Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment: The Position of the Division on Career Development and Transition

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What is This?
Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment: The Position of the Division on Career Development and Transition

Debra A. Neubert, PhD1 and Pamela J. Leconte, EdD2

Abstract

Age-appropriate transition assessment (TA) serves as the foundation for youth with disabilities to identify measurable postsecondary goals and to determine necessary transition services to pursue such goals during the secondary school years. This position paper provides guidelines for special educators, transition specialists, and other members of the Individualized Education Program team to work with youth with disabilities, their families, and interagency personnel in providing ongoing TA. The Division on Career Development and Transition endorses this position paper, which identifies federal policy; definitions, terms, and purposes; a conceptual framework and process; and competencies for personnel involved in age-appropriate TA.

Keywords

transition services, age-appropriate transition assessment, self-determination, Summary of Performance, transition specialists, IDEA 2004, measurable postsecondary goals, functional vocational evaluation

Transitions occur for all individuals at various critical junctures throughout life as roles and environments change. To successfully transition from one role or setting to another, an individual and the people who support the individual must explore options in current or new environments and then determine the best match. For some youth, such as those with disabilities and others who face significant educational and vocational challenges, policy mandates and innovative practices are needed to ensure they learn skills that are needed to reach optimal outcomes as they transition from one life role or environment to the next. Transition assessment (TA) represents innovative practices that are promoted but not defined by federal mandates.

For several decades, youth with disabilities have faced challenges transitioning from school to employment, postsecondary education, and community living; federal mandates to address these issues through transition service requirements have been evident in special education since 1990. Challenges in preparing all youth for a changing workplace and the need for increased access to postsecondary education have surfaced again in policy initiatives that emphasize college and career readiness standards (Dougherty, 2010; Test, Cease-Cook, Fowler, & Bartholomew, 2011). These issues have been addressed to varying degrees in previous educational reform, career education, transition, and interagency initiatives since the 1970s. The current challenge to the field is to incorporate what we have learned from past experiences and evidence-based research as we offer youth meaningful TA that will truly inform their postsecondary goals. This includes collecting and compiling information that leads to an understanding of their unique needs, strengths, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of career and college readiness. The purposes of this article are to (a) review policies that facilitate TA; (b) define key terms, purposes, and assumptions that guide the TA process for youth with disabilities; (c) provide a framework for conceptualizing and implementing age-appropriate TA; and (d) identify issues in assigning or preparing multiple stakeholders involved in the process.

The Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) endorses this position paper to assist youth, families, and practitioners in demystifying and/or conceptualizing the TA process. The benefits of using information gathered during the TA process for youth are as follows:

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• provides access to and participation in meaningful courses of study during the secondary years along with needed transition services,
• identifies desired and measurable postsecondary goals, and
• develops Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and compiles the Summary of Performance (SOP) document to expedite connections and supports to postsecondary environments.

Federal Policy
Policy makers at the federal level have long recognized that appropriate assessment is necessary for youth to successfully participate in career and technology programs, general education programs, and school-to-work transition programs, and to receive special education services, vocational rehabilitation services, and other employment services. To ensure that all youth with disabilities have access to and can participate in age-appropriate TA services, youth, their families, and local education agency and interagency personnel must understand key terms and mandates in the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 and the IDEA Final Regulations (Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP], 2006). Currently, there are no federal definitions of age-appropriate transition, functional vocational evaluation (FVE), or suggested methods for students with high- and low-incidence disabilities. Rather, it is largely left to State and local education agencies to determine how they conceptualize and provide age-appropriate TA. In fact, special education personnel often serve as the decision makers for when, where, and how they will implement TA for students with disabilities. This is problematic, as many states did not have clear guidelines or policies for TA in 2008, when Morningstar and Liss conducted a national survey.

Promoting an understanding of federal policies can be addressed in preservice, in-service, graduate certificates, or professional development modules. Knowledge and skills for leadership and policy from the Special Education Transition Specialists Standards (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2009) include history of national transition initiatives, transition-related laws and policy, and emerging issues and trends that potentially affect the school community and the mission of the school.

