TRANSITION PLANNING: BEST PRACTICES TO INCREASE POST-SECONDARY SUCCESS IN ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

IDEA mandates that all students receiving special education services have a transition plan in place by the time they turn 16. A team made up of school staff, outside agency representatives, parents, and the student meets to create the plan. The transition plan includes the students’ goals for post-high school life along with the activities used to assist with obtaining their goals. It is evident that the transition planning process is lacking for most students with disabilities, as people with disabilities continue to fall far behind people without disabilities in the employment rates. This literature review addresses the transition process by describing effective transition practices in four areas: the IEP process, self-determination, collaboration, and community-based learning.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Since 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) made it necessary for all students with disabilities to have the services needed to make the transition from school into adult life provided by the school. The transition services may include vocational training, employment opportunities, continuing education, independent living and community participation. Each year the transition plan is reviewed and adjusted according to the student’s goals until the student has completed high school (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 make clear that improved post-school outcomes are the driving force and focal point of a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities. These transition mandates found in the 1997 IDEA Amendments strengthen existing transition concepts and mandates that have been in effect since IDEA was originally passed in 1990 by focusing attention on how students’ entire high school programs can be planned to foster success in high school and in their transition to post-school employment, continuing education, and independent living. (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

Individuals with disabilities continue to lag far behind individuals without disabilities in employment and aspects of community engagement (Field & Kohler, 2003). Realizing the enormous intrapersonal, interpersonal, community and social costs of unemployment in particular, professionals have designed policies of special education programming during the high school years to increase employment competence and vocational stability for young people
with disabilities. However, these policies have not necessarily translated into effective practices in serving these young people (Gamach, Westerland, Granucci, & Clark, 2006). When compared to general education peers, students with disabilities who received special education services are less likely to enroll in post-secondary programs, less likely to be employed after leaving school, less likely to have a checking account, and less likely to have a credit card (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010).

All students with an IEP are required to start their transition planning by age 16. The transition process involves the student, teachers, parents, and outside agencies including Vocational Rehabilitation Professionals. Unfortunately, adult services personnel are not involved in the planning process in a majority of the transition plans (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997). The lack of collaboration has had a negative effect on transition success as rehabilitation professionals are overlooked and the school staffs’ capabilities are stretched beyond their training (Oertle & Trach, 2007). More importantly, only 75% or less of the students are being included in their own transition process. Given the fact that teachers and other professionals have historically made decisions for students with disabilities, students with disabilities lack self-determination skills.

**Research Question**
The following research question guided my review: What are the characteristics of effective transitional planning for high school students who receive special education services?
Definition of Terms

**Transition services.** A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post school activities including post secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing education, adult services, independent living, or community participation (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997).

**Post-secondary success.** High levels of quality full-time employment, independent living, postsecondary education, and community engagement (Field & Kohler, 2003).

**Self-determination.** Acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life free to make choices and decisions about one’s quality of life, free from undue influence or interference (Saddler, Thoma, & Baker, 2002).

**Collaboration.** Involvement of teachers, the student, parents, community businesses, organizations, and agencies in all aspects of transition-focused education to clearly articulate roles, responsibilities, communication strategies, and other collaborative actions that enhance curriculum, program development, and service delivery in the transition process (Field & Kohler, 2003).

**Sustainability.** Extent to which essential features of a transition program are integrated and continued as part of the district’s services (Dowdy, 1996).

**IEP.** Individualized Education Plan (Keyes, 2003).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review will examine the best practices in transition planning for young adults with disabilities. The review of literature inspects and analyzes four specific areas of importance with transition planning: the IEP transition process, self-determination, collaboration, and community-based instruction.

The Transition Process and the IEP

Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood (1997) describe the cornerstone of effective transition services as the transition planning process written in the IEP. IDEA does not formally define transition planning, but the law emphasizes the importance of student and family involvement in the process and taking into account student’s preferences and interest in developing post-school goals (Shogren & Plotner, 2012).

