Developing a Long-Term Vision: A Road Map for Students’ Futures

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Person-Centered Planning

One of the major background sources related to the philosophy and practice of positive behavior support (PBS) is person-centered planning (PCP). The idea of person-centered planning (PCP) emerged as an alternative to the traditional “systems-centered” approaches to special education, which has in the past focused on the placement of individuals with disabilities into the special education system. In contrast, in person-centered planning the planning is centered on the individual’s disabilities and his family’s wants, hopes, concerns, and dreams. Although PCP was typically used with students with low incidence disabilities, it can benefit all students with disabilities and their families.

PCP involves a team that includes the person with a disability, family members, professionals, and others who are involved in the life of the individual with a disability (e.g., friends, community members). Team members collaborate, using a problem solving approach, to develop a holistic long-term vision and plan for the individual with a disability.

Long-Term Vision

The long-term vision is a descriptive statement of the desired outcomes for the student in 3-5 years. The vision statement should be holistic (i.e., addresses school, home, community, social, and other outcomes), positive, and reflective of high and enviable outcomes. The vision statement reflects input from the entire team, with emphasis placed on the input from the learner and family members. The vision statement guides the rest of the planning process. The vision statement serves as a destination for which a road map of learning experiences, supports, and services the learner and family may need in the next 3-5 years is developed.

Kayla

Kayla. Kayla is currently in 1st grade. Her vision statement reflects her parents’ values regarding inclusion. They emphasized the importance of Kayla not simply being placed in a general education classroom but also being fully integrated and included within the classroom activities and with her peers. They value independence, social relationships, and safety. Kayla receives special education services based on her intellectual disability. She has limited expressive language and is currently included in a general education classroom with the support of a one-on-one aide. Kayla has limited interactions with her peers and is typically working on different activities.

Kayla’s long-term vision: In 3-5 years, Kayla will spend most of her day interacting with and learning alongside her peers. She will have some social opportunities without family members and will participate in a sport of her choice. Kayla will be safe in and out of school and work well with others. Kayla will communicate effectively. Kayla will become independent with her morning routine and begin taking care of more of her personal needs.

Martin

Martin. Martin is currently in 7th grade. His vision statement reflects input about educational values from Martin and his parents. Their longer-range plans for Martin include continuing his education at a college or university. He and his parents believe it is important for him to not only succeed academically, but also to be responsible and show leadership skills in order to be successful in college. Martin receives special education services based on his specific learning disability.

Martin’s long-term vision: In high school, Martin will be an A/B student that independently organizes and completes his homework, working toward enrollment in a college or university after high school. He will advocate for himself, participate in extracurricular of his choice, and have friends that he plans social activities with. He will spend time in family activities, complete his household responsibilities, and hold a summer job.

The PCP Process

There are different approaches/processes/tools for PCP including: Making Action Plans or MAPs (Forest & Lusthaus, 1990), Group Action Planning or GAP (Tunbull & Tunbull, 1992), Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope or PATH (Pearpoint, O’Brien, & Forest, 1993), Choosing Outcomes and Accommodations for Children or COACH (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1998) and Circle of Friends (Perske, 1988).

PCP usually includes the following steps:

1. Organizing and preparing a team meeting where the individual with a disability is placed at the center of the planning process;
2. Developing a personal profile of the individual with a disability, including strengths, interests, and dreams;
3. Constructing a long-term vision;
4. Developing action steps toward the long-term vision;
5. Providing support; and
6. Evaluating progress toward the goals. This process assists the individual with a disability.

5. Share the vision at the IEP meeting. Start the IEP meeting with the vision statement and use backward planning to reach the vision. Services, goals, and objectives identified in the IEP should all support movement toward achieving the vision.

6. Revise and update the vision. PCP is an ongoing process; therefore, the long-term vision will need to be updated and revised. Discuss with parents progress in relationship to the vision statement and share with them how the vision and their input influences the day to day activities in school. PCP may not need to be fully implemented each year, but should be modified to update and revise the vision as necessary.

In summary, developing a long-term vision for a student could be beneficial for students with disabilities, their families and their teachers. Backward planning and PCP tools that focus on breaking the vision down into concrete actions and skills will naturally become the next step in developing a meaningful, personalized curriculum. The vision can be used as a road map for students’ futures to guide the development of goals and activities. Though yearly progress is an important facet of special education, a long-term vision allows for continuity, creativity, and caring for children with disabilities.