



Missouri online Community of Practice in Transition Ask the Expert: Gary Clark Transition Assessment in Transition Planning Archived Discussion

Gary Clark, Ph.D., an expert on transition assessment, answered questions and posted resources on the Missouri Community of Practice October, 1-12, 2007. The event was hosted by DESE and The Transition Coalition. The Missouri Community of Practice can be accessed through the Transition Coalition website (www.transitioncoalition.org).

Clark's Short Biography

Dr. Gary Clark has been on the faculty of the Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas since 1970. He has served as a consultant in secondary special education, career education, and transition programs and services to state departments of education, local education agencies, and private non-profit agencies across the country. He has been a visiting scholar in Korea, South Africa, and Taiwan in the area of transition services and spent a year as Transition Consultant for the Utah State Department of Education. He received the DCDT Oliver P. Kolstoe Award in 1992-93 and the Budig Teaching Professorship Award in Special Education for 2003 at the University of Kansas. Major publications include Career Education for the Handicapped Child in the Elementary Classroom (1979), two editions of Career Development and Transition Education for Adolescents with Disabilities (1990, 1995), Transition Education and Services for Adolescents with Disabilities (Sitlington, Clark, & Kolstoe, 2000, 3rd ed.), Transition Education and Services for Students with Disabilities (Sitlington & Clark, 2006, 4th ed.) the Transition Planning Inventory (Clark & Patton, 1997, 2007), Transition Planning Inventory, Computer Version (Clark & Patton, 2004), Assessment for Transitions Planning, 2d. ed. (2007), Informal Assessments for Transition Planning (Clark, Patton, & Moulton, 2000), Employment and Career Planning: Informal Assessment for Transition (Synatschk, Clark, Patton, & Copeland, 2007), Independent Living and Community Participation: Informal Assessment for Transition (Synatschk, Clark, & Patton, in press), and Understanding Occupational Vocabulary (Fisher, Clark, & Patton, 2003).



Clark's Perspective on Transition Assessment

Assessment for transition planning is not a new idea. Common sense dictates that one cannot expect to develop or implement appropriate transition education or services without appropriate assessment. Does that mean give tests? Tests might be a part of the assessment process, but at this stage of responding to IDEA 2004 and the new language related to appropriate assessment for academic and functional achievement, the primary tests given are the state/district wide assessments for academic achievement. My view is that selected tests for individual students can be helpful, but most of what we need to know can come from the questions we ask through informal assessment. Assessment, as a term, is basically question-asking. If one looks at it that way, one can draw appropriate questions to ask from standardized (formal) instruments or informal instruments. The challenge, though, is to select either kind with the view that the information you get must be considered valid and reliable, or it should not be used. Making these selections appropriately requires some new knowledge as well as a good review of what makes an assessment instrument useful.

To learn more about informal assessment measures, please watch my web-based presentation, *Using Informal Assessments for Transition Planning*, <http://itcnew.idahotc.com/st/training/cec/player.html>

Questions & Answers

Question: *At what age should transition assessment start?*

Clark's Response: While some might use the old axiom, "Better late than never", I prefer "Better early than late." If I were in charge of the world (or at least the education part of it in the U.S.), I would ask elementary teachers providing special education services and related services providers to start as early as kindergarten to begin documenting student progress in independence skills, choice-making skills, following directions, social skills, etc. so that each succeeding teacher is made aware of some of these critical developmental skills and where a student is functioning. Since most elementary teachers are tuned in to these things, it would be mainly a matter of providing them with a simple checklist or rating scale across some very basic developmental skills and letting them evaluate each student so that the next IEP team can have more information for planning than just academic goals.

Middle school/junior high school assessment is absolutely the latest that I would recommend that more systematic assessment occurs. It does not have to be highly formal assessment, and, in fact, probably should consist primarily of informal assessments of a student's present level of performance in functional areas. These can be observation notes, curriculum-based assessments, situational assessments that target some of the same behaviors mentioned above in the elementary level, but in addition behaviors reflecting preferences and interests in the future (occupational, schooling, lifestyle, etc.), self-determination, personal life skills management, goal-directed behavior, community participation, etc. Some students will turn 14 during



this period, so for those students who live in states that have retained the previous beginning age of 14 for transition planning, this gets into much more systematic assessment. While Missouri follows the federal guidelines of transition planning must be in place on the IEP when a student turns 16, this would legally be the latest that the ongoing transition assessment process could start.