Meaningful assessment is the backbone of effective transition planning (Carter, Trainor, Sun & Owens, 2009). Carter, Trainor, Sun & Owens, (2009) developed a study to determine the differences, if any, between the students, teachers, and parents’ results of the same transition assessment given for one student. The researchers chose one hundred and sixty high school students with disabilities from 29 rural and urban high schools participating in the study. The researchers gave a packet including the Transition Planning Inventory to each student, his or her parents, and their special education teacher. The Transition Planning Inventory (TPI) was a 46-item standardized assessment tool used to gain information about the student’s transition-related knowledge and skills. The items were broken up into nine domains which included; employment, further education and training, daily living, leisure activities, community participation, health, self-determination, communication, and interpersonal relationships. Out of
all the packets distributed, 69 students were used in the results, as all three of the components were collected. From the results gathered, Carter, Trainor, Sun & Owens (2009) indicated that teachers, students, and parents differed in their assessments of students’ transition-related strengths and needs. They also found that the strengths and needs of the students with disabilities were likely to be evidenced across multiple domains and that the transition planning teams need to design coordinated services and supports that take into account all of the strengths and needs of the student and directly align them with transition plan for the student.

Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood (1997) collected survey data from 94 transition randomly selected students with varying special needs with transition IEP’s and evaluated their IEP using a modified version of the Statement of Transition Services Review Protocol. The evaluation instrument consisted of 25 questions organized into the following four sections: demographics, transition component format, compliance with IDEA’s mandate, and the reflection of best practices. The best practices were broken down into three areas; interactions with students without disabilities, evaluation procedures, and adaptations for activities or materials. The researchers evaluated each transition component of the IEP using a 3-point system. Each goal was rated from 0 to 3 with 0 = not present; 1 = minimal; 2= adequate; 3 = detailed. Results indicated that the majority of the transitional components complied with the IDEA mandates; however, most of the IEP’s lacked many of the elements that are reflective of best practices in transitional planning and education. Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, (1997) concluded that the transition components of the IEP’s include vague statements of student outcomes and activities, responsible personnel, and timelines. In conclusion, there was a lack of long-range planning and annual revision and a lack of opportunities for regular interaction with people without disabilities, and adaptations of activities of materials.
Shrogren and Plotner (2012) conducted a similar study in regards to the transition process, including the transition planning, instruction, goals, and progress. For this study, the sample included 1000 transition-aged students from each IDEA disability category to ensure representation from each of the categories. Shrogren and Plotner collected data from Parent Telephone interviews and the School Program Survey completed by the teacher who knew the student the best. The results of this study indicated that the schools complied with the transition mandates of the IDEA. Differences occurred based upon the disabilities that the students had. For example, students with intellectual disabilities and autism were more likely to have instruction focused on transition planning than students with other disabilities. All of the students made between little progress and some progress towards their transition goals. With the exception of postsecondary education supports, students with autism and intellectual disabilities were much more likely to have identified needs in the transitional needs when compared to students with other disabilities. Accommodations for postsecondary education were indicated on a much higher percentage of the IEP’s of students with other disabilities. Also indicated by this study is that there was very low participation in the transition process by the students themselves. Overall, an average of twelve percent of the students did not attend their IEP. Thirty-five percent of the students attended their IEP, but gave little or no input. Forty-six percent of the students attended the IEP and provided some input.

Self-determination in the transition process

According to Konrad, Arndt, & Test (2005), self-determination is “the necessary skills enabling anyone to assume controls over his or her own life directly, making therefore free choices that are not otherwise influenced by external agents.” Konrad, Arndt, & Test (2006) suggested that individuals with higher levels of self-determinations are more independent and
have a better quality of life. The possibility for individuals with disabilities to become a real citizen within the community, who can, not only express oneself but also take decisions and make choices concerning one’s own life, is achievable (Bara, Haelewyck, & Lachapelle, 2005). The ability to participate in self-determination activities is not available on command. This process must be developed purposefully and these skills begin with understanding one’s disability (Dowdy, 1996).

