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# An Examination of Transition Professional Profiles Based on Value-Based Principles: A Latent Profile Analysis

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## Plain Language Summary

*There are some key things to know about this study. First, a lot of research has shown that when students with disabilities finish high school, they often do not do as well as their peers without disabilities in areas like getting jobs or going to college. One thing that has been shown to help these students as they move into adulthood is when professionals from different agencies work together to support them. How these professionals work together is also very important. This study focused on something that might influence these professionals—value-based principles. Value-based principles refer to the beliefs that guide how these professionals support youth with disabilities. In this study, we asked two groups of professionals about which value-based principles are important to them. These two groups included 562 people working in special education or at a Center for Independent Living. Based on their answers, we were able to group the professionals into four different profiles. These profiles help explain the trends in the value-based principles that matter most to different groups. Having this knowledge can improve how people work together to support youth with disabilities as they transition to adulthood. It also shows that more research in this area is needed.*

## Abstract

*This paper presents findings from a study utilizing Latent Profile Analysis to examine the value-based principles of transition professionals from two distinct disciplines: special education and Centers for Independent Living (CIL). Specifically, this paper aimed to identify profiles emerging from the value orientations of special education and CIL professionals, and to explore how individual factors such as professional role, disability status, education, and years' experience differ across these profiles. Findings revealed a taxonomy comprising four distinct profiles within the transition professionals sampled. These profiles delineate varying dominant values that encapsulate the convergence of special education and independent living philosophies. Implications for research and practice are also discussed.*

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## Introduction

The transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood is a transformative period characterized by profound physical, cognitive, and social changes. For some individuals with disabilities, this transitional phase is marked by unique challenges and opportunities, necessitating comprehensive support systems that facilitate successful navigation of this critical life juncture. Transition services are mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and are a set of activities designed to help youth with disabilities move from school to post-school life (PL 101-476, 2004). Additional support for employment skills and services is provided for transition-age youth with disabilities through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA; 2014). These programs operate through a network of local centers in each state, often including American Job Centers and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies. It is well known that providing optimal transition support for students with disabilities cannot be provided by a single agency (Shogren & Wittenberg, 2020). Thus, professionals who serve transition-age youth with disabilities work in a variety of work settings, including schools, and across myriad agencies, each filling critical roles. While the service coordination of various agencies and professionals has proliferated in the last three decades, research continues to examine the roles of transition professionals who are charged with supporting youth and their families (Oertle et al., 2021; Plotner et al., 2017). By bringing together providers across disciplines, like general education, special education, vocational rehabilitation, and school counseling, transition teams aim to ensure a coordinated and holistic approach to transition services (Frazier et al., 2020; McKnight et al., 2022).

Ideal transition planning involves a variety of school- and community-based professionals, working in collaboration to plan and ultimately provide distinct but complementary services and supports for the student in transition (Frazier et al., 2020; Mazzotti et al., 2021). Using person-centered planning practices (Lee & Kim, 2021) centering the person with the disability, the transition team should not only provide services across life domains, but also provide valuable and nuanced perspectives on student transition needs through their distinct professional lenses (Frazier et al., 2020). Special education professionals operating within educational institutions are pivotal and often take the lead in facilitating this transition planning; however, other service providers are included in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and transition-planning meetings to ensure seamless service provision.

Rooted in the principles of individualized education, they work to provide tailored support, accommodations, and specialized instruction to promote academic, social, and emotional development (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2014). Their efforts aim to equip students with disabilities with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage actively and inclusively within their communities. Another critical contributor are professionals within Centers for Independent Living (CILs). CILs were first established in the U.S. in the 1970s and prioritize community access and integration for people with disabilities. Concurrently, professionals within CILs contribute significantly to the transition to emerging adulthood for individuals with disabilities. Operating from the perspective of autonomy, empowerment, and community integration, CIL professionals offer a range of services aimed at fostering independent living skills,

self-determination, and self-advocacy (Administration for Community Living, 2024). Their focus extends beyond education, encompassing peer support and cultivating social connections within diverse community contexts. By emphasizing self-directed decision-making and facilitating active participation in society, CIL professionals support individuals in realizing their potential and achieving meaningful, self-determined lives.

