

# BASIC CONCEPTS OF LIFE SKILLS INSTRUCTION



The schooling experience is designed to prepare individuals for adulthood, essentially to create a competent citizenry. In the early school years, students are taught basic skills that they will use in applied ways in subsequent school endeavors and ultimately in life. The mastery of the scholastic skills of reading, writing, speaking, and performing mathematical tasks is the *sine qua non* for a literate society. Their relevance in terms of career options and personal fulfillment is extremely important, resulting in these skills being the foundation upon which one's early schooling experience is based.

Many other skills and areas of knowledge are extremely valuable but are not fundamental academic skills or the type of content knowledge covered in the traditional general education curriculum. Many skills needed to get by in today's world do not involve knowledge of the periodic table or the use of various trigonometric functions; instead, they involve the ability to handle the events that occur on a day-to-day basis at home, at work, and in the community. Later in this chapter we identify 146 major demands of adulthood for which we all must develop a level of competence. For the most part, many students—those with special needs or placed at risk as well as students without barriers in their lives—leave school unprepared to deal effectively with the array of day-to-day challenges that most of us face as adults.

This guide provides recommended procedures and suggestions of useful resources for covering life skills topics in which students with or without special needs must display competence to successfully deal with adulthood. The conceptual framework of the guide derives from a realistic appraisal of likely subsequent environments for students and application of a top-down process to effect curricular coverage of important topics. In other words, the scope and sequence of what should be taught to students must be predicated on a thorough examination of the demands of adulthood that these students are likely to face. In a bottom-up approach to life skills instruction, curricular content is arbitrarily selected with the expectation that it will benefit students in their future living and work environments.

While we believe that this guide is appropriate for all students, regardless of any identifiable specific need, we use the term *students with special needs* throughout the guide. We are referring to individuals who are placed at risk either for not doing well in school-related tasks or for having difficulty dealing with the demands of daily living. This might include individuals who have disabilities, are low-achieving, require alternative learning conditions, or come from environments that create other barriers to their opportunities for success.

## Terminology and Definition

As seen in the title of this book, we have decided to use the term *life skills* as our operative term to describe key skills needed for life. As Cronin (1996b) noted in her review of the use of life skills–related terminology, a range of terms has been used to convey the concept of life skills. Table 1.1 highlights some of the major terms that have been used and provides brief descriptions of the terms as used in the professional literature.

The important point that needs to be made is that a myriad of terms is used to describe the skills needed for living. At times, the meaning associated with the terms is interchangeable; however, at other times, differences in meaning are apparent. For instance, the term *applied academics* suggests skills that are clearly different from self-care skills of toileting and grooming that are associated with *daily living skills*.

As indicated, we have chosen to use *life skills* as the generic term in this book. Following is our definition of *life skills*, along with an explanation of key features of the definition.

**LIFE SKILLS** Specific competencies (i.e., knowledge, skills, and their application) of local and cultural relevance needed to perform everyday activities across a variety of settings.

- *Knowledge acquisition, skill performance (or procedural knowledge), and the application of the knowledge and skills:* Three elements of competence are essential for successful functioning. *Knowledge acquisition* refers to the need to learn basic factual information that will be important for accomplishing a specific life skill (e.g., in taking a person's temperature, the knowledge component would involve identification of appropriate equipment and understanding of normal body temperature). *Skill performance* implies that one can execute a series of specific actions related to the life skill (e.g., appropriate use of a traditional or digital thermometer). Neither of these components alone is sufficient to demonstrate competency in most situations. One still needs to display the *appropriate application* of the knowledge and skills. This element relates closely to the concept of *everyday intelligence* (practical and social intelligence), as promoted by Greenspan, Switzky, and Granfield (1996; see also Table 1.1). In essence, this element implies that an individual can reason well enough to make key decisions on when to use the knowledge and skills (i.e., problem solving) and how to use the resulting information (e.g., to call the doctor if the temperature is above a certain level).

- *Local relevance:* This part of the definition imparts the idea that the specific life skills needed in one's life milieu are very much a function of the specific demands of their settings (i.e., context) and accordingly vary from one location to another. For instance, the major life demand of "using public transportation," although generic to a certain extent (schedules are posted, signage is present), requires specific life skills that vary from one city to another because the details of each system are different. As a result, the specific life skills that a person must possess must be validated at the local level.

**Table 1.1**  
**Select Terminology Related to Life Skills**

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Activities of daily living

- activities such as cleaning, shopping, cooking, taking public transportation, paying bills, maintaining a residence, caring appropriately for one's grooming and hygiene, using telephones and directories, and using a post office (Reschly, Myers, & Hartel, 2002, p. 175)
- term used in the field of occupational therapy to describe daily living occupations that consist of self-care activities (Hinojosa & Blount, 2000, p. 8)

Applied academics

- those skills and bodies of knowledge typically associated with core academic content areas that are applied to real-life contexts and situations (Patton & Trainor, 2002, pp. 56–57)

Career education

- a curriculum designed to teach individuals the skills and knowledge necessary to have a career (Smith & Luckasson, 1995, p. 434)

Daily living skills

- those skills that individuals use in their personal self-care and occasionally in their interactions with others (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janse, 1990, p. 296)

Everyday intelligence/competence

- a function of practical and social intelligence (Greenspan & Driscoll, 1997, p. 133)

Functional academics

- practical skills rather than academic learning (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994)
- basic academic skills taught in the context of real-life activities. A curricular emphasis on academic skills that are meaningful and useful for daily living (Hunt & Marshall, 1994, p. 162)

Functional curriculum

- a way of delivering instructional content that focuses on the concepts and skills needed by all students with disabilities in the areas of personal–social, daily living, and occupational adjustment (Clark, 1994, p. 36)

Functional literacy

- ability to read (decode and comprehend) materials needed to perform everyday vocational tasks (Miller, 1973, p. 7)
- rudimentary social literacy—that is, those skills required by a prospective employer or institution that a student is deemed likely to encounter in adult life (Buchanan, 1975, p. 73)

Functional skills

- the skills that are useful in accomplishing some activity in important environments (Wolery & Haring, 1994, p. 279)
- those skills required to operate in normal daily life (Bigge, 1988, p. 2)

Independent living skills

- preparation to function independently as adults; must include more than just attaining a particular vocational or occupational skill (Meese, 1994, p. 385)

Life skills

- those skills that are relevant to independent, day-to-day living (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1994, p. 320)
- those skills used to manage a home, cook, shop, and organize personal living environments (Smith & Luckasson, 1995, p. 421)

Survival skills

- everyday coping skills needed in adulthood (McClure, Cook, & Thompson, 1977, p. 26)
  - skills necessary to function effectively in an environment (Bullock, 1992, p. 552)
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*Note.* Adapted from “Life Skills Curricula for Students with Learning Disabilities: A Review of the Literature,” by M. E. Cronin, in *Transition and Students with Learning Disabilities* (p. 88), edited by J. R. Patton & G. Blalock, 1996, Austin, TX: PRO-ED. Copyright 1996 by PRO-ED. Adapted with permission.