Transition Services
It is important to note that there is no mandate or reference to the term transition plan or transition goals in the IDEA. These terms continue to surface both in practice and the literature. Rather, the law makes reference to postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate assessments and transition services. The term transition services has been part of special education policy since 1990, and the definition was expanded considerably in IDEA 2004 (Section 300.43) to include coordinated activities that are

• designed within a results-oriented process;
• focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the youth to facilitate movement from school to postschool activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated and supported employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;
• based on the youth’s individual needs, taking into account the youth’s strengths, preferences, and interests; and
• related to instruction, related services, community experiences, employment and other postschool adult living objectives, and the acquisition of daily living skills and FVE (when appropriate).

Transition services must be included in the IEP by the time a youth reaches age 16 or younger when appropriate (IDEA, 2004). More than half of the states require that transition services be included in the IEP by the time a student reaches age 14. Therefore, it is important that youth learn self-determination skills as early as possible—so they can play prominent and leading roles in crafting their postsecondary goals and annual IEP goals. According to IDEA 2004 (Section 300.302), the IEP must include,

• appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate assessments—related training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills, and
• the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the youth in reaching those goals.

Indicator 13
Postsecondary goals and age-appropriate TA are tied to Indicator 13 in IDEA 2004. Each state is required to have a state performance plan on 20 indicators; Indicator 13 asks for a report of the percentage of youth ages 16 and above with an IEP that includes,

appropriate measurable postsecondary goals updated annually and based upon an age appropriate transition assessments, transition services, including courses of study, that will reasonably enable the youth to meet those postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals related to the youth’s transition services needs. (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B))

To assist state and local education agencies to collect this information, the National Secondary Transition Technical
Assistance Center (NSTTAC; n.d.-a) has materials and personnel development resources at http://www.nsttac.org/content/what-indicator-13. The Indicator 13 Checklist provides states with a structure for collecting data to comply with IDEA and a checklist that includes the following:

- Is there evidence that the measurable postsecondary goal(s) and annual goals were based on age-appropriate TA(s)?
- Is the use of TA(s) for the postsecondary goal(s) mentioned in the IEP or evident in the youth’s file?

**Documenting Results and Recommendations**

There is no standard format for profiling TA results as a youth moves through the secondary years. It is important for a school system or a school team to decide how to collect and compile TA data and the roles of personnel involved. It is also important that the youth be responsible for compiling (or assisting) TA data and using it in the IEP process to develop annual goals and postschool outcomes.

A one- or two-page profile that details a student’s needs, strengths, preferences, and interests when they are aged 14 and 16 should provide the foundation for documenting TA data. The youth, at these ages, should be taught to share this information in some format with the IEP team. As more information becomes available through the ongoing TA process, additional components of the TA profile or SOP can include progress in meeting IEP goals through instruction, related services, and other experiences; progress toward preparing for postsecondary goals (and continued interest in a specific goal); exploration of secondary and postsecondary options related to postsecondary goals; and recommendations for supports, accommodations, services, and technology needed in school and the community.

IDEA 2004 mandates that youth be invited to their IEP meetings each time transition services are discussed (Section 300.321). This law also mandates that each student with disability exit school with a SOP document that includes a summary of academic and functional performance along with recommendations on how to assist the individual in meeting postsecondary goals (IDEA, 2004). While state education agencies determine the format and the name of the SOP, a number of national organizations, including DCDT, participated in a national forum to support the use of collecting and transferring assessment information to postschool providers by 2005. Research and practice have now informed the field on how to teach students to develop the SOP and how to transfer assessment data to the SOP for rehabilitation or college personnel (e.g., Izzo & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006; Leconte, 2006; Martin, Van Dycke, D’Ottavio, & Nickerson, 2007; Martin, Zhang, & Test, 2012; Shaw, 2006; Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, & Leconte, 2007; Wehmeyer, Field, & Thoma, 2012). Student participation in the IEP meeting and techniques to incorporate self-management, self-advocacy, and self-monitoring are also identified as evidence-based practices (Test et al., 2009). Therefore, TA must incorporate principles of choice and self-determination as follows:

- The youth and family are free to express their desires and hopes for the future during assessment and at IEP meetings; the youth’s postsecondary goal is not dependent on the available “programs or services” within a school or the community;
- The youth is taught to develop and update annually (to the extent possible) the SOP by using the results of TA to detail his or her needs, strengths, preferences and interests, postsecondary goals, accommodations, supports, and technology needs;
- The youth is taught an appropriate technique to present the results of TA at the IEP meeting when transition services are discussed annually. This is best accomplished through universal design for learning (UDL) principles using multiple means of expression (e.g., oral presentation, written profile, PowerPoint presentation with text to speech features or pictures).

