



Chapter 1.

Introduction

As children with autism spectrum disorders approach adolescence, they and their caretakers face a major educational challenge: planning for their adult lives, which includes vocational, recreational, and living arrangements. When Gary Mesibov, Eric Schopler, Bruce Schaeffer, and Rhoda Landrus created *The Adolescent and Adult Psychoeducational Profile (AAPEP)* in 1988, their intent was to design a highly structured, skills-based instrument to evaluate students' current and potential skills in those areas most important for successful, semi-independent functioning in the home and the community. Considering the service options of the 1980s, most adults with moderate to severe mental retardation sought placements in sheltered employment settings and community-based group homes. Since then, several important changes have occurred. Partly in response to improving educational opportunities, more individuals are reaching adulthood with milder forms of mental and social delay. As a result, increasing numbers of individuals with autism spectrum disorders do not require a sheltered environment, but can contribute to community-based jobs in offices, in manufacturing, in retail businesses, and in other sites.

Rationale for the TTAP

Experience with adolescents in the autism spectrum has shown that it is too late to plan for their adult lives when they phase out of school attendance between 18 and 21 years of age. Instead, it is in the best interest of individuals, schools, and communities to begin planning and teaching toward this transition during early adolescence or even earlier. Educators now recommend that transition services and planning be incorporated into the curriculum during elementary and middle school (Repetto & Correa, 1996). In addition, needs assessment and comprehensive planning should occur at an early age (Michaels, 1998; Patton & Dunne, 1998). Awareness of the importance of such early planning was reflected in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, which required, conservatively, that an evaluation of transition needs must be made and an educational plan put in place by age 14 (in 2004, IDEA was modified to the age of 16). This revision of the AAPEP, now called the TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile (TTAP), is intended to accommodate the latest progress in disabilities legislation (IDEA 2004) and the converging views of scholars in education. Although developed with older children and adolescents in mind, the instrument is also effective for assessing and developing goals for adults in the autism spectrum and those with related developmental disorders.

The TTAP provides school personnel with a means of complying with federal law in two primary ways. First, it is a comprehensive screening instrument that identifies principal transition goals, identifies student interests and strengths, and incorporates the feedback and perceptions of family and school personnel. Second, the Cumulative Record of Skills form (see Appendix A), along with two data collection forms, provides a method of obtaining and compiling informal, community-based assessment information over the course of a student's transition education, with a central focus on preparing for positive adult outcomes. This cumulative record, which is important for a student's successful integration into adult employment and residential settings, can be provided to future service providers after the student leaves school.

The TTAP includes the following six features:

1. Assessment for transition. In his review of transition assessment instruments, Clark (1998) noted a dearth of instruments designed for students with autism spectrum dis-

orders, especially those with moderate to severe range of mental handicap. He emphasized that effective assessment requires student-centered, family-centered, and school- and work-centered evaluation. The TTAP addresses these elements of effective and comprehensive assessment through its three scales.

2. Focus on six functional areas. IDEA (2004) promotes education as the means for individuals with developmental disabilities to achieve positive outcomes in adulthood. In doing so, the act stipulates that a student's educational program can no longer be isolated from his or her working, social, and community environment. Similarly, Cronin and Patton (1993) emphasized the importance of generating curriculum from an analysis of the anticipated adult-life demands facing a student. They suggested a "top down" approach, in which a broad range of life demands are identified, the student's skill level is anticipated, and then the curriculum needed to improve these skills is determined. The TTAP addresses these issues by focusing on six areas of life demands and suggesting a potential curriculum that addresses the specific learning issues affecting adults with autism spectrum disorders. The six areas—vocational skills, vocational behavior, independent functioning, leisure skills, functional communication, and interpersonal behavior—provide a systematic way of identifying long-range educational goals for students with autism and addressing the cognitive style so frequently characteristic of these students.

3. Assessment in three different environmental contexts. The Direct Observation scale provides a skills-based observation and evaluation of a student. The School/Work scale and the Home scale each provide information from interviews with teachers and supervisors and with parents, respectively, on strengths and weaknesses in student performance. The culmination of observations from these three different environmental contexts helps the examiner confidently identify current skills and appropriate goals. This testing structure is supported by Clark's (1998) assertion that "most state guidelines addressing transition planning under IDEA requirements recommend that assessment service include standardized tests, interviews, direct observation, and curriculum-based evaluations" (p. 15). Bullis and Davis (1999) also emphasized the importance of multiple assessment procedures that measure work, living, and educational skills. Their conceptual model for functional assessment includes criterion-referenced measures, third-party rating scales, self-reports, and behavioral observations in employment, educational, and community settings—all of which are reflected in the organization of the TTAP.

4. A unique scoring system. The scoring system in the TTAP is the same one developed for the *Psychoeducational Profile* (Schopler, Lansing, & Marcus, 2005), or PEP, now in its third revision and known as the PEP-3, which was designed to provide the assessment data required for formulating an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for younger students. With this system, a task can be scored in one of three ways: "pass" when the student completes the task successfully, "fail" when the student is unwilling or unable to do the task, and "emerge" when the student completes the task partially, showing a beginning understanding of how to do it. This unique scoring method and its resulting profile give an evaluator critical supporting evidence about a student's level of functional skills, his or her educational requirements, and the environmental supports needed for successful transition to adulthood.

