

# 'Governmentality', 'technologies of the self' and disability: Understanding disabled students' self-efficacy and career planning knowledge at the tertiary level

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## Abstract

The self-efficacy and career decision-making processes of disabled students in the Caribbean are assessed and their meanings explored utilising Foucault's notions of 'governmentality' and 'technologies of the self' in this article. Self-efficacy and career decision-making processes are viewed as precursors to employment and as integral constructs embedded within Foucault's 'technologies of the self'. Findings suggest that students with disabilities possess a high self-efficacy and use their knowledge and education in instrumental ways to govern themselves and determine future employment outcomes.

**Keywords:** Technologies of the self; governmentality; self-efficacy; career decision-making; students with disabilities

## Introduction

Foucault's work on technologies of the self and governmentality has wide applicability to persons with disabilities in the Caribbean region. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2007) report on global labour trends, persons with disabilities are likely to experience unemployment due mainly to worldwide discrimination and stigmatisation. It can be argued that the impact of unemployment not only has a deleterious effect on disabled peoples' ability to be productive citizens within the region, but may also affect their identity as a result of not being able to exercise their right to participate in economic and employment activities that are either publicly or privately constituted. Persons with disabilities experience restrictions when governments do not legislate that they have a right to participate in state and private employment, when they are left out of decisions that impact on their employment status and financial wellbeing and when participation in the work force is contingent on the nature of their impairment rather than their ability.

The work of Michel Foucault has much to contribute to our understanding of how persons with disabilities construct their identities in the face of unemployment. In this article Foucault's care of self provides a broader platform to problematise, conceptualise and discuss issues relating to how persons with disabilities govern themselves and the role that 'technologies of the self' plays in mediating and negotiating the impact of unemployment. Foucault viewed the term 'care of self' as a rule of social and personal conduct. Foucault (1988b) admonishes western culture for viewing 'care of self' in a disparaging way. According to him 'care of self' should not be construed as imbibing selfish attitudes, immorality or narcissistic principles within an individual. It was through caring for the self that persons can then be altruistic and care for others around them. This notion is dismissed by Besley (2005) as very naïve on Foucault's part because he views all men as inherently good and perhaps overlooks their ulterior motives.

The notion of government in Foucault's work has its origins in 18<sup>th</sup> century political discourse on how the state governs its people and, in turn, how persons internalised and negotiated the boundaries delimited within the laws and policies of the time. According to Lemke (2001) government in Foucault's works is used in a broader context and is not limited to political realities only, but can also be found in ideas in the humanities, medicine, sciences, religion and, of course, philosophy. Although the dominant discourse on issues surrounding government seems to be addressed mainly with reference to the historic-cultural context, Foucault's technologies of the self locate the axis of power within the individual's ability to engage in self-directed and self-regulated behaviours enabling one to transform their self with the intention of attaining a certain state of happiness and quality of life.

In addition power is used to direct or guide the course of events in a situation or within ones' life through self-government and self-regulation. It is therefore elevated to the status of an instrument rather than a means to and a foundation for subjugation, oppression and the imposition of the political will of the state or of individuals. Lemke (2001) states: "Foucault attempts to show how the sovereign state and the modern autonomous individual co-determine each others' emergence" (Lemke, 2001, 3).

It could be argued that education and employment are two ways through which individuals with disabilities can govern themselves. In this research we argue that university students with disabilities at the Cave Hill Campus in Barbados utilise education as a means to direct and transform their lives so that they can become productive citizens. Foucault (1984) calls this transformative process the *ascetic practice of self-formation*. We explore the role that self-efficacy plays in enabling students to negotiate the possible challenges that unemployment presents. We include self-efficacy as the component of self which allows individuals to take decisions on their competencies when faced with difficult situations such as unemployment. In addition we contend that Foucauldian notions of care of self and technologies of the self are

complementary to and encompass Albert Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and reciprocal determinism as a means to regulate the conduct and behaviour of the individual.

The link between self-efficacy and career decision-making can be viewed as pre-requisites for employment opportunities and this research explores students with disabilities' knowledge of career planning and decision-making as developmental precursors to the world of work.

