Factors Influencing Transition For Students With Disabilities:The American Indian Experience

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The purpose of this study was to explore those factors impacting successful transition of American Indian students with mild to moderate disabilities to postsecondary academic settings and other lifelong learning opportunities. Thirty-five individuals from three Southwestern tribes were interviewed about personal factors during transition, and secondary, and postsecondary experiences. A second interview was conducted with 14 participants approximately two years later to follow-up on the progress of the student following transition. Many of the participants did not see themselves as active participants in the IEP process and educational placements ranged from inclusive to more traditional resource classrooms and self-contained settings. Secondary teachers and mentors offered support and encouragement to participants. Fewer participants received accommodations in postsecondary settings, and in some instances instructors lacked an understanding about ADA and ways to modify instruction. Participants highlighted the importance of family and religion in their lives throughout the transition process. Those participating in both interviews showed statistically significant positive change in self-ratings of dimensions of self advocacy and self-determination. Implications of the findings will be discussed.

Secondary and postsecondary educational programs for young adults with disabilities that aim to promote resilience and minimize risk factors will result in the most favorable outcomes. This is particularly true for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students whose educational experiences can be discordant with their cultural and linguistic heritage (Avoke & Simon-Burroughs, 2007; Greene & Nefsky, 1999). Longitudinal studies have shown that CLD youth with disabilities are not as successful as their non-CLD counterparts (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996)

American Indian youth who have a disability, like others who are CLD, may face added challenges during transition from high school. They are more likely to experience poverty, be less proficient in English, encounter difficulties with social relationships, and have less access to technology (Leake & Black, 2005). Moreover, their cultural values and beliefs may impact achievement of self advocacy and self determination.

Adolescence is recognized an important developmental period bridging early childhood and adulthood and is shaped by a wide range of factors for all individuals, including those with disabilities. Understanding the process whereby these factors exert influence individually and collectively on the adolescent will enable us to design and implement more effective educational practices. In a national longitudinal study that included 90,000 adolescents three factors were found to be associated with positive outcomes. These included the support and guidance of family, positive school experiences and personal characteristics of the student (Blum & Rinehart, 1997). The results from this and other studies present us with important insights regarding approaches for helping adolescents succeed.

As our country experiences major demographic changes we must examine more closely those factors impacting developmental and educational outcomes for adolescents who are CLD. Recent studies (Campbell, Pungello & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Trusty, Plata, & Salazar, 2003) focus on CLD youth and represent an important step in furthering our understanding of important socio-cultural variables.
Fewer studies focus on American Indian youth, representing over five hundred tribes, each with its own unique geographical and cultural context. Bergstrom, Cleary and Peacock (2003) conducted in-depth interviews of 120 native youth to identify those factors that contributed to their success. The authors

emphasized the importance of connections to parents, community, teachers and schools. They also noted that tribal, cultural, and personal characteristics and resources contribute to positive outcomes for youth.

Collectively these studies make important contributions to our understanding of those factors associated with positive outcomes for young adults. Yet, we know little about those factors that impact the transitional process for American Indian youth with disabilities. The purpose of this study is to explore those factors that contribute to successful transition to postsecondary education settings. The study will focus on three categories of factors including personal (personal, familial, cultural and socioeconomic), characteristics of secondary programs (resources, instruction, expectations, etc.) and characteristics of postsecondary programs (resources, supports, etc.).

Method
This study is a part of a larger multi-site national study that was five years in duration. Data were collected at five sites for the purpose of identifying those factors influencing postsecondary outcomes for CLD students who were eligible for special education in high school. The design of the study allowed the research team to explore a wide range of variables through the different phases of data collection. During the first phase interviews with individuals who had made the transition were conducted. During the second phase a subset of those individuals perceived to be successful was convened in a focus group to further explore those factors that influenced their ability to successfully transition. In the third phase case studies of two individuals judged to be successful were compiled to illustrate their personal stories. Those factors that were identified in the first phases of the study were explored further in the final phase of the study through follow-up interviews and focus groups, giving a longitudinal perspective. Through this iterative process members of the research team were able to substantiate certain factors and explore the nature of their impact further.

All aspects of the investigation were informed by Participatory Action Research (PAR) teams at each site who met semi-annually for the duration of the project. The PAR teams offered critical insights in revisions of interview protocols, recruitment efforts, procedures, and interpretation of the findings. The focus of this paper will be the interviews conducted in the first and final stages of this project.

