Career Development for Adolescents and Young Adults with Mental Retardation


**Article Summary**

Both the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 (Public Law 98-524) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Public Law 101-476) address career assessment of students with disabilities and vocational outcomes for students with disabilities. The author discusses the rationale for career development throughout the education process for students with disabilities as well as the justification for school counselors to take an active role in vocationally-related programming.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, in particular, provides a framework that school counselors can utilize to develop:

- Career awareness
- Employment readiness
- Career goals
- Knowledge to achieve career goals
- Application of skills to achieve career goals

Considerable research emphasizes occupational choice, as opposed to career development, for individuals with moderate to severe mental retardation. Occupational choice centers on a decision at a particular time while career development encompasses a lifelong series of choices related to vocational outcomes. Whereas career development and choice for individuals with severe disabilities had traditionally been related to the presence of segregated local programs, supported employment and consumer choice has changed this. Employment outcomes are less likely to focus on extensive tenure at one job but instead, development of work skills and experiences in a number of settings.

The author discusses the following areas of career development that are instrumental in the lifelong goal of career choices for students with mental retardation:

- Goal-Setting
- Career Interests
- Transferable Skills
- Decision-Making
- Reframing Existing Opportunities

As consumer choice of service delivery becomes the norm for adults with disabilities, it behooves those who work with school-age students, especially counselors, to provide the framework from which to learn effective decision-making that will carry them throughout their lives.