

# The Way to Work

SECOND EDITION



**How to Facilitate  
Work Experiences  
for Youth in Transition**

**Richard G. Luecking**

Forewords by Mary E. Morningstar and Madeleine Will

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# **The Way to Work**

## **How to Facilitate Work Experiences for Youth in Transition**

Second Edition

by

**Richard G. Luecking, Ed.D.**  
University of Maryland  
College Park

*with invited contributors*

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# Contents

About the Appendices.....	vii
About the Author .....	ix
About the Contributors.....	x
Foreword <i>Mary E. Morningstar</i> .....	xiii
Foreword <i>Madeleine Will</i> .....	xv
Preface .....	xvii
Acknowledgments .....	xix
Introduction.....	xxi
1 Recognizing Work Experiences as Indispensable Transition Tools .....	1
<i>Richard G. Luecking and Kelli Thuli Crane</i>	
2 Setting the Stage for Quality Work Experiences .....	21
3 Planning for Work Experiences.....	39
<i>Richard G. Luecking, Amy Dwyre D'Agati, and Marie Parker Harvey</i>	
4 Navigating Work Experience and Disability Disclosure.....	79
5 Supporting Families to Support Work Experience .....	95
<i>Richard G. Luecking and Amy Dwyre D'Agati</i>	
6 Finding Workplace Partners: Strategies for Recruiting Employers.....	113
7 Retaining Workplace Partners: Strategies for Ensuring Effective Employer Participation.....	135



8	Supporting Youth in the Workplace .....	157
9	Facilitating Workplace Mentorship for Youth Workers .....	187
	<i>Richard G. Luecking and Meredith Gramlich</i>	
10	Connecting With Professional and Agency Partners to Foster and Sustain Work Success.....	205
	<i>Richard G. Luecking and Kelli Thuli Crane</i>	
11	Pursuing Quality Work-Based Learning for All.....	221
	Index.....	235

## About the Author

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Dr. Luecking is Co-Director of the Center for Transition and Career Innovation and is Research Professor in the Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education in the College of Education at the University Maryland, College Park. He previously served for 28 years as President of TransCen, Inc., a national nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the employment success of people with disabilities. During his tenures at TransCen and the University of Maryland, he has designed, implemented, and evaluated numerous model demonstration and research projects related to school-to-work transition and competitive integrated employment of individuals with disabilities. He is widely published on related topics in books, refereed professional journals, and trade publications.

Dr. Luecking's professional history includes serving as a state vocational rehabilitation counselor and the director of nonprofit competitive integrated employment service programs. He also served as a Policy Advisor to the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, where he helped establish its national Employment First initiative, and in the National School to Work Opportunities Office, a combined initiative of the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor. His research and professional interest is the translation of knowledge for both policy makers and practitioners.

## About the Contributors

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Kelli Thuli Crane is Assistant Research Professor at the Center for Transition and Career Innovation (CTCI), University of Maryland, College Park. She has extensive experience designing and implementing transition-related interventions to improve postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities, and she has served in leadership roles on several highly visible research and model demonstration projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Social Security Administration. Prior to joining CTCI, Dr. Crane worked for TranCen, Inc., as Senior Research Associate. In this capacity, she consulted with national, state, and local stakeholders to build their capacity in aligning and delivering evidence-based practices leading to improved education, employment, and financial outcomes for youth with disabilities. Dr. Crane also served as a consultant for the National School-to-Work Office (NSTWO) of the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor, where she collaborated with federal and state government entities to ensure the inclusion of youth with disabilities in high school reform and other programs and services. During her tenure at the NSTWO, Dr. Crane served in an advisory capacity on the youth subcommittee of the Presidential Task Force on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities. She has published journal articles as well as numerous products related to school-to-work transition. Dr. Crane is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and, early in her career, worked as a job coach and transition specialist for an urban school district.

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Amy Dwyre D'Agati is Technical Assistance Specialist at the Center for Transition and Career Innovation at the University of Maryland, College Park. Prior to that, she spent more than 20 years as Senior Associate at TransCen, Inc. Throughout

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Marie Parker Harvey is Training and Development Coordinator in the Center for Transition and Career Innovation in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. This position focuses on the development of webinars and curriculum to teach workers in the education and disability fields how to create individualized work experiences for youth with disabilities. It builds upon her many years of service to youth and individuals with disabilities through direct service work, advocacy, training, and program development. This next step in her career is the result of her many years as Program Director and County Liaison for the Montgomery County Customized Employment Public Intern Project (MCPIP) for Montgomery County (MD) Government. As the County Liaison for MCPIP, Ms. Harvey identified and created more than 120 part-time positions for people with disabilities in Montgomery County government offices, based on a department's need and the candidate's specific interests, skills, and abilities. Ms. Harvey also oversaw Youth with Disabilities programs through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), assisting hundreds of in- and out-of-school youth to find employment. She developed and led her team in a successful summer youth employment program that later expanded into a year-round work-based learning program (Division of Rehabilitative Services/Summer Youth Employment/Pre-Employment Transition Services, or DORS/SYE/Pre-ETS) to place hundreds of in-school youth with disabilities in individualized work-based learning opportunities with cooperating employers. Ms. Harvey is well-known for her working relationships and collaborations with state and local government and nongovernmental agencies, local and private school systems, community service providers, nonprofits, private sector businesses, and families in need. Her experience and expertise has allowed her to serve people with a broad range of disabilities and barriers, and her work and advocacy continues to impact the field.

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Meredith Gramlich is Senior Faculty Specialist at the Center for Transition and Career Innovation (CTCI) in the Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. She has extensive experience promoting business–education partnerships,

work-based learning opportunities, customized employment solutions, and model transition services. Prior to her work with CTCL, she worked for TransCen, Inc., for 27 years as Senior Research Associate—where she provided training, technical assistance, and direct service to facilitate competitive integrated employment for youth and adults with disabilities as part of model demonstration projects, including Maryland PROMISE (a partnership of state agencies and private sector disability organizations that addressed the challenges faced by youth receiving Supplemental Security Income by promoting improved education and career outcomes), Maryland Customized Employment Partnership, Maryland Transition Initiative, and Bridges from School to Work. Ms. Gramlich is a certified special education teacher with a master's degree in transition special education with emphasis on secondary and vocational programming and business–education partnerships. She taught in Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools Alternative Programs, where she established its Career Program and also developed a cutting edge model education program for adjudicated youth pretrial. Ms. Gramlich is a trainer for the Employment Services Certificate endorsed by the Association for Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE). Ms. Gramlich's younger sister—who has disabilities and works independently in a customized, community-based, integrated job—inspired her to dedicate her career to finding creative solutions for independence.



# Foreword

I was so thrilled when Rich asked me to write a forward for the new edition to his book, *The Way to Work*. It was not just the honor of being asked, which of course, coming from Rich Luecking, is quite the honor. More important, as a long-time transition educator who has taught probably hundreds of secondary and transition practitioners, I have used the first edition of *The Way to Work* for years, hoping that sooner or later Rich would get around to updating the content. For the many students who have enrolled over the years in the Employment and Career Development classes I have developed and taught, *The Way to Work* was a cornerstone.

The second edition continues to maintain the strong emphasis on ensuring that youth with disabilities make positive transitions from school to competitive integrated employment by continuing to engage transition practitioners in supporting youth to learn how to work. As is now well established in our field, students with disabilities must obtain high-quality work-related experiences in order to exit school with successful work experiences leading to employment (Test et al., 2009). The critical impact of *The Way to Work, Second Edition*, is the emphasis on supporting transition stakeholders to understand the importance of career development and work-based learning, given the emergent research associated with programs and experiences that predict future job success. Since the first edition was published, the research associated with what we know as a field about how best to support youth with disabilities to transition successfully from school to integrated employment has continued to grow. Especially important is emergent research indicating that vocational education and work-based learning while in school is one of the strongest factors impacting postschool employment for a wide range of youth with disabilities (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011; Luecking, Fabian, Contreary, Honeycutt, & Luecking, 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2016).

In addition to emerging research, recent work-related policy developments associated with employment for individuals with disabilities demonstrate the critical need for a current perspective on work, such as is found in *The Way to Work*. It is essential for transition practitioners to understand and collaborate with the outside agencies responsible for supporting work-related transition services, in particular preemployment transition services, as described in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) of 2014 (PL 113-128). Given the now substantially increased role of vocational rehabilitation to support and implement Pre-Employment Transition Services

requirements, it is vital that secondary schools refocus their school- and work-based learning to incorporate high levels of collaboration for the benefit of students. This book lays out these critical changes and how transition practitioners can engage with the wide array of outside agencies and services. In addition, Rich has updated and enhanced the core information pertaining directly to building strong and essential school–business partnerships that is found in Chapters 6 and 7.