Participants
Initial Interview: Individuals who are American Indian who received services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and have transitioned from high school were recruited to participate in this study. A final sample that included both *successful* and *unsuccessful* individuals was desired. Recruitment involved a number of steps. First, we identified programs and or individuals who could assist in the recruitment process. Vocational Rehabilitation Services, disability support programs at community colleges and universities, and Native Americans for Community Action, a regional program providing a wide range of services to Native American people were all identified. Members of the research team met with representatives from these programs to discuss the study and explore recruitment strategies. Additionally, the team met with the PAR team who suggested specific strategies for recruitment and some members of the PAR team even assisted in contacting others to inform them about the study. Staff from university programs designed to support American Indian students also assisted in the recruitment process. Because of confidentiality, names of individuals could not be released to the research team necessitating an approach that relied on potential participants to contact the team. Flyers describing the key purpose of the study, what the participant would be asked to do and the monetary incentive ($25) were dispersed to programs and also posted on campuses, and key community locations.

The research team is situated in close proximity to the Navaho nation and tribal lands for several other American Indian tribes. Recruitment efforts targeted all tribes living within 200 miles in an effort to obtain a sample that had representation from more than one tribe.

There were 35 participants in the initial interview and 14 in the follow-up interview. Demographic information about participants is presented in Table 1. At the time of the initial interview the vast majority (83%) of the participants was enrolled in or had completed some form of post secondary education. Most of those participating in the follow-up interview (79%) indicated they were attending school or working, while some (21%) were unemployed.

Table 1

– Demographic Information about Participants

Demographic Information	Initial Interview	Follow-up Interview
Tribal Affiliation		
Navaho	27	11
Hopi or Hopi-Tewa	4	2
Apache	2	1
Navaho/Hopi	1	
Gender		
Male	18	6
Female	17	8
Age		
18-30	31	12
Over 30	4	2
Disability		
Learning Disability	19	8
Visual Impairment or Blind	6	3
Orthopedic Impairment	3	
Traumatic Brain Injury	2	1
Hearing Impairment or Deaf	3	1
Speech Difficulty	2	
Marital Status		
Single	30	12
Married	5	2
Children	7	5
Primary language in home during childhood		
English	15	5
Navaho	11	6
English and Native Language	8	1
Apache	1	1
Current primary language		
English	26	10
English and Native Language	8	4
American Sign Language	1	

Measures
Initial Interview Protocol: An interview protocol was developed that included items drawn from other measures used in other postsecondary studies. Items from measures that were already piloted and validated in previous studies (California and Hawaii Post-school Follow-up Studies of Individuals with Disabilities and the National Survey of Educational Support Provision to Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education Settings) were included in the item pool. All members of the research and PAR teams at each site reviewed the initial protocols. The interview protocol was piloted at different field sites and revisions were made.

The final protocol contained 62 questions divided into eight sections (general information, educational experience, post-secondary services and supports, employment, family history, peers/socialization, locus of control, and success). Fifteen questions were short-answer allowing the individual to offer further explanation of ratings or to expand upon their responses.

The General Information section included demographic questions. Questions in the Educational Experience section focused on the individual's goals while in high school, his or her involvement in and satisfaction with the IEP process, the location and types of special educational services and supports received, and satisfaction with high school and post-secondary supports. The individual's need for and access to services and supports in the postsecondary setting as well as the coordination of services were examined in the Post Secondary Services and Supports section. The individual's employment history and plans for employment were the focus of questions in the Employment section. The educational and employment status of the individual's parents and the family's support were explored in the Family History section. The Peers and Socialization section focused on the language of the participant and his or her religious practices as well as characteristics of peers and the high school

activities. The individual was asked to self-rate on three questions pertaining to Locus of Control in the next section and reflect on his or her definition and attainment of success in the section on Success.

Follow-Up Interview Protocol: The follow-up interview protocol was shorter as it was unnecessary to include many questions for which the responses would be unchanged. Questions included in the protocol allowed the respondent to reflect on changes in experiences and perspectives from the initial survey. Questions for the protocol sought to expand upon the findings of the first interviews and focus groups. The protocol was reviewed by all members of the research team and revised accordingly.