- *Cultural relevance*: Many life skills are tied to family and/or cultural values. As a result, sensitivity to these values and mores is imperative when developing curriculum and planning instruction. For instance, for the major life demand of “planning a nutritional diet,” certain life skills like identifying meals that are healthy will be influenced by one’s family and/or cultural situation. What is considered a nutritious breakfast for a family of Latino heritage in South Texas is likely to look very different from the breakfast offerings of a family living on the island of Kauai.
  - *Performs*: This aspect of the definition refers to the intelligent and reasonable application of the skill in the appropriate setting(s).
  - *Everyday activities*: Life skills are those skills that a person must use in whatever setting he or she functions. Most life skills are general and apply to most people; however, some life skills may be specific to one’s geographic location (e.g., treating a jellyfish sting) or working situation (e.g., handling dangerous materials at the workplace).
  - *Across a variety of settings*: It is important to understand that many life skills are not situation specific. For instance, the life skills associated with the major life demand of “getting along with others” cuts across a host of situations that a person may encounter (e.g., at work or on the softball field).
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## Rationale for Teaching Life Skills

Concern for what happens to students when formal schooling ends has increased over the years. The amount of attention given to the transition needs and the post-school outcomes of students has been evident in the professional literature and has been underscored in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004. IDEA now defines the transition process from school to adult living as a “results-oriented” process.

The adult status of many individuals has been a driving force behind the need for transition services. In a related sense, the fact that special education had been mandated for all students with disabilities since 1975 promulgated the need to examine what impact this special education was ultimately having on students when they departed formal schooling. Follow-up studies conducted in various parts of the country in the 1980s and early 1990s pointed to a less than positive scenario of unemployment and underemployment, restricted living options, and few social interactions and activities (Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Mithaug, Horiuchi, & Fanning, 1985; Sitlington, Frank, & Carson, 1993).

The most comprehensive study conducted in the late 1980s and published in the early 1990s was the National Longitudinal Transition Study (M. Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, Hebbeler, & Newman, 1993). The overall results of this study corroborated the findings of other studies. Currently, a second study—the National Longitudinal Transition Study–2 (NLTS–2)—is being conducted and the results are being released incrementally. Go to <http://www.nlts2.org> to see the results that have been made available.

A source of data on adult outcomes is the U.S. Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html>). The following statistics, based on the 2000 census, provide additional information in regard to the outcomes of persons with disability. The following figures are available online from the U.S. Census Bureau:

- number of people age 5 and over in the civilian, noninstitutionalized population with at least one disability: 49.7 million
- percentage of people with disabilities who report more than one disability: 46%
- percentage of working-age men with disabilities who are employed: 60% [10.4 million]
- percentage of working-age women with disabilities who are employed: 51% [8.2 million]
- median 1999 earnings of the 12 million year-round, full-time workers (in six disability areas): \$28,803 [Median income of nondisabled workers: \$33,970]
- percentage of individuals with disabilities ages 18 to 34 of all individuals enrolled in school: 12% [1.9 million individuals]

The published studies, as well as others conducted locally by school districts throughout the country, have had a significant impact on current thinking and professional discussion. However, for a number of reasons they provide only a partial picture of the lives and resultant problems facing many adults. First, most of the research, the NLTS–2 not included, provides a “snapshot” (i.e., at one point in time) of the lives (i.e., outcomes) of young adults. As a result, little information exists on the impact that their special needs have over time and on the quality of their lives. This is due to the simple fact that this type of research can be methodologically problematic, expensive, and effort intensive. Yet, the need to obtain a longitudinal sense of how these adults cope with the demands of adulthood remains an important and relatively untapped area for research activity (Gajar, 1992). Current discussion of conceptualizing the transition process as a results-oriented process will increase the need to document the “results” of transition efforts.

Second, most studies conducted to date examine a restricted range of outcome measures, typically focusing on employment and other general demographic dimensions (e.g., marital status). Omitted are measures of performance on day-to-day facets of adulthood such as managing money, getting along with one’s spouse, or utilizing community services. Perhaps even more important, little information has been collected on various qualitative aspects of adulthood such as one’s values, happiness, well-being, and goals. These omissions—similar to those made for the lack of longitudinal studies—result from the fact that gathering this type of information is difficult, expensive, and time consuming.

## Curricular Considerations and Standards-Based Education

Upon inspection of school curricula, it is possible to draw some conclusions that tend to represent the nature of the content that is being taught in schools today. This

section highlights the curricular features of elementary and secondary curriculum and offers some salient arguments for curricular innovation.

## Grade-Level Distinctions

In general, the focus of the curriculum for all students at the *elementary level* is the development and mastery of basic skills. As students progress through the upper elementary grades, emphasis is put on using these skills in more applied ways. In essence, these skills are being refined so that students can handle the growing amount of content knowledge being introduced and deal effectively with increasingly more complex demands associated with secondary-level coursework. For some students who are in special education, more time is likely to be devoted to remediation of the basic skills that have not been acquired.

Although providing career education at this level is warranted and advocated strongly (Clark, Carlson, Fisher, Cook, & D'Alonzo, 1991), in reality, little instruction in this area occurs (Moore, Agran, & McSweyn, 1990). Covering career education with elementary-age students provides a valuable linkage with transitional activities that must occur at the secondary levels. Such instruction can cover topics that are precursors to life skills that can be taught at a later time. Clark and colleagues offer the following principles:

- Education for career development and transition is for individuals with disabilities at all ages.
- Career development is a process begun at birth that continues throughout life.
- Early career development is essential for making satisfactory choices later.
- Significant gaps or periods of neglect in any area of basic human development affects career development and the transition from one stage of life to another.
- Career development is responsive to intervention and programming when the programming involves direct instruction for individual needs.

Teaching career education obviously has direct relevance to the development of life skills. As Chapter 3 discusses, a comprehensive conceptualization of life skills instruction extends the preparation for adulthood down to the elementary level.

Curricular focus at the *secondary level*, particularly for students with special needs, can be more clearly specified. However, clarity of focus does not correlate highly with sensitivity to individual student needs. Much of the literature suggests three general orientations, each of which contains more specific curricular models: support within the general education classroom, academic and social skill development or remediation, and specialized functional programming. Due to confusion associated with these terms and in consort with what is occurring in schools, Polloway, Patton, and Serna (2005) presented an overview of program options for students with special needs at the secondary level (see Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2**  
Program Options at the Secondary Level

Program option	Content
General education curriculum without supports or accommodations	
General education curriculum with supports and accommodations	Cooperative teaching Tutorial assistance Paraeducators Natural supports Accommodations to content, materials, and instruction Learning strategies Study skills
Special education curriculum with a focus on academic and social skill development and remediation	Basic skills Social skills
Special curriculum with focus on adult outcomes	Life skills Vocational training Apprenticeship

## Relationship of Life Skills to Standards-Based Education

The emphasis on standards and the testing of whether students are meeting these standards has become a major theme in general education in recent years. Students with special needs have been affected by this standards-based movement because of the heavy emphasis in the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 given to making sure that these students have access to the general education curriculum.

