

Transition: A Frame of Reference

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The purpose of this paper is to provide the reader with a basic awareness and understanding of the concept and practice of transition as it applies to youth and young adults with disabilities. First, the evolving definitions of transition services are presented. These definitions are then examined, along with the developing program models that have provided the operational framework for the implementation of transition services and activities.

Definitions of Transition

OSER's 1984 Definition

When the transition movement began as a federal initiative in 1984, Madeleine Will, the Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, defined transition as:

. . . an outcome oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment. Transition is a period that includes high school, the point of graduation, additional post secondary education or adult services, and the initial years of employment. Transition is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and the risks of life. (Will, 1984, p. 1)

Will identified different levels of services or means of crossing this bridge (no special services, time-limited services, and ongoing services) that an individual with disabilities might need in order to obtain his or her desired employment outcome.

Halpern's 1985 Definition

Halpern (1985) broadened Will's definition to include community adjustment as a desired adult outcome. In addition to employment, he suggested a more comprehensive approach to transition that included the components of residential adjustment and the establishment of desirable social and interpersonal networks. Halpern (1989) further proposed that community adjustment would be enhanced by developing personal factors such as one's self-esteem and empowering the individual to select his or her own goals and make decisions. Halpern's concept of transition focused the developers of transition programs on a broader array of desired student outcomes.

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Brolin's 1989 Definition

In 1989, Brolin, a national leader in the field, wrote:

Transitions occur throughout one's lifetime and include both paid work and the work roles of students, homemakers, family members, volunteers, and retirees, as well as productive recreational, avocational and leisure activities. Many people encounter problems when making various transitions. Adults in transition, especially many of those with disabilities, sometimes become confused and need special assistance to help them solve their problems and make wise decisions. The "transition from school-to-work" concept is inextricably related to the career development concept that has been theorized and implemented in various education and agency settings for many years. (Brolin & Schatzman, 1989, p. 22-23)

Brolin (1993) expanded the transition concept further using the familiar bridge model by linking elementary and secondary students not only to employment but also to community living, integration, and socialization. He identified several key components that had to be effectively implemented if successful transition services were to be provided. These components included: "interagency cooperation; individualized transition plans; employer incentives; supported employment (for some individuals); a functional career curriculum; collaborative efforts with employers, agencies, and parents; and a postsecondary support and follow-up system to ensure community and job adjustment" (Brolin, 1995, p. 207).

IDEA's 1990 Definition

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (Public Law 101-476) amended and changed the name of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142). Incorporating the increasing broader focus on student outcomes, this new legislation mandated and defined transition services as:

a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living and community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall take into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. [IDEA, PL 101-476, 20 U.S.C. Chapter 33, Section 140 (a)(19)]

Significantly, the 1997 Reauthorization of the IDEA mandated initiation of transition planning by no later than age 14 and required integration of transition services into other aspects of the student's program (Section 614). Therefore, from a legislative standpoint, transition now requires looking at the entire period of education from age 14 (middle school) to graduation, postsecondary education, and employment.

CEC's 1994 Division of Career Development and Transition Definition

Seeking to create a framework for continuing development in the field of transition services, the Division of Career Development and Transition (DCDT) adopted the following definition in 1994.

Transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in post-secondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships. The process of enhancing transition involves the participation and coordination of school programs, adult agency services, and natural supports within the community. The foundations for transition should be laid during the elementary and middle school years, guided by the broad concept of career development. Transition planning should begin no later than age 14, and students should be encouraged, to the full extent of their capabilities, to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for such planning. (Halpern, 1994, p. 117)

A Few Comparisons

Just as the federal definition of transition is represented by that of OSERS (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services), the profession's definition is represented by DCDT's (Division of Career Development and Transition, Council for Exceptional Children), as originated by Halpern. Table 1 (page 4) presents a comparative profile of these two contemporary definitions (Browning, 1997). Aside from their many similarities, an important qualitative difference between them is the emphasis placed upon the student as consumer. First, while both definitions call for consumer input into the development of the transition plan, the profession's position is that students should be the primary architects of their own future to the *fullest* extent of their *capability*. In this respect, the nature of each plan differs depending upon the individual, and the extent to which the blueprint is the student's own rests upon his or her capability in drafting it. Furthermore, the student should be *encouraged* to assume a *maximum* amount of *responsibility* for the development of their own plan. By contrast, OSERS's definition subtly implies that someone other than the consumer is primarily responsible for determining the student's needs and developing the plan to address them. While those needs are to include students' *interests* and *preferences*, one senses that the students simply must be allowed the opportunity to provide such input into the larger design.