The final form of the interview protocol contained 40 questions clustered in seven sections (general information, post-secondary educational experiences, other agencies, employment, other life domains, locus of control and success). A larger number of the questions were short answer, allowing the individual to elaborate on ratings or provide further description or explanation.

Each individual updated information about current activities and living arrangements in the first section. Those individuals participating in postsecondary programs were asked questions about their progress, the types of services and supports used and what barriers he or she may have faced in the Post-Secondary Educational Experiences section. The questions included in the Other Agencies section asked the individual to identify the scope of services he or she may have received and to rate the quality of the service(s). In the Employment section the individual updated his or her progress toward employment and rated various dimensions of the work environment. The individual was asked a few questions pertaining to relationships with other people, leisure activities and the role of religion in his or her life in the Other Life Domains section. Questions in the Locus of Control and Success sections were identical to those in the initial interview protocol.

Procedure
Before this project could be undertaken IRB approval was obtained. During the first stage of the project the team focused on developing and refining the interview protocol, recruitment of participants and convening the PAR team, which would be comprised of five to seven CLD individuals with disabilities. The first order of business at the initial meeting of the PAR team was to review the interview protocol. Their comments and recommendations were forwarded to the principle investigator of the larger study who collected feedback from all five sites. Revisions of the instrument were made the protocol was finalized. As noted previously a number of steps were taken to recruit and select individuals to interview. Members of the research team were trained to conduct the interviews in a manner that was culturally sensitive and uniform across participants. Accommodations were made when necessary (e.g., using an interpreter). Arrangements for childcare were also made available to those individuals who requested them so that they could participate in the interview.

Procedures for data collection were modified from those that were originally proposed for the larger study. The plan was to interview participants by phone; however, it was suggested by the PAR team that all interviews be conducted in person. Members of the PAR team felt very strongly that American Indian youth would not be responsive in a phone interview. This change in procedure necessitated an approach whereby members of the research team traveled to different locations to interview individuals. In almost all cases the initial interviews were ultimately conducted in person.

The sequence of research activities for the larger project began with initial interviews in the first year and a half of the project. In the second and third years focus groups and case studies were conducted. Participants from the original survey and focus groups were contacted in the fourth and fifth year of the project to participate in the follow-up survey. Using contact information obtained at the time of the original survey, attempts were made to contact all individuals. Many attempts were made to locate individuals whose contact information was not current. While the majority of interviews were conducted in person, out of necessity some of the interviews had to be conducted over the phone as participants were no longer living in close proximity to the research team.

Data Analysis
Responses to closed-ended questions were entered into the database and responses to open-ended questions were saved into text files. All entries into the database and text files were verified to assure accuracy. The initial analysis included all participants while a secondary analysis was made by

category of disability. Transcripts of responses to open-ended questions were organized by question. Two members of the research team reviewed responses to familiarize themselves with the responses and to develop a preliminary coding system for themes. After discussing the preliminary findings team members conducted a second reading and identified themes. They met and identified themes and a system for coding the responses; discrepancies were discussed and consensus was reached.

All transcripts of the open-ended questions were analyzed and coded by both researchers. This process was done in this manner for both interviews. Cohen's Kappa was computed for all coding of the transcripts. The Cohen's Kappa for the first interview transcripts ranged from 72% to 91% with a mean of 84%. Cohen's Kappa for the second interview transcripts ranged from 73% to 100% with a mean of 90.3%.

Descriptive statistics were computed for data collected from both interviews. T-tests were conducted on self-rating items that were included in both the initial and follow-up interviews.

Results
The findings from both interviews will be organized according to sections of the interview protocol. Descriptive statistics from the initial interview will be presented first followed by those of the follow-up interview. Statistical comparisons of items included in both interviews will be described.

Initial Interview
Educational Experiences: The majority (85%) indicated that they had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and or a 504 plan while in high school while others (8%) could not remember and some (9%) indicated they did not receive any special education services. Many participants spent all or most of their time in the general education setting while others were in self-contained classrooms or programs (See Figure 1). Students with learning disabilities were educated in general education classrooms full time (53%) or the majority of the time with some pull-out services (26%). Some students with learning disabilities indicated they were educated in a self-contained setting with some inclusive activities (21%). As a group, those students eligible under other categories reported receiving services in both inclusive and self-contained settings. Participants were asked about their IEP, supports, and services received while in high school (See Table 2). When asked to identify those issues of personal importance during the planning process, many (46%) were concerned about their performance in and completion of high school while others (37%) were more concerned about postsecondary goals, and life and work-related skills. Rating of satisfaction with the IEP can be found in Table 3.
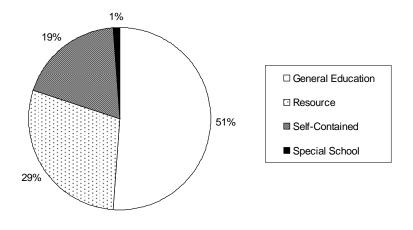