Given the emphasis on college and career readiness models for youth with disabilities (Morningstar, Lombardi, Fowler, & Test, 2015), it is not surprising that *The Way to Work* focuses on strategies that create necessary opportunities for successful work experience tied to a relevant, rigorous curriculum and to instruction that increases the likelihood of career pathways leading to productive postschool employment. I appreciate the book's clear and compelling organization because it carefully scaffolds each topic in a logical approach, with information and strategies building upon one another for the reader. The heart of the book offers specific and applicable approaches for planning, implementing, and sustaining successful career and work experiences. A new and exciting element of this edition is the inclusion of Learning Labs that are designed to guide the reader toward implementation of work-related strategies. To hook the reader and illustrate strategies in a real-world context, case studies are used throughout each chapter. As a long-time user of the original book, I'm happy to see that updated forms are available for use. I have always used the forms as a starting point for practitioners to practice newly acquired content and then, as they gain confidence and experience, to adapt and modify to meet their unique contextual needs. From my perspective as a transition researcher and teacher educator, the second edition of *The Way to Work* was long overdue. For those concerned about ensuring that every student leaves school prepared for a career-focused employment outcome—from higher education faculty, secondary school administrators, and transition stakeholders (including school and community providers)—the book serves as a complete package that combines the most current research, evidence-based practices, and critical school and community strategies for positive outcomes.

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# Foreword

If you listen carefully you can hear the rumbling of a strengthening current in American society: the insistence on the part of more and more youth and adults with disabilities and their families for more and better employment opportunities. Since the mid-1980s, this current has led slowly to a larger body of knowledge about how to prepare people with disabilities for employment and a subsequent solidifying commitment on the part of policy makers to encourage and expand employment and career opportunities for individuals with disabilities choosing the path to employment.

In fact, when the concept began to emerge that people with disabilities could become employed and should have the supports and services required to make employment possible, the federal government placed increasing emphasis on improving the practice of supported employment and the processes it entails to increase employment outcomes for transitioning youth. But this has not been an easy matter given the necessity for painstaking effort 1) to raise expectations regarding the competencies of people with disabilities in the workforce, 2) to discern the factors that contribute to better outcomes for these individuals, and 3) to design and implement the ideas, processes, and strategies necessary to deliver improved outcomes.

As new knowledge and practice emerged, the necessity of communicating this information clearly to transition professionals, vocational rehabilitation counselors, job specialists, job developers, and individuals with disabilities and their families became compelling and continues to be so. Few who have accepted this challenge have contributed as much to the endeavor as the author of this book.

For his entire career, Rich Luecking has been immersed in the change of culture from sheltered work and nonwork to competitive integrated employment. An esteemed researcher, practitioner, author, and teacher, he has played an enormous role in maturing our thinking about what constitutes effective transition from school to work and adult life. This book follows up on the 2009 publication of *The Way to Work: How to Facilitate Work Experiences for Youth in Transition*, and it must be underscored that the timing of this new edition is fortuitous.

In the decade since the first book was released, a more robust and nuanced understanding of the processes of preparing and successfully placing individuals with disability in work-based experiences—which is a significant correlate to successful employment—has evolved and, more recently, has been embedded in legislation. In 2014, Congress successfully reauthorized the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which requires greater alignment of programs, collaboration across agencies, movement away from the use of subminimum wage certificates, and more efficient use of funds to achieve competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities. In that same year, Congress also enacted a law (the Achieving a Better Life Experience [ABLE] Act, PL 113-295) creating a tax-advantaged savings account for people with disabilities and their families to encourage work, earnings, and savings. In addition, initiatives, such as paid internships and apprenticeships and postsecondary education programs for students with disabilities—including those with intellectual disability—have begun to multiply. Perhaps most important, a new model of supported employment for those in transition—customized employment—is being utilized to a greater extent to support individuals who have significant disabilities.

From my perspective, the system of adult services and supports that has been in place for longer than the last half-century is in the early stages of great transformation, but transformation is impeded—it cannot successfully occur without transmitting the knowledge of practice necessary to implement new ideas and execute new processes and strategies. In a sense, this book has anticipated the coming transformation; it is expressly designed to facilitate it.

*Madeleine Will  
President*

*Collaboration to Promote Self-Determination*

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Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act of 2014, PL 113-295.  
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, PL 113-128, 29 U.S.C. §§ *et seq*

# Preface

Two noteworthy developments have occurred since the first edition of this book. First, federal policy continues to move in the direction of presuming that anyone with any disability who wants to work can work. The presumption of employability is the underpinning of current special education transition planning requirements, vocational rehabilitation eligibility guidelines, and other federally supported programs that include employment as a service for people with disabilities. Second, more is known about how to make employment happen. Yet, policy is still not where disability employment advocates would like it to be, and advocates are still learning how to take effective services and strategies to scale so everyone can benefit no matter what their support needs might be and no matter where they live. But things are moving in the right direction.

To keep things moving forward, this edition of *The Way to Work* incorporates new strategies, along with long-standing proven approaches to helping youth experience work. All the techniques covered in this book have come from over 3 decades of developing, implementing and evaluating transition models that feature work experiences as a centerpiece of transition service to youth with disabilities. They come from everyday application by schools and their partners in communities throughout the country. They also come from large-scale national programs and initiatives, which have lent themselves to thorough evaluation. From all of them, the evidence continues to build supporting the idea of work as both an essential transition service component and as the desired outcome of transition service. In other words, to get work and have a career, one has to learn how to work. When this happens, the ideal culmination of education service for students with disabilities will be productive and meaningful employment and careers as adults. Our success as transition professionals should be judged against this standard.

To that end, this edition of *The Way to Work* intends to elevate the effectiveness of transition specialists. It uses numerous real-life examples to illustrate strategies and techniques that my contributors and I have found successful. These examples come from our work on national scale projects such as the Marriott Foundation's Bridges program, the National Youth Transition Demonstration, and Promoting Readiness for Minors in SSI (PROMISE). They come from statewide initiatives such



as the Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative. And they come from working with individual school systems in communities around the country. The approaches detailed in this book, then, come from actual practice in the field where dedicated transition professionals use them. Furthermore, they are supported by rigorous research that has evaluated their application. In short, the strategies in this book have been field tested, and we know they work.

The challenge is now to take to scale what is known to work. To say work experience should be central to good transition service is one thing. To make sure that all youth have the opportunity to be exposed to work experience is another thing. Schools and communities, of course, will have to commit to making work experience available to all youth with disabilities. But even when that commitment is made, youth with disabilities still struggle with employment preparation in the absence of transition professionals who know how to help them experience work. It will always be necessary to build the capacity of those professionals who have been tasked with facilitating work experience for youth in transition. That is, those who are new to this work need to be trained how to do it, and experienced professionals need ongoing training to continually improve their work experience facilitation skills. The intention of this book is to do both of these things. *The Way to Work* is meant to be a resource for both the aspiring and the experienced transition professional.

My previous work at TransCen, Inc., and my current work at the Center for Transition and Career Innovation at the University of Maryland has been driven by the potential of all youth to achieve employment success. In various ways, activity continues at both places to illustrate “the way to work.” In particular, the Center’s mission is threefold: 1) to study how, when, and under what circumstances youth achieve employment success; 2) to translate knowledge gleaned from that study so as to influence both policy and practice, which will impact transition and employment success for youth with disabilities; and 3) to help professionals learn and put into practice those techniques known to be successful. I invite readers to follow our work at <https://education.umd.edu/CTCI>.

as a high-level federal official, to her ongoing national leadership in this movement, and to her voice as a parent who knows whereof she speaks.

A big thank you goes to my colleague, friend, and wife, Debra Martin Luecking, who has been a partner in many of the seamless transition models we have implemented and whose ideas and encouragement were invaluable during the production of both editions of this book.

Most important, I want to thank the many youth and families who kindly agreed to let their stories be told about the value of work experience in the pursuit of employment and careers. It is they who have inspired this work.

# Introduction

The research on effective transition service can be summed up in three words: Work is good! The evidence continues to grow that work experience in high school is one of the strongest predictors of adult employment for youth with disabilities (Luecking, Fabian, Contreary, Honeycutt, & Luecking, 2018; Wehman et al., 2014). Effective transition professionals already know this. In fact, anyone who has watched youth blossom in self-confidence and skill as they perform in an authentic workplace can attest to this phenomenon.

The implications of the value of work are wide reaching, especially for youth with disabilities currently in the nation's secondary schools—almost 400,000 of whom exit school each year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Ever since school-to-work transition became a federal policy priority (Will, 1984) and transition planning became a legal requirement (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] of 1990, PL 101-476; Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEIA] of 2004, PL 108-446), the value of work experience for youth with disabilities as they prepare to exit publicly mandated education has become increasingly obvious. It has long been known that it is critically important for youth with disabilities to experience learning in work-based environments—that is, situations in which they spend concentrated and structured time in actual work settings provided by cooperating companies and employers.