## Self-efficacy, career decision-making and disability

The literature on students with disabilities and career development is well researched. Many studies (Danek, 1992; DeLaoch, 1992; Enright, Conyers & Szymanski, 1996; Hitchings, Luzzo, Ristow, Horvath, Retish & Tanners, 2001; Martz, 2003; McCarthy, 1986) have investigated factors that influence the career choices and career outcomes of students with disabilities and their findings are congruent. These studies outline key factors which act as a catalyst for career development and change. They include the nature of the disability, family, education, socio-economic status, ethnic identity, gender, culture, self-efficacy and self-concept. Of these factors the nature of the disability, education, self-efficacy and gender emerged as strong predictors of future employment opportunities for students with disabilities.

With regard to the nature of the disability three factors determined whether tertiary level students with disabilities successfully gained employment. These factors include whether the disability is congenital, acquired or invisible. In general job procurement rates are viewed as considerably reduced for students with disabilities.

Research by Enright *et al.* (1996) argued that individuals with congenital disabilities are not likely to apply for a first job because they tend to be supported by their parents throughout their adult life. This dependency however often leads to a diminished sense of self-worth and poor self-concept.

Conte (1993) suggested that the age of onset, the nature of the disability and access to assistive technologies mediated the effects of the disability for students with acquired disabilities. According to Whitmore and Maker (1985) the age of onset of the disability plays a key role in determining the individual's ability to cope. Individuals who acquire their disability at a pre-employment stage of their lives are less likely to suffer an identity crisis because they have time to cope and adjust to their disability. However those who acquire their disability at a post-employment stage are more likely to develop a crisis in identity with a need to recreate their self-image since they were more likely to face unemployment depending on the severity of their disability.

Interestingly, the "invisibility of disability" is also viewed as having a powerful influence with regard to employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Martz (2003) in a modest size sample of participants with health-related impairments such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and mental illness noted that individuals with these impairments were sixteen times more likely to obtain employment because these conditions did not result in observable disabilities and were not stigmatised. Although the invisibility of disability emerged as an important factor it did not determine the extent to which these persons possessed an internal locus of control or significantly predicted employment outcome.

Another important factor, which acts as a stimulus for career development of persons with disabilities, is education. Research by Enright *et al.* (1996) paints a bleak picture for students with disabilities educated in the most restrictive settings. Enright *et al.* argued that students educated predominantly in segregated rather than inclusive settings possessed limited interpersonal and leadership skills that are essential to the world of work. However for those who attained their education in inclusive settings other factors imposed barriers to participation in education and employment. These include the attitudes of lecturers, other students and employers with respect to persons with disabilities, accompanied by misconceptions about their sexuality, abilities and skills.

It can be argued that the nature of the disability and access to education collectively determine disabled students' perceived competence with respect to employment. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as the belief that one can accomplish goals and succeed at the behaviours that one attempts. Bandura contended that people avoid tasks that they believe are beyond their abilities. An important decision made by students with disabilities is whether or not they could successfully complete a tertiary level education. In addition these students also had to decide what they would do in the event that they were not employed after undertaking a university education.

According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory an individual's response or behaviour can be attributed to the way they perceive themselves and their own competence in a particular task or skill. Studies by Mazurek and Shoemaker (1997), Enright *et al.* (1996), Thompson and Hutto (1992), Babbit and Burbach (1990) suggest that students with disabilities experience a diminished sense of self-efficacy as they approach the world of work. Mazurek and Shoemaker (1997) specifically examined the career self-efficacy of students with disabilities and those without. They found that those with disabilities had significantly lower career self-efficacy than their non-disabled peers. In particular Thompson and Hutto (1992) note that these students experienced greater difficulty selecting a career, finding a first job and were also less occupationally mobile than other peers without a disability.

In the Caribbean context there may be a more informal approach to making decisions about a career. In spite of this a formal career planning and decision-making process is introduced through the secondary schools guidance and counselling programme and continues both at the local college and university where engagement in the programme is voluntary.

Research by Friehe, Aune and Leuenberger (1996) indicates that a majority of students with disabilities do not in fact utilise the available career development services, and this has implications for their self-efficacy. Enright *et al.* (1996) found that students with disabilities also possessed more negative self-images and poor self-efficacy because they view their disability as a hindrance, refuse to set realistic goals with regard to employment and adopt a pessimistic view of their chances to equal job opportunities and access to employment in comparison with their non-disabled counterparts.

