

From School to Adult Living: A Forum on Issues and Trends

AN INTERVIEW WITH
LOU BROWN
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SUSAN BRODY HASAZI
PAUL WEHMAN

EDITORS' NOTE: This article presents a forum for the personal views of four significant contributors to the conceptualization and implementation of transition programming as it exists in this country today. These individuals were selected from among a number of active contributors to the transition movement as representative spokespersons for the field. The questions posed by the guest editors were developed from ideas and concerns that surfaced in the many manuscripts submitted for consideration in this special issue. Some of the issues raised in the questions reflect concerns expressed openly by professionals in the field, while others were inferred from more subtle or cautious statements. Each contributor received a set of questions to address. Each question was given to at least two contributors. They were encouraged to respond not only to their own set, but to any question of interest contained in other contributors' sets as well. As a result, a few questions were addressed by all four contributors. Their responses appear to reflect some consensus regarding the importance of the issues and trends suggested in the questions. Even so, the substance of their responses reflects a range of positions that would provoke keen consideration by readers.

Gary M. Clark and H. Earle Knowlton, Guest Editors

■ **Guest Editors:** It has been said that major policies are not brought about by persuasive philosophical concepts or even research data

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but rather by political factors. Do you agree with this, and if so, what do you predict will be the status of the transition movement in 1997?

Halpern: Although political influences that shape legislation, litigation, and program regulations have a clear and direct relationship to current policy, an argument can be made that important programs and services, whether or not they are influenced by philosophical concepts or research data, have a way of mutating and surviving the shifts in political winds. Current transition programs, for example, are in many ways a variation of the cooperative

work-study programs that were quite popular during the 1960s and early 1970s. When these programs fell out of favor, the need for them did not cease to exist, and this need provided a context for their reincarnation under the rubric of "transition." If the political winds shift once again, we'll simply have to invent a new policy to support programs that will be just as necessary in a decade as they are now.

Brown: Although political factors bear heavily upon most decisions, many advancements have occurred in our field as a result of strong philosophical beliefs regarding "best educational practices" and the quest for a decent quality of life. The transition movement as we know it will soon pass and will take its place beside other movements in our evolution toward quality educational services for people with severe disabilities.

A short time ago there was a movement to allow all children with severe intellectual disabilities access to a free public education. Prior to 1976, many were denied such access. That wonderful movement has now passed. All children in our society now have legal access to a tax-supported education.

The movement from segregated to integrated schools is now gaining momentum. Hopefully, this too will pass in the near future so we can say proudly that all students with severe intellectual disabilities receive their education in age-appropriate, integrated schools as close as possible to their homes, friends, neighbors, brothers, and sisters.

Individuals with disabilities, parents, professionals, and taxpayers realize how terribly devastating it is to have school-to-postschool transitions disrupted by delays, waiting lists, segregated-only options, and poorly coordinated services. Soon, we will be able to look back and see that all individuals with severe intellectual disabilities have access to services that guarantee smooth and habilitative movements from school to integrated postschool environments, activities, and services.

Guest Editors: Is it realistic to expect effective coordination between schools and adult service agencies for transition planning under existing practices?

Halpern: Probably not. In a statewide survey reported elsewhere in this issue (Benz & Halpern,

pp. 507-514), we found that one-third of the special education administrators in Oregon did not regard coordination as an important issue. Even when interest in coordination did exist, teachers and administrators had very different perceptions concerning who, if anyone, was responsible for such coordination.

Furthermore, 15% of the school districts acknowledged no contact at all with any adult service agencies and only 10% of the districts had formal cooperative agreements with such agencies. This is an especially interesting finding in light of the fact that formal cooperative agreements were very popular and prevalent during the 1960s and early 1970s. Although these agreements did present certain problems at the time which interfered with their effective administration, it would appear that there is a strong need to reinstate the basic concept of a formal agreement, taking into account and correcting for problems that were experienced in the implementation of previously used models.

Wehman: It is realistic but, nevertheless, difficult. There really is no reason why public schools, post-21 agencies, and local vocational rehabilitation offices cannot pool their collective financial resources and share responsibility for the movement of students from school to meaningful employment and residential outcomes. There are many places in Virginia and other parts of the country where this is happening.

