

**TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO  
POST-SCHOOL LIFE FOR  
INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

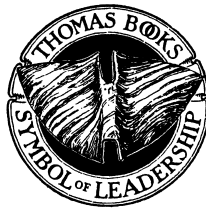
**Dr. Edward M. Levinson** is a professor of educational and school psychology at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), and previously worked for eight years as a school psychologist and vocational assessment coordinator in the public schools of Virginia. He is a nationally certified school psychologist (NCSP), and holds certification as a school psychologist in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and New York. In a 1997 *School Psychology International* article which listed the top 50 authors in the school psychology literature from 1987–1995, Dr. Levinson was ranked 16th. He has published three books and over 80 book chapters and journal articles, and in May of 1996 received IUP's distinguished faculty award for research. Dr. Levinson has served on the editorial boards of *Psychology in the Schools*, *Career Development Quarterly*, *Journal of Counseling and Development* and the *Journal of Employment Counseling*, and has been an ad hoc reviewer for *School Psychology Review* and *School Psychology Quarterly*. He has made close to 100 presentations at local, state, and national meetings on the topics of vocational assessment, transition, and stress and burnout.

**TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO  
POST-SCHOOL LIFE  
FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH  
DISABILITIES**

**Assessment from an Educational and  
School Psychological Perspective**

*Edited by*

**EDWARD M. LEVINSON, ED.D.**



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## CONTRIBUTORS

**HEATHER BEAUCHAMP, ED.S., NCSP**

*School Psychologist  
Lake Forest School District  
Felton, Delaware*

**DANIEL CANE, M.S.**

*School Psychologist  
Lincoln Intermediate Unit #12  
New Oxford, Pennsylvania*

**MEGAN COSTANZA, ED.S.**

*School Psychologist  
Fox Chapel Area School District  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

**LESLIE A. EGET, ED.S., NCSP**

*School Psychologist  
Charles County Public Schools  
LaPlata, Maryland*

**Larry Fultz, Ph.D.**

*School Psychologist  
Baltimore County Board of Education  
Towson, Maryland*

**KELLEY E. GOSS, ED.S., NCSP**

*School Psychologist  
Appalachia Intermediate Unit #8  
Altoona, Pennsylvania*

**DEBORAH A. HOUCK, M.A., C.A.S.**

*School Psychologist  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools  
Charlotte, North Carolina*

**M. ALICIA JENKINS, ED.S., NCSP**

*School Psychologist  
Baltimore County Public Schools  
Towson, Maryland*

**KATHLEEN R. KIEWRA, ED.S.**

*School Psychologist  
Fox Chapel Area School District  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

**CHAD KINSEY, MS, NCSP**

*School Psychologist  
Fleetwood Area School District  
Fleetwood, Pennsylvania*

**JENNIFER SMITH KUZEMCHAK, ED.S.**

*School Psychologist  
ARIN Intermediate Unit #28  
Indiana, Pennsylvania*

**NICHOLE LEHMAN, ED.S., NCSP**

*School Psychologist  
Lincoln Intermediate Unit #12  
New Oxford, Pennsylvania*

**EDWARD M. LEVINSON, ED.D.**

*Professor of Educational and School Psychology  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Indiana, Pennsylvania*

**MARK NEVILL, MSED**

*School Psychologist  
Blast Intermediate Unit #17  
Williamsport, Pennsylvania*

**KIRSTEN STIFFLER, ED.S.**

*School Psychologist  
Blacklick Valley School District  
Nanty Glo, Pennsylvania*

**KRISTEN YOUNG, ED.S.**

*School Psychologist  
Butler Area School District  
Butler, Pennsylvania*





## PREFACE

According to the U.S. General Accounting Office, one-third of young workers ages 16-24 do not have the skills they need to perform entry-level, semiskilled jobs. Additionally, nationwide studies conducted by the National Career Development Association and the Gallup Organization suggest that adults who consciously plan and prepare themselves for a job make up only one-third of those currently working. Consequently, the remaining two-thirds of employed adults enter their jobs as a result of chance, the influence of others, or took the only job available. Most importantly, only half of these workers are content with their jobs.

In particular, individuals with disabilities are at especially high risk for failure or dissatisfaction with their jobs. When compared with their non-disabled peers, individuals with mild disabilities experience a higher rate of unemployment and underemployment, lower pay, and greater dissatisfaction with their job. Moreover, there is a high dropout rate among students with disabilities, and as a result, this population has not received the vocational training necessary to make a smooth transition from school to work. Studies that have compared special education dropout rates with control group dropout rates (normative data) have consistently demonstrated that students with disabilities leave school more often than students without disabilities. Students with learning disabilities and emotional disabilities are at an especially high risk of dropping out of school. Some studies have reported dropout rates exceeding 40 and 50 percent, respectively, for these populations. Hence, this population of students is especially in need of effective school-to-work transition services.

This high dropout rate may be attributed to several factors. Many schools focus their curriculum on college-bound students rather than those who plan to enter the work force following high school. Statistics indicate that only 15 percent of freshmen entering high school gradu-

ate and obtain a degree from a four-year college within six years of their high school graduation. As a result, focusing resources on college-bound students leaves the majority of non-college-bound students lacking in the skills necessary for success in the work force. The 21st Annual Report to Congress reported that students with disabilities were more likely to stay in school and even more likely to be employed after high school if they were provided with some form of vocational training and school-to-work transition service.

