

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The purpose of this book is to present a group of case studies to show how one can assess students to develop a clear statement of transition service needs and needed transition services, and then use that information for goals and objectives in the Individualized Education Program/Individual Transition Plan (IEP/ITP). We do this with the expectation that case studies personalize the way assessment procedures relate to young people. The individuals described in these case studies may be very much like students in any school or may be so different that planners see the range of assessment possibilities that lead directly to planning in the IEP/ITP process, particularly if planners work with students with unique special needs.

OVERVIEW OF THE IEP/ITP TRANSITION PLANNING PROCESS

Two of the most troublesome provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990; IDEA) and its amendments have been the mandate for transition services and the transition planning requirement for IEPs. Students, parents, and educators support transition planning and services, but the troublesome aspect is in compliance with the mandate. The transition component of the law remains the most frequent area of noncompliance.

Individual planning for transition services is prescribed in the provisions of IDEA and accompanying regulations through three components: assessment, family participation, and specific procedures to be followed in the development of the IEP. This case study book provides examples of assessment and family participation as critical factors in generating present levels of performance in a variety of transition outcome planning areas. School planners and family members identify critical information from the assessment results to help develop meaningful goals and objectives for transition outcomes.

Figure 1.1 presents a diagram of the transition planning process. This illustration of the ideal transition planning process assumes that school personnel, the student, and family members, including the student's parents or guardians, and, when appropriate, siblings or extended family members who live with the immediate family, are involved in each step of the process. The steps in the transition planning process are discussed briefly to set the stage for the case studies.

