

Beginning in the early 1980s, and continuing into the present, collaborative interagency teamwork has been suggested consistently in legislation and in professional literature as a promising transition practice (e.g., Everson & Guillory, 2002; Johnson & Emanuel, 2000; Kohler, 1993; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). Practical applications of collaborative interagency teamwork in transition services have taken many forms (e.g., Aspel, Bettis, Quinn, Test, & Wood, 1999; Certo et al., 2003; Everson, Guillory, & Ivester, 2005).

For example, without argument, collaboration among students, their families, and the numerous education and related services professionals involved in a student's individualized education program (IEP) has been identified as a necessary component of comprehensive transition assessment and service delivery while a student is in high school (deFur & Patton, 1999). Likewise, collaboration between teams of school personnel and adult services personnel has been suggested as a promising practice for accomplishing the seamless transition of paperwork and services as a student prepares to exit special education services and enter adult services (Wehman, 2001).

The membership of collaborative teams has been expanded to include students and their families, the business community, affordable housing organizations, institutions of postsecondary education, the health and medical community, public and private transportation providers, and other social services agencies and organizations (Everson & Guillory, 2002). In addition, the functions of these collaborative interagency teams have been expanded to include local program development, program management, and program monitoring and evaluation (Aspel et al., 1999; Certo et al., 2003; Everson et al., 2005). There can be little doubt that interagency collaboration is viewed by professionals and public policymakers, as well as by students and their families, as a critical component of comprehensive transition models and a promising practice in improving an array of postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Teamwork is a familiar if somewhat fuzzy term to most educators and social services personnel. Federal legislation mandating special education, vocational rehabilitation, and other social services frequently includes language promoting

DID YOU KNOW?

Transition studies indicate that collaborative interagency teamwork can enhance employment and other postsecondary outcomes among young adults with disabilities (Aspel et al., 1999; Certo et al., 2003; Everson et al., 2005).

teamwork. Lectures, and sometimes entire courses, are dedicated to the importance of teamwork in most university personnel preparation programs for future educators and social services personnel. Professional conferences and other continuing education forums dedicate sessions, and even entire events, to the importance of teamwork. Book chapters and textbooks on teamwork fill the shelves of university libraries. Teaming is consistently rated one of the most requested training and technical assistance needs among practicing human services professionals.

With all of this information about teamwork readily available, why don't we do a better job of collaborating with our fellow team members? The simple answer may be that while we agree on the importance of teamwork, we do not truly understand the *concept* or the *process* of teamwork. If we do not understand the concept and process, then we cannot begin to apply teamwork knowledge, skills, and behaviors to transition practices, or indeed, to any of our social services mandates and models. And if we can not systematically apply teamwork abilities, then we will never be able to achieve the seductive promises of teamwork that lurk behind every university class, conference presentation, book chapter, and federal and state mandate.

What Is a Team?

An often-quoted adage states, "Agencies don't collaborate, people do." In truth, collaborative teamwork is largely about individual people—not agencies—working together. A **team** may be defined as a group of two or more people who agree to come together and work interdependently to address common needs and pursue common goals (Everson & Guillory, 2002). The group becomes a team if, and only if, its members (a) identify shared needs and values, (b) agree upon common goals, (c) define roles and processes that enable members to know how to behave, and (d) agree upon team regulating and evaluating procedures (Everson & Guillory, 2002). Similarly, Varney (1989) noted that a successful team embraces four concepts:

1. Members' roles are clear to each individual as well as to other team members.
2. Individuals have goals, and the sum of individual goals adds up to the team's goals.
3. Structure and practices are understood and agreed to by all team members.
4. Working relations are viewed as an essential part of the team.

As these definitions indicate, teamwork is not magical. It is hard work, and it is serious work. A team may be initiated when a defined group of people agrees to meet together for a common goal or purpose, but it takes much more than an agreement to meet for the group to function as a team. Consider the commonly held myths about teams listed in Figure 5.1.

The term *team* is generally assigned to any group of people—even if their membership and roles vary—when they are charged with working together for any length of time in order to pursue any goal, even if it is poorly defined. But

- ◆ A team is a group of people who all work in the same department or are employees of the same business.
- ◆ A team is a group of people who are all assigned to serve on the same task force and are charged with accomplishing the same impossible task within an impossibly short time frame with no identifiable resources.
- ◆ A team is a group of people who all wear the same color hat or the same tee shirt and who play the same game or sport.
- ◆ A team is a group of people who claim the same academic credentials and who understand and use the same mysterious terminology and acronyms.
- ◆ A team is a group of people who all provide services and supports to the same student or client.
- ◆ A team is a group of people who come together once or twice a year for a 2- to 3-hour meeting to write an individualized education program (IEP).

Figure 5.1
Common Myths About Teamwork

many of these groups are not truly teams. Groups must, by definition, exhibit the characteristics and behaviors described earlier in order to be defined as teams. A group of people who meet together once or twice a year to develop or monitor an IEP is not a team unless these defining characteristics and behaviors are evident. Similarly, a group of people who meet quarterly to address a community's employment services for citizens with disabilities is not a team unless these defining characteristics and behaviors are evident.