Notably, two national developments illustrate increasing recognition of the importance of work experience for youth in transition from school to adult life. The first is legislative. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 (PL 113-128) requires that state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies allocate 15% of their service funds to transitioning students and youth for what are called Pre-Employment Transition Services, or Pre-ETS. Pre-ETS include five categories of service to students with disabilities for which VR can pay: job exploration counseling, counseling on opportunities for enrollment in postsecondary education and training, workplace readiness training, instruction in self-advocacy, and work-based learning experiences. This means that VR can now pay for the development and support of work experiences for students with disabilities while they are in secondary school. This has the potential to significantly boost the ability of students with disabilities to exit school better prepared for successful adult employment.

The second development is the increasing advocacy for adult employment for all individuals with disabilities. This advocacy is embodied in the Employment First movement. Per ODEP (2018), this initiative urges publicly financed systems “to align policies, service delivery practices, and reimbursement structures to commit to integrated employment as the priority option with respect to the use of publicly-financed day and employment services for youth and adults with significant disabilities.” In other words, government should fund those services that promote employment and minimize funding to those services that do not. In many states and federal initiatives, Employment First activities have prioritized work and work experiences for youth with disabilities who are still in high school (ODEP, 2018). This movement has provided strong impetus to the notion that employment is presumed desirable and possible for *all* people with disabilities, including those who might need unusual or significant support to make that happen.

## **JOB SUCCESS**

Although the case is strong that work experience is best predictor of postschool job success, it is not the only one. There are, of course, other circumstances that contribute to successful transition to work and adult life. Near the top of that list is the involvement and support of families. Simply put, when families expect that their family members with disabilities will become employed, these youth are highly likely to do so (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011; Wehman et al., 2014). Furthermore, when family members actively support work experience, including by providing important perspective about interests and preferences, young people with disabilities tend to succeed in work experiences and in adult employment (Test et al., 2009).

Another contributor to successful employment is self-determination, or self-advocacy. That is, youth with disabilities succeed in the workplace when they have the ability and opportunity to express themselves regarding what they prefer, what they can do, and what kind of help they need to perform effectively in the workplace (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, & Little, 2015). There has been a long-standing movement within the disability community that says “nothing about us without us.” This means that individuals with disabilities do not want things done to them or for them without their input and consent. It also means that no one should assume what type of work experience or ultimate employment goal should be pursued without express input from students preparing to work. Furthermore, it means that a disability label should not determine whether someone can work or what kind of job someone should aspire to. Indeed, disability advocacy and current federal policy direction presume that not only do all people with disabilities have the potential to work but also that what type of work they pursue should be determined only with the informed input and consent of the job seeker (Martinez, 2013).

Interagency collaboration, under the right conditions, also contributes to the achievement of work experience and employment goals of young people with disabilities. Many students and youth with disabilities are served by multiple systems and professionals. However, it has often been the practice among schools and collaborating agencies to merely make a hand-off to another responsible organization for an employment or transition-related service. Yet, to achieve the best outcomes,

the context of the collaboration is important. When collaboration is jointly and directly focused on outcomes for youth, such as work experience or integrated paid employment, higher rates of employment are more likely (Fabian, Simonsen, Deschamps, Dong, & Luecking, 2016; Luecking et al., 2018).

The evidence about what works when helping youth with disabilities make the transition from school to work and adult life continues to grow. It builds on past attempts to synthesize what research, experts, and advocates point to as essential components of effective transition service. The Guideposts for Success (NCWD/Y, 2005, 2019), for example, is a widely used framework to conceptualize optimum service delivery for youth in transition. It is based on extensive review of research, demonstration projects, and acknowledged effective practices. The Guideposts identify five general areas of intervention:

1. *School based preparatory experiences*—that is, academic instruction and targeted curriculum
2. *Career preparation and work-based experiences*, including vocational training and work experiences
3. *Youth development and youth leadership*, especially as they relate to self-determined transition planning
4. *Family involvement and support*
5. *Connecting activities*—that is, those activities that enable youth to be linked with organizations and services that complement their transition services and/or enable necessary postsecondary supports

Although this edition will touch on all of these factors, work is the obvious thrust of this book. Work is the strongest forecaster of postschool employment success. The other features of the Guideposts, and thus other relevant evidence, will be discussed intermittently as they are often critical to making work experiences and work successful. Many publications are available that highlight aspects of each and all of these factors, but even in the ensuing time since the first edition of *The Way to Work* (Luecking, 2009), still too few exist that exclusively address how to help youth learn how to work and how to build their employment portfolio so that they begin their adult careers *before* they exit school. This book builds on the first edition to continue to fill that void.

## **THE NEED FOR A CONTINUED EMPHASIS ON WORK**

Given the growing evidence about effective transition interventions and services, there is every reason to look forward to the day when young people with disabilities enter the workforce for what ideally will be the start of a long career. The statistics, however, suggest that these expectations are still not the norm and that employment is still an elusive postschool outcome for many youth with disabilities. Since the late 1990s, there have been modest improvements in postschool employment for youth with disabilities (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005; Wehman, 2013). However, there continue to be lags in youth participation in paid jobs outside of school (Lipscomb, Lacoë, Liu, & Haimson, 2018). Significant disparities,



including the following, continue between youth with disabilities and their same-age peers without disabilities:

- Youth with disabilities are less likely than their peers without disabilities to finish high school (Stark & Noel, 2015).
- Youth with disabilities are less likely to pursue postsecondary education that will prepare them for good jobs and careers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).
- Some groups of special education students need connections to ongoing support to sustain the benefit of public education, and these supports are not always available (Wehman, 2013; Windsor et al., 2018).
- Subminimum wage and sheltered employment remains the fate of thousands of people with intellectual and other significant disabilities (Hiersteiner, Butterworth, Bershadsky, & Bonardi, 2018).
- Unemployment, poverty, and dependence on public assistance programs await many transitioning youth as they exit school (Davies, Rupp, & Wittenberg, 2009; DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015).

In effect, less-than-optimal postschool employment outcomes could be cited for all categories of youth with disabilities. That is, whether youth have the label of intellectual disability, behavioral disabilities, mobility disabilities, sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, or multiple disabilities, the field can do better in helping them achieve adult employment. It remains clear that special education transition services must improve the way in which they create and offer to students important work experience opportunities, how they complement curricula requirements, and how these experiences and the rest of public education lead to productive postschool employment. The field may be moving in the right direction, but it is not there yet. The good news? So much more is now known about how to make work happen for all categories of youth with disabilities. That is what this book hopes to impart.

## EMPLOYMENT FOR ALL

Youth and their families no longer have to settle for historically disappointing post-school outcomes. Work-based experiences, such as job shadowing, internships, cooperative work placements, service learning, and volunteer work experiences, are effective and important prerequisites to successful postschool employment success. Moreover, when *paid work*, the gold standard of youth in the workplace, is paired with education, either as an ancillary activity or as an integral aspect of curriculum, youth are considerably more likely to obtain and retain employment as adults (Wehman et al., 2014).

In essence, focused work experiences throughout secondary education can be the antidote to obstacles to adult employment. Carefully organized and supervised work experiences, where there are opportunities to receive guidance and feedback on work performance, would go a long way to improve postschool employment outcomes. Furthermore, these experiences serve as career building blocks as adolescents exit school, especially when upon exit they require connections to supports that will help them to continue pursuing work and career opportunities

to which they were exposed during secondary education. Thus, this book's purpose is to offer strategies essential for creating opportunities for successful work experiences, for pairing them with curricula requirements, and for bolstering the likelihood that publicly supported education leads to productive postschool employment. Indeed, a case could be made that the nation's education system can only be deemed to have achieved its aims when the climax of each student's educational experience is the beginning of a productive adult life. For most people this means a job—or, even better, a career.

This book is framed by the belief that the culmination of publicly supported education for youth with disabilities can and should be real adult employment. The book guides the reader in helping youth choose and pursue work experiences. It provides approaches for identifying, developing, organizing, and monitoring work experience opportunities in the workplaces of a community's employers.

My experience and that of committed colleagues around the country have led to the driving philosophy of this book: *All youth who want to can achieve an adult life of productive and successful employment, regardless of disability label, the need for support and accommodation, the intensity of special education services, or even the economic vitality of their communities.* The approaches described in this book can be applied to help all of these youth achieve this goal. This book shows how work experiences become opportunities for learning how to work so that postschool employment becomes the rule rather than the exception for youth with disabilities.

## HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The chapters in this book are arranged so that ideas and strategies presented in each chapter are logical precursors to the ideas and strategies presented in the subsequent chapter. They are ordered to build a continually reinforcing knowledge base. However, although the chapters are organized to follow a logical sequence, the reader may extract ideas and strategies directly from any one of them at any time. Each chapter has stand-alone strategies that can be applied in direct practice related to the chapter topic.