**Definitions, Purposes, and Assumptions**

TA includes concepts and methods from career assessment, ecological or functional assessment, person-centered planning, vocational assessment, and self-determination across service delivery systems. Age-appropriate TAs should be used to plan transition services and postsecondary goals for youth with disabilities throughout their secondary years.

**Definitions**

TA. DCDT endorsed a position paper on TA before the term appeared in federal policy (Sitlington, Neubert, & Leconte, 1997). The following definition takes into account the mandates in IDEA 2004, along with research and practice that continually inform the field:

Age-appropriate transition assessment is an ongoing process of collecting information on the youth’s needs, strengths, preferences, and interests as they relate to measurable postsecondary goals and the annual goals that will help facilitate attainment of postsecondary goals. This process includes a careful match between the characteristics of the youth and the requirements of secondary environments and postsecondary environments along with recommendations for accommodations, supports, and technology to ensure the match. Youth and their families are taught how to use the results of transition assessment to drive the transition
requirements in the IEP process, develop the SOP document, and advocate for needed or desired supports to succeed in meeting postsecondary goals.

**Age-appropriate.** IDEA 2004 does not define *age-appropriate*, and state policies vary regarding when TA should begin or what it should entail (Morningstar & Liss, 2008). Age-appropriate TA means that the process is based on methods and planning that take into account a youth’s chronological and developmental ages.

**Ongoing assessment.** Assessment is an ongoing process that requires the youth, family, IEP team, and personnel outside the school system to plan and deliver age-appropriate TA methods, and to collect, compile, and use the data at least on an annual basis in the IEP process. Once a youth’s needs, strengths, preferences, and interests are identified by age 14 or 16 along with their desired postschool outcomes, ongoing assessment includes,

- monitoring to collect data on the youth’s progress toward his or her postschool outcomes, transition services, and academic and functional achievement;
- planning to address the youth’s changing needs, strengths, preferences and interests related to postsecondary education, independent living, and employment outcomes; and
- instruction to the youth and family on how to use the results of TA in the IEP and the SOP as new information becomes available on the youth and additional environments.

**FVE.** While the term *FVE* has been included in the IDEA definition of transition services since 1997, it is not defined in the law or final regulations (OSEP, 2006). This has caused state and local policy makers, and implementers to struggle with how to comply with this part of the law.

FVE was defined in a white paper sponsored by Vocational Evaluation and Career Assessment Professionals (VECAP; Castiglione et al., 2009) with input from secondary special education teachers and administrators, vocational evaluators, transition specialists, related services personnel, and parents. As DCDT has a history of working collaboratively with this organization (Smith et al., 1992), we recommend the following definition for FVE:

A systematic assessment process used to identify practical, useable career, and employment-related information about an individual. FVE incorporates multiple formal and informal assessment techniques to observe, describe, measure, and predict vocational potential. A distinctive feature in all FVEs is that they include (and may emphasize) individualized experiential and performance-based opportunities, in natural vocational or work environments.

FVE is often included on IEP forms under the umbrella term of *transition services*. Due to interagency collaboration between special education and rehabilitation programs, some transitioning youth may participate in an assessment process outside the school system, which may be referred to as *career assessment, vocational evaluation, or FVE*. When this occurs, the assessment data should be reviewed and used at the IEP meeting. When assessment information is exchanged and used by all, it results in better planning for youth and resource sharing between education and community agencies.

**Purpose**

The purposes of age-appropriate TA include assisting youth with disabilities to

- identify their needs, strengths, preferences, and interests in relation to measurable goals for postsecondary education, independent living, and employment;
- identify a focus of study and transition services to facilitate the attainment of postsecondary goals;
- identify accommodations, supports, related services, and technology needs during the secondary years;
- determine annual goals to learn the skills to facilitate attainment of postsecondary goals;
- determine progress annually toward postsecondary goal(s) and annual IEP goals;
- identify self-determination skills needed to participate in IEP meetings, to pursue postschool goals, and to participate in general education and work experiences;
- identify and explore specific postsecondary environments that match measurable postsecondary goals (e.g., types of postsecondary institutions, employment options);
- stimulate interest and motivation to formulate and, eventually, achieve postschool academic, employment, and adult living goals;
- provide valid information and recommendations in the SOP to advocate for needed and desired services to meet postschool goals; and
- identify accommodations, supports, services, technology, and funding needed upon exit from school to learn, live, and work in the community.