A case-study study by Konrad, Arndt, & Test (2006) addressed the effects of instruction on a Self-Directed IEP curriculum on student participation in IEP meetings. This study involved five students with varying special needs from the same high school who have or have not previously attended their own IEP’s. The research team collected data on the level of student participation in the IEP meetings before and then after self-determination instruction. The skills taught were identified and grouped into three different units and a total number of points were available for each Unit. The students earned points, based on these Units at their initial IEP and during a few mock IEP’s before the self-determination lessons. The teacher used a Self-Directed IEP lesson package to teach students how to lead their own IEP’s. The results of the Self-Directed IEP intervention indicated a functional relationship between implementation of the Self-Directed IEP and student participation in their IEP’s.

McGuire & McDonnell (2008) also supports the notion that the skills needed for self-determination are best learned in social settings because they have greater generalizability than skills learned out of social context. McGuire & McDonnell (2008) studied the connection between learning self-determination skills in social settings by utilizing a multiple linear regression analysis to determine relationships between recreation and levels of self-determination for adolescents and young adults with disabilities. Forty-seven students with intellectual
disabilities with an IQ that ranged from 40 to 75 who attended high school or post-high school programs participated in the study. The researchers used Arc’s Self-Determination Scale to measure each student’s self-determination level. The researchers collected each student’s self-report activity log for their participation in recreation activities. The data collection for recreation took place over a 2-week period and it included a description of the activity, length of the activity, number of participants, general activity satisfaction, and opportunity for self-determination through the activity. The results of the data collection of recreation activity included an average weekly total time of participation in an activity was 9.46 hours. The mean length of the activities was reported at 2.46 hours per activity. The metabolic equivalents for activities averaged 1.79 metabolic equivalents, which indicated inactive activities. The number of co-participants per activity averaged 4.08 and the average level of satisfaction was at 97.9%. 16.9% of the activities were planned without the knowledge of the participant, 37.7% were known by the participant, but not planned by them. 16.9% of the activities were planned independently by the participants. McGuire and McDonnell concluded that there was a positive correlation between self-determination and time spent in recreation. This supported the hypothesis that adolescents and young adults with disabilities who participate in recreational activities are more likely to have higher levels of self-determination than their peers who are less active. The results of this study also showed that IQ is a strong indicator of self-determination skills; the greater the intellectual capacity of the person, the greater his or her access to the community and what it has to offer.

Collaboration

Vocational rehabilitation is a state and federal program whose purpose is to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve gainful employment consistent with their
strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, and capabilities (Dowdy, 1996). Key legislations passed have affected both special education and vocational rehabilitation concerning the transition process. In 2006, the reauthorization of the Carl Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 held schools accountable for graduation, post-secondary education, and employment outcomes of students enrolled in career and technical education including coordination among federally funded programs and agencies as well as secondary and post-secondary education entities (Oertle & Trach, 2007). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 defined transition services as, “a coordinated set of activities for a child with disabilities that is designed to be results-orientated process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation” (Test & Cease-Cook, 2012). This reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 required the identification of professionals to assist in the transition planning process, emphasizing interagency collaboration (Oertle & Trach, 2007).

Although Congress mandated that special education would be the responsible agency for providing the transition services to students with disabilities, the expectation of the LEA was to collaborate with other agencies for the provision of the transition services (Edmondson & Cain, 2002). The interagency collaboration included the interactions and activities between the special education providers and rehabilitation professionals such as working as a team, sharing information, attending transition-planning meetings, combining resources, and establishing and utilizing effective lines of communication to benefit students with disabilities during their transition period in life from high school to the adult world (Oertle & Trach, 2007).
Special educators are able to lay the education foundation upon which vocational skills can be built. Vocational rehabilitation counselors have the knowledge and skills needed for successful school to work transition. These two professional disciplines are capable to provide a coordinated continuum of services for students with disabilities as they move from their school to post-school activities (Edmondson & Cain, 2012). Oertle and Trach (2007) reviewed research that concluded interagency collaboration between special educators and rehabilitation professionals was a key part of the transition process and when the rehabilitation professionals were involved through collaboration early in the process, they could develop relationships, provide services and other community links while the student was still in school. Test & Cease-Cook (2012) learned students who received assistance from more community-based agencies were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment and education. Rehabilitation professionals can provide this assistance by linking the students to the valuable community and work-place resources (Oertle & Trach, 2007).

