Abstract

This paper addresses the following statement by the Project Director for the 2009 National Summit on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities:

“Since the 1998 Summit, advances in technology have transformed the workplace. This paper will identify major trends in these advances as they affect the definition of careers in the arts for all Americans, as well as facilitate participation of people with disabilities in all possible arts careers, both traditional and visionary”.

After defining the broad areas of disability, technology in the workplace, and careers in the arts, relevant examples of the primary technologies generally used in the
modern workplace will be described. The workplace here is widely defined as environments where individuals work in the applied, creative, fine, and performing arts, and within the business of the arts. Workplace technologies generally are categorized by productivity (office applications such as spreadsheets, word processors, etc.), specialty applications related to a work specialty, and network-based systems for communications. These technologies can be enhanced by assistive and augmentative technology solutions. A few examples are provided, in order to set a context, demonstrate function, and identify issues related to access.

Predicting the form and function of future technology is tenuous, but the collective expectations of specialists in workplace technology, disability and technology solutions, and futurists will be reviewed and evaluated in terms of likely impact on persons who are disabled and working within the arts. Strategies used at a technology-centered university that offers majors in the arts will be described as examples of ways to monitor and plan for new career opportunities and technology integration.

Additional information is offered regarding strategies recommended to ensure that emerging workplace technologies enhance and expand upon opportunities for individuals to contribute to the arts in both traditional and yet-to-be recognized career paths. Discussion of reporting successes, recent initiatives, and increased use of technology in educational programs concludes the paper.
Purpose

The following challenge was offered by the Project Director for the 2009 National Summit on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities to set the theme for this paper. “Since the 1998 Summit [on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities], advances in technology have transformed the workplace. This paper will identify major trends in these advances as they affect both our definitions of careers in the arts for all Americans, as well as facilitate participation of people with disabilities in all possible arts careers, both traditional and visionary.”

Introduction

To adequately understand the key issues associated with the general topic of technology, disability, and the arts, it became necessary to conduct a great deal of reading, in-depth reviews of the literature and analysis, three key elements emerged: career development, disability rights, and technology in the arts. The research and literature review used to draft this paper were drawn from academic and professional literature, popular press, and the nearly 40 years accumulated professional experience of the author, whose background is primarily in deaf education and assistive technology. This exploration proved to be a very instructive experience, in that the topic was so much broader when considering disabilities other than deafness. While the problems and issues differ among persons who are disabled, overall strategies for solutions are similar.
Attitudes are Key

Preparation, education, motivation, and technology all play a significant role in predicting the career success of persons who are disabled. However, it is likely that the attitudes of the community surrounding a disabled person can have an equally powerful impact on that individual’s career path. When examining case studies of successful deaf individuals in the arts, it becomes clear that attitudes of key “influencers”, including employers and clients, affect people’s career paths and successes. Patricia Mudgett-DeCaro, in her work examining attitudinal barriers facing deaf persons in career selection, reveals how the attitudes of parents, teachers, counselors, and significant others can have a strong influence on how deaf people define themselves and their capabilities. According to Mudgett-DeCaro, a deaf person may encounter two types of employment barriers: environmental and attitudinal.

Environmental barriers refer to the physical or structural challenges that may prevent a person from acquiring a position or advancing on a typical career path. These barriers typically can be reduced or eliminated through accommodations, training, or technology in the workplace.

Attitudinal barriers are not as easily remedied. Such barriers, whether real or imagined, can be found among counselors, employers, parents, teachers, and other individuals with whom the disabled person interacts on a daily basis. The belief, on the part of a key decision maker or influencer, that a person cannot successfully perform a specific job due to a perceived inadequacy, can eliminate an opportunity before qualified individuals are able to consider the position. Unfounded perceptions that a
person cannot perform a job task are a very powerful negative factor that requires education and sensitivity in order to be overcome. Mudgett-DeCaro reminds us that accommodations focus on the way work is done and not the actual job requirements. Performance expectations should remain consistent regardless of the person in the position; lowering the bar of expectations does nothing to motivate or drive the disabled individual’s job performance. Rather, the focus should be on finding alternative processes and solutions in order to reach the same performance standards for all employees. Persons who are disabled can perform as successfully as others, given the correct mix of accommodation and support.