The emphasis on including CILs in secondary transition is particularly noteworthy as their involvement in transition is less explored than other publicly funded agencies such as VR despite the critical contributions CILs make (Plotner et al., 2024). These important roles include supporting identity formation and self-advocacy for individuals with disabilities. Decades of research purport including self-advocates in their own transition planning activities as best practice to ensure future success and quality of life (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013; Mazzotti et al., 2021; Morningstar et al., 1999). Professionals working in CILs often bring unique, yet necessary, values and philosophies to service provision, such as consumer control, peer support, community integration, and equal access (Hayman, 2019). The discussion and focus on CIL involvement in transition planning have intensified in recent years (Mann & Wang, 2021; Walters & Plotner, 2023). In fact, in 2023, the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) awarded \$223,333,333 to 20 State Agencies (i.e., State Vocational Rehabilitation [SVR], State Office of Special Education) aimed at the development and implementation of collaborative transition service delivery (e.g., State Education Agency [SEA], Local Education Agency [LEA], SVR, and CILs) where CILs are a *required* partner. This money will result in states developing, implementing, and evaluating models of transition collaboration. Although there are increasing discussions around roles, there is limited information on how value-based principles drive professional practice and how and to what extent prevailing philosophies and values are shared by collaborative transition partners.

### **Value-Based Principles and Critical Approaches to Disability Service Provision**

Value-based principles that drive professional practice exist across most fields of practice, namely those in the human services sector (e.g. Petrova et al., 2006). While transition professionals share a unified vision focusing on student skill development and goal achievement, value-based principles that drive professional practice are relatively understudied and likely vary across professional settings. By exploring value-based principles, we can better align collaboration efforts and complementary service provision. For this study, we examine professionals across transition professional settings, namely those working in either schools or CILs. Understanding the commonalities and differences between these two transition professional groups is important before exploring how these individuals approach supporting youth.

The roots of special education service delivery can be traced back to the gradual recognition of the unique educational needs of individuals with disabilities (Gerber, 2017). Historically, people with disabilities were often marginalized, excluded, or institutionalized, with limited access to education. However, societal attitudes towards individuals with disabilities

began to shift over time, leading to the development of specialized educational services. Several core values underpin special education service delivery, which has evolved based on these changing societal attitudes and research in the field. These values include *equity and inclusion* (i.e., the belief that all individuals, regardless of their abilities, have the right to access a quality education and be included in mainstream settings to the greatest extent possible); *Individualization* (i.e., the recognition that each student with a disability has unique strengths and support needs, and tailoring education supports accordingly); *parent and family involvement* (i.e., acknowledging the crucial role of parents and families as partners in the education decision-making process); *Least Restrictive Environment* (i.e., striving to educate students with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate, providing necessary supports and accommodations); and *evidence-based practices* (i.e., utilizing research-based methods and interventions to ensure effective instruction and supports) (Francisco et al., 2020). These principles guide the design and implementation of special education services, supporting the overarching goal of equipping individuals with disabilities to reach their full potential and participate actively in society. As societal awareness and understanding of disabilities continue to evolve, so will the practices and value-based principles underpinning special education service delivery. Special education professionals often prioritize fulfilling educational standards and providing individualized accommodations (Shepherd et al., 2016). Their value orientation often revolves around academic progress and the cultivation of the skills necessary for academic engagement.

With similar overarching goals of promoting independence, integration, and full participation in society and schools, CILs are disability-centric organizations that approach service delivery through a somewhat different lens. The principles guiding CILs are based on the Independent Living philosophy, deeply rooted in the disability rights movement and the broader civil rights movement (Wilson, 1998). Core value-based principles include *consumer control* (i.e., individuals with disabilities are in charge of making decisions about services and supports they receive, empowered to set their own goals and determine the path towards achieving them); *peer support and mentorship* (i.e., recognizing the importance of individuals with disabilities supporting and learning from each other, creating an environment of shared experiences); and *disability pride and justice* (i.e., believing a disability is an asset and facet of human variation, worthy of equitable access to all aspects of society; Administration for Community Living, 2024). These principles are vital as they challenge traditional medical models of disability, which have historically focused on fixing individuals with disabilities. Rather, the Independent Living (IL) philosophy emphasizes the rights of people with disabilities to live independently and make their own choices, while advocating for an inclusive and accessible society that benefits everyone.

While these value-based principles guide the efforts of both special education and CIL professionals, the emergence of distinct profiles based on these orientations has received limited attention in the literature. Gaining insight into the potential profiles that emerge within each group can offer a nuanced understanding of how professionals approach the transition to emerging adulthood for individuals with disabilities. Studies have illuminated that special education professionals and CIL professionals are guided by distinct value-based principles that underpin their practices (Plotner & Walters, 2022). To better describe the variation of

professional profiles based on value-based principles that CIL and education-centric professionals venerate, we used Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) to explore the taxonomy of transition professionals. By identifying sub-groups of professionals with different value-based principles, LPA elucidates distinct groups of transition professionals as well as overlap between them. This could provide a dynamic framework to understand how such professionals approach service provision. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine what profiles emerge for special education and CIL professionals based on their value-based principles. Specifically, two research questions guided this study:

- What profiles emerge for special education professionals and CIL professionals based on their value-based principles?
- In what ways do the professionals' individual factors (e.g., professional role, disability status, education, and years of experience) differ across profile membership?

## Methods

### Procedures

Recruitment for online survey participants occurred through a snowball sampling strategy to reach both special education and CIL professionals currently working with transition-age youth with disabilities (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). A list of email addresses for state unit presidents of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) was obtained from CEC's website. In total, email addresses were obtained for representatives from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, apart from Delaware. A list of 698 CIL contacts for every U.S. state and territory with an active CIL was obtained from the Independent Living Research Utilization's website. An email tailored to each group was sent with a request to forward information to any CIL or special education professional who was actively supporting young adults with disabilities in transition. To incentivize participation, two \$500 donations were offered to the CEC state unit, and two \$500 donations were offered to the Statewide Independent Living Council for states with the most responses. The instrument was administered online using the web-based survey platform SurveyMonkey®. In total, 581 valid survey responses were collected between March and May 2021. Survey responses were considered valid if respondents indicated in the first survey item that they were professionally involved in supporting youth or young adults with disabilities.

### Participants

Of the 562 professionals who submitted the survey, 44 participants were removed from the sample because they did not complete the value-based principles scale, leaving an analytic sample of 518 participants. Most participants identified as female (83.1%) and were an average of 45 years old. The sample was comprised predominantly of White participants (78%), with 13.7% identifying as Black or African American, 5.4% identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 2.2% identifying as Asian or Pacific Islander, and 0.8% identifying as Native American or Alaskan Native. A minority of participants (37.2%) identified as a person with a disability and/or disabled. On

average, participants had spent 14 years supporting youth and/or young adults with disabilities and had experienced 6.5 years in their current role. Over half (53.1%) of survey participants had obtained at least a master's degree. Slightly less than half of the respondents (49.1%) indicated they served in special education-related roles in schools. A similar proportion (47.7%) indicated they served as professionals within a CIL. The remaining 3.3% of participants reported working in vocational rehabilitation. See Table 1 for sample demographics.

## Measures

This *Value-Based Principles Scale* measures the degree to which 11 value-based principles drive the participant's professional service delivery (Plotner & Walters, 2022) on a 5-point Likert-type scale (0 = *Does not drive my practice* to 4 = *One of the main principles driving my practice*,  $\alpha = 0.85$ ). To explore factor structure, MPlus version 8.8 was used with the robust maximum likelihood (MLR) estimator (L. K. Muthén & Muthén, 2021). MLR provides parameter estimates with standard errors robust to non-normality. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to determine the possible number of factors with the Geomin rotation, an oblique rotation type. The EFA revealed a two-factor solution: education-centric values and disability-centric values. The education-centric values factor included 6 items related to principles driving special education practice (high expectations and rigor, access to inclusive environments, professional collaboration, family partnerships, evidence-based practice, and data-based decision making;  $M_d = .565$ , range = .401 - .908,  $\alpha = 0.843$ ). The disability-centric values factor included 5 items related to principles derived from research on CIL professionals (disability pride, strength-based and goal-driven, empowerment, autonomy, and independence, peer-based, and youth-led;  $M_d = .614$ , range = .532 - .833,  $\alpha = 0.784$ ).

## Statistical Analysis

We used Mplus version 8.8 to conduct a latent profile analysis (LPA) to identify distinct subgroups of professionals based on their scores on the value-based principles scale's two factors (education-centric values and disability-centric values). Before running an LPA, we needed to ensure the sample size was large enough for the analysis. Previous simulation studies have shown that a minimum sample size of 500 is adequate for accurate class identification (Nylund et al., 2007). Given our sample size of 518 professionals, we proceeded with the analysis. The first stage in LPA was determining the number of classes with well-defined differentiated profiles across the sample. Beginning with a one-class model, the number of classes was iteratively increased until there was no further improvement in the model (Lubke & Muthén, 2007). To avoid local likelihood maxima, we increased the random start values to 1,000 (with the best 100 of these starts being retained for final stage optimization), increased the number of iterations to 100 in the first steps of the optimization procedure, and checked the replicability of best log-likelihood value (Morin, 2016). Furthermore, the MLR estimator was used to produce parameter estimates with standard errors that are robust to non-normality.

**Table 1***Demographic Information*

Item	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	423	81.7
Male	86	16.6
Missing/Unknown	9	1.7
<b>Disability</b>		
Yes	185	35.7
No	312	60.2
Declined to answer	21	4.1
<b>Race</b>		
White	393	75.9
Black or African American	69	13.3
Hispanic or Latinx	27	5.2
Asian or Pacific Islander	9	1.7
Native American or Alaskan Native	4	0.8
Declined to answer	16	3.1
<b>Age</b>		
18-23	8	1.5
24-30	68	13.1
31-40	113	21.8
41-50	151	29.2
51-60	120	23.2
Older than 60	54	10.4
Declined to answer	4	0.8
<b>Years experience</b>		
Less than 2	33	6.4
2-5	85	16.4
6-10	94	18.1
11-15	90	17.4
16-20	82	15.8
21-25	67	12.9
More than 25	67	12.9
<b>Years in role</b>		
Less than 2	140	27.0
2-5	176	34.0
6-10	96	18.5
11-15	52	10.0
16-20	29	5.6
21-25	15	2.9
More than 25	10	1.9