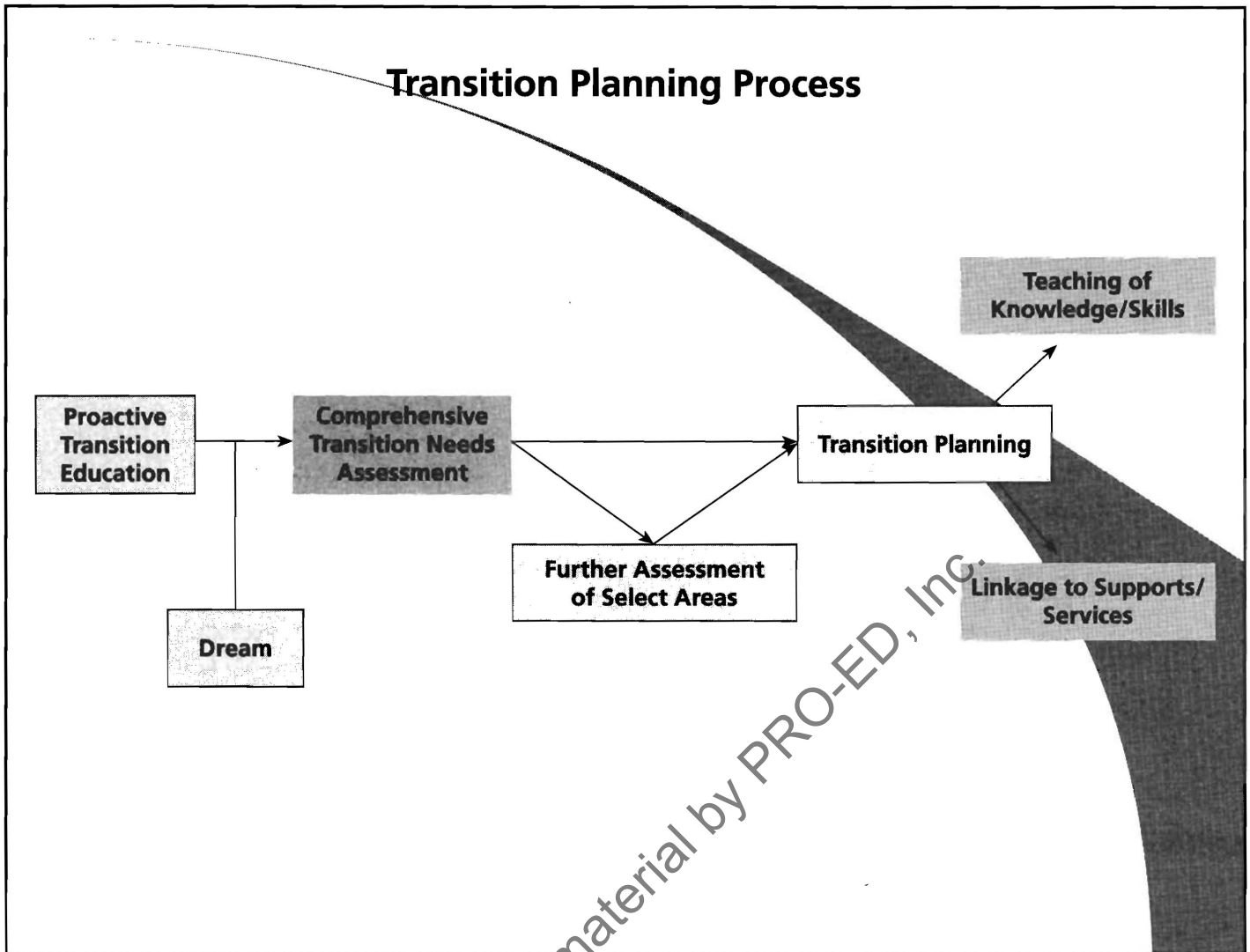


FIGURE 1.1. Transition planning process. Adapted from *Transition Planning Inventory* (p. 26), by G. M. Clark and J. R. Patton, 1997, Austin, TX: PRO-ED. Copyright 1997 by PRO-ED, Inc. Adapted with permission.

Initial Identification of Transition Needs

Proactive Transition Education. Prior to the first formal transition planning activity, students have been receiving some type and level of transition education both at home and school. The quality of transition education ranges from poor to excellent. Under IDEA, at least some minimum attention should be given to post-school transition needs and some decisions should be made regarding students' courses of study. At the very least, every student and family should have a dream for the future, be able to articulate it, and be satisfied with the course of study that is spelled out in the IEP for reaching that dream.

Comprehensive Transition Needs Assessment. Transition planning has to start with some notion of what "comprehensive" and "transition needs" might include. A comprehensive needs assessment does not mean a complete evaluation

of a student in every aspect of human performance. It does refer to the broad starting point for an annual IEP planning process that looks beyond the 3-year evaluation data used for acceptance for special education services. It also looks beyond academic achievement. We believe that there are numerous “transition needs” and that they can be organized for assessment under various categories. At a minimum, the following areas of transition needs should be assessed for the IEP/ITP planning process:

- Employment
- Further education or training
- Daily living
- Leisure activities
- Community participation
- Health
- Self-determination
- Communication
- Interpersonal relationships

A comprehensive transition needs assessment can come from a variety of assessment approaches. At this stage in transition planning practice, most schools are not beginning the planning process with a comprehensive needs assessment. Schools may do some identification of transition needs, mostly in informal ways, such as interviewing students and family members, asking students or parents to complete survey instruments or checklists, having students complete some formal assessment instruments, and relying on continuing observations of students. Frequently, in situations where a student is functioning reasonably well and has only a few clearly identifiable need areas for planning, the identification of transition needs is considered sufficient to move directly to transition planning (see left-to-right arrow on Figure 1.1 between the Comprehensive Transition Needs Assessment stage and Transition Planning stage).

Typically, though, assessments are not systematic and leave gaps both within and across some transition planning areas. Some assessment probes also may raise as many questions as answers and indicate a need for additional assessment. It is at this point that further assessment is needed. It also may be needed even with a more comprehensive and systematic initial assessment, especially for students with multiple planning area needs.

Further Assessment of Select Areas

Further assessment might involve new or different types of assessment procedures, new or different transition need areas, or in-depth assessment of select

areas. For example, observing a student's behaviors at school might raise the question of whether the student engages in those same behaviors at home and in the community. Additional observation data could be obtained in the new settings, or telephone interviews with parents, employers, or community representatives could be used to do further assessment. In another example, personal interviews with students and parents might yield little in terms of substantive information related to interests and preferences. Frequent "don't know" responses indicate lack of information about the student or lack of information about possibilities for the student. Further assessments could involve an appropriate interest assessment or a series of situational assessments as ways of determining interests or preferences.