**Assumptions**

Assumptions to guide age-appropriate TA are updated from the *Position Paper of the Interdisciplinary Council on Vocational Evaluation and Assessment* (Smith et al., 1992) that DCDT endorsed 20 years ago. The endorsed assumptions follow.
Humanistic. Assessment activities are designed, planned, and implemented with the person in mind, to benefit the person, and to focus on capacities and capabilities rather than disabilities or deficits. The TA process occurs in a strengths-based context, and all activity assumes that environments may be adapted to accommodate and support the youth rather than the individual adapting to the environment or changing his or her desired goal. All aspects of assessment require the youth’s input and involvement.

Holistic. The youth and his or her environments, circumstances, resources, relationships, and culture are taken into account when planning for TA and using the results. The youth is not viewed separately from his or her family background, living conditions, ethnic heritage, and cultural mores.

Therapeutic. This assumption presupposes that (a) assessment is a learning process for the youth and others, (b) growth can result, and (c) one’s life or circumstances can be changed or improved (Leconte, 1994b).

Equitable. Every youth has an opportunity to access and participate in TA. Each person can benefit as much as another—This assumes that the process is designed and implemented within a universally designed space and that all aspects of the assessment take place within the context of UDL (Leconte, Smith, & Johnson, 2007; Smith, Leconte, & Vitelli, 2012). When a UDL framework encases the TA process, there is increased congruence between the learner and his or her environment, and expanded career options can be considered. Just as curb cuts allow youth with disabilities to use sidewalks, they also allow parents with strollers, older citizens pulling grocery carts, and delivery persons pushing carts easier access. In the same vein, UDL allows all youth multiple ways to access and participate in assessment activities, and learn about various forms of social media and digital technology. Using UDL as a framework has been supported within the context of delivering secondary content instruction and transition services to youth with disabilities in school and community (Kortering, McClannon, & Braziel, 2008; Test & Bartholomew, 2011; Thoma, Bartholomew, & Scott, 2009).

The TA Process

This section describes the planning component of the TA process and a three-part, foundational framework for practices. When TA is viewed as a process that requires a team approach, it becomes clear that a specific interest inventory or a survey administered by one teacher is not sufficient to meet the mandate in IDEA 2004.

Planning

If transition services are to be meaningful in the IEP process by the time a youth reaches age 14 or 16, it is important for a school system to consider when career education and TA should begin. Each youth with a disability, his or her family, and members of the IEP team should undertake the important task of planning for TA at least by the middle school years. Planning is critical to ensure that assessment activities are age-appropriate for the youth, build on early career education experiences, and identify methods that allow the team to gather assessment information from multiple people (Sitlington et al., 2007).

A first step in planning is to interview the youth and have him or her answer the following questions about the future:

- Where do I want to live after leaving high school?
- Where do I want to work after leaving high school or after postsecondary education?
- What do I want to learn after high school and where can I do this?

It is also critical at this point to determine whether the youth and their family have similar or divergent career expectations regarding the future (Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, & Zane, 2007).

Another initial step in planning for TA is for the school administrator(s) to designate someone (e.g., special educator, school counselor) to be responsible for reviewing the youth’s folders for background information on academic performance and school history, assessment results to date, work habits and attendance patterns, medical information, and previous IEP goals and outcomes. This information should be compiled in a one- or two-page format for the IEP team to use with the youth in planning for TA. The planning question to answer at this point is as follows:

- What information is known about the youth and does this assist him or her or the IEP team to determine tentative measurable postsecondary goals?

While the next questions obviously vary for each youth, the following should serve as guidelines in assessing the youth and/or secondary/postsecondary environments:

- What methods will provide age-appropriate TA data that will assist the youth in developing or further exploring postsecondary goals and needed transition services during the secondary years?
- What formal or standardized instruments might provide valid and reliable data on this youth’s needs, strengths, preferences, and interests? Do the norms and development of the instrument take into account...
differences in culture, language, ethnicity, gender, nationality, and other factors relevant to diversity?
- How will the information from informal methods, such as situational assessments, be validated and triangulated?
- Has the youth been taught to summarize the data and use this in developing the IEP and SOP along with the members of the IEP team?
- How will TA information be shared with the family?

