

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy on Employment Development of Individuals with Disabilities

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Abstract. This article considers the factors that contribute to being employed for the individuals with disabilities (IWDs). There are two dimensions that are commonly mentioned about the factors underlying IWDs poor employment performance, one is society factor, the other is IWD's personal physiological conditions. However, this article claims it can be viewed from an alternative perspective. The mechanism responsible for this can be explained by the *self-fulfilling prophecy*: with a conviction of being accepted by society and the employment market (ASE), an IWD has more opportunities to obtain a job a short time after graduation. Based on self-fulfilling prophecy effect, this article proposes implications of employment transition services for IWDs.

Keywords: individuals with disabilities; employment; self-fulfilling prophecy; transition services

Introduction

Low employment of IWDs (Individuals with disabilities) is a problem prevalent in many countries all over the world. In the United States, 81 per cent of the overall population were employed, compared to only 32 per cent of IWDs (Carter et al., 2010). A survey of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services in England noted that most IWD graduates were less able to enter into professional and full time employment than the general working-age population (Piggott & Houghton, 2007). In Taiwan, 22.5 per cent of IWDs over 15 years of age were employed while the unemployment rate was 4.14 per cent for all adults (Yang, 2009). Compared with the general working-age population, the poor employment achievement of IWDs is a concern in many countries (Carter et al., 2010; Ju et al., 2012; Piggott & Houghton, 2007). Is lower employment rate the fate of IWDs?

There are two dimensions that are commonly mentioned about the factors underlying IWDs poor employment performance. The first dimension is the barriers caused by personal physiological conditions, including the level and category of the disability. If the disability status is the only critical factor in poor rates of gaining employment, there appears to be a direct explanation: the IWD's

disability has undoubtedly caused the obstacles to employment; The second dimension involves the social factors including social unwelcoming conditions that make IWDs encounter unfair employment situations. Given these two conditions, which one cannot change, the IWDs have an inevitable result of poor employment status and there is no need for IWDs to make efforts to improve their employment potential; welfare policies are the best and only solution. However, it was agreed that policy intervention is not the fine solution. On the other side, it was found that an IWD's internal conviction of being accepted by society and the employment market (ASE) is the real impact factor of an IWD's employment status (Chen, 2015). The research provides support for the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' phenomenon which has been advocated in the humanities and social sciences in past decades. This article describes the self-fulfilling prophecy mechanism applied to IWDs' potential employment, and guides readers to another perspective on interpreting IWDs' employment predicaments.

Self-fulfilling Prophecy

In 1928, W. I. Thomas proposed a sociological perspective idea that was later conceptualised as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy': the situation finally realised into the true when a person defined an affair is that meaning. What a person expects in advance is what he or she subsequently realises. Outcomes are associated with one's expectations. This argument was much questioned initially: could an incorrect belief identified at the beginning actually become true in the consequence just because many people believed it, or because the incorrect belief was very strong (Wineburg, 1987)? It was with none scientific justification. In 1948, when Robert K. Merton first proposed the term self-fulfilling prophecy, the theoretical concept was systematically developed. Since the 1980s, many scholars and practitioners have believed that the self-fulfilling prophecy is a considerable force and a widespread phenomenon in society (Madon et al., 1997). Since then, this 'magical' viewpoint has been widely discussed in the stock market, the state of war, crime, etc., and has branched out into the fields of economics, psychology, politics, education and elsewhere.

Thomas (1928) and Merton (1948) explained how the self-fulfilling prophecy works from a psychological viewpoint. According to Merton:

Men respond not only to the objective features of a situation, but also, and at times primarily, to the meaning this situation has for them. And once they have assigned some meaning to the situation, their consequent behaviour and some of the consequences of that behaviour are determined by the ascribed meaning. (p. 194)

Thomas (1928) and Merton (1948) stated that once a meaning was attached to a situation, one's subsequent behavior and its consequences were affected by the meaning attributed. Merton pointed out that when a mistaken belief is held by a person or a group of people, the mistaken belief becomes true in the end. This rule can explain social issues, including the financial meltdown, medical effects and racial discrimination problems.