Transition Planning

After a comprehensive needs assessment or a combination of comprehensive needs assessment and further assessment, the process moves to transition planning. After identifying transition needs, the persons responsible for developing the transition plan can begin. Transition planning should focus on two areas: (a) instructional goals for the student's knowledge and skills, and (b) linkage goals to facilitate the connections between students and their families with providers of services and supports, for both current and future needs.

The formats used across the country vary greatly. Some local education agencies dedicate a section of their standard IEP form to transition planning. Others require separate ITPs. Regardless of format, however, quality assessment in identifying transition needs facilitates the creation of statements of transition service needs and needed transition services, instructional goals and benchmark objectives, linkage goals, and other transition services activities or action statements.

Few "how-to" resources exist for schools to generate quality transition plans because each state and local education agency retains the right to design its own procedures. In most instances, "function follows form," rather than the ideal view of "form follows function." This case study book provides a useful model for determining a student's strengths and needs with planning notes, and then generating goals from a clearly stated present level of performance for transition outcome areas.

Some resources that might be helpful in generating good transition plans:

- *Individual Transition Plans: The Teacher's Curriculum for Helping Youth with Special Needs* (Wehman, 2002)
- *Informal Assessments for Transition Planning* (Clark, Patton, & Moulton, 2000)
- *Transition from School to Young Adulthood: Basic Concepts and Recommended Practices* (Patton & Dunn, 1998)

In addition, the *Transition Planning Inventory: Administration and Resource Guide* (Clark & Patton, 1997) provides more than 600 transition goals in its appendix, organized according to the 46 transition planning statements in the *Transition Planning Inventory* (TPI; Clark & Patton, 1997).

USING THE TPI FOR PLANNING

There are several commercially available instruments designed for transition planning (Clark, 1998; Clark, in press), but this case studies book uses the TPI (Clark & Patton, 1997) for several reasons. First, independent assessment input from the student, the home, and the school provides an opportunity to involve the family in the assessment process. Second, the nine transition planning domains of the TPI comprise the major areas of transition planning that have emerged from the literature and from legislation. Finally, the TPI results and any additional assessment results allow schools to move to the transition planning process in the IEP in an efficient and effective way that also provides documentation of the assessment process and the involvement of families.

The TPI is an initial screening instrument that can provide useful information for immediate transition planning. The TPI is comprehensive only to the extent that it covers a range of transition outcome areas for planning. Other assessment instruments may be needed. The case studies in this book reflect this reality in most instances.

THE CASE STUDY METHOD FOR THIS BOOK

Case studies have been used in professional fields for many years to move learners from theory to application, from the abstract to the concrete, and from generalities to specifics. Case studies help learners identify issues, help present situations in context for perspective, and help to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant data. Good case studies clearly identify problems. One common question is what to do with assessment information in order to develop IEP/ITP goals for transition planning, which is the focus of each case study in this book. Those involved in assessment for transition planning can use these specific case studies to

- learn how to identify what one knows with some certainty,
- understand available data (which may have no verification of reliability),
- learn to identify what one knows but cannot evaluate fully because of discrepancies, and
- learn to identify and admit what one clearly does not know because of a lack of adequate information.

Good case studies also engage the planner in a problem-solving process. Although some cases will be of more interest than others because of disability specializations, each case illustrates different types of transition service needs and the issues of individual problem solving. Each case highlights these basic and critical questions:

1. What are the facts of the case?
2. What do these facts mean in relation to transition service needs?

3. What other information is needed for good planning?
4. Which needs stand out as priorities?

ISSUES OF DIVERSITY IN ASSESSMENT FOR TRANSITION PLANNING

As teachers help students and their families with their current and postsecondary transition-related needs, it is important to understand that all parties enter into the process with cultural identities that help determine their values and beliefs in regard to the transition between adolescence and adulthood. Similarly, the special education process itself is embedded with cultural values (Harry, 1992). For example, the idea that older adolescents should prepare to live independently, apart from immediate family members, may seem inappropriate or unappealing to some students and families. The idea of a young adult living independently in a dormitory or an apartment may be acceptable to some people, but others may prefer that unmarried children live at home until they begin their own families. Values and beliefs, determined in part by cultural identities, help form perceptions about the concepts that impact transition planning, such as disability, self-determination, and independence (deFur & Williams, 2002).