Figure 1
Primary High School Placements

Table 2
Access to services and support in high school

Question	*Yes* Responses (n) (%)	*No* Responses (n) (%)	*Don't know/not sure* Responses (n) (%)
Did teachers support you in reaching your goals?	30 (86 %)	4 (11 %)	1 (3%)
Did special education help you achieve your goals for after high school?	21 (68%)	7 (23%)	3 (9%)
While in high school, did you know you had a right to attend and participate in IEP meetings?	22 (71%)	7 (23%)	2 (6%)
Were you invited to attend IEP meetings?	25 (81%)	4 (13%)	2 (6%)
Were you encouraged to participate in IEP meetings?	22 (63%)	7 (20%)	6 (17%)
Did you use assistive technology in school?	15 (43%)	16 (46%)	4 (11%)
Were there any AT devices you needed, but didn't get?	5 (14%)	25 (71%)	5 (14%)
Did you have a quiet place to study at home?	24 (69%)	10 (29%)	1 (2%)

Table 3
– Mean Scores for Rating Questions*

Focus of Rating	Mean Rating	Standard Deviation
Initial Interview (N = 35)		
Enjoyment of High School	4.29	.83
Satisfaction with IEP/504 Plan	3.79	1.06
Importance of religion during high school	3.69	1.42
Comfort level with asking others for help	3.03	1.22
Control over your life	3.60	1.44
Comfort level with trying out new ideas	4.00	1.08
Follow-up Interview (N = 14)		
Importance of living independently	4.04	1.01
Satisfaction with living/housing	3.75	1.05
Degree of acceptance from other students in postsecondary setting	3.70	.823
Degree of acceptance from faculty or staff	4.10	.568
Satisfaction with services provided by non-education agencies	4.09	.944
Degree of acceptance by co-workers	4.41	.86
Degree of acceptance and support from supervisors or managers	4.27	.905
Satisfaction with work skills	4.45	.57
Satisfaction with personal relationships	4.64	.53
Satisfaction with leisure time and activities	4.32	1.07
Importance of religion	4.21	1.12
Comfort level with asking others for help	4.07	.997
Control over your life	4.11	1.18
Comfort with trying out new ideas	4.21	.80
Perception of success since leaving high school	4.39	.56

*Likert Scale ratings used (1-5 with 5 the highest rating)

Those who use assistive technology (AT) were asked to identify the principle devices and accommodations they received from a list. In all cases the AT appeared to be appropriate given the individual's disability. A small minority of individuals (15%) felt they needed AT that they did not receive. Of those individuals who used AT fewer than half (48%) received specialized training in how to use the device(s).

Four survey questions focused on the individual's goals after leaving high school. Most of the participants (86%) wanted to attend postsecondary school while some (23%) wanted to work (percentages do not add up to 100 as individuals could select more than one response). When asked what their family's goals were for them, the principle goals identified were postsecondary school (74%) and work (17%). A similar question asked what the teacher's goals for the individual were and the majority (69%) thought the teachers wanted them to go to postsecondary school, while some (14%)

thought the teachers wanted them to work and others (17%) indicated they did not know. Many (86%) indicated that their teachers did provide them support and direction to help them reach their goals while in high school. When asked to identify the ways in which teachers supported them the following were identified: encouragement and moral support (47%), guidance and assistance during high school (18%), focusing on specific skills needed for postsecondary settings (15%), information about higher education (12%), and information about supports, services, and programs for students with disabilities in postsecondary settings (6%).

Many (63%) noted that they had a mentor while in high school. In most instances that mentor was someone associated with the school (e.g., teacher, instructional assistant, counselor, coach, or principal). Mentors were described as supporting the students by offering encouragement (47%), instructional support (29%) and advisement and informational support (18%).