The first two chapters set the stage for the practical strategies that will be presented later throughout the book. Chapter 1 illustrates the need for work experiences and how they foster the development of a career pathway for youth. Chapter 2 goes into some detail about the types of work experiences and their respective uses and importance in job and career pursuits. It also provides the framework for making sure that quality is built into youth work experiences and that the roles of youth, educators, families, employers, co-workers and other interested parties are carefully considered and well defined. These chapters are intended to provide a basis for proceeding with the strategies found in subsequent chapters.

The process of and strategies for organizing and supporting quality work experiences begin in Chapter 3 and continue through Chapter 10. It is in these chapters that the practitioner will be able to take away specific and directly applicable strategies for planning, developing, and supporting successful work experiences. Again, although these chapters are ordered in a sequence that suggests a practical progression, readers can access them out of order if their experience and learning needs are more in one area or another. Since these chapters represent the heart of

work experience practice, they include specific Learning Labs, designed to help the reader practice and implement the strategies the chapters present.

Every chapter contains specific case examples of youth and/or case examples of how strategies have been applied to good effect. These are meant to illustrate real-world application of these ideas and strategies. They are all derived from actual examples taken from field experiences, using pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Many chapters also contain sample forms that the reader is free to reproduce or adapt for direct use in transition practice. They are samples of forms transition professionals have found useful for advancing transition, but they are by no means the only or necessarily the best way to do it. Readers are encouraged to adopt and adapt them as they find helpful.

Finally, Chapter 11 presents issues and trends that may affect the future of work experience and employment for youth with disabilities. It presents a context for thinking about how transition practice might be affected by these trends and how transition professionals and advocates might work to ensure that the way to work might be constantly improved, rather than hindered, by these developments.

## **AN IMPORTANT NOTE ON CHARACTERIZING YOUTH, EMPLOYERS, AND THOSE WHO LINK THEM TOGETHER**

When a disability label serves as a major descriptor of a student, too often assumptions are made about youth circumstances that are either stereotypical or limiting. Therefore, throughout the book, specific disability labels are used sparingly when referring to youth in the case studies. Such references are used only if there is a compelling reason to identify a disability for case study clarity. It is important, of course, to factor in accommodations that individual youth may need in order to succeed in the workplace. However, it is also essential to know that even within particular disability categories, the range and type of accommodations are broad. They depend entirely on each individual's circumstances. Thus, in general discussion, the book almost always refers to young people with disabilities simply as students or youth. The reader, with noted exceptions, will be able to apply the concepts discussed to any youth seeking or participating in a work-based experience, regardless of disability label, nature of disability, or need for support.

It should also be noted that employers are absolutely essential partners in creating work experiences for youth. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the importance of employer cooperation and of viewing employers as another ultimate customer of transition programs that promote work experiences and jobs for youth. Employers are as heterogeneous as the youth with whom they may come in contact. They come in all sizes and descriptions: private sector; for-profit entities; local, state, and federal government entities; and nonprofit and civic entities. Some have a handful of employees; others hire thousands. In addition, a host of industry sectors exist under which various employer entities could be classified. To simplify matters, the book uses in general discussion the terms *employer*, *business*, and *company* interchangeably to refer to any entity—public or private, large or small—that could potentially offer work experiences and jobs to youth. Again, the issues and strategies that successfully link employers on behalf of and with youth ultimately frame the success of this work, no matter what labels are used to describe it.

Finally, many types of professionals come in contact with youth with disabilities. There are, of course teachers and educational staff. There are vocational rehabilitation counselors. And there are job developers and job coaches who may work for schools or for community employment service agencies. Any of these people may have the responsibility of connecting youth to workplaces for work experiences and for supporting them during these experiences. In this book, all those who have the responsibility for facilitating work experiences—regardless of job title or affiliation—are referred to universally as transition specialists. The strategies presented throughout are meant to be useful to anyone who does this important work.

As readers consider the ideas and strategies that the book offers, I sincerely hope that more and more people will adopt the belief that work is good! It is good for youth to learn in real work environments, to learn how to work, to learn where to work, to find the best ways to be supported and accommodated at work, and to produce at work to the satisfaction of current and future employers. The intent is that through these activities the ultimate good is that youth can find life satisfaction as contributing citizens and self-supporting adults.

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FOR MORE, go to <http://bit.ly/Luecking2E>

*To Nick Certo (1949–2017), who was a friend and colleague and whose belief in the employability of all youth was the cornerstone of his pioneering work on seamless transition programs for youth with disabilities*

FOR MORE, go to <http://bit.ly/Luecking2E>

# Recognizing Work Experiences as Indispensable Transition Tools

Richard G. Luecking and Kelli Thuli Crane

## By completing this chapter, the reader will

- Discover the primary benefits to youth who participate in work experiences
- Understand the types and purposes of work experiences
- Learn the types and purposes of work experiences
- Consider what constitutes a quality work experience
- Engage with examples of transition models that feature work experience and that provide evidence of their value

**M**arquita has two strong interests. She wants to be a lawyer and she wants to “make a difference.” She is a hard-working, meticulous student. Her accommodations at school include voice recognition software on her computer. Her teacher helped her find a job shadowing experience at a small law firm where she observed the processes for legal research. She had a subsequent internship at a large law firm where she performed a range of administrative tasks and where she learned how her need to use voice recognition software could be accommodated. These experiences helped solidify her interest in law. She is now enrolled in a local university majoring in political science. Next stop: law school.

Erika always wanted to have a job and make money. Until her last year in school she had almost no exposure to work other than knowing her family members had jobs. Even her teachers had doubts about her ability to ever work in a “real” job due to her blindness and need for close supervision to perform many basic tasks. She participated in a work experience program in her last year of school, where she learned—with specific accommodations—to perform clerical tasks such as preparing mailings. She did so well that she was offered a job at that company at the end of her work experience. Many years later, she still works there.

Roberto had no notion of what kind of job or career he wanted. But he liked to be busy and active. As part of his high school transition program, he had work experiences as a grocery store shopping cart attendant and as a janitor at a shopping mall food court. He didn't do well in either work experience. As he is nonverbal, he could never say what he liked or did not like about the experiences. Then, he sampled tasks at a recreation center's ropes course. He was always busy at the center, filling water jugs, sorting equipment, and packaging marketing materials. His smile and his proficient work made it clear this was a good match. Now that he is out of school he works as a fitness center attendant with support from an adult employment agency.

Declan struggled in the early years of high school. He faced many behavioral challenges, and bounced back and forth between his neighborhood school and an alternative high school. Things turned around for him when he began an internship as an information technology (IT) assistant with a large research company. It challenged him and engaged his interest. He found his niche and purpose. He finished high school, completed an associate degree in IT, and is now employed as an IT technician at a small nonprofit organization.

Marquita's, Erika's, Roberto's, and Declan's stories are examples of the employment and career success that students and youth with disabilities can achieve, especially when we assume that all youth with disabilities can work and when we apply effective, evidence-based practices to make that happen. Over the past few decades, the postschool employment rates for students with disabilities are slowly but steadily inching upward. Youth in all categories of disabilities are faring slightly better in terms of postschool employment rates, with an overall employment rate now above 50% (Liu et al., 2018). This compares with overall postschool employment rates for all categories of youth with disabilities of well below 50% in the late 1980s (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Although these rates are not as high as they should be, they are improving, thanks in large part to newly focused policy and improved practices to plan for and facilitate work experiences. As the field continues to identify evidence-based practices that promote work, it is logical that youth with disabilities become better prepared for the world of work.

This is good news for youth, their families, disability advocates, professionals, and policy makers. It means that school-to-work transition outcomes are starting to catch up to the original legislative intent reflected in the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1990 (PL 101-496), which mandated transition planning, and, more recently, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) of 2014 (PL 113-128), which mandates state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies provide services, including work experiences, for students with disabilities before they exit high school. The underpinning of each of these laws is the notion that anyone eligible for services provided through the agencies supported by these legislations has the potential to benefit from them. That is, employability is presumed.

Increased employment rates and legislation that presumes employability for youth with disabilities are the result of learning better ways to educate and prepare students and youth for transition to employment and adult life. The transition field has learned improved ways to structure resources and services to ensure that better connections are made to support youth. Most important, it has become clear that

connecting youth to workplaces early and often throughout the secondary school years is a valuable way to help youth get started on productive postschool careers.

Unfortunately, many students with disabilities continue to struggle to successfully make the transition from school to adult employment. For every Roberto, Erika, Marquita, and Declan, there are other youth with disabilities who will not be so fortunate as to have their education lead directly to a job and career path. This does not have to be the case. The field of transition from school to work is ever evolving and its methodology improving. Carefully organized and monitored work experiences are part of this evolution. This chapter elaborates on why work experiences are so important, illustrates the potential they have for benefiting youth, introduces components of quality work experiences, and briefly discusses transition models that feature work experience as a centerpiece intervention.

