Designing Transition Programs for Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Students with Disabilities

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Introduction

Transition planning for students with disabilities and the involvement of their families in such planing is a requirement of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004* (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The law states that an individualized transition action plan must be in place before the child reaches the age of 16.

Such transition plans are tailored to meet the unique needs of each child with a disability in order to assure a successful transition from school into the community. Each transition action plan takes into account the skills the child already has and the additional skills the child should acquire before adulthood (Morgan, Morgan, Despain, & Vasquez III, 2006; Patton & Cronin, 1997).

Both general education and special education professionals need to know effective strategies, methods, and ideas to teach students with disabilities the skills that they will need in adult life (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, & Tamura, 2002). To ensure that the student leaving the classroom and entering the adult world is prepared, transition skills from high school to young adulthood should include, as appropriate, enrollment in postsecondary education, career and vocational skills, and acquiring the ability to live independently (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

These transition goals help prepare children for the adult roles that lie ahead (Hartman, 2009; Wehman, 2006). These adult skills relate to employment, independent living, caring for one's self, social interactions, and personal relationships (Beirne-Smith, Ittenbach, & Patton, 2002).

In order to foster these skills in students with disabilities who come from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds, schools, educational professionals, and families must work together to help students learn at an early age the skills that lead to self-determination (Chen, Wehmeyer, & Zhang, 2005).

For culturally and linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities, the collaboration with school personnel during transition planning can be challenging. Professionals (e.g., special education, general education, administrators, stakeholders) should examine what steps they take to support CLD families and their transition-age children (Zhang, 2005; Zhang & Benz, 2006; Zhang, Landmark, Grenweige, & Montoya, 2010).

Family and Student Involvement

Parents from culturally diverse backgrounds need to feel that they play a vital role in the future success of their sons or daughters with disabilities. Differences in culture and ethnicity can affect families' involvement in transition planning and the goals that they emphasize for their children.

Families of diverse backgrounds were surveyed and shown to be concerned with their sons and daughters transitions into the community (Pruchno & Patrick, 1999). Differences in culture can influence the transition goals that families emphasize the most. For example, Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) found that families from Western cultures (i.e., Anglo European) valued independence and personal choice while other cultures (e.g., Native American) valued interdependence and cooperation for the good of the group. CLD families (i.e., African American, Hispanic American, Native American) were found to place great emphasis on culture and interdependence when planning for their children's' transition programs (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001).

All families were concerned about who would protect and look after their children with disabilities when they were no longer able to support them (Goupil, Tassé, Garcin, & Doré, 2002). Additionally, families expressed concerns about the vocational services available to their transition-age sons and daughters (Kraemer & Blacher, 2001).

Success in transition planning is positively associated with situations in which CLD families and students take an active role in planning for the future. Families who are equipped with effective strategies become empowered and more involved in the transition planning process. Professionals can use the following steps to involve CLD families and students in successful transition planning.

Step One: Enrich Families' Lives

Professionals need to be familiar with the community and postsecondary options (e.g., employment, education) available to the CLD families of the students in their classrooms. Professionals must view families as valuable members of the transition planning team in order to avoid feelings of inadequacy within the family (Cooney, 2002; Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez,

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2005). Since CLD families have a strong influence in the lives of their children, it is important that professionals share supports, services, and community resources during transition planning (Goupil, Tassé, Garcin, & Doré, 2002; Matuszny, Banda, & Coleman, 2007).

Kolb and Hanley-Maxwell (2003) suggested that professionals create a network of families that share information about agencies, health providers, legal issues, and strategies. Postsecondary disability representatives can be invited to the transition meeting to share information on accessing services and supports (Gil, 2007). The development of cohesive partnerships (i.e., colleges, local education agencies, vocational rehabilitation) between the school and families/students promote success in transition planning (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). In addition, newsletters can be sent home that focus on transition for all students, providing relevant community information (Goupil et al., 2002).

Step Two: Demonstrate Cultural Competence

A critical component to successful transition planning is the encouragement and respect of all family perspectives on a child's potential strengths (Cooney, 2002). Professionals play an important role in promoting the acquisition of student self-determination, and they can look for opportunities to teach such behaviors (Sands, Spencer, Gliner, & Swaim, 1999).

Palmer and Wehmeyer (2002) noted, "Self-determination provides a framework for a lifelong pursuit of individually determined abilities and outcomes" (p. 1). Self-determination behaviors enable children to: (1) act autonomously, (2) self-regulate, (3) self-initiate, and (4) act in a self-realizing manner (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998). Self-determined children/students are better able to advocate, self-monitor, set goals, and make quality decisions about their lives (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000).