Postsecondary services and supports: The majority of the participants (55%) indicated they received services or supports while attending college while others (45%) did not. Individuals with learning disabilities were less likely to have received services or supports (43%). Close to one third of the participants felt that services or supports had been unavailable or denied to them. When asked what they were doing to make up for needed services or supports there were a variety of answers. Many turned to others such as the teacher, classmates, and family members while others depended upon themselves to get what they needed or make do without them. Participants were asked who were coordinating or managing their services identified different persons including vocational rehabilitation counselor (72%), college disability support personnel (40%), family or friends (28%) and self (40%). Half of the participants indicated that more than one person was managing services for them.

Employment: Most worked during and after high school, often in positions in the service industry. Seventy percent of those not working at the time of the interview indicated that it was because they were going to school. Others indicated they were currently looking for work (19%), felt they would lose benefits (7%), encountered difficulty getting to work because of transportation problems (7%) and had given up after being unsuccessful (3%). The types of jobs participants wanted included professional (34%), skilled labor (31%), and clerical (12%).

Family History: Forty-six percent of the participants indicated that both parents were responsible for them while in high school, while 23% identified extended family and 29% identified their mothers. A significant portion of the mothers (73%) and fathers (84%) reportedly completed high school and some attended college. Occupations of parents of the participants were most often described as skilled labor (65%), professional (12%) and craftsmen (12%). Seven percent of the parents were unemployed. Most participants (85%) felt their family supported them while in high school to reach their goals. When asked how their families supported them the majority (72%) described support as encouragement and advice. Some participants recognized the help they received with their homework (12%) and financial support (9%).

Several questions pertaining to the cultural and religious beliefs of the participant were asked. According to the participants most of the parents identify themselves using tribal affiliations (e.g., Navaho) while others (43%) prefer to identify themselves as American Indian. The majority of participants (59%) indicated that they were active in a religion while in high school. Those who did were affiliated with the Native religion (71%) or a Christian church (33%). Ratings of importance of religion while in high school are shown in Table 3.

Peers and Socialization: Most or all of the friends of the majority of participants (66%) graduated from high school. Seventeen percent of the participants specified that most or all of their friends went on to postsecondary education. While in high school the majority of the participants described the activities they most often engaged in with their friends as *hanging out* (54%). Other activities included organized activities such as sports and church (20%), and studying (13%). Participants were asked to rate how often they participated in specific activities with friends and family (See Table 4 – next page).

Table 4
Mean Frequency Ratings of Participation in Selected Activities during High School

(N = 35)*	
Activity	Mean Score
Watching television/videos/ games	3.0
Hobbies	2.7
Sports	2.9
Hanging out with friends	3.2
Going to parties	1.4
Dating	1.3
Shopping	2.3
Reading	2.7

*Ratings were 1=rarely or never, 2=1-2 times a week, 3=3-4 times a week and 4=daily

Locus of Control: Each participant was asked three questions regarding locus of control in which they rated themselves on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest. On all three questions the mean rating for the group was very close to the middle anchor rating of 3 (See Table 3 for mean rating scores).

Success: The majority of the participants (86%) felt they were successful or somewhat successful in high school. Most of the participants (39%) define *success* as reaching one's goals and a few (17%) define it in broader terms of happiness and satisfaction. Others identified specific achievements such as employment, education, becoming independent, having material possessions, improving one's self and making a difference. Those who felt they were successful in high school attributed their success to performance and completion of school, social relationships, being motivated and having a positive outlook and sense of competence. Those who felt they were *somewhat successful in high school* noted a wide variety of issues affecting their success including the academic challenges and failure, lack of motivation, distractibility, feelings of isolation and lack of teacher support. Those who felt unsuccessful in high school attributed it to academic challenges, learned helplessness and lack of motivation or interest in the curriculum.
Participants were asked to describe their personal strengths. Personal strengths ranged from having an easy going or friendly manner (21%), positive attitude (18%), to having a good work ethic and work skills (27%). Others noted that they are motivated or have talents or skills.

Follow-up Interview
Participants in the initial interview were contacted by telephone or letter to arrange a follow-up interview. The research team made every effort to contact all participants, but in many cases the contact information was no longer correct. Fourteen individuals were interviewed a second time and demographic characteristics of those individual are presented in Table 1. The average length of time between the two surveys was 28.9 months (range: 17 to 35 months).