5. Environmental accommodation. According to IDEA (2004), assessment instruments should identify life-skill domains (e.g., job skills, personal care) that require accommodation. The TTAP goes further by identifying types of accommodation that may assist independence in these domains. Because individuals with autism tend to have difficulty generalizing acquired skills to new or varied settings, identifying the physical and visual structures that assist generalization, and thus enhance independence, is promoted by the strategies in the TTAP. The elements of structured teaching used in some of the TTAP items provide information on a student's ability to use different kinds of structures to perform tasks independently. The structures that can help an individual focus on relevant information in various environments and on different kinds of tasks are identified in the Recommen-

dations for Structuring Intervention (see p. 8 of the Profile/Scoring Form). The form can assist the examiner in recommending appropriate accommodations that will enhance performance quality, stamina, independence, and generalization.

6. Establishment of preferences for individuals with limited communication skills. IDEA (2004, ¶ 300.42) states: “Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that . . . [are] based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests.” Along these same lines, Wehman (1998) emphasized the importance of using appropriate methods to allow a student with a disability to express preferences about (a) a preferred job in 2, 5, and 10 years, (b) important qualities of a job, and (c) skills needed to obtain a preferred job. There is now growing awareness, however, that people with autism spectrum disorders require opportunities to experience different settings and activities to be able to identify their own preferences. The TTAP emphasizes the assessment of strengths and interests so that those preferences may be identified, even among those who have limited communication, perspective, and judgment skills when transition service needs must be evaluated. It does so both in the formal instrument (formerly the AAPEP) and in the new, informal community-based assessment protocol.

Overview of the TTAP

The following section provides an overview of the TTAP, including its organization, target population, item selection, and continuity with another instrument.

Organization

Like other formal assessments, the TTAP provides structured test items that are systematically administered in a controlled setting for the purpose of comparing an individual’s level of performance to a skill set. The TTAP incorporates functional evaluations from three environmental contexts into one instrument through combining a direct assessment of skills (Direct Observation scale) with interviews that evaluate performance in the residential setting (Home scale) and in the academic/vocational setting (School/Work scale). The Direct Observation scale is administered by a teacher, psychologist, job coach, or other trained professional in a quiet testing environment, in a way that is similar to most traditional intellectual and skills assessments. The Home scale and the School/Work scale, in contrast, are made up of behavioral reports obtained by interviews with the primary care providers in each setting. For example, the Home scale is filled out by an interviewer who talks with the individual’s parents or group home manager, depending on where the individual resides. The School/Work scale is based on a similar interview with the individual’s teacher or work supervisor. Results obtained consistently across these three different environmental contexts offer powerful data for formulating appropriate educational and habilitation plans.

Each of the three scales is divided into six function areas: (1) vocational skills, (2) vocational behavior, (3) independent functioning, (4) leisure skills, (5) functional communication, and (6) interpersonal behavior. Described more fully in Chapter 2, TTAP Description and Administration, these are the basic areas of competency an individual needs for a degree of independent success in adult living and working environments. All three scales in the TTAP assess an individual’s strengths and weaknesses in these areas, although there is some overlap among them, just as in real life different learning areas overlap.

Target Population

The TTAP was designed for individuals with autism spectrum disorders who have mild to severe mental disabilities. People in this group, which comprises most individuals with an autism spectrum disorder, are also among the most difficult to assess appropriately due to problems engaging their attention. As a result, the TTAP is also appropriate for use with

most individuals who have mild to severe mental disabilities, whether they have autism or not. For higher functioning individuals with Asperger syndrome, additional assessment may be appropriate.

Item Selection

For this revision, there were three criteria for adjusting or replacing items of the AAPEP: (1) adapt the materials of existing items to more relevant and useful tasks for residential and vocational independence, (2) provide additional items that assess more skills of students and adults with milder forms of mental disability, and (3) provide a broader range of visual structures within the items to assess student strengths and abilities to use visual cues. A description of item selection for each criterion follows.

To make items more relevant for assessing independent living, the cluster of Vocational Behavior items that address assembly, speed, handling corrections, and so forth, was adjusted from assembling pencils and erasers to inserting documents in envelopes. The materials available to assess solitary leisure activity were expanded and adjusted to address a broader range of leisure interests. Many material adjustments have been made to meet this criterion.

To assess students and adults with milder disabilities, items were added that assess slightly more sophisticated residential and vocational skills. The travel kit assembly (Item 7) addresses both a more relevant vocational packaging skill and a larger number of items to organize and package. Check writing and recording (Item 35) is an example of the more relevant and complex item addition. Within the Leisure Skills area, keeping score in a game of darts (Item 40) is a more complex skill, as is planning a recreational event from a newspaper (Item 47).

To assess the ability to use visual structures, the authors identified items that help determine how to use an individual's strengths and interests to support independence in skill development. The addition of picture/photo symbols to the survival signs item (Item 28) is one example. Following a schedule (Item 36) exemplifies assessing structure that assists the student in predicting events.

Continuity with the PEP-3

The *Psychoeducational Profile* (PEP), developed in the 1970s (Schopler & Reichler, 1979), was designed for children from school age through preadolescence who have been diagnosed in the autism spectrum. It provided a developmental profile showing a child's learning strengths and weaknesses. Now in use for more than 25 years, the PEP has been translated into many languages and is used in many different cultures. It has been so successful for several reasons. First, it was the first psychoeducational profile designed especially for children in the autism spectrum, based on the first statewide program for these children. Second, it was designed for use with children who have minimal language skills, and it employed materials that interest children in that age group. Third, it used a pass-emerge-fail scoring system that facilitated the development of an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) based on the assessment profile. Finally, it measured behaviors and skills relevant to learning. The PEP has now been revised (becoming the PEP-3) to improve its psychometric properties by using more current educational function areas. The TTAP uses the same unique testing structures and scoring system that are used in the PEP to determine and help an individual achieve an optimum placement for work and living arrangements.

Reliability and Validity Studies

Studies regarding the reliability and validity of the TTAP were being conducted at the time of this printing. Please contact the publisher, PRO-ED, for further information regarding these studies.