

CHAPTER 5
GENERAL DISCUSSION AND
RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Answers to the Research Questions and Discussion

In Chapter 1, the Introduction, there were three purposes of the study stated as three research questions in order to reach the goal of the study - to obtain data to demonstrate points that might lead to the improvement of student and parent involvement in individualized transition support plans. Then, from Chapter 2 to Chapter 4, five empirical studies were designed and executed to examine each of these three questions. The following are the answers to the questions as well as a general discussion.

Question 1. What kind of actual condition, characteristics and problems does student and parent participation in transition support demonstrate at Japanese special high schools for students with intellectual disabilities? Study 1 showed a limited involvement of students and parents. It was limited because teachers listened to the

hopes and opinions of students and parents through daily communication or by questionnaire, and because teachers made individualized plans for instruction at meetings where neither students nor parents were invited but were held only with other teachers. Teachers at special schools for students with intellectual disabilities did not include students' opinions into the individualized plans compared to other schools, although they made students evaluate themselves for thorough self-understanding in the class more than at other types of special high schools.

Question 2. Do young adults with intellectual disabilities, their parents, and professionals have the same thoughts with regard to transition needs of the young adults?

As far as we saw from the results of Study 2, young adults, parents, and professionals rarely had the same thoughts on the young adults' transition needs. Some parents, for example, felt their sons or daughters had fewer needs with regard to self-determination or community participation compared to the thoughts of the professionals and the young adults. One young adult demonstrated greater needs, particularly in post-secondary education and employment, than did his parent or the professional. Some parents thought that their daughters had greater overall transition needs compared to the feelings of the professionals and the young adult themselves. Although some

parents and professionals did seem to share quite similar thoughts on the young adults' transition needs, it was not proved that their thoughts were exactly the same and since, in these cases, the young adults themselves didn't answer the questionnaire, we couldn't tell even here if everyone had the same thoughts on the young adults' transition needs. It is probably appropriate to assume that the thoughts of young adults and the thoughts of parents and professionals are not exactly the same in these or any of the cases.

Question 3. How do teachers and parents think about student and parent involvement in transition planning process?

Both teachers and parents thought it was important to have student and parent participation in the transition planning process. However, there were a number of differences in their thoughts. For example, while teachers thought that the students should be the person most responsible for the goal-setting in their individualized transition support plans, parents thought that they themselves were the person most qualified to establish their sons or daughters' goals. In addition, whereas teachers were more likely to want to understand students' hopes and opinions regarding the development of the plans through daily communication and to understand those of the parents' from the questionnaires that were conducted prior to the career counseling meetings, it seems that parents were more likely to

hope to communicate directly with teachers to develop the plans together at the career counseling meetings as well as to obtain the original plans, not the simplified ones. In another difference, teachers tended to consider parents as equal partners and expected more involvement from them, especially when their sons or daughters had severe intellectual disabilities, whilst parents tended to think that they might not be needed at the meetings or should perhaps not express their opinions. Finally, parents hoped that student and parent participation would be mandated, whilst teachers thought that it would gradually increase without the need for regulations.

What is Expected of Students, Parents and Teachers in the Individualized Transition Support Plans

In order to actualize student and parent participation in the individualized transition support plans, what is expected of students, parents and teachers is suggested below in accordance with the results of the present study.

What is expected of students. Study 3 showed that teachers thought that students should express their own opinions and hopes for their own transition plan and Study 4 showed that parents, too, thought that students should take classes to learn the skills to be more actively involved in their plans. It is not known what the thoughts of students themselves were, although the students were encouraged to participate in

the career guidance meetings, possibly to express their opinions and hopes by learning those practical skills in the classroom.

What is expected of parents. As revealed by the results of Study 3, teachers expected the parents to be actively involved - especially when their sons or daughters had severe intellectual disabilities. Parents, however, did not often think that they should express their own opinions and hopes and instead seemed to like to listen to the others' opinions at career counseling meetings. This was in spite of them feeling that they should like to be the person most responsible for their child's future goals in the transition plans. As it could be difficult for parents to be responsible for students' goals if the plans are made solely by teachers, they should be encouraged to express their hopes and opinions. Besides, as the results of Study 2 show, parents were encouraged to have active attitudes towards community participation as well as to communicate openly with the teachers or other professionals; this was so that the parents could build an equal partnership with them and therefore more effectively advocate the needs of their sons or daughters as it was suggested was needed from the results of Study 3, 4, and 5.

What is expected of teachers. Studies 3 to 5 show that teachers and parents hoped that there would be both student and parent involvement in the transition planning process.

According to Studies 3 and 4, teachers need to provide sufficient information and have the right to select it voluntarily to the students and the parents, as well as needing to teach self-determination skills to the students and lastly to support parents in raising their advocacy skills through daily activities in school. Teachers also need to respect students' volitions objectively and need to build an equal partnership with parents in the transition planning process as Studies 2, 3 and 4 suggested.

Discussion through the System 4 Theory by Likert

Among the three characteristics proposed by Likert (1967; 1961), the communication process, the goal-setting and the decision making process, both teachers and parents wished to be in the participative group for the first two. However, for the decision making process, 73% of the teachers and half of the parents wished to be in the consultative group, with the other half of the parents wishing to be in the participative group. The reason that parents hoped to be in the consultative group could be they felt that they did not have sufficient information about the students' transition and were, perhaps, inhibited in participating equally in the decision making with the professionals. As for the teachers, it could be other reasons such as satisfaction with current decision making practice at school, teachers' good understanding of students

and parents' hopes and the observed lack of competency of decision making in students and parents that might have contributed to the teachers feelings about being in the consultative group. Both teachers (90%) and parents (83%) considered providing information as the most important action that the school could do to promote parent involvement as shown by the results from Studies 3 and 4.

If parents have sufficient information and an active attitude towards community participation, parents may be able to participate more in the transition planning process. In cases where that happens, it is expected to improve the practice of ITP because morale and productivity will be increased in all participants¹. Therefore, collective decision making after discussion with the participative groups of students, parents, and teachers is desirable for the planning process for the individualized transition support plans² while negative influences can be carefully eliminated³. The principle to aim for in individualized transition support plans will be collective decision making in the participative group,

¹ Series of studies by Likert proved that morale and productivity decrease in authoritative groups while they increase in participative groups (Komai, 1987).

² Stakeholders' theory also supports the collective decision making for the planning, because more positive transition outcomes were observed when all stakeholders who were related to the students' future participated in the decision making for students' future plans (Johnson, et al., 2003).

³ "Group polarization" is the phenomena that the opinion will be extremely changed after group discussion. "Group think" is the situation that one cannot judge objectively because of absolute requirement for consensus within a highly cohesive group (Shigeno, 1994).

regardless of the severity of students' intellectual disabilities. However, it is desirable to be flexible with each individual's case because, as shown in Study 3, teachers strongly hoped for more parent participation in cases where students had more severe intellectual disabilities.

Limitations of the Study

Local Area for the Sampling

One limitation of this study is that whilst Study 1 was executed throughout Japan, Studies 2, 3, 4 and 5 were executed only in Tokyo, the capital. This was due to individualized transition support plans not being practiced nationwide at the time of the survey. The situation in Tokyo was considered to be ahead of the rest of the nation since the plans were started by the request of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. If the studies had been executed in other, more remote areas, the results might have been different.

Sample Size

Small samples were used with the case study method in Study 2 in order to find out detailed personal information through intensive interviews and observation, in addition to the numerical data of TPI-J. Rapport between the interviewer and interviewees had to be established to obtain detailed facts

as well as to gain the interviewees' understanding and consent to use the data for the academic purposes. Thus, the number of the participants had to be limited. Still, the case study method proved effective to identify differences in thinking about transition needs between young adults, parents, and professionals, as well as to understand the process needed in order to reach agreement.

Bias in Thoughts of Parents and Young Adults

The group of parents who participated in Study 4 was those who had already participated in the activities - parent surveys on student and parent involvement and how to promote them. This means perhaps, that the parents who took part in the survey were those who already have more active involvement than the parents who did not answer the questionnaire.

The thoughts of young adults were identified in two with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities in Study 2. The thoughts of students were not surveyed in Chapter 4 because of the difficulty of informing them of the concept of student and parent involvement in individualized transition support plans for the survey.

Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

As described above, although each empirical study strictly controlled its external factors, there were at least

3 limitations affecting the study. Therefore, the recommendations for future research and practice must aim to supplement the limitations of the present study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The actual conditions and characteristics of current practice in communities other than Tokyo must be examined so that better partnership among students, parents and professionals will be built based on resources in local areas.

The methods of assessment and development of the individualized transition support plans must to be examined in details beyond Study 2. More case studies may provide sufficient data to standardize the Japanese version of Transition Planning Inventory and may provide suggestions for its development.

Future research needs to be done to investigate thoughts of students as well as those of parents who are not willing to participate in their sons or daughters' transition planning. In addition, after the individualized transition support plans have been practiced with student and parent involvement for several years, follow-up studies to evaluate students' outcome may promote improvement of the practice. The National Longitudinal Transition Study in the United States has followed up on its student's progress since the 1980's and reports its results and provides recommendations for current practice. Such a study may also be desirable to meet the accountability of

special education and transition support in Japan.

Recommendations for Practice

Student and parent participation could be premised as the principle of informed consent, since informed consent is necessary for student and parent participation. Kitamura and Kitamura (2000) listed 3 premises to practice informed consent in psychiatry: (a) providing sufficient information to the patients, (b) patients demonstrating competency for decision making, and (c) voluntary decision making from sufficient options to be promoted for the patients. Although Kitamuras' studies focused on individuals with psychiatric disorders, the premises are relevant due to similar difficulties in self-determination performed by individuals with intellectual disabilities and the ones with psychiatric disorders. And Takamatsu (1994) supported the premise as a pediatrician specializing children with disabilities.

Therefore, special education teachers will also need to provide sufficient information and prepare sufficient options for students and parents about the students' post-secondary settings so that these can be selected voluntarily with the teachers trying not to promote their volitional decision making through imposing or coercing. However, competency of decision making should not be required for student and parents at the present, because the major difference between informed consent

in medical practice and student and parent participation in individualized transition support plans is that the informed consent requires only a one-time decision for medical treatment whereas student and parent participation in transition planning is a part of an ongoing practice at school. Thus, as supported by the results of Studies 3 to 5, it is thought that supporting and instructing a) students to increase their self-determination and b) parents' skills to be advocates, are necessary in daily class or extra-curricular activities. Consequently, the competency for decision-making may be acquired in the planning process.

A Lesson Plan

As a concrete recommendation for practice for students' learning of participation skills in the planning process, the author proposes a lesson plan based on the five steps of developing the ITP with the use of the person-centered planning (PCP)⁴ approach from the State of California. It is an idea for individualized transition support plans, although it may not all be applicable since the practices and systems of special

⁴ PCP is the umbrella term of the approach. Active plans are made for the future vision of the client's own dream for PCP (Everson, 1998; Mizutani et al., 2003). PCP is applied for developing individual plans in the State of California and the effects were reported (California Department of Developmental Services, 2000; 1998; California Department of Education, 2001). Mizutani et al. (2003) discussed that teaching self-determination skills to students from early stage at school is premised for the practice of PCP because the approach is connected to the competency of self-determination skills. See Figure 5.1.