Framework

Figure 1 presents a foundational framework, Making the Match, for facilitating the TA process and builds on earlier work (Leconte, 1994a; Sitlington et al., 1997; Sitlington et al., 2007).

Individual Dimension: Methods to Assess Youth. Ideally, the TA process should build on the career education experiences that youth participated in during elementary and middle school. Beginning at age 14 or 16, the characteristics and attributes of the youth should be identified and profiled according to needs, strengths, preferences, and interests. For instance, strengths or needs can include abilities, aptitudes, skills, values, temperaments, and behaviors that are identified through a variety of assessment methods. Interests and preferences can include expressed, tested, and observed interests and preferences for an activity; a course of study; and postsecondary goal(s). Once a youth identifies needed transition services including a course of study, it is important for the youth and another designated person to monitor progress, identify additional assessment needs and methods, and explore multiple options for postsecondary goals.

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**Figure 1.** Making the Match: Facilitating age-appropriate transition assessment.

*Note. IEP = Individualized Education Program; SOP = Summary of Performance.*
Various models of TA are described in the literature, but methods used within the models overlap. Methods for TA encompass a variety of options and are different from using one instrument or test (Leconte, 1994a). Methods to assess and learn about the youth are depicted in Figure 1 and include the following:

- **activities** (e.g., interviewing, background reviews, identifying one’s social support network, self-determination questionnaires, person-centered planning processes);
- **formal (standardized) assessments** (interest, self-determination, values, temperaments and preferences, transition planning, work samples) with technical manuals including norms, reliability, validity, reading level, and directions for administration;
- **informal assessments** (behavior observation—narratives and checklists, task analyses for job shadowing, situational assessments, job try-outs, or activities in community); and
- **assistive technology assessments** and/or integration of technology, supports, and accommodations across environments.

There are many resources that describe individual and environmental methods for TA and include,

- State and national websites, wikis, and webcasts (e.g., DCDT; Iowa Model for Transition Assessment, n.d.; Leconte, 2011; NSTTAC, 2013; Pennsylvania Transition Assessment Wiki, http://patransassessment.pbworks.com/w/page/26214148/Pennsylvania%20Transition%20Assessment%20Resources; University of Kansas-Transition Coalition; Virginia State Department of Education, n.d.);
- Instruments, manuals, and toolkits (e.g., Clark, Symatschk, Patton, & Steel, 2012; Croke & Thompson, 2011; NSTTAC, 2013; Patton & Clark, 2013; Silitatingon, Clark, & Patton, 2008; Silitatingon et al., 2007; Timmons, Podmostko, Bremer, Lavin, & Wills, 2005); and
- Textbooks and research (e.g., Carter, Brock, & Trainor, 2012; Kochhar-Bryant & Greene, 2009; Roessler, Hennessey, Hogan, Savickas, 2009; Rowe, 2009; Silitatingon, Neubert, & Clark, 2010; Trainor, 2007; Whitfield, Feller, & Wood, 2009).

Knowledge of TA methods requires some personnel to have specific skills in this dimension. Special educators and/or transition personnel should work cooperatively with school counselors and psychologists to determine what types of instruments are used within a specific school to determine career interests, adaptive behavior skills, and social skills. Skills related to methods include (a) knowledge of a variety of methods for assessing and evaluating individuals with exceptional learning needs performance, (b) knowledge of how to evaluate a youth’s success in the general education curriculum, and (c) knowledge of formal and informal approaches for identifying individuals with exceptional learners’ interests and preferences related to educational experiences, and post-school outcomes and support needs (CEC, 2009). In addition, practitioners involved in selecting TA methods and specific instruments need an understanding of how to determine the validity and reliability of an instrument; the appropriateness of the items in the instruments and norms in terms of cultural, language, ethnicity, and gender fairness (Brown & Lent, 2004); the career readiness of the youth; and the cultural and community factors that may impact planning transition services for youth (Trainor, Lindstrom, Simon-Burroughs, Martin, & Sorrells, 2008).

