Understanding and Promoting the Transition of Minority Adolescents

by Sarah Geenen, Laurie Powers, Alfonso Lopez Vasquez, Hank Bersani

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Summary

It has been established that adolescents with disabilities face significant economic, educational and community-based barriers in their transition to adulthood. Over the past 25 years, substantial attention has been paid to improving their transition outcomes, with some positive impact. Unfortunately, however, little attention has been directed towards understanding and meeting the unique transition needs and experiences of underrepresented ethnically and culturally diverse adolescents with disabilities. A lack of culturally responsive transition services continues despite dramatic demographic changes within the United States. For example, U.S. Census data from 1980 to 1990 (1992) revealed that while the growth rate for the Euro-American population was moderate 6%, minority populations have experienced rapid growth (African Americans = 13%; Asian Americans = 107%; Hispanic Americans = 53%; Native Americans = 38%). Assuming this trend continues, minorities will represent a numerical majority by the year 2050 (Sue, Bingham, Porché-Burke, & Vasquez, 1999).

Evidence further suggests that ethnic minority young adults often experience poorer transition outcomes than their Euro-American counterparts. For example, African American, Hispanics and Native Americans lag behind Euro-Americans in postsecondary attendance rates for both individuals with and without disabilities (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and the College Board, 1991). More specifically, the National Longitudinal Study (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996) found that Hispanic and African American young people with disabilities were significantly less likely than Euro-American youth with disabilities to find competitive jobs and earned significantly less when they did work. Furthermore, data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) for years 1993 through 1996 revealed that unemployed Euro-American adults with disabilities were 40% more likely to find employment than adults with disabilities from ethnically diverse backgrounds (Yelin & Trupin, 1997).

The field of transition has centered around issues considered most relevant to postsecondary outcomes (e.g., school-to-work programs, career exploration and development, life skills training, transition assessment and planning, student participation), whereas issues surrounding cultural diversity have typically been overlooked. In this study, the author's purpose was to gather information about the unique needs and experiences of ethnic minority youth with disabilities as they transition from school to work and adolescence to adulthood.

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used to investigate the barriers minority families encountered as their adolescent youth with disabilities move into adulthood and to identify what issues or goals are most important to families during this time of transition. The qualitative study consisted of focus groups or interviews with adolescents and their family members from Native American, African American and Hispanic communities. The transcripts were coded by a multicultural research team. The analysis of the coding revealed seven key themes: a) insensitivity/discrimination; b) lack of accommodations; c) unresponsive services/supports; d) typical adolescent issues; e) contextual barriers; f) desire for optimum capability, and g) the importance of family and family values. A survey designed to corroborate the findings of the qualitative study was completed by 308 African American, Hispanic, Native American and Euro-American parents who rated the extent to which certain barriers, experiences or issues around transition were true for their child. The quantitative results were generally consistent with the
qualitative findings, suggesting that minority adolescents, overall, appear to encounter greater barriers to transition than do their non-minority peers.

References:


