Supporting Culturally Diverse Families in Transition Planning

Mary E. Morningstar
Arizona Transition Conference
Phoenix AZ
October 15, 2012
Culture refers to...

- Knowledge, concepts, and values shared by members of a group through systems of communication
- Common beliefs, symbols, and interpretations that shape human behavior in generally predictable ways
- Gender, Ethnicity, Race, Class, Language, Exceptionality, Religion, Geography, Age, Learning Style
- Not static, cannot be determined by ethnicity alone, and is not a “risk factor to be lessened or reduced” (Barrera & Corso, 2003)

It is not just a racial or ethnic consideration!

Interaction between People in a Given Environment

### STUDENT OUTCOMES 6 years after HS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African Am</th>
<th>Latino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any postsecondary school</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed at time of interview</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave Hourly wage</td>
<td>$9.70</td>
<td>$8.40</td>
<td>$8.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No engagement</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living independently</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking account</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHY CULTURAL DIVERSITY WITHIN TRANSITION

- Limited & conflicting understanding of type of involvement of families
- Professionals attribute lack of involvement as “apathy”
- “Involvement” means school meetings, which most CLD families place less value on
- Contextual, attitudinal, language, bureaucratic barriers
- Unfamiliar with US special education

- Professionals define transition as:
  - Independence
  - Autonomy
  - Individualism

- CLD families consider:
  - Interdependence & collectivism
  - Success in school contributes to family well-being

Thinking about Transition to Adulthood….

• What do you consider to be a successful adult life for students with disabilities?

• Why do we need transition planning?

• How should families be involved?
What’s so Important about Family Involvement during Transition?

Parent involvement in transition has an impact:

- Postschool employment outcomes
- Positive educational outcomes
- Independent living
- Academic achievement: High expectations = better achievement
- Increased school attendance; decreased dropouts; better attitudes toward school
- Role models for student postschool outcome expectations
- Families provide:
  - Information about strengths, interests, needs and desires
  - Consistent source of support throughout the lifespan
  - High expectations
  - Support from family & friends

(Devlienger & Trach, 1999; Pleet, 2000; Field & Hoffman, 1999; Lindstrom, Doren and Benz, 2004; Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, & Zane, 2007; Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1995; Wehmeyer, Morningstar, & Husted, 1999; Timmons, Whitney-Thomas, McIntyre, Butterworth, & Allen, 2004; Wandry & Pleet, 2004; Leake & Boone, 2007; )
In a mobile, all the pieces, no matter what the size or shape, can be grouped together and balanced by shortening or lengthening the strings attached, or rearranging the distance between pieces.

So it is with a family. None of the family members is identical to any other; they are all different and at different levels of growth.

As in a mobile, you can’t arrange one without thinking of the other.

Changing Characteristics of Families:
What does it mean for us?

- What are our current expectations for families to be engaged in transition?
- Can we expect single-parent families working full-time to be equal partners in transition?
- Do we need to rethink meetings?
- Does the changing composition of families impact our assumptions about postschool outcomes?
Where are there Differences

U.S. schools perspectives about transition planning and services.

Vs.

CLD families’ perspectives about transition planning and services.

1. Distribution of information
2. Definition of transition
3. Disability
4. Adulthood
5. Employment
6. Family Involvement
7. Authority figures

**Distributing Information about Transition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S. Schools</th>
<th>CLD Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mailings</td>
<td>Preaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochures</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Informal Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flyers</td>
<td>Religious Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendars</td>
<td>One-on-one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>Family/Clan gatherings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>Parent support groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Fairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let’s compare- Defining Transition

U.S. belief

• Legal requirements
• Formal process
• Independent Adult outcomes

CLD Families

• Home-centered, sheltered
• Community cares for their own
• Do not seek services outside family/clan/tribe
• Embedded within family

Let’s compare - Disability

**U.S. belief**
- Positive
- Natural experience
- Contributions
- Accommodations
- Remediation

**CLD Families**
- Denial
- Shame
- Blame
- Spirit, not defect
- Acceptance

Adapted from: Nix, T. (2010). *Transition Planning and Services: Empowering Diverse Families.* Lawrence, KS
Let’s compare- Adulthood

**U.S. belief**
- Independence
- Self-determination
- Employed
- Postsecondary Education
- Living on own

**CLD Families**
- Interdependent
- Dependent
- Rites of passage

Let’s compare - School Involvement

U.S. belief
- Attend school meetings
- IEPs
- Homework
- School Functions
- Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Paperwork
- Visiting school

CLD Families
- “Recursive cycle of disengagement”
- High regard for education
- Perfunctory involvement (say yes)
- Lack of respect from school
- Don’t understand legal issues
- Reliance on community networks

Let’s compare- Authority figures

**U.S. belief**
- Experts
- Parents and teacher are partners
- Collaborate with families

**CLD Families**
- Experts
- Untrustworthy
- Teachers know best
- Teacher should handle problems
- Teacher’s don’t try as hard with children with disabilities
- High level of respect
- Do as teacher says

CLD Family Involvement during Transition

• Families want their child to be as capable and self-sufficient as possible
• Families seek majority of support from informal and community networks
• Families view certain transition activities as highly important
• Families priorities for involvement differ from professional priorities (family and culture)
• Report more negative experiences than Euro-American families
• Parental influence leads to more positive outcomes
• Caring professionals who were honest, clear and knowledgeable & shared information and listened to families made a difference
• Strong partnerships promotes cultural understanding & responsiveness in transition planning

Steps to Cultural Reciprocity

Step 1: Identify the cultural values embedded in the professional interpretation of a student's disability and special services

Step 2: Find out whether the family recognizes and values these assumptions, and if not, how their view differs from yours

Step 3: Acknowledge and give explicit respect to any cultural differences and fully explain the cultural basis of the professional assumption

Step 4: Through discussion and collaboration, set about determining the most effective way of adapting professional interpretation and services to the family's value system

Kalyanpur & Harry 1999
Strategies to Enhance Transition & Cultural Competence

• **Seek out Informal Social Supports**
  – “cultural brokering” liaisons who can negotiate solutions acceptable to CLD families
  – Visit informal cultural networks
  – Offer workshops @ ICNs for families using culturally responsive methods

• **Empower families**
  – Provide culturally responsive information & teaching
  – Collaborate with extended family members
  – Learn about how families support transition at home & in community

• **Enhance cultural competence**
  – Know your own world view
  – Learn about your families
  – Acknowledge and respect cultural views
  – Develop mutual goals

Outreach to Diverse Families During Transition

Strategies

- Distributing Information to CLD Families During Transition Planning

- Overcoming Barriers to School Involvement when Working with CLD Families

- Partnership Suggestions from Informal Community Networks