A self-fulfilling prophecy has two dimensions: one is that social beliefs, whether true or false, lead to the masses following blindly; an incorrect evaluation towards an event or person by the group encourages people to think in a particular way. The common expectations allow for potential social mobility and

then affects individuals' actions. Social beliefs ultimately create the results expected by the majority. Another dimension of self-fulfilling prophecy is personal inner conviction; this inherent belief is moulded by prevailing social beliefs or by self-criticism. In either case, it will affect the individual's intrinsic motivation to act, deprive of his or her activities and eventually affect the performance outcome. Although one's individual actions is impacted by his or her belief directly in this process, actions are still profoundly impacted by the belief in the society. As shown in Figure 1, A impacts B, and B impacts C; this appears as a series of impacts. Here is thinking about whether it is possible to skip A and examine the impact of B on C directly. The self-fulfilling prophecy effect on the outcome of an event will have a different meaning.

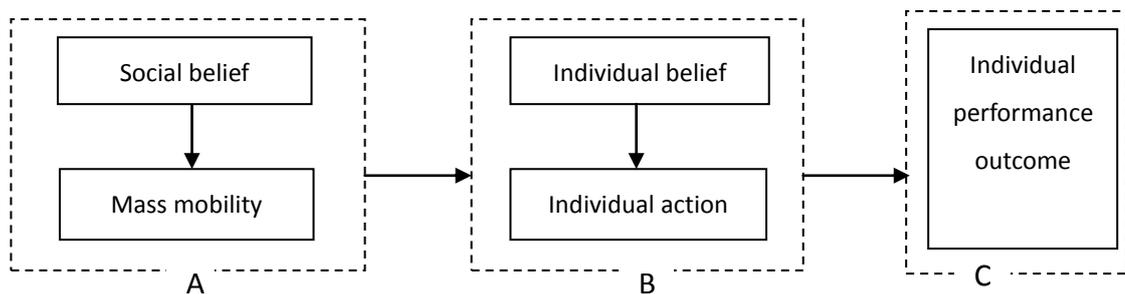


Figure 1: The impact of belief on action and its outcome

The Factors of an IWD's Employment

The barriers caused by disabilities either directly or indirectly affect an IWD's progress in employment. These obstacles include the following.

Physiological Conditions

Personal physiological conditions such as disability type and level are thought of as obstacles to one's employment. Individuals with mild or physical disabilities have better development while individuals with severe disabilities, emotional disabilities, mental disabilities or multiple disabilities have poorer performance (Carter et al., 2010; Winn & Hay, 2009). If the physiological obstacle is the cause of poor development, IWDs will attain limited progress in employment as the disability condition is hard to change and it is meaningless to work hard. However, some studies have suggested that no relationship exists between employment status and physiological conditions for IWDs (Chen 2013; Bishop, 2005).

Social Conditions

Much of the discussion on social conditions is about discrimination (Ju et al., 2012; Piggott & Houghton, 2007; Roessler et al., 2007). These studies have repeatedly pointed out that discrimination and prejudiced attitudes towards IWDs result in severely impaired social participation, which is the critical reason for IWDs' poor gaining employment. To protect IWDs employment rights, many countries have set up social welfare policies, or job rights protection regulations to promote IWDs' employment opportunities. At present, welfare and rights

policies for the promotion of IWDs' employment, such as the 1963 Vocational Education Act, and the 1984 Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act in the United States, and the Disability Welfare Act in 1980 in Taiwan, have been in place for decades. However, these policies still cannot completely resolve the obstacles to IWDs gaining employment (Chen, 2015; Winn & Hay, 2009). So far the employment rate of IWDs is much lower than that of the average person. Clearly, social welfare policy alone is still not the only solution to IWDs' employment issues.