There are two critical aspects of effective coordination. The first is frequent communication, trust, and reciprocal understanding of responsibilities between key agency representatives, parents, and advocacy groups. The second is that coordination and agreements to share resources which are undertaken for the common good of the exiting student are done best at the *local* level. Increasingly, our finding is that no matter how excellent state interagency agreements may be, the real action for change occurs locally.

Hasazi: Over the past two years there has been an increased interest in interagency collaboration to effect a successful transition from school to adult life for students with handicaps. Most states have developed interagency agreements which gradually are being adapted and implemented at the local level. Although differing definitions, eligibility requirements, funding

formulas, and service options serve as initial barriers to collaboration, there are numerous demonstrations of successful collaboration efforts throughout the country. Many of these efforts have occurred at the local level and have begun around providing comprehensive services to one individual and expanded to include a more systematic approach.

Brown: Many parents and taxpayers function under the tragic illusion that we professionals like each other, work together, respect each other's roles and expertise, share information, and plan jointly. We do not. In fact, the cooperation that occurs between senders and receivers of public school graduates is meager at best. These unfortunate circumstances must be improved upon dramatically if meaningful transitions are to be realized. All responsible for school-to-postschool transitions must join together in order to provide for the individualized services so critical for lifelong success in integrated community environments. As schools become more integrally involved in the vocational preparation of students with severe disabilities, it will be mandatory that cooperative and effective relationships between schools and adult service agencies be developed.

Guest Editors: Do you believe the contention of some professionals that social skills are equally if not more important than specific occupational skills in holding a job? If so, how would you respond to a training program that spent equal or more time on community-based social skills?

Brown: Certainly, social skills and the establishment of social bonds with nondisabled people are critical for extended and successful functioning in integrated work environments. Most now realize that some people with severe intellectual disabilities often lose their jobs because of a dearth of, or inappropriate, social skills rather than because of poor work performance. However, social phenomena cannot be taught in isolation. They must be developed in natural contexts in association with many other factors critical for success in integrated work and work-related environments and activities. Social skills should be critical components of all instruction across all environments, within the context of naturally occurring activities and over long periods of time.

Wehman: Social competence in a job setting is usually an essential aspect of employment. I'm not sure, however, that I would say social skills are more important than specific occupational skills.

I suspect the real question to be addressed is what level of social competence is necessary for employer satisfaction in a given work environment. For example, an individual with severe intellectual handicaps who has difficulty in reducing self-stimulating verbalizations might best be matched with a work environment that is relatively indifferent to those behaviors and, instead, values high levels of dependability and productivity.

Social skills are highly contextual and therefore training programs, community-based or otherwise, must focus upon modifying or improving social competence in the context of real life activities—such as how to behave when someone jumps in front of you in line at a McDonald's restaurant or how to maintain appropriate levels of physical proximity when interacting with others. These capabilities are generally best taught while engaging in or receiving instruction in functional life skills.

Guest Editors: Is the supported employment model using job coaches or trainer advocates one that could or should be used for training in community living skills and personal-social skills?

Wehman: I have two answers to this question, which is one that I frequently encounter. First, I think it is misleading to compare industry-based employment specialists, that is, job coaches, with training personal-social skills in the community. Job coaches who are doing their job well work as much for the business which employs the client as they do for the sponsoring agency. We have found that excellent employment specialists are often the reason "at-risk" clients are hired; the agreement to provide guaranteed work to the company is a unique aspect of supported employment.

The second way I would respond to this question is that a trainer-advocate model is, in fact, already being used by those programs which practice good community-based instruction. The difference is the lack of permanent long-term follow-along support which may not be practical.

Brown: In my opinion, people with severe intellectual disabilities will need the assistance and support of nondisabled others throughout their lives. Our goal must be to reduce dependence upon paid professionals in favor of natural support systems which allow a person to be absorbed into the social fabrics operative in integrated living, working, and recreation/leisure environments and activities.

