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Occupations: The Key to Empowering Students with Disabilities in Transition from School to Work

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Introduction:

Occupations are empowering and should be incorporated into the transition process for students with disabilities to improve their quality of life.

Objectives:

The attendee will be able to:

- Discuss how occupations can be empower students with disabilities in transition from school to work
- Implement strategies to use occupations to empower students in a school setting
- Understand the role of the occupational therapist as part of a school's transition team

Description:

This presentation will discuss how occupations can empower students with disabilities during their transition from school to work. Case studies will be provided to demonstrate how incorporating occupations in a school setting can result in the students developing new skills, creating new occupational roles and resulting in an overall better quality of life.

Discussion:

Students with disabilities often feel powerless and marginalized. If by graduation they can become empowered, they are more prone to live independent lives compared to their peers who do not (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Students should have opportunities to develop these skills while they are still in school. Engaging in occupations can empower individuals. Fisher & Hotchkiss (2008) have proposed a model to empower marginalized populations using occupations. In particular, Michaels & Orentlicher, (2004) have proposed using occupations to improve the quality of life for students with disabilities in transition. Engaging in occupations should be a part of a student's transition process to prepare them for their future.

Conclusion:

Students engage in occupations and develop new skills. As a result, they develop a sense of mastery and many develop a role as a worker for the first time. When this occurs, the students feel empowered and their quality of life is improved.

Contribute to practice:

Students with disabilities would benefit from having occupational therapists involved in their transition process. This presentation will propose strategies to expand the role of occupational therapists in the transition process and educational setting.

