

# Empowerment

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## Multicultural Aspects of Parent Involvement in Transition Planning

A study conducted at the Oregon Health Sciences University looked at the how parents from various cultural and linguistic groups participate in transition planning activities and how important they perceived each activity to be. In addition, school professionals' perceptions about the level of parent involvement in various activities were also analyzed.

The article brings to attention the lack of information regarding the cultural aspects of transition planning and also the need to fill this gap considering that culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) youth with disabilities often experience poor transition outcomes, even more than their non-CLD peers with disabilities. Often the cultural differences between CLD students and educators in addition to the lack of culture awareness increases the risk of inappropriate diagnosis and classification.

In general, parental involvement is an important factor in a successful transition plan. But parental participation may be especially important for CLD youth since parents can promote cultural understanding and responsiveness in the process. Norms, behaviors and expected adult roles vary among CLD groups and parents can play a valuable part by helping educators understand and identify outcomes valued within a family's culture. The definition of "successful adulthood", which is the goal of transition, is determined by culture specific values and expectations and should be considered.

Studies have shown that actual parent involvement in transition planning usually declines during the transition period. It has been reported that there is significantly less participation in IEP conferences by parents of older students than by parents of younger children and involvement of CLD parents may be lower than European-American parents, as they experience more barriers to participation.

This study looked at how parents from different cultural groups practice and define participation, and to what extent this definition differs from that of educators. A survey listing different transition activities was mailed out and completed by 156 African-American, 34 Hispanic-American, 31 Native-American, and 87 European-American parents, relatives or guardians. Parents were

asked to rate their involvement within each activity and how important each activity was to them. The survey was also translated into Spanish and mailed along with the English version for participants with Hispanic surnames.

A separate survey was mailed out to school professionals. Professionals were asked to rate the level of parental involvement in the same activities. Like the parents, professionals were also asked to rate the importance of parental participation in the various activities. The survey allowed for responses to be completed for CLD and European-American parents separately. The survey was administered to staff identified by the school district as serving the targeted students and families. A total of fifty-two professionals completed and returned the survey.

### Differences Among Parents

African-American parents placed significantly more importance on talking to their children about life after high school and teaching them to use transportation than did European American parents. African-American, Hispanic-American and Native-American parents assigned significantly more importance to teaching their children about the family's cultural values and beliefs, as compared to European-American parents. European-American parents reported significantly more involvement in school meetings to talk about transition than parents from CLD groups. African-American parents reported significantly more involvement in talking to their

*(Continued on page 4)*

### Inside this issue:

**Assistive Technology— What Employees Say** Page 2

**2000 N.O.D. Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities** Page 3

**Innovative Software Teaches Deaf Children to Speak** Page 3

# Assistive Technology—What Employees Say

Over the last decade, rapid changes in technology have increased our access to information and changed the ways in which we do business, get an education, communicate with others, travel and recreate. A specialized area in technology development called assistive technology has had dramatic effects on the lives of people with disabilities. Assistive technology (AT) refers to products or systems that enhance the ability of a person to function independently. These tools range from low tech to high tech and may include items as simple as Velcro, or a reaching stick, to complex tools like text reading computer software that can read aloud text that appears on computer monitors, or eye gaze technology that allows someone without hand control to operate a computer by looking at an on screen keyboard.

**“Low cost and low tech devices often made the difference between having and not having a job. These might be items that most of us don’t even consider to be assistive**

Up until recently, the employment rate for individuals with significant disabilities has been abysmal with about 30% employment, but assistive technology has increased opportunities for individuals with disabilities to enter the job market and has increased recognition by employers that this population constitutes an overlooked segment of the potential workforce. Leveling this playing field has allowed us to benefit from the talents and skills of individuals in all areas of employment and at all levels from entry level through executive positions.

The Research Department of the National Center for Disability Services has been conducting a national study on the critical factors in the successful employment of individuals with disabilities who use assistive technology in order to work. Over the past year, 40 individuals who use AT in employment situations have participated in in-depth interviews to share information regarding critical factors in employment success, barriers, and recommendations they have for further enhancing successful employment experiences. The participants were from varied geographic regions, were employed in a wide range of settings and represented all levels of the employment ladder.

Several themes were generated by the wealth of information the participants provided. They included

personal characteristics, public attitudes, technology advances, legislation and education. Although the detailed results will appear in published form in the near future, some of the interesting findings were:

► Low cost and low tech devices often made the difference between having and not having a job. These might be items that most of us don’t even consider to be assistive technology. In fact they may be commonly used tools or pieces of office equipment like speakerphones that allow someone without hand use to access the telephone, or email access that enhances communication for those who can’t speak.

► Although the ADA has been instrumental in increasing opportunities and creating more equal access for employees with disabilities who use AT, some feel that it is a double edged sword in that it has created fear of litigation and made employers wary of interviewing and hiring individuals with disabilities. Some interview participants expressed concerns that legal accountability created a focus on the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law.

► Education on several fronts was addressed as being critical. The appropriate education of children who need AT, methods to teach children to use that AT within the classroom, the importance of teachers understanding AT issues, the importance of teacher preparation programs that infuse information on technology into the curriculum and the importance of ongoing corporate education were all addressed by participants.

► In terms of personal characteristics, individuals cited their persistence and determination as important.