Question: *How do you make transition assessment an ongoing process?*

Clark's Response: The idea of a transition portfolio is gaining acceptance with teachers as a means of keeping the process of assessment ongoing. If a portfolio (which can be a loose leaf notebook with tab dividers or an expansion folder with file divider sections) is organized into areas such as Preferences and Interests, Life Skills, Community Participation, Employability Skills, Self-Determination, teachers and students could work together to try to have something added to each section twice per year. Students should be given a major responsibility for seeing that the portfolio entries are made (and they can be graded on this). Papers, projects, formal assessment scores/reports, and quizzes or exams from courses could be documentation of various assessment activities that reflect a student's ongoing assessment of achievement and functional performance. It is very easy to get the achievement assessment, but teachers have to "get it" that frequently an assessment of an academic skill might also have functional performance relevance. For example, a writing assignment of one paragraph or one page to assess current writing skills, can be focused on any number of functional performance areas--dreams for the future, what to do in case of an emergency, where would go in the community to take a driver's license, how much interest does one have to pay for getting a paycheck cashed, etc. Every assignment that a student completes should be reviewed by the student and teacher as something that would be reflective of the student's strengths, preferences, and interests as well as current levels of performance that might reflect student needs.

Another way to try to ensure that assessment for transition planning is ongoing, is to plan individually for each student for an academic year as to the assessment activities that will be used during the year in each of the three areas of Living, Learning, and Working. For an example of this, see the draft of an assessment planning guide that Iowa is providing teachers (found in the File Repository on the Missouri Community of Practice). This guide presents teachers with an array of transition planning areas that are directly related to postsecondary outcome goals, with sub-competencies within each area, and then suggested assessment activities for each. In almost every case, the guide suggests to teachers that the first step is to review what existing information you might already have in an area, use direct questioning through interviews or student conferences as the next "easy" assessment option, and then turn to formal and informal assessment options. You will note that some of these are listed by title and a source. Iowa's plan is to have this guide on the Iowa Department of Education website so that these are readily available, including PDF files of all the informal assessments suggested so that teachers can print them out when appropriate. You would be able to access many of these same informal assessments through the sources cited because they are black line masters in informal assessment books.



I know this sets the bar high for doing the job of assessment for transition planning, but I am not one to say to do what you can get by with to avoid due process or just enough effort to be in minimal compliance. If we have some idea of what to strive for, we are more likely to do the job well. I'm sure you will have more specific questions related to all of this.

Question: *What is the difference between formal and informal transition assessments?*

Clark's Response: Formal assessments are those that have features associated with professional test developers and provide users evidence of the levels of demonstrated validity and reliability from the field testing. Standardized tests are typically the ones we think of when we use the term formal assessment. Standardization can be "highly standardized" with multiple proofs of validity and reliability as well as norms, or just "standardized", reflecting one or two studies showing evidence of validity and reliability and norms might or might not be provided. Non-standardized or informal assessments would be those that might be commercially available, available online, or locally developed, but no evidence exists for validity or reliability of the instruments or assessment activity.

Some people think that if an assessment is commercially available, printed on high quality paper with attractive formats, or looks very impressive on the internet, then it is not an informal instrument. Not true.

Examples of formal or standardized assessments are individual intelligence tests, achievement tests, personality tests, aptitude tests, etc. There are formal transition assessments, though, in the areas of general transition planning inventories, interest inventories, life skills competencies, responsibility/independence, adaptive behavior, and the like.

Examples of informal assessment activities include checklists, rating scales, questionnaires, surveys, interview protocols, observation protocols, situational assessments, curriculum-based assessments, etc. These activities cut across many of the same knowledge, skill, interest, and ability areas described above with formal assessments.

Question: *I have done an informal assessment. How do I know if I need to do a formal assessment? How do I know what assessment to use?*

Clark's Response Without knowing what kind of informal assessment instrument or activity you used or for what purpose, my response will have to be general. Generally, you want to confirm any informal assessment information with other assessments or the same assessment with other respondents. That is, if you interview the student and get information on occupational interests and preferences, you need to confirm the information with some type of assessment. You might use a formal assessment to see if you get the same results (Kuder, *Reading-Free Interest Inventory*, or *Self Directed Search*, Form E are three examples there are more). Or you might



interview one or both parents to see if they have heard the student express any occupational interests and see if they match what the student said. There are also other informal interest assessments in the form of surveys or questionnaires. Another way to confirm the interest is to use the informal assessment approach of situational assessment in which you place a student in a job shadowing situation for a period of time to see if the student loses interest in that occupational area or becomes more convinced that this is what he/she would like to pursue.