At first glance, it seems that life skills instruction and content and performance standards are not a good match. However, real-life topics can fit well within a standards-based world. In a review of standards taken from a variety of states, Patton and Trainor (2002) concluded that most standards do relate to real-life topics, and life skills coverage could be worked into lessons that meet state standards. Some examples of standards that have “direct,” “indirect,” or even “distant” functional relevance are provided in Table 1.3. The critical dimension for ensuring that functional content is addressed, however, is that teachers must make the effort to relate course content that has to be covered (i.e., explicit curriculum) to life skills–related topics. Chapter 3 of this book presents some practical ways of integrating real-life topics into the curriculum.

**Table 1.3**  
Examples of Standards Related to Functional Outcomes

Degree of relationship	Source of standard	Standard/student expectations	Performance outcomes
Direct	Texas: Mathematics / Middle School / Grade 6	Underlying processes and mathematical tools: The student applies Grade 6 mathematics to solve problems connected to everyday experiences, disciplines, and activities in and outside of school.	Determine amount of paint needed to paint a room, as a part of a house improvement project.
	North Carolina: Technology / English / Grades 9–12	Use electronic resources for research.	Use Internet browser to locate several types of sources on a topic of choice.
	New Jersey: Mathematics Core Curriculum Standards / Grades 9–12	Use measurement appropriately in other subject areas and career-based contexts.	Maintain a portfolio of occupations that require extensive use of measurement skills; include interviews with professionals.
	New Jersey: Science Core Curriculum Standards / Grades 9–12	Use computer spreadsheet, graphing, and database programs to assist in quantitative analysis.	Collect and organize data from school sports teams in terms of wins and losses. Analyze according to sport, team membership, and location of event.
	North Carolina: Social Studies / World Cultures / Grade 10	Engage in cross-cultural comparisons of such phenomena as religion, education, and language.	Create a “World Atlas” of countries and cultures represented by the family histories of class members. Interview members of each group and include a visitor’s guide of “Do’s and Don’ts.”
Indirect	Texas: English, Language Arts, Reading / High School / English I	Reading / word identification / vocabulary development: The student uses a variety of strategies to read unfamiliar words and to build vocabulary.	Introduce occupational vocabulary that is essential in the job acquisition process.
	Texas: Science / Grade 8	Science concepts: The student knows that substances have chemical and physical properties.	Change a solid to a liquid during a cooking activity.
	North Carolina: Algebra / High School	Use matrices to display and interpret data.	Create and maintain a matrix of grades received on homework assignments, tests, and projects.

*(continues)*



**Table 1.3** (Continued)

Degree of relationship	Source of standard	Standard/student expectations	Performance outcomes
	Hawaii: Language Arts / Grade Cluster 9–12	Use reading strategies appropriate to text and purpose (e.g., annotating, quoting, alluding to text, rethinking initial responses).	Write a persuasive essay or engage in formal debate regarding the importance of the First Amendment and the need to protect citizens from acts of terrorism.
Distant	Texas: Social Studies / High School / United States History Studies Since Reconstruction	Government: The student understands the changing relationships among the three branches of the federal government.	Find out which representatives from home area hold offices in the three branches of government.
	North Carolina: English I / Grade 12	The learner will deepen understanding of British literature through exploration and extended engagement.	Identify themes commonly found in Shakespeare's dramas in contemporary film.
	Hawaii: Science / Grade Cluster 9–12	Describe and explain properties of elements and their relationship in the periodic table.	Analyze the elements contained in common substances such as salt and water.
	New Jersey: Language Arts Core Curriculum Standards Grades 9–12	Understand the range of literary forms and content that elicit aesthetic response.	Keep a journal of movies, books, and songs that illustrate literary forms; provide a personal response or critique for each entry.
	North Carolina: Geometry / High School	Identify, name, and draw sets of point, such as line, ray, segment, and plane.	Create a "Geometry Dictionary" and post on line as a reference tool for fellow students.

*Note.* From "Using Applied Academics to Enhance Curricular Reform in Secondary Education," by J. R. Patton and A. Trainor, in *Aligning Transition and Standards-Based Education* (pp. 55–75), by C. Kochhar-Bryant and D. S. Bassett, 2002, Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional Children. Copyright 2002 by the Council for Exceptional Children. Reprinted with permission.

## Need for Curricular Innovation

The appropriateness of the various program options described in Table 1.3 depends on a number of variables that must be considered (see Polloway, Patton, Smith, & Roderique, 1991). Nevertheless, we propose that all students, whether or not they have been identified as having special needs, should be provided instruction on dealing with the day-to-day demands of adulthood (i.e., life skills). For students with special needs, it is imperative that their current and future needs be considered in designing programs.

With the movement to provide the educational programs of as many students with special needs as possible in general education settings, creative ways to deliver

life skills instruction are needed. Doing so poses some special challenges, as the importance of covering real-life topics must be recognized, understood, and acted on by general education teachers, as well as by special education personnel. Interestingly, providing this type of instruction within the general education setting offers great benefits to teachers (i.e., makes the content more meaningful) and to *all* students, as there are many students in these settings who are at risk for unsuccessfully dealing with adulthood.

## Relationship of Life Skills to the IEP and the Transition Planning Process

Life skills instruction is often closely woven with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and definitely relates to the whole notion of transition planning. Figure 1.1 depicts an overview of addressing the real-life needs of students. As can be seen at the far left of the figure, proactive transition education provides the basis for curricular attention throughout the schooling process. *Transition education* is defined as all education-related activities, particularly in the areas of curriculum and instruction, that correspond with and prepare students for the demands of adulthood. The very topics that should be addressed throughout the school process become the focus of attention when transition planning occurs. Starting with the assessment of transition needs and leading to the generation of instructional (aca-