For employers in the community, providing work-based learning opportunities to students allows them to help prepare workers for the next generation and also test the job skills of potential future employees (Burghstahler, 2001)

Community Work-based learning

Employment gaps between individuals with and without disabilities continue to be a problem in our country. Out of the 11.3 million working age adults with disabilities, only 37% are employed compared to the 78% employment rate of the adults without disabilities. Students and adults with disabilities have largely been an ignored source of employees and contributors in our society, but have the potential to meet the workforce needs if given the necessary training.
education and work experiences to develop the qualifications for employment (Oertle & Trach, 2007). Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood (1997) analyzed the transition pages in a sample of IEP’s found workplace settings to be an important setting for students with disabilities to interact with students without disabilities. The problem is only 15.5% of students with disabilities are participating in school-sponsored, off-campus work experiences (Swedeen, Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, & Owens 2009).

A qualitative study by Swedeen, Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, & Owens (2009) examined the employment experiences of 220 youth with high incidence disabilities and how the experiences impacted their employability after high school. The researchers conducted structured telephone interviews at two points during summer employment of the students. Information gathered during these interviews included job responsibilities, hours worked, pay, length of employment, who helped find the job, and transportation. The researchers gathered information on interest in finding employment for students who were not working and why they were or were not interested. The teachers completed assessments on employment skills, social skills, and capacity of self-determination skills. The results of this study showed that 124 out of the 220 students were employed at least at one time during the summer. Youth who were working at the beginning of the summer tended to remain working at the end of the summer. Out of the students who were without employment at the beginning of the summer, 64% of them were interested in finding work, but only 11 unemployed students at the beginning of the summer were working at the end of the summer. Swedeen, Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, & Owens (2009) showed that it is important for the students to be given the opportunity to be placed in a work-based learning experience during high school that could lead to a place of employment after graduation.
Another study regarding work-based learning experiences focused not only on the importance of work-based learning and vocational training, but even more directly on the positive impact on learning in these experiences with the use of peer mentors. Society benefits when individuals with disabilities are given the opportunity to participate side-by-side with their peers (Zambo, 2010).

A qualitative research case study by Gamach, Westerland, Granucci, & Clark (2006) investigated the effectiveness of using peer mentors as natural supports for young people with learning disabilities and severe emotional disabilities in a vocational training cosmetology salon, rather than instruction only from the class instructor or supervisor. The study included 4 women students ages 16 to 18 with either severe emotional disturbances or specific learning disabilities who had indicated an interest in pursuing cosmetology through an earlier transition planning process and were all attending the Pinellas Technical Education Center cosmetology program for half of their school day. The researchers chose four advanced students as peer mentors to facilitate instruction and feedback. Gamach, Westerland, Granucci, & Clark (2006) collected data on the accuracy of two specific behaviors performed in the salon. The researchers collected adequate baseline data and then disclosed the first target behavior to the peer mentor so they could start the training and intervention with their student. The researchers disclosed the second target behavior once they collected adequate data from the first target behavior. The researchers observed the percentage of steps that were correctly completed for each of the target behaviors before the peer mentor training and intervention and then after the peer mentor training and intervention. Gamach, Westerland, Granucci, & Clark (2006) found the students scored low on the accuracy of many aspects of the hair styling techniques on each targeted behavior prior to peer mentor intervention. Once the peer mentor demonstrated the expected behavior and gave
descriptive praise and feedback, the performance of the students increased significantly. As an example, accuracy of completing a specific hair styling technique went from an average of 36% accurate before the peer mentor to an average of 90% accurate after the peer mentor intervention. After the research was completed, they gave a post intervention questionnaire to each participant and each mentor. The results of the questionnaire showed that the students felt more comfortable with peer mentors conducting the training compared to the instructor or supervisor. The students felt that their confidence level also increased with the peer mentors.

