Research Compilation for:
The *Transition Planning Inventory* and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004

Focus on schools' uses of sound theoretical and research-based methods and materials has long been advocated by professionals, but it was the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) that really forced schools to take notice. The Office of Special Education Programs follows NCLB's accountability principle and holds educators responsible for implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004) to the same standards. The new provisions and language in IDEA 2004 as it relates to the age-appropriate measurement of academic achievement and functional performance for the purpose of establishing measurable postsecondary goals in students' Individualized Educational Program (IEP) raise the bar for schools in identifying assessments that are theoretically sound and based on evidence of effectiveness. This paper describes the Transition Planning Inventory (Clark & Patton, 1997a, 1997b, 2006) and how this assessment instrument meets the evidence-based research recommendations of NCLB and the mandate of IDEA 2004 for appropriate transition assessment.

Transition Planning Inventory

Overview

The Transition Planning Inventory (TPI) is a general screening instrument used for assessing students' current knowledge and skill performance in a wide range of areas related to adult demands and expectations. The original print version was extended to a computerized version (Clark & Patton, 2004), and the TPI manual was recently updated (Clark & Patton, 2006).

The TPI is not a test, and it does not require direct observation and/or curriculum-based assessment procedures for completion (although recommendations can be made through the TPI for further assessment using these methods); it does, however, represent the first standardized transition planning instrument which specifies that the student, a parent/advocate, and a school representative rate the individual on a series of statements describing knowledge, behavior, and skill in nine different planning areas. The rating scale's format permits a differentiation in levels of agreement and disagreement regarding the student's current and typical demonstration of knowledge and skills.

The administration of the TPI's print version may follow one of three administration options: self-administration, guided self-administration, and oral administration. These format options address barriers in regard to student's reading, understanding of English, comprehension of the items, and how to use the rating scale. The TPI-computer version (TPI-CV; Clark & Patton, 2004) provides the same administration options as the print version, but with features such as "Read Aloud" and "More Information," users may take advantage of assistance if reading or comprehension barriers are present.

The TPI yields a profile of the ratings that the school obtains in the assessment process and provides information for transition planning across nine areas: Employment, Further Education/Training, Daily Living, Leisure Activities, Community Participation, Health, Self-determination, Communication, and Interpersonal Relationships.

Meeting the Requirements of IDEA 2004

With federal special education law and the transition-services mandate as its legal foundation, the TPI was (Clark & Patton, 1997) and is (Clark & Patton, 2004, 2006) designed for IEP teams nationwide (including non-English-proficient families) as they begin and refine the comprehensive transition planning process. According to Clark and Patton (1997b),

> the ultimate purpose of conducting transition assessment is to generate information that leads to the development of comprehensive transition plans for students and their families. If executed properly, such activity will maximize the chances that students will be able to deal successfully with the complexities of adulthood. (p. 25)

Use of the TPI represents one method for conducting comprehensive transition assessment that meets the specific minimal requirements of IDEA 2004. These requirements are presented in the following paragraphs.

- The IDEA 2004 definition of transition services states that transition services refers to "*a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be within a results-oriented 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 postschool activities.*"

  The TPI items are based on results-oriented knowledge and skills. Furthermore, 5 items relate specifically to academic achievement, and 41 items relate to functional achievement.

- The IDEA 2004 transition provisions also call for providing transition services, "*a set of coordinated activities that is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests.*"

  The TPI ratings reflect knowledge- and skill-need areas as well as strength areas. Students and parents are asked to express postsecondary-outcome goals related to further education and training, employment, and type of living arrangement. Students are asked to respond to 15 open-ended items reflecting their interests and preferences. Parents/guardians are invited to respond to 12 similar items, noting their preferences for their sons or daughters.

- With regard to assessment requirements, IDEA 2004 specifies that "*the IEP for students 16 and older (and younger when appropriate), must have … appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills.*"

  The TPI assists schools in meeting this IEP requirement by providing an age-appropriate transition assessment (appropriate for ages 12 through 21). The TPI items reflect careful development in expressing knowledge or skill competencies that are not only socially age appropriate for school-aged youths in middle school (as young as 14 years) but also up through the young adult years (21–25 years). Reading levels are considered also to address educational age functioning. Areas that represent competencies related to education and training, employment, and independent-living skills are clearly covered in the TPI assessment.

Theory and Research-Based Support for the Transition Planning Inventory

Theoretical Support

The transition from school to adult life is a complex and dynamic process that should begin as early as possible for every student. Successful transition planning in schools for students with disabilities should result in either (a) the transfer of support from the school to an adult service agency, (b) access to postsecondary education, and/or (c) life as an independent adult. This planning process includes choosing which experiences during their remaining secondary school years would best prepare students with disabilities for what lies ahead in the adult world. A successful transition from secondary school to life thereafter requires both formal (school- or government-sponsored) and natural family supports (McDonnell, Hardman, McDonnell, & Kiefer-O'Donnell, 1995; Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1996; Szymanski, 1994; Turnbull, Turnbull, Bronicki, Summers, & Roeder-Gordon, 1992). Historically, providing formal supports such as health care, employment preparation, and supported living has been emphasized (Halpern, 1994). Only recently, however, has society begun to understand the importance of family and other natural support networks, including the student themselves, in planning and preparing for adult life.