## **WHY WORK EXPERIENCE IS IMPORTANT**

A work-based learning experience includes essentially any activity that puts youth in the workplaces of employers and that offers an opportunity to learn about careers, career preferences, work behaviors, and specific work and occupational skills. For youth with disabilities, work-based learning has the additional benefit of helping to identify any necessary supports and accommodations that might be essential to perform tasks and engage in behaviors that are necessary for workplace success. This book refers to this type of purposeful educational and transition activity as *work experience*. Work experiences can include such sporadic and brief activities as job shadowing, informational interviews, and workplace tours; more intensive activities of various durations such as workplace mentoring; and other more-protracted experiences, including work sampling, service learning, on-the-job training, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. Each of these activities contributes to the career development, career choice, and career success of individuals with disabilities.

### **Benefits to Students and Youth**

The textbox titled Benefits of Work Experiences summarizes research-supported benefits associated with work experiences as transition tools. For all youth, with and without disabilities, work experiences have long been shown to improve self-esteem, teach and reinforce basic academic and technical skills, promote an understanding of workplace culture and expectations, and help youth develop a network for future job searches (Haimson & Bellotti, 2001; Hoerner & Wehrley, 1995; Wehman, 2013). For youth with disabilities, these experiences further serve as opportunities to identify the particular workplace supports they may require as they pursue later employment and career prospects (Wehman, 2013).

Such experiences also serve to expose students to work and career options that would otherwise be unknown to them. This is especially critical to youth with disabilities for whom exposure to the range of career options is often very limited. For anyone, it can be said that exposure precedes interest. That is, how can anyone know if he or she likes or is interested in something without first knowing about it? One of the key values of work experiences for youth with disabilities is that they often function to introduce youth to tasks, jobs, and careers they would not know about otherwise.

### **Benefits of Work Experiences**

Students and youth who participate in work experiences benefit by having the opportunity to

- Gain exposure to new experiences that will inform career interests
- Explore career goals
- Identify on-the-job support needs
- Develop employability skills and good work habits
- Gain an understanding of employer expectations
- Link specific classroom instruction with related work expectations and knowledge requirements
- Develop an understanding of the workplace and the connection between learning and earning
- Gain general work experience as well as experience connected to a specific job function that can be added to a work portfolio or résumé

### **Legal Special Education Requirements**

Although not specifically cited in current special education law, work experiences can be valuable tools for education systems to meet requirements for monitoring the transition components of the law. For example, states are required by special education legislation, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 (PL 108-446), to measure the “percent of youth aged 16 and above with transition planning that includes coordinated annual goals and transition services that will reasonably enable the student to meet his/her postsecondary goals in the identified areas” (Indicator 13, IDEIA 2004). Obviously, if those goals include employment and/or postsecondary education, then work experiences are critical to help students meet postsecondary goals.

States also are required to monitor the “percent of youth who had IEPs [individualized education programs], are no longer in secondary school, and who have been competitively employed, enrolled in some type of postsecondary school, or both, within one year of leaving high school” (Indicator 14, IDEIA 2004). If this percentage is high, then it can be inferred that youth were adequately prepared for postschool life, including employment. Of course, previously cited research indicates that work experiences are important to adequate preparation for positive postschool employment outcomes (e.g., Carter et al., 2012; Wehman et al., 2014). The incentive exists, therefore, for state school systems to monitor their local systems so that they adopt curriculum and teaching methodology that helps address these indicators. The clear intent is for local school districts to receive the help they need to deliver the best possible transition services for their students. Transition planning, as required by law, is important to meeting the intent of IDEIA



and, more important, help facilitate an effective transition from school to work and adult life for students with disabilities. The fact that students in special education are showing gains in postschool employment rates, however modest, illustrates the value of these requirements.

Local education agencies are also required to report the percentage of students with IEPs who have dropped out of school compared with the percent of all students in the state who have dropped out (Indicator 2, IDEIA 2004). There are thousands of students who, like Roberto introduced at the beginning of this chapter, likely would drop out of school without appropriate incentives and relevant curriculum to engage them in career development activities. Although it would be naïve to suggest that work experience alone will mitigate this problem, it certainly is an important action to consider. In any case, special education law recognizes that it is crucial for schools to find ways to address an alarmingly high drop-out rate among students receiving special education services.

Compliance with special education law is important to schools, as both federal and state funding support depend on it. However, the law exists to ensure that students benefit from the education they receive from the schools—it is students who ultimately realize the benefits of transition planning, especially when that planning includes work experiences. These experiences have direct, tangible benefit for youth, as illustrated by the brief examples at the beginning of this chapter. Each of the youth in these examples had opportunities to identify career interests, explore the need for on-the-job support needs, learn work skills, become aware of employer expectations, and connect learning in the school with its relevance to the world of work. Most important, these experiences resulted in either direct adult employment success or the path to obtain it.

## **Systemic and Program Benefits**

Although youth are the obvious beneficiaries of work experiences, it is instructive to point out that advantages accrue to those entities that provide and fund education, transition, and employment services. For example, when work experiences are included in educational curricula, or as adjunctive experiences to education, or as integral features of the IEP, school systems stand to have better results related to Indicators 2, 13, 14 of the special education law described earlier. For example, a recent initiative in Maryland is specifically requiring local school systems to track the work experiences of all students as part of the State Department of Education's objective to increase the number of students participating in work experiences before exiting high school. As stated by the Assistant State Superintendent of Education Marcela Franczkowski, "What gets measured gets done" (personal communication, November 18, 2018).

Similarly, state VR agencies that provide services to eligible youth can benefit. In particular, when youth with disabilities engage in work experiences as part of their services, VR agencies can expect better returns on the service dollars (Luecking et al., 2018). In effect, when students achieve employment, state VR agencies can report more successful case closures for the students and youth they serve. Moreover, WIOA also now requires VR agencies and schools to increase collaboration on behalf of students with disabilities. One study illustrated a significant difference both in money spent and in the number of successful case closures for VR service recipients who participated in work experience as part of their

**Table 1.1.** System and program benefits of collaborating on work experiences

Schools/ school districts	Vocational rehabilitation	State I/DD, mental health, and other service agencies	Community employment service programs
More meaningful IEPs and transition plans required by special education law	Clear opportunities to meet WIOA require- ments to collaborate with schools	More efficient applica- tion of resources Improved employment outcomes	Improved capacity to serve youth More efficient applica- tion of resources
Additional positive outcomes for Indicators 2, 13, and 14 of IDEIA	More efficient applica- tion of resources More successful case closures		Improved employment outcomes

Key: I/DD, intellectual/developmental disabilities; IEPs, individualized education programs; IDEIA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004; WIOA, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014.

transition service when compared to VR service recipients who did not (Luecking et al., 2018).

State agencies for intellectual and developmental disabilities, and state mental health agencies, are often in a position to provide employment-related postschool services to transitioning youth. These programs have much to gain when individuals entering their service system have experienced work before exiting school or, even better, already have jobs at the point of exit. In such cases, there will be less need for work assessment and job development services from these agencies. Not only will it maximize resources, but the outcomes of service provision will improve (Certo & Luecking, 2006). Agencies can spend less money for better outcomes.

Finally, there are advantages to community employment service programs that might directly collaborate with schools in the facilitation of work experiences. They can essentially bring young people into their programs who are either already working or who have had the benefit of work experiences. This makes the application of job development and job support resources all that much easier and more efficient. It also improves service capacity and effectiveness. Of course, the sharing of resources and collaboration between schools, VR agencies, and other community partners to facilitate transition is often easier to say than to do. Where collaboration includes work experience, however, all partners benefit and outcomes improve (Fabian, Deschamps, Simonsen, & Luecking, 2016). Table 1.1 summarizes these benefits.