Most important, if these groups do not behave as teams, then they cannot be expected to achieve the outcomes expected of teams. As this chapter will show, teamwork behavior requires all team members to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and behaviors in three areas: defining goals, establishing roles, and following processes.

What Is Meant by Interagency?

Interagency is an adjective used to describe the relationships between two or more agencies or organizations and between the representatives of these agencies and organizations. The term is typically used to describe a team whose membership consists of various agencies and organizations, each of which plays some defined role in planning and delivering services to a specified target population. In the arena of transition services, the word *interagency* may describe a team that is composed of numerous education and adult services personnel. Education personnel may represent one agency—the student's school system—but they may also represent numerous disciplines—special educators, general educators, vocational educators, school nurses, occupational therapists and physical therapists,

speech and language therapists, orientation and mobility specialists, school counselors and social workers, audiologists, and psychologists. Similarly, adult services personnel may represent several different agencies as well as several different disciplines. Among others, these may include vocational rehabilitation counselors, case managers, personal care assistants, Social Security Administration representatives, job coaches and other employment services representatives, community college and university personnel, personnel from affordable housing agencies and organizations, and staff from centers for independent living (CILs).

When applied to transition services, *interagency* also describes a team that includes students, their immediate families, and sometimes potential employers and other family members and friends. By definition, a transition planning team must have interagency membership. That is, a transition planning team will always include one or more educators, a student, one or more family members, and one or more adult services providers.

What Is Collaboration?

Collaboration is another concept that is frequently used in the arena of transition services. Typically, *collaborative* is used as an adjective to describe the manner in which a team of people organize themselves, communicate among themselves, and accomplish tasks. **Collaboration** may be defined as a relationship between two or more people, agencies, or organizations that is well defined and mutually beneficial (Everson & Guillory, 1998). The purpose of such a relationship is to achieve common goals by pursuing mutually agreed-upon actions and roles.

Specific to the planning and delivery of effective transition services, collaboration demands coordination and communication among multiple team members who may represent differing agencies and organizations, differing mandates and policies, differing cultures, differing languages, differing professional disciplines, and differing needs and goals. Thus, to be collaborative, a transition team will need to articulate common goals and values, agree upon operating structures, share roles and responsibilities, share resources, and share accountability for successes and failures. Just like teamwork itself, developing collaboration within a team requires time and is serious work.

Putting It All Together: Collaborative Interagency Teamwork

Specific to high-school-to-adult-life transition services, Everson and Guillory (1998) defined a collaborative interagency team as

a group of individuals and organizations who come together to address a common need and agree to pursue a common goal. Over time and with much effort, the group becomes a team if its members agree to common values and a mission, set clear goals and objectives, design an organizational structure and operating procedures, develop common communication patterns, and pursue agreed-upon roles and activities. (p. 301)

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In planning and delivering transition services, collaborative interagency teams typically are convened at different levels to accomplish distinctly different goals. First, by Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) mandate, student-level IEP teams must be convened for every student with a disability. Their goal is to develop, implement, and monitor an IEP for individual students. Second, community-level teams may be convened by cities, counties, or regions that are interested in pursuing systems change. Their goal is to identify the transition service needs of a defined group of high school students and to mobilize community resources to address those needs. Third, state-level teams may be convened by state-level agency administrators to address legislative, policy, and funding needs. Their goal is to address the statewide transition needs of students through legislative, policy, and fiscal responses.

BUILDING EFFECTIVE INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

The remainder of this chapter offers examples of effective teamwork strategies that may be used to convene and build student-, community-, and state-level teams. Strategies are suggested for building student-level teams across agencies, disciplines, and organizations whose purposes are to develop, implement, and monitor individual students' IEPs, as well as for building community- and state-level teams whose purposes are to promote more comprehensive and outcome-oriented services. Strategies are also suggested for encouraging students' self-determination abilities both as members and as leaders of these teams.

Rationale for Using Collaborative Interagency Teams

Transition services are complex for a number of reasons. First, they demand the involvement and expertise of multiple disciplines, agencies, and organizations. At the very least, special educators and general educators need to collaborate with students and their families. More typically, these players need to collaborate not only with each other, but also with a host of educational support personnel and adult services personnel. Thus, identifying common values and goals is essential. Second, transition services demand adherence to a number of IDEA educational mandates as well as to a host of adult services mandates covering postsecondary education, housing, employment, transportation, legal services, and medical services. Thus, communication about roles is essential to avoid gaps in service delivery and to ensure nonduplication of services. Finally, transition services frequently must be accomplished within limited timelines and with limited resources. Thus, effective meeting and action planning processes are essential to make best use of scarce resources.

Collaborative interagency teamwork, when used effectively, brings all available resources together so that teams may assess, plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate individualized services and outcomes for students and their communities.

Key Collaborators in Transition Services

The cornerstone of effective transition planning is collaborative interagency teamwork between educators and adult services personnel and between professionals, students, and families. Although the specific agencies and team players are by necessity defined by state legislative mandates and local priorities, as well as by the level and goals of the team, most transition planning teams consist of the key collaborators and roles summarized in Figure 5.2.