The same process holds for other areas of assessment. Probes with informal or formal assessments can be a starting point and follow up as needed can be used to narrow your question asking or to confirm what you learned in your initial probe. I like a general screening instrument across multiple transition planning areas to start with, then you have a better idea of what you know and what you don't know so well. An informal one of these is the *Enderle-Severson Transition Rating Scales*. A validated one of these is the *Transition Planning Inventory*. In both cases, it is likely that you end up with some areas that respondents (raters) do not really know whether the student knows or can do something and further assessment is needed. For example, in a general screening inventory on a couple of self-determination items, the raters might respond Don't Know, or you might have a school rater rate the student low, the parent rate the student marginal, and the student rates himself high. In both cases, you have useless information without looking for some other way to probe into the self-determination competencies that we want our students to have. Two options for that would be the *AIR Self-Determination Scale* or the *Arc Self-Determination Scale* (see list below).

Question: *How do I choose an assessment?*

Clark's Response I think I have partially answered this question above. You want to select an instrument to use that falls into the category of what you are interested in assessing" life skills, employability skills, capacity for succeeding in a postsecondary education or training program, self-determination, health, community participation, recreation/leisure, communication skills, etc." and an instrument that is recommended because of its demonstrated validity and reliability or recommended on the basis of its potential (face validity or content validity) for yielding useful information. There are books out on assessment now that provide you with that type of information: *Assessment for Transition Planning* (2nd ed.) that I wrote (www.proedinc.com) and *Assess for Success* (2nd ed.) by Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, & Leconte, Corwin Press.

Question: Recently, I came over from the VR sector to the secondary sector to provide transition services to students with disabilities and students at-risk. Over the years, one of my frustrations is the reluctance by educators, particularly psychological examiners, to administer batteries to students with identifiable diagnoses. So often do I see educators persuading parents and students to bypass aptitude and achievement batteries when they enter the high school setting. In other words, many students with postsecondary education



plans become ineligible for support services (e.g., Student Support Services, Student Disabled Services) due to the age of psychoeducational reports. I can't begin to tell you how many reports I've seen when seniors in high school were last tested when they were in 7th or 8th grade. Correct me if I'm wrong, but the brain doesn't stop maturing when a student reaches the eighth grade. Am I correct? Besides, environmental factors may have played a role in why one scored low when he/she was in 7th or 8th grade. *I know psychological examiners are overwhelmed with the high number of students they have to serve but from an ethical standpoint, shouldn't a student be tested at least once while in high school?*

Clark's Response: I agree with you 100%! I believe it is inexcusable and professionally negligent to let that happen. The "relief" that IDEA gave to school districts with regard to the loosening up of a required three-year evaluation has provided a loophole that districts are using with a vengeance. We all know that anything that is only permissible and not mandated these days is very difficult to obtain. The language is such that Congress is not held accountable because they left it up to IEP teams to decide such discretionary procedures (including beginning earlier than 16 for transition planning). If the IEP team can get it into the IEP, the school must provide a current re-evaluation. Realistically, we know that administrators can influence strongly how the professional component of the IEP will vote. This leaves the parent(s) and the student in the minority. I would recommend the following:

Try to get the district to commit to providing a three-year evaluation at least once during the high school years. This will vary for students by age, but the goal should be to time it so that it is maximally useful for current use in transition planning during high school as well as be useable by adult service agencies within a year of high school graduation.

When there is no district commitment to do this, then priority cases should be identified and strategies developed to get a consensus of the IEP team to approve requesting the evaluation as part of the IEP. This request should come officially from the parent or guardian and these cases might be moved along better if parents claim their right to have an advocate for the student and family at the IEP meeting when the decision is made. Remember, the squeaky wheel gets the oil, and if enough pressure is brought to bear on school districts, they are smart enough to see that an evaluation costs much less than a due process hearing.

As a last resort, families that can afford to obtain such an evaluation on their own should be encouraged to do so and charitable agencies brought in to sponsor such evaluations for individuals who cannot afford it. (You will be surprised how much money is out there and available when a clear and reasonable request is made.)

Question: *Can you provide examples of free online transition assessments?*



Clark's Response: Two quickly come to mind: The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment-III http://www.caseylifeskills.org/pages/assess/assess_aclsa.htm and the AIR Self-Determination Scale <http://www.ou.edu/zarrow/sdetermination.html> . I recommend those. Others are posted online and one can do an internet search for "free online assessments." There are learning styles inventories and assessments of career interests and personality. I would caution you about using any of these with students until you have taken them yourselves and determine their quality and usefulness. Some of the postings online have some free components, but the instruments might not be free, so check that out.