Nonetheless, researchers have noted differences in how families of dominant and diverse cultures promote self-determined behaviors in their children (Zhang & Benz, 2006; Zhang et al., 2010). While self-determined students may exhibit independent living skills, set goals, self-advocate, and make decisions, professionals must be culturally competent in their approach to CLD families when promoting and facilitating students' self-determination (Zhang & Benz, 2006; Zhang, et al., 2010).

For example, CLD families may not know what self-determination is or what these behaviors would look like in their children (Zhang et al., 2010). Additionally, educational professionals should facilitate CLD families in grasping what self-determination components are of value in the family and cultural contexts. See Figure 1 for a sample CLD family survey.

Professionals may share ideas on the ways CLD families can promote self-determined behaviors in their transition-age child (Zhang & Benz, 2006), including choosing a free-time activity, planning a family event, and facilitating goal-setting of long- and short-term goals. Professionals and families can work together to create goals that include the components of self-determination, such as problem solving and choice making (Wehmeyer et al., 2000). For instance, the professional can talk to CLD families about setting post-school academic goals, such as where the student will attend college, whether nearby or distant from home.

An additional way to build cultural competence is through community mapping. During this process, professionals and students acquaint themselves with the broad aspects of the students' domains and communities through which they might establish positive relationships (Tindle, Leconte, Buchanan, & Taymans, 2005). Professionals and students gather information about their communities by talking to residents and leaders, taking pictures, and mapping resources to share with families (Tindle et al., 2005). A professional's cultural awareness and competence promotes a student's community interdependence and real-life experience (Ankeny, Wilkins & Spain, 2009; Geenen, et al., 2001; 2005; Shafer & Rangasamy, 1995).

Step Three: Support Family Values

Professionals must provide opportunities for CLD students to transition into post-secondary life with their family values in tact. A professional can facilitate CLD students and families in identifying transition goals such as prevocational training, job placement, independent living, and community-based work experiences that are culturally appropriate and valuable to the families.

Also, professionals should continue to work with CLD families and students to develop individualized transition goals that families support at home (Povenmire-Kirk, Lindstrom, & Bullis, 2010). Several meetings may be held throughout the year to develop culturally appropriate individualized student transition goals.

Figure 1
Sample CLD Family Survey

Your Name:

Child's Name:

Date:

Your Preferred Choice of Communication (letter, phone, in person):

1. How can I best support your child?
2. What do you and your child enjoy doing together?
3. What community services or agencies are you familiar with?
4. What are some post-school concerns you have regarding your child's education?
5. Would you be willing to share your culture with the students and the class?
6. What child-led pursuits do you encourage?
7. What goals have you and your child set for the next year?
8. Who (family/community members/spiritual leaders) are regularly involved in your child's life?
9. What community programs or activities does your child participate in?
10. What values do you want your child to maintain in life?
11. What post-secondary academic goals do you have for your child?
12. Where do you see your child living after graduation?
13. What employment goals do you have for your child?
14. What skills do you want your child to achieve in the next year?
15. What can I do to support your family?

CLD students can benefit from educational practices that promote both professional and family involvement/collaboration (Benz et al., 2000).

Researchers recommended that professionals' help students develop transition goals linked to personalized career interests so as to promote long-term success in the workplace (Carter, Swedeen, & Trainor, 2009; Trainor, 2005). Natural supports such as occasional check-ins by family members assist students in acquiring and maintaining competitive employment (Carter et al., 2009; Frank & Sitlington, 2000).

Additionally, professionals' use of appropriate transition goals will be supported by CLD parents who prefer that their sons and daughters learn to be independent (Geeen, Powers, Lopez-Vasquez, & Bersani, 2003). See Table 1 for a list of strategies that professionals can use to support CLD students and families during transition planning.

Step Four: Promote a Family-Centered Approach

Professionals can promote a family-centered approach during transition planning while understanding and meeting the unique needs of their students. One way to do this is through the use of a student self-directed intervention (Shogren, 2011). To assist CLD students, professionals can introduce the *Self-Directed IEP* (Martin, Marshall, Maxson, & Jerman, 1996; Valenzuela & Martin, 2005) to facilitate CLD student and family voice.

The *Self-Directed IEP* benefits a student and his or her family in expressing self-advocacy. The intervention prepares the transition-age student to be a leader in his or her transition planning relative to the family or cultural group, and to the degree of independence or interdependence that matches the family preferences (Martin et al., 1996; Valenzuela & Martin, 2005).

Over the course of the year, a professional can prepare a CLD student to lead his or her transition meeting by having the student introduce everyone, state the purpose for the meeting, and share the progress made in meeting goals. See Table 2 for Chen's sample transition planning meeting (adapted from Martin et al., 1996).