Transition Specialists: Essential Team Members

Who is a "transition specialist"? Unfortunately, in many school systems, the answer may be simply "whoever is assigned responsibility for transition services." In practice, school systems assign one or more school personnel responsibility for all aspects of transition services within a defined geographic area and to a defined population of students. That is, depending upon the size of the school district, transition personnel may be responsible for an entire school district, or they may be responsible for all transition-age students within multiple high schools within the school district. Within their assigned area, they may be responsible for all transition-age students, or different personnel may be assigned to students with specific educational classifications. They may be assigned full time to transition services, or they may be responsible for transition services along with other administrative or teaching duties. In some cases, systems may even assign high school teachers responsibility for coordinating all aspects of transition services for the students assigned to their classrooms.

The term **transition specialist** is used in this chapter to refer to any educator who is assigned responsibility for any aspect of transition services. Regardless of the approach adopted by a school system, the person (or persons) assigned responsibility for transition services functions as a transition specialist and must be prepared to play a number of roles.

A Fact Sheet developed by the Council for Exceptional Children, Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) defines a transition specialist as

an individual who plans, coordinates, delivers, and evaluates transition education and services at the school or system level, in conjunction with other educators, families, students, and representatives of community organizations. (Council for Exceptional Children, 2000, p. 1)

This Fact Sheet further suggests that a transition specialist should possess competencies in the following eight core areas:

1. Foundations of special education.
2. Characteristics of learners.

Education personnel may include among others: special education teachers, general education teachers, vocational educators, school nurses, occupational therapists and physical therapists, speech and language therapists, orientation and mobility specialists, school counselors and social workers, audiologists, and psychologists.

- ◆ As appropriate, conduct educational, psychological, speech and language, motor, behavioral, vocational, and adaptive skill assessments and evaluations of students.
- ◆ Provide functional interpretations of assessment and evaluation data.
- ◆ Identify appropriate members to serve on teams and represent the respective agencies and disciplines.
- ◆ As appropriate, convene and participate in individualized education program (IEP) and other team meetings by communicating meeting goals, roles, and processes.
- ◆ Engage in effective discussion, manage conflict, and summarize decisions and action steps during meetings.
- ◆ Support students' self-determination abilities before, during, and between meetings.
- ◆ Communicate with family members and promote family involvement before, during, and between meetings.
- ◆ Coordinate development and implementation of IEPs, including transition requirements.
- ◆ Provide interdisciplinary skill instruction according to IEP requirements.
- ◆ Assist with job development and job placement goals and outcomes.
- ◆ Assist with postsecondary education goals and outcomes.
- ◆ Assist with community living goals and outcomes.
- ◆ Assist with other community participation goals and outcomes.
- ◆ Participate in staff development activities.
- ◆ Share information with other agencies, disciplines, and team members.
- ◆ Assist with program evaluation
- ◆ Participate in development and implementation of interagency agreements.

Adult services personnel may include: vocational rehabilitation counselors, case managers, personal care assistants, Social Security Administration representatives, job coaches and other employment services representatives, community college and university personnel, personnel from affordable housing agencies and organizations, and staff from centers for independent living.

- ◆ As appropriate, conduct vocational, financial, medical, psychological, behavioral, and adaptive skill assessments and evaluations of students.
- ◆ Provide functional interpretations of assessment and evaluation data.
- ◆ Identify appropriate members to serve on teams and represent the respective agencies and disciplines.

(continued)

Figure 5.2
Key Collaborators and Their Roles

- ◆ Engage in effective discussion, conflict management, and decision making during meetings.
- ◆ Support students' self-determination abilities before, during, and between meetings.
- ◆ Communicate with family members and promote family involvement before, during, and between meetings.
- ◆ Implement agreed-upon transition action steps between meetings.
- ◆ Oversee job development and job placement goals and outcomes.
- ◆ Oversee postsecondary education goals and outcomes.
- ◆ Oversee community living goals and outcomes.
- ◆ Oversee other community participation goals and outcomes.
- ◆ Participate in staff development activities.
- ◆ Share information with other agencies, disciplines, and team members.
- ◆ Assist with program evaluation.
- ◆ Participate in development and implementation of interagency agreements.

Figure 5.2
Continued

3. Assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation.
4. Instruction.
5. Planning and managing the teaching and learning environment.
6. Managing student behavior and social interaction skills.
7. Communication and collaborative partnerships.
8. Professionalism and ethical practices.

Competency 7, "communication and collaborative partnerships," requires a transition specialist to be able to demonstrate a variety of collaborative interagency teamwork abilities. A transition specialist may be called upon to demonstrate this competency in many ways. For example, a transition specialist may be asked to convene and facilitate student-level IEP teams, or to convene and facilitate community-level teams, or, just as critically, to represent the school district on one of these teams. A transition specialist may be asked to serve as a member of a state-level team.

A transition specialist may be asked to form a new team, lead an existing team, guide a struggling team, manage a team in conflict, implement activities identified by the team, or evaluate a team's activities and accomplishments. Regardless of the team's level, its goals, or the transition specialist's role, transition specialists who use teamwork practices will be able to maximize scarce resources, individualize plans and services, and effect quality student outcomes more effectively than those who do not.

