

A Personal Perspective on the Importance of Self-Determination

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The clock on the wall of the high school counseling office read 7:10 A.M. There I sat nervous, with palms sweaty, and staring at the methodical jolt of the clock's red second hand. Each tick pounded in my head, reminding me of the weeklong migraine I had after this same type of meeting just 6 months before. On my right sat my dad, staring straight ahead in his pressed business suit. On my left sat my mom, who couldn't seem to do anything but shake her leg impatiently. I watched the second hand hit the 12, marking exactly 7:15 A.M. I always dreaded 7:15 A.M. because it meant the beginning of the school day. Prompt as always, the counselor glided into the room and asked me sympathetically whether I was ready. Well, ready or not I thought, here I come. We walked up the hall to the small conference room, where I saw the intimidating faces of my new ninth-grade teachers.

The reason I was having this meeting was because just 6 months before I had been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. Ever since second grade I had struggled. Every night I was forced to sit at my desk and study with my dad. I would work with him for hours on homework, crying through every problem. I was confused about why it took me longer to understand and get through my studies than my friends. If I had not had such wonderful parents, or had been in any number of other school districts across the country, my chances of making it to high school graduation would have been slim.

Fortunately, I attend a proactive and progressive high school that started a class called LEAD (Learning and Educating About Disabilities). I became a member of the class in my freshman year. LEAD taught me and many other students about our disabilities and how we should advocate for ourselves and take ownership of our lives.

I calmed down and gathered my thoughts, knowing that this was my first chance to prove myself. For the next few minutes I shocked my parents and teachers with my knowledge and confidence about my disability. My parents sat there with their mouths shut and tears in their eyes. This was a side of me they had never seen. I finally understood my particular needs and was able to speak with confidence about them.

By the end of the meeting my teachers and parents knew my goals and had a roadmap for how we would work to achieve them. I am proud to say that I reached the goals set in that meeting and surpassed them long ago. I have continued to be an avid spokesperson for students with learning disabilities. By giving numerous presentations in my community and speaking at several international learning disability conferences, I work to dispel the stereotypes that students with learning disabilities face. I now look forward to the start of the school day, and I want other students like me to feel the same.

Note: This was Aimee's essay for her application for admission.

BEST PRACTICES IN TRANSITION

What Are "Best Practices"?

One of the most interesting challenges facing educators who wish to develop and implement transition programs that will improve the postschool outcomes of their students is trying to determine what constitutes "best practice." Fortunately, researchers in the field of transition have been trying to provide this answer since the introduction of Will's (1984) model of three bridges to transition.

Promising transition practices were first identified in some of the early transition outcome studies (Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Kortering & Edgar, 1988; Mithaug, Horiuchi, & Fanning, 1985; Sitlington & Frank, 1990; Wehman, Kregel, & Seyfarth, 1985). Among these original studies, which documented poor postschool outcomes for students exiting high school programs, were a set of studies that also investigated the relationship between improved postschool outcomes and the components of these students' high school program.

Hasazi and colleagues (1985) conducted a study of 462 youths from nine Vermont school districts who exited high school between 1979 and 1983. Their results indicated that 55% were in paid jobs but only 67% of these were full time. Of those who graduated from high school, 72% earned less than \$5.00/hour, while of those who dropped out, more than 84% earned less than \$5.00/hour. One important finding was that students who received work experiences while in high school had better postschool employment outcomes than students who did not.

Overall, these studies found a positive relationship between taking vocational education classes, participating in paid job experiences, and receiving transition programming and better student postschool employment outcomes. These early findings are still being supported by research (see Baer et al., 2003).

Following the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) revisions mandating transition services, the compilation of lists of best practices accelerated. These lists, summarized in Table 2.1, were developed based on a variety of analyses including the following:

- ◆ Exemplary transition programs (Kohler, DeStefano, Wermuth, Grayson, & McGinty, 1994).
- ◆ School-to-work components (Benz, Yovanoff, & Doren, 1997).
- ◆ Three exemplary states (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997).
- ◆ Five model and four representative local school systems (Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999).
- ◆ The research literature (Hughes, Eisenman, et al., 1997; Karge, Patton, & de la Garza, 1992).
- ◆ Empirical validation from transition teachers (Hughes, Kim, et al., 1997).
- ◆ Follow-up study data (Johnson & Rusch, 1993).