## TYPES AND USES OF WORK EXPERIENCES

Work experiences may include any combination of the following: career explorations, job shadowing, volunteer experience, service learning, paid and unpaid internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. These experiences offer opportunities for youth to learn specific work and occupational skills, as well as appropriate work behaviors—often referred to as “soft skills” (e.g., following instructions, getting along with coworkers)—needed to succeed in the workplace. In addition, work experiences can help identify the youth’s employment and career preferences, and the supports and accommodations that might be essential to long-term workplace success. A range of work experience is presented and defined in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2.** Types of work experiences

Career exploration	Career exploration involves visits by youth to workplaces to learn about jobs and the skills required to perform them. Visits and meetings with employers and people in identified occupations outside of the workplace are also types of career exploration activities from which youth can learn about jobs and careers. Typically, such visits are accompanied by discussions with youth about what they saw, heard, and learned.
Job shadowing	Job shadowing is extended time, often a full workday or several workdays, spent by a youth in a workplace accompanying an employee in the performance of his or her daily duties. For example, many companies have take your son or daughter to work days and some companies organize annual official job shadow days when they invite youth to spend time at the company.
Work sampling	Work sampling is work by a youth that does not materially benefit the employer but allows the youth to spend meaningful time in a work environment to learn aspects of potential job tasks and to learn soft skills required in the workplace. It is important for transition specialists to be familiar with the Fair Labor Standards Act requirements for volunteer activity.
Service learning	Service learning is hands-on volunteer service to the community that is integrated with course objectives. It is a structured process that provides time for reflection on the service experience and demonstration of the skills and knowledge acquired. Many school districts require service learning time as a condition for graduation, which offers opportunity to structure them as meaningful work experience.
Internships	Internships are formal arrangements whereby a youth is assigned specific tasks in a workplace over a predetermined period of time. Internships may be paid or unpaid, depending on the nature of the agreement with the company and the nature of the tasks. Many postsecondary institutions help organize these experiences with local companies as adjuncts to specific degree programs and are alternatively called cooperative education experience, cooperative work, or simply co-ops.
Apprenticeships	Apprenticeships are formal, sanctioned work experiences of extended duration in which an apprentice learns specific occupational skills related to a standardized trade, such as carpentry, plumbing, and drafting. Many apprenticeships also include paid work components.
Stipend jobs	Stipend jobs include those in which wages are paid through an external source, such as a youth employment program, rather than directly by the employer. These jobs are typically customized or created to match student and employer circumstances, rather than match a specific existing job description. Some youth employment programs feature stipend jobs.
Paid employment	Paid employment may include existing standard jobs in a company or customized work assignments that are negotiated with an employer, but they always feature a wage paid directly to the youth by the employer. Such work may be scheduled during or after the school day. It may be integral to a course of study or simply a separate adjunctive experience.

Work experiences during secondary school can be organized in many different ways. They can be

- Structured as essential elements of educational instruction, such as when they are a primary element of the transition plan and most of the educational instruction happens in relation to the work experience

- Complements to classroom instruction, such as when a youth has a work experience related to the course content
- Adjuncts to classroom instruction, such as when a youth has a full complement of mandated coursework related to achieving a diploma, but has a work experience assignment that counts as class credit
- Unrelated to any specific classroom or educational instruction, such as a part-time job after school, but nevertheless useful and important to career development

The key aspect of any work experience is the contribution it makes to the youth's path to adult employment. Regardless of how they are structured, how long they last, or when they occur, all work experiences during secondary school help students find the way to work. The sections that follow further explain and explore the types of work experiences.

### **Career Explorations**

Career exploration generally involves the youth visiting a workplace for brief exposure to a specific kind of work environment or job type. One middle school teacher organized half-day trips to three different local companies every semester for her students to learn about different jobs in those companies and the skills required for performing them. After each visit the class discussed what they saw, what jobs existed in the companies, what skills were necessary, and whether these would be jobs of interest to them.

Similarly, employment specialists with community rehabilitation agencies often arrange company visits and informational interviews for young job seekers on their caseloads. This allows youth to ask key employees what the company is most known for, what skills and traits they look for in new employees, and what they see as future workforce needs. After these visits, the employment specialist might lead a discussion for youth to consider how these job requirements might relate to jobs and careers they might want to pursue.

### **Job Shadowing**

One way to understand the requirements of a job or job type is to spend a whole day with someone who is performing that job. Many high schools participate in "Groundhog Job Shadow Day" which happens annually in February. On that day, both general and special education students shadow an employee at a company to learn about their daily job duties. In some instances, schools require students to prepare a report and/or participate in a discussion on what they learned about the job and the company during a shadowing experience, whether it occurs on a designated job shadow day or any time during the school year. Job shadowing experiences are unique ways young people can be introduced to jobs, job requirements, and potential career options. This introduction to the workplace often provides a foundation upon which youth can begin identifying other work experience options for the rest of their high school years as well as the beginning considerations for career options after high school.

Other job shadow experiences can be less formal but no less valuable, such as when youth participate in “take your child to work days” sponsored by many schools and communities. In short, these types of episodic experiences are ways to introduce youth to workplace circumstances and to provide them with initial knowledge about work and careers.

## **Work Sampling**

Youth can also be exposed to work by spending time in a workplace as an unpaid worker. For example, many schools and community employment services will provide rotations through several workplaces so that youth can “sample” different types of job tasks and different work environments. These experiences also help youth to learn “soft skills” required in the workplace. Volunteer work experiences take many forms and can be conducted in the workplaces of almost any employer. They are especially useful for youth for whom learning in simulated environments is difficult to generalize to authentic work environments. Sampling work experiences is another way for students to be exposed to a variety of workplace environments, discover work preferences and interests, and identify accommodation needs.

Although these are common and valuable work experience options for many youth, transition specialists need to be aware of Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements. FLSA is in place so that employers do not take advantage of workers or benefit from free labor. Essentially, as long as the youth in the work sampling experience does not perform work that materially benefits the employer’s operation, there is no violation of FLSA. More is said about these requirements in Chapter 2.

## **Service Learning**

Another common type of volunteer work experience is when youth provide purposeful volunteer service, such as assisting with delivering Meals on Wheels or helping at a public library. When these types of volunteer experiences are formalized into a structured and purposeful process that contributes to community improvement or addresses a community need in some way, as well as integrates with course objectives, they are often considered for service learning hours by schools.

For example, some school districts require a certain number of service learning hours for students to graduate. One teacher helped students participate in an oral history project where they recorded the stories of military veterans for consideration for inclusion in a Library of Congress archive on veteran history. For the community, this activity helped maintain and capture the contributions veterans provided their country. For the students, this activity helped them learn valuable lessons on planning, organizing, and carrying out purposeful tasks. And, of course, they earned service hours that counted toward their graduation requirements. For some, it also can suggest a career path. For example, one student decided to pursue a postsecondary education program in media communications as a result of learning about audio and video recording during this service learning project.

Regardless if service learning is for school credit or not, by participating in this type of activity, youth learn valuable work behaviors such as being on time, completing assigned tasks, working as a team, and dealing with distractions—all the while serving the community.

## Internships

Internships are extremely valuable experiences as they provide opportunities to learn while completing specific tasks under a formal agreement with employers. They can be either stand-alone experiences or paired with a particular curriculum requirement, such as when a vocational preparation program requires cooperative work, or co-ops. They may be paid or unpaid, depending on the arrangement with the employer and the nature of the internship. One example of stand-alone internship experiences that are adjunctive to the high school experience is the Bridges program of the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities described later in this chapter (MFPD, 2018). Students referred to this program participate in a semester-long experience in a local company where the youth is paid directly by the employer. The youth learns real job skills in a real workplace, but neither he or she nor the employer are under any obligation to continue the relationship at the conclusion of the internship. For the participating youth, it serves a number of purposes, including learning both specific and soft work skills, learning employer expectations for performance, building a résumé, and earning extra spending money.

## Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are primarily associated with a particular trade and are available in a wide range of occupations, including traditional fields (e.g., construction), and high-growth fields (e.g., health care, information technology). Apprenticeship programs are highly structured and typically include supervised on-the-job training by a qualified journey-level worker, as well as outside related instruction, which is generally classroom based. Apprenticeships offer not only skill development under a set of predetermined requirements, but also a direct path to postschool employment. Many apprenticeships feature a paid work experience along with classroom work that leads to both a diploma and an apprentice certificate. Participation by youth with disabilities in apprenticeships has been sporadic, but interest is growing due to an initiative from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), which is supporting projects focused on preapprenticeship and apprenticeship opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities in high-growth industries (ODEP, 2018).

## Stipend Jobs

The primary goal of any work experience is to teach the skills, knowledge, and competencies needed to perform specific tasks in the workplace. Work experiences can be paid or unpaid, but sometimes youth may be part of a program that offers stipends during work training. That is, the payment comes from an agency or program rather than directly from the employer. Employment agencies or youth service programs that sponsor vocational preparation programs, such as summer youth employment programs or some VR programs, will occasionally provide stipends to participants. These stipends can be an incentive to participate in work experiences and a demonstration of another benefit of working—that is, earning money.



## **Paid Employment**

These experiences can be full or part time, regular or customized jobs, and during or after school. However, the common denominator is that youth are paid a wage directly by the employer. Paid employment may occur because a student's IEP specifies a work objective; other times, it is simply an after-school job. For reasons already stated and that will become more obvious by the end of this book, paid work in authentic community settings is what contributes most strongly to postschool employment success for youth. It is therefore the gold standard of work experiences. Paid employment is a key intervention associated with effective transition preparation and it represents the desired outcome against which transition success can be measured.