In addition the literature also highlights gender differences with regard to employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. According to research by Danek (1992) women with disabilities in the United States of America had a 33% participation rate in the work force compared with 60% by their male counterparts. Gender has also been found to predict other factors such as the salary paid and type of employment of men and women with disabilities (DeLoach, 1992).

Employment opportunities for women with disabilities were confined to traditional fields such as education, teaching, clerical work and the enabling professions. Women also faced challenges to participation in the work force similar to those of non-disabled women and these included child-rearing responsibilities, lack of social support, low self-efficacy, low self-esteem and a lack of a clearly defined social role (Danek, 1992). Furthermore the "invisibility of disability" (Martz, 2003) did little to enhance the position of women in terms of access to employment opportunities that were comparable with those of males (Hitchings *et al.* 2001).

The purpose of this study was to examine two questions regarding the self-efficacy and career planning knowledge of university students with disabilities. In this study career-planning knowledge is viewed as a prerequisite component to career decision-making. First, do students with disabilities display high or low general self-efficacy? Second, what knowledge do students with disabilities have of career planning?

## Doing research with students with disabilities at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus

The University of the West Indies (UWI), Cave Hill Campus is a regional institution which offers a wide range of disciplines to students within the Caribbean and internationally. It is a modest size campus with an undergraduate student population of 6530. Entry to the campus' undergraduate degree programmes is based on the attainment of either four Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) Caribbean Secondary Education Certificates (CSEC) at Grades 1, 2 or 3 levels to obtain lower level matriculation status, or full matriculation status may be obtained by passes in advanced assessment examinations such as CXC Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE), British Council's General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Levels (A levels) or an Associate Degree. All students including those with disabilities must satisfy these requirements in order to gain entry to the University.

Currently twenty undergraduate students with learning and physical disabilities are registered on campus. This figure is low as it is dependent on whether or not students opted to declare their disability when they matriculated before going to the University. However it appears as though many do not make such a declaration. In terms of accommodation made by the university, the main provision comes in the form of extra time permitted for examinations. The campus offers a general career counselling service to all students.

### Methodology

#### The students and their disabilities

The sampling approach utilised in the study was the snowball technique and the researchers relied on the students' knowledge of other individuals on campus that had a disability. In addition students who took courses in Special Education and who divulged their status with regard to their disabilities were also asked to participate in the study.

**Table 1: Age range of the sample used in the study**

Age	Frequency
18-29	4
30-39	3
40-49	1

All the respondents in the study were females between the ages of 18-49. We recognise that this skews our results and is a limitation in terms of making useful comparisons between males and females. However enrolment at the University of the West Indies is predominantly female and this might account for the female bias in the sample. Female undergraduates presently outnumber males at 2:1 on campus (UWI, Official Statistics, 2007).

On the other hand at the international level there is also a growing body of literature that focuses specifically on females with disabilities. These include Lindstrom, Johnson, Doren, Zane, Post and Harley (2008), Marder, Cardoso and Wagner (2005), Doren and Benz (2001), and Russo (2001). These researchers suggest that women are more likely to face discrimination and significant barriers to employment at the post-secondary level.

We see this study as an attempt to contribute to that dialogue and to introduce the Caribbean as a new cultural context in which the marginalisation of women with disabilities can be investigated and discussed.

**Table 2: Disabilities of students in the study**

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Learning Disability	3
Psychological Disorder	1
Physical Impairment	2
Health Impairment	1

Disabilities in this study were broadly defined and therefore this research encompasses students within the broad spectrum of disabilities. These include learning disabilities, psychological disorders, orthopaedic and physical impairments, and sensory impairments. The majority of students in the study have congenital disabilities in the form of health impairments or learning disabilities. However, those with physical impairments acquired their disability at a later stage in life.

### Finding a research strategy that works

The approach taken to investigate the self-efficacy and career planning knowledge of students with disabilities may best be described as an embedded case study research strategy. The research context is dynamic because although we are investigating the views of a small group of students within a university setting, we also have delimited the boundaries of our case to include only the individual student's responses to an online closed ended questionnaire. We see two phases of this research; the first phase will adopt a positivist approach based on two assumptions: 1) that there is an absolute truth that can be known about students' self-efficacy and career planning knowledge and 2) that a paper and pencil questionnaire will not accommodate all students given the range of their disabilities.