*(table continues)*



Item	<i>n</i>	%
Educational attainment		
High School Diploma/GED	40	7.7
Associate's degree	11	2.1
Some College	11	2.1
Bachelor's Degree (B.S.)	79	15.3
B.S. Plus Additional Credits	102	19.7
Master's Degree	117	22.6
Master's Degree Plus Additional Credits	135	26.1
Doctoral Degree	23	4.4
Role		
Special Education Teacher (not specified)	5	1.0
Middle School SPED Teacher	28	5.4
High School Special Education Teacher	107	20.7
School-Level SPED Administrator	26	5
District-Level SPED Administrator	43	8.3
Transition Specialist	45	8.7
VR Counselor/Admin	12	2.3
CIL Staff	145	28.0
CIL Administrator	102	19.7
Other	5	1.0

In assessing model fit, we first compared models with different numbers of classes using the Bayesian Information Criteria (BIC), where lower values indicate better model fit (i.e., an optimum trade-off between model parsimony and residuals). Next, we tested the statistical significance to determine whether a more complex model (*k* classes) would fit the data significantly better than a more parsimonious model (*k* -1 classes) by using the Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT), which is generally preferred over other likelihood ratio tests (Nylund et al., 2007). The BLRT test provides *p*-values that can be used to determine if there is a statistically significant improvement in fit for the inclusion of one more class. Then, we examined entropy, where values ranging from 0.70 to 1.0 are preferable, indicating clear classification and greater power to predict class membership (B. Muthén, 2001). The sample size of the smallest class was then evaluated, specifically deciding that models with a class of < 1% and/or numerically *n* < 25 should be rejected or rigorously grounded by theory and research (Bauer & Curran, 2004). Finally, since LPA is a probabilistic approach, we considered the average probabilities of class membership, where values at least 0.80 indicate a more useful and accurate solution (Rost, 2006).

After determining the optimal number of classes, we tested for significant differences in individual characteristics across the profiles. We used the auxiliary variable function in Mplus to preserve the probabilistic approach of LPA (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014). We utilized the Bolck-Croon-Hagenaars (BCH) method (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014), the most robust approach and the recommended method for examining relationships between profiles and continuous variables (education and years of experience in this study). We also employed Lanza's method

for having an auxiliary variable specified as categorical (DCAT; Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014; Lanza et al., 2013), which is the preferred method to accommodate categorical outcomes (disability status and professional role) across latent profiles.

## Results

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas, and bivariate correlations among variables used in the study. Table 3 presents the LPA model fit outcomes for the sample on education-centric and disability-centric values. The BIC statistics and BLRT tests indicated that a 4-class solution was the best model for allocating cases to profiles in the sample. BIC increased for the 5-class solution, and the BLRT test was not significant for the 5-class solution. The 4-class solution contained a class representing 0.1% ( $n = 4$ ) of the sample, which can be problematic. However, we also observed this same class of four individuals in the 3-class and 5-class solutions. As such, we relied on fit indices to proceed with the 4-class solution and discuss the limitations with the small, unique class.

**Table 2**

### *Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations for Variables in the Study*

Values	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	$\alpha$	1	2
1. Education-centric values	3.28	0.65	-1.29	2.84	0.825	1	
2. Disability-centric Values	3.18	0.69	-0.87	0.65	0.731	0.415***	1

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 3**

### *Model Fit of the LPA on the 2 Factors of the Value-Cased Principles Scale*

# Classes	Log-likelihood	Number of replications	Bayesian Information Criteria	Entropy	BLRT $p$	Mean APCM
1	-1053.49	100/100	2131.98	-	-	-
2	-990.34	100/100	2024.43	0.874	<.001	0.921
3	-956.52	71/100	1975.54	0.814	<.001	0.930
<b>4</b>	<b>-929.91</b>	<b>87/100</b>	<b>1941.07</b>	<b>0.844</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>0.926</b>
5	-922.09	100/100	1944.19	0.849	0.07	0.888

Note. BLRT  $p = p$  value of the Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio test; APCM = average probability of class membership. Optimal model indicated in bold.

