**CEC’s DCDT FAST FACTS: Culturally Responsive Transition Practices**

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For the DCDT Publications Committee

The focus of this FAST FACTS is to provide practitioners with suggestions to develop culturally responsive transition practices. Examples of culturally responsive postsecondary goals are provided along with additional resources to support culturally responsive transition practices for teachers.

**Background Information**

The make-up of public school in the U.S. continues to become more diverse across multiple domains. It is important to note students who identify as culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse (CELD) expand beyond racial boundaries or countries of birth. As practioners we must not ignore the multifaceted and intersectional nature of diversity and members of the CELD communities we serve.

During the 2013-2014 school year, 73% of students with disabilities served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are of a diverse background shown by proportionality statistics (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Inversely proportional to the student population of IDEA is the teacher population; Public school educators are predominantly Caucasian (82%) (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2016). Recognizing and addressing cultural differences and potential disconnect between professionals and the population of students in classrooms is an essential practice for all educators.

In contrast to the increasing diversity of the overall population, federal mandates and transition elements of IDEA are rooted in Euro-American cultural beliefs (Halley & Trujillo, 2013). Cultural considerations in transition planning have been given little attention in current research (Trainor, Lindstrom, Simon-Burroughs, Martin, & McCray Sorrells, 2008).

Culturally responsive practices “value students’ cultural and linguistic resources and view this knowledge as capital to build upon rather than as a barrier to learning. These teachers use this capital as the basis for instructional connections to facilitate student learning and development” (Aceves & Orosco, 2014, p. 7). Expanding culturally responsive practices into transition allows an interdisciplinary team to develop, support, and foster post-school success grounded in individual student cultural beliefs. When educators are cognizant and respectful to a student’s diverse background, they will consider a variety of types of jobs sought, identify language barriers and needs, acknowledge their own ignorance and student fears of other cultures, and recognize feelings of isolation among students.

**Culturally Responsive Transition Practices** (Community Foundations of Canada, 2018)

1. Brainstorm resources, potential mentors, and other role models from diverse cultural groups who can interact with students (e.g., guest speaker, job shadow, internship, paid work experience, mock interview) and support others trying to break the same barriers.
2. Connect with immigrant-serving organizations for resources, cultural connections, and leadership opportunities for students.
3. Provide opportunities for students to role play how respond to situations in which they either encounter others from diverse cultures and/or how others could potentially respond negatively to cultural differences.
4. Make the transition process less intimidating through active family involvement by (a) developing a culture of trust, (b) explaining the IEP process, (c) seeking and valuing their input, (d) providing alternative ways for participation, and (e) being open-minded and sensitive to cultural difference and preferences.
5. Become informed: Learn as much as you can about different cultures, and be considerate of cultural and religious events, holy days, and cultural norms/taboos.
6. Consider and help employers understand cultural needs in employment during work experience programs.
7. Achola (2018) outlines the importance of incorporating multicultural educational practices across academic and transition domains to support students more fully.

**Culturally Responsive Tasks to Consider**

1. Personal bias can be reduced through a combination of