State of Mind

Scholars believe that the social support system and ASE are important factors for developing IWDs' employment potential (Roessler et al., 2007; Winn & Hay, 2009). IWDs may believe that society has not accepted them and shape negative self-expectations during the seeking employment process (Hopkins, 2011). Hopkins pointed out that an IWD's expectation is affected by the experiences of disability sake. In addition, IWDs may believe that the IWD welfare and rights protection policies mean that they are a social burden and make less contribution to society. Holding this belief strengthens their convictions about community charity and leads to a negative mental state.

Actions of IWDs

The actions of IWDs are affected by their disabilities, which thereby affects their progress in employment (Chen, 2013; Babbitt & White, 2002).

1. Disability itself: Strauser et al. (2006) found that IWDs believed disabilities had a great impact on their career orientation. Hitchings et al. (2001) indicated that the disability type and its severity affected one's performance. Impairments such as physical disabilities, hearing impairments and severe learning disabilities often placed restrictions on movement and reduced exploratory behaviour in career development.
2. Academic performance: Some IWDs do not perform well in academic settings. They may have a comprehensive cognitive disability or have restrictions in learning inputs such as auditory stimuli, visual cues or operating performance. These often result in IWDs having poor academic or professional achievement that affects their career development.
3. Career activities: As with most people, IWDs who had a clear goal or took aggressive action towards their potential career had clearer career orientations and better achievement (Hitchings et al., 2001). These actions were encouraged in a career exploration process that included career scaling, workplace visits or gaining work experiences (Alverson et al., 2010). Employers often worry about IWDs' work ability and this reduces their willingness to hire. Without work experience to prove work ability, IWDs will limit their employment opportunities (Kang et al., 2010; Piggott & Houghton, 2007; Winn & Hay, 2009). IWDs often take time for medical treatment or resist taking action because of psychological problems. These factors reduce positive actions in IWDs' professional life (Chen, 2015; Piggott & Houghton, 2007).

From one point of view, IWDs' employment status is impacted by their disabilities: disabilities impact on social opportunities, personal psychological

states and the actions that determine individual employability and subsequent employment achievements. However, from another angle, one should not look at how the disability is an obstacle to social survival opportunities or its effects on employment, but instead look at how employment achievement is impacted by personal mental states and their related actions. Figure 2 shows a similar, but more nuanced perspective than Figure 1, where A has an impact on B, and B has an impact on C. It is feasible to see the impact of B on C directly. If the social conditions are set aside, it is possible to review how an IWD's action directly impacts on his or her employment activities. A surprising argument can be made concerning the self-fulfilling prophecy, which offers an analysis that goes beyond the traditional view of employment development.