Table 4 reports profile allocation based on the estimated posterior probability for the four latent profiles and factor mean scores for education-centric and disability-centric values. Proportions varied across the profiles. Figure 1 provides a visual illustration of the conditional means. Considering the factor means scores for education-centric and disability-centric values, the four profiles were labeled as follows:

**Table 4**

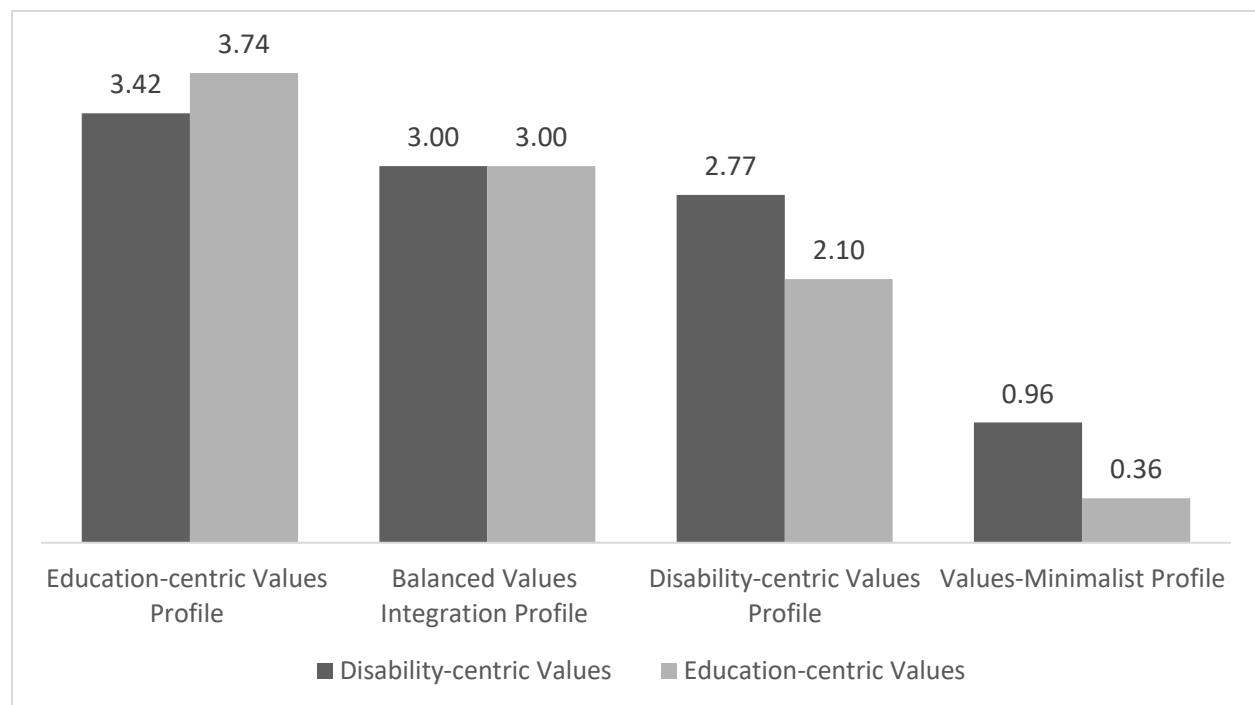
*Profile Allocation Based on Estimated Posterior Probability for Four Latent Profiles, Mean Probabilities of Latent Profiles, and Mean Scores on the Value-Based Principles*

Profiles	<i>n</i>	%	Avg. prob. <sup>a</sup>	Education-centric values		Disability-centric values	
				M	SE	M	SE
Education-centric values	280	54.1	0.92	3.74	0.03	3.42	0.04
Balanced values integration	181	34.9	0.90	3.00	0.04	3.00	0.06
Disability-centric values	53	10.2	0.89	2.09	0.08	2.77	0.14
Values-minimalist	4	0.8	0.99	0.36	0.22	0.96	0.16

<sup>a</sup> Average probabilities of profile membership.

**Figure 1**

*Visual Representation of Latent Profile Results*



*Note.* This figure represents the factor mean scores for the two subscales of the Values-based Principles Scale (presented as raw scores) across the four latent profiles.

- a. *Education-Centric Values Profile (ECV)* – This class represented the largest profile, with approximately 53% of the sample. On average, these professionals rated all principles as having a significant impact or as one of the main principles driving their professional practice. However, the conditional mean was higher for education-centric values, suggesting more education-centric values were likely to be one of the main principles driving their professional practice.
- b. *Balanced Values Integration Profile (BVI)* – This class represented the second largest profile, with approximately 37% of the sample. On average, these professionals rated all principles as having a significant impact on their professional practice. The conditional means were identical for education-centric and disability-centric values.
- c. *Disability-Centric Values Profile (DCV)* – This profile was smaller, representing 9.9% of the sample. On average, these professionals indicated that disability-centric principles had a moderate to significant impact on their professional practice compared to education-centric values, which tended to have a moderate impact. As such, the conditional mean was higher for disability-centric values, but overall, professionals in this profile reported less influence from the professional values represented in the scale.
- d. *Values-Minimalist Profile (VM)* – We interpret this very small profile (0.1%,  $n = 4$ ) with an abundance of caution. On average, these professionals reported disability-centric values as having a low impact in driving their professional practice and education-centric values as low to no impact.