Table 2.1
(Continued)
Reference

Reference	Data Source	Data Source
Kohler (1996)	Concept mapping	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Appropriate integration 5. Interagency collaboration 6. Support services 7. Staff development 8. Public and employer relations 9. Academic instruction 10. Social/independent living skills training 11. Program evaluation 12. Instructional issues and strategies 13. Funding 14. Early intervention <p>Created transition taxonomy involving five areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student development 2. Student-focused planning 3. Family involvement 4. Interagency collaboration 5. Program structure and attributes

- ◆ Transition researchers (Hughes, Hwang, et al., 1997).
- ◆ The 1997 Policy Forum on Transition (DeStefano, Heck, Hasazi, & Furney, 1999).

Taxonomy for Transition Programming

As shown in Table 2.1, many lists of transition best practices are available and many are grounded in research. However, the **Taxonomy for Transition Programming** (Kohler, 1996) is the only model based on both empirical and validation studies as well as outcomes from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS)-funded model demonstration transition projects. As such, the Taxonomy provides a user-friendly conceptual framework based on practices associated with improved postschool outcomes for thousands of students with disabilities. Figure 2.1 provides a diagram of the Taxonomy for Transition Programming. It includes a comprehensive set of strategies organized into five categories including (a) student-focused planning, (b) student development, (c) family involvement, (d) interagency collaboration, and (e) program structures.

Student-Focused Planning. This category focuses on using student assessment data and promoting student self-determination skills to help students develop individualized education programs (IEPs) based on their chosen postschool goals. The transition planning process provides the cornerstone for providing effective