Strategies for Building Teams

A transition specialist charged with forming new teams and/or leading existing teams needs to be able to respond to a number of planning questions (see Figure 5.3). For example, an IEP team's membership and goals, as well as the frequency and even the structure and process of its meetings, are dictated to a large extent by IDEA and district mandates and policies. Likewise, a community- or state-level team's membership and goals may be defined by local and/or state policies. The team may be encouraged or supported by special grants and technical assistance endeavors. At the other extreme, team-forming ideas and activities may be left almost entirely to the vision and resources of a transition specialist charged with forming the team.

In all cases, a transition specialist, as the person charged with organizing and convening a team, has responsibility for some initial planning and decision-making tasks that can help a new or existing team organize and operate itself effectively at every meeting. Being able to answer the questions posed in Figure 5.3 will help a transition specialist form and convene both new and existing teams.

1. Confirm the need for a team.
 - ◆ Has a team's existence been mandated?
 - ◆ If not, what factors support or hinder a team's development?
 - ◆ What will a team accomplish that individuals cannot?
2. Define the team's goals.
 - ◆ What is the team's goal or goals?
 - ◆ What are the goals of the meeting that is to be scheduled?
3. Establish roles.
 - ◆ Who needs to be invited?
 - ◆ Who will be the team's facilitator?
 - ◆ What roles will each agency and discipline and participant play?
 - ◆ What information and resources do invited members need to bring to the team?
4. Follow processes.
 - ◆ How should the agenda be structured to accomplish the goals?
 - ◆ How much time is needed?
 - ◆ How should the meeting flow from beginning to end? What paperwork, forms, and data need to be used during the meeting?
 - ◆ How will communication be enhanced? How will conflict be managed?
 - ◆ How will agreements be reached?
 - ◆ What needs to occur after meetings end, and how will responsibilities be ensured?

Figure 5.3
Strategies for Forming New Teams and Convening Existing Teams

Define Goals. The first planning task is to define the team's goals. Specifically, what is the goal of the new or existing team? And what is the goal of the meeting to be scheduled? A goal is a desired future state of affairs. Simply put, a goal describes where a team hopes to be by the end of a meeting and at the end of a series of meetings and actions. For example what is the goal to be attained at the end of a 2-hour IEP meeting? Or 12 months from now, once a county-wide affordable housing task force has written and implemented its new rental housing guidelines for citizens with disabilities? Goals should be behavioral, measurable, attainable, and have timeframes. Goals define a team's work scope and should be used to develop an agenda for every meeting.

For example, in the case of a community-level team convened to address employment services and outcomes for special education students in a specific community, an appropriate set of community-specific annual goals might read as follows:

The 2005–2006 goals for Jefferson County Transition Team are to:

1. Conduct two focus groups with local employers to determine current and upcoming workforce needs.
2. Convene a business advisory task force twice annually to advise the teachers and staff at Jefferson High School and Lakeview High School about vocational programming for students with disabilities.
3. Use a request for proposals (RFP) process to establish three new employment providers to serve students exiting the two county high schools.
4. Secure employment placements for 125 students (55%) of the 227 students with disabilities scheduled to exit the two county high schools this year with occupational diplomas.

Alternatively, an IEP team convened for a specific student should set annual goals that are more student centered while still adhering to behavioral, measurable, attainable, and timeframe components. For example:

Because Lincoln Anderson wants to complete an associate's degree in information services at Highview Community College, he will enroll in and complete two introductory computer courses and one English composition course at the community college during his senior year of high school. He will enroll in and complete CS 100 on Mondays and CS 110 on Tuesdays and ENG 150 on Mondays and Tuesdays. Lincoln will ride the high school bus from his home to the community college, and he will use the bus schedule and telephone to plan and make reservations to ride the accessible bus from the community college to the high school in the afternoons after his classes end.

Determining goals is not as simple as it may seem at first. In Lincoln's example, what goals need to be accomplished by the IEP team to support Lincoln's dreams of attending community college? What goals need to be accomplished by Lincoln himself? What are the goals of the IEP meeting?

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A transition specialist may reply that the goal of Lincoln's IEP meeting is to update Lincoln's transition plan to include goals and activities associated with his recently articulated dreams to enroll in the local community college. Another team member, Lincoln's physical therapist (PT), may respond that the goal of the meeting is to develop a transition plan to enable Lincoln to use the accessible public bus system independently. An adult services team member, Lincoln's vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor, may indicate that the goal of the meeting is to determine whether Lincoln is eligible for VR services and financial support to attend the community college once he completes high school, and if so, to provide the counselor with the information she needs to develop Lincoln's IPE (individualized plan for employment). Lincoln's grandmother may indicate that the goal of the meeting is to make sure Lincoln is prepared to use the bus service safely, while Lincoln may say that the goal of the meeting is to allow him more independence.

Certainly, all of these potential goals are related, and all may in fact be individual team members' goals for Lincoln's upcoming meeting. However, the transition specialist needs to reach agreement on team goals before the meeting in order to determine who needs to be at the meeting, what information members should bring with them and expect to leave with, and the expected length and outcomes of the meeting.

