

A problem exists with the typical transition assessment process when the tools, even when modified with illustrations or photos, become too complex for students to complete. Lack of skills to understand the transition assessment questions combined with limited to no on-the-job experiences, may make it impossible for some students to make informed choices during the transition assessment process. When this happens, a functional transition assessment process may provide meaningful results.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004, Section 1414) demands transition assessments be used to assist in developing postsecondary student goals. Furthermore, IDEA indicates that when needed functional vocational evaluation may be provided as a transition service.

What are Functional Vocational Assessments?

Think of functional vocational assessment as an authentic or real-life assessment process. Functional vocational assessment measures student interests and skills completing actual job tasks in the natural environment where the work actually takes place. Targett et al. (2005) believe functional assessment facilitates an understanding of current skills and support needs associated with possible jobs.

What the Research Says

Individuals' "career goals should be a driving force in the development of employment opportunities within integrated community environments" (Powell et al., 1991, p. 27). Too often single point-in-time interest or skill assessments do not yield useful results. When this happens, an alternative approach must be used where transition-age students select career goals after experiencing a variety of vocational experiences and supports while using a means to document their choices (Martin et al.,

2008). To obtain reliable and socially valid results, educators may use a repeated measures situational assessment job matching process (Agran et al., 1994).

When using a repeated measures situational assessment, individuals identify their likes, spend time observing or doing specific jobs, evaluate their initial choices, and choose again making any needed adjustments based on what they learned from their visit to the job site (Martin et al., 2002). For instance, a student initially may have chosen a noisy job site as a characteristic preference, but after spending time at a noisy job site, she learned loud noises hurt her ears. She then logically chooses a quiet job. Educators repeat this process with students until obtaining reliable job, task, and characteristic choices. The process of comparing choices to real job sites provides a useful means for students with a severe disability to discriminate among work choices and pick what is right for them (Martin & Mithaug, 1990).

To make meaningful postsecondary choices students with severe disabilities need hands-on experience with different jobs to add reality to the transition assessment process. The repeated-measures situational assessment process produces job-choices using matches made between student-stated interests and the reality of actual work locations (Schalock & Jensen, 1986). The match between students' choices and the actual job increases the likelihood that on-the-job behavior meets the job and environmental expectations (Martin, et al., 2002).

Guidelines for Practice

Functional vocational assessment requires using actual work sites where students observe and/or do actual jobs. Educators need to arrange opportunities across several types of work settings for students to experience a range of jobs. To comply with labor laws, educators need to include in the

IEP a functional vocational assessment transition service. The work the student completes must not replace the task of a paid worker (see Additional Resources section for more information).

Additional Resources

Choosing Employment Goals

www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/choicemaker-curriculum

Self-Directed Employment: A Handbook for Transition Teachers and Employment Specialists

www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow/transition-education-materials/self-directed-employment

Illustrations accompanying the Self-Directed Employment Handbook

archive.brookespublishing.com/picturebank/

For more information on how to set up vocational assessment sites that comply with the labor laws, see employmentfirstma.org/files/DDSVolunteer-Unpaid-Work-Feb17.pdf.

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