

Shannon Simonelli:

I'd like to welcome our listeners to the next edition of our Effective Practice Briefings in this audio series. This is sponsored by the Hawaii State Improvement Grant, a collaboration between the Hawaii Department of Education, the Zero To Three program at the Department of Health, the Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii, and the Learning Disability Association of Hawaii with parent organization involvement.

So we'd like to welcome our listeners today. We've got Dr. Robert Stodden with us. He's a national expert in the field of transitions and supports to people throughout the lifespan around the issue of transition. Particularly today we'll be focusing on supporting children and adolescents in their transition throughout the school years.

Dr. Stodden is the Director of the Center on Disability Studies and has been in this position for twenty years and is widely published in the field of transition.

So I'd like to welcome you today.

Robert:

Thank you, Shannon. It's good to be here.

Shannon:

Thank you. I really appreciate your time.

Maybe we could start out with you talking a little bit about your connection with the field of transition: what attracted you to it and just a little bit about why you're involved and what is important to you in that.

Robert:

Sure. Transition, at least transition as a field of study with youth with disabilities, has been around for almost thirty years. Initially my involvement with the field was right from the start, as I was coming into the field as a new professor. Transition and movement from school to work was becoming an important area of study and an important area of concern for the United States Department of Education. This was primarily because the early to mid eighties were a period of time that was approximately ten years after the initial passage of Public Law 94-142 which was the first special education legislation that provided a Free Appropriate Public Education for all children with disabilities. So, ten years after the passage of that legislation, there was a lot of interest in the U.S. Department of Education to try to show that it was making a difference for students with disabilities.

And, one of the measures of making a difference was how students were leaving the public education system and what happened to them as adults. So that transition to adulthood and what the outcome was, became really important to the United States Department of Education in the mid 1980s.

Out of that, they issued a number of research and demonstration projects. I think the first being in 1985-1986, to begin to explore and discover how transition was occurring, if it was occurring, and what the outcomes were. So, at the University of

Hawaii, we were really instrumental in applying for one of the first transition grants, which was referred to as the Hawaii Transition Project. That project worked on setting up procedures, guidelines, and paperwork, or forms, for transition planning, individualized transition planning, transition assessment procedures, interagency teaming procedures; basically how to focus on preparing young people for adulthood, how to link them, and then to support them to be received in the adult world.

So that was kind of the start. And from that point, we've been involved in probably thirty or more research, demonstration, training kinds of projects to bring transition to the State of Hawaii. Several of those projects have been national projects where we've developed procedures, collected data nationally to assist the United States Department of Education in refining and pulling together all this information that we have today in the area of school-to-work transition for young people with disabilities.

Shannon:

Wonderful.

Robert:

So there's a long history.

Shannon:

Good. Maybe you could describe a little bit about how you would define transition, first in general—I mean, you've sort of touched on some of that already,—and then how it applies to youth with disabilities.

Robert:

Yes. Transition, in many people, (particularly in the field of special education in school-to-work transition) don't think of it this way, but transition is a very natural process that occurs with everyone. There are various transitions in people's lives which are basically movements from one stage or one phase of life to another.

The initial transition that everybody faces is leaving home at age four or five and going to school, or changing, or transitioning from your mother and your home life to having a teacher in school during the day. And, for a lot of very young children, obviously, that's a major transition. It's one of the first real changes in environments that they experience.

As students proceed through school, they transition from grade level to grade level and typically from elementary to middle school to high school. And then a big transition is transitioning out of secondary school, or out of high school, to the adult world, which can consist of continuing in school, in post-secondary school which is typically very different than secondary school, or it's transitioning into the world of work, or into another adult role that we all play. But, this is a natural process for everyone, and everyone's expected to go through it.

Typically it involves three phases of activity, and we all experience these to some extent. Some are less prepared than others some are better received than others.

Typically, the first phase of transition that one goes through is a Preparation Phase where one kind of learns the skills and behaviors that are required in the next environment and develops those skills and behaviors and readies themselves to make this transition.

Typically, the second phase is that once you have those skills and are prepared, you're assisted in being linked with the next environment, so it's kind of a Linkage Phase. Linkage might involve admission, or applying and admission, to postsecondary education. It might involve making contact with various agencies or community groups or other kinds of entities that assist you to make that bridge into the new environment. Linkages also might involve family relationships, where someone else in the family has already made that transition and they share the various steps that one goes through, all those sorts of things.

The third phase is typically being received in the next environment, or Reception. Reception typically involves the environment that you're going into, people in that environment receiving you, maybe asking you a number of questions, asking for paperwork, those sorts of things; maybe assisting you to adjust to that environment. These are all those sorts of things that make up assisting you to be received in the environment.

So those three phases are typically the phases that everyone goes through as they make transitions throughout life.

Shannon:

Right.

Robert:

And transitions continue on throughout adulthood. So it's a very natural process that everyone proceeds through.

Shannon:

As you're speaking about them, I'm just reflecting on my own life and in the work that I do, and even in the life of my own daughter, and those are very important steps. We all really need those pieces. So I appreciate you really lining them up like that. It's very easy to see and to relate to.

And when you think about people with disabilities, youth with disabilities, can you talk a little bit about that in terms of how there might be an added layer to all of this?