**Environmental dimension: Methods to assess current and future settings.** Methods to assess environments in Figure 1 also vary with the youth’s chronological and developmental age, the grade or age the youth will exit the school system, the options available in secondary public schools, and the surrounding community. Assessing secondary environments requires collaborative efforts between counselors, Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers, and regular and special educators to identify options available in the high school and community, and then have youth explore these in terms of how it can help in meeting individual post-secondary goals. Examples include courses to prepare for college, CTE courses or programs, Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) classes, extracurricular opportunities, and programs and supports for students ages 18 to 21 on college campuses or in the community. Assessing future environments covers a broad range of options related to independent living, postsecondary education, employment, and adult services related to postsecondary goals. Examples include local vocational rehabilitation and developmental disabilities offices and programs, community and technical colleges in the community, 4-year colleges, workforce investment offices, and agencies that assist with supported living options in the community.

Youth and families should be taught how to systematically collect information that is related to a postsecondary goal. For example, if a youth with an intellectual disability and his or her family express an interest in attending a college program after exiting the school system, the first step is to explore college options, including cost of program, type of setting, transportation needs, support systems, and types of classes/work experiences. This can be done by visiting local and state colleges or by using national databases ThinkCollege.net or the Transition Coalition at the University of Kansas. Collecting information on environments or programs provides youth and families with real
information on requirements, demands, and cost or eligibility criteria—This is vital in the TA process.

Environmental analyses can be approached as a group effort (by teachers or by students) to identify transition services and interagency links for a specific community. For example, a group of youth, special educators, or a community transition team could conduct a Community Analysis (e.g., transportation options, postsecondary options, employment agencies, adult service providers) by using the Internet and/or visiting programs to collect information (Neubert, 2010; Neubert & Moon, 2006). If youth are involved in this process, they can present relevant information on program options or settings at their IEP meetings when postsecondary goals are discussed. Information from a Community Analysis can be shared with IEP teams in multiple schools and updated annually by a designated person in the system.

Another example, Community Mapping, has been used in transition programs that combine career exploration, TA, and transition planning. Students are assigned to groups to identify specific types of jobs, social activities, and transportation options within a specific institution or setting. The results are then presented to the entire group of students and instructors as a way to encourage career exploration and promote transition planning (e.g., Mattis, Taymans, & Anderson, 2010).

The environmental dimension is often overlooked when planning for the future with youth and families. It is easier to comply with IDEA 2004 by assessing an individual and checking off a postsecondary goal on an IEP form than to identify and research options within the broad categories of postsecondary education, independent living, adult services, or employment. However, without this information, some youth and families may find it difficult to make their postsecondary goal a reality. For example, if the youth desires to go to a 4-year college, it will be important to teach him or her how to match his or her SAT or American College Testing (ACT) score, grade point average (GPA), courses completed, and writing skills to the admission requirements of the institution. In addition, they will need to determine whether the support services offered at a specific college match their needs in terms of accommodations and supports on the campus. The same is true in terms of employment outcomes for youth who require ongoing support after exiting the school system. If the youth and family understand the various options that a community rehabilitation program might provide (e.g., paid job in the community, supported employment, contract work in the facility), they can then determine whether the agency provides the type of support and employment option they desire. Once the demands of specific environments are known, it should be easier to link TA to postsecondary goals (Mazzotti et al., 2009) and annual IEP goals. Youth should be encouraged to answer questions in the IEP process such as the following:

- What skills do I need to learn to live where I want?
- What skills do I need to learn to work where I want?
- What skills do I need to learn where I want?

Initially, assessing environments requires time and effort on the part of a youth, special educator, or other personnel responsible for the transition requirements on the IEP. This person needs access to forms and methods to “teach” this strategy to youth and their family whenever possible. Additional skills and knowledge needed by personnel include (a) knowledge of vocational education (or CTE) methods, models, and curricula; (b) knowledge of school and postschool services available to specific populations of individuals; and (c) knowledge of scope and role of agency personnel related to transition services (CEC, 2009). It is also important that personnel understand how TA planning and methods vary for youth with high-incidence disabilities and for youth with intellectual and development disabilities (e.g., Carter et al., 2012; Martin & Sylvester, 2011; Neubert, 2012). Identifying the appropriate methods to guide TA and to determine the requirements of environments should provide the path for youth (along with their families) to reach desired postschool goals that truly match interests, preferences, and needs.