A second noticeable difference is that DCDT's outcomes are more consumer oriented in a variety of action roles (*participating, maintaining, becoming, experiencing, and interacting* with others). These verbs signify that transition success is to be earmarked by the consumer's involvement in the process of assuming adult roles. Third, with respect to the transition process, DCDT's definition focuses on the consumer's *growing-up stages* from adolescent to young adulthood. By contrast, the OSERS definition refers to the transition movement as if it were a relocation from place A (school) to place B (post-school). The first definition emphasizes how consumers should behave in various settings, whereas the latter emphasizes where they will reside. Finally, with reference to time-frame, DCDT includes a starting point of no later than 14 years of age, drawing upon the field of career education and its concept of career development over time, beginning in the elementary school years. OSERS's time frame is left to the more static vantage points of 'school' to 'post-school.'

Table1: A Comparison Between Two Highly Regarded Transition Definitions

Criteria	OSERS 1990	DCDT 1994
Transition	movement from school to post-school	change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · instruction · community experiences · the development of employment · other post-school adult living objectives, and <u>when appropriate</u>, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation 	coordination of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · school programs, · adult agency services, and · natural supports within the community
Outcome Goals	An outcome-oriented process that promotes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · postsecondary education · vocational training · integrated employment (including supported employment) · continuing and adult education · adult services · independent living, or community participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · employment · participating in post-secondary education · maintaining a home · becoming appropriately involved in the community · experiencing satisfactory personal participation successful · adult living · interacting with others · and working
Time Frame	school to post-school activities	Foundations for transition should be laid during <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the elementary and middle school years, · guided by the broad concept of career development. Transition planning should begin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · no later than age 14

<p>Person Centered</p>	<p>. . . activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's <u>preferences</u> and <u>interests</u></p>	<p>Students should be encouraged, to the full extent of their capabilities, to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for such planning.</p>
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In summary, transition has always been considered an *outcome oriented process*, regardless of the definition being considered. This issue of outcome is critical when we consider that the high school’s goal is to prepare its students for a successful transition from school to a meaningful post-school life. And, it is within this context that we are faced with the more specific question of what we mean by a “meaningful” adult life, as well as how we might measure it as being successful.

Models of Transition

Work-Study Model

The 1960s gave birth to what later would become the extensive literature on vocational preparation for people with disabilities. The intended goal of successful employment focused educators on equipping students with general work habits, skills, knowledge, and attitudes. The device for accomplishing this goal was the establishment of the work-study program model as a transition strategy to more effectively assist students as they move from school to the workplace. Work-study models provided integrated academic, social, and vocational curricula, including community-based work experiences, to prepare students for a meaningful and productive adult life. Halpern (1992) noted that work-study program models had many elements in common with transition programs of today, including a focus on vocational instruction, community experiences, and interagency linkages.

Through these work-study programs, community employment became a legitimate part of the school curriculum and rehabilitation counselors became an agency partner with the assigned schools they served. As a result, students with disabilities experienced education and school much more relevant to their future lives as they learned basic knowledge and skills that led to employment and active community life.

Career Education Model

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the concept of career education emerged and became a national priority and pre-transition program model. Professionals influenced by the career development movement began to adopt a more longitudinal and expansive life-centered approach to students with disabilities and their preparation for adult life.

Brolin (1995) defined career education as “a lifelong process that infuses a career emphasis in all subjects, grades K-12, including job training, apprenticeship programs, mentoring, career exploration, and the nonpaid work done as a family member, citizen, and leisure seeker” (p. 53). Hoyt (1987) identified seven major goals of career education, many of which were to become central tenets of the transition movement:

(a) to help persons in career awareness, career exploration, and decision-making; (b) to equip persons with general employability and adaptability skills; (c) to promote and implement private sector and public school system partnerships; (d) to interface education and work so that the student may make better choices; (e) to reform education by infusing a “careers” emphasis in academic classrooms; (f) to make work a meaningful part of the individual’s life; and (g) to protect freedom of choice by reducing prejudice and stereotyping.

