

Culturally Responsive Transition Planning

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Introduction

The demographics of Virginia's public schools are changing dramatically. Over the past ten years, minority student enrollment has increased as a reflection of ever-changing communities (Virginia Board of Education, 2018). This increasing population of students is typically categorized as being from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds, including African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, Pacific Islanders, students who speak English as a second language, and students who have immigrant or undocumented status (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, 2017). According to 2018 VDOE Fall Membership data, 52% of secondary students with disabilities in Virginia were from the CLD population (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). Current research indicates that students from CLD backgrounds do not always fare well when it comes to major transition outcomes (PACER Center, 2017). While best practices should be utilized for **all** students, effective transition planning will require more intentional efforts on the part of educators and service providers to improve their knowledge and skills in the area of culturally responsive transition planning.

Phrases such as **cultural competence, cultural responsivity, and cultural reciprocity** are interchangeably used in studies on educating students from CLD backgrounds. However, to fully understand how to develop culturally responsive transition plans for these students, it is important to focus on one question: "What do educators and other transition professionals need to do differently to meet the unique needs of this population and subsequently improve outcomes?" This topical paper presents research designed to answer this question and discusses implications for practice.

What the Research Tells Us

When planning for positive postsecondary outcomes for CLD students, trying to understand diversity in its many facets is not enough. Special education teachers need to develop cultural competence, examine their own cultural values, and recognize how students' diversity affects their future planning (Povenmire-Kirk, Bethune, Alverson, & Kahn, 2015). Subsequently, when engaging in transition planning for CLD youth, some issues to consider include:

- a lack of understanding of each other's cultures occurs between families and schools,

- language differences are viewed as a liability instead of a strength,
- stereotypical biases exist on both sides, and
- generational differences related to transition outcomes and family values occur (e.g., conflicts may exist between students and parents about types of jobs, expectations, risk taking, security, and availability or knowledge of training experiences).

Much of the literature on CLD students has focused on the overrepresentation of specific cultural groups within special education (Ford, 2012), and few studies have revealed promising transition practices for educators working with CLD students. Research reveals that the ability of special educators and transition personnel to be competent in the use of cultural reciprocity, person-centered planning, and skilled dialogue greatly facilitates successful outcomes (Greene, 2011). Effective culturally responsive transition planning requires forming collaborative relationships with CLD families and youth with disabilities (Greene, 2011). It is important that students and their families from CLD backgrounds have equal access to appropriate information, resources, services, and knowledgeable personnel when transition planning occurs (PACER Center, 2017). Research shows that when compared to income and social status, family involvement is a greater predictor of successful outcomes. By developing positive relationships with the transition team, families may help ensure their students' success while providing additional information on any cultural needs (PACER Center, 2017).

Implications for Practice

Implementing predictors for post-school success and best practices for transition planning are critical for successful outcomes for students regardless of ethnicity. Specific considerations must apply to educators when working with students from CLD backgrounds. These include:

- Acknowledge that cultural differences exist and are important to understand.
- Develop an awareness of the needs of CLD students.
- Increase knowledge on students' experiences, home, and culture.
- Build trust, rapport, and credibility with diverse families in addressing fears and concerns.
- Support the values of the family when identifying transition goals, including vocational training, independent living, and community work experiences.
- Allow students to lead their own transition planning meetings and to incorporate cultural practices or beliefs.
- Provide access to translated resources about transition and transition planning.
- Offer guidance and support in understanding the transition planning process.
- Assist families in accessing new opportunities, resources, and networks (PACER Center, 2017).

It is important for special educators to reflect on current practices when engaging in transition planning for CLD youth, embed these considerations, understand how much of what educators do every day is rooted in cultural assumptions, and recognize that these practices might differ slightly or a great deal between groups (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015).

Conclusions

Professional development, including preservice and in-service training, must be revised to give cross-cultural education the highest priority (Greene, 2011). Such training should inform professionals on the three categories of barriers in the transition planning process: (1) professional insensitivity to cultural groups, (2) school-imposed barriers to transition, and (3) inherent characteristics of CLD groups and how to overcome the barriers faced by these groups (Greene, 2011). It is imperative for special education teachers who are involved in the transition planning process to develop the knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to provide culturally responsive transition planning to youth and families from any background. Working with the cultural values of hard work, dedication to family, and respect for authority can yield the development of adult living skills and job skills without disrespecting the culture of the student (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015). Successful outcomes for students from CLD backgrounds will occur when professionals are able to incorporate culturally responsive practices with research-based best practices for transition planning.

References

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