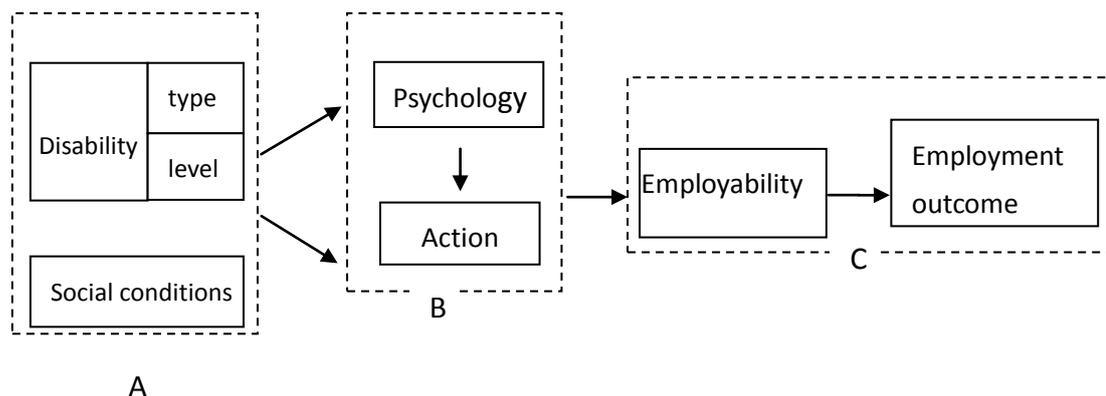


Figure 2: How disability impacts IWDs' employment development

The Effect of the Self-fulfilling Prophecy on IWDs' Employment

When an IWD transits from school to the employment market, his or her anticipation of ASE was found to influence his or her development greatly (Hopkins, 2011). Carter et al. (2010) noted that IWDs' beliefs whether society accepts them is the critical issue affecting their employment performance and career progression. The thoughts eventually becomes realized in accord with the self-fulfilling prophecy. In the self-fulfilling prophecy, the IWDs' employment development may be divided into four steps (see Figure 3):

Belief of Acceptance Shaping

Most people develop a negative belief – 'I am not accepted by the society' – think themselves cannot integrate into the community to which they belong. Roessler and colleagues (2007) found that people try to contribute to the society in order to obtain positive attitudes from the community. For the sake of gaining the benefits of well-being policies, IWDs may define of themselves as vulnerable in society; which makes them more sensitive to doubting whether society accepts them with sincerity. One study found that 27.8 per cent of IWDs before graduation, and 20.8 per cent of IWDs after graduation think of themselves as accepted by society. These perceptions did not vary by gender, disability category, disability level or academic achievement (Chen, 2015). When other IWDs shared their perception that there is discrimination in society against IWDs, or that workplaces regard IWDs as with poor abilities, then their belief in society acceptance tends to be negative. Individuals will hold negative attitudes towards opportunities to enter the workplace and negative expectations towards his or her performance outcomes.

Madon et al. (1997) pointed out that when teachers teach for students with low academic achievement with much unpleasant learning experiences over a long time, these students will have low self-affirmation. Madon et al. explained that for these students, lack of friendliness in the environment made satisfactory learning performance more difficult to achieve. Jussim et al. (1996) found that African-Americans, individuals with low socioeconomic status and those with low academic achievement are more intensely affected by the self-fulfilling prophecy than others. These students are more sensitive to the strong messages generated by the mechanism of the self-fulfilling prophecy. The self-fulfilling

prophecy effect occurs more severely in IWDs because they have greater sensitivity about feeling accepted.

Beliefs Impact Employability

One's mental state affects knowledge and attitudes, and thereby changes one's actions; these actions ultimately have an impact on progress in employment. If an IWD thinks the labour market accepts them, he or she will be confident that the opportunity exists to obtain the same results as a person without disabilities. One will make efforts to acquire employment and contribute to society. On the other hand, if an IWD believes that society has negative attitudes and is unfriendly, he or she may believe there are no opportunities to achieve and intends to give up working hard to avoid wasting time. The individual then takes passive action and is unable to raise employability. It is found that in this case, progress in employment was not optimal, and the barriers to action were more intense (Madon et al., 1997). Further research found that no matter what the disability was, when an IWD felt high ASE, his or her actions were no different from the general population: aggressively cultivated their employability, captured employment information, and developed their job-seeking strategies. They experienced considerable confidence about their futures while at school, which made them take more positive actions; they also did not ask for much welfare support from the government and pursued a high quality of life. On the other hand, those IWDs who thought ASE is low gave up on working hard in order to achieve more meaningful survival. Given the reality they perceived, most did not rely on working hard but instead hoped to access employment-related social welfare, and were less concerned about cultivating employability (Chen, 2013).

