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Learning Objectives

- Examine limitations of traditional assessment for students with complex support needs
- Explore innovative and evidence-based assessment strategies that emphasize discovery, participation, and authentic experiences
- Learn practical tools for assessing interests, strengths, support needs, and conditions for success
- Apply assessment information to develop meaningful post-secondary goals, including employment

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Key Take Aways Today

- Transition assessments should use practical, flexible tools that are customized to each student's unique needs, strengths, and goals.
- Effective transition assessment requires collaboration among educators, families, and community partners.
- Actively involving students in the assessment and planning process builds self-determination and self-advocacy skills.
- Transition assessment drives meaningful planning and supports successful postsecondary outcomes.

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Poll Question

- Which transition assessment do you use most often?
 - ✓ Interest inventories
 - ✓ Vocational evaluations
 - ✓ Transition surveys
 - ✓ Observation
 - ✓ Discovery

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The Reality

Many students with complex support needs:

- Cannot complete traditional assessments
- Are underestimated
- Have limited opportunities to demonstrate strengths
- Are assessed through deficits rather than potential

Circle one:

A

B

C

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Why Traditional Assessments Often Fail Students with Complex Support Needs

Traditional assessments typically rely on:

- Reading
- Writing
- Language processing
- Abstract thinking
- Hypothetical questions

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Why This Matters

Transition assessment drives:

- Postsecondary goals
- Transition services
- Work-based learning

The skills of students with complex needs are often under-assessed

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Does your assessment actually drive your IEP?

Moving Beyond the Checkbox

Federal policy (IDEA, WIOA, Perkins V) is already coherent. The challenge is implementation coherence.

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The Paradigm Shift: From Clinical Deficits to Ecological Validity

 THE TRADITIONAL MODEL	 THE ECOLOGICAL PARADIGM
Focus: Standardized, norm-referenced testing.	Focus: Person-centered, customized employment models.
Mechanism: Measures predictive validity within controlled testing environments. Relies on abstract reasoning, reading comprehension, and compliance.	Mechanism: Measures ecological validity. Determines how a student interacts with real-world settings (domestic, community, vocational).
Outcome for ESN: Identifies cognitive/motor deficits. Frequently results in low expectations, restrictive post-school recommendations, and false unemployable labels.	Outcome for ESN: Identifies strengths, positive contributions, and the exact environmental/assistive conditions under which the student thrives.

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Key Shift

Assessment is NOT testing	Assessment IS discovery
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ongoing• Context-based• Student-directed

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Key Shift

The most valuable assessment strategy? → Spending time with the job seeker in a variety of settings.

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Discovery: Getting to Know You

- Not an "assessment."
- Community-based focus
- Identify strengths, interests, and support needs
 - Job seeker input
 - Identify themes and potential opportunities
- Qualitative approach
- Descriptive versus comparative/evaluative
- Focus on assets versus deficits
- Ongoing
 - Interviews
 - Observations (multiple settings)
 - Job shadows

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What is a Positive Personal Profile?

In the context of transition assessment for students with complex support needs

A Positive Personal Profile (PPP) is a strengths-based summary that captures what is important to the student, what is meaningful for them, and what is valued about them. It is created with the student and their team to support person-centered transition planning.

A POSITIVE PERSONAL PROFILE INCLUDES:

- Strengths and abilities:** What the student does well and what we notice about them.
- Interests and preferences:** What they enjoy, what motivates them, and what is important to them.
- Communication:** How they communicate, how we know what they are saying, and how we can best support their understanding.
- Support needs:** How to support them to be successful, including routines, strategies, and environments.
- Vision for the future:** What a goal they look like for them now and in the future.

THE PURPOSE IN TRANSITION ASSESSMENT:

- Center the student's voice, preferences, and strengths in planning.
- Build shared understanding among families, educators, and community partners.
- Guide the development of meaningful, individualized transition goals and experiences.
- Help match the student with supports, services, and opportunities that fit them.
- Promotes self-determination, inclusion, and a positive sense of identity and purpose.

The Positive Personal Profile is a living document. It is reviewed and updated over time as the student grows, their interests change, and their goals evolve.

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Meet Mattie

What Mattie's file said:

- Developmentally disabled and deaf and blind
- Lived in an institution most of her life
- "Failed" at several work placements
- Nonverbal
- "Behavior outbursts"
- Moves slowly

What we discovered:

- Very curious
- Loves variety and learning new things (like tactile communication)
- Likes working with her hands
- Always smiling
- Enjoys cooking (smelling the food, stirring, pouring)
- Loves swimming (especially the whirlpool)

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Communication Mapping

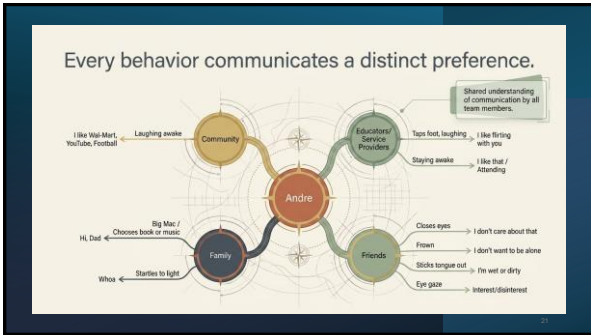
- Students communicate constantly.
- Not all communication uses words.
 - Eye gaze
 - Body position
 - Facial expression
 - Refusal behavior
 - Movement
 - Engagement