Whenever possible, a transition specialist should define the goal or goals of the meeting with team members before the meeting. This may be accomplished by talking with team members ahead of time, reviewing notes from the previous meeting, writing the goals in an invitational letter for the meeting, or telephoning participants to invite them to or remind them of a meeting. For example:

You have been asked to attend Lincoln Anderson's IEP meeting on April 21st from 2:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. in room 117 of Lakeview High School. At last month's preliminary meeting with Lincoln and his grandmother, we agreed that the goal of this meeting is to update Lincoln's transition plan and IEP for the upcoming school year. Specifically, the team's goals for this meeting are to: (1) write IEP objectives and activities to support Lincoln's enrollment in courses at Lakeview Community College; (2) write IEP objectives and activities to support Lincoln's use of the Lakeview transit system; and (3) discuss Lincoln's eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services and, if he is eligible, determine the necessary next steps to refer him to the vocational rehabilitation agency.

Another strategy is to begin the meeting by stating the meeting's goal or goals. When this strategy is used, the transition specialist must be prepared to revise or add additional goals or to negotiate postponing team members' goals to a follow-up meeting. For example:

"I understand from his English teacher that Lincoln recently wrote a paper expressing his dream of renting an apartment once he leaves high school. However, we only set aside 2 hours to address three specific goals. Can we postpone discussion on his independent living goal until our next meeting?"

In these situations, a transition specialist must also be prepared to address disagreement and conflict. For example:

"Ok, if you believe that it is essential to discuss Lincoln's independent living goals at this meeting, then I propose that we extend this meeting, perhaps by another 45 minutes. Raise your hand if you are willing to extend today's meeting to discuss Lincoln's independent living goal. Raise your hand if you are unable to extend today's meeting to discuss Lincoln's independent living goal."

When goals are clarified before the meeting, or at the beginning of the meeting, all team members have a more accurate understanding of the expected outcomes of the meeting and their roles on the team during the meeting. As a result, the meeting will run more efficiently and productively.

Establish Roles. Once goals have been articulated for a meeting, the transition specialist must consider each team member's unique roles on the team. This need is especially critical when a team convenes for the first time and when new members join the team. Again, the transition specialist should consider two questions. First, why is this specific member being invited to participate on this team? Second, what information or resources does this member bring to this meeting to help accomplish the meeting's goals? The transition specialist may consider several strategies to address these questions. Again, whenever possible, the transition specialist should define each team member's role with the team member ahead of time, by talking with team members in advance in person, by reviewing notes from the previous meeting, in writing, or by telephone.

When students and their families are involved in identifying people to invite to their IEP meetings, the transition specialist should ask them to help clarify responses to these two questions. For example:

"Tell me why you would like to invite Monique's vocational training site supervisor to her next transition planning meeting? How do you think he can help us find a permanent job for Monique?"

An additional strategy, and one that is critical when a new member first joins a team, is to introduce the new member by describing the role that he or she is expected to play on the team and during the specific meeting. This should be done immediately following the statement of the meeting's goals. For example:

"Monique invited Mr. Richards, the evening manager from Farm Fresh, to attend today's meeting. Even though his store does not currently have any job openings, Mr. Richards does have some suggestions for additional skill training that Monique might benefit from, as well as some ideas for permanent job possibilities within the next 12 months."

In some situations, especially during initial meetings of newly forming teams, it may be unclear to the transition specialist and other members of the team why

a specific agency or member has been invited to join the team and attend a meeting. In these situations, it may be useful to begin the meeting by asking all members to briefly introduce themselves and describe the roles they might play.

When teams meet infrequently, membership changes between meetings, mandates dictate team membership, and/or goals are perceived by members as being adversarial, role clarification can be difficult. However, it is precisely in these cases that role clarification becomes most important. The transition specialist may need to encourage problem solving and decision making that will encourage members to take actions beyond their traditional and comfortable roles. For example:

"I understand that you provide Lincoln with his PT sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays. However, if you and the principal can revise your weekly therapy schedule to address the issues you raised, would you be willing to meet with Lincoln and at the community college's office of disability affairs to assess his seating and positioning needs while using the college's computer lab?"

Follow Processes. Meeting processes include determining the agenda for a specific meeting, along with the meeting's organization and flow and the supporting paperwork, forms, or data that will be used during the meeting. The transition specialist is responsible for familiarizing all team members with the planned processes for every meeting. For example:

"At today's IEP meeting, we need to review Lincoln's IEP, and, as needed, revise goals and activities. Specifically, we agreed to discuss his plans for postsecondary education and the support services that he needs to pursue this goal. We are scheduled to begin now and adjourn at 4:00 P.M., so let's get started. Does anyone have any questions about today's agenda?"

One simple process for planning meetings (Leadership Designs, n.d.) is to envision any meeting as having required actions that a transition specialist needs to attend to before, during, and after the meeting (see Figure 5.4). Attention to these items will help the transition specialist plan, facilitate, and follow upon interagency meetings, thereby maintaining the active participation of all team members.