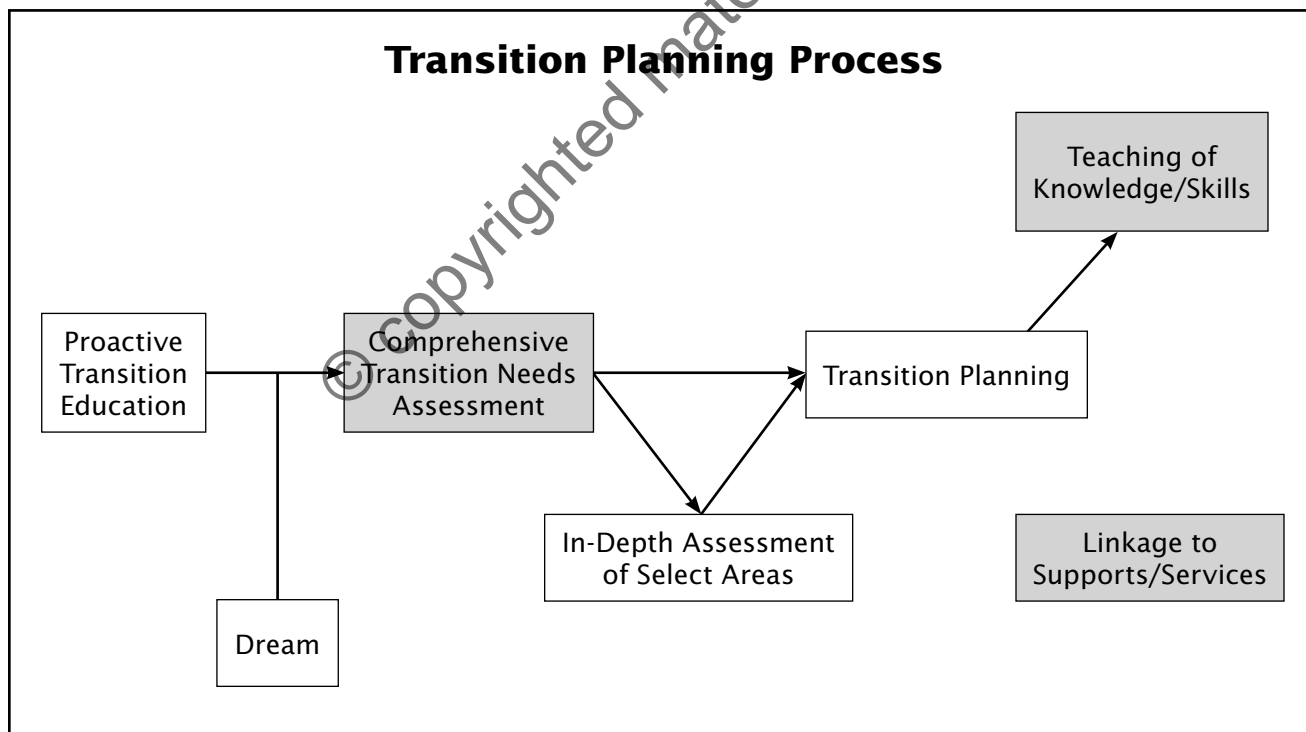


FIGURE 1.1. Transition planning process. *Note.* Adapted from *Transition Planning Inventory* (p. 26), by G. M. Clark and J. R. Patton, 1997, Austin, TX: PRO-ED. Copyright 1997 by PRO-ED. Adapted with permission.

demic, behavioral, social) goals as well as linkage goals (i.e., connecting the student and his or her family with supports and services that will be needed when the student is no longer in school). The “Dream” box refers to the notion that a student should have opportunities to think about and explore various adult outcome topics such as careers or where he or she wants to live. Each student should be encouraged to “dream” and then to see if those dreams can happen.

## Individualized Education Program

The IEP serves as the “management tool that is used to ensure that each student is provided special education and related services appropriate to address identified learning needs” (Strickland & Turnbull, 1990, p. 13). Many life skills can be included as academic or behavioral goals or objectives on students’ IEPs. For instance, an annual goal in math focusing on measurement can easily be related to a life skill need. The inclusion of life skills goals and objectives in IEPs helps ensure that students are taught these important topics. Unfortunately, far too often the IEPs for students who are in general education settings contain very few goals and corresponding objectives related to career development and life skills.

## Transition Planning

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 requires that the IEP include a “statement of needed transition services” by age 16. The law defines transition services [§ 300.29(a)] as

- a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that—
- (1) is designed within a results-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation;
  - (2) is based on the individual student’s needs, taking into account the student’s preferences and interests; and
  - (3) includes—(i) instruction; (ii) related services; (iii) community experiences; (iv) the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and (v) if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

Although this requirement is extremely important, it is possible that many important areas of adult functioning may still be overlooked. For this reason, comprehensive transition plans are essential. Clearly, the elements described above relate very closely to the main substantive features of life skills instruction.

Comprehensive transition planning should address the major life skills areas for which students need to be prepared prior to leaving school. Frequently, this involves the direct instruction in specific skills that students will need in their subsequent environments as well as the establishment of linkages with post-school services, as

indicated in Figure 1.1. As emphasized earlier in this chapter, the actual goals and objectives to be included as part of a student's transition plan will be determined after assessing needs. Once transition needs have been established, goals can be developed. One possible way to do this is to consult the list of major life demands presented in the next section of this chapter (see Table 1.5). We feel that these demands can usually serve as goal statements, and the short-term objectives can be generated from a careful analysis of the specific life skills associated with each major life demand.

## Implications

Based on the preceding discussion, we can conclude that

- many individuals with special needs are not being prepared for the multidimensional demands of adulthood;
- a large percentage of students who have special needs are not finding the school experience to be valuable and are dropping out;
- the educational programs of many students are not meeting their current and future needs;
- opportunities for continuing-education options (i.e., recruitment, ongoing support, specialized training, and follow-up services) for adults with special needs are needed; and
- a pressing need exists to reexamine school curriculum at both elementary and secondary levels and to develop innovative ways to address the functional needs of students within the context of the general education curriculum and standards-based education.

## The Nature of Life Skills Instruction

All students need to acquire those life skills necessary for successfully dealing with everyday living (i.e., productive adulthood). Unfortunately, few functional life skills are actually addressed in the traditional curricula found in most schools, and those that are covered typically are taught in classrooms rather than in applied community settings (Halpern, Benz, & Lindstrom, 1992). Although many individuals do learn specific life skills on their own in informal ways or from family and friends, many others do not. The stakes are too high to leave this area of learning to chance.

In light of the realities highlighted in the previous section, efforts are warranted to find ways to teach important life skills to students at risk for failing or dropping out of school as well as to students who will stay in school but need the competencies to deal with their future worlds. This section discusses the nature of life skills instruction that can contribute to addressing the needs of students.

Although it is easy to make a case for teaching life skills, we note that they are not taught often enough. This guide helps professionals address that very concern. The first part of this section presents a brief look at previous initiatives supporting the development of programs that prepare students for adulthood. The next part provides a framework on which life skills instruction can be based.

## Historical Perspective on Teaching Functional Skills

Interest in teaching functional skills is not a new phenomenon, as many dedicated people have argued for such instruction for a long time. As Kolstoe (1976) pointed out, the goals of the National Education Association as specified in a 1938 document suggest a strong interest in functional outcomes. The goals focus on economic efficiency, worthy home membership, worthy citizenship, and self-realization.

Many programs of the 1950s and 1960s for students with mental retardation were designed with adult outcomes in mind. Programs heavily emphasized functional skills, particularly related to vocational training and employment. Typically, school districts developed curriculum guides with functional themes that were used extensively with students in special education.