Chapter 2 discusses when and how to incorporate each of these types of work experiences. Subsequent chapters share how to use various strategies for planning, developing, organizing, and monitoring work experiences regardless of the type of experience. So, how can we ensure that youth get the maximum benefit from their work experiences?

## **QUALITY WORK EXPERIENCES**

Work experiences can be created through school-sponsored work study programs, through established school curricula, through resources such as VR pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS), as adjuncts to transition planning, or combinations of these approaches that may be available to students with disabilities. Irrespective of the particular route students may take to gain these experiences, there are several factors that require consideration when organizing work experiences. Among these are connections between workplace and school-based

### **Quality Work Experience Characteristics**

- Clear program goals
- Clear expectations and feedback to assess progress toward achieving goals
- Clear roles and responsibilities for worksite supervisors, mentors, teachers, support personnel, and other partners
- Convenient links between students, schools, and employers
- On-the-job learning
- Range of opportunities, especially those outside traditional (e.g., hospitality, retail) youth-employing industries
- Mentor(s) at the worksite
- Youth and employer feedback on the experience

learning, clear expectations of student activity at the workplace, clearly defined roles of transition specialists and worksite supervisors, and well-structured feedback on student performance. In addition, it is important for youth with disabilities to have appropriate supports and accommodations in place. Training and guidance for workplace personnel also is an important feature of creating a welcoming and supportive environment in which students can thrive. The textbox titled Quality Work Experience Characteristics summarizes the characteristics of quality work-based programs that are supported by research (e.g., Cease-Cook, Fowler, & Test, 2015). These characteristics and how to achieve them are discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.

Quality work experiences are especially dependent on everyone knowing and fulfilling their roles in the arrangement. Students must know what is expected of

### **Shared Responsibility for Work Experience Success**

#### **Student/youth responsibility in work experiences**

- Perform job responsibilities
- Communicate needs and suggest support strategies
- Adhere to workplace guidelines and procedures
- Comply with expectations for job performance, behavior, and social interactions
- Show respect, be responsible, and follow through on commitments
- Learn as much as possible about the work environment and the job

#### **Transition specialist responsibility in work experiences**

- Orient youth to the workplace
- Orient youth to their roles and responsibilities
- Communicate expectations for job performance, behavior, and social interactions
- Explain consequences for inappropriate behavior
- Orient employers to their roles as mentors and supervisors
- Help students communicate their support needs and strategies
- Help employers capitalize on youths' learning styles and identify support strategies
- Communicate with youth and employers on a regular basis
- Link work experiences to classroom learning and academic curriculum

**Employer responsibility in work experiences**

- Model expectations
- Give clear, detailed, and repeated directions
- Communicate expectations for job performance, behavior, and social interactions
- Explain consequences for inappropriate behavior
- Identify the best methods of communication for each student
- Capitalize on each youth's learning style and identify support strategies
- Teach skills needed for successful job performance
- Provide feedback on youth performance
- Communicate with youth and transition specialists on a regular basis

them, how they are expected to behave on the job, and general and specific workplace guidelines. Transition specialists must carefully and thoroughly orient the student to the workplace, communicate and coordinate procedures with the hosting employer, ensure that everyone is clear about their respective responsibilities, and link the work experience to the student's course of instruction, if applicable.

For their part, employers are often viewed as “donating” their places of work as the learning environment. More will be said in Chapters 6 and 7 about minimizing this perception and about making sure cooperating employers receive reciprocal benefit from work experiences. For now, it is important to know that employers will have critical basic responsibilities to fulfill if the work experience is to be productive for both them and the youth. These responsibilities include, among a host of other possible roles, communicating behavior and performance expectations, informing the youth and transition specialist about workplace requirements, and training youth on necessary job skills. The textbox titled Shared Responsibility for Work Experience Success lists the basic responsibilities of students, transition specialists, and employers that contribute to the effectiveness of work experiences. These respective responsibilities also are discussed in considerable detail in subsequent chapters.

**MODELS THAT WORK**

A host of models throughout the country feature successful implementation of work experience. Most transition specialists organize work experiences with students through a locally designed, and usually school-specific, approach where students regularly access community workplaces for various types of work experiences. Some are able to help youth access specially designed and well-known programs. In either case, these programs offer further useful insight into the importance of work experiences and their potential to launch youth with

disabilities into adult careers. A few are summarized in this chapter to show what is possible. These examples also provide empirical evidence of the impact of work experience. However, schools and communities do not need to have formal and highly visible models like the examples described here to successfully incorporate work experiences into the individual student's educational program or transition plans. In fact, most often, it is individual professionals working in individual school systems or with workforce agencies that make work experiences successful for individual youth.

## **Bridges From School to Work**

Bridges From School to Work, or simply Bridges, developed by the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities, continues to illustrate the power of paid work experiences for youth with disabilities. Since its inception in 1989, Bridges has served more than 21,000 youth (MFPD, 2017). It operates in 11 major metropolitan areas: Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York City, Oakland, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. Bridges was originally designed to create paid internships in local companies for youth with disabilities who are in their last year of high school (Luecking & Fabian, 2000). It has since made several adaptations to serve more youth and to ensure postschool follow up to some participating youth. Today, Bridges is delivered during a 15- to 24-month period. Its component parts include skills assessment, career planning, job development, placement, evaluation, action planning, and follow-up. Bridges partners with school systems, VR agencies, and workforce agencies in local communities to identify young people with disabilities for program participation who are in their last year of high school or have just exited. Bridges also serves out-of-school youth who are 17–22 years old.

Bridges produces universally high employment placement rates, up to 90%, across socioeconomic and disability characteristics, and across diverse urban areas throughout the United States (Gold, Fabian, & Luecking, 2013). Bridges also produces universally high employment placement rates regardless of school characteristics (Dong, Fabian, & Luecking, 2015). That is, the job placement services represented by Bridges can benefit youth with disabilities regardless of the quality, structure, or available resources of the schools in which they are enrolled.

These results did not happen by accident. Bridges pays particular attention to building staff competence to facilitate these work experiences. One study showed that Bridges staff who have highly successful track records in job placement and retention exhibit four distinct personal attributes: 1) principled optimism, meaning a belief that all youth regardless of disability have the ability to work; 2) cultural competence, meaning they are aware of and sensitive to the context in which youth live; 3) business-oriented professionalism, indicating they have a work ethic that also helps them see their work through a “business lens”; and 4) networking savvy—that is, they are good at connecting with people and resources (Tilson & Simonsen, 2013).

For their part, employers see successful engagement with Bridges as related to their confidence in the Bridges staff (Simonsen, Fabian, & Luecking, 2015). Employers say that matching particular skills of the Bridges job candidate to the specific demands of the business operation is more important than filling vacant positions.

That is, they will hire individuals who can show they will help the operation even if there are no specific job openings. Furthermore, they indicate that hiring youth with disabilities as a way of giving back to the community is a less important factor in hiring decisions than performance capacity of youth and meeting specific business needs.

The success of Bridges suggests two things about the practice of pairing paid work experiences with other educational activities. First, the youth obviously benefit since as an aggregate group they are achieving employment at a rate that notably exceeds typical employment rates of transitioning youth with disabilities. Second, employers are benefiting as well. It is apparent that exposure to youth with disabilities—along with the competent support of Bridges professionals—enables employers to access workers who can contribute to employers' operations. Chapters 6 and 7 explore this latter point in some detail, as it has implications for how transition professionals interact with employer partners who are so essential to making work experiences happen.

## **Project SEARCH**

The Project SEARCH Transition-to-Work Program is a branded, business-led, 1-year employment preparation program for students with significant disabilities that takes place entirely at the workplace of employer partners (Rutkowski, Daston, Van Kuiken, & Riehle, 2006). Since its establishment in 1996 at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Project SEARCH models have literally expanded to locations around the world. More than 3,000 students participate in Project SEARCH around the United States each year (Project SEARCH, 2019).

Project SEARCH features total immersion in the workplaces of participating companies from medical, banking, and other industries that might have large enough locations to offer multiple integrated job task learning opportunities. It includes a combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations within the company (Persch et al., 2015). Each site is staffed by a special education teacher and one to three skills trainers to meet the educational and training needs of the interns. The Project SEARCH instructor, host business liaison, state vocational rehabilitation counselor, and community rehabilitation provider staff work together for intern referral and program oversight.

Project SEARCH interns attend the program for a full school year in the host business. The host business provides access to an on-site training room that can accommodate up to 12 interns. The program culminates in individualized job development. The program regularly achieves a 75% postproject placement rate in competitive integrated employment, defined as year round and nonseasonal, at least 16 hours per week, at the prevailing wage, and working among coworkers with and without disabilities (Project SEARCH, 2019).