Teachers have the challenging task of helping students and their families plan for the future while maintaining awareness and sensitivity about the impact that culture has on the planning process, use of services, and desired outcomes for the people they serve. First and foremost, however, teachers must understand how their own biases and preferences impact their participation in the transition planning process. This initial task—recognizing one's own cultural values and beliefs—may be as difficult as seeing the proverbial forest through the trees. Teachers, many of whom share common cultural identities (European American, middle class, college educated), may mistakenly think that their own beliefs and values are universal. For example, teachers who value the idea of self-determination and equate this concept with autonomy may encourage or expect young adult students to independently make decisions about their futures. Some students, however, may be members of families that expect children to defer to their parents and significant elders in their families or communities. Other families consider the child's gender as the determining factor in their preferences regarding self-determination. It is essential that teachers consider their own values and how these values influence the guidance they give students, as well as the values students and their families bring to the transition planning process.

Conceptualizing cultural identities is a complex task. By definition, cultural identities are multidimensional and fluid (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Multidimensional means that multiple aspects of a person's identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, language, gender, sexual orientation, disability, generation in relation to immigrant status) interact and influence the person's beliefs and values. Cultural identities are also fluid because they are dynamic and subject to change and redefinition. These two important aspects of cultural identity mean that teachers cannot rely on stereotypes to guide decisions when working with people. The implication for transition planning is that teachers need to be *culturally responsive*. This term is used to describe teacher behaviors that demonstrate an awareness of their own and others' cultural characteristics, use of respectful strategies to increase their understanding of students' cultural backgrounds, and

willingness to incorporate students' cultural values into individualized transition planning efforts (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999).

Each of the cases in this book includes brief information about the student's race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (e.g., parental education and occupation), gender, disability, home language, and other pertinent information. As in real life, information varies from case to case, and not all factors are known. Collaborative planning requires the establishment of a trusting relationship in which practitioners acknowledge and respect cultural differences (Harry, Kalyanpur, & Day, 1999). A person's cultural identity may impact the transition planning document, but the possibility that cultural identity will impact the planning process is more likely. For example, in the case of Rashida, teachers working with Rashida and her family need to understand that her background is ethnically diverse. The extent to which this influences her cultural identity may only be known after extended contact. Is Rashida Muslim? Is she Hindu? Is she Southern Baptist? Does Rashida's religious identity influence her ideas about careers and independence insofar as gender roles are concerned? Adding to the complexity is the fact that Rashida has been living independently in a deaf community. How does the distinct culture of the deaf community influence her plans for the future?

The key point to be made from this collection of case studies is that classroom teachers will likely face a richness of diversity. Teachers should use this information as springboards for generating questions (rather than for generating stereotypical responses) about the nuances of cultural identity and the extent to which cultural identity affects the transition planning process.

ASSESSMENT DATA INTERPRETATION CONSIDERATIONS

The questions raised earlier about the uncertainties of case study information pertain to the interpretation of data. Interpretation must be specific in terms of validity, reliability, and usefulness for each student. Consider, for example, the following issues:

- **Interpretation of competency strengths in goal setting.** Competency strengths are relative. Certain skills are stronger than other skills for each individual and interpretations should be based on these levels of strengths. An item that indicates task competence might range across three levels of agreement (e.g., rating of 3, 4, or 5) on an instrument such as the TPI. A strengths approach in IEP planning might indicate goals needed for further development in any area with a 3 or 4 rating. A strengths approach also might suggest developing a goal for applying that strength to a different competency in an area of student interest. Finally, a strengths approach may indicate that an area of competency is well developed and that no further planning or intervention is necessary.
- **Interpretation of areas of least competence in goal setting.** Areas of least competence frequently suggest direction for specific planning or intervention, but not always. Planners should first consider areas that are most directly related to a student's interests, preferences, and likely postsecondary setting as priority areas for planning. Then, planners should determine reasonable priorities if there are numerous areas of relatively low

functioning. Some low competence areas will not appear as IEP/ITP goals that year.