Certainly, some nondisabled people will need to be paid to ensure that citizens with severe intellectual disabilities receive appropriate services and supervision. However, the fewer professionals that are involved in a person's life space, the better. Therefore, we must design and implement strategies that can be used to facilitate and enhance meaningful social bonds between people with severe intellectual disabilities and others who are not paid to be with them.

My direct response to your question is that just as people with severe intellectual disabilities require technical assistance in vocational areas, they will also need assistance where they live and play in order to become as independent and as participatory as possible. Job coaches and trained advocates appear to be viable options for such roles.

Halpern: A strong analog to supported employment can be found in a relatively new type of residential program called semi-independent living programs (SILPs). The essential characteristic of SILPs is that clients live in their own homes and apartments in the community and receive only occasional training or supervision in accordance with their specific needs for assistance. The services associated with such "supported living" can be provided indefinitely.

Unlike supported employment, however, the services associated with SILPs are aimed primarily at helping clients to improve their independent living and personal/social skills with the goal of enhancing overall community adjustment. Recent research indicates that these programs are at least partially successful in achieving the goal of supported living for their clients, and that the model is clearly deserving of additional research and development.

Guest Editors: What effect, if any, has the excellence in education movement had on public schools' acceptance of a transitional program philosophy, policy, and practice?

Wehman: I have not found that the excellence in education movement has enhanced transitional philosophy. If anything this movement, with its emphasis on improving academic skills and standardized test scores, has not helped students who need a greater focus on life skills, community-based instruction, and employment before leaving school. The problem seems to be that school boards, PTAs, and other important policy setters in the schools frequently do not realize the necessity for a highly individualized and differentiated educational plan for students with a wide range of special needs. We in the field have our work cut out for us to do a much better job of communicating directly with local school boards on special education curriculum and service delivery issues.

Halpern: The impact of the excellence in education movement on transition programs is directly tied to any progress that is made in the development of meaningful alternative diplomas. As graduation requirements are raised, fewer and fewer students with certain disabilities will be able to receive a regular diploma legitimately. This can create either a problem or an opportunity. It will be a problem if the only alternative to a regular diploma is a certificate of attendance. It will create an opportunity if the response to more difficult graduation requirements is to develop a good alternative diploma program that clearly identifies a meaningful set of alternative requirements that provide structure to the IEP process and the student's education during high school.

Guest Editors: Is a regular high school diploma a necessary condition for a successful transition into the community for youth with mild, moderate, or severe handicapping conditions?

Hasazi: For the most part, students with handicaps have instructional programs designed to meet their individual needs. Although many high school students with IEPs may need to acquire some skills and knowledge which are not characteristic of a traditional high school curriculum, they nonetheless can achieve and succeed. Thus, since a high school diploma is one valued and accepted outcome of a successful high school career, I believe that students with handicaps, like their nonhandicapped peers, should receive a diploma.

Brown: A regular high school diploma is not necessary for the success of any individual. However, for people with mild disabilities, a diploma may contribute to acceptance in the competitive job market, increased self-esteem, happier parents and advocates, etc. A high school diploma should represent the acquisition and performance of competencies typically expected of a nondisabled 12th grade student.

A diploma is an irrelevant condition for the successful postschool functioning of most students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities. For these individuals, the entree to postschool success is not a diploma. Access to the individually meaningful resources necessary to secure and maintain a job in an integrated workplace, live in a decent family-style home, and have fun and enjoy friends are far more important. If a student who is severely intellectually disabled receives a diploma along with nondisabled peers, wonderful! However, I realize that receiving that piece of paper has no predictive validity for successful transition into integrated postschool life.

Halpern: Since current law does not require that students with disabilities receive a regular diploma, and furthermore prohibits the modification of graduation requirements for the sole purpose of allowing students with disabilities to pass, there is no legal way of requiring a regular high school diploma as a necessary condition for successful transition. Aside from legality, it is not very useful to award a regular diploma to anyone who has not earned it. The alternative, however, should not be a "certificate of attendance." A much more useful option would be a "modified diploma," the attainment of which is tied to the achievement of a modified set of graduation requirements which have been negotiated formally through an appropriate set of school, district, or even statewide procedures. These modified requirements should then be addressed throughout the student's IEP process during the high school years.