The online questionnaire was viewed as an appropriate tool because of the nature of student's disabilities; some students experienced the following challenges: difficulty in reading, writing, spelling, poor memory and sequencing of ideas. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. A demographic section, a section assessing self-efficacy originally developed by Sherer, Maddux, Mercadante, Prentice-Dunn, Jacobs and Rogers (1982) with an internal consistency Cronbach alpha of 0.86 and modified to a shortened form by Bosscher and Smit (1998) with an internal consistency Cronbach alpha value of 0.69. The final section of the questionnaire assessed students' career planning knowledge as tested by the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment IV with an internal consistency Cronbach alpha value of 0.86 (ACLSA; Casey Family Programs, 2005).

The second phase of the research will adopt a qualitative and interpretive approach to help us understand the unique experiences of each case or student at a deeper level with regard to how these students view themselves and the possibility of unemployment.

### Self-efficacy

The General Self-efficacy Scale – Short Form (Bosscher & Smit, 1998) was used to measure the self-efficacy of students in the study. The instrument consists of 12 items that form three subscales: Initiative (items 1-3), Effort (items 4-8) and Persistence. The internal consistency; Cronbach alpha for the 12 item scale as reported earlier in this paper was .69. Cronbach Alphas for the subscales are Initiative (.64), Effort (.63) and Persistence (.64) making this scale a reliable one to use in the study. Examples of scale items include 1) Initiative: I avoid trying to learn new things when they look difficult, 2) Effort: Failure just makes me try harder and 3) Persistence: When unexpected problems occur, I don't handle them very well. The scores on the short

version of the general self-efficacy scale ranged from a minimum of 12 to a maximum of 60 for the twelve (12) items that formed the three subscales, with cumulative scores of 28 or less being low, and scores over 44 high.

## Career planning knowledge

Students' knowledge of the career planning process was analysed utilising their scores on the Career Planning subscale of the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA; Casey Family Programs, 2005). The subscale comprised of 13 items on a 3-point Likert scale that ranged from 'Not like me', 'Somewhat like me', to 'Very much like me.' The scores on the Career Planning subscale on the ACLSA ranged from a minimum of 13 to a maximum of 39 for the thirteen items on the scale, with a cumulative score of 20 or less being low and a cumulative score of 30 or above being high.

## Findings

The findings in this study by no means represent an attempt to generalise all students with disabilities or individuals in the broader society, and so we limit our claims specifically to the group of students studied. We want to argue however, that we see these findings as a good basis for extending this study to the broader community of individuals with disabilities in the Caribbean.

Table 3 displays the mean self-efficacy score for the group  $N = 7$ ,  $M = 49.28$  ( $SD 5.49$ ) and the three subscales.

**Table 3: Mean of students' responses on shortened form of the General Self-efficacy Scale**

Scales	Mean	Score range	Standard deviation
General self-efficacy	49.28	12-60	5.49
Initiative	12.57	3-15	2.29
Effort	20.57	5-25	4.89
Persistence	16.14	4-20	2.49

The mean scores on the subscales were initiative  $M = 12.57$  ( $SD 2.29$ ), effort  $M = 20.57$  ( $SD 4.89$ ) and persistence  $M = 16.14$  ( $SD 2.49$ ).

**Table 4: Raw scores for General Self-efficacy Scale – Short Form**

Cases (Score Range)	Self-efficacy (12-60)	Initiative (3-15)	Effort (5-25)	Persistence (4-20)
1.	45	15	11	19
2.	53	12	25	16
3.	55	14	22	19
4.	45	9	19	17
5.	54	14	25	15
6.	52	14	23	15
7.	41	10	19	12

Students with disabilities generally had high self-efficacy  $M = 49.28$  and this seems to suggest that they possessed the qualities to succeed in spite of the presence of their disabilities. Table 4 shows the individual scores of students in the study and it could be inferred that the students

have a positive approach to life that will enable them to take the initiative, be persistent at and make the effort to obtain a career so that they can actively participate in employment.

