



Transition Planning for Students with Developmental Disabilities and Autism: The Role of Administration, Teachers, Parents, and Therapists

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Introduction

- Society has shifted from institutionalizing and excluding individuals with disabilities to accepting and accommodating their various needs (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2023).
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):**
 - Created opportunities for transition planning
 - Focused on measurable, postsecondary goals met by the student's coursework
 - Produced an individualized education program (IEP) to prepare students for adulthood (DeVos & Schultz, 2020, p.15)
- **Transition Services Exist to Assist Students with:**
 - Postsecondary education
 - Vocational education
 - Employment
 - Adult services
 - Independent living
 - Community participation (IDEA, 2017)
- **Common Programs that Aid in Transition:**
 - Project SEARCH (Wehman et al., 2012)
 - Step Transition in Education Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (STEPS) (White et al., 2017)
 - National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD) for youth
 - Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) for college students with disabilities
 - Bridges from School to Work (Social Security Administration, 2015)

Methods

- Sixteen participants were recruited from Bridgeway Academy, a charter school located in Ohio. These participants underwent semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to address their lived experiences and perceptions of the transition process. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology, as outlined by Smith et al. (2022), was employed to analyze the data.
- **Participants:**
 - Four adolescents with autism and developmental disabilities
 - Three administrators
 - Three teachers
 - Three parents
 - Three occupational therapists
- **Focused Participant Criteria:**
 - Males and females, aged 14–21 years on the applied or academic track involved in the "B.R.I.D.G.E to Adulthood" program or those receiving outpatient services at Bridgeway Academy

Results

- **Overarching Theme 1. Fostering Independence**
 - The implementation of orderly, client-centered transition plans
 - Reduction in the need for parental support by promoting independence in daily tasks at home
 - Incorporation of functional academics and repetition into school assignments
 - Reliance on a team of individuals

Results Continued

Overarching Theme 2. Areas of Improvement

- Barriers faced by students
 - Behaviors
 - Instrumental Activities of Daily Living Skills (safety, household, and financial management)
 - Executive functioning skills
 - Receiving constructive criticism
- School barriers
 - Academic standards
 - Funding
 - Insurance
 - Time constraints
- Community barriers
 - Transportation
 - Acceptance and trained staff at day programs
 - Paid job opportunities
 - Leisure activities

Overarching Theme 3. Resources and Supports

- Vocational and Life Skills Center
- School market
- Practical Exploration Assessment System (PAES)
- In-school jobs
- Community outings
- Internships
- Therapies
- Job skills program
- Transition to adulthood program
- Dual enrollment program

Themes and Subthemes:	Direct Quotes:
Theme 1: Fostering Independence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Subtheme 1a. Transition Plan ◦ Subtheme 1b. Fading Support ◦ Subtheme 1c. Academic Teaching ◦ Subtheme 1d. It takes a Team 	"The transition plan should not be what I want but what the students want for themselves." "Having parents with high expectations is a huge indicator of success." "We need to leave our students alone more." "I do not need to teach my students Abraham Lincoln's birthday if they do not know their own birthday." "We have nailed collaboration."
Theme 2: Areas of Improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Subtheme 2a. Barriers Faced by Students ◦ Subtheme 2b. School and Community Gaps ◦ Subtheme 2c. Barriers to Leisure Involvement 	"Safety is every parent's biggest concern." "I am having a hard time finding a day program that checks all the boxes." "All the training in the world is not going to do anything if the job is not there." "I am not involved in the community as much as I used to be."
Theme 3: Resources and Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Subtheme 3a. Vocational and Life Skills Center ◦ Subtheme 3b. "B.R.I.D.G.E. to Adulthood" ◦ Subtheme 3c. Therapy 	"Jobs allow students to contribute to society and give them purpose and responsibility." "I can now speak up and advocate for myself...I even get to go to college because of the "B.R.I.D.G. E. to Adulthood" program." "Therapies are one of the main reasons the students have so much success."

Discussion

- Limited resources or the absence of a transition plan should not hinder teaching transition skills
- Maintain ongoing communication with the transition team
- Use a "backward planning model" by focusing on the end goals
- Avoid over-prompting as it decreases independence
- Chores allow for vocational experiences
- Encourage practical activities for retention
- Telehealth is a useful tool to increase carryover
- Include an occupational therapist on the transition team
- Focus on executive functioning skills, sensory input, and safety awareness
- Provide vocational opportunities, whether paid or unpaid
- A lack of leisure activities restricts social participation

Conclusion

- Early independence and reduced reliance on support are linked to better outcomes
- Functional academics and sensory accommodations are beneficial
- Collaboration among parents, therapists, behavior analysts, and teachers is vital
- Challenges include academic standards, funding constraints, and limited time
- Encouraging life and vocational skills development and community engagement is crucial, despite behaviors and fear of safety
- Paid employment and expanded leisure opportunities would benefit students

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