Table 5 reports the relationships between the four profiles and individual characteristics (professional role, disability status, education, and years of experience). All four omnibus tests for individual characteristics were significant ( $p < .05$ ). We used a Bonferroni-Holms corrected  $p$ -value for significance for all pairwise comparisons. With regards to their professional role, participants in the ECV profile were more likely to be in special education-related roles in schools compared to the DCV profile ( $\chi^2(2) = 26.73, p < .001$ ) and the VM profile ( $\chi^2(2) = 9.04, p = .011$ ). Participants in the DCV profile were more likely to be professionals within a CIL compared to the BVI profile ( $\chi^2(2) = 13.00, p = .002$ ). For disability status, professionals in the ECV profile were more likely to report having a disability compared to professionals in the DCV profile ( $\chi^2(1) = 9.72, p = .002$ ). For education, professionals in the ECV profile had significantly more education compared to professionals in the BVI profile ( $\chi^2(1) = 10.47, p = .001$ ) and the DCV profile ( $\chi^2(1) = 18.79, p < .001$ ). In terms of years of experience, professionals in the ECV profile had significantly more experience than professionals in the BVI profile ( $\chi^2(2) = 9.286, p = .002$ ).

**Table 5***Relations of the Four Latent Profiles to Individual Characteristics*

Variables	Education-centric values		Balanced values integration		Disability-centric values		Values-minimalist		Omnibus		
	M/Prob	SE	M/Prob	SE	M/Prob	SE	M/Prob	SE	$\chi^2$	df	p value
Years of experience	4.40 <sup>a</sup>	0.11	3.79 <sup>a</sup>	0.15	3.73	0.32	3.75	1.03	25.32	3	<.001
Education	3.79 <sup>a,b</sup>	0.09	3.26 <sup>a</sup>	0.12	2.77 <sup>b</sup>	0.22	3.00	0.79	11.86	3	0.008
Disability	0.69 <sup>a</sup>	0.03	0.60	0.04	0.43 <sup>a</sup>	0.08	0.25	0.21	14.23	3	0.003
Professional Role	a,b		c		a,c		b		36.24	6	<.001
School-based	0.56	0.04	0.50	0.05	0.17	0.09	0.25	0.21			
CIL	0.42	0.04	0.47	0.05	0.83	0.09	0.75	0.21			

*Note.* Information for relations of the four latent classes to categorical outcome variables is presented as probability, Standard Error (SE). Information for relations of the four latent classes to continuous outcome variables is presented as mean (SE). Wald test results are represented as chi square value (degrees of freedom). Matching superscripts denote pairwise significance at Bonferroni-Holm-adjusted  $p$  value.

## Discussion

Although it is not a new concept to have a wide variety of professionals serving on transition teams to meet the complex educational, health, and social needs of students, it is imperative that secondary transition teams include all professionals who can provide needed support. Transition services have advanced with emerging roles in school and community settings that expand beyond the traditionally understood roles of teacher and coach (Mazzotti et al., 2021; Snell-Rood et al., 2020). In disability support services, professionals play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences and opportunities available to individuals with diverse needs. The findings from the current study revealed a taxonomy of four distinct profiles across individuals working in these two professional entities: secondary schools and CILs. These profiles are characterized by their dominant values, reflecting the intersection of special education and independent living philosophies. By examining these profiles, we gain insight into the diverse approaches taken by professionals to support individuals in their journey to adulthood.

The first professional profile (i.e., Education-Centric Values) aligns closely with the ethos of special education and is primarily driven by the principles and practices that make up special education. This group is made up of the largest group of professionals and should be noted that while these individuals were in the education-centric profile, this was the largest profile for both school and CIL professionals ( $n = 273$ , 56% school professionals). These professionals emphasize an inclusive and individualized approach centered on addressing the unique needs of students with disabilities within the school setting. Their values are often rooted in academic progress and transition planning. For instance, professionals' values support the design of IEPs that target specific learning goals and strategies tailored to each student's ability. Their commitment is often providing targeted interventions and utilizing adaptive techniques ensuring students receive the specialized attention they need to thrive and achieve their goals. Interestingly, while 56% of the professionals in this profile were in school settings, 42% were employed at CILs.

The second professional profile (i.e., Balanced Values Integration) represents strong but uniform values in both CIL and special education value-based principles. This profile, consisting of 190 professionals, was approximately split between those in schools and CILs. While they had significantly less education and years of experience compared to those in the education-centric values profile, they had more education and experience than those in the disability-centric values profile. Professionals in this group recognized the importance of a well-rounded education that addresses academic needs and prioritizes youth-led and peer-based approaches. In the context of schools, these values could be reflected in professionals holding roles such as transition specialists or coordinators, actively working to bridge the gap between the academic setting and post-school environments. They may currently collaborate with CILs to infuse elements of self-determination and community engagement into educational experiences. By integrating these values, they empower students to develop a sense of identity and purpose, equipping them with the tools to navigate that transition to independent living successfully and with the utmost quality of life.