General Information: Participants were asked questions pertaining to their living and school/work situation. The majority (79%) indicated they were attending school or working, while 29% were unemployed. When asked how they got around in the community most specified walking (50%) or driving a car (43%). Fifty-seven percent of the participants indicated that they used more than one means of transportation.

Forty-three percent of the participants were living with their parents and 21% lived in the dorm. Participants were asked to rate their feelings about independent living and how satisfied they are with their current living situation (See Table 3). In general most were satisfied with their living arrangement and many noted that they liked to live independently. Those who were living with their parents were more likely to be less satisfied with their living arrangements.

Postsecondary Education Experiences: Thirty-six percent of the participants had been attending a postsecondary educational program at the time of the initial interview. Forty percent of those participating I the follow-up survey had completed their education and the remaining 60% were still in school. Students attributed poor progress to personal reasons (e.g., needed to be home with their family) or to the educational program. Several individuals attributed their difficulties to instructors who did not understand their needs and two identified transportation issues.
Other Agencies: Fifty percent of the participants receive services from Vocational Rehabilitation Services Administration or the Social Security Administration (43%). They indicated that they were

somewhat satisfied with these services (See Table 3), often identifying the types of services received, such as financial support (43%).

Employment: Most of those who had jobs (64%) revealed that they obtained employment themselves without assistance from others. General satisfaction was expressed about their work skills, relationships with co-workers and supervisors (See Table 4). Reasons for relatively high ratings were attributed to attitudes of others and expectations and support from supervisors.

Other Life Domains: When asked who they were closest to most participants identified a member of the immediate or extended family (85%) with *mother* most often named (31%). Participants were quite satisfied with their relationships with others (see Table 3) and attributed that satisfaction to their own ability to get along as well as the benefits from the relationships (e.g., support and affection). When asked about their religious beliefs, most felt religion was important or very important (see Table 3). Thirty-six percent described religion as being integrated into their daily lives, while 29% described themselves as attending church services.

Locus of Control: The same three questions were asked of the participants that were asked in the first interview. The mean rating for each question is shown in Table 3. Participants had a group mean that was higher for all three questions on the follow-up interview when compared to the initial interview. Participant's ratings of their willingness to ask others for help changed for those that participated in the follow-up interview from a mean of 2.71 to 4.07. T-tests were conducted for the three questions and the ratings on all three were found to be statistically significant.

Success: Most of the participants felt they had been successful since leaving high school (see Table 3). When asked why they felt they were successful the 67% indicated they had a strong sense of self worth or were working toward or achieving their personal goals. Future indicators of success that were most frequently identified were finishing school or getting a job.

Discussion
This study examined those factors impacting transition of American Indian students with disabilities through initial and follow-up interviews. The participants in this study were from three different Southwestern tribes and represented a range of disability categories under IDEA, with the majority being Learning Disabled. Many of the participants learned a native language or a combination of their native language and English when they were growing up. Religion, both native beliefs and Christianity, is integral to the lives of many of the participants.

IDEA has historically promoted least restrictive environments for eligible students, and in recent years promotes maximum participation in the general education classroom whenever possible. High expectations should be set for students with disabilities (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000) and a large percentage of students with learning disabilities should be educated in the general education classroom. However, many of the participants in this study were still receiving pullout services and some were primarily educated in a self-contained classroom. Participants with other disabilities experienced a range of different placements, including specialized school. While inclusion has been promoted for a number of years, it appears that some schools may be slower to embrace the concept of inclusion or implement strategies that facilitate inclusive practices.

A framework for transition proposed by Kohler and Field (2003) includes five areas of practice incorporating *student-focused planning, student development, interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration, family involvement and program structure and attributes* (p. 176). The majority of participants in this study were familiar with the IEP, but did not see themselves as active participants in the meetings. This would suggest that person-centered planning and self-determination are not fully realized for all American Indian students with disabilities even though they are generally associated with improved outcomes (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Zhang & Benz, 2006). This may be attributed to a lack of understanding of self-determination and strategies that promote it as teachers revealed in a study conducted by Grigal, Neubert, Moon & Graham (2003). Alternately, this may be occurring as a result of a commonly held perception that self-determination is not compatible with native beliefs. Frankland, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, and Blackmountain (2004) concluded that the construct of self-determination is relevant to the Dine' (Navaho) culture, but expressed somewhat differently. They suggest that individuals who are Navaho emphasize the importance of interdependence rather than

independence as a goal of self- determination. Trainor (2008) emphasizes the importance of using *cultural and social capital* to improve transitional outcomes for CLD students (p. 149).