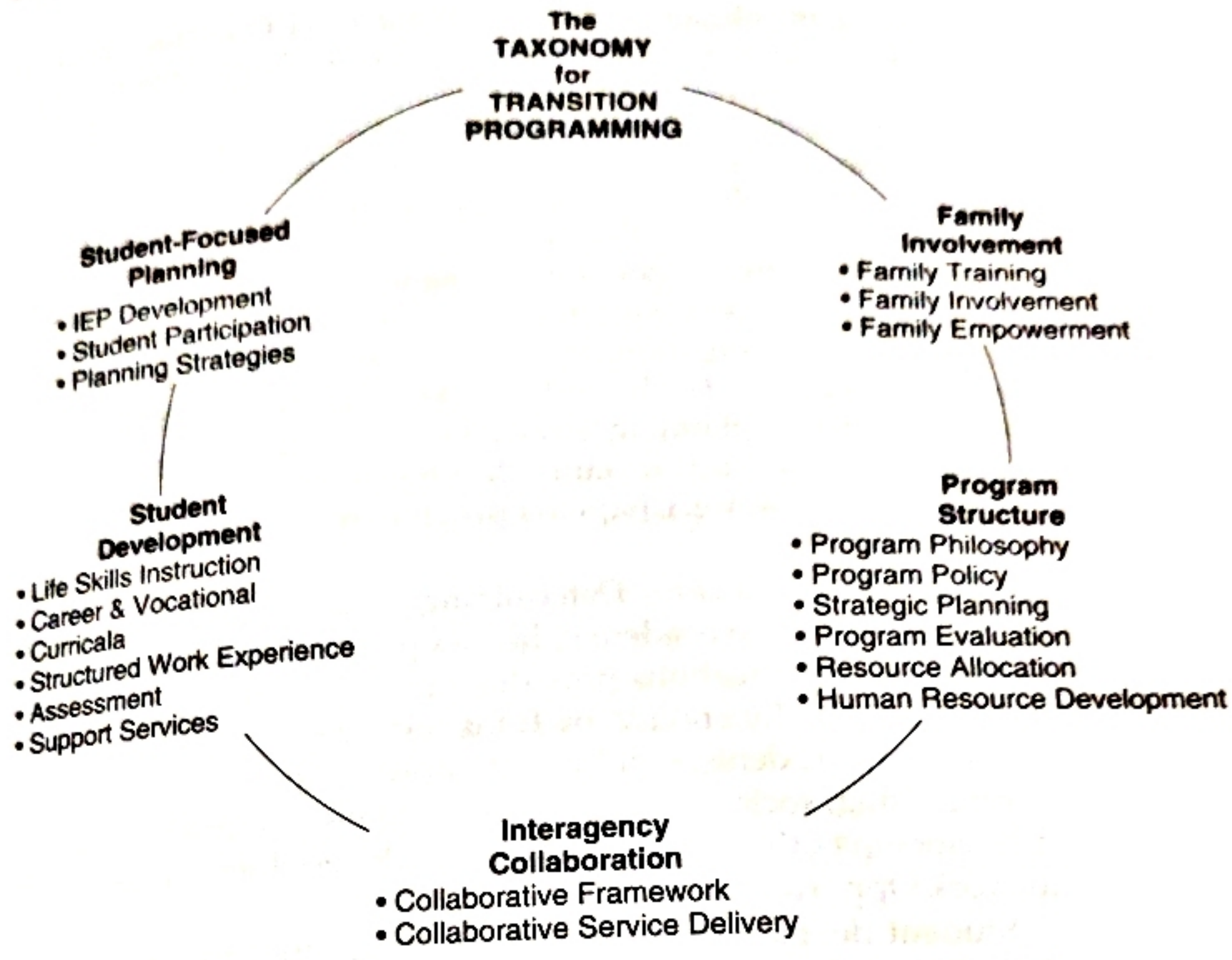


Figure 2.1
 The Taxonomy for Transition Programming.
 Note. From *A Taxonomy for Transition Programming: Linking Research and Practice* by P. D. Kohler, 1996, Champaign: University of Illinois, Transition Research Institute.

transition services (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997; Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, & Benz, 1995; Sale, Metzler, Everson, & Moon, 1991; Zhang & Stecker, 2001). Two of the most critical competencies for transition educators are knowledge of IDEA's transition planning requirements (P.L. 105-17 and amendments), and the skills to involve students in the IEP process. For example, transition personnel must know the definition of transition (P.L. 105-17, Section 300.29), the content of the IEP relative to transition planning (P.L. 105-17, Section 300.347), and the IEP requirements for students beginning at ages 14 and 16 (P.L. 105-17, Section 300.347(6)). Educators also need to know proven best practices in transition (Grigal et al., 1997), such as student involvement in the transition process. Although IDEA (2004) no longer requires involvement by age 14, this best practice was originally recommended in P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Martin & Marshall, 1995), promoting shared responsibility and self-determination.

Although research indicates that to date not all students are involved in their transition planning process (deFur, Getzel, & Kregel, 1994; Everson, Zhang, &

Chapter 2 Best Practices and Future Issues in Transition

Caillory, 2001; Grigal et al., 1997; Williams & O'Leary, 2001; Zhang & Stecker, 2001); numerous examples of empirically validated strategies for increasing student self-determination skills, including involvement in transition planning, are available (Allen, Smith, Test, Flowers, & Wood, 2001; Cross, Cooke, Wood, & Test, 1999; Powers, Turner, Westwood, et al., 2001; Van Reusen & Bos, 1994; Van Reusen, Doshier, & Shumaker, 1999) and must be strategically shared.

Recently, Test and colleagues (2004) reviewed the literature to identify strategies for promoting student involvement in the IEP process. Results indicated that students with widely varying disabilities can be actively involved in their IEP process. In addition, these researchers' results indicated that both published curricula designed to teach students skills to enhance their IEP participation and person-centered planning strategies were effective in increasing students' involvement in the IEP meeting. In other words, students can be taught to take charge of their future. Chapter 4 provides more information on this topic.

Student Development. Determining, evaluating, and supporting individual achievement in the academic, life, employability, and occupational skills needed for successful transitions provides the foundation for the **student development** category of the Taxonomy for Transition Programming. Student development activities help students acquire and apply self-determination skills as well as academic, living, social, and occupational skills; career awareness; and work-related behaviors in both school-based and work-based settings as set forth by the School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994.