Several of the early career education curriculum models successfully used with students with disabilities included (a) the life-centered, competency-based model (Brolin, 1978); (b) school-based career development and transition education model (Clark, 1979); (c) ecological inventory (Brown, Branston, Hamre-Nietupski, Pumpian, Certo, & Gruenewald, 1979); (d) experienced-based model (Larson, 1981); and (e) career development model (Egelston-Dodd & DeCaro, 1982). Each of these models presented a viable method for appropriately blending academic and functional life skills. While evolving over a 30 year period, the career education approach continues today to be important for educators to consider as they develop curriculum to meet contemporary needs of students with disabilities in regard to productive, competitive work and meaningful avocational activities.

Special Needs Vocational Education Model

The special needs vocational education models grew out of the Education Amendments of 1976, Public Law 94-482, Vocational Education Section provisions, which set aside 10% of each state’s federal vocational education grant for youth with disabilities. These models required that students be provided access to all appropriate vocational education classes with modified occupational content and supplemental services when needed. This requirement resulted in a continuum of vocational options ranging from general vocational class placement to segregated vocational education programs. Examples of this model included a school-based career development and transition education model for adolescents with disabilities (Clark, 1979), the Ohio Special Needs Vocational Model (Flexer, Simmons, Luft, & Baer, 2001), and the Three-Stage Vocational Transition Model for Youth with Disabilities (Wehman, Kregel, & Barcus, 1985). Unfortunately, when the “specific 10% set aside” vanished and the call for higher academic standards was issued, many of these model options disappeared.

The “Bridges” Model

In 1984, Madeleine Will, Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), U.S. Department of Education, established transition from school-to-work as a priority of the decade. Among other things, Will proposed a model for transition from school-to-work that emphasized “bridges” or service linkages between the high school and employment (Will, 1984). Her model identified different levels of services (no special services, time-limited services, and ongoing services) that an individual with disabilities might need in order to obtain his or her desired employment outcome. The model started with the premise that a solid foundation of functional curricula was essential as the student crossed one of the three support bridges, depending upon his or her need for further training and support.

Community Adjustment Model

In 1985, Halpern proposed his community adjustment transition model as an alternative to the Bridges Model (Halpern, 1985). Based upon his research, this model broadened Will's total focus on employment to incorporate community adjustment and its three related components: employment, residential environments, and social and interpersonal networks. To impact the overall community adjustment (quality of life) for students with disabilities, Halpern (1985) advocated transition programs that built upon these three related components to create a solid foundation for needed support services. After much discussion, his model was largely adopted as the basic structure for defining transition services in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, leading to community participation, community living, and employment (Johnson & Rusch, 1993).

Summary

The transition goal is for our high schools to prepare their students with disabilities to successfully assume young adult roles and responsibilities. Thus, the issue of transition outcomes remains a critical dimension when considering what we mean by young adult roles and responsibilities. Will's (1984) initial definition only included "employment" as a post-school outcome. Since then, a variety of life goals have come to be deemed as important outcomes for students with disabilities. Halpern (1985), for example, challenged the employment-only definition by offering an alternative definition that also included "community adjustment" considerations in terms of residential environments and the quality of social and interpersonal networks. The legislative definition (1990) referred to transition as an outcome oriented process that included "post secondary education," "vocational training," "integrated employment," "continuing and adult education," "adult services," "independent living," and "community participation." And finally, DCDT's professional definition (1994) views outcomes from the standpoint of emerging adult roles in the community, including "employment," "participating in post secondary education," "maintaining a home," "becoming appropriately involved in the community," and "experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships." Finally, in the 1990s, quality of life issues came to the forefront as a critical component of any transition model that had to be considered, since individuals with disabilities had a high likelihood of living in poverty, being victims of crime, and having health and medical concerns (Doren, Bullis, & Benz, 1996; West, 1991).

Over the past 40 years, numerous transition models have been drafted and implemented. These models have provided the operational framework from which to design programs and deliver services. Contemporary transition models include many elements from past models, such as the work-study model, career education model, special needs model, bridges model, and community adjustment model. Flexer, Simmons, Luft, and Baer (2001), for example, highlight common elements of the 60s work-study model that exist in transition practices of today. These elements include (a) part-time work experiences combined with functional academics with credit toward graduation for work experience; (b) the classroom teacher as a work coordinator working along with the rehabilitation counselor as part of the school program; and (c) interagency agreements utilized to combine school transition, including work-based learning, and rehabilitation services. Finally, the Bridge's Model of the 80s has remained until this day a cornerstone for

transition efforts, even though it has since been expanded by many other professionals (e.g., Brolin, 1993; Brolin & Schatzman, 1989; Halpern, 1985; Rusch & Phelps, 1987; Wehman, Kregel, & Barcus, 1985).

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