Wineburg (1987) pointed out that when an IWD has received the message from society that he or she is subordinate, that person will feel themselves to be poor and their performance will be poor. The perceptions of the general public inculcate profound values into one's mind (Clark, 1955, p. 50, cited in Wineburg, 1987), thereby affecting the IWDs' actions. As Wineburg stated, the effects move from 'out there' in society to inside individuals' minds and become 'embedded in the personality' aided by the mechanism of the self-fulfilling prophecy (p. 28). In this effect of the self-fulfilling prophecy, expectation is an important element that profoundly impacts one's next action. The direction of behaviour is not only caused by psychological factors, but also by practical considerations of survival. Although the perception may be wrong and the expectations unreasonable, the self-fulfilling prophecy effect still has a considerable impact on employment.

Employability Impacts on Performance Outcomes

Same with other people, an IWD's attitude has an impact on his or her efforts in employment; this affects employability and eventually affects employment outcomes. It leads some people to enter into the job market, while others have greater difficulty. According to a study in Taiwan (Chen, 2015), 40.4 per cent of college students with disabilities got a job after graduating if, when they were still in school, they believed ASE of IWDs was low. In contrast, 80.0 per cent of college students with disabilities got a job after graduating if they believed ASE of IWDs was high when they were still in school. The latter figure is close to the

general college graduates' employment rate of 83.5 per cent in Taiwan (Chen, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2006). If IWDs considered themselves unaccepted by society and the workplace, they reduced their efforts and were less employable, which resulted in difficulties in acquiring a job. Given the self-fulfilling prophecy effect, ASE was not a direct cause in gaining a job or not; rather it was the action formed by the beliefs that affected an IWD's employability, and thereby affected their employment outcomes.

Outcomes Strongly Affect Convictions

The experience of entering the job market or working in the workplace continues to have an impact on IWDs' convictions concerning ASE of IWDs. If an IWD has a negative belief originally, bad personal experience in the workplace makes the belief in non-acceptance stronger: 'This society considers an IWD incompetent' or 'I was rejected no matter how hard I work.' This belief then has an impact on subsequent actions, and repeatedly affects employment performance, which goes into circulation. As Wineburg (1987) put it, the inferior feelings have been formed and will be continued. The public's conviction that IWDs are characterised by their poor employability has fostered a widespread social norm in society that has a recurring influence on IWDs' progress in employment generation after generation.

Chen's follow up study found that one year after graduating from college, there was a marked change in the person's beliefs about ASE of IWDs: for the IWDs who did not gain a job after graduating, 100 per cent of those who had thought that there was high ASE of IWDs before graduation, changed into holding a belief in low acceptance after graduating. However, no one who believed low ASE of IWDs before graduation changed into believing that ASE of IWDs was high; For the IWDs who acquired a job after graduating, 37.5 per cent, who thought there was high ASE before graduating, came to believe there was low ASE. Only 9.5 per cent, who believed low ASE of IWDs before graduation came to believe high ASE of IWDs after graduation (Chen, 2015). These findings show that after the IWDs left formal education, their experiences were likely to create more negative beliefs. This phenomenon may be because they themselves had bad experienced. Thus the conviction held about IWDs' employability spreads to the social environment, where it has a specific impact on other IWDs entering the labour market. The prophecy has a circular impact on society (see Figure 3) and profound impacts on the IWDs in their search for employment.