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Communication Map Example

Behavior	Meaning
Looks away	Finished
Leans forward	Interested
Laughs/Smiles	Enjoying
Turns head	Refusal


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Assets versus Deficits Approach

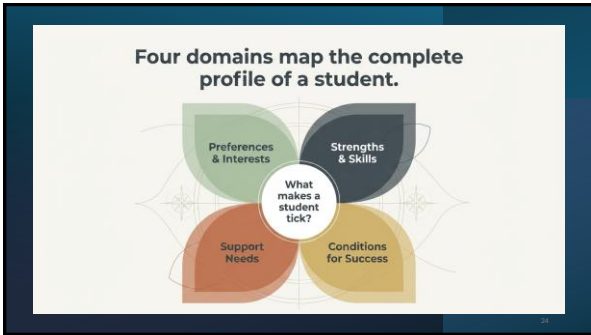
- Identify strengths- not what's broken
- Focus is the student's preferences and interests
- Student-directed process, based on Positive Personal Profile (PPP)
- PPP is used to target businesses where their unique characteristics and skills will be seen as assets
 - Identifies employer needs and ways the job seeker can help
 - Shifts emphasis to "adding value"
 - Strength-based approach - Not job-carving



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Deficits	Assets
Short Attention Span	Many Interests/Fast Paced
Irresponsible	Carefree/Risk Taker
Distractable	Perceptive/Adaptable
Hyperactive	Energetic/High Stamina
Unpredictable	Flexible/Resilient
Impulsive	Fast/Thinks on feet
Stubborn	Grit/Determined/Persistent
Obsessive	Attention to detail/Precise/Focused
Manipulative	Negotiator/Influencer/Persuasive

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Interviewing and Active Listening


- Meet at the person's home or a neutral spot
- Ask Open-ended questions
 - "Tell me about yourself" "What do you do for fun?", "What do plan to do after school?", "What kind of work have you done? What was your favorite job?", " How did you meet Joe?"
- It is a conversation, not an interrogation
- Be Quiet! (Silence is golden)
- Take notes and ask for clarification

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Where Can We Learn the Most About a Person?

Where are we most relaxed?
Where are we at our best?



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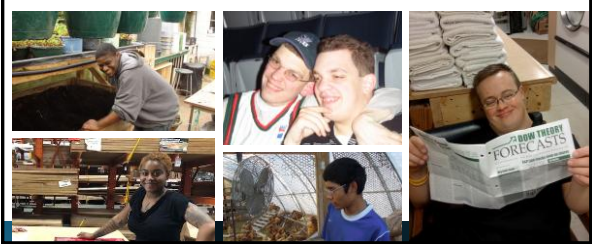
Social Capital Assessments

- Who knows the student?
- Who can open doors?
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Neighbors
 - Employers
 - Faith communities
 - Community groups
- Relationship mapping and Reciprocal Roles Mapping

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Tour the Neighborhood, Talk with Friends and Family



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Strategy 1: Person-Centered

- Tools:**
- Discovery, PATH, MAPs
 - Good Day / Bad Day
 - Preference assessments

Key Question:
What does the student want their life to look like?

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At Home...

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Strategy 2: Real-World Assessment

Skills change depending on the environment.

School Enterprises, Community-Based Instruction, Task Sampling & Transportation Practice, Repeated Trials, Embedded choice-making

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Ecological Assessment

Assess across environments – not just in school

- Community
- Recreation
- Transportation
- Work-Based Learning Experiences

- Library
- Grocery Store
- Animal shelter
- Food pantry
- Nursery/garden center
- Hospital
- Office

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Conditions for Success

Noise level, Pace, Structure, Social demands, Physical environment

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Activity

Choose one Viznug from the following list of Viznugs available in your area to individuals with your background.

All selections must be made within 15 seconds of viewing.

You will be required to spend 4-8 hours per day with your Viznug (days per week must be flexible)

By choosing a Viznug you agree to its maintenance and care, as well as any accommodations or modifications necessary to maintain your chosen Viznug.

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Ready!

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Which Viznug Did you Choose?
Type the number in the chat box

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BECAUSE IT LOOKS CUDDLY LOOKS FRIENDLY
COLORFUL I LIKE CATS?
SCARRY! IT SWIMS!
= Your Viznug!

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Strategy 3: Embedded Assessment

Use everyday routines:

- Classroom jobs
- Transitions
- Social interactions

Collect data on:

- Independence
- Engagement
- Supports needed
- word for "conditions"


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Assessment through Choice Making

Choice is communication

- Activity choices
- Food choices
- People choices
- Environment choices

Patterns reveal preferences!



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Strategy 4: Assistive Technology

- Visual supports
- Switch access
- Eye gaze
- AAC devices


Student voice must be accessible

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Emerging Innovations

- AI-supported observation tools
- Digital portfolios
- Wearables
- Electronic data collection
 - Google Forms observation logs
 - Digital portfolios
 - Video-based assessment
 - QR-code data collection
 - AAC-generated preference data



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**Strategy 5:
Family Input**

Holistic assessment is impossible without family input and cultural context.

Family Context Educator Data

What are your hopes?
What does inclusion look like?
What works at home?

Rooted in Family & Cultural Responsiveness.

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Life Trajectory and Life Domain Vision Tools

Life Trajectory / Family Perspective

Life Vision / Family Perspective

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Every student can show us who they are if we design the opportunity.

Meaningful work. Inclusive environments. Stronger communities.

We see potential We open doors We build skills We strengthen communities

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Reflection

What is one thing you will change tomorrow?