Question: *Where do I find transition assessments?*

Clark's Response: Any time you have the name of a commercially available instrument, you can do an internet search for it on your preferred search engine (Google, Yahoo, etc.). If you are looking for suggested names by categories, then Appendices A and B of the Assessment for Transitions Planning book gives you those, with publisher addresses.

The list below was prepared by Amy Gaumer Erickson. It has some of the commonly used commercially available or online instruments for transition assessment.

ARC Self-Determination Scale. Wehmeyer, M.L., & Kelchner, L. (1995). *The Arc's self-determination scale*. Arlington, TX: The Arc of the United States. Available online at www.beachcenter.org.

Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment – I, II, & III (Designed for ages 8-15). Casey, J. *The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment – I, II, III (ACLSA-I, ACLSA-II, ACLSA-III)*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs: Available online at <http://www.caseylifeskills.org/>

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). Practice tests available online at <http://www.military.com/ASVAB/>

OASIS-III Aptitude Survey. Parker, R.M. (1983). *Occupational aptitude survey and interest schedule – Third Edition (OASIS-3)*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED.

Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales. Sparrow, S.S., Balla, D.A., & Cicchetti, D.V. (1984). *Vineland adaptive behavior scales*. Bloomington, MN: Pearson.

Wide Range Interest-Occupation Test 2. Jastak, J.F., & Jastak, S. (1979). *Wide range interest-occupation test (WRIOT2)*. San Antonio, TX: Harcourt Assessment.

Work Adjustment Inventory. Gilliam, J.E. (1994). *The Work Adjustment Inventory (WAI)*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED.



AIR Self-Determination Scale. American Institutes for Research. (1994). *AIR Self-Determination Scale*. Available on the Zarrow Center website, <http://www.ou.edu/zarrow/AIR%20User%20Guide.pdf>

Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment – IV (Designed for ages 16+). Casey, J. *The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment - IV (ACLSA-IV)*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs: Available online at <http://www.caseylifeskills.org/>

BRIGANCE Employability Skills Inventory. Brigance, A.H. (1995). *BRIGANCE employability skills inventory (ESI)*. North Billerica, MA: Curriculum Associates, Inc.

Choice Maker Self-Determination Assessment. Martin, J.E., & Masrhall, L.H. (2000). *The choice maker self-determination assessment*. Colorado Spring, CO: Center for Self Determination.

Transition Planning Inventory. Clark, G. M., & Patton, J. R. (2006). *Transition planning inventory—updated version: Administration and resource guide*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED.

Transition to Work Inventory. Liptak, J.J. *Transition-to-work inventory (2nd Edition)*. Manassas Park, VA: Impact Publications.

Question: *I would like information on "Learning Style Inventories" and I would like you to talk about why we need to make sure our students know their own strengths and weaknesses (how they learn best and what they need). Do you know of "low reading" and "no reading" examples as well as good examples to use with readers.*

Clark's Response: This follow-up question to the last response I posted requested more information on learning styles inventories. There are a variety of these out there, so you could go to your favorite search engine and search using those key words. One you will get is the *C.I.T.E. Learning Styles Instrument* (<http://www.wvabe.org/CITE/cite.pdf>). You may download it and have a useful one to try out to see if it meets your needs. The pdf file provides some background information about the types of learning styles and working conditions that we all respond to, and sets up an assessment to let individuals assess themselves on these characteristics.

Assessing learning styles is part of the first step in self-determination and self-advocacy. One needs to know what kind of information input is difficult to process and what accommodations in certain settings might facilitate learning. To self-advocate in the adult world an individual must be able to do that in work settings, in postsecondary education and training, and in lifelong learning.

Reading levels of any instrument, formal or informal, pose barriers in assessment. It is inappropriate to use any standardized results (age scores, grade scores, standard scores, percentile ranks, etc.) if a teacher or examiner changes the wording for a



student to make it easier reading. You can read to the student(s) and not violate test standardization, unless the test is a reading comprehension test. Once you have changed a standardized test in any way, it becomes an informal assessment. You might still be able to use some of the information you get, though, as a modified standardized assessment might have higher content validity than an informal assessment that is locally developed. The point is that a student's reading level is important in instrument selection. Appendix B of *Assessment for Transitions Planning* (2nd ed.) (Clark, PRO-ED, 2007) lists scores of instruments, their publishers, and, when it was available, reading levels required for the instruments. Another option for knowing reading levels is to get a software program that computes reading level and use it on the instrument you are considering. Only a few instruments are out there that require no reading, and they are mostly in the occupational interest category.