Robert:

Yes. Well, young people with disabilities go through the same three phases. But there are various overlays of activities, supports, and other kinds of things that typically happen for a young person with a disability because typically they need some additional assistance in making this transition successful..

Typically at the Preparation level there is a focus on actually training young people with disabilities in the skills and behaviors that might be needed in the next environment-- such as self-determination skills, there may be very specific

vocational skills, or very specific skills related to participation in a postsecondary education environment. So there would be a specific focus placed on acquiring those skills prior to making the linkage to postsecondary education.

Shannon:

Self-advocacy would be one of those, right?

Robert:

Yes. Definitely.

And in terms of Linkage, for a young person with disabilities there's a lot of activity around linking up, or shifting from school-based services that might've been provided by a special education teacher to linking to adult agencies that might provide services or supports and accommodations for this young person as they move in to various adult roles. These typically include making linkage with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation or the Social Security Administration office, or the Medicaid office, or various other offices that might provide services and supports on an ongoing basis once the young person makes that transition to the next receiving environment. Linkage is very important for a young person with disabilities. And typically there's a lot of focus placed on the linkage phase for those individuals.

The Receiving activities, often which are not done real well when providing transition services, (receiving activities) actually involve contacting and working with the receiving environment, whether it be postsecondary education environment, like the admissions office, or faculty and faculty development offices in postsecondary education. Or, in the employment sector, it may mean contacting and working with employers—large companies or small, independent employers, and familiarizing them with young people with disabilities, with their needs, what different characteristics of different disabilities are, what their responsibilities are to accommodate and support these different disability needs. There's a lot of work to do there in preparing people in the receiving environment so they're ready for a young person with a disability to either enter the world of work, or further education, or something else—recreation, community participation- all the different roles that we participate in as an adult.

So that's a real important step also for young people with disabilities.

Shannon:

Yeah. It sounds like that helps to really potentially usher in a whole new life essentially, particularly when you're looking at that transition from high school to life after high school. It can really lay the groundwork for lots of things.

Robert:

Yes. It's a very ... (for anybody, any young person) it's somewhat of a scary transition. It's a scary anticipation of what all could be out there and what might not be out there, and how it might go. And, for a young person with a disability there are just a number of added things that are typically heaped on all of the scary thoughts

and unknowns. So the more we can do to assist the Preparation, the Linkage, and the Reception, the more chance that fear is taken out of this process, and the less scary it is for a young person and their family and others that happen to be in the role of supporting them through this.

Shannon:

Right. Maybe you could talk a little bit (as you were speaking about this) I'm finding myself wondering, "Who are the key players involved in this process?" I suppose it would depend which transition you were speaking about. But even across the transitions there may be some specific roles or people that we might just name that would be involved in this process. So could you talk a little bit about that? Like, who helps us do this?

Robert:

Yes. Well definitely in the Preparation Phase, which should be the high school years,--and a lot of people advocate for middle school and even earlier for special education personnel and other teachers in schools to be familiar with what the skills, behaviors, and knowledges are that are needed after school by students. So they are definitely important people in assisting students to have these skills. Also in many states, (in Hawaii it's true), there are people referred to as transition specialists in the high schools. There are counselors, career counselors, academic counselors, and kind of personal social counselors that all should be and are somewhat attuned to this process and can be of assistance in this Preparation Phase. So almost everybody in the high school environment has something to do with this, but definitely people in instructional roles and in counseling roles have a lot to do with it, have major roles.

In the Linkage process, typically it's people who would be reaching from the school in to the community, and then people that bridge across the school in the community. Typically in Hawaii, transition specialists are charged to do that, also counselors. All different types of school counselors are charged with making that bridge or creating those linkages. And then on the other end, vocational rehabilitation counselors; and typically employment counselors and employment agencies are also charged with making some of those bridges or linkages.

On the Receiving end, typically personnel, resource personnel, human resource personnel in businesses, are people that are involved in creating receiving kinds of environments and climates. In postsecondary education, obviously, admissions officers, admissions counselors, disability service office personnel, faculty development personnel, student services offices in higher ed are all charged with creating a receptive environment for young people as they come in. And many of them are focused on the needs of people with disabilities that would be making this transition.

So there's a lot of people in different roles which can often be part of the problem because they often don't coordinate and collaborate well. They each have their own distinct function, and often that overlaps with another function; or it might conflict with another function, so you might be getting three different stories about

something. And it makes it often very difficult for the young person and their family members who are trying to wade through this transition process. Partly the reason for that is because there are so many people that play different pieces or parts, and they're often all not on the same page.

Shannon:

Right. And so then the management of that, comes down to the student and their family playing sort of the management role of how all of that's coming together where needs are being met or not met. Is that right?

Robert:

Yes, very much so. Actually, given that we know that, that the student and their family is ultimately responsible for trying to put all these pieces together, one of the things we could do a lot better is to prepare students and family members with these types of skills, these case management or case coordination kinds of skills. And that is typically a very important missing piece in the preparation, the training of young people. And, families are often shocked to find all of the disparate services and where to find them and how to figure out how they fit together. And all of that is something people are typically not prepared for.

Shannon:

Mm-hmm. Yes. I can see that.

Okay. I think that this is a natural resting place. I'd like to give our listeners a chance to just sort of reflect on this for a moment. And we'll be back in just a moment with Part Two of our conversation.

Robert:

Okay. Thank you, Shannon.