Guest Editors: Since philosophical and ideological issues have been an important basis for the transition movement, what are your ideas about the issue of choice by individuals with disabilities? For example, do we permit a person with handicapping conditions to say, "I choose not to work or live on my own?"

Hasazi: It seems to me that the choices one makes in life are dependent upon the opportunities one experiences and the skills one acquires. Given this notion, it is important for educators to ensure that all learners, including those with handicaps, have a wide variety of positive learning experiences, so that the choices they make contribute to their feelings of self-worth, comfort, and accomplishment.

Brown: Choice-making opportunities should be embedded in and emphasized throughout the daily lives of people with severe intellectual disabilities. Along with the right to make choices comes the need to appreciate consequences, that is, to understand cause and effect relationships. We all must have a reasonable array of opportunities, experiences, and information upon which to base our decisions. In relation to work, informed choice requires that decisions are based on a wide variety of real life experiences.

If people choose not to work, my assumption is that they have the economic resources necessary to pay for their food, shelter, clothing, etc. If they do not have such resources, the differential consequences available to those who work and those who do not must be clearly communicated. When Frank Rusch interviewed me for his 1986 book, *Competitive Employment Issues and Strategies*, I said:

I do not mind people choosing unemployment. But don't ask taxpayers to give them money to buy clothes, go to movies and have a great place to live. I think it's wonderful that some choose to live alone on a mountain, to spend their lives on a private island or to live off the land. Fortunately, there are still some places in our country where you can do just those things. But don't ask the coal miner, the truck driver, the mail clerk, or any other hard working citizen to pay for their dental bills, their telephone, or a videocassette recorder. If you are unable to work, so be it. We will all pitch in and help. If you are able to work, but choose not to, good luck. (p. 341)

There must be a delicate balance between respecting the wishes of people with disabilities, allowing the occurrence of natural consequences for decisions, and making decisions in the best interest of the individual and others in the culture.

Halpern: If people who are clearly capable of working choose not to do so, there should be

some economic consequences of this decision if the person making the choice is clearly taking advantage of other citizens who must foot the bill through tax dollars. There are, however, good and bad reasons why a person might choose not to work. A bad reason would be to take unfair advantage of public assistance opportunities. Some good reasons for choosing not to work might be that the person loses health insurance benefits as a consequence of taking a job, or the person's net disposable income after taking a job is less than she or he received as a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipient, and SSI income is still below the poverty level. In each of these examples, along with others that could be articulated, the "gains" of employment are offset by other significant losses. It is dangerously seductive to sort people into two classes: those who can and can't work. Those who "can" work may not truly benefit from work, when the consequences of work are examined from the full spectrum of the person's community adjustment. If we fail to look at community adjustment from this broader context, then it seems to me that we are placing the societal value of work on an inappropriate pedestal, at the expense of addressing the true and more complex needs of the person with a disability.

The potential for conflict between ideological principles and individual choice is a major issue that needs to be examined carefully. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) policy on transition states that the singular goal of transitional programming is that "individuals leaving the school system obtain jobs," which also promotes "community integration." Community integration is defined as "regular access to interactions with individuals without identified handicaps and regular use of normal community resources." The conflict emerges when we consider the possibility that some people with disabilities may not want to work for good reasons, and furthermore, may choose to spend a significant portion of their time in the company of other people with disabilities. Our own research suggests that both of these possibilities are quite real for some adults with mental retardation who are living semi-independently in their communities. For example, one woman whom we interviewed chose not to work for wages and spent a great deal of her time doing volunteer work for *People First*, a self-help and

self-advocacy organization for people with disabilities. From the perspective of the OSERS policy, this woman would probably be viewed as unsuccessful. From her own perspective, she is highly satisfied with her life style.

One way of resolving this conflict would be to expand the acceptable goals of transition to include client satisfaction, as well as other dimensions of community adjustment such as an attractive residential environment, an effective social support network, and a relatively independent life style in managing the activities of daily living. Success along any (and hopefully many) of these dimensions could be viewed as evidence of meaningful and appropriate community adjustment.

