



NCWD/Youth Primer on PREPARATORY EXPERIENCES

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Helping youth make informed choices about what they want to do as adults is the root of why preparatory experiences are so essential. Assisting youth to negotiate the transition from school to employment and further education means, in part, preparing them to adjust to the workplace and the performance of work. In a major sense, what happens during the preparatory (work-readiness) stage of career development can significantly affect the transition to employment of the young person. A stable, smooth, and supportive transition to employment can reduce the problems of unemployment and productivity that sometimes plague young workers, particularly those with disabilities.

WORK READY

Someone is “work-ready” when they can make the educational and vocational decisions and perform the kinds of educational and vocational tasks (behaviors) that are expected by schools and employers (Sarkees-Wircenski & Scott, 1995). Individuals differ in their readiness to deal with career development tasks at the “expected” or “appointed” time. Some youth are more aware than others of the work-related decisions that must be made at various points in their lives, and are therefore, better equipped to enter and participate in the world of work. Research indicates that youth with disabilities tend to lag behind their peers in readiness for the career development process (Faas, D’Alonzo & Stile, 1990). Family involvement in skill development has been shown to positively contribute to the development of work-readiness skills for youth with and without disabilities (Mooney, 1998; Way & Rossmann, 1996).

What do youth need to know and be able to do to be considered “work-ready”? A number of national taxonomies and research studies looked at this issue and identified the following that young people needed to know in order to succeed in the working world:

13 Basic Skills and Workplace Knowledge and Competencies

1. Identifying, organizing, planning and allocating benefits and resources;
2. Working with others on teams, teaching others, exercising leadership, negotiating and influencing others, and working with diverse groups of individuals;
3. Acquiring, organizing, interpreting, evaluating and communicating information;
4. Understanding complex interrelationships and distinguishing trends, predicting impacts, as well as monitoring and correcting performance;
5. Working with a variety of systems and technologies and choosing the appropriate tool for the task;
6. Developing higher-order thinking skills such as creative, innovative thinking, critical thinking, problem solving, goal-setting and decision-making skills;
7. Developing self-knowledge, self-determination and self-advocacy skills;
8. Developing self-discipline, self-management skills, and the ability to work without supervision;
9. Strengthening basic academic skills such as reading, math, writing and oral communications skills;
10. Being self-confident, willing to learn new tasks, and maintaining a positive attitude toward work;
11. Developing effective skills and traits such as dependability/responsibility, conscientiousness, punctuality, efficiency, flexibility, honesty, integrity, being well-mannered, cooperative, and using appropriate dress and good grooming;
12. Developing leadership skills to guide and support others and seek guidance and support from others to pursue goals;
13. Exercising rights and responsibilities.

ASSESSMENT

A number of sources (Clark, 1999; Clark & Patton, 1997; National Council on Disabilities, 2000; Schelly, Kothe & Sample, 1995) identify **assessment** as an integral component of a successful post-secondary transition program for students with disabilities.

Formal and informal career assessments should be conducted periodically to:

- determine a young person's evolving levels of functioning in reference to these critical work-readiness areas;
- assist in identifying individual characteristics, education, and training needs; and
- plan appropriate opportunity awareness activities to enhance current knowledge and skills.

Not only can career assessment provide valuable information about work-readiness skills, it can also provide insight into basic skills levels, vocational interests, vocational aptitudes and abilities, and learning styles. Effective transition plans and services often depend on reliable and useful assessment data.

Career assessment is important for all youth transitioning to adult roles, but it is particularly important for youth with disabilities. Many youth with disabilities experience a variety of difficulties handling the realities of work demands, and career assessment offers them the opportunity to discover their career, transition, and pinpoint to their vocational and educational strengths. Both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) identify career assessment as integral to assisting youth to make informed choices and set realistic goals for their successful transitioning to adulthood (Leconte & Neubert, 1997).

Seven Major Uses of Informal and Formal Career Assessment Data

Identified by Neubert (1985) and Leconte (1986)

1. **Determination of career development:** To find out where the student stands in terms of: career awareness, orientation, exploration, preparation, placement, or growth/maintenance;
2. **Measurement:** To identify abilities, interests, capabilities, strengths, needs, potentials, and behaviors within the areas of personal/social, functional/academic, community/independent, employment and employability areas;
3. **Prediction:** To match an individual's interests and abilities with appropriate training, community employment, or postsecondary training;
4. **Prescription:** To identify strengths and needs, and to recommend types of adaptive techniques and/or remedial strategies that will lead to improved career preparation and development;
5. **Exploration:** To "try out" different work-related tasks or activities and to determine how interests match abilities for work-based experiences, community jobs, postsecondary, or other adult activities;
6. **Intervention:** To implement the techniques or remedial strategies that will help a student explore career or work options;
7. **Advocacy:** To develop a career profile to help students, their families, and others identify concrete ways to assist students in achieving their goals.

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