Planning, Expectations and Post-secondary Graduation among Youth with Emotional Disturbance

500-word, Layperson Summary of Proposal for Honor’s Thesis

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Post-secondary education outcomes for youth with Emotional Disturbance (ED), emotional or behavioral disorders that significantly and persistently impact functioning in primary and secondary school settings (Forness & Knitzer, 1992), are historically poorer than those among their peers, including those in other disability groups (Wagner & Newman, 2012). Increasingly, efforts to identify solutions to this problem are focusing on resources thought to support successful transition to adulthood among youth facing psychosocial adversity, known as “emerging adult resources” (Masten, Obradović, & Burt, 2006) or alternatively, in the literature on youth with ED, positive youth development assets (PYDAs; Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011).

Two PYDAs of particular interest are planning, youths’ abilities to set goals for themselves and participate in activities that help them reach their goals, and future expectations, or youths’ optimism about their long-term future prospects, including the possibility of graduating from a post-secondary educational program. These assets have been shown to be predictive of a wide range of outcomes in the transition to adulthood among both youth generally as well as certain disability populations (Carter et al., 2011; Masten et al., 2004), but at present never among youth with ED.
It is important to understand how the planning and future expectations predict outcomes both separately and in conjunction with one another, especially among youth with disabilities such as ED. Discrepancies between planning and future expectations may be especially important in predicting outcomes, though the nature of these predictive relationships is unclear in disability groups (Owens, Goldfine, Evangelista, Hoza, & Kaiser, 2007). Some prior studies have shown that positive future expectations and planning ability are highly related and jointly predictive of better outcomes in the general population (e.g., MacLeod & Conway, 2005). However, youth with disabilities have been found to hold artificially high future expectations and poor planning (Heath & Glen, 2005), which could result in poor selection and frustration in achieving goals (Owens et al., 2007). Conversely, the effect of having low expectations while having high planning ability, also known as defensive pessimism, has been shown to produce superior outcomes in non-disabled groups (Martin, Marsh, & Debus, 2001), and in some cases may produce superior outcomes among youth with disabilities as well, though this is currently unknown (Owens et al., 2007).

The present study examines predictive relationships of planning and future expectations with post-secondary graduation, using a nationally representative sample of students with ED provided by the National Longitudinal Study-2, a study following students with disabilities from adolescence into adulthood (Wagner & Newman, 2012). The effects of planning and future expectations on post-secondary graduation will be assessed using polynomial regression, a statistical procedure that shows the effect of each individual variable on an outcome, as well as the effect of each possible discrepancy between two variables and outcomes (e.g., high planning and low future expectations and vice versa; Shanock et al., 2010). Implications for intervention programs to support the transition for youth with ED will be discussed.
References


American Psychological Association