Student development includes teaching students a variety of skills including daily living skills, functional academics, independent living and personal living skills, and self-determination and self-advocacy skills. These skills can be taught using locally developed functional curricula or by using commercially available materials such as *Life Centered Career Education* (Brolin, 1997). Chapters 7 through 10 provide more information on how to teach these critical skills.

Next, students need to develop employment skills. Employment skills can be taught using a variety of strategies including school- and community-based work experiences (paid or nonpaid) and through vocational education coursework. Training can be conducted by teachers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, peers, job coaches, and/or mentors in community businesses. Chapters 7 and 8 provide more detail on strategies for teaching employment skills.

Assessment plays a key role in determining what skills need to be taught as well as what skills students have learned. While traditional vocational assessments have not proved to be consistently useful for these purposes, Chapter 3 provides readers with information about student-friendly vocational assessment strategies.

Family Involvement. Strategies in this category are designed to encourage parents and families to become involved in planning and delivering transition services for their sons and daughters. Family-focused training and empowerment activities should be developed to help family members collaborate effectively

with educators and other service providers. For this to be accomplished, educators must learn to communicate effectively with families to create a supportive environment for their participation in transition planning, since their involvement in the transition process is mandated by IDEA (P.L. 105-17; Section 300.345), is desired by students (Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1995), and has been shown to be key to successful postschool transition (Greene, 1996; McNair & Rusch, 1991; Sample, 1998).

Families should be encouraged to participate in the range of transition activities from assessment and planning to implementation and evaluation. For many parents this will require training (by educators or other parents) in such issues as parents' transition-related roles (Wehman, 1996), their participation in the IEP process (Miner & Bates, 1997), the variety of adult services and supports available in their community, and strategies families can use to promote student self-determination (Abery, 1994; Curtis & Dezelsky, 1986; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998).

At the same time, educators must be taught not to impose their own values and cultural biases on families by learning strategies for understanding and working with culturally and linguistically diverse families (e.g., Gersten, Baker, & Marks, 1999; Greenan, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001; Harry, Kalyanpur, & Day, 1999; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lynch & Hanson, 1998).

Finally, transition personnel should be trained in strategies to help empower families (deFur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001). Chapter 4 provides strategies for increasing family involvement in the transition process.

Interagency Collaboration. *Interagency collaboration* refers to key people, businesses, and agencies joining together in their efforts to promote students' pursuit of successful outcomes during the transition process. Educators can learn to foster collaborative service delivery by using interagency agreements that clearly articulate roles, responsibilities, communication strategies, and other cooperative actions that enhance curriculum and program development and service delivery.

Another major vehicle for collaborating with potential partners is the planning meeting. Therefore, transition personnel must know about the IDEA requirements for agency notification and participation (Section 300.344) and agency responsibilities (Section 300.348), as well as specific information on various adult service agencies, including their eligibility requirements and the types of services offered. This means that transition personnel will need to have knowledge and skills related to (a) the multiple levels of transition planning teams, (b) possible membership and responsibilities of interagency teams, and (c) how to successfully implement collaborative service delivery.

Empirically-supported interagency collaboration processes, such as the TASSEL transition model (Aspel, Bettis, Quinn, Test, & Wood, 1999) exemplify the multilevel approach by advocating community-level, school-level, and individual-level teams as well as specific processes for facilitating team accomplishments. Chapter 5 provides more detail on this important area.

