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# Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities: Expectations, Perspectives and Inclusive Education Practices for a Transition to Adulthood

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## Abstract

*This future research is related to the preparation for school-to-work transition and adulthood of students with intellectual disabilities who are attending the ninth grade in regular public schools in the north of Portugal. Therefore, in this paper we will present the design which was developed in order to conduct this research.*

## 1. Introduction

Students with intellectual disabilities are "characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originated before the age of 18" (Schalock, Borthwick-Duffy *et al.*, [9]). Public schools play, or at least should play, an important and critical role in assessment, planning, and the implementation of specialized and transdisciplinary services which help students to be prepared for the world of work, as well as for their adult life in the community (Levinson e Palmer [5]). Therefore, the Portuguese Legislative Act 3/2008 that address the preparation of students with intellectual disabilities for school-to-work transition and post-school life, mandates that, beginning no later than the age of 14, the student's Individual Education Programme must include an Individual Transition Plan (ITP). This ITP should be designed in order for students to make not only a successful transition from school to community life and work, but also to enhance social and family inclusion (Decreto-Lei N° 3/2008, 2008). Thus, the ITP is part of the transition education, described as all the education and related activities which correspond with and prepare students for adulthood (Smith, Ittenbach *et al.* [10]).

In Portugal the phenomena of transition education and of preparing students with intellectual disabilities to work and live in their post-school life, lacks in research and therefore with this study, we aim to characterize transition education, particularly the implementation of the ITP that is used with students with intellectual disabilities, who attend the ninth grade in regular public schools in the north of

Portugal. Our goals are related to: (a) describing the expectations of students about their school-to-work transition and post-school life; (b) compare the relationship between the expectations of students and the objectives outlined in their ITP; (c) describe the expectations of parents in what concerns their child's school-to-work transition and post-school life; (d) understand students' perspectives about the relationship between their academic curriculum and their ITP; (e) understand the perspectives of all participants regarding the feasibility of students' ITPs; (f) analyze the consistency of the curriculum areas defined in the Individual Educational Plan and the objectives of the ITP; (g) understand the perspectives of all participants about the professional future of students with intellectual disabilities; (h) describe the organizational structure of the ITP found in schools and compare it with the recommendations set out in the Portuguese Law.

Next, we will present the design plan which will be carried out.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Three students with intellectual disabilities who are attending the ninth grade in three public schools, as well as their parents and their regular and special education teachers will be selected to participate in this study. We will select these participants by purposive sampling [6]. As a result, students will be selected due to the presence of intellectual disability, as well as, the application of an ITP for two years; professionals will be selected based on their experience and status in the field that will enable them to address issues related to the phenomena we are studying in a comprehensive and all-embracing way (Lincoln e Guba [6]; Creswell [2]; Patton [7]).

### 2.2. Data collection instruments

In this study, we will gather data by conducting in-depth, face-to-face open-ended interviews and analyzing school documents such as students'

Individual Transitions Plans and Individual Educational Plans.

### 2.3. Data analysis

Qualitative data that may be collected will be analyzed using the technique of content analysis (Bardin [1]; Ryan e Bernard [8]), in both an inductive and deductive way.

### 3. Presentation of Results

We plan to synthesize and report results in order to reflect the themes of the study. First, we will present a three case study format, which will be written in a factual analytic way using, as much as possible, the words of the participants, as well as, words that can transmit the emotions and behaviors we may observe in participants during the interviews. The cases will offer different angles on meaning and experiences of realities in respect to the education transition process (Lincoln e Guba [6]; Patton [7]). Second, we will present data using a cross case format in which similarities and/or differences between participants' perspectives and expectations will be pointed out and interpreted within the context of national and international research. Finally, we will report on the knowledge gained from this study in the form of conclusions and recommendations.

### 4. Establishing trustworthiness

In order to obtain a high credibility in our final results, we plan to use peer debriefing, triangulation of data sources, a reflexive diary, member checks, and a thick description of the context (Lincoln e Guba [6]; Guba e Lincoln [4]).

### 5. Conclusion

This future study intends to contribute to the extension of the existing knowledge in the field of education transition for students with intellectual disabilities who attend public schools in Portugal. By carrying out this research we recognize the importance of empowering these students with the "necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills to make decisions about their current and future lives" (Smith, Ittenbach *et al.* [10]). Furthermore, we believe that students' families must be involved in this process, as well as community members. Finally, we think that although the Portuguese law

requires the implementation of education transition for students with intellectual disabilities, it is not considered top priority for schools, and thus we expect to find diversity in terms of its quality. In the conclusion of our study we expect not only to show the multiple realities of the purposive sample in what concerns the transition education process, but also to contribute to the development of a model that professionals in schools can follow for developing a systematic way to prepare students with intellectual disabilities for the world of work and community life.

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