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Introduction

In this issue, we explore the ecology of transition. Transition is certainly not a new concept. At the conclusion of the Second World War, after many individuals with disabilities had successfully served the war effort, the pressure to develop vocational training programs began in earnest (Dearden, 1952). Vocational training efforts continued in a similar manner until follow-up studies revealed that many programs were only marginally effective and often grounded in narrow concepts of work. Will's (1983) model of transition was an initial recognition that transition services had to become more varied to meet the needs of a diverse population including individuals who would require long-term support. Halpern (1985) and others quickly realized that transitional outcomes included many aspects beyond employment. Community adjustment, social skills, and independent living skills were viewed as essential components of transitional programs. Subsequently, practitioners and researchers recognized that successful transitional processes result from highly sophisticated interactive networks. Transition is not just the process of going from high school to adult life. Transition is never completed. It is a continual process of adapting to the changes in one's environment.

Fig. 1, depicting the ecology of transition, is an adaptation of a model first devised by Halpern (1985) that illustrates that services available to students with disabilities are shaped by both ideology and science. Because these forces serve to define the transition services of students with disabilities, such factors have affected the manner in which we train educators to serve students in transition as well as how programming is carried out. It is the melding of ideology and science that has defined the importance we assign to particular ideas and if these ideas are formalized into law. The ADA and IDEA are examples of ideologies that have been formalized into legislative

mandates that now broadly affect programming and services available to individuals with disabilities. Although educators in the field of special education continue to search for 'best practices' to guide our efforts, some educators would argue that services for students with disabilities lag dangerously behind ideology and science. Given the relative recency of the mandate for transition and the variety of roles and responsibilities educators may be asked to assume under the mandate, it is no surprise that service delivery personnel are playing 'catch-up'. However, in order to provide services to students with disabilities as they transition from school to adult roles, we as a profession, must seek to close the gap between best practice and actual practice. Although closing this gap represents a sizable challenge, Fig. 1 provides a useful framework for analysis and synthesis of the complexities of transition and link the articles that are presented in this issue.

The first two articles reflect the roles and processes of iterative science. The two outcome studies (Johnson et al. and Lin et al.) provide information that must be looped back to practitioners who can then modify transition services or transition contexts. The Johnson et al. study is an apt point of embarkation for this special issue because it provides a broad analysis of the transitional outcomes for 398 young adults with severe disabilities and is thus a statement of the current status of the effectiveness of transition programs. In addition to reporting that outcomes continue to be disappointing and include isolation, dependence and instability Johnson and colleagues also examined variables that affect outcomes such as personal choice, family needs and access to community services. Their findings provide critical information for necessary modifications to the contexts of family dynamics and training, politics and economics. McAfee and McNaughton's research is much narrower in scope being focused

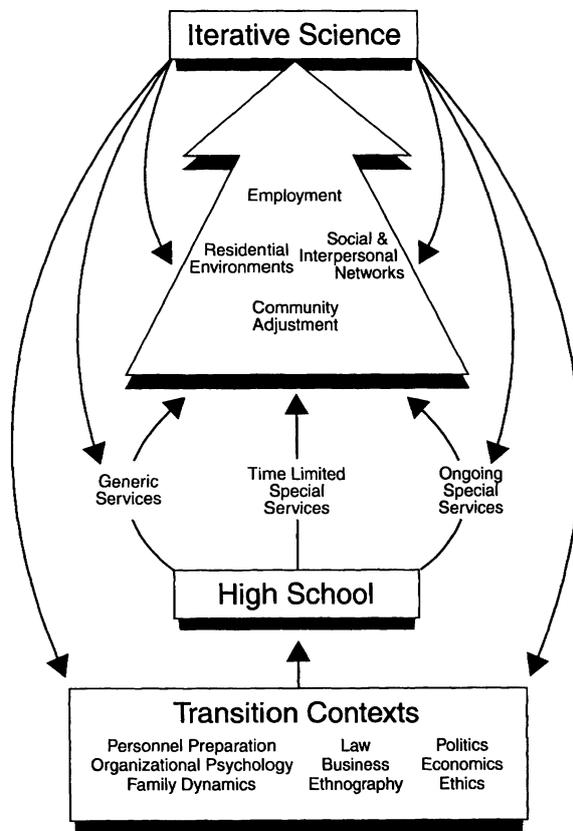


Fig. 1. The ecology of transition.

on job satisfaction, but it also provides information that has specific implications for transition processes (e.g. secondary education) and contexts (e.g. business and industry). For example, it is apparent that the educational and vocational training background of workers with disabilities has a significant impact on job satisfaction. Furthermore, overall job satisfaction appears to be determined more by the individual's preparation than by the type of job they perform.

Wolfe and Blanchett discuss the need to address socio-sexual concerns in transition plans; Schleien and Ray highlight the necessity of leisure/recreation programming for students with disabilities. Both sets of authors reinforce the concept of transition as planning for adult adjustment in a variety of domain areas. Further, both sets of authors provide a process for educators to use to create holistic transition plans for students

with disabilities and provide suggestions about areas of programming that need further attention.

The final three articles included in this issue are directed towards descriptions of the contexts of transition including the legal/political, personnel preparation, and organizational psychology contexts. This section begins with an analysis of the 1992 Rehabilitation Act Amendments by Wendy Wood and David Test. Wood and Test believe that there is widespread misunderstanding and lack of knowledge of the Rehabilitation Act. Their analysis is presented in a very readable question and answer format with numerous specific references to the law and implementing regulations. The information is particularly useful for individuals with disabilities, advocates and secondary/post-secondary service providers who seek access to and services from vocational rehabilitation agencies.

Obviously, transitional endeavors, whether they be scientific inquiry or direct service to individuals with disabilities, are only as effective as the programs that provide training to the professionals who conduct the research and provide the services. Flexer et al. describe the efforts at Kent State University to develop and implement a graduate interdisciplinary transition training program. The key element of the program is experiential learning in a variety of transition environments and agencies. Students develop an understanding of transition interventions, political contexts and organizational psychology. The authors conclude their discussion with outcome data and an analysis of the problems encountered as the program was developed.

This issue concludes with an article by Alberto et al. It is fitting that this article is the final discussion as it is perhaps the broadest and most integrative of the seven papers included. Alberto and his colleagues discuss outcomes research and the implications for focused change in the contexts of transition including family dynamics, politics and policy, and the specific transition processes of curriculum development and application, development of social networks and self-determination. Thus the discussion comes full cycle from the iterative science addressed by Johnson

et al. and McAfee, through the analysis of specific processes presented by Wolfe et al. to the broader syntheses of Wood and Test, Flexer et al., and Alberto and his colleagues.

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