Gamach, Westerland, Granucci, & Clark (2006) used the data of task completion accuracy and the information from the questionnaires to conclude that the use of natural supports to help increase task-related behaviors in community based vocational work settings may have significant potential for young people with disabilities.

Society benefits when individuals with disabilities are given the opportunity to participate side-by-side with their peers and positive experiences can also reduce the most significant barrier, negative attitude, faced by individuals with disabilities pursuing employment (Burgstahler, 2001). The results from the study Gamach, Westerland, Granucci, & Clark (2006) conducted seems to correspond well with the statement made by Burgstahler.
Chapter III: Results and Analysis Relative to the Problem

Planning for Transition and the IEP:

It is important that the transition planning team first starts with the student’s goals and then use relevant assessment information as a basis for planning, student participation in planning and decision making, and student evaluation on their progress in meeting their goals (Kohler & Field, 2003). Effective assessment of transition knowledge and skills involves participation from the teacher, student, and parents. In the study conducted by Carter, Trainor, Sun & Owens (2009), the results from the Transition Planning Inventory were quite different between the teachers’, students’, and parents’ assessment inventories. Across the nine domains included in the assessment, the students’ ratings were significantly higher when compared to both the parents and the teachers’ ratings. In this study, there was also some discrepancy between the areas of the assessment in which domains the parents’, teachers’, and students’ had insufficient information to evaluate the students’ level of competence. If the transition planning team simply used the information from only the teacher, only the student, or only the parents the overall knowledge of the students’ transition skill level would be inaccurate. Overall, the teachers reported insufficient information to evaluate a students’ level of competence in the areas of daily living skills, community participation and leisure activities, while the parents and students reported needing additional information in the domains of further education and training, community participation, and employment (Carter, Trainor, Sun & Owens, 2009).

In the multiple research studies completed on the transition portion of the IEP document, the evidence showed that most IEP transition pages were compliant under the IDEA mandates, but although they were compliant, they lacked best practices when it came to preparing the
students for life after high school (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997). Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood (1997) found that many of the transitional goals in the IEP were vague and often illegible. The goals did not provide team members with specific steps that would facilitate the students’ successful entrance into the adult world. They also found that the students with disabilities had few post-school outcomes beyond employment and further education and training. Shogren & Plotner (2012) also found that the IEP’s being examined were compliant with the IDEA mandates, but there were many discrepancies within each area of the transition portion of the IEP between students with different disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities and autism were most likely to lack goals related to employment and post-school education and training and most likely had goals relating to functional independence and social relationships. Also, students with intellectual disabilities and autism had higher levels of no or limited participation in their IEP transition process than students with other disabilities. These results showed that the transition plan for one student with a disability will most likely be different than the transition plan for another student with a disability.

In regards to the IEP portion of transition planning, the research showed an overall lack of student participation in the planning process and more specifically participation in the IEP meeting itself. Student attendance in their own IEP meeting ranged from 54% for students with learning disabilities and 75% for students with emotional/behavior disorders (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997). About 54% of students with intellectual disabilities attended and participated in their IEP meeting and about 32% of students with autism attended and participated in their IEP (Shogren & Plotner, 2012).
Self-Determination

McGuire & McDonnell (2008) showed a positive correlation between self-determination skills and adult outcomes and an individual’s perception of his or her quality of life. Involving students in self-determination preparation allows the students to be able to understand their learning differences and how to level the playing field related to their specific needs (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). A great way for adolescents to put their self-determination skills to work is to involve the students in their IEP planning. When students participate in choosing their IEP transition goals based on preferences and interests, the students feel invested in the process, and as a result, the students may be more likely to pursue and attain their goals (Konrad, Arndt, & Test, 2006). According to Konrad, Arndt, & Test, (2006) students’ involvement in their IEP meetings increased significantly after following a curriculum that allowed the students to learn and practice self-determination skills. When the teachers taught the students self-determination skills, their ability to direct their own IEP increased drastically. Also, “increased student participation, as measured by comparing real IEP meetings before and after intervention, indicated that students were able to generalize skill acquisition to their post instruction real IEP meetings” (Konrad, Arndt, & Test, 2006).