During the 1980s, the dramatic realization that disappointing adult outcomes existed for many former students gave rise to more formal study of the transition from school to adult life. This realization was particularly painful, considering that many of these former students had received extensive special education services during their school careers. Even though the transition movement has focused more on linking students to adult services and enhancing the mechanisms that facilitate these linkages, some attention was given to the curricular implications of this process (Patton, 1986).

In a more contemporary context, as discussed previously, some confusion exists today concerning how to address the need for life skills preparation in light of the demands of the general education curriculum and standards-based education movement, whereby many students are receiving academically oriented educational programs within regular education classes. As suggested, this should not be a problem, but tactics for covering life skills in such settings are not obvious. Chapter 3 shows some examples of how life skills instruction can be provided to students in inclusive settings.

Given the realities of current restructuring in special education, innovative curricular options emphasizing the skills needed to be successful adults should be available to students. The future challenge is to balance the need for students to be in integrated, academically oriented settings with the need to provide instruction on life skills topics that they will most certainly need in their foreseeable futures.

## Top-Down Approach to Curriculum Development

The model used in this guide for identifying specific life skills relies on a top-down approach to content or curriculum development. This model, depicted in Figure 1.2, emphasizes the need to consider likely subsequent environments of students and basing curriculum development on working “down” from consideration of anticipated outcomes. The various major life demands required for success in different post-school environments can be organized into general domains. Ultimately, this process leads to the identification of specific life skills that can be taught to students.

The top-down process to curricular development is a powerful approach to determining the content being taught in today’s schools. The top-down process, also

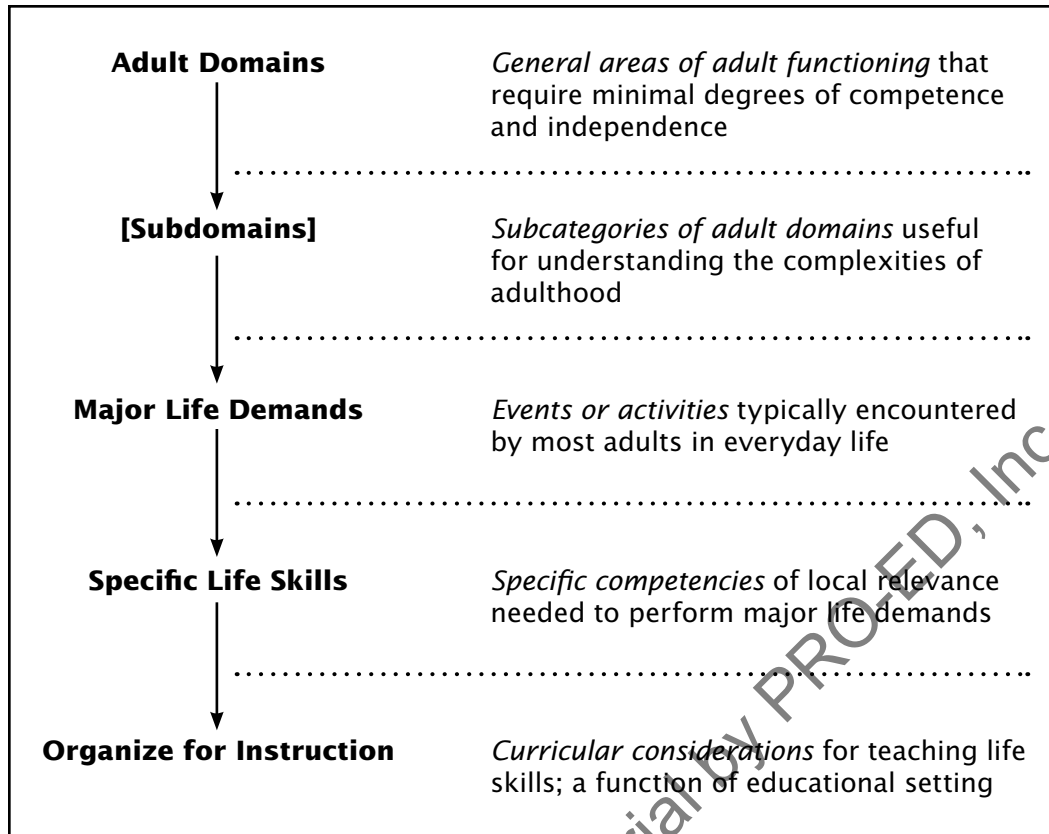


FIGURE 1.2. Top-down approach to curriculum development.

referred to as the outcome-based approach (Champlin, 1991; Friedland, 1992; King & Evans, 1991; Spady, 1986; Spady & Marshall, 1991), identifies the objectives or competencies based on a student's desired outcomes. The top-down process is used extensively in many fields, including vocational technical programs, NASA training for space flight, and professional degree programs (e.g., doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses).

The question asked when developing a top-down curriculum in any area is, "What are the competencies these individuals need to know in order to competently perform the adult tasks?" The outcomes of each job are examined first to provide the foundation for building the curriculum. Outcomes are examined to determine the competencies needed to perform the tasks of the job. Those identified competencies or objectives are then organized into a curriculum or program of study. If any of the aforementioned fields and occupations did not develop curriculum from the top down, many of our professionals would be haphazardly trained. The need to use a top-down approach for any adult outcome-oriented curriculum is imperative, even more so in preparing all students with special needs for the basic everyday demands of adulthood.

The generation of life skills developed from the top-down process needs to begin at the local level. Local needs should drive the focus of the competencies of the curriculum. There are "generic" or general competencies or life demands that all adults face, such as transportation, shopping, banking, and driving, which should be

addressed in every life skills curriculum. The local generation of life skills competencies in the curriculum will reflect the differences in many locales—urban, rural, small community, big city, regional, and sometimes even within states. The differences reflected in locally generated life skills topics include vocabulary (e.g., use of the term *neutral ground* for the median on a street or boulevard), transportation (subway, ferry, bus, streetcar), culture (type of music, such as country, pop, soul, jazz), shopping practices (bagging vs. not bagging your own groceries), and driving ordinances (e.g., right turn on red, U-turns). The identification of specific life skills by local school personnel when developing a life skills curriculum must reflect the competencies needed to be successful in that particular community.

## Major Life Demands

This section provides an organizational framework for the various day-to-day demands of living. This framework is the centerpiece of planning life skills coverage. The focal component is the set of “major life demands”—events or activities that most individuals will have to face in everyday life.

**Domains of Adult Life.** Adult domains, as defined in Figure 1.2, are categories depicting very general areas of adult functioning that require minimal degrees of competence and independence. A number of sources exist where one can find formats for organizing skills deemed necessary for adult living. Table 1.4 summarizes a select list of such sources. Although all use different descriptors to refer to functional areas, they share common themes. All of these models have merit and are worth further examination.