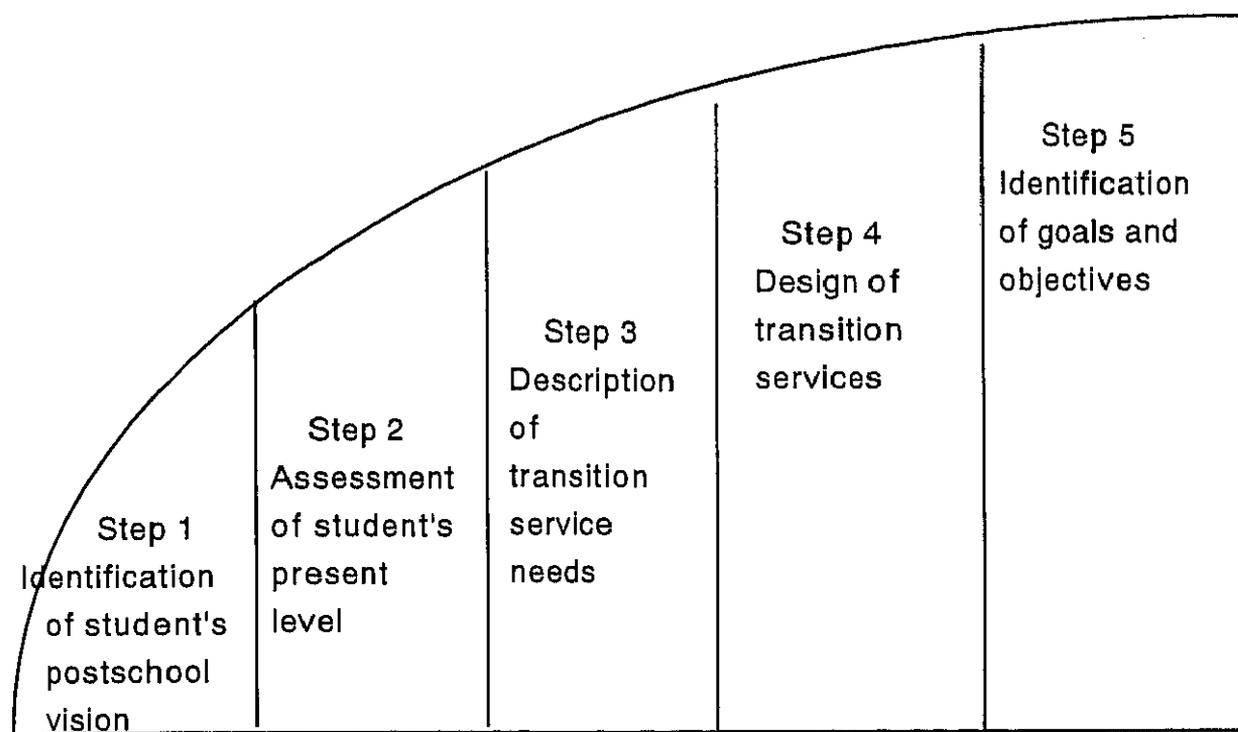


Figure 5.1. Five Steps to Develop Person-Centered ITP in the State of California.

Note: Adopted from *Transition to adult living: A guide for secondary education*, 2001, by California Department of Education.

education in Japan and California are not quite the same.

This lesson plan is different from conventional career guidance or individualized planning process, because the principle of participative group is actualized. Students will describe their future dreams and set out their goals and objectives in a small group with support from the teacher.

A 50-minute student-directed, group-work planning class based on the person-centered planning approach, is the lesson. First, a facilitator and assistants (both can be teachers or some volunteers) will demonstrate the 5 steps, modeling the person-centered transition planning to the students. The contents of the 5 steps will be filled in on five sheets of different colored butcher paper attached on the board.

First, the future dreams of the facilitator and the assistants, such as "I want to visit good hot-springs," "I want to live with 10 dogs at home," "I want to buy a house in downtown Tokyo," "I want to run a patisserie" etc, will be introduced to the class. Each person will fill in his or her own dreams on a pink sheet. Then, one of the mentioned dreams, such as "I want to visit good hot-springs," will be selected for group discussion.

Second, regarding the person whose dream has been selected, his or her strengths will be discussed and filled in on the gray paper on the board. Strengths such as: "I am honest," "I am considerate of other people's position," "I can drink a

lot of alcohol without being intoxicated," "I pray everyday."

Third, the needs for the person in order to pursue that dream will be discussed and filled in on the blue sheet on the board. Needs such as: "I want to make more money," "I need to look for which *ryokan* (Japanese style hotel with hot-springs) is the best," "I need to be careful about my health," "I must work hard everyday," etc.

Fourth, the support and services needed by that person in order to pursue his or her dream will be discussed and will be filled in on the green sheet on the board, i.e. "my wife and family," "work," "home doctor who regularly checks my health," "travel agency or the internet."

Fifth, the annual goals for that dream will be discussed and will be filled in on the yellow sheet on the board, i.e. "I will get along with my wife" or "I will check my health regularly." The objectives to achieve the annual goals will be also filled in on the same sheet, i.e. "I need to help my wife with the house work," "I need to be nice to my wife" or "I will manage my health everyday."