The third professional profile (Disability-Centric Values) embodies the core values of CILs. This group was the smallest of the three profiles and is made up of 91 professionals (83% CIL professionals). Professionals within this group value CIL-focused principles such as disability pride. Their focus emphasizes CIL value-based principles, and they potentially believe that many special education value-based principles are being addressed by other professionals. These professionals may collaborate with professionals to design individualized plans that prioritize individual aspirations and empower them to lead self-directed lives.

We cautiously mention the fourth professional profile (Values-Minimalist). This profile represents a very small group of professionals who perceive both disability-centric and education-centric values as having minimal to no influence on their professional practices. The emphasis in this description is on the notably low impact that these value systems have on their work approach and decisions. Future research with a larger sample is needed to determine if this profile represents measurement error or is part of the taxonomy of transition professionals.

Professionals' roles within their respective agencies may significantly influence their alignment with specific value-based profiles (Plotner et al., 2023). The professionals with strong but education-centric values had more education and experience than those with strong but balanced value integration or disability-centric values. Those with disability-centric values had the least education across the profiles. These personal factors of education and experience relate to how professionals simultaneously hold education-centric and disability-centric values and principles. Special education professionals working within educational settings may be more inclined to prioritize academic progress and skills development due to the inherent goals of the educational system. Conversely, CIL professionals tasked with fostering independent living may be driven by principles emphasizing self-determination and community engagement. Additionally, factors such as education level and experience may shape professionals' value-based orientations and subsequently influence their profile membership. Higher levels of education and extensive years of experience could lead to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in the transition to emerging adulthood for

individuals with disabilities. Our findings support previous research that demonstrates education and experience can enhance the development of professional values and dispositions, including the importance of education and positive regard for students with disabilities and their families (Novak et al., 2009; Whitney et al., 2002).

The likelihood of professionals expressing certain values and principles may be influenced by their personal identification with a disability. For instance, a higher proportion of professionals in the education-centric values (69%) and balanced values integration profiles (60%) reported a personal disability, compared to those in the disability-centric values profile (43%). This suggests that professionals who have experienced disability firsthand might have a greater inclination towards principles like autonomy and self-advocacy, aligning them more with the value orientations seen in CIL professionals. This parallels findings by Ferri et al. (2001), who explored how personal experiences as special education students affected teaching approaches, emphasizing the importance of service delivery, teacher expectations, and perceiving learning disabilities as tools rather than barriers. This connection underlines the significance of personal experience in shaping professional values and approaches in special education.

The diversity of professional profiles within the contexts of secondary transition (e.g., special education and CILs) highlights the intricate interplay of values and approaches in supporting individuals with disabilities. While each profile has its unique emphasis, all contribute to the overarching goal of enhancing the lives of those they serve. By acknowledging and understanding these diverse profiles, stakeholders in both education and independent living sectors can collaborate effectively to create comprehensive support systems that nurture the holistic development and well-being of individuals with disabilities.

### **Implications for Practice**

The diverse array of roles, skills, and approaches exhibited by professionals in these settings play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences and successes of individuals navigating the transition to adulthood. Identifying and understanding distinct professional profiles within transition service providers hold profound implications for enhancing services and outcomes for individuals transitioning out of secondary environments. The nature of collaborative transition service delivery and the role demands that accompany it demands a nuanced understanding of the professionals' characteristics, strengths, values, and areas of expertise. The findings gleaned from this study contribute valuable insights into the diverse ways in which transition practitioners may approach their work. This insight enables us to tailor interventions, training programs, and collaborative efforts to maximize the positive impact of the students as they transition. By acknowledging the distinct values of each profile, practitioners can better engage with individuals in a manner that aligns with their preferred trajectory of development. CIL-dominant professionals are well-positioned to promote strength-based approaches. These professionals can guide individuals with disabilities toward recognizing their abilities and advocating for their rights. This perspective should also be integrated into educational settings, encouraging educators to focus on nurturing students' strengths while addressing their academic needs. Further, greater understanding of roles and potential contributions can potentially catalyze

collaborative efforts.