**Congruence dimension: Matching youth to targeted environment.** A critical step in TA process that is often overlooked is the need to triangulate TA data (verify information by more than one method) by more than one person. Collecting information from multiple stakeholders is the key to the congruence dimension or to matching a youth to a desired environment. Sample questions to guide this part of the TA process include the following:

- Is there enough information on this youth’s needs, strengths, preferences, and interests to determine a match with the demands of the targeted environment?
- Does the youth, family, and IEP team understand the range of secondary courses of study and transition services available to all youth in the school system?
- Does the youth, family, and IEP team understand options available in the community, state, or nation for this youth to reach his or her desired postsecondary goals?
- If the youth is not making progress to prepare for postsecondary goals, what needs to happen next? What TA assessment questions and methods can be used to collect additional information on the youth’s needs for accommodations, services, and supports to reach his or her desired postsecondary goals?

Determining if there is congruence or a match between what is known about the youth and what is known about
the demands of the desired environment involves the following:

- If there appears to be a good match between the youth and the environment, the IEP should reflect the appropriate course(s) of study, the necessary transition services, related annual goals, and the person(s) designated to monitor progress toward goals.
- If a match is possible, but not definite, the youth, family, and IEP team should identify instruction, accommodations, supports, assistive technology, or interagency resources that may be needed to make the match a reality.
- If the youth, family, and IEP team determine there is not a good match even after exploring additional supports, services, and technology devices, additional methods should be identified to continue the TA process, including the collection of additional information on the youth’s needs, strengths, preferences, and interests, and exploring the demands of additional environments. Once this information is collected, the matching process is initiated again.

Becoming proficient at matching in the TA process is likely to require professional development activities, time, and practice. A team approach to TA and planning transition services that includes the youth, family, and interagency personnel makes it easier for the IEP team to demonstrate expertise in planning experiences that lead to college and career readiness for all youth. Professional development activities should include the following skills and knowledge for assessing environments (CEC, 2009): (a) ability to use a variety of formal and informal career, transition, and vocational assessment procedures; (b) ability to match skills and interests of the individuals to skills and demands required by vocational and postschool settings; (c) ability to interpret results of career and vocational assessment for individual families and professionals and families; (d) ability to evaluate and modify goals on an ongoing basis; and (e) ability to assess and develop natural support systems to facilitate transition to postschool environments.

**Personnel Issues and Roles**

Implementing the three-part framework for TA depicted in Figure 1 requires multiple stakeholders to gather data, plan, and conduct assessment, and collaborate across systems to triangulate data. This includes the youth and family members, counselors, psychologists, speech and language therapists, assistive technology specialists, general educators, special educators, transition specialists or coordinators (where they exist), career or school counselors, psychologists, and trained professionals outside of the school system (e.g., career assessment specialists, vocational evaluators, and adult providers). Identifying and using multiple stakeholders is imperative to implementing a TA process—It should not be viewed as the sole responsibility of a special educator. However, it is also important that someone on the IEP team (e.g., the special educator, a counselor, a transition specialist) synthesize assessment information and assist the youth in translating information into goals that will lead to meaningful IEPs, postschool outcomes, and SOPs.

For nearly 20 years, guidelines for encouraging interagency collaboration and research that targets competencies needed by personnel involved in transition planning, career assessment, and vocational evaluation have been evident in the literature (e.g., DCDT, 2000; Noonan & Morningstar, 2012; STTAC, n.d.-b, n.d.-c; Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, & Leconte, 1996). However, practitioners often do not have adequate administrative support and/or time to plan, implement, and use the results of the TA process with personnel inside and outside of the school system. Throughout this article, competencies or skills and knowledge associated with various aspects of TA have been highlighted and can provide guidance for framing professional development activities within school systems. While a number of states have established guidelines and resources that identify instruments and methods for age-appropriate TA, special educators or IEP teams may not have a process or framework to implement ongoing TA for youth over the middle and secondary school years—This position paper describes the importance of planning in the TA process and of framing the process to use the results and data from TA.

All stakeholders involved with youth possess valuable information that can be shared and validated with others in age-appropriate TA. Sharing requires designated times or places (such as a wiki, Google docs, or Dropbox), where the information can be reviewed and acted upon. Special educators, transition or vocational coordinators, and other personnel need preparation and updated resources to coordinate the TA assessment process.