The conceptualization of adult domains used in this guide was developed out of the Hawaii Transition Project (1987). One of the early efforts of the project focused on the development of a frame of reference for looking at the transitional needs of students. Initially, nine areas of transition were identified; however, over time these nine areas were reduced to six, as indicated in Table 1.4. These six domains fell under one of two overriding areas: life domains and support domains. Patton and Browder (1988) explained the distinction between the two areas:

The designation of life domains is simple—the domains represent how most individuals explicitly or implicitly organize their lives. The selection of support domains is likewise simple—the need to provide financially for one’s food, shelter, clothing, and physical and emotional health must be met before individuals can take on adult responsibilities and activities beyond themselves. (p. 296)

The life and support domains used in the Hawaii Transition Project were modified over time into a new set of general adult domains. One source that contributed to our thinking was Knowles’s (1990) categorization of the adult problems of young adults. Figure 1.3 shows the domains used in this guide. We feel that all of the activities we do as adults can fall into one of the six domains, which are closely related to the way we organize our lives and the transition planning domains typically used in schools.

The major domains of adult functioning identified in Figure 1.3 provide the format or structure from which to identify workable classifications called subdomains to generate the major life demands. The subdomains organize the adult domains

**Table 1.4**  
Select Conceptualizations of Adulthood Dimensions

Source	Major functional areas
Life Centered Career Education (LCCE) (Brolin, 1993)	22 competencies divided across three domains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daily Living</li> <li>• Personal–Social</li> <li>• Occupational Guidance and Preparation</li> </ul>
Community-Referenced Curriculum (M. A. Smith & Schloss, 1988)	Major areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work</li> <li>• Leisure and Play</li> <li>• Consumer</li> <li>• Education and Rehabilitation</li> <li>• Transportation</li> </ul>
Community Living Skills Taxonomy (Dever, 1988)	Major areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Maintenance and Development</li> <li>• Homemaking and Community Life</li> <li>• Vocational</li> <li>• Leisure</li> <li>• Travel</li> </ul>
Life Problems of U.S. Adults (Knowles, 1990)	Major areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocation and Career</li> <li>• Home and Family Living</li> <li>• Enjoyment of Leisure</li> <li>• Community Living</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Personal Development</li> </ul>
Hawaii Transition Project (1987)	Four life domains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocation/Education</li> <li>• Home and Family</li> <li>• Recreation/Leisure</li> <li>• Community/Citizenship (Guardianship/Advocacy)</li> </ul> Two support domains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Support</li> <li>• Emotional/Physical Health</li> </ul>

into workable categories for long-range goal planning. The domains and their key subdomains are listed below.

**Employment/Education**

- General Job Skills
- General Education/Training Considerations



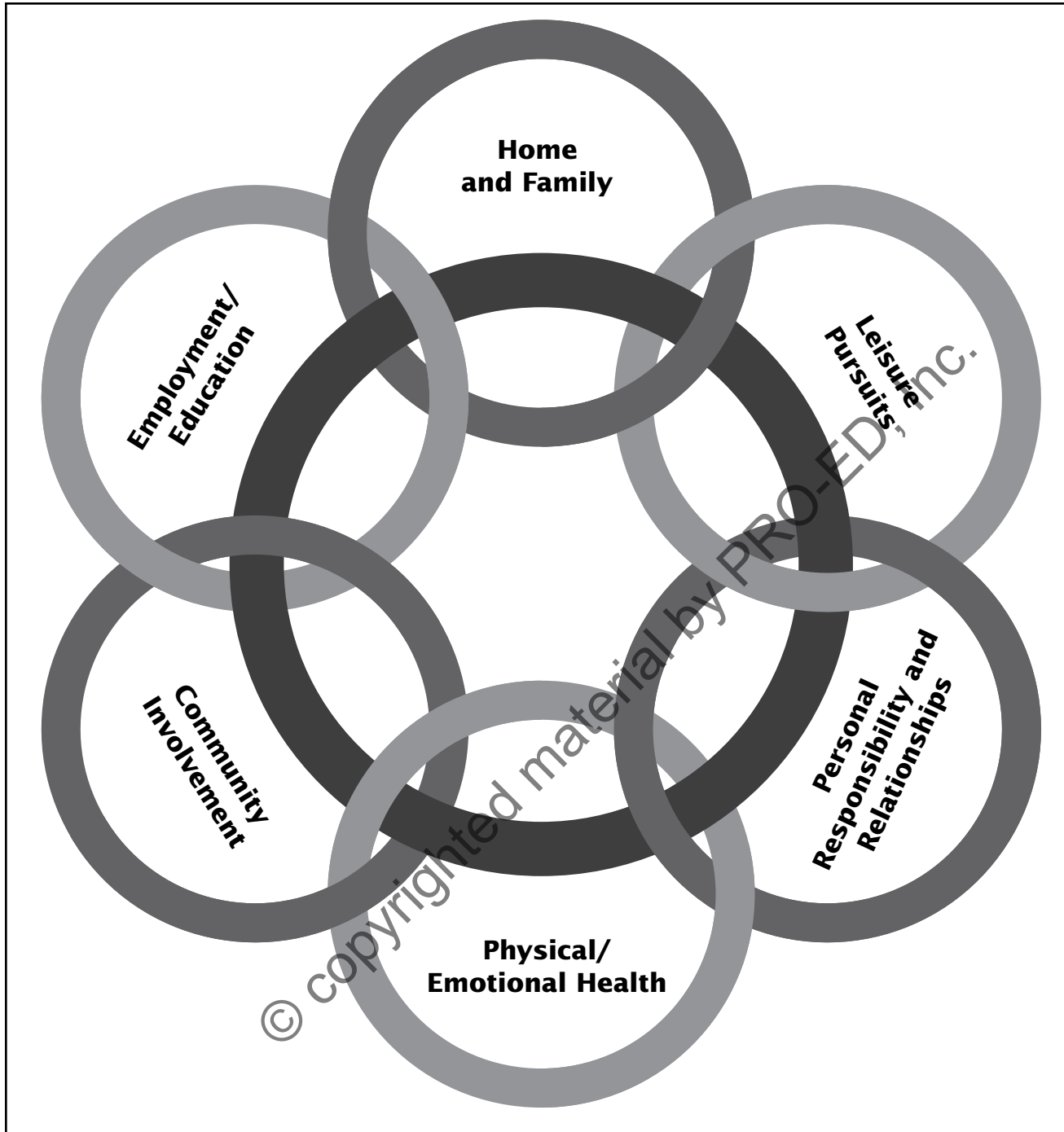


FIGURE 1.3. Domains of adulthood.