Parent's Timeline for Transition from School to Life

Student Age

Action Needed

- 11-14**
- ◆ Make sure your child's IEP (individualized education program) includes social skills, communication, and self-help skills with at least functional math and functional reading within inclusive settings (if appropriate).
- By 14**
- ◆ Begin transition planning as part of the IEP process (focus on student's course of study).
 - ◆ Learn about exit options to ensure that your child will be able to reach his or her goals (e.g., going to college or entering military service).
- No later than 16**
- ◆ Continue transition planning (focus on interagency responsibility or any needed linkages).
 - ◆ Identify job interests and abilities.
 - ◆ Include activities such as career exploration, job sampling, and some job training.
 - ◆ Begin to identify community services that provide job training and placement.
 - ◆ Prepare a job placement file with references and skills the student has acquired.
 - ◆ Begin application to adult service agencies.
 - ◆ Consider summer employment or participation in volunteer experiences.
- 16-18***
- ◆ Contact adult services programs:
 - ◆ Colleges, vocational or technical schools.
 - ◆ Social Security Administration.
 - ◆ Residential or independent living services.
 - ◆ Recreation/leisure groups.
 - ◆ Medical services.
- 17-18***
- ◆ Begin to consider and research guardianship.
 - ◆ Continue to review and update the transition plan.
 - ◆ Have the student take ACT or SAT tests.
 - ◆ Visit colleges and their disabilities services offices.
 - ◆ Register with the disability service office of the student's preferred school by the end of the senior year.
- 18-21***
- ◆ Continue to review and update the transition plan.
 - ◆ Establish needed health benefits.
 - ◆ Develop a long-term financial support plan (e.g., SSI).

*Depending on the extent of their disability, some students may remain in school and continue working on transition goals through age 21 or as defined by state law.
Note. Adapted from *Full Life Ahead: A Workbook and Guide to Adult Life for Students and Families of Students with Disabilities*. Montgomery, AL: Southeast Regional Resource Center, Auburn University-Montgomery.

Program Structures and Attributes. Program structures are features that relate to efficient and effective delivery of transition-focused education and services, including philosophy, planning, policy, evaluation, and resource development. These structures and attributes represent many of the systems change targets that educators must be equipped and motivated to address in order to implement all the other practices featured in Kohler's (1996) Taxonomy.

Transition personnel must develop knowledge and skills to address systemic problems with coordination among schools, adult services agencies, and employers. In addition, the information generated to evaluate a school system's transition practices has direct implications for continuous program improvement, as well as for ensuring that students are achieving their goals. Chapter 11 provides more detail on how to develop a thorough transition program evaluation plan.

FUTURE ISSUES AND TRENDS

What makes the field of transition from school to adulthood so exciting and at the same time so exasperating, is the fact that requirements and best practices are constantly evolving. This section introduces the reader to a few of the issues and trends that currently impact how transition services are implemented.

Adolescent Milestones

The first issue is the fact that while transition personnel are attempting to provide quality transition services within an ever-shifting educational environment, the students who are receiving these services are undergoing their own internal rite of passage called *adolescence*. For example, between the ages of 13 and 20, students undergo many fundamental changes including the onset of puberty, developing an identity separate from their parents, developing advanced reasoning abilities, and reaching the age of majority (Steinberg, 1999). The adolescent transition carries with it many new rights, privileges, and responsibilities, including the opportunities to drive, marry, and vote. As a result, as transition programs for students with disabilities are developed and refined, we must consider the fact that our students will not always want to do as we say. It is imperative, then, that we promote self-determination skills and abilities for all of our students.

Gender Differences

Unfortunately, research has documented that young women with disabilities experience poorer outcomes when compared to men with disabilities (Baer et al., 2003; Benz et al., 1997; Fulton & Sabornie, 1994; Hasazi, Johnson, Hasazi, Gordon, & Hull, 1989). These outcomes appear to be related to the fact that young women with disabilities often do not have access to the full array of transition services while in high school. For example, numerous studies have documented that

young women are less likely to be enrolled in work-study and vocational education programs (Baer et al., 2003; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Van Beaver, Kohler, & Chadsey, 2000). While the field is calling for research designed to help promote better transition services and outcomes for young women, school systems and transition personnel need not wait. What is needed is to make sure that all students, including young women with disabilities, have equal access to all the transition services they need to become successful adults.

Self-Determination

The **self-determination movement** is one of the most important initiatives in the fields of special education and rehabilitation today. The right to make one's own decisions about one's life and future is viewed as an inalienable right by American adults without disabilities and yet has only recently been recognized for adults with disabilities. Evidence of this belated recognition is present in key pieces of disability legislation that have been passed or reauthorized since 1990, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 and its 1997 and 2004 amendments, and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992. These laws have all stressed the right of individuals with disabilities to choose where and with whom they want to live, what jobs they want, and by what means they want to achieve their personal goals.