Definitions

Disability

An understanding of what it means to be defined as a “disabled” person is a complex and evolving definition influenced by personal experience, public policy, and legal parameters. The number of individuals in the United States loosely classified as “disabled” is increasing rapidly as the “Baby Boomer” generation ages and requires educational, social, and workplace services and accommodations commonly associated with individuals who are disabled. Disability in the United States defines characteristics related to physical, sensory, medical, mental, learning, or age issues. Under the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), an individual with a disability is defined as a person who:

1. Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities;
2. Has a record of such an impairment; or

3. Is regarded as having such an impairment.ii

Clearly, this definition encompasses an extremely wide segment of the population that can be seen from differing perspectives according to one's understanding of policy and legal regulations.

Two general models of disability are recognized by experts in the field; medical and “disability”.

“Disability” in this context refers to a specific view of the nature of disability (see below).

Medical refers to the rehabilitation model of disability and focuses on disability as a medically based condition that can be treated, cured, or rehabilitated through intervention, treatment, and therapy.

The disability model has become more prominent in recent years, primarily through the efforts of disabled individuals themselves, who see their impairment(s) as one element of a rich life, often culturally distinct, that often is not viewed in a negative way. Those accepting this view of the disability model often believe that, “There’s nothing wrong with me—it’s others who need to adjust or amend their demands and expectations to fit into my lifestyle, with which I am completely happy.”

One example of this is the strong sense of “Deaf Culture” shared by deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals in the United States. Deaf Culture advocates do not view
their deafness as a disability of any sort; rather, it is celebrated as a “difference in human experience that sets them apart”.iii

The disability view suggests that society in general needs to better understand the nature of persons who are disabled and should not necessarily see them as defective or somehow less than “normal”.

Regardless of which view of disability—medical or disability—one ascribes to, there is general agreement that technology plays a significant role in how disabled individuals navigate their educational and career paths. Technology, particularly in the last several decades, has paved the way for employment in countless professions to those with disabilities.

The medical model of disability generally embraces assistive technology, defined as solutions, either hardware, software, or a combination of the two, that adapt or enhance the functional features of existing products or applications to better meet the needs of those with disabilities. These technologies can be used in personal or professional situations to improve mobility, communication, life tasks, or greater success in employment.

Instant messaging, for example, allows deaf and hearing co-workers to share information even more quickly than if they opted for face-to-face communication. Instant messaging, when used by a deaf person, is an example of a technology that can be used to great advantage without any modification of the commercial product. However, a person unable to enter text directly through a standard keyboard or handset would
probably require a form of assistive technology to make the product fully functional for them.

Some products require modification or the addition of assistive or augmentative technology to become fully accessible for all users.

**Technology in the Workplace**

Technology plays such a significant role in the modern workplace that it is difficult to imagine a situation, within the arts or business in general, where it is not central to all aspects. Telecommunications and sophisticated networking systems, combined with improved user interface designs, allow all users, disabled or not, to do their work more efficiently.

Technology provides access to vast amounts of information, enhances communication capabilities, and offers an opportunity to improve productivity and efficiency. It can give disabled individuals greater independence and more opportunities to participate in all aspects—both professional and social—of the workplace environment.

*Productivity Technology*

The universal productivity software application is the Microsoft Office family of applications, including word processing, spreadsheets, email system, and presentation software and database. Certainly any individual working in the arts, either independently, as a small business person, or as an employee in a larger organization, should be familiar with these individual applications. The most used application within
the Office Suite is Microsoft Word, the universally accepted standard for word processing. Microsoft has taken great care to use universal design principles to improve the functionality of its product, both by features included in the product and by making it possible for assistive and augmentative technology solutions to be used in conjunction with the product. Menus and command structure both can be customized to facilitate work processes. The display of documents can be enlarged and enhanced as needed. The keyboard control can be modified to reflect the needs of individuals who are not able to press multiple keys at once. Additionally, it is possible to use external products such as screen readers to provide text-to-speech services and voice recognition as an alternative input method. It is also possible to integrate phonetic spellchecking software and word prediction software to assist those who require such features.