Strategies for Facilitating Teams

Create Action Plans. During team meetings, action planning is a strategy that many transition specialists find useful in helping teams attain their goals. Action planning is a flexible process that results in written planning documents such as an IEP, a team work plan, or an interagency agreement. Neither the title of the form nor the format used is important. What is important is that all action plans include these components: (a) the team's goals; (b) a list of actions or short-term steps necessary to accomplish each goal; (c) the names of team members responsible for accomplishing the actions; and (d) timelines for accomplishing the actions (Everson & Guillory, 2002).

Before a Transition Planning Meeting

- ◆ Determine the meeting's goals, roles, and processes.
- ◆ If possible, communicate the goals, roles, and processes to all team members before the meeting.
- ◆ Schedule the meeting date, time, and location, and notify all participants.
- ◆ Develop an agenda and, if possible, distribute it to all team members before the meeting.
- ◆ Arrange for assistive services and supports if needed.

During a Transition Planning Meeting

- ◆ Begin the meeting on time.
- ◆ Describe the goals of the meeting.
- ◆ Introduce any new members or visitors by name and by role.
- ◆ Summarize the agenda and meeting processes.
- ◆ Use effective communication skills to keep the meeting moving toward its goals.
- ◆ Manage conflict.
- ◆ Record action items for team members to accomplish.
- ◆ Complete the individualized education program (IEP) and/or any other paperwork, such as an action plan.
- ◆ Summarize discussions, decisions, and next steps.
- ◆ Develop draft agenda for the next meeting.

After a Transition Planning Meeting

- ◆ Evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting.
- ◆ Make contact with any team member(s) unable to attend the meeting.
- ◆ Distribute the IEP and/or any other paperwork, such as an action plan.

Figure 5.4
Effective Teaming Processes

Any team may use action planning to formalize the team's commitment to its goals and to define its work scope. Action plans are beneficial because they enable a team to break goals into the smaller, incremental steps necessary to accomplish the goals. Action plans also document the team's decisions, actions, and assignments during team meetings, thereby ensuring both forward movement toward goals and accountability.

When the transition specialist uses action planning, members feel positive about the time and other resources they are contributing to the team. Team members feel energetic and positive about the work they are accomplishing. They begin to develop relationships and trust with other team members. In sum, they begin to function as a team, and importantly, they develop and model a collaborative relationship for families and for students.

Practice Effective Communication Skills. Effective communication strengthens all human relationships, including relationships among interagency team members.

There are literally dozens of examples of communication models described in teaming literature, and most models include strategies for (a) initiating communications with other team members; (b) listening to the communications of other team members; and (c) responding to the communications of other team members.

Leadership Designs (n.d.) suggests a communication model that many transition specialists have found useful when they are charged with facilitating interagency transition teams. Figure 5.5 summarizes this model.

The transition specialist may need to use some or all of these communication behaviors during interagency team meetings. For example, when a team is newly forming or when a student or family member has communication or language difficulties or is reticent to speak for other reasons, the transition specialist may need to use proposing, inquiring, or reflecting behaviors. For example, to bring in a reticent member the transition specialist might say:

"Monique, I would like to suggest that you begin today's meeting by sharing the dream map that you created in your English class with the rest of the team."

Or to reflect on an observed body language:

"Lincoln, do you have any concerns about attending the community college that you would like to share with the team today?"

Initiating Behaviors

- ◆ *Proposing*: proposing a new idea or action to the team.
- ◆ *Expanding*: expanding upon an idea or action previously proposed by another team member.

Active Listening Behaviors

- ◆ *Informing*: informing other team members about facts or information.
- ◆ *Inquiring*: inquiring of other team members about an idea, action, fact, or information previously communicated by another team member.
- ◆ *Reflecting*: reflecting upon the perceived emotion of another team member by commenting on an observed behavior or a communicated comment.
- ◆ *Testing for understanding*: asking a question of another team member in order to attempt to clarify one's understanding of a previous communication.
- ◆ *Summarizing*: summarizing previous discussion or decision making in order to conclude an agenda item.

Responding Behaviors

- ◆ *Agreeing*: agreeing with or supporting another team member's ideas
- ◆ *Disagreeing*: disagreeing with or expressing lack of support for another team member's ideas.

Figure 5.5
Effective Communication Competencies

To move discussion along, the transition specialist might find it useful to propose actionable ideas. For example:

"I propose that we postpone discussion about purchasing a new computer desk chair for Lincoln until his PT has visited the college campus and assessed what they have available for him to use."

Active listening and responding skills are most likely to be needed when goals and roles are unclear, when team members generate lots of exciting new ideas, and when there is little consensus about desired goals or action steps. For example, stating factual information limits aimless discussion:

"The school district's policies on transportation do support Lincoln's goal of using the public bus, including allowing us to purchase a bus pass for him."

There will be other times when a transition specialist will find it useful to test understanding of what has been stated by asking the speaker a question, for example:

"Mr. Richards, are you suggesting that Monique could be successfully employed as a bagger in a grocery store if she learned to look at customers, greet them, and smile?"

Acknowledging disagreement and keeping a team moving forward is sometimes difficult but always important for a transition specialist. For example:

"I understand that you disagree with postponing discussion about Lincoln's independent living goals until our next meeting, but if the rest of the team does support this decision, can you live with the decision?"