Conclusion

Students with disabilities are often faced with leaving the classroom and entering the adult world unprepared (Frank & Sitlington, 2000; Wehman, 2006). In compliance with IDEA, professionals must teach students the essential skills necessary for a successful transition into adulthood. While students without disabilities routinely learn the skills needed to survive in the world, students with disabilities require extra time to develop and generalize

Table 1
Strategies to Support CLD Families and Students

Strategy	*Definition*
Support Quality of Life	Professionals must be familiar with and support what quality of life means to the individual student and his or her family when developing a culturally responsive transition plan. (Frankland, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Blackmountain, 2004)
Utilize Role Play	Professionals can prepare students ahead of time to understand their role in transition planning and to take the lead in transition planning meetings. (Thoma, Held, & Saddler, 2002; Valenzuela & Martin, 2005)
Share Culture	Professionals can encourage students to share information about their individual culture (e.g., beliefs). (Matuszny et al., 2007)
Find Natural Supports	Professionals must look for the natural supports that can facilitate a student's successful employment in the community. (Frank & Sitlington, 2001)
Model Acceptance	Professionals who model genuine acceptance of all students encourage similar social behaviors in their students. (Kaufmann & Ring, 2011)
Push and Support	Professionals can scaffold instruction, providing and fading supports as needed. (McMillan & Reed, 1994)
Facilitate Goal Setting	Early on, professionals gain input from students in developing age-appropriate goals. (Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003; Martin et al., 1996)
Value Family Voice	Professionals engage judicially in honoring different student cultures based on individually identified characteristics unique to the family dynamics. (Browder, Wood, Test, Karvonen & Algozzine, 2001)

Table 2
Sample Self-Directed IEP Meeting (adapted from Martin et al., 1996)

Student Steps	*Example*
Introduction of self	Chen introduces himself to the team members (e.g., Hi, my name is Chen).
Introduction of those in attendance	Chen introduces all team members (e.g., This is Ms. Gonzales, my special education teacher, this is Mr. Smith, my government teacher, this is Ms. Hong, my vocation teacher, etc).
Identify reason for meeting	Chen states the reason for the meeting (e.g., Welcome to my IEP and transition planning meeting. We are here to review my goals and to create new goals).
Discuss Progress	Chen discusses last year's goals (e.g., A goal from last year was to identify potential job sites. I met with three potential employers and left an application with an employer at a bookstore).
Elicit Reactions	Chen seeks reactions from the team (e.g., Dad, what do you think about me working at the bookstore? I would really like to work there).
Seek Additional Info	Chen seeks additional information when he does not understand something (e.g., Ms. Gonzales, can you explain what the YES Program is).
Address Disagreements	Chen addresses team members who disagree (e.g., Dad, I know you wanted me to wait to get a job, but after we all met last month, you agreed that I could work 10 hours a week).
Facilitate Success	Chen discusses his need for support (e.g., Dad, I need help in getting back and forth to work).
Identify Interests	Chen identifies his interests (e.g., I want to attend the local community college when I graduate. I can live at home and still help out).
Note Strengths	Chen shares his strengths (e.g., I am a hard worker, who can work long hours. But, I also want to help mom with my younger brothers and sisters).
Identify Goals	Chen identifies choices and objectives for the next year (e.g., I can ask dad to drop me off at work, but after talking with my parents, I want to learn to ride the bus to work).
End Meeting	Chen ends the meeting (e.g., Thank you for coming to my transition planning meeting).

vital skills. Preparing CLD students with disabilities to transition into post-school life requires a comprehensive transition plan (Geenen et al., 2001)

Professionals must address family culture and diversity when planning students' transition into the community (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2010). Culturally appropriate transition goals enhance a student's ability to attain his or her dream. Teachers need to be aware of the supports and agencies available to students and families. When CLD families and students are aware of the agencies that offer needed supports, they make more informed decisions.

Transition planning plays a fundamental role in the future successes of CLD families and students. Most professionals can agree that collaboration needs to occur between CLD families and students for successful transition planning; however, professionals must honor and respect CLD families' and students' needs and wants during this process (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001; Zhang, 2005).

Jung (2011) stressed the importance of valuing CLD families' opinions and cultural diversity bearing in mind that collaboration facilitates their participation in the planning process. Therefore, it is incumbent on professionals to provide CLD families with the appropriate supports to facilitate students' successful transitions in to post-secondary life. Incorporation of these steps and strategies by professionals and families collectively increase the likelihood of gratifying transition planning experiences for CLD students with disabilities.

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