**Job-Specific Technology**

Adobe products, including tools for photography, graphic design, Web site production, animation, video editing, and digital documents are certainly the most generally used set of applications that could be considered the “Technology Tools for Disabled Artists”. These tools are central to virtually all visual and technology-based artists working in a number of media. Adobe products can use very similar functional modifications of the user interface depending upon the needs of the disabled user, and can use scripts or macros to automate complex, repetitive, and redundant tasks, saving time and improving accuracy for users. Special scripts and macros can be created to automate tasks that are particularly difficult for disabled users. Adobe’s products often include accessibility features not found elsewhere. Acrobat 8.0 software provides a
number of capabilities that improve access for disabled users, including the ability to “tag” files when converting Microsoft to Adobe files, making it easier for people who use screen reader software to navigate a document; usability enhancements such as support for high contrast viewing and keyboard shortcuts; and tools to troubleshoot and optimize Adobe PDF files for accessibility.

To help make Web page design accessible to persons who are color blind, Photoshop CS4 Adobe has “soft proofing for color blindness,” with filters for color vision deficiency developed in consideration of various types of color vision.

Adobe Flash CS3 makes the process of adding closed-captioning information to video files easier. This adaptation not only helps deaf/hard of hearing viewers but is useful for times when people cannot listen to audio.

Such recognition of the needs of persons who are disabled is exemplary from a user and consumer perspective.

Universal Design

An alternative to assistive technologies is the concept of universal design, which has been growing in popularity since being introduced in the late 1970s.

Universal design, as defined by the Center for Universal Design, College of Design, North Carolina State University, “is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”
It is the brainchild of product designers, architects, engineers, and others who recognize that changes to some of life’s most common tools and processes can have far-reaching benefits for all. It emerged from the earlier concepts of accessible design and assistive technology, both of which offered greater freedoms for people with disabilities, but sometimes with the price tag of a solution that separated, rather than united, individuals.

Adaptive Environments, a Boston-based, non-profit organization, offers the following definition:

“Universal Design is a framework for the design of places, things, information, communication and policy to be usable by the widest range of people operating in the widest range of situations without special or separate design. Most simply, Universal Design is human-centered design of everything with everyone in mind.”

Accessible design means products and buildings that are accessible and usable by people with disabilities. Universal design means products and buildings that are accessible and usable by everyone—older people as well as young, women as well as men, left-handed as well as right-handed persons.

While an accessible design solution to creating access to a building for a wheelchair user might be a separate entrance with a ramp, a universal design solution would be to actually design the building with a ramp as the main entrance for all people. Accessible design seeks to modify existing ideas; universal design “builds” them into a project’s design from the start and provides a single solution that accommodates all people.
As famed violinist Itzhak Perlman notes, “The major issue is accessibility with dignity. It is not enough to get into the building any old way. I like to get into the building at the front like everybody else, where the rest of society gets in.”

The basic principles of universal design are equity and flexibility in use and a design that is simple, intuitive, clear to the consumer, requires low physical effort, and considers size and space.

Some examples from the Center for Universal Design site include:

- Use of meaningful icons as well as text labels
- Clear lines of sight (to reduce dependence on sound)
- Volume controls on auditory output
- Speed controls on auditory output
- Choice of language on speech output
- Ramp access in swimming pools
- Closed captioning on television networks

When universal design principles are successfully integrated in technology products, the resulting applications require fewer, if any, modification for specific users, increasing productivity and reducing the need for additional training. Universal design theory calls for an understanding of the range of a user’s personal preferences and requirements when using a particular technology product. Because technology is both familiar and important to a majority of persons who are disabled, in both their personal and professional lives, such individuals frequently are more sophisticated than their
non-disabled counterparts when it comes to their ability to use technology to their advantage.

**Careers in the Arts**

Options for individuals with disabilities who want to pursue careers in the performing arts, visual arts, literary arts, fine arts, design, and the business of arts management and support are vast.

One resource for job seekers interested in visual and performing arts is the Vocational Information Center. Its Web site lists hundreds of career categories, including arts, performing arts, and visual arts. Although not specifically designed for persons who are disabled, the career classifications and descriptions are very informative, as are the nature and qualifications for each job.

Another is the University of California’s National Arts and Disability Center (NADC) Web site, which provides links to hundreds of careers, including acting, playwriting, dance, and photography. This site includes links to the VIC Web site, as well as to resources specifically designed for persons who are disabled. Since 1994, the NADC has been providing free services to advance the careers of artists with disabilities. The organization recently created a Facebook group called, “Rising Artists with Disabilities” to connect aspiring artists with potential resources.