This book is designed to assist professionals in developing and implementing transition services for students with disabilities. Specifically, this book focuses on the importance of assessment in transition planning and targets the various domains which should be included in any school-to-work transition assessment. The book advocates a transdisciplinary school-based approach to transition assessment which involves not only school-based professionals in the assessment process but community agency representatives as well. As such, the book may be useful to a variety of professionals including regular education teachers, special education teachers, vocational education teachers, school counselors, school psychologists, and school administrators, as well as professionals employed by community agencies like Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health/Mental Retardation, and Social Services.

Most books on transition are written from a special education or vocational rehabilitation perspective by authors with extensive backgrounds in those fields. This book, however, is written from an educational and school psychological perspective and is designed to complement the existing literature on transition by offering a slightly different perspective on the process. All authors are practicing school psychologists who have had extensive experience in the schools working with students with disabilities. Authors were assigned chapters based upon their interests and experiences and were asked to write their chapters in a way that blended a review of the literature with their personal and professional experiences in working with students with disabilities. It is my sincere hope that their efforts and the resulting chapters prove to be in some way helpful to those professionals involved in transition planning, and in particular, to those involved in the very important assessment component of the process.

In particular, I would like to thank Karen Wolff, our administrative assistant extraordinaire for her help with this project. I would also like

to thank the students, faculty and staff of the Department of Educational and School Psychology at Indiana University of Pennsylvania for their effort toward and support of this project. This book is dedicated to them.

EDWARD M. LEVINSON



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## Chapter 1

# INTRODUCTION TO TRANSITION ASSESSMENT

EDWARD M. LEVINSON

### INTRODUCTION: TRANSITION ASSESSMENT

In the last several years, schools have increasingly focused upon providing students with the services and skills they need in order to obtain and maintain employment and to function effectively and independently in the community. More often than not, this effort has been focused upon students with disabilities, in that these students are those who historically have had greater difficulty achieving such goals once they leave school. Through this effort has been termed “transition,” the term transition has been used to refer to different processes within the school environment. Several years ago, I was teaching a doctoral seminar in school psychology and one of the students asked if she could make her required presentation on the topic of transition. I was thrilled; however, my attempts to provide the student with needed information were met with quizzical looks and blank stares. “What does all this have to do with preschool assessment and kindergarten transition programs?” she asked. Slightly embarrassed, I explained that I misunderstood her topic, took back the reference materials I had provided to her, explained that the term “transition” meant different things to different people, and told her that the topic was nonetheless acceptable!

Though the term transition has been used to refer to different processes within the educational environment (for example, it has been used to describe movement from preschool to kindergarten, or from elementary school to junior high school, etc.), for the purposes of this book, the term transition will be used solely to describe the process of facilitating the post-school adjustment of students, particularly students with disabilities. Post-school adjustment will be broadly defined to include adjustment to work, leisure, and independent functioning in the community.

### DEFINITIONS OF TRANSITION

Wehman, Kregel, and Barcus (1985) offered the following definition of vocational transition:

Vocational transition is a carefully planned process, which may be initiated either by school personnel or by adult service providers, to establish and implement a plan for either employment or additional vocational training of a handicapped student who will graduate or leave school in three or five years; such a process must involve special educators, parents and/or the student, an adult service system representative, and possibly an employer.

This definition clearly suggests that transition efforts must involve a variety of school and community personnel and must include the parents of the student or the student themselves. Moreover, the definition suggests that transition is a planned and systematic process that occurs well before the student is eligible to leave school.

Although the definition provided by Wehman et al. (1985) emphasizes school-to-work transition, many transition specialists argue that transition programs must focus upon community adjustment and other aspects of adult life as well. In the landmark document "OSERS Programming for the Transition of Youth with Disabilities: Bridges from School to Working Life," Madeline Will of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services defined transition as follows:

The transition from school to working life is an outcome-oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment. Transition is a period that includes high school, the point of graduation, additional postsecondary education or adult services, and the initial years of employment. Transition is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and the opportunities and risks of adult life. Any bridge required

both a solid span and a secure foundation at either end. The transition from school to work and adult life requires sound preparation in the secondary school, adequate support at the point of school leaving, and secure opportunities and services, if needed, in adult situations. (Will, 1986; p. 10)

In October, 1990, Congress enacted the *Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990* (P.L. 101-476), an amendment of P.L. 94-142, the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA). Under this new law, the name EHA was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Though this legislation will be discussed again later in this chapter, IDEA includes a definition of transition that is currently the basis for many school-based transition programs. Section 602(a) of IDEA defines transition services as:

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 and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990, P.L. 101-476, Section 602(a) [20 U.S.C. 1041(a)].

P.L. 101-476 requires that a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) address the issue of transition, and that transition planning be initiated by at least age 14. Specifically, IDEA lists the following additional requirements for the IEP:

(D) a statement of needed transition services for students beginning no later than age 16 and annually thereafter (and, when determined appropriate for the individual, beginning at age 14 or younger), including when appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or linkages (or both) before the student leaves the school setting, and (F) in the case where a participating agency, other than the educational agency, fails to provide the agreed upon services, the educational agency shall reconvene the IEP team to identify alternative strategies to meet the transition objectives.

Additionally, the law specifies that if the IEP team determines that services are not needed in one or more of the areas specified in the legislation, the IEP must include a statement to that effect and the basis upon which the determination was made.