- **Interpretation of discrepancies in assessment data and ratings.** Discrepancies in assessment data can occur in a variety of ways. Multiple administrations of assessment instruments result in consistent findings or noticeable (and sometimes alarming) discrepancies. Multiple ratings work the same way. IEP planners must determine which, if any, of the results are useful for planning. Planners also need to consider the source in the case of discrepancies and draw interpretive conclusions about why or how the discrepancies occurred. If planners can explain the “outlier” score or rating and the other two scores or ratings are reliable, then planning can proceed.

There are other times, however, when discrepancies are hidden in the overall scoring or rating. For example, in the case study of Heather, the Home rating of 5 (*Strongly Agree*) on the TPI–Computer Version was high enough to make the average rating of 3.33 on “Establishes and Maintains Friendships” suggest that Heather did have some strengths in interpersonal relationships. The School and Student ratings split the dividing line between *Agree* and *Disagree* (2 and 3, respectively). In this situation, with the school representative and the student in relatively close agreement of only one rating point difference, the average of the two scores is 2.5, which is not useful for a clear interpretation. The Home rating would be more useful if it were closer to the other two ratings. What does the 3.33 mean then? Perhaps the parents’ perceptions of Heather’s ability to make and keep friends is very positive, based on what they see in the neighborhood, the church, or other settings. Or perhaps the parents do not understand Heather’s stress as a deaf student in an inclusive placement with regard to making and keeping friends. In this instance, a discussion of the rating of this item with Heather, her parents, and the school representative might lead to a better understanding of the meaning of this TPI item and a clear decision about whether this item is a priority area for planning and intervention.

- **Interpretation of gaps in assessment data and ratings.** Gaps in assessment data can come from a lack of information or from situations in which planners have unverified information. Interpreting TPI ratings can be difficult when planners have one or two of three raters indicating “don’t know” (DK) or if there are ratings from only one or two of three raters. In these situations, the planners need to determine if there is sufficient evidence to support using the existing data. If the only rating available is from the school, and the school representative believes that the school’s rating represents the consensus of staff members who know the student, then the interpretation that the rating is accurate might be defended. In the case of Heather, two TPI items (numbers 45 and 46) under “Interpersonal Relationships” show DK as the School rating. As important as this rating should be, it is possible to interpret the Home and Student ratings as sufficient because the ratings of 5 (*Strongly Agree*) are in agreement.
- **Interpretation of *Not Appropriate* and *More Information Needed* on TPI–Computer Version.** The TPI–Computer Version Profile provides a

summary of item rating results across two or more form ratings (School, Home, and Student). When at least two forms are completed, the profile shows the mean rating for each item or indicates that an item has been designated “not appropriate” (NA) or “more information needed” (MIN). An item may be rated NA by any of the three raters; NA indicates that the item is either not appropriate to consider for transition planning at this time, or the item is not appropriate for the rater to consider. If the *only* responses for an item are NA, the item result summary will be NA. If, however, there is at least one DK or one NA among the ratings for an item, the item summary will be MIN. Any rating of NA or DK restricts the program from calculating a mean of ratings for that item.

Both of these entries require interpretation. In the case of an item rated NA, NA can mean that the item is not appropriate at the present time or that the item is not appropriate for the rater to consider. Planners should determine which alternative it is and make note of the fact for future reference. This note may be the additional information needed for interpreting an item with a summary result of NA.

MIN is more complex because the computer profile program indicates that more information is needed if one rater lists an item as DK or NA. To interpret the summary result for an MIN item, the planner first determines which of these two ratings was used and which form reflected that rating. NA ratings usually come from home or school respondents because students rarely use NA (but they can, and do). Planners should query the rater to find out the intent of an NA. If the rater is the home respondent, usually the item is dropped from current consideration and discussion of appropriateness is tabled. Use of DK, however, by one or more raters suggests that not enough information is available. Further information in the form of more assessment data is needed or an interpretive judgment needs to be made about the validity of the other two ratings. If the decision is made that the existing ratings will be used in planning, measures should be taken to encourage the DK rater to become a more active participant in the planning process. This may be especially true if the rater is the student and DK is used frequently.