Policy makers could consider requiring a collaborative team similar to the teams that implement Individual Family Service Plans for infants and early childhood students with disabilities. Youth could benefit from some type of mandated TA and team planning to facilitate the cooperation of outside agency personnel. The type of assessment, including ongoing assessment required during the early years could model similar strategies for youth at the other end of mandated schooling. Understandably, IDEA cannot mandate adult services, especially as these services are authorized by other laws (e.g., Rehabilitation Act Amendments), but discussing such a notion might bring more attention to the critical needs of youth as they leave the school system.
TA requires that some personnel have time away from the classroom and develop expertise in effective communication, cooperation, and collaboration with the various stakeholders. DCDT strongly urges state and local school systems to recognize these realities in building professional development activities and support during a typical day for planning. These issues are important to consider as many states move to implementing the Common Core Standards and focus their efforts on Career and College Readiness, linked learning, and Individualized Learning Plans. Practices from secondary transition services and TA can be integrated into the newest wave of education reform efforts (Test et al., 2011).

The CEC (2009) standards for transition specialists can help shape professional development activities and preservice programs for TA. While collaboration among interagency personnel is necessary, the legal mandate for age-appropriate TA falls squarely on the shoulders of special education personnel and the IEP team. To date, there are no certification standards for personnel involved in TA in the public school systems although some states have endorsements for vocational evaluation or certificates for transition services. Rather, institutions of higher education use the initial standards for preparing special educators and the advanced standards for preparing transition specialists (CEC, 2009) along with state certification guidelines. These standards and the accreditation process differ from personnel outside of the school system who may provide FVE or career assessment through private consulting or rehabilitation services. These personnel may use standards of the Registry of Professional Vocational Evaluators, Inc. (http://rpve.org) or are certified vocational evaluators (CVEs) under the Commission on Certification of Work Adjustment and Vocational Evaluation Specialists (CCWAVES). Many of these professionals contribute invaluable expertise to the TA of youth. DCDT recommends that policy makers, researchers, and practitioners continue to document the types of skills and knowledge needed by personnel in the TA process and provide up-to-date resources for professional development as the field embraces the newest wave of educational reform efforts in Career and College Readiness for all students.

Conclusion

Typically, position papers are written to advocate for change or to promote new practices; while this is true for this article, much of what we know about effective assessment practices, TA methods, changing demographics in schools, and individualized planning for optimal postsecondary outcomes is not a reality for many youth and their families. Given that the term age-appropriate transition assessments was mandated in IDEA 2004 and the process has been used in the field as early as the 1990s, it is unfortunate that some state and local education agencies are not clear on policies or practices. This second DCDT position paper on TA provides youth, families, and professionals with information on policy and a conceptual framework to provide age-appropriate TA for youth with disabilities. The emphasis on terms, purposes, and assumptions are offered for IEP team members in schools and other practitioners to advocate for and implement age-appropriate TA that is meaningful to youth and their families. The sample resources and references provided in this article should convince readers that instruments, TA methods, and suggestions for how to frame the age-appropriate piece of this process are available through print, online materials, and webcasts. The pieces that are often neglected in the TA process are the planning and implementation of multiple methods that are individualized for each youth; these pieces require time for collaborative planning, time outside the classroom to acquire knowledge of school and community resources, and time to work with youth and families to learn how to use TA results in planning for the future.

DCDT urges policy makers at the federal, state, and local levels to recognize the importance of providing meaningful age-appropriate TA to all youth, but especially to those with disabilities. To accomplish this goal, youth, families, and professionals need to understand how to frame the TA process. Personnel need additional professional development to implement age-appropriate methods and then use assessment results. This requires the continuation of preservice programs that emphasize transition-related skills and competencies when preparing secondary special educators, advanced certificates for transition personnel who understand TA practices, professional development activities in the schools, and technical assistance to state and local education agencies to incorporate this process into transition services along with standards-based education.

Outcomes for transitioning youth have improved slightly, but overall remain unacceptable. For the past two decades, technical assistance, conferences, publications, and web-based seminars have been devoted to the topic of vocational assessment or TA; yet, exemplary practices and research remain spotty and isolated. Policy makers must strengthen the IDEA mandate by creating practitioner-recommended performance measures and indicators that move beyond compliance in the IEP process to strengthen the intent and spirit of IDEA and transition requirements. Embedding the assumptions and guiding principles recommended in this article, and drawing on exemplary state and local policies may move us closer to full compliance.

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