One can identify self-determination skills outside of the IEP meeting and during other activities in peoples’ lives when a person is able to engage in self-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior and evidence shows that the skills needed for self-determination are best learned in social settings (McGuire & McDonnell, 2008). The study by McGuire & McDonnell (2008) found that adolescents and young adults with disabilities who are actively involved in recreation are more likely to have higher levels of self-determination than their less active peers are. The results support the idea that self-determined attitudes and beliefs are built from
experiences and opportunities, and more specifically recreation may provide the ideal platform to support the development of self-determined behaviors.

**Collaboration**

When special educators and vocational rehab staff collaborate while students are in school, the vocational rehab staff can start to support the adolescent earlier in the areas of career assessment, career guidance, accessing viable employment, education and residential living. The vocational rehab staff can start linking the students to valuable community and workplace resources in which a school staff may not have the ability to do (Oertle & Trach, 2007). In addition, vocational rehab staff is able to provide students with choices, which is seldom available for special education students when developing their high school curriculum (Dowdy, 1996).

Vocational rehabilitation’s main goal is to assist with finding gainful employment for adults with disabilities. In most cases, vocational rehab staff is not working with students with disabilities until after the students graduate. According to one study of transition plans, a vocational rehab staff member was part of the transition planning process 8.5% of the time (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997). This “late start” could be the reason why only 37% of working age adults with disabilities are employed while 78% of working age adults in the general population are employed (Oertle & Trach, 2007).

IDEA law requires school districts to invite representatives of any agency that are taking responsibility for providing or paying for transition services to the annual IEP meeting. However, the intent of the law is not just to invite the outside agency, but also to collaborate with the school to develop the plan that provides the students with the best possible chance to make a
successful transition from school to post school life (Edmondson & Cain, 2002). The main barrier to interagency collaboration not taking place is the lack of relationship between the special educators and the vocational rehabilitation counselors. Vocational rehabilitation staff and school personnel have not been able to collaborate due to the differences in professional jargon and practices (Dowdy, 1996). The lack of collaboration has had a negative effect on transition success as rehabilitation professionals are overlooked and the school staffs’ capabilities are stretched beyond their training (Oertle & Trach, 2007).

Community –based experiences

Students with disabilities gain knowledge about specific careers and skills in working with supervisors and peers, performing job tasks, and securing appropriate accommodations by creating the opportunity for students to participate in work-based experiences (Burghstahler, 2001). School sponsored work experiences are of great importance to the student as they allow the students to discover career-related preferences, navigate interpersonal relationships more effectively, learn through encountering natural contingencies, and develop greater self-determination (Swedeen, Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, & Owens 2009).

Community businesses also benefit from students participating in work-based learning opportunities. Full inclusion in work-based learning increases the supply of skilled workers available to fill positions. Employers also gain practice in working with an individual to create a work environment that maximizes productivity and minimizes the impact of the disability (Burgstahler, 2001).

Positive work experiences can reduce the most significant barrier, which is negative attitude, faced by people with disabilities pursuing employment (Burgstahler, 2001). Students
who are given the opportunity to participate in a broader range of career development outside of the classroom and who have been employed during the school year are in better position to find or continue their jobs into the summer. Previous work experience is strongly associated with employment outcomes (Swedeen, Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, & Owens, 2009).
Chapter IV: Recommendations

The transition requirements set forth by IDEA require the transition planning team to ensure that the transition planning for each student with disabilities is a results-orientated process that focuses on improving academic and functional achievement to facilitate movement from school to post-school activities (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Transition planning outcomes and activities should not be disability specific, rather they should be driven by each student’s desires and then the activities should be selected to ensure students reach their goals (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997).

