

Occupational Therapy in Post-secondary Transition: Barriers, Strategies, & Experiences

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BACKGROUND

- Federal law requires students with disabilities to receive post-secondary transition services focused on education, work, independent living, and community participation outcomes¹
- Because the law does not define a specific transition process, service coordination and delivery is often haphazard and ineffective²
- Although occupational therapists (OTs) are well-equipped to be on transition teams, few are involved in this high-need area of practice³
- Barriers to OT practice in transition include lack of interagency planning, parent participation, and therapist education about relevant assessments and interventions⁴

What are the unique strategies, challenges, and experiences of occupational therapists involved in post-secondary transition planning for youths with disabilities?

METHOD

Participants

- Three OTs in North Carolina public schools
- Caucasian females, all with 10+ years of experience

Design: Sequential explanatory mixed methods

Phase 1: Survey

- Developed by researcher to answer research question
- 25 items based on transition best practice articles and documents
- Quantitative: Rating agreement/frequency on a Likert scale
- Qualitative: Free response items about transition planning experiences

Phase 2: Follow-up Interview

- Semi-structured interview to collect qualitative information about the experiences of an OT providing transition services
- Interviewee had extensive personal experience with transition planning

Data Analysis: Thematic coding

RESULTS

Variability in Transition Services
“[...] It also depends on which high school. [...] And it really depends on the case manager and how they’re gonna push it.”

Level of Disability Impacts Involvement
“OT is often involved with severely cognitively delayed students [...] but less so with more functional students who might be in occupational course of study.”

Other Professionals Limit OT Involvement
“In my experience we either had a transition specialist [...] or it was done by the IEP team which often did not include OT...”

Learning by Doing
“[...] One parent requested an OT transition eval – I had never done one before – I researched it and did the eval which I found interesting...”

BARRIER & STRATEGY INCIDENCE

	(-) Less Frequent	More Frequent (+)
<u>BARRIERS</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Knowledge of assessments and community resourcesStaff awareness of OT role in transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Minimal involvement with transition aged studentsLack of education about transition in OT program
<u>STRATEGIES</u>		
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Educate about transition to adult servicesFormally educate about OT’s role in transition planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Educate about student strengths, needs, and goalsEducate about community resources
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Involve community partners in transition planningInvolve student in IEP/transition meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Collaborate with other disciplines to provide transition services
Direct Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Prepare students for work, higher education, or independent livingUse formal assessments to monitor progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Recommend/provide assistive technologyHelp students develop self-determination & self-advocacy skills

DISCUSSION

- Data support conclusions in literature about barriers to OT involvement in transition planning
- Occupational therapists need more hands-on training to provide high quality transition services
- Lack of OT involvement in transition is also an awareness issue that could be resolved by increased advocacy in the workplace
- Improve OT collaboration with school staff, students, families, and community programs for best outcomes

Limitations

- Non-standardized survey
- Very limited sample size; interviewee not likely a representative sample

CONCLUSION

- Many barriers to OT practice in transition exist, and more supports are needed
- OTs should be stronger advocates for their role on transition teams to better serve students with diverse needs
- Future research should explore ways to provide effective education and training to occupational therapists in this practice area



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