The U.S. Department of Education has identified self-determination as an important outcome of the educational process for children and adults with disabilities and has committed significant resources promoting this concept by funding initiatives on self-determination (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998a; Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995). The Rehabilitation Services Administration has also committed agency resources to increasing consumer choice by funding seven choice demonstration projects following the passage of the 1992 Rehabilitation Act Amendments. Choice and self-determination are also encouraged for funding within the grants program of the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD).

Self-determination might be viewed as the culmination of the normalization and deinstitutionalization movements that started in the early 1970s. We have been trying to restore the rights of U.S. citizenship to individuals with disabilities since the inception of the deinstitutionalization movement with an ongoing succession of values-driven movements and paradigm shifts (e.g., from developmental to chronologically age-appropriate functional life skills instruction; from institutionalization to community integration and inclusion; from segregated sheltered employment to supported employment in integrated jobs for real pay).

Because of our country's history of having other people (i.e., professionals) make most major life decisions for people with disabilities, actualizing the concept of self-determination now requires that we spend considerable effort to teach children, youths, and adults with disabilities how to be self-determining citizens. At the same time, we must retrain citizens without disabilities to respect and honor the choices and decisions of individuals with disabilities. Therefore, actualizing self-determination for our citizens with disabilities requires a two-way

paradigm shift that involves both teaching and encouraging citizens with disabilities to self-determine and teaching citizens without disabilities to honor their choices and decisions.

Many of the changes written into the 1997 IDEA amendments encouraged a focus on promoting self-determination skills. For example, (a) delivering a set of coordinated activities based on student needs, preferences, and interests and (b) the requirement to notify students as to the rights, if any, that will transfer to them upon reaching the age of majority both focus on a need to promote self-determination skills and knowledge for students with disabilities. As a result, the Division on Career Development and Transition published a position statement supporting self-determination for persons with disabilities (Field et al., 1998). This position statement emphasized the importance of self-determination to career development and transition for all students. In addition, it suggested "exemplary educational activities that encourage student self-determination" (p. 119) including student involvement in assessment and IEP transition planning and implementation.

The concept of self-determination was defined by consensus by Field and colleagues (1998) as

a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults. (p. 2)

To aid teachers in promoting self-determination in their classrooms, the concept of self-determination has been divided into a number of teachable components. The components most commonly identified in the literature (e.g., Field & Hoffman, 1994; Mithaug, Campeau, & Wolman, 1992; Ward, 1988; Wehmeyer, 1996) are choice/decision making, goal setting/attainment, problem solving, self-evaluation/management, self-advocacy, person-centered IEP planning, relationships with others, and self-awareness.

Further support for the importance of promoting self-determination for students with disabilities can be seen in the results of several studies that have found a positive relationship between people with higher levels of self-determination and a better quality of life (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998b).

In another study, Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, and Wood (2001) reviewed the literature to investigate what self-determination interventions have been studied, what groups of individuals with disabilities have been taught self-determination, and what levels of outcomes have been achieved using self-determination interventions. While Algozzine and his colleagues located more than 450 articles on self-determination, only 51 were actually studies designed to evaluate the effects of an intervention or teaching strategy specifically designed to promote a self-determination skill. Based on their findings, they concluded that:

1. The components of self-determination that were most often taught were self-advocacy and choice making. In terms of teaching self-advocacy skills to students with disabilities, Algozzine and colleagues found that self-advocacy skills were typically taught to students with learning disabilities and that choice-making skills were taught to students with mental retardation. In fact, most research on self-determination has been conducted with students with either learning disabilities or mental retardation. Only a few studies were found that included students with sensory impairments, behavioral and emotional disabilities, or traumatic brain injury. Finally, the least studied components of self-determination were self-advocacy and self-efficiency.
2. Self-determination skills have been taught using a variety of instructional methods including large-group instruction, individual conferences, and one-to-one instruction with systematic prompting and feedback. While most interventions have directly taught self-determination skills, self-determination has also been enhanced through the use of preference assessments to promote choice making and person-centered planning to promote goal setting. In addition, while more than 60 self-determination curricula were identified, only 12 studies have been conducted to evaluate the effects of these materials empirically. Although many of the 12 studies were researcher implemented, some presented results from teacher or direct service staff field tests.