Realistic transition goals should be in place by the time the student is ninth and tenth grade. Information to create the goals should be collected in various ways and assessments including student profile sheets, community-based work experience evaluations, student interviews, and general observation (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Although IDEA states that the transition planning should be in place by the time the student turns 16 years old (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997), the transition planning process could be started earlier in the students’ school career. A transition interview, including questions on postsecondary living, postsecondary working, postsecondary learning, employability skills, and recreation and leisure could start when students are 13 years old (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010).

For transition to be effective, the transition planning process must be collaborative (Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997). Student and family involvement, as well as active involvement from school and adult services supports must continue to be the forefront of the transition planning process (Shogren & Plotner, 2012).
Providing students with opportunities to make decisions about what is learned can help prepare the students to become full participants in a democratic society (Dowdy, 1996). There is evidence to support the importance of teaching self-determination skills to students with disabilities (Konrad, Arndt, & Test, 2006). Five themes should be considered when preparing self-determination activities. Adolescents first need to know themselves. The adolescents need to know their strengths, weaknesses, needs, and preferences. Second, adolescents need to value themselves. The adolescents need to admire their strengths, uniqueness, recognize and respect rights and responsibilities, and take care of themselves. The third theme is plan. Adolescents need the skills to set goals, plan actions to meet goals and anticipate results. Act is the fourth theme. Adolescents should take risks, communicate, access resources and support, deal with conflict, and be persistent. Experience outcomes and learn is the last theme. Adolescents should compare outcome to expected outcome, realize success, and make adjustments (Konrad, Arndt, & Test, 2005).

One way to increase student involvement in their IEP is to implement the idea of the self-directed IEP. With the self-directed IEP, before the IEP annual meeting, the teachers prep the students on things to expect during the IEP meeting. The students then practice these skills during mock IEP’s. Student participation increases during the real IEP meetings and students feel a greater voice in planning for their futures. (Konrad, Arndt, & Test, 2006). Another way to increase student involvement in their IEP is through the Essential Lifestyle Planning method. This method focuses on the transitioning student by starting with a current snapshot of the student and building to detail the most important desires and goals in the student’s life. The student expresses his or her non-negotiables, highly desirables, and strong preferences as a way to lay the foundation or construct a blueprint for the future (Keyes & Owens-Johnson, 2003).
Teaching specific skills related to self-determination may not be the only way to increase a student’s self-determination. Self-determined attitudes and beliefs can be built from experiences and opportunities. One example for experiences would be providing students with recreation opportunities. These tend to be option rich, responsive, and social. Recreation opportunities are an ideal platform to support the development of self-determined behaviors (McGuire & McDonnell, 2008).

Peer mentoring is a way to build social networks for students with disabilities. A peer mentor instructional role for students with disabilities in a school-based setting could provide an effective means to build on adolescent’s interests and strengths, tailor supports, and improve successful learning of work-related curriculum skills. In a study of the effectiveness of peer mentors with four students with disabilities, all of the students reported that they felt more comfortable receiving assistance from their peer mentor than from the instructor and some added their mentors as friends on their circle-of-support form (Gamach, Westerland, Granucci, & Clark, 2006).

In regards to collaboration, to bridge the gap between special education teachers and vocational rehabilitation providers, Oertle & Trach (2007) says, “Vocational rehabilitation providers need to take a leadership role in transition.” They cannot wait for referrals and invites from the school staff. The Vocational rehabilitation staff must be proactive to meet the spirit of IDEA by extending out a helping hand before receiving the invitation (Edmondson & Cain, 2002). They need to create frequent opportunities to communicate with school staff exchanging knowledge and resources not just on an annual basis (Oertle & Trach, 2007).
Vocational rehab staff could start working with students on developing personal portfolios to prepare students for interviews. They could also participate in teaching some transition classes, provide an in-service for teachers on the vocational rehabilitation process, visit the classroom to meet with students to discuss vocational rehabilitation opportunities, and try to find ways to infuse transition activities into content classes (Dowdy, 1996). Vocational rehab staff could establish relationships with schools without identified students in need of services. Protocols could be developed for cross training of professionals, both the teachers and the counselors (Edmonson & Cain, 2002).

