How Are Transition Assessment, Career Assessment, and Vocational Assessment Related?

Figure 1 is an attempt to present the relationship among transition assessment, career assessment, and vocational assessment. I offer this to the field as a beginning point of discussion. There is debate over the meaning of the terms vocational evaluation and vocational assessment. Some feel these terms are synonymous; others feel they have different meanings. It is not the purpose of this article to enter this debate. For ease of expression the term vocational assessment will be used in the remaining sections of this discussion.

As can be seen in Figure 1, transition assessment is the umbrella term that encompasses both career assessment and vocational assessment. Transition assessment relates to all life roles and to the support needed before, during, and after the transition to adult life. Probably the biggest shift in my vision of assessment as we began to discuss transition to adult life was the need to gather information on the potential environments as part of the assessment process, rather than as a closely-related process of environmental analysis. The other major shift was on gathering information on the actual transition to the next environment, rather than just on the individual while he or she was in the current environment.

Career assessment is a major component of transition assessment. In the school years career assessment provides information on which to make decisions related to all areas of adult life. This process directly

Figure 1. The relationship among transition assessment, career assessment, and vocational assessment.
parallels the career education stages of awareness, exploration, and preparation and provides information upon which to make decisions as soon as the individual enters the educational system. The career assessment process encompasses vocational assessment and the occupationally-related information gathered as part of this process. Career assessment also gathers information on the individual's other life roles, such as family member, citizen, and participant in leisure, recreational, and avocational activities (Sitlington, 1985).

Career assessment also continues for the individual involved in postsecondary education and training programs. This concept focuses on all aspects of adult life, from skills and support needed for living in the community to skills and support required to succeed in a specific postsecondary education or training program. Career assessment also encompasses the narrower process of vocational assessment. Finally, career assessment continues as the individual enters and progresses through adult life, either from a postsecondary education and training program or directly from school. This process relates to all of the individual's roles as an adult, from worker and family member to lifelong learner, participant in social and interpersonal networks, and community citizen. Again, this process encompasses vocational assessment.

Vocational assessment relates primarily to the role of worker. As such it occurs in a number of places within the transition assessment and career assessment processes. Vocational assessment first occurs during the school years, as the student begins to become aware of and explore various occupational clusters. It continues as the individual begins to narrow his or her focus and interests and to be trained in an occupational area. The vocational assessment process, which usually begins in the high school years, parallels the vocational preparation process and provides information on which to make decisions related to the student's program.

Vocational assessment continues for individuals entering postsecondary education and training programs. This process provides information on which to make decisions related to vocational training programs once the individual leaves high school. It also continues as the individual enters adult life from one of these programs or enters adult life directly from school. In adult life vocational assessment provides information to the individual related to his or her role as a worker.

The final aspect of Figure 1 indicates that individuals in adult life often return to postsecondary education and training programs for further preparation. When this occurs the transition assessment process continues, particularly involving the career assessment and vocational assessment components.
WHERE SHOULD WE BE GOING?

I feel a number of changes have occurred in the years from when the vocational assessment process began in our schools to the current emphasis on transition assessment. We need to continue these changes and broaden them to all programs. Many of the concepts listed in this section have been recommended in the existing literature on transition assessment (Leconte, 1994b; Neubert, 1994; Sitlington et al., 1996; Smith et al., 1994), but they need to be translated from theory into practice and move from the literature into the programs that serve our youth and young adults. To achieve this I propose the following action steps.

1. Broaden the focus of transition assessment to add an emphasis on assessing the ecology of future living, working, and educational environments, including the natural supports in these environments.

2. Begin the assessment process at an earlier age, even as early as infant and toddler programs, and extend it longer into postsecondary education and training programs and into other aspects of adult life.

3. Move from a heavy reliance on formal assessment systems and paper and pencil tests to a stronger emphasis on assessment tied to the curriculum and to the individual's performance in the community.

4. Continue our move from one-shot assessments to collecting ongoing assessment data throughout the individual's lifetime.

5. Move from dictating how we assess the individual and telling him or her what the results mean, to involving the individual and the family in the design and implementation of the assessment process and deciding together what implications the results have for the individual's future.

6. Move from a set assessment sequence involving the same assessment for all students to an individualized sequence based upon the future living, working, and educational environments identified by the individual and family.

7. View transition assessment as an integral part of the ongoing assessment effort for all students—not as an add-on or as a process only for certain students. The techniques advocated as part of transition assessment correspond directly to those advocated in curriculum-based assessment and authentic assessment (Salvia & Hughes, 1990) and in community-based assessment for individuals with development disabilities (McDonnell, Wilcox, & Hardman, 1991; Moon, Inge, Wehman, Brooke, & Barcus, 1990).

8. Promote the belief that transition assessment is a responsibility of all special education professionals, not something done solely by the transition specialist or job placement personnel.

9. Integrate competencies related to transition assessment into