Participants in this study felt their family and high school teachers supported them in reaching their goals, and appeared to place more value on their teachers than the special education enterprise itself. Teachers can and do play an important role in mentoring students and participants in this study identify many ways their teachers contributed to their success. They indicated that teachers usually supported them by offering encouragement and moral support. The participants in this study valued teachers who were supportive and have many of the characteristics identified by other researchers (Bergstrom et al., 2003; Jackson, Smith & Hill, 2003). Beyond showing interest in the student and being supportive, special educators can and should provide needed guidance and specific information to students so they can be successful in high school and ready themselves for postsecondary educational or work settings.

Accessing services and supports in postsecondary settings appears to be an issue for a number of the participants in this study, particularly those with learning disabilities. Graduating students entering postsecondary educational settings should be knowledgeable about the steps needed to obtain assistance with accommodations in their academic programs (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2007). Nonetheless, many of those who did not receive formalized services and supports took initiative in getting the help they needed.

Poor progress in their college careers was often attributed to personal reasons, but in some cases students identified the educational program itself as being a barrier for them. More training may be needed for instructors who are not aware of the ADA requirements for students with disabilities (Dona & Edmister, 2001) or who have low expectations for students with disabilities (Rao, 2004).

Students participating in the follow-up survey highlighted the importance of family and religion in their lives. Families were supportive and helped the students work toward their goals and should be more fully engaged in the transition process (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001). Many lived with their families, while completing their postsecondary education. Self-ratings of comfort levels of asking others for help, trying out new ideas and taking control over one's life increased from the initial interview to the follow-up interview. Whether this is attributed to maturation or life experiences these changes reflect an increased level of self-advocacy and self-determination.

Limitations of Study
The results of this study cannot be generalized to American Indians from other tribes living in different regions of the country. The final sample included individuals with a variety of disabilities, but was heavily represented by students with learning disabilities and did not include students eligible under all categories of eligibility.

To accurately portray how successful students were in meeting their transition goals, more time should lapse between the two interviews. The goal of obtaining employment may not be achievable for the youth in this study because there are fewer job opportunities in communities on the reservation lands for young adults with and without disabilities (Ramasamy, 1996).

Implications for Practice:
Secondary teachers supporting CLD students with disabilities in the transitional process must recognize the importance of the student's connections to his or her family and community. Person-centered planning approaches should begin early in students' academic career so that they are better prepared to make decisions and advocate for themselves. American Indian students should be given the opportunity to engage in the IEP process in a meaningful way. They may not choose to assume the lead, but can and should be encouraged to participate more fully in setting goals pertaining to transition. Special educators should be more systematic in their approach to helping students transition and promote the knowledge and skills students will need to reach their postsecondary educational goals.

Instructional staff and faculty in postsecondary settings should be better prepared to teach American Indian students with disabilities. They should become familiar with the requirements of ADA and the resources available to students needing accommodations. Further training may be necessary to achieve this goal.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

This study explored a range of factors impacting transition of American Indian students with disabilities. Thirty-five students with mild to moderate disabilities were interviewed immediately after transition and 14 of those participants were interviewed approximately two years later. The results of this study emphasize the importance of the students' relationships with adults in the educational setting, their families, and their cultural milieu that are important for all American Indian youth (Bergstrom et al., 2003). American Indian students with disabilities bring important cultural values to the academic setting that can be an important source of resilience and should be recognized. Preparing students to participate more fully in the IEP process in high school will give them the skills necessary to achieve their goals in postsecondary educational settings. Teachers who promote these skills and provide students with information and strategies they can use to be successful in higher education will see better results for their students. Further training of higher education staff and faculty is necessary to facilitate student participation in all academic activities.

Future research should explore the ways effective transition practices can be modified for American Indian students with disabilities. Particular emphasis should be placed on culturally sensitive approaches for promoting self-determination for these students. It is also recommended that factors impacting transition be conducted with participants from other tribes in the country to extend the research literature on American Indian students with disabilities. Finally, ways to improve training of professionals working with American Indian students with disabilities during transition is critical if we expect to see progress in the future.

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