- Employment Setting
- Career Refinement and Reevaluation

**Home and Family**

- Home Management
- Financial Management

- Family Life
- Child Rearing

#### **Leisure Pursuits**

- Indoor Activities
- Outdoor Activities
- Community/Neighborhood Activities
- Travel
- Entertainment

#### **Community Involvement**

- Citizenship
- Community Awareness
- Services/Resources

#### **Physical/Emotional Health**

- Physical Health
- Emotional Health

#### **Personal Responsibility and Relationships**

- Personal Confidence/Understanding
- Goal Setting
- Self-Improvement
- Relationships
- Personal Expression

With a top-down perspective of life skills identification, it is useful to begin with general dimensions for organizing the events and activities associated with adulthood (i.e., adult domains and subdomains). However, as indicated at the beginning of this section, the most important component of the model shown in Figure 1.2 is the listing of the major life demands.

**Identification of Major Life Demands.** The identification of critical life skills should be based on the behaviors that individuals will need in their specific community environments. The major life demands provide the foundation for local school systems to generate, develop, and identify life skills for competency and course development.

The identification of the major life demands for this guide drew upon the authors' teaching experiences, the experiences of school-based personnel and other professionals interested in life skills instruction, personal schooling, consultation with colleagues, study of relevant literature, and observation of students, parents, teachers, siblings, friends, and strangers. Table 1.5 provides a list of these major life demands and represents a core from which life skills curricula, competencies, instructional objectives, courses, and activities can emerge. Additional life demands, created by school-based personnel, should reflect those demands and tasks deemed necessary in the specific community in which the students live and, therefore, need to know in order to function successfully in that environment. Identification of these community- or individual-specific life demands is necessary in order to realize the most complete and efficient transition program for each student during his or her middle and high school years.

*(text continues on p. 22)*

**Table 1.5**  
Major Life Demands

Domain	Subdomain	Life demands
Employment/ Education	General Job Skills	seeking and securing a job learning job skills maintaining one's job understanding fundamental and legal issues
	General Education/ Training Considerations	knowing about education/training options gaining entry to postsecondary education/training settings (higher education, adult education, community education, trade/technical schools, military service) finding financial support utilizing academic and system survival skills (e.g., study skills, organizational skills, and time management) requesting employment services when needed (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, unemployment) accessing support services of training setting
	Employment Setting	recognizing job duties and responsibilities exhibiting appropriate work habits/behavior getting along with employer and coworkers understanding company policies (e.g., fringe benefits, wages, sick/personal leave, advancement procedures) understanding take-home pay/deductions managing employment-related expenses (travel, clothes, dues) understanding OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] regulations
	Career Refinement and Reevaluation	revitalizing career choice exploring alternative career options pursuing career change
Home and Family	Home Management	setting up household operations (e.g., initiating utilities) arranging furniture and equipment identifying and implementing security provisions and safety procedures cleaning dwelling maintaining and landscaping a yard laundering and maintaining clothes and household items performing/contracting for home repairs/improvements and regular maintenance storing household items maintaining automobile(s) and equipment, appliances, etc. reacting to environmental dangers (e.g., pollution, extreme weather conditions)
	Financial Management	creating a general financial plan (e.g., savings, investments, retirement) maintaining a budget using banking services paying bills establishing a good credit rating purchasing day-to-day items (clothes, food, etc.) renting an apartment selecting and buying a house (building new/purchasing existing) making major purchases (e.g., auto) determining payment options for major purchases (cash, credit, layaway, debit card, finance plan, etc.) preparing and paying taxes buying insurance

(continues)

**Table 1.5 (Continued)**

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Subdomain</b>	<b>Life demands</b>
<b>Home and Family (cont.)</b>	Financial Management (cont.)	purchasing specialty items throughout the year (e.g., birthday gifts, Christmas gifts) planning for long-term financial needs (e.g., major purchases, children's education) obtaining government assistance when needed (e.g., Medicare, food stamps, student loans)
	Family Life	preparing for marriage, family maintaining physical/emotional health of family members maintaining family harmony scheduling and managing daily, weekly, monthly, yearly family events (e.g., appointments, social events, leisure/recreational pursuits) planning and preparing meals (menu, buying food, ordering take-out food, dining out) arranging for/providing day care (children or older relatives) managing incoming/outgoing mail
	Child Rearing	acquiring realistic information about raising children preparing for pregnancy and childbirth understanding childhood development (physical, emotional, cognitive, language) managing children's behavior preparing for out-of-home experiences (e.g., day care, school) helping children with school-related needs hiring and training in-home babysitter
<b>Leisure Pursuits</b>	Indoor Activities	playing table or electronic games (e.g., cards, board games, puzzles, video games, arcades) performing individual physical activities (e.g., weight training, aerobics, dance, swimming, martial arts) participating in group physical activities (e.g., racquetball, basketball) engaging in individual hobbies and crafts (e.g., reading, handicrafts, sewing, collecting)
	Outdoor Activities	performing individual physical activities (e.g., jogging, golf, bicycling, swimming, hiking, backpacking, fishing) participating in group physical activities (e.g., softball, football, basketball, tennis) engaging in general recreational activities (e.g., camping, sightseeing, picnicking)
	Community/ Neighborhood Activities	going to various ongoing neighborhood events (e.g., garage sales, block parties, barbecues) attending special events (e.g., fairs, trade shows, carnivals, parades, festivals)
	Travel	preparing to go on a trip (e.g., destination, transportation arrangements, hotel/motel arrangements, packing, preparations for leaving home) dealing with the realities of travel via air, ground, or water
	Entertainment	engaging in in-home activities (e.g., TV, videos, music) attending out-of-home events (e.g., theaters, spectator sports, concerts, performances, art shows) going to socially oriented events (e.g., restaurants, parties, nightclubs) and other social events
<b>Community Involvement</b>	Citizenship	understanding legal rights exhibiting civic responsibility voting in elections understanding tax obligations obeying laws and ordinances

(continues)

Table 1.5 (Continued)

Domain	Subdomain	Life demands
Community Involvement (cont.)	Citizenship (cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>serving on a jury</li> <li>understanding judicial procedures (e.g., due process, criminal/civil courts, legal documents)</li> <li>attending public hearings</li> <li>creating change in the community (e.g., petition drives)</li> </ul>
	Community Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>being aware of social issues affecting community</li> <li>knowing major events at the local, regional, national, world levels</li> <li>using mass media (TV, radio, newspapers, Internet)</li> <li>understanding all sides of public opinion on community issues</li> <li>recognizing and acting on fraudulent practices</li> </ul>
	Services/Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>knowing about the wide range of services available in a specific community</li> <li>using all levels of government agencies (tax office, drivers license [Department of Motor Vehicles], permits, consumer agencies [Better Business Bureau])</li> <li>accessing public transportation (trains, buses, subways, ferries, etc.)</li> <li>accessing private services (humane society, cable services, utilities [phone, water, electric, sewage, garbage, Internet provider, cell phones])</li> <li>accessing emergency services/resources (police, emergency medical service, hospital, fire, civil defense)</li> <li>accessing agencies that provide special services (advocacy centers)</li> <li>securing legal representation (e.g., lawyer referral)</li> </ul>
Physical/Emotional Health	Physical Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>living a healthy lifestyle</li> <li>planning a nutritional diet</li> <li>exercising regularly as part of lifestyle</li> <li>having regular physical/dental checkups</li> <li>understanding illnesses and medical/dental needs across age levels</li> <li>using proper dental hygiene/dental care</li> <li>preventing illness and accidents</li> <li>recognizing health risks</li> <li>recognizing signs of medical/dental problems</li> <li>reacting to medical emergencies</li> <li>administering simple first aid</li> <li>using medications</li> <li>providing treatment for chronic health problems</li> <li>recognizing and accommodating physical changes associated with aging</li> <li>recognizing and dealing with substance use/abuse</li> </ul>
	Emotional Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>understanding emotional needs across age levels</li> <li>recognizing signs of emotional needs</li> <li>managing life changes</li> <li>managing stress</li> <li>dealing with adversity and depression</li> <li>dealing with anxiety</li> <li>coping with separation/death of family members and friends</li> <li>understanding emotional dimensions of sexuality</li> <li>seeking personal counseling</li> </ul>