A basic theoretical assumption is that good, comprehensive transition assessment leads to good, comprehensive transition planning and, in general, one does not usually exist in the absence of the other. Definitions by Clark (2007); Miller, Corbey, and Lombard (2007); Sax and Thoma (2002); Sitlington and Clark (in press); and Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, and Leconte (2007) took positions that support the theory that transition assessment be student centered and designed to identify and emphasize an individual's strengths, interests, and preferences in relation to appropriate adult outcome goals.

The TPI was based on both the legal framework of IDEA and the evolving literature on transition services since the mid-1980s. The legal definition from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA, 1990) actually came from theoretical positions regarding the critical determination of what adult outcomes were important to address for individuals with disabilities and what preparation and supports they needed to move from school settings to adult settings (Brolin, 1989; Clark, 1980; Cronin & Patton, 1993; Dever, 1988; Halpern, 1985; Knowles, 1990; Kokaska & Brolin, 1985; Smith & Schloss, 1988).

Beyond the legal and theoretical views of transition planning, a number of states developed guidelines for developing and implementing transition services for local school districts after the reauthorization of IDEA in 1990. Clark and Patton (1997b) presented data from 17 state guidelines available in 1994 that indicated that the number of transition planning areas ranged from 4 to 23. Clearly, some of the lists of planning areas differed primarily in organization and clustering rather than in

content. Still, there was general agreement that planning for postsecondary education, employment, community participation, and other adult-related outcomes were the essence of transition services planning.

These lists of state guidelines served as the starting point in item development to ensure content validity for the TPI. The item pool was generated from state guidelines and a variety of sources in the transition and career development literature. Practitioners in secondary special education programs then validated the importance of the items selected for final inclusion in the inventory.

Research Support

Evidence-based data from the psychometric field-testing of the TPI was the initial source of validation of the TPI. Specific data analyses for reliability, both internal and test–retest, were part of the TPI standardization process as well as a targeted group analysis for criterion validity (Clark & Patton, 1997b, 2006; Smith, 1995). An additional study demonstrated translation integrity and reliability for the Spanish version of the TPI Home Form (Stevens, 2006).

Rehfeldt (2006) conducted a study that examined whether secondary IEP teams that used the TPI (Clark & Patton, 1997a, 2004) generated significantly more transition-related IEP goals than those who did not use the TPI or any other instrument. The study also investigated whether students reported an increased locus of control that was consistent with assuming an active, participatory role throughout the transition assessment, planning, and IEP development process. Finally, students' parents were surveyed regarding their knowledge of the purpose for the IEP meeting, their behavior during the IEP meeting, whether they felt they were being listened to and valued in the IEP meeting, and if all legally required transition-related IEP components were discussed.

Fifty-six students and their families from a large Midwestern suburban area were randomly assigned to the experimental (TPI) or control group. TPI group participants completed their respective versions of the TPI (Home, School, or Student Form) one month before their IEP meetings. Control group participants did not complete this inventory. TPI results for each team were entered into the TPI-CV (Clark & Patton, 2004), and were then printed and mailed to meeting recorders, who were responsible for orally presenting, interpreting, and answering questions related to TPI results during the IEP meeting. All students completed the researcher-made How I Feel About Myself questionnaire (measuring locus of control), with TPI group students doing so 1 week before completing the TPI. Students completed the same questionnaire within 3 days after the conclusion of their meeting. All parents were requested to complete a post-IEP meeting survey regarding their meeting experiences.

Results supported all hypotheses. IEP teams who used the TPI developed significantly more transition-related goals. Students assigned to the TPI group reported an increased locus of control after, in comparison with before, their meetings, which were consistent with their assuming an active role throughout the planning and meeting process. Whereas parents in both groups felt generally positive regarding their IEP meeting experiences, parents in the TPI group were likely to provide more favorable responses on the postmeeting survey. These findings add to the growing literature demonstrating the benefits of active parent and student participation in the transition assessment, planning, and IEP development process and reinforce the long-held assertion that the TPI can be used as an effective tool to identify necessary transition-related goals for the IEP.

Key Points Regarding the TPI

The careful development and standardization of the TPI and the evidence from a well-designed study of the effects of using the TPI in the transition planning process for students' IEP meetings provide strong support for its use in schools with students 14 years of age and older. More transition goals are likely to provide students with direction and support for their futures; students are more likely to feel empowered by the assessment and planning process, and parents are likely to be more satisfied with the IEP meeting when discussion involves data-based information related to transition services. The TPI should be considered for general transition assessment screenings not only to be used proactively with students and parents but also to meet the spirit and letter of the IDEA and NCLB provisions for using evidence-based assessments and interventions.

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