Or even:

"I disagree, and I cannot commit my agency's money to this project, but I am willing to continue working with the team on other goals."

Likewise, summarizing discussion and proposed actions is important:

"Let me summarize what we decided at today's meeting. Between now and our next IEP meeting, Lincoln will use his journalism class assignments to explore possible affordable apartments near the college campus. He will ask his cousin whether he can spend a weekend with him in his apartment to learn more about independent living. His journalism teacher will help him set up an interview with a representative from Neighborhood Housing Resources to learn about local housing services. And finally, Lincoln's PT will spend time with Lincoln evaluating his independent living skills. Did I leave anything out?"

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

During an IEP meeting, a transition specialist is responsible for ensuring that assessment, planning, and goal discussion begin from the point of view of the student. The transition specialist is also responsible for guiding the team into dis-

discussions about the student's preferences, needs, interests, talents, and goals. There are three broad strategies for a transition specialist to use to involve students more in their transition planning activities: (a) model effective communication; (b) use person-centered planning; and (c) develop students' self-determination abilities.

Model Effective Communication Behaviors

Modeling effective communication is useful in increasing an adolescent's involvement during meetings because it provides an organized, positive, and engaging environment. Specifically, a transition specialist might ask questions to encourage the student to participate and to encourage the team to listen. Inquiring can be used to prompt a student to share a story or an interest or to seek clarification on something the student has already shared. For example:

"Derek, would you tell your IEP team the story you told me about why you want to work at Frank's Sporting Goods Store?"

Reflecting may also be used to encourage a student to participate in a discussion and to ensure that a student is comfortable with the content of a discussion. For example:

"Vong, how do you feel about Mr. Freeman's idea?"

Testing for understanding by asking a question about what has previously been stated is a third strategy that a transition specialist can use to ensure that what a student says is understood by the team. For example:

"Lincoln, are you telling us that you would like someone to help you make that telephone call?"

Each of these strategies will help the transition specialist and the rest of the team ensure the student's active involvement and understanding before the student agrees or disagrees with what has been shared.

Use Person-Centered Planning

Person-centered planning tools (see chapter 4) have been suggested as appropriate transition assessment and planning tools (Wehman, Everson, & Reid, 2001) because they attempt to position people with disabilities in more self-determined and leadership roles as members of their IEP teams. By encouraging young adults and their families to identify and express the young adult's wants and needs and to assume responsibility for goal setting and taking action, person-centered planning is clearly aligned with the goals of transition planning and interagency collaboration.

Develop Students' Self-Determination Abilities

Self-determination is a concept based on the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives. It encompasses a broad set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that enable an individual to set goals, make decisions, explore options, solve problems, speak up for himself or herself, understand what supports are needed for success, and evaluate outcomes (Martin & Marshall, 1996). Self-determination is a critical issue as a student approaches the age of majority and becomes legally responsible for control of and consent to his IEP. In addition, a small body of research is beginning to emerge supporting the relationship between self-determination abilities and positive transition outcomes among young adults with disabilities (e.g., Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997).

A transition specialist and other educators can support an adolescent's attainment of self-determination abilities as part of high school academic programming (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998). Figure 5.6 summarizes best-practice strategies for building self-determination abilities in adolescents. In addition, there are a number of commercially available curricula and methodologies. For more information on these curricula, see Wood, Test, Browder, Algozzine, and Karvonen (2000), *A Summary of Self-Determination Curricula and Components*, available online at http://www.uncc.edu/sdsp/sd_curricula.asp.

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

The transition specialist is also responsible for ensuring that assessment, planning and discussion incorporate the point of view of the student's family and, increasingly, the points of view and resources of other community members. The importance of family and community participation in transition planning at all team levels has been reinforced in recent legislation and in best-practices literature.

Family (including extended family members), along with neighbors, family friends, church members, and coworkers, can and should be active participants in person-centered planning activities. In addition, family must be involved in all IEP teams. These are the people who know the adolescent's experiences, preferences, dreams, hopes, and fears. They are also the people most connected to the adolescent, the ones most likely to witness and support the transition from educational services and experiences to adult services and experiences. Finally, they are the ones who are most frequently called upon to step up to the plate for the delivery of nonmandated adult services such as transportation, coordination of medical services, financial planning, and the promotion of social and recreation activities (see chapter 10).

Family members should also be involved, along with other community members, in community- and state-level teams, offering personal insight into how services and policies impact individuals with disabilities. As a team's goals are defined, the transition specialist will need to identify potential agencies and

- ◆ Ask students to define *self-determination*, and ask them to identify personal examples of self-determined actions. Encourage them to identify how teamwork with others helped them in the past or could help them in the future.
- ◆ Develop case studies of teenagers in situations requiring them to evidence self-determination abilities in order to progress toward their desired goals, and ask students to discuss appropriate responses that the case study teenagers might evidence.
- ◆ Assign students group projects, and ask them not only to complete the project as a team, but also to identify both effective and ineffective teaming behaviors that they used.
- ◆ Have students develop person-centered planning "maps" illustrating their postschool goals. Have them share with their peers, and encourage group feedback.
- ◆ Have students develop action plans of the steps and timelines they need to pursue in order to achieve their goals. Have them share with their peers and encourage group feedback.
- ◆ Provide examples of potential challenges and setbacks to their goals, and have them identify alternative action strategies. Encourage them to identify how teamwork with others helped them in the past or could help them in the future.
- ◆ Have students interview adults about their career goals and the actions they are undertaking to achieve them. Encourage them to identify how teamwork with others helped them.
- ◆ Invite guest speakers—especially successful adults with disabilities—to discuss their impressions of self-determination and personal goals and actions. Encourage them to identify how teamwork with others helped them.
- ◆ Have students identify personal goals and actions, and ask them to self-evaluate their actions and the outcomes of their actions. Have them identify potential alternative action strategies.