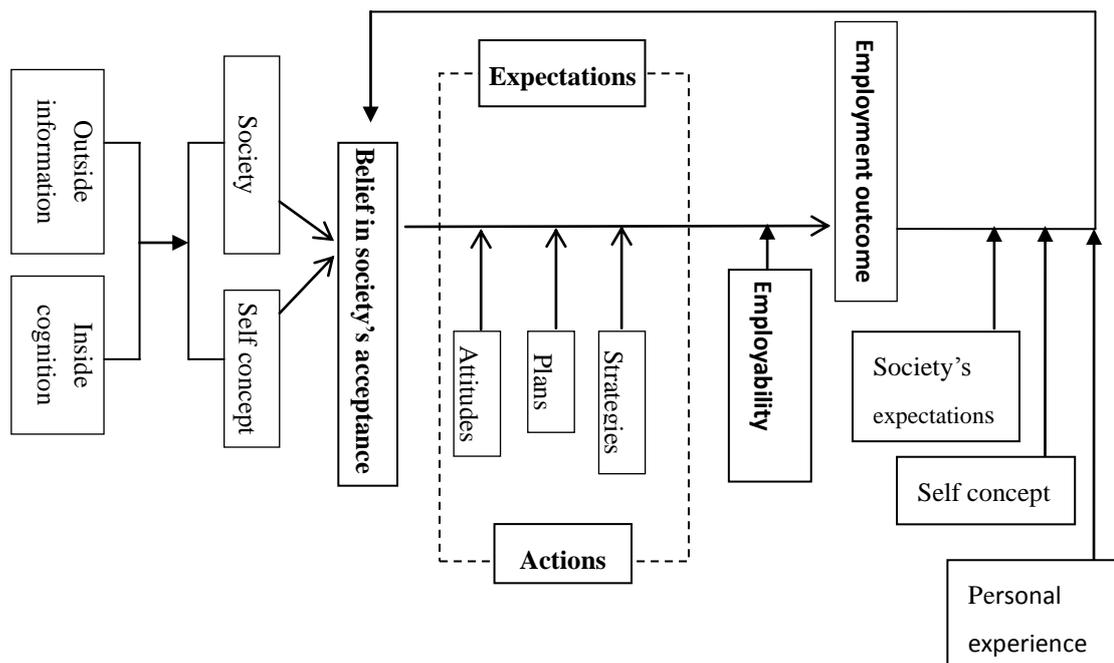


Figure 3: Self-fulfilling prophecy concerning IWDs' progress in employment

Employment Transition Service

IWDs' beliefs are influenced by others' discriminatory stereotypes in society, which cause reciprocal feelings among IWDs and have an impact on IWDs' expectations of the future. According to the self-fulfilling prophecy, these feelings are sufficient to make IWDs isolate themselves from the crowd and develop differently from others in employment. Wineburg (1987) pointed out that the effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy process are caused by environmental issues and the individual's convictions; those who do not have positive expectations are sacrificed in the social structure, IWDs are innocent.

Because of the self-fulfilling prophecy on IWDs' employment, the employment transition service offers a new perspective: although disabilities create some barriers for IWDs, people are able to develop their employment resources despite their disabilities. This perspective creates another opportunity: Other than a victim in society, IWDs' progress in employment is mainly restricted by themselves. As long as IWDs do not place limits on themselves by thinking themselves inferior before taking actions, they can develop their employment in the same ways as other people. The key point is whether a person is aggressively undertaking activities to develop job skills and get ahead in finding and keeping employment. An employment transition service for IWDs can offer the following assistance.

Changes in the External Social Environment

Prejudices and stereotypes in society led some groups to be underestimated and subjected to uneven treatment (Madon et al., 1997). A social responsibility viewpoint as O'Hara noted in 2004: It is the first thing in a transition service's policy to change people's attitudes to reduce workplace discrimination against IWDs. This was quite a humanism concept in rehabilitation innovations. This

phenomenon needs recognition in national policy to uphold justice and encourage society to have more reasonable expectations and positive attitudes about IWDs (Eden, 1986). Employment supports in the social environment are expected to be consistent with the first chapter of the 'Americans with Disabilities Act' which states avoiding workplace discrimination against IWDs, and allow them to reasonably obtain and retain employment (Roessler et al., 2007). In such a policy, employers are guided to understand IWDs' abilities, and to eliminate inappropriate attitudes so that IWDs make efforts without the hesitation to promote their employability and enhance their employment opportunities.