(continues)

**Table 1.5 (Continued)**

Domain	Subdomain	Life demands
Personal Responsibility and Relationships	Personal	recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses
	Confidence/ Understanding	appreciating one's accomplishments identifying ways to maintain or achieve a positive self-concept reacting appropriately to the positive or negative feedback of others using appropriate communication skills following one's religious beliefs
	Goal Setting	evaluating one's values identifying and achieving personal goals and aspirations exercising problem-solving/decision-making skills becoming independent and self-directed
	Self-Improvement	pursuing personal interests conducting self-evaluation seeking continuing education improving scholastic abilities displaying appropriate personal interaction skills maintaining personal appearance
	Relationships	getting along with others establishing and maintaining friendships developing intimate relations deciding upon potential spouse or partner being sensitive to the needs of others communicating praise or criticism to others being socially perceptive (e.g., recognizing contextual clues) dealing with conflict nurturing healthy child/parent interactions solving marital problems
	Personal Expression	sharing personal feelings, experiences, concerns, desires with other people writing personal correspondence (e.g., letters, e-mails, notes, greeting cards)

Table 1.5 lists the six adult domains, 23 subdomains, and 146 major life demands. The major life demands represent the events or activities typically encountered by most adults in everyday life. It is from these demands that specific life skills, or the competencies needed to perform major life demands, will be generated to develop instructional objectives to meet students' real-life needs.

## Examples of Specific Life Skills Identification

Figure 1.2 describes the actual sequence suggested for identifying specific life skills. Table 1.6 contains top-down examples for the six domains of adulthood. It is important to note that these examples provide only a sampling of possible specific life

**Table 1.6**  
Examples of Specific Life Skills Identification

<b>Adult domain</b>	<b>Specific subdomain</b>	<b>Major life demand</b>	<b>Specific life skills</b>
Employment/ Education	General Job Skills	seeking and securing a job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify marketable job skills and interests</li> <li>• identify sources of job possibilities</li> <li>• use all sources of available jobs to identify appropriate jobs for the skills you possess</li> <li>• send e-mail or letters of inquiry or make calls of inquiry regarding the job, its availability, and application procedures</li> <li>• locate the site of the prospective job on the map</li> <li>• determine transportation needs for prospective jobs</li> <li>• obtain and fill out a job application</li> <li>• call for an interview appointment</li> <li>• record time, place, location, and name of person interviewing for future reference</li> <li>• determine appropriate dress for interview</li> <li>• practice interview skills</li> <li>• generate list of questions to ask about the job</li> <li>• compute weekly or monthly income</li> <li>• calculate mileage to work</li> <li>• ask about subsequent evaluations of job performance</li> <li>• identify appropriate dress for the job</li> </ul>
Home and Family	Financial Management	purchasing day-to-day items (e.g., clothes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• know where to shop</li> <li>• compare prices</li> <li>• understand cleaning and care instructions</li> <li>• be aware of available money in checking account</li> </ul>
Leisure Pursuits	Entertainment	engaging in in-home activities (e.g., renting videos/DVDs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• compare prices at various multimedia stores</li> <li>• determine costs and amount of available cash</li> <li>• identify multimedia store and location</li> <li>• understand terms of video/DVD rental</li> <li>• agree on movie selection with others</li> <li>• know how to use video/DVD player</li> </ul>
Community Involvement	Citizenship	voting in elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• register to vote</li> <li>• identify appropriate polling place and its location</li> <li>• obtain information on offices and candidates</li> <li>• determine distance from home to polling place</li> <li>• schedule time to vote</li> </ul>
Physical/ Emotional Health	Physical Health	recognizing signs of medical/dental problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• know symptoms of common illnesses (e.g., flu)</li> <li>• determine the temperature of your body</li> <li>• know when to call or go to the doctor</li> <li>• describe symptoms over the phone to health care worker</li> <li>• understand the roles of doctor, nurse, pharmacist</li> </ul>

*(continues)*

**Table 1.6** (Continued)

Adult domain	Specific subdomain	Major life demand	Specific life skills
Personal Responsibility and Relationships	Self-Improvement	maintaining personal appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• buy appropriate clothes for work</li> <li>• understand directions for cleaning work clothes</li> <li>• wear appropriate clothes for weather</li> <li>• style hair when needed</li> <li>• brush/floss teeth regularly</li> </ul>

skills associated with a given major life demand and are by no means exhaustive of the specific life skills competencies necessary for dealing with the selected major life demands.

The generation of a list of life skills, as mentioned earlier in this section, depends on local needs and expectations for success in each community. The importance of this local input cannot be overstated. The success of programs is reflected in the ability of students to perform adult tasks within their own community, and coverage of life skills topics must reflect those adult tasks.

## Guiding Principles for This Book

In light of the preceding discussion on the challenges facing us, professionals concerned about the adult outcomes of youth in today's schools must identify a philosophy that guides policy, decisions, and actions. We want to share the principles that guide how we conceptualize service delivery:

- *Utilize the notion of “subsequent environment as attitude.”* The concept described by Polloway et al. (1991) implies that everything we do with students should be considered in the context of where they will likely be in the near future.
- *Treat each instructional day as if it were the last day in a student's scholastic life.* This idea emphasizes the importance of making every moment count. As many teachers know, there are students who may at any time drop out of school and never return.
- *Reevaluate what we are doing with students on a regular basis.* It is extremely important that we continually strive to be innovative in terms of curricular design and instructional methodology.
- *Take advantage of opportunities to cover real-life topics within the context of existing standards, curricula, and materials.* In today's classrooms, it is important to balance the need to be always mindful of the critical standards that guide curricula, to work effectively with the set curricula and the materials associated with it, and to address the real-life needs of students.

These four principles should apply to all educational decisions related to youth with special needs or placed at risk. These principles certainly apply to the themes discussed in the remainder of this book.