There are also implications for students with disabilities to better understand professional values. For example, when professionals value student empowerment, they recognize the importance of involving individuals with disabilities in the decision-making process regarding their own care and support; thus, knowing a professional's values might allow individuals to assess whether the professional is committed to empowering them and involving them in the process (Bryne et al., 2016). Additionally, it is vital for addressing ethical considerations and general quality of services. Values play a crucial role in shaping ethical decision-making. Disability professionals with a strong ethical framework ensure that their services uphold principles of fairness, justice, and non-discrimination. For example, if professionals value inclusivity, they are more likely to strive for equal opportunities and accessibility, ensuring that individuals with disabilities are not excluded or disadvantaged. When a disability professional's values are closely related to the principles of equity, social justice, and promoting the well-being of individuals with disabilities, they are more likely to go above and beyond to ensure the delivery of effective, comprehensive, and compassionate services. Overall, understanding how disability professionals approach service delivery based on their values helps individuals with disabilities make informed choices, ensuring they receive appropriate support that aligns with their own values, needs, and aspirations. It also promotes transparency, trust, and collaboration between professionals and the individuals they serve.

Further, given the distinct orientations identified, schools and CILs should collaborate on training programs. Professionals in education-centric values profile can benefit from exposure to CIL values, fostering a broader understanding of individuals' needs beyond the academic realm. Conversely, professionals in disability-centric values profile could gain insights from special education principles, enhancing their ability to support clients' educational aspirations.

### **Future Research Directions**

As the disciplines of special education and CIL and the collaboration between the two continue to evolve, there remains a compelling need for innovative research to illuminate unexplored avenues and address persisting gaps. The symbiotic relationship between these two domains offers a unique opportunity to enhance the quality of support and services provided to individuals with disabilities, paving the way for improved outcomes and enriched lives. There are several ways to potentially deepen our understanding of the intricacies surrounding special education and CIL collaboration. By delving into these research trajectories, we aspire to not only expand the knowledge base but also catalyze transformative advancements that positively impact individuals with disabilities and their families through better service provision. Future research should conduct longitudinal studies to explore the long-term outcomes of individuals exposed to different professional profiles. Tracking individuals' progress from educational settings to independent living can shed light on the effectiveness of each profile in facilitating successful transitions and meaningful lives. Several potential research directions are presented below.



### ***Interdisciplinary Collaborative Research***

One promising avenue for future research involves investigating the effectiveness of interdisciplinary collaboration between professionals in the realms of special education and CILs. Such research could offer valuable insights into the ways in which these collaborative efforts influence the overall well-being, self-determination, and community integration of individuals with disabilities. By examining the outcomes of joint intervention and coordinated support, research can elucidate the mechanisms that contribute to improved life outcomes and guide the development of comprehensive, student-centered support systems.

### ***Understanding the Influence of Cultural and Contextual Elements***

An essential aspect of future research involves exploring how cultural and contextual factors intersect with the identified professional profiles within special education and CIL collaboration. Researchers should examine whether the prevalence and effectiveness of each profile differ across diverse cultural backgrounds or geographic regions. This exploration can shed light on the universality and adaptability of these profiles and provide insights into how different cultural and regional contexts impact the prioritization of special education and CIL value-based principles.

### ***Uncovering the Nexus Between Identity and Professional Orientation***

A fruitful area of future inquiry pertains to understanding the intricate relationship between personal identity development and the adoption of specific professional values within the context of special education and CIL collaborative service delivery. Investigating how professionals' personal experiences shape their orientations and decision-making processes can illuminate the motivations behind the preference for certain profiles. This line of research can offer a deeper understanding of the alignment between personal beliefs and professional practices.

### ***Exploring the Impact of Joint Training Initiatives***

Future research endeavors should delve into the impact of specialized training programs and cross-agency collaboration on the effectiveness of transition services. By examining how joint training initiatives influence practitioners' attitudes, knowledge, and practices, researchers can gain insights into how these programs ultimately affect the quality of support provided to individuals with disabilities. This research could offer practical guidance for designing more comprehensive training models that enhance service delivery.

### ***Profiling and its Implications for Student Empowerment***

An essential avenue for future research involves investigating how each identified

professional profile influences student and family satisfaction and the development of self-determination skills in individuals with disabilities. By understanding how different values and approaches contribute to students' sense of empowerment and autonomy, researchers can provide valuable insights for refining service delivery models that prioritize student-centered outcomes.

### ***Navigating Transitional Phases through Professional Profiles***

Researching the impact of different professional profiles on the identity development and autonomy of individuals during emerging adulthood is paramount. Understanding how various profiles contribute to successful navigation of this pivotal transitional phase can shed light on specific strategies and interventions that enhance the support provided to individuals with disabilities during their journey toward increased independence and self-actualization.

In conclusion, the findings of the three distinct professional profiles across schools and CILs have significant implications for practice and future research. By leveraging the strengths of each profile and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, professionals can better support individuals with disabilities during their transition to independent living, ultimately enhancing their quality of life and societal participation. Further research can provide valuable insights into the nuanced characteristics of individuals within each of these profiles, better understand how the professionals within each can best collaborate and guide the development of tailored interventions for this population.

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