After a 10-minute model presentation, students will be asked to make small groups of three or four. The facilitator or an assistant will join a group as an observer and will record the frequency and the duration of each student's oral expression. Each group will be asked to select a facilitator and a person whose dream will be the focus of discussion for 30 minutes. The

student whose dream has been selected for the group discussion will present their planning results orally using the 5 different colored papers that posted on the board; the same as for the model group.

Effective results were found after this lesson was actually administered even one time at a special high school in Tokyo, though the lesson should ideally be in a series for a certain period of time in order for the students to prove its solid effects. The questionnaire items can be developed referring to TPI (Clark & Patton, 1997) or other self-determination scales. A pre-test and post-test may be administered in order to examine the effects of the lesson by comparing results from both tests. Other sources, such as videotapes of the classes or observation and interviews, can be added to examine the effectiveness of the lessons.

As for the parents, professionals are expected to collect and provide more information about the students' transition for the parents, as well as holding the training sessions so that parents can participate fully as partners.

Summary

The goal of the present study was to examine what might improve the current practice of student and parent involvement in individualized transition support plans. Three purposes were posed as 3 research questions in Chapter 1, and one empirical

study each in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 and three empirical studies in Chapter 4 were executed to gain the answers.

In Chapter 2, the actual conditions, characteristics and problems of student and parent involvement in individualized plans for instruction and career guidance at Japanese special high schools were examined by the results of questionnaire survey nationwide. It was found that career guidance was carried out based on the annual plans for career guidance of the whole school. Instruction for self-evaluation was provided significantly at special schools for students with intellectual disabilities. Teachers for students with intellectual disabilities developed the plans at the teachers' meeting within the school, meaning that student and parent involvement was limited.

Chapter 3 examined whether the thoughts of young adults with intellectual disabilities, their parents and their supervising professionals were the same. Post-school case studies of the young adults were examined through semi-structured interviews, and it was found that the thoughts of the three protagonists were not the same in spite of the severity of the young adults' intellectual disabilities. Yet, in two cases, the thoughts of the parents and professionals were generally close. The reason was probably because those parents thought positively towards their sons' community participation and acted to include them in their local communities.

In Chapter 4, the questionnaire survey in Tokyo examined how teachers and parents felt about student and parent involvement in individualized transition support plans. It was found that both teachers and parents generally agreed, in spite of slight differences, that the involvement of students should be the focus with that of the parents as supporters. For example, teachers placed more importance on the hopes and opinions of the students than did the parents (Study 5), while also wishing to include the parents' hopes in the plans and thinking of the parents as their partners (Study 3). Parents tended to think that they themselves should be most responsible for the students' goal-setting in the plans and wished to visit schools daily to discuss their sons or daughters' transition (Study 4), while also tending to think they did not need to attend the career counseling meetings to express opinions and hoping that student and parent involvement would be mandated (teachers wanted involvement to be progressive) (Study 5).

The application of the results of Study 3 and 4 to the System 4 Theory by Likert (1967; 1961) revealed that teachers and parents hoped to be in the participative groups for the communication process and goal-setting, while most teachers and also half the parents hoped to be in the consultative groups for the decision making process. The reason that many wished to be in the consultative groups for decision-making process was thought to be that a lack of information inhibited the

participation in decision making from the result of Study 3 and 4, although there might be other reasons such as satisfaction with current practice of decision making which might be similar to the consultative group.

It has been revealed by Likert (1967;1961) that participative groups promote the highest degree of morale and productivity in the 4 systems. Stakeholders need to be included in decision making in order to ensure the best possible outcome of the student. Therefore, the collective decision making of students, parents, and professionals in participative groups is desirable in the process of making successful individualized transition support plans.

Limitations of the present study were suggested to be supplemented by future research, for example the partnership among students, parents and professionals based on the resources of local areas and the method of participation based on the degree of competency of students and parents, both need to be examined. A longitudinal study on transitioned students will be necessary to evaluate and improve the practice. A lesson plan based on the 5 steps for developing person-centered ITP from the State of California was proposed since the results of Studies 3 and 4 revealed the needs for lessons aiming for the promotion of student involvement in the planning. Sufficient information and training for parents aimed at increasing their supportive involvement in the planning is also necessary.