Figure 5.6

Suggested Activities and Methods to Guide Self-Determination

organizations along with the specific community members who are most appropriate to serve on teams. The transition specialist will also need to help these members understand and assume their roles as interagency team members.

Provide Family and Community Outreach and Support

Families can support adolescents' attainment of self-determination abilities in a number of ways. For example, families can encourage adolescents to make age-appropriate choices, take age-appropriate risks, and learn from the natural consequences of their choices. Families can encourage adolescents to learn about their disabilities and to assume an appropriate level of responsibility for managing their health and medical care and maintenance of their assistive devices and equipment. Families can also encourage adolescents to set goals for themselves and to plan the steps needed to accomplish the goals.

Valuable Family Supports

Parent training and information centers help families:

- ◆ Obtain special education services for a family member.
- ◆ Understand a family member's disabilities and abilities.
- ◆ Develop and use effective communication skills.
- ◆ Develop and use effective problem-solving and conflict-management strategies.
- ◆ Improve children's school and community behaviors.
- ◆ Obtain information from national, state, and local resources.
- ◆ Understand and use IDEA and other laws impacting disability services.
- ◆ Collaborate as team members with educational personnel and other professionals who assist families.

Parent training and information centers may provide:

- ◆ Workshops to help families develop knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- ◆ Dissemination of written and audiovisual information and materials.
- ◆ Individualized assistance targeted around specific family needs.
- ◆ Assistance in developing and nurturing family organizations.
- ◆ Public awareness of disability issues.
- ◆ Low-income/minority/at-risk family outreach.

To find out more about parent training and information centers in your area, visit the Technical Assistance ALLIANCE for Parent Centers at <http://www.taalliance.org/Centers/PTIs.htm>

Successful family and community involvement in transition planning depends on the identification of future, visionary goals for adolescents and the creation of clear and valued roles for family and community members. First, family members must be involved in the process of articulating goals for their transition-age children. This may be accomplished through person-centered planning, home visits, high school open houses, parent training and information centers (PTIs), and other family outreach and support groups. The transition specialist must encourage use of strategies that increase the participation of families in this process, especially families from diverse cultural backgrounds and those with low incomes.

The competencies needed by a transition specialist continue to evolve. Along with information on educational programming and mandates, a transition specialist must be able to share information with families about adult community options such as income maintenance programs, health and medical insurance programs, workforce development entities, affordable housing programs, specialized transportation programs, employment programs, and postsecondary

education programs. A transition specialist must be able to identify and coordinate with these community resources and be able to provide students and families with contact people and agencies, telephone numbers, Web sites, and other resources to ensure that they are able to have their specific questions answered and their needs met.

Second, clear and valued roles for family and community members must be defined and promoted. Families are not only experts about their children; they are also experts in many other areas of adult life. For example, they may be employees and employers with connections to the local workforce. They may be homeowners, landlords, builders or contractors, or real estate agents with expertise about the real estate market, home maintenance, or budgeting. They may be members of local gyms, health clubs, or YMCAs with ideas about health, fitness, and social networks. They may be church members or civic leaders with connections to numerous people and groups. Families also have connections to their own network of friends, coworkers, employers, church members, and neighbors. Any one of these people may be the resource needed to secure a job, support a carpool, provide a helping hand at a health club, or serve as a real estate agent or landlord.

Like family involvement, community involvement may be accomplished in a number of different ways, including person-centered planning, PTI training and outreach activities, local interagency teams, and systematic outreach to civic and church groups.

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING ADULT SERVICE AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Involving adult service agencies in transition services requires interagency collaboration at all levels—student, community, and state. Although the participation of adult service agencies has been endorsed in recent IDEA legislation and in descriptions of effective transition models (e.g., Aspel et al., 1999; Certo et al., 2003; Everson et al., 2005), few states and communities have made a commitment to truly collaborative interagency teaming. To improve collaboration between education and adult service personnel at all levels, a transition specialist must join with others to aggressively pursue two components.

Encourage Teambuilding and Teamwork

First, teambuilding and teamwork, as illustrated in this chapter, must be viewed not as a desired practice, but as an essential practice. This means that a transition specialist must complete coursework in teaming as well as practica with interagency teamwork experiences. Classroom experiences must enable a transition specialist to complete role-play and case study assignments and be assigned to teams to practice and evidence teamwork skills. Practica experiences must enable the transition specialist to attend meetings and observe team leaders and