

# Preface

The third edition of *Functional Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Students with Special Needs* reflects a broad conceptual framework of functionality for children and adolescents with disabilities and other special needs. We started at the classroom level and then examined the workplace and how Social Security incentives can make a difference to the lives of these young people. The demand is stronger than ever to provide a functional curriculum for students—that is, a curriculum with everyday usefulness and value in making the student more competent and independent. Another current emphasis is on showing how to tie the curriculum from the elementary school to the curricula of middle and secondary schools, and ultimately to tasks common in adult life. To this end, response to intervention is an important concept, and we offer a new chapter on this topic. We believe that not enough attention has been paid to connecting the different curriculum levels to provide a continuity of educational service for students and their families. We also believe that transitions from middle school to high school and from high school to adulthood are more important than ever.

In this edition, we have added several new chapters:

- Response to Intervention (Chapter 3)
- Social Security, Work Incentives, and Benefits Planning (Chapter 8)
- Positive Behavior Support (Chapter 9)
- Adult Services (Chapter 16)
- Going to Work (Chapter 18)

This material reflects recent advances in the field and will greatly enhance the teacher's ability to integrate functional curriculum into transition planning for adulthood.

Compared with their nondisabled peers, youth with disabilities are significantly unemployed or underemployed, and they tend to drop out of school more often and go to college less frequently. Increased concerns about the dropout problem are now emerging because of the experiences of state and local education agencies with high-stakes accountability in the context of standards-based reform. States and school districts have identified what students should know and be able to do, and have implemented assessments to ensure that students have attained the identified knowledge and skills. Large numbers of students, however, are not faring well on these assessments. For youth with disabilities, several factors beyond academic achievement influence their ability to pass these assessments, including accurate identification of disabilities, provision of needed

accommodations, and educational supports that make learning possible regardless of disability-related factors. In particular, the provision of accommodations assures that a student's true academic skills, rather than elements of the disability, are measured by the assessments. There is a strong need for evidence-based practices of transition-related activities, specifically as they relate to vocational competence, career preparation, and competitive employment.

Having high aspirations for success can influence the actual outcomes of people with disabilities—a major theme of this book. Society is changing rapidly, both politically and technologically, and one can easily feel inept or overwhelmed. However, positive self-esteem and confidence can directly affect one's level of success. Many in society have substantial doubts about the quality and credibility of education for young people with disabilities. We believe that the only way to change these views is for young people with disabilities to demonstrate their competence on college campuses, in community malls, in recreational centers, and in the workplace. Societal attitudes will change only when everyone can see the successful behaviors of individuals with disabilities, many of whom have never been given the opportunity to perform well.

Whatever the political climate, there will always be young adults in need of education and work opportunities. In addition to emphasizing evidence-based academic research and high-stakes testing, we promote inclusive employment as a targeted outcome. Transition from school to adulthood has remained a major priority of state legislatures, as well as the U.S. government, primarily because intelligent and informed people know that the country's future rests on the education and employment of its young people, thousands of whom have specialized needs or disabilities. As society becomes more complex, and as technology and jobs become more specially designed, upgraded equipment and facilities, as well as a more sophisticated approach to training, will be required. Greater work experiences in the community, more intensive apprenticeships, greater use of business mentors, and employment during school all constitute a more successful approach to transition planning.

Contributors to this book focus on key priorities in helping students with disabilities prepare for independence and employment through having a functional longitudinal education. For example, students need to attain competitive employment *before* leaving school through assistance from school personnel in conjunction with the state-federal vocational rehabilitation program and other community agencies. One of the most powerful ways to interfere with the progression of large numbers of youth onto long-term benefits from Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is to create a competitive employment work history. This could be done by strengthening the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) to provide stronger language supporting the responsibility of local education agencies (LEAs) to provide employment and career building services. It could also be done by establishing a grant authority in IDEA for states to earmark dollars strictly for funding LEA competitive employment initiatives, including supported employment.

Many youth with disabilities and their families experience a sense of isolation from the community. A primary example of this isolation is the limited participation of youth

with disabilities in work and work-related activities. By encouraging and supporting middle and secondary school-age youth with disabilities to obtain ID cards, develop and maintain résumés, and seek out work opportunities, school programs can expand students' involvement in the community, knowledge of work requirements, and awareness of individual interests. These activities provide a firm base of information for the transition committees to use in assisting individual students in planning for postsecondary interests and service needs.

Wonderful progress has been made in the education and employment of young people with disabilities over the past 20 years. However, there is an unfortunate disparity among communities in successfully helping their young adults. In this text, the contributors provide individualized examples of how person-centered planning can be fused with transition planning to give the reader more specific and concrete illustrations of how students can collaboratively plan for meaningful outcomes. The strong focus on person-centered planning, business partnerships, and career development imparts a clear message: Unless businesses and industry are involved in a more direct fashion, those training activities generated exclusively in the school environment are doomed to fail because they are largely ungeneralizable.

Clearly, Congress and the administration should work to ensure that federal monies appropriated through the Workforce Investment Act, Titles XIX and XX of the Social Security Act, the Rehabilitation Act, and IDEA are used to support competitive employment and career development alternatives for students. For example, federal and state agencies should expand the use of funding mechanisms that encourage joint funding of career development and work experiences that begin early in the educational process for youth with disabilities. Illustrations include the following:

- Local school districts and developmental disabilities agencies could jointly fund job placement and ongoing support services for students with significant disabilities who may already be receiving SSI benefits.
- Local school districts and vocational rehabilitation offices could jointly fund the development of apprenticeships, mentor programs, or corporate partnership initiatives.

The federal-state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program needs to be funded in such a way that students can participate earlier and more fully in the transition process. Many, if not most, state VR agencies follow a policy of not providing rehabilitation placement services until the student is within 6 months of graduation.

In this book, we have assembled contributions from some of this nation's leading authorities in curriculum design; they have provided dozens of highly relevant tables, charts, and instructional programs for direct service providers. We hope this material can be used not only in teacher preparation but also in leadership training. At the same time, each chapter is based on the most recent research and the most contemporary thinking to help teachers and other instructional personnel be current in their planning. The chapters in this book deal with areas of expertise that most students will need.

For example, self-determination skills, functional academics, transportation, home and community living, and activities of daily living, as well as work preparation and socialization, are all critical to success in adulthood. The chapters have a heavy curriculum format that is designed to be as user-friendly as possible to teachers, instructional personnel, counselors, and occupational therapists, as well as other people in the special education, psychology, and rehabilitation fields with interest in this area.

We are extremely grateful to the contributors in this book. Pam Targett, Mark Richardson, Liz Getzel, James Martin, Paul Sale, Colleen Thoma, Kelly Ligon, Katherine Wittig, Pamela Wolfe, Cheryl Ostry, Kathryn Banks, Lucy Miller, Susan O'Mara, Carol Schall, Sara Pankaskie, Shirley Chandler, Michael West, Victoria Barrett, Stacy Dymond, Daniel Steere, Teri Burcroff, Caroline DiPipi-Hoy, Wendy Wood, Fred Spooner, Martin Agran, Grant Revell, Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell, Lana Collet-Klingenberg, and Howard Green all willingly gave their time to make this an outstanding curriculum book for either pre-service or in-service use. We are most grateful to them and to our many colleagues who provided insights about the best way to develop this book. It is our hope that it will have tremendous utility for students in training as well as professionals in the field.

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