In a related initiative, the Screen Actors Guild, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, and Actors’ Equity in October 2008 announced a joint campaign to improve visibility for performers with disabilities. The “Inclusion in the Arts
& Media of People with Disabilities initiative will begin in January 2009 and will focus on promoting access, inclusion, and accuracy in the entertainment and news media.

This important initiative and others already in the works are good news for job seekers with disabilities who are interested in the arts. The key to success will be education, confidence, technical skill, and a willingness to suggest creative solutions to communication or accessibility barriers.

The following is a job description for a performing arts administrator as described by the online service of the Princeton Review.

The world of business and the world of art come together in the office of the performing arts administrator. A PAA controls the finances of a company or a theater, with the goal of producing exciting and profitable performances. A performance arts administrator often acts as an artistic director, guiding the focus of a season’s shows and hiring directors, and as an internal accountant/promoter/publicist/manager, controlling all the financial decisions that affect a theater, from allocating a budget for props to hiring a janitorial crew to clean up after each show.

Note that there are no specific tasks or responsibilities mentioned that would preclude a disabled person from applying for and/or succeeding in the position.

In fact, the correct mix of attitude, training, and accommodation would make a person with a disability a viable candidate. Technological skills, as described below, also will play a key role.
Lessons from a University on Successfully Implementing Technology in Creative Arts

One challenge for disabled individuals interested in finding careers in the arts will be to focus not only on current jobs and technologies, but also on emerging fields and career areas. Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), a university of 16,000 students in Rochester, New York, is one institution of higher education that is working to ensure that its graduates are relevant and job ready when they leave college.

RIT provides graduate and undergraduate education in a number technology and arts programs. One of its four colleges that offer degree programs in the arts is the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), the world’s first and largest postsecondary program for deaf students on a campus planned principally for hearing students. Because of NTID’s 1,300 deaf/hard-of-hearing students, RIT is very familiar with the issues related to disabled students and support services.

RIT has developed strategies to help its disabled students pursue degrees in the arts.

*Market Scans*

The university uses “market scans” for many of its majors. These scans of industry experts and employers are conducted by members of each college’s faculty to be sure that the content being taught is relevant and that skills of graduates reflect the needs of potential employers. Employers actually review curriculum and offer feedback on the educational experiences offered to students. Technology used in labs and
classes is carefully examined to be sure it reflects the environment that will be encountered in the workplace.

The wider implication for those with an interest in education and employment of persons who are disabled is that the market for careers in the arts should be constantly monitored to ensure that training programs, technologies, and related support services relate to growth areas and not declining areas of specialty.

**Research Activities**

RIT engages in research activities that lead to stronger relationships with government and industry. Research is a benefit to the university on several fronts, but primarily serves as a means for students to participate in state-of-the-art processes and activities. Hardware and software companies know that college graduates will be hired into positions where they eventually will specify products purchased by their firms. Since these employees typically select products they learned at college, industry often likes to partner with universities to provide them with the newest technologies as they are developed and become available.

Recently, RIT/NTID had the opportunity to provide feedback to a major software company on the accessibility features of a soon-to-be-released version of a standard operating system. This operating system could eventually be used by more than 90 percent of PC users! This was both a powerful learning experience for students and for the university disability and access specialists who were evaluating the product.
Those with an interest in disability and arts should seek ways to become part of the network that is invited to participate in research and evaluation of new technologies, mostly through an affiliation with a university program.

**Cooperative Education**

Cooperative education experiences provide opportunities to apply classroom education to real-world problems and projects. Cooperative education is a unique work-study scheme where students at RIT obtain real world job experience as part of their formal RIT education. Students, typically in their third or fourth year of an undergraduate experience, alternate their academic quarters (10 weeks in duration) between school and a paid position at a business or organization related to their field of study.

RIT’s cooperative education program is the oldest and largest in the world. Each year, students undertake assignments with more than 1,900 companies from small start-up to Fortune 500 corporations. For deaf and other disabled students, the opportunity to work at a business is an invaluable experience in exploring all the dynamics of work.

This type of experience, if used more widely within the educational programs serving persons who are disabled, could improve the rate of success for individuals transitioning from school to work. For the student, soon to be an employee in the arts, this experience would be invaluable as a means of experiencing the successes and challenges of the workplace and learning how to prepare for how technology is used and how it can be adapted if necessary to meet the needs of a specific employee.
Emerging Trends in Technology and Arts

Several key trends in technology most likely will have a significant impact on arts, as well as other fields. The following list originates from work by the Trace Center and National Council on Disability, and is supported by other predictions and examples by the author as noted.