These results are unusual and not congruent with the findings on self-efficacy of students with disabilities in the literature. Indeed research by Mazurek and Shoemaker (1997), Enright *et al.* (1996) and Thompson and Hutto (1992) suggested that students with disabilities possessed low self-efficacy. One student had a lower cumulative self-efficacy score (41) than the others and it was most salient on the persistence scale (scored 12 out of a maximum of 20) where it could be inferred that there were perhaps some insecurities, which this particular student had to overcome.

## Career Planning

**Table 5: Raw scores for the Career Planning subscale of the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment**

Students	Career Planning score
1.	31.00
2.	34.00
3.	31.00
4.	24.00
5.	24.00
6.	36.00
7.	30.00

The mean for the group of students on career planning was  $M = 30$  ( $SD 4.58$ ). Table 5 shows the individual scores of students in the study, and overall it could be inferred that students did have the knowledge needed to make sound career decisions. On some of the items students rated themselves positively; 'very much like me' included: 'I have a career plan', 'I sometimes read materials to further my knowledge of specific areas' and 'I know the education required for the work I am doing.'

These results seem to suggest that students are transforming their lives through education, self-determination (as exhibited in the high scores on the general self-efficacy scale) and sound career planning knowledge. These findings are also consistent with Foucault's notions of governmentality, which suggest that self-determination is needed for an individual to transform their lives in positive ways (Foucault 1988b).

## Discussion

The case study of a group of female students with disabilities at the University of the West Indies Cave Hill Campus has yielded some useful results and can be used to speculate on the relationship between self-efficacy and career development among these students. The results from this study suggest that female students with disabilities are keenly aware of how to direct their lives through making astute career plans. These findings support those found by Hitching *et al.* (2001), Panagos and DuBois (1999), Enright, Conyer and Szymanski (1996), which suggest that the relationship between disability, career development and self-efficacy is complex. Females in the group held positive perceptions of their ability to successfully achieve their goals in life, which signifies high self-efficacy, and confidence in their abilities. In addition the results also indicated that students were also skilled at making plans about their futures career options. It could be argued that perhaps females did not regard their disability as a significant factor that influenced how they felt about themselves or predicted their career development. Research by



Enright *et al.* (1996) and Panagos and DuBois (1999) support this assumption that disability alone does not predict a person's career development. They emphasised the importance of subjective factors, such as self-efficacy, as being important in shaping the career development of adolescents with learning disabilities (Szymanski & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996).

In the Caribbean context education historically has been viewed as part of one's trajectory towards freedom, social mobility and financial security. Perhaps these ideas have been internalised by disabled students and have acted in powerful ways to direct students' perceptions of self and career planning knowledge. Hence, people with disabilities in our sample have used knowledge or education in a way that enables them to govern themselves (Foucault, 1988a).

In addition these findings are also congruent with arguments made by Foucault (1984) with respect to 'technologies of the self'. He sees this construct as a form of power that propels an individual forward and allows him/her to engage the '*ascetic practice of self formation*'. Among this group of students we argue that high self-efficacy will provide the motivation or power for these students to transcend barriers such as negative attitudes and little or no accommodation for persons with disabilities and being unemployed. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory argues that individuals with high self-efficacy employ coping mechanisms, are persistent and sustain their efforts when faced with aversive experiences. Perhaps advances in technology can create new opportunities to enable students to continue to govern themselves by surmounting architectural and other barriers to employment.

We believe that we have tapped into an important area which needs to be investigated further, with the following to be addressed: the absence of males in particular is a limitation which inhibits our ability to make useful comparisons with regard to gender. In the light of this future research questions will address this issue. We are also curious to discover what other factors might have accounted for the high self-efficacy noted among females in the group. Research by Szymanski and Hanley-Maxwell (1996) suggest that factors such as ability, interest, belief, sex, family, socioeconomic status, culture and ethnic identity are the key to understanding how a person reacts to a disability, and we also think that these are important factors to target for further investigation.

Finally, a more extensive study of persons with disabilities in the Caribbean is of great importance as it would help us understand how these individuals are indeed governing themselves in the face of unemployment and what psychosocial factors and interventions need to be addressed or put in place to increase opportunities for employment among this group of individuals.

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