mental handicap? | No  | Yes   | Yes   | No  | Yes  |
| 2. What type of disabilities do/did they have? Please describe.           | He was mentally retarded but physically very capable.   | We have various levels of mental retardation and physical disabilities.   | Down's syndrome. He is considered moderately retarded.  | She was very low functioning and had Down's syndrome.   | He has Down's and he can find his own time card but can't read. His speech is difficult to understand.   |
| 3. What type of job(s) do/did they perform? Please explain.               | We usually gave him simple jobs that other employees found boring. He enjoyed weeding, raking, sweeping general cleaning.             | The graduate you asked about works in our recycling center. He sorts material into bins for recycling.  | He started out stocking shelves and moving boxes but that didn't work too well. For safety reasons I had to move him to the commissary to serve other employees, sweeps and wipes tables.       | She used to come in early every weekday and make the biscuits. She did the entire process from gathering supplies to cleaning up.                     | Collecting carts and loading groceries into customers cars.  |
| 4. Do/did you train these special employees for specific jobs?            | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   | Yes   | Yes  |
| 5. What type of training do/did you provide? Please describe.             | He was shown which areas needed sweeping and raking daily. He was shown how to weed too. He already knew how to clean the break room. | We provide specific training for the jobs themselves. We also teach the employees how to use the time cards, follow the schedule, and safety practices. | He got the same training I give all my new employees.... scaled down some. He knew the basic job so not much training was needed but he does require frequent directions and reminding to work. | She was trained to do this job by example. The manager at that time showed her exactly how the job should be done and she learned one step at a time. | I told him the same thing I tell the teenagers doing his same job. How and when to collect the carts, be careful with carts and groceries being loaded, etc. |

**TABLE I Continued**

| Questionnaire Items   | Employer #1 | Employer #2   | Employer #3  | Employer #4  | Employer #5  |
|---|-------------|---|--|--|--|
| 6. Do/did you feel schools could better prepare their graduates for employment? | No          | Yes   | Yes  | Yes  | Yes  |
| 7. Please describe how schools could better prepare graduates for employment.   | _____       | We find the graduates of Special Services lack independence. They are unable to signal job or task completion. They aren't sure what to do when they run out of materials. They are also unable to use the time clock. Some employees appear to be afraid to make an error so they just sit and wait for instruction. | Our employee could have used more lessons on direction following. He doesn't listen well when directions are given either. I think he could have benefitted from lessons on how to be a good employee too. | I feel that communication skills really need to be stressed in school. I need to be told when there is a problem. I can't have employees standing around because they didn't understand the directions given. They should be taught to go to the boss and say, "I don't understand" or "I need help". That would be great! | Work skills or employability skills, communication skills and what is appropriate social behavior at work. |
| 8. Have you ever hired an employee with special needs?                          | Yes         | _____   | _____  | Yes  | _____  |

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

There is wide agreement regarding the importance of vocational education for persons with moderate levels of mental retardation and handicaps. This vocational training should also be relevant and appropriate for successful employment. Employers need to provide information concerning skills needed for successful employment.

The two research questions which were the focus of in this project were (1) What are the specific vocational skills needed for the successful employment of moderately handicapped individuals? and (2) Are the current skills being taught at Burlington County Special Services adequate to the needs of past and potential employers?

A review of the research and literature related to vocational training, trends and employability showed limited information directly related to moderately mentally retarded persons. The information provided by the literature review applied to most of the population included in the research project.

The methodology employed in this project consisted of interviewing five employers of individuals with moderate mental retardation. These five managers either employed persons with moderate to severe mental retardation or had employed them in the past. A questionnaire was administered to determine the skills each employer felt was important for schools to teach. A review of the vocational curriculum used by Burlington County Special Services was also



completed for comparison of skills needed to skills being taught.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

From the information obtained from these employers and the curriculum review, the two research questions were answered. First, the specific skills employers are looking for in their employees with special needs included: communication skills, social skills, employability skills, listening skills, direction following skills and general work skills or improved work habits. Secondly, the vocational curriculum revealed that employability skills, listening and direction following skills and work habits are all included in the program being taught at Special Services. It was discovered that social skills and communication skills were not being provided for in the vocational curriculum to the extent employers felt they were needed. It should be noted that these skills were being addressed in other areas such as language lessons and affective education lessons.

It should be mentioned that the limitations of this study may have effected the findings. Employers willingness to answer as well as allowing themselves sufficient time to think before responding to questionnaire items was an important factor.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The related research in the area of employment and vocational education of persons with special needs is considerable. However, there was little research on specifically the population

considered moderately mentally retarded. It would prove helpful to educators of this population to review research on skills employers find essential to successful employment. This could be used to improve and revise life skills and vocational programs in all schools, not just Special Services Schools.

Again it should be mentioned that the best source of information concerning which are the most important employment skills comes directly from employers. The project completed here included a small number of employers interviewed. It would be helpful for future research to take place with a broader population of employers.

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