In conclusion, it appears that self-determination is an important and teachable skill. Since the concept of self-determination is not new, why do we include it as a future issue? Unfortunately, while recent research has indicated that special education teachers view self-determination skills as important (Agran, Snow, & Swaner, 1999; Mason, Field, & Sawilowsky, 2004), teachers do not write self-determination skills into student IEPs (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1998a). As a result, the need still exists for transition methods to incorporate strategies that promote self-determination for all students. Finally, because transition and self-determination are so interwoven, we offer Figure 2.2, *Transition and Self-Determination Pitfalls to Avoid*, as a reminder that while the focus is on each student's desired postschool outcomes, the process is still full of difficult issues that must be overcome through collaboration and teamwork.

High-Stakes Assessment

With the current push for student accountability expressed in the 1997 IDEA amendments and the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act, many students find themselves in general education classes that stress academics and meeting performance standards (Blalock et al., 2003). While this does not necessarily mean that students will not have access to needed transition services, it does complicate the situation. As Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, and Mack (2002) pointed out, the challenge now is to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the full range of general education curricular options while at the same time ensuring

access to full participation in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living opportunities.

This balance can be achieved if the content-based standards and increased expectations for skill learning are both embedded in the transition process. Kohler (1996) has argued that this is possible if education will adopt a "transition perspective." For example, the post-high school (or future) outcomes focus of the IEP transition planning process requires students to select a course of study appropriate to their educational goals. Thus, all coursework taken by a student would be determined appropriate only if it moved the student closer to his or her desired postschool outcomes.

Next, high-stakes assessments can be infused into the transition process if they are used to obtain a snapshot of how students are doing relative to accessing content standards and other educational opportunities (Blalock et al., 2003). These assessments can be accomplished by use of alternative measures. As part of the IEP transition planning process, students, teachers, and families can advocate for the types of accommodations that will promote the use of alternative assessments designed to measure mastery of skills in real-life environments.

Finally, teachers can look for state standards that overlap career and academic skills. For example, Williams (2002) identified 17 states that have already developed performance standards for all students in the areas of career readiness, career preparation, and workplace competencies. Still other states (e.g., New Jersey, Massachusetts) have incorporated workplace competencies into their academic standards.

Diploma Options

Another current issue involves the lack of consistent graduation requirements (e.g., credits, exams) and exit options (e.g., standard diploma, IEP diploma, graduation certificate) across states and sometimes within states. Pankaskie and Webb (1999) found that the number of states requiring an exit exam for graduation increased from 15 in 1984 to 17 in 1996 and to 22 in 1998. At the same time, the average number of Carnegie Units required for graduation has increased by 2.5 points since 1996. To compound this issue, Guy, Shin, Lee, and Thurlow (2000) found that at least one third of the states were considering making changes to their current systems. The confusion surrounding exit criteria and documents raises a major concern that students can become frustrated by repeated failure on state graduation tests and their related requirements and simply drop out of school to avoid the confusion (Johnson et al., 2002).

Approximately 80% of the states provide an alternative exit document, usually a certificate or alternative diploma that verifies the student's attendance in school but does not document the student's level of skill attainment or require the completion of a specified course of study. The real worth of these exit documents is questionable when it comes to future education and career opportunities.

Only a little more than 10% of the states allow students with disabilities to obtain a standard high school diploma by demonstrating the completion of IEP goals and objectives or an alternative course of study. Without the options of

to provide what are being called "18-to-21-year-old programs." These programs are often located away from the high school campus at either community colleges, 4-year colleges and universities, or other community sites (Grigal, Neubert, & Moon, 2002), but they are designed and staffed by public school personnel. The goal of such programs is to provide students aged 18 to 21 with age-appropriate settings in which to receive their final transition services. Specific goals and services are typically designed through a person-centered planning strategy. Grigal and colleagues suggested that students' goals can focus on obtaining full-time or part-time employment, participating in college classes, increasing community mobility, accessing the support of adult services, improving social and communication skills, promoting self-determination skills, developing friendships, and learning leisure and recreation skills.