*Increasing Computational Power*

The increasing capability of computing power, combined with reduced costs, will make computer operations faster and more efficient and will make tasks currently too complex, feasible. Assistive technologies will become less expensive, smaller, and less complicated to implement. As computational power increases, so does the availability of universal design.

As more power is available for lower costs, products become more feature rich and occasionally more complex. The addition of features generally is required to provide a competitive edge for a specific product, such as cell phones. However, the risk for disabled users and the population in general is that these new features often are more complex and typically not as accessible because good universal design concepts were not part of the design process. The use of all but the most essential features on many cell phones are completely ignored by most individuals because of complexity.

In addition to increased power and lower cost associated with future technologies, dramatic reduction in the size of products will be possible. Again, reduced size is a significant aspect of product differentiation, but it can cause barriers for those with physical challenges.
**New Types of Interfaces**

As technology product designers move toward new user interfaces, more opportunities exist to improve the ability of persons who are disabled to use technology.

Sometimes, however, new interfaces can present new challenges for persons who are disabled. For example, speech recognition technology to control devices, if used exclusively, could present major barriers for individuals with voice or speech disabilities. Similarly, speech output, if used exclusively, could present barriers to those with hearing loss. However, on balance, new and future user interfaces will likely provide more and expanded ways for persons who are disabled to control technology.

**Ubiquitous Connectivity**

Currently, most users of laptop computers and personal digital devices can access the Internet and all its benefits from virtually any location. The general availability of the Internet and its increased levels of broadband make it possible to send and receive vast amounts of data, regardless of location. This is especially significant to persons who are disabled who can access support services, caregivers, and their workplace environments from virtually any location. Access to such bandwidth makes it possible for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons to receive support services directly and remotely through the Internet. Basically, it is possible for deaf users to use a generally available PC to send to an interpreter a video signal of a meeting or class and have that interpreter then interpret the communication through ASL so the deaf person can view the interpretation on their local computer. It is not difficult to imagine similar applications in the arts where persons who are disabled will be able to utilize such technology for
many aspects of the creative process, business connectivity, and dissemination of work
products.

Future Opportunities in the Arts

Expanded Entrepreneurship Opportunities

“According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of self-employed Americans with disabilities has grown from 12% to 15% since the dawn of the Web. For the rest of us, the figure has stayed static at 8%.xlv Fortune Small Business and CNN Money featured a number of articles on the current successes of persons who are disabled who are using technology and the entrepreneurial spirit to create and grow successful businesses. Though none of the examples cited in the reporting related directly to the successes in the arts, the key elements of the success can be applied to those in the arts field.

The common thread to most of these case studies is how technology is making it possible for disabled entrepreneurs to compete and succeed in the new marketplace. Through the use of off-the-shelf technologies, the Internet, and, in some cases, assistive technologies, these entrepreneurs have built successful businesses. Significantly, many of the technology-based businesses run by persons who are disabled offer products and services for persons with disabilities.

For example, Disaboom.com, founded by two disabled innovators in Colorado as a social networking system for disabled Americans, targets the 50 million Americans with disabilities and caregivers who wish to contact with others on the system to find share information and find specific information. It is clear that social networking and
expanded Internet capabilities will make it possible for an artist to offer services, such as graphic design, photography, and video work to niche markets that may include disabled customers and clients with an expressed interested in the products and services.

**Self-Employment and Small Business in the Arts**

For many generations, persons who are disabled have found it easier to become entrepreneurs and independent artists rather than seek “traditional” employment in the arts. These artists, however, face the same problems of fully understanding the business aspects of managing a career in the arts. Again, the creative use of technology, both for professional development, business management, and marketing can be key to the successful independent artist.

Equally important are small business opportunities for persons who are disabled who likely began their careers as independent business persons, then grew into small businesses. The Job Accommodations Network (JAN) provides direct assistance to disabled entrepreneurs who wish to plan and start small businesses.