Some recommendations from participants included: ongoing corporate training on disability awareness and assistive technology, increased corporate leadership role in hiring people with diverse needs and abilities, use of online resources by employers like JAN, ADA Hotline etc., more universal funding streams for AT, higher expectations of people with disabilities from teachers and vocational rehabilitation professionals, changes in teacher preparation programs, increased parent education for young children with disabilities and increased career exploration activities for students with disabilities. For more information on the study, please e-mail Fran Prezant at [fprezant@ncds.org](mailto:fprezant@ncds.org).

## 2000 N.O.D/ Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities

The report of the most recent N.O.D./Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities has now been published. This survey, which is the fourth of its kind, has obtained data on ten very important indicators of the quality of life and standard of living of Americans with disabilities since 1986.

The 10 indicators are: employment, income, education, health care, access to transportation, entertainment/going out, socializing, attendance at religious services, political participation and life satisfaction. N.O.D./Harris have measured the gaps on these ten indicators between people with, and without, disabilities.

The study shows that large gaps exist between people with and without disabilities in all ten areas.

Over the past 14 years of this research, employment has shown signs of improving for people with disabilities. However, "Only three in ten working age (18-64) people with disabilities are employed full or

part-time, compared to eight in ten working-age people without disabilities (32% versus 81%)". Additionally, education has shown signs of improvement as 77% of people with disabilities have graduated from high school today, compared to 61% in 1986. Again, their still exists a gap in the high

school graduation rates of people with disabilities (22% failing to graduate) and people without disabilities (9% failing to graduate).

The study finds that the majority of people with disabilities (63%) believe that life has improved for the disabled population over the past decade. The study attributes the improvement in the quality of life of people with disabilities since 1986 as most likely a result of several

factors, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), a robust economy, and growth in technology.

A copy of the full report can be obtained through the National Organization on Disability website at [www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org), or by calling (202) 293-5960 / TDD:

“...the majority of people with disabilities (63%) believe that life has improved for the disabled population over the past decade.”

## Innovative Software Teaches Deaf Children to Speak

Fluent Animated Speech (TM) software is revolutionizing the way individuals with communication problems are taught. By combining 3-D animation with speech recognition and speech synthesis, Sensory Inc., of Santa Clara California has developed a software package that generates a facial computer image whose realistic facial expressions and mouth movements accurately teach the user how to form words, practice pronunciation, and allows the user to obtain immediate feedback.

Staff at Tucker-Maxon Oral School in Portland, Oregon use the program to teach deaf children between the ages of six and twelve how to speak. They report significant speech improvement especially for children with acoustic nerve implants as communication barriers are reduced. Children can

more easily read and understand the sounds, thus accurately reproducing these sounds. Another reason for the animated character's effectiveness is the capability to vary its rate of speech and pitch levels. Furthermore, the software requires little or no programming experience, thus individuals can tailor the program to meet specific needs.

Further applications for this technology include teaching individuals with learning disabilities how to read and enhancing verbal communication in autistic children. The company foresees the software to have many potential capabilities to facilitate communication access for all individuals. For more information, visit Sensory Inc.'s web site at: [www.sensoryinc.com](http://www.sensoryinc.com).

## Multi-cultural Aspects of Parent involvement in Transition Planning (Continued from page 1)

children about life after high school and also teaching their children to use transportation independently, than European-American parents.

### Differences Between CLD and non-CLD Parents

CLD parents placed significantly more importance than European-American parents in talking to their children about transition, helping their children to prepare for post-secondary education, teaching their children to care for their disability, teaching their children about family's culture and how to use transportation independently.

CLD parents reported significantly more involvement than European-American parents in talking to their children about life after high school and about cultural beliefs and values. European-American parents reported more involvement in school based transition meetings than CLD parents.

### Professional Perceptions and Parent Self-Reports

Professionals placed significantly *more importance* upon European-American parents talking to their children about life after high school than did European-American parents. Professionals placed *less importance* on CLD parents teaching their family's cultural values and beliefs than CLD parents.

Professionals reported significantly *less involvement* by CLD parents than CLD parents themselves for 7 out of the 10 activities. Professionals reported significantly *less involvement* in 3 out of 10 activities for European-American parents.

### Professional Perceptions for CLD Parents versus European American Parents


Professionals perceive CLD parents as significantly *less involved than* European-American parents on 8 of the 10 transitions activities. In only one instance did professionals rate the involvement of CLD parents significantly higher than that of European-American parents, this was teaching child about the family's cultural values and beliefs.

Overall results indicated that parents and professionals were in agreement regarding which activities are important for transition, only in two occasions parents and professionals differed in the level of importance they assigned to a particular activity. But there were *differences between parent groups* in terms of the *level of importance* assigned to various activities.

Findings also indicated that CLD parents see themselves as active and involved in the transition process, the one exception was in their participation in school-based planning meetings, for which they indicated low participation. This was consistent with what was reported by professionals about the involvement of CLD parents in this area. An interesting finding is that, in contrast to what was reported by CLD parents, professionals describe their involvement in other transition activities low as well.

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<p><b>NATIONAL CENTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES</b></p> 	<p><b>FROM THE EDITOR</b></p> <p>I hope you find the information in this inaugural edition of <i>Empowerment</i> useful. The purpose of <i>Empowerment</i> is to disseminate current disability-related research. Specifically, it is intended to focus on the education, employment and technology for people with disabilities so that service providers are empowered to provide those services in ways that will lead to the greatest benefit to people with disabilities. Should you wish to contribute to future editions of <i>Empowerment</i>, please feel free to contact me. Appropriate submissions may include summaries of recent research articles, disability-related news and events as well as reports of the most recent developments in education, employment and technology related to people with disabilities.</p>
<p><b>www.ncds.org</b></p>	<p>-Stephen Morabito</p>