Project SEARCH illustrates several key points related to the value of work experiences. First, it is not only heavily invested in the participation of businesses, but these businesses play a leadership role. Like Bridges, this suggests perspectives about employers that are important in all work experience development. Second, it involves a collaboration between several partners whose programs and services might otherwise overlap but not necessarily intersect. Here schools, VR agencies,

and community rehabilitation service providers are working together at the same time with the same students. The example of seamless transition in the next section shows how this might work in typical transition efforts where there are no programs like Bridges or Project SEARCH available. Finally, the outcomes speak for themselves. When the norm for employment in community integrated employment for individuals with significant disabilities is less than 20% (Winsor et al., 2017), Project SEARCH is achieving outcomes that are more than three times higher.

## Seamless Transition Models

One common approach to transition service includes components that lead to students exiting school already employed or enrolled in postsecondary education that will lead to employment. Moreover, they have been linked to the necessary supports to maintain job and career achievement into adulthood. That is, they move seamlessly from being a student to an employed adult. Certo et al. (2009) first promoted what was called the Transition Service Integration Model (TSIM), whereby the first day after school exit looks the same to the youth as the day before—that is, the same job, same supports. During participating students' last year in school, their school system enters into a formal service contract with a local private non-profit community rehabilitation program that serves adults with significant support needs and that agrees to work with pending graduates *before* and *after* school exit through a combination of school district, vocational rehabilitation, and developmental disabilities funding.

TSIM was designed to combine the resources of school and postschool systems, during the last year of a student's enrollment in public education, to share the costs of a student-driven approach to transition planning, resulting in long-term adult employment in place before school exit. Most of the youth participating in TSIM have not been likely candidates to apply for standard or advertised jobs due to lack of requisite work experience and skills, and/or because of extensive or unique accommodation and support needs. However, successful employment can be achieved through job development that identifies employers who can benefit from the youth's particular attributes in alternative, customized ways (Certo & Luecking, 2006).

This approach to seamless transition has expanded from its original application for students with intellectual/developmental disabilities to a model that can be applied on behalf of any student with any disability who requires support to prepare for and achieve postschool employment success (Luecking & Luecking, 2015). The centerpiece of the seamless transition model is work experience during the secondary school years. Typically, seamless transition models feature the following components:

- *An asset-based and person-centered discovery process* that is the basis for planning for work experiences and employment and that involves working with the student to develop an inventory of skills, positive traits, interests, personal preferences, and support and accommodation requirements
- *Individualized work experiences* that potentially include a combination of informational interviews, jobsite tours, work sampling, unpaid internships, and summer youth employment opportunities



- At least one individualized *paid integrated employment* experience before school exit, defined as one where the student is paid directly by the employer and where other workers are primarily individuals without disabilities
- *Early VR case initiation* that occurs no later than the second school year prior to projected school exit
- *Interagency collaboration* represented by a cross-functional team of school and service agency professionals convened on behalf of individual students to plan for and deliver services that facilitate work experiences and paid employment

Family support and coordination with teachers and instructional staff ensure that work experiences and jobs occur with their necessary input and support. Figure 1.1 illustrates the typical progression of seamless transition service.

One feature of seamless transition worth noting is the early involvement of VR. In one study of a seamless transition model, researchers found that, compared with nonparticipants, model participants received more job-related services from VR, but fewer assessment and diagnostic services. They also achieved significantly higher employment rates at VR case closure (Luecking et al., 2018). This not only points to the strong value of work experience as a precursor to adult employment, but it also provides support for the Pre-ETS work experience provisions of WIOA as a key VR service available to transitioning students and youth. This also means that variations on the concept of seamless transition service provision can essentially be implemented in any school district in the country. Work experiences can be organized for students with disabilities anywhere transition specialists can partner with VR and other community partners. Chapter 10 includes a discussion of how to use Pre-ETS as a useful tool to facilitate work experiences. In any case—with or without the presence of highly organized work preparation programs such as Bridges or Project SEARCH, and with or without a formal seamless transition partnership model—work experiences can happen. Where there are work experiences during secondary and postsecondary education there will be more youth with disabilities who will achieve adult employment.

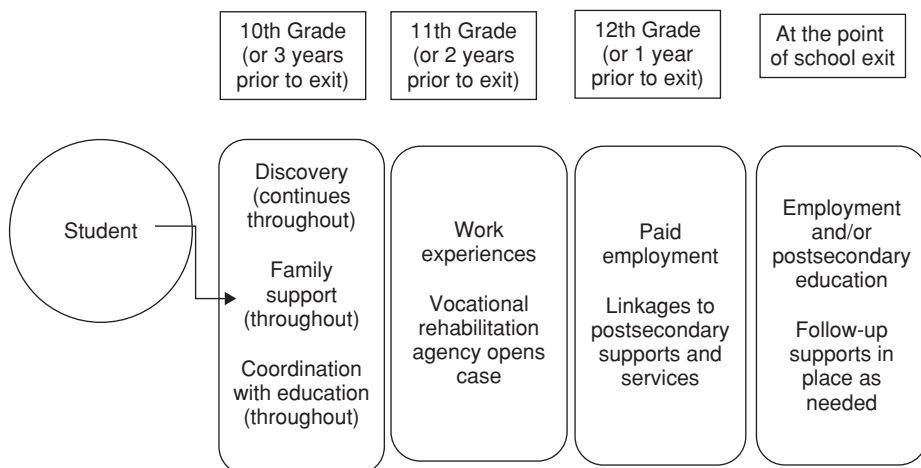


Figure 1.1. Seamless transition flowchart.

## **IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF WORK EXPERIENCES**

As important as work experiences are, and as clearly as research and the models described above have supported their value, there are still hurdles to implementing them on a broader scale so as to benefit all youth with disabilities currently in the nation's secondary schools, almost 400,000 of whom exit school each year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). There are three general challenges to making work experiences a bigger priority in secondary and postsecondary education.

First, there is frequent tension between time at the worksite and time in the classroom because of the need to focus on academics and classroom-based instruction. This is particularly the case for students who are on track to receive a diploma. Unless there is a specific course or education-related work experience required, these students are usually only available for work experiences after school on weekends, or during summer breaks. This limits the opportunity for them to access work experience without careful planning and without schools collaborating with VR and other community programs. In addition to resources within the typical school system, potential resources for facilitating such opportunities include youth employment programs that provide work experiences for a range of youth, including those with disabilities. Also, disability-specific resources, such as those funded by state VR agencies, are important pregraduation links to jobs and work experiences that lead to eventual successful adult employment. Chapter 10 also focuses on strategies to address this need.

Second, school personnel and their community partners often struggle to find time to establish and maintain relationships with participating employers. Of course, available and willing employer partners are essential for the establishment of work experiences. Hence, the challenge becomes how to maximize the use of available time to recruit employers and to nurture relationships with them. Employers, for their part, require convenient ways to link with students that do not impede on their time or ability to operate efficiently. Thus, convenient and effective mechanisms for linking students with employers will need to be created or expanded in most school systems. Chapters 6 and 7 address this need.

Finally, there is a need to build the capacity of transition specialists to perform the tasks necessary to facilitate work experiences. Many transition specialists are thrust into their roles with little or no preparation or training. They are left to learn by trial and error or maybe through sporadically available in-service opportunities. Other transition specialists who are experienced and effective will still benefit from upgrading their skills and knowledge. Even partners in transition services who do not necessarily have direct responsibility for facilitating work experience need to know how it is best done. Indeed, it is essential that these partners understand what it takes so they can contribute to the development of work experiences and provide the ancillary services that support them. There is thus the need to create avenues for training transition specialists and their partners on how to facilitate work experiences through preservice training and in-service training. This need has been well documented for education staff (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2014), for VR counselors (Neubert, Luecking, & Fabian, 2018), and for community rehabilitation providers (Butterworth, Migliore, Nord, & Gelb, 2012).

This book is of course meant to be a resource in meeting this need. Subsequent chapters provide strategies for addressing each of these concerns while ensuring that youth with disabilities experience opportunities to receive the important exposure to work during formative education years that we know is necessary for them to achieve productive and meaningful employment in their adult lives.

## SUMMARY

Research has consistently demonstrated that education and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities can be significantly improved by frequent and systematic exposure to a variety of real work experiences. Compared to their peers without disabilities, the persistently lower employment rates of youth and young adults with disabilities suggest that these types of experiences should be integral to secondary education for students with disabilities, regardless of the nature of the disability or the need for special education services. This chapter provides a rationale for work experiences, describes the type and function of different types of work experiences, describes models that embody the best features of work as integral aspects of transition planning and service, explains indicators of quality for such experiences, and provides examples of work-based learning models that have proven effective in boosting the career development of youth with disabilities. The next chapter covers in detail the types of work experiences introduced here, when and how to use them, and ways to ensure their inclusion in transition planning.

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