Guest Editors: With respect to transitional programming, do you believe there are substantive differences in the competencies required of professional personnel who work with students with mild, moderate, and severe handicapping conditions? If so, what are they?

Halpern: I believe that the answer to this is both yes and no. In a general sense, there are categories of teacher competencies that are important regardless of the level of student disability. These categories include design and delivery of instruction, functional assessment, classroom management, behavior management, program coordination (including transition services), and program evaluation. Within each of these categories, however, there are different problems to be solved which derive in part from the severity of the student's disability. For example, where it may be appropriate to teach students with mild disabilities a set of generic skills that are required to perform a variety of activities, it may be necessary to teach students with severe disabilities directly how to perform each desired activity. Similarly, the mainstreaming of students with mild disabilities usually involves both instructional and social integration, whereas the mainstreaming of students with severe disabilities usually involves primarily social integration. Although generic teacher competencies are relevant to the full range of problems and issues that a teacher might encounter, there are enough contextual differences that derive from severity of disability to warrant specialization for at least a portion of a teacher preparation program.

Hasazi: In order to plan and implement successful transition programs, all professionals who work with students who have handicapping conditions must be prepared to identify specific skills in need of instruction, design instructional strategies, and evaluate the effectiveness of those teaching strategies. In addition, they should demonstrate the ability to collaborate with a variety of individuals, including other educators, human services providers, and parents. Although the curriculum, setting, mode of instructional delivery, and intensity of support will vary depending on the needs of the individual learner, the basic teaching/learning principles remain the same. I believe that all professionals teaching students at the secondary level, regardless of the severity of the handicapping condition, will need to focus their instruction on ensuring that students can successfully participate in the adult world following graduation from high school. This will require a greater emphasis on vocational preparation, community-based training, and social interaction with nonhandicapped peers in academic environments and extracurricular activities. The new emphasis will result in changes in the roles and responsibilities of some secondary special education personnel to include such areas as job development, interagency coordination, and consultation with vocational education personnel such as cooperative education instructors.

Wehman: There are some similarities but on balance more differences. For example, we know that professionals working seriously in the transition process must learn about agencies other than their own that may influence the transition outcome. We also know that a more expanded knowledge of business, industry, and other postschool community environments is essential. I think these competencies are necessary regardless of the level of student handicaps involved.

On the other hand, there is little doubt in my mind that systematic instruction competence is critical in successfully implementing community instruction for youth with autism or in working as a job coach with a recently employed student who is labeled as severely mentally retarded. The latter student will not last two weeks on the job without high quality instructional interaction; therein lies a major difference between supported employment and

more traditional types of vocational arrangements.

Another major level of staff competence will be creativity in job development and identifying meaningful work opportunities. Locating the "right" job for high risk or problem students is often the key element of a successful placement. Teachers and counselors who are highly skilled in this aspect of vocational education will open the doors to employment for many students who have been previously excluded.

The necessity for greater vocational adaptation, working to overcome low levels of parent and professional expectations, and behavior management are just some of the additional areas of competence which I think differentiate those working with persons with mild versus severe handicaps.

Brown: Professionals working with people with disabilities must have a wide range of competencies to address constructively the unique needs of individuals in this diverse population. However, while there are differences in the methodologies and instructional techniques needed, this does not mean we must have separate training programs or a different set of professionals to teach each group within the population. Integrated communities will never be able to afford, nor do I think it is productive or necessary to have, people who work exclusively with an extremely small homogeneous subgroup.

Our orientation should be toward heterogeneous groupings so that a job coach, a teacher, a therapist, or anyone else can work effectively with a group of people who express a wide array of abilities and disabilities. Thus, we recommend that professionals be taught a broad set of strategies that can be readily adapted for individual use across many different people. I disagree with those who argue for a "Severely Handicapped Credential," a major in "Profound Retardation," etc.

Guest Editors: What trends do you see emerging now for the field in transitional programming?