Perceived and Addressed Personal Beliefs

It is difficult to change external conditions, so transition services should focus on IWDs' attitudes, living strategies or life plans to cope with unfavourable external conditions. Scholars have advocated that there should be a curriculum to help those who suffer from the negative impact of the self-fulfilling prophecy to change their feelings into positive beliefs of themselves (Farmer, Allsopp, & Ferron, 2015; Marburger, 1963, cited in Wineburg, 1987). Another critical program is to improve self-determination and to promoting successful transitions (Farmer et al., 2015). When an IWD thinks he or she is not accepted by society, the service should identify the circumstances and guide the individual to adjust their attitude and cope with the social reality; this would minimise the impact of social rejection. Helping IWDs to avoid misunderstanding and negative behaviours but with self-confidence in response to social attitudes and social discrimination will help them attain better employment prospects.

Enhancing the Individual's Employability

In the process of the self-fulfilling prophecy, social conscience and self-concept shape personal conviction. Social conscience is part of popular convictions and is difficult for an individual to change. Self-concept can be adjusted by personal experience, achievement and thinking, which can be controlled by an individual. Madon et al. (1997) pointed out that when an IWD's awareness of the environment is consistent with his or her personal self-concept, the self-fulfilling effect will be more intense. That is, if an IWD believes society think IWDs are poor performers, and they also think of themselves in this way, then the predicted effects of poor performance are very likely to occur. On the other hand, if one believes that society thinks IWDs are poor performers, but one does not think that of oneself, the predicted effects of poor performance will be less. An IWD is able to have more confidence in meeting employment conditions with high employability even if he or she think the external environment holds negative expectations about IWDs. The negative self-fulfilling prophecy effect is then reduced. Therefore it is a very good strategy to aggressively cultivate employability, for example, to perceive and find work opportunity (Martini, & Cavenago, 2017) will make the students have more opportunities to successfully transition from school to employment (Wehman, Sima, Ketchum, West, Chan, & Luecking, 2015). It will encourage IWDs to hold a positive self-concept that will enhance their opportunity to enter the job market.

Conclusion

IWDs' employment issues were much discussed according to the social model that has prevailed in past decades. It is thought that others' prejudices against IWDs have created barriers and discrimination, resulting in difficulties for IWDs to participate fully in society. Unwelcoming and inadequately accessible facilities among employers have led IWDs to have much lower employment rates than the others. This article does not deny that these social factors have an impact on IWDs' employment. However, the history of the social factors involved is a long one, and difficult for individuals to confront. For social changes to give IWDs fair employment conditions, IWDs should patiently look forward to the government establishing employment policies that initiates public acceptance, at least, with apparent acceptance. On the other hand, a factor which an individual can control is keeping any negative attitudes to himself or herself away. According to research and the self-fulfilling prophecy, it seems that IWDs' negative self-perceptions and projections lead to their employment prospects being difficult to develop. Therefore, changing the individual's attitude is the most direct and promising strategy for promoting IWD progress in employment.

A statistic shows that from 1985, when the self-fulfilling prophecy was first analysed and discussed, nearly 400 related articles explored the effects of self-fulfilling prophecy in educational environments (Wineburg, 1987). Now, 30 years later, this topic is discussed in depth in other disciplines. However, the self-fulfilling prophecy was never applied to IWDs' poor employment performance issues. The employment research pointed out that there is a significant relationship between IWDs successful employment after graduation and their convictions about ASE of IWDs before graduating. Of course, this conviction is not a direct factor concerning whether a person is successfully employed, but it is the driving force behind working hard or giving up. Thus shaping one's employability differently and shape a different performance outcome in the workplace. In an employment transition service, IWDs should actively establish themselves as moving forward. To motivate IWDs to actively cultivate employability, namely, to strengthen the link between B and C in Figures 1 and 2, IWDs need to expect promising employment development.

As an advocate in Reader's Digest once said: 'Self-fulfilling prophecy - the key to success. It was proved this magical power can greatly enhance one to have the intelligence, willpower and competitiveness to the success. The secret is: to expect' (P34, Good & Brophy, 1977, cited in Wineburg, 1987). An individual's behaviour tends to be influenced by his or her personal conviction: If a person thinks of oneself as others think of him (or her), that is what he (or she) becomes.

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