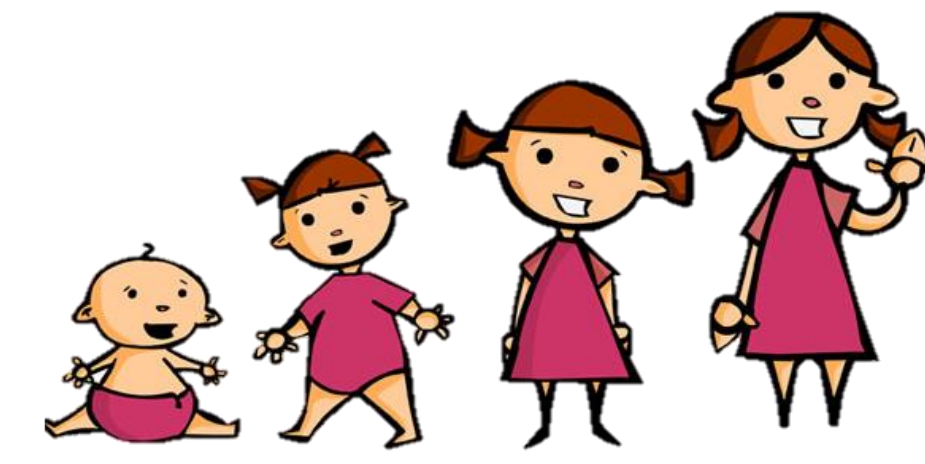


Cross-sectional Comparison of Individualized Education Program Quality for Transition Age Youth with ASD and Young Children with ASD

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What is This Study About?

- Federal law mandates all students receiving special education services have an Individualized Education Program (IEP; IDEA, 2004)
- There is little known about IEP quality of students with ASD (Wilczynski et al., 2007)
- Autism research tends to focus on early childhood, neglecting adolescent and adult outcomes (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009)



Focus on Transition Age Youth

- Most transition age youth with ASD are faced with significant obstacles as they attempt to navigate their way into college, work, community participation, and independent living (Gerhardt & Lainer, 2011)
- Data suggest that IEPs for youth with autism are far from best practice, often lacking individualized and measurable objectives (Ruble et al., 2010)

Purpose of Study

- To compare IEP quality between young students with ASD (3-9 years) and students of transition age (16-22 years)
- To describe IEP quality of transition age youth in relation to an adapted national measure of postsecondary quality transition planning

Participants

Special Education Teacher/Student Dyads

| | Study 1 Young Students (N = 35) | Study 2 Transition-Aged Students (N = 20) |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Teacher Variables | | |
| Mean years teaching | 10.6 (SD = 7.6) | 12.3 (SD = 7.6) |
| Gender (% Female) | 94.3 | 85.0 |
| Student Variables | | |
| Mean Age (years) | 6.1 (SD = 1.7) | 18.2 (SD = 1.1) |
| Gender (% Female) | 17.1 | 10.0 |

- The sample was gathered from a randomized control trial of the *Collaborative Model for Promoting Competence and Success for Students with ASD* (COMPASS; Ruble, Dalrymple, & McGrew, 2012), an evidence-based consultation intervention, where participants were randomly assigned to control or experimental groups

Measures

IEP Quality Measure

- An IEP Quality measure was developed based on federal law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), requirements and National Research Council (NRC) recommendations for best practice in education for students with ASD (Ruble et al., 2010)

IDEA Indicators

- 8 items measuring the quality of descriptions of the students' present levels of performance and the measurability of their goals
- Rated on a 3-point Likert scale (0= no/not at all; 1= somewhat; 2= yes/clearly evident)
- Total score was based on the mean of two subscores plus 1 dichotomous item
- Examples of IDEA Indicators
 - Association between the IEP objective and the general and/or developmental curriculum
 - Measurable and behavioral description provided

NRC Indicators

- 9 items based on NRC recommendations for best practice
- Emphasize social communication and independent learning skills
- Rated on a 3-point Likert scale (0= no/not at all; 1= somewhat; 2= yes/clearly evident)
- Examples of NRC Indicators:
 - Parental concerns described
 - Social skills to improve
 - Basic cognitive and academic thinking skills described

*Overall scores for IDEA indicators, NRC indicators, and IEP quality were calculated

Transition Quality Measure

- An adapted version of Indicator 13 developed by the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) to meet requirements outlined by federal law (IDEA, 2004) was used to measure postsecondary transition planning quality
- Assesses domains of employment, education, and independent living

Adapted Indicator 13

- Scores generated from each of the 3 domains of the postsecondary goal
 - Independent Living
 - Employment
 - Education/Training
- 12 items
 - 5 items scores dichotomously (0=no; 1=yes)
 - 7 items rated on a 3-point Likert scale (0=no; 1=somewhat; 2= yes)

Examples of IEP Goals

IDEA Indicator: The conditions under which the behavior is to occur is provided (i.e., when, where)

2: "By March 2016, **when engaged in conversations/activities with adults/peers**, student will appropriately participate with conversational skills including but not limited to greetings, eye contact, body language, turn-taking, etc., **across settings** with 80% accuracy, as monitored by SLP and/or staff over a grading period."

1: "By October 2016, **when given 6th grade reading passage**, student will answer general comprehension questions to 75% as monitored by general and special education teachers."

0: "Student will understand and express knowledge of receptive and pragmatic language skills with 80% accuracy across 3 consecutive sessions."

Results

IEP Quality

There was a difference between groups on scores of IDEA indicators for IEP quality [$F(1, 53) = 18.12, p < .001$].

Transition age youth score higher on IDEA indicators
Young children: $M = 0.94, SD = .57$
Transition age youth: $M = 1.51, SD = .24$

There was a difference between groups on scores of NRC indicators for IEP quality [$F(1, 53) = 43.89, p < .001$].

Young children score higher on the NRC indicators
Young children: $M = 1.15, SD = .33$
Transition age youth: $M = .62, SD = .20$

Young children have significantly higher average number of IEP goals

Young children have significantly higher average number of IEP objectives

Young children: $M = 3.89, SD = 1.23$
Transition age youth: $M = 3.05, SD = 1.85$ goals

Young children: $M = 14.80, SD = 9.89$ objectives
Transition age youth: $M = 4.45, SD = 4.35$ objectives

Postsecondary Goals

- On average, transition age youth had 1.6 postsecondary goals ($SD = 0.8$)
- 40% of students had goals for independent living**, while 100% of students had goals for employment, and 95% of students had goals for education/training
- Only 25% of IEPs demonstrated evidence that the student was invited to the IEP transition meeting
- Overall quality = 0.94 (out of 2) which shows postsecondary planning falls short of requirements

Discussion

- IEP quality for students with ASD show inconsistencies and areas needing improvement.
- Transition age youth have higher quality in terms of the written descriptions of IEP objectives compared to young children.
- Young children have higher quality in terms of breadth of goals that match deficits associated with ASD, including goals that cover social skills, communication, and independent learning skills compared to transition age youth.
- IEPs for transition age youth need to include measurable and well-defined independent living postsecondary goals

want to know more?

For a full list of references, please contact Jordan Findley, jordan.findley@uky.edu

This work was supported by Grant 1RC1MH089760 and 5R34MH104208-02 from the National Institute of Mental Health.