Placing these programs on college campuses or in the community provides students with disabilities ready access to classes, resources, and supports that are available to other young adults. For example, students receiving "18 to 21" services at a community college might be able to take or audit classes and use the cafeteria, fitness center, computer lab, and library just like other students their age.

STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING COMMON CHALLENGES

How Do I Develop an Off-Campus Program for 18- to 21-Year-Olds?

Grigal (2002) developed a fact sheet designed to provide a step-by-step procedure for school personnel interested in developing off-campus programs for 18- to 21-year-old students with disabilities. What follows is a summary of the information provided in the fact sheet. For more detail visit: <http://www.education.umd.edu/oco/resources/factsheet.html>.

Step 1: Visit other programs. By visiting and talking to personnel who are already providing these services you can get ideas for resources, curriculum, and strategies that have already worked. Visiting existing programs will also help you get a feel for the logistics and see what you like and do not like. If you are planning to provide services at a community or 4-year college, invite a representative to accompany you so that person, too, can see first hand how the pieces fit.

Step 2: Identify a population of students. Identify the age, employment experience, and instructional support needed for students to be successful in your program.

Step 3: Identify planning partners. Partners should include high-level administrators at both the high school and community location who have the authority to make financial and personnel decisions. In addition, consider including local adult service providers, department of vocational rehabilitation and developmental disabilities personnel, parents, and employers. Be sure to create a process for ensuring ongoing communication among all partners.

Step 4: Identify possible funding needs and resources. Funding needs will vary based on program goals and students served. Local school systems typically fund personnel, transportation, office, and instruction space. Other necessary equipment will include computers; desks; filing cabinets; telephones or cell phones; and access to fax machines, e-mail and photocopiers. Be sure to get written agreements from all parties as to who will be paying for what.

Step 5: Identify access issues. If you want to access college resources you will have to find out how. Do students need to apply to the college? Is there an activity fee? Can students take courses for credit or must they audit? Can students receiving supplemental security income (SSI) have their tuition waived? Which instructors are more responsive to having students with disabilities in their class? These are all questions to consider when determining how to access resources.

Step 6: Deal with school system logistics. Make sure you plan for success by considering transportation requirements, free and reduced-price lunch availability, how medication is dispensed, liability insurance, access to mail and e-mail, attendance policies, student participation in the high school graduation ceremony, and differences between the high school's calendar and the college's calendar.

Step 7: Establish a referral process. Clearly communicate the process in writing to all people who might make referrals. Ideally the process should begin 1 year in advance so that students, families, and teachers have an opportunity to make an informed choice about the appropriateness of services. Remember, this may not be the right service for all students.

Step 8: Create a daily schedule of activities. Most programs combine classroom and community-based instruction in functional and life skills, paid and unpaid work experiences, participation in college courses, use of campus facilities, and participation in campus and/or community clubs. Posting individual weekly schedules will help encourage student independence.

Step 9: Don't get discouraged; relationships take time. Since "18 to 21" programs are not typical, it will take time for all parties to understand how the program works and why it is necessary. Focus on developing relationships with key individuals, and remember to communicate regularly.

Step 10: Be an asset and learn to barter. Find out how your students, you, and your staff can help others at your site. If you give a little, you may get much in return.

Step 11: Create opportunities for peers to become involved. Can college students work with your program for field experience credit? Talk to instructors in education; social work; physical education; and occupational, speech, and physical therapies to learn whether their students could benefit from working with your students. Also, see if your campus has a Best Buddies or other peer-related program.

Step 12: Think outside the box. If there is no college available, consider contacting local adult service agencies, employers, libraries, and shopping malls. If space at the local college is the only limitation, consider locating your program someplace else but get an agreement with the college to access its resources.

Step 13: Evaluate your program from day one. Collect data on goals achieved, program costs, customer satisfaction (including students, families, businesses,