Rehabilitation professionals need to be the primary source of information regarding community resources and adult service providers to increase youth independence, choice, and success. Youths’ goals in transition plans have the greatest likelihood of being realized when rehabilitation professionals are involved to bridge the educational and rehabilitation systems (Oertle & Trach, 2007).

Creative strategies must be employed to help create community/work-based learning opportunities for students during their transition years of school. Work-based learning administrators, educators, parents, service providers, policy makers, funding sources, and other stakeholders need to work together to reach this goal (Burgstahler, 2001). One form of community based learning opportunity is developing job shadowing work programs in which students choose areas that are of interest to them and they are given the opportunity to visit a worksite and observe employees performing their day-to-day duties (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Community-based learning experiences could also be in the form of cooperative education in which the student works in more of a “trainee” position in the field of their choice. These positions are often paid positions. These experiences can also be presented in non-paid
working positions where teachers place students in jobs outside of the classroom to learn on-the-job skills that can only be taught in work-like settings (Burgstahler, 2001).

Most students with learning disabilities and mild and moderate cognitive disabilities do not receive extended school year services, or summer programming, through their schools because their disabilities are not considered “severe” enough. As an option, schools may explore the idea of addressing students’ transitional needs through summer programs in which teachers place students in “summer work” positions (Swedeen, Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, & Owens, 2009).

**Areas of Further Research**

After reading multiple studies, I believe the most adequate way to define the best practices in transition would be to judge best practices based on the amount of transition goals that are reached by young adults with a Transition IEP. This study would need to include young adults with disabilities from multiple school districts, to ensure differences in the transition planning processes.

Method: Young adults with disabilities, ages 17-23 would be randomly selected from multiple school districts in both rural and urban areas. Once the young adults were selected, an analysis of their transition IEP’s would be conducted to collect information on the transition goals that were created during their eleventh and twelfth grade years. Once the goals are determined, the IEP’s are analyzed and the young adults should be contacted to determine if they had reached their transition goals. Employment, daily living, post-school education, and community participation would all be areas in question. If the person achieved their goals, it would also be recorded. An analysis of the activities that were completed during the transition
planning processes would be determined to be positively correlated to the achievement of the goals.

**Conclusion**

The examination of this transition literature demonstrates the importance of the transition process for a student with disabilities. The experiences students have during adolescence have long been acknowledged as playing a central role in shaping their preparation and aspirations for life after high school (Swedeen, Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, & Owens, 2009). A transition IEP is in compliance if the paperwork covers all the components mandated by IDEA. A transition IEP is compliant and more importantly effective when best practices are put into place to ensure the student the best transition process that he or she deserves. These best practices include the transition planning process, collaboration, self-determination, and community based education. The literature supports this model and provides solid evidence to the importance of interagency collaboration, teaching self-determination skills, and offering classroom based and community based life skills instruction. Collaboration with vocational rehabilitation professionals proved to be successful as 63% of youth with disabilities who have applied for vocational rehab services to help with entering the labor forces achieved an employment outcome, which is much more than the 49% of employed youth with disabilities without vocational rehabilitation services (Oertle & Trach, 2007). Educators acknowledge that self-determination is an important element of transition and students taught how to participate in their transition planning are much more willing to advocate for themselves through participation in IEP planning meetings (Konrad, Arndt, & Test, 2006). There is proof that curriculum is important as well, especially community based trainings. Students who are provided with school sponsored work-based experiences throughout the community have a higher chance of finding or continuing their jobs outside of
school (Swedeen, Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, & Owens, 2009). Transition is such a critical time in a student with disabilities life. It takes solid effort from the school staff, outside agencies, and most importantly the student to make the transition process effective and successful.
References:


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