Wehman: I see four trends, all of which seem to be developing at different rates. The first is that more and more parents and advocates are going to insist on real employment *before* students leave school. Prevocational, simulated,

or other pretend types of work are increasingly in disfavor in many school systems; this will continue. Second, the segregated adult centers which have been spawned over the past decade and a half are now and will continue to change rather dramatically in the nature of services they offer. Center-based options will be rejected by students and parents, thus forcing local programs to become more industry-based in nature. Third, the eligibility requirements for vocational rehabilitation services are beginning to blur tremendously as more and more students, previously thought to be ineligible because of functioning level, are exhibiting vocational competence, thus placing greater pressure on rehabilitation agencies to provide services. Finally, more students are moving into better paying manufacturing positions and are less concentrated into the entry level service positions such as dishwashers or potscrubbers.

Hasazi: The recent focus on transition programming has led to a number of promising practices from both a learner-centered and systems perspective. First, during the high school years, students are having increased opportunities to acquire and use occupationally specific and social skills in a variety of paid and unpaid jobs in the community. This will allow students with handicaps to build a work history prior to graduation and increase their prospects for employment following high school.

Second, parents and professionals are spending a great deal more time together planning from a futures oriented perspective. Goals and objectives will be developed and implemented that address outcomes, such as building and maintaining a friendship network, planning for a place to live in the community, and placement in a job or postsecondary education program.

Third, because of the enthusiasm about and successful demonstrations of competitive and supported employment, adult services agencies are developing vocational service options that focus on employment as an outcome. These options will gradually replace day and work activity centers, and change the way sheltered workshops operate.

Finally, there is a trend in awareness of a need to train special educators and adult services professionals as employment specialists for placing, training and maintaining individuals with handicaps in supported and transi-

tional employment. This trend will require specialty concentrations in secondary special education and rehabilitation training programs.

Brown: I think several trends can be delineated. First, unlike school, adult services are not guaranteed. Parents have become more aware of the vulnerability of their children and are more involved in lifelong planning. Second, the very nature of secondary education is changing dramatically for the better. In the past, many people were spending the adolescent years trying to take students with disabilities through normal infant development stages and phases. This, of course, resulted in 21-year-old people acting like young children. The trend now is to look at the requirements of adulthood and then devote the last 10 years of education to teaching students to behave as adults and to function as effectively as possible in integrated environments and activities.

Third, in the past, the goal of public school personnel was to prepare people with disabilities to spend the years from age 21 to 70 in segregated activity centers or sheltered workshops. If someone goes through an integrated school program at an immense cost and is then locked up in an activity center, a workshop, or an institution ward, we have failed that person, that family, and the taxpayers.

In my opinion, there are fewer obstacles to overcome in the process of securing integrated postschool services. More adult service agencies are providing integrated options and more professionals have the values, skills, and experiences necessary to provide quality services therein. Parents are playing a stronger role in advocating for integrated work options due to their increased involvement in integrated services throughout the school years.

Finally, there is a trend for people with disabilities to be afforded a wider range of work options as we move beyond the limited and stereotypic jobs currently offered. Ultimately, paid work and affirmative social relationships with nondisabled others will evolve if we professionals do our jobs proficiently.

Halpern: The first of two main trends that I see emerging in the field of transition is a broadening of the goals to include residential, social, and leisure dimensions, in addition to the vocational dimension. In fact, if we consider adjustment from the perspective of client satis-

faction, it may turn out that vocational adjustment is less consistently valued by people with disabilities than are the other dimensions of community adjustment. Furthermore, it appears that the various dimensions of community adjustment are relatively uncorrelated with one another, meaning that success in one area does not guarantee success in any of the others. This implies that transition programs will have to be individually tailored to each dimension of community adjustment that is a desired outcome, and that the OSERS policy guiding the transition movement will also have to be broadened to accommodate the nonvocational dimensions as valued ends in themselves.

A second major trend that should emerge soon is a reawakening of concern for people with mild disabilities. During the past decade, there has been a clear and understandable focus of attention and resources on serving people with the most severe disabilities. Unfortunately, this has occurred somewhat at the expense of services for those with milder but still significant disabilities. As a consequence of this shift

in emphasis, many people with "mild" disabilities are falling far short of their potential for achieving satisfactory levels of community adjustment. Transition services will have to be reoriented somewhat toward this group, which outnumbers those with severe disabilities by a ratio of at least ten to one.

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