Residency Project: Creating Programs to Establish Self-Determination and Socialization Skills for Students with Cognitive Disabilities
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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to create programs that would establish self-determination and socialization skills for the students in the Life Academy Program at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis, Indiana. The students involved all had cognitive disabilities. Specifically, these programs included the initiation of a Unified Track and Field Team, social groups, student and staff self-advocacy and socialization skills. The goals of the project were to make the students with intellectual disabilities more independent and included in the rest of the school at Roncalli High School. These programs created peer-mentor relationships that allowed the students to have social skill development opportunities and required the use of self-determined behaviors. My hope was that these programs and opportunities would foster greater independence, social participation, and friendships for the future. Furthermore, by developing peer-mentor and supportive relationships and putting them into action through experiential learning, my intent was that the 6 individuals participating in the Life Academy program at Roncalli would develop more self-determined behaviors such as goal setting, self-advocacy, self-empowerment, and decision making and self-esteem that would allow them to have more self-regulated and goal-directed behaviors. These behaviors would allow these individuals to transition after high school into the community in a more independent and empowered manner.

Literature Review

As students move through school and adulthood they are expected to have greater responsibility for managing their own behavior, and to play a role in planning their future. This would require self-determined behaviors and socialization skills that would allow individuals to be more independent (Wehmeyer et al., 2012). Wehmeyer defined self-determined behavior as “the attitudes and abilities required to act as the primary causal agent in one’s life and to make choices regarding one’s actions from undue external influence or interference” (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007, page 2). The volitional actions of self-determination are characterized as having four essential characteristics: (1) the person acted autonomously; (2) the behavior was self-regulated; (3) the person initiated and responded to the event in a psychologically empowered manner; and (4) the person acted in a self-realizing manner (Wehmeyer, 2007). Research has linked student self-determination status to the achievement of more positive academic and transition outcomes, including more positive employment, recreation, and independent living outcomes. Furthermore, it has also led to a more positive quality of life and life satisfaction in individuals with cognitive disabilities (Wehmeyer et al., 2012).

Life self-determination, social skills have been critical for an individual’s success in school performance, transitional planning, and an overall greater quality of life. However, these skills often elude students with intellectual disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and autism (Hughes et al., 2011). Additionally, social skills limitations have been exacerbated at the high school level where students, families, and staff had the opportunity to openly express themselves. Therefore, programs should be developed that encourage individual reflection and thoughtful discussions.

Mission Statement

"To establish self-determined and social skills for students with cognitive disabilities in the Life Academy Program at Roncalli High School in the development of peer-mentored and inclusive programs, specifically, Unified Track & Field, Christian Awakening senior retreat, and social groups in order to foster independence, socialization, and an overall greater quality of life.*

Goals and Outcomes

Goal 1: To interact through written, oral, and nonverbal communication with the caregivers of the students, and students in a person-centered, acceptant manner.

Goal 2: To develop and promote the use of appropriate programs to support meaningful participation of the students at Roncalli High School.

Goal 3: To apply the principles of the teaching-learning process using appropriate methods to design program materials that will be beneficial to the students in the Life Academy program and the supervisors in the program.

Timeline

Phase 1: Education (January)

• Created unified and social programs

• Established self-determination skills

• Attended 4AAA Track and Field conference for coaches

• Completed all coaching training through IHSSAA to be a head coach.

Phase 2: Planning (February)

• Recruited Unified Field and social, and retreat peer mentors

• Collaborated with Richfield and Roncalli for unified and April schedule for Unified Track & Field

• Created Life Academy senior retreat (agenda, materials, & schedule) with

• Created social groups during study hall period

Phase 3: Development (March - May)

• Held parent/student meeting for Unified Track & Field

• Unified Track & Field-Freshman League (March 19)

• Met with athletic director for unified track meet schedule

• Held 1st Life Academy senior retreat with supervisor

• Created social groups during study hall period

Phase 4: Integration (April - May)

• Created manual for Life Academy Program to assist implementing Unified Track & Field, retreat, and social groups as the team, step by step methods to use create program.

References


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