“JAN consultants handle each inquiry on a case-by-case basis offering self-employment and small business development expertise and referrals regarding business planning, financing strategies, marketing research, disability-specific programs, income supports and benefits planning, e-commerce, independent contracting, home-based business options, and small business initiatives for disabled veterans.” xv

**Use of Virtual Support Services and Expanded Cyber-infrastructure**
Recently, there has been expanded use of direct audio and video communication using standard Internet connectivity for a number of business and personal applications. This type of service, generally referred to as video conferencing, is available to users of such applications as Instant Messaging, Skype, and iChat. Applications such as these and more sophisticated Video Relay Services (VRS) demonstrate how persons who are disabled can utilize emerging technologies to obtain support services and resources using the Internet.

Basically, VRS services make it possible for deaf persons who use American Sign Language (ASL) to place phone calls to hearing persons, by means of an ASL interpreter available through a business that provides the video and Internet systems necessary to make such communication possible.

At a recent NSF-sponsored summit\textsuperscript{vii} at the National Technical Institute of the Deaf, national leaders on the provision of support services to deaf students at the postsecondary level agreed that such technology that makes communication possible for hearing and deaf persons individually could be deployed on a larger scale to provide instructional support for deaf students studying Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. The summary recommendations called for further investigation in the features and capabilities of establishing a virtual support center that would provide communication support, such as interpreting and captioning, remotely to deaf students through a cyber community. The concept was expanded to reflect the desire on the part of students to be able to use such a cyber community for social networking and support on many aspects of their college experience.
It is likely that other persons who are disabled could benefit from the use of high-speed Internet systems that would bring to their workplace the support services and resources that currently are delivered directly by a person on site. Additionally, the expanded use of social networking would certainly provide an enhanced channel of communication and access not currently available to persons who are disabled in the arts.

**Independent Publication of Arts Using the World Wide Web**

The entertainment business is shifting to a more decentralized distribution model that relies on the Internet and the use of free or low cost sites that permit the widespread distribution of performing arts directly to the consumer. This is especially true for visual artists, such as illustrators, photographers, filmmakers, and musicians. It is now possible for artists to self-publish directly by posting their art on the Web for distribution. This is a very positive development as it means that artists are able to offer their products without having to pass screening by distributor or agents. Though the art is easily accessible to the general public on the Web, it remains a constant challenge for artists to differentiate their art to the public so the availability of the material is made known to the consuming public.

An interesting problem with media posted on the video services such as YouTube is that video files posted there are not required to be captioned. Though it is technically possible to open or close caption items posted on YouTube, most postings are not yet captioned, though YouTube is used by many deaf individuals who post videos with ASL as the primary form of communication.
Strategies to Ensure Continued Implementation of Technology within the Arts Workplace

Reporting Successes and Increasing Awareness

Disabled artists must be strong self advocates in order to make the general public aware of the issues they face in their careers. Keeping information about accessible technologies in the media, disabled individuals create more global awareness and acceptance of strategies that can help them succeed in their jobs. Such visibility and education will help reinforce positive attitudes toward disabled individuals and increase public support for more and better technologies. The aforementioned Inclusion in the Arts & Media of People with Disabilities campaign is a good example of this.

Utilizing Technology in the Education of Disabled Artists

Disabled students who wish to pursue careers in the arts need to be encouraged and supported. All programs that teach the arts should include as many examples of technology and state-of-the-art resources as possible.

Recognizing the Benefits of New Technologies

New technologies are constantly arriving in the marketplace, bringing new opportunities and challenges for disabled users. Encourage the use of these technologies and give the marketplace time to help mature the technology. If there are issues with accessibility and the new technology, hopefully the marketplace will bring
pressure on the manufacturers to use universal design to increase the functionality of
the product. If not, policy and regulation may need to be enforced.

**Conclusion**

Young people interested in careers in the arts should be encouraged to explore
their dreams. Keeping in mind the attitudinal barriers mentioned earlier in this paper, a
disabled young person’s strongest advocates should be their parents, teachers,
counselors, and others with whom they interact daily. Perceptions and attitudes formed
at an early age can have powerful positive benefits throughout a disabled individual’s
educational years and continue during their transition to employment. Negative thinking
embroiled in the unfounded belief by a key decision maker that someone cannot
successfully perform a specific job due to a perceived inadequacy can hinder and even
eliminate an opportunity before the qualified individual is able to compete for a position.
Education and sensitivity as well as a realistic view of “how” a job is done versus
“requirements” for that job are needed. Don’t lower the bar! Disabled persons can
perform as successfully as others, given the correct mix of accommodation and support
from, among others, employers, hardware and software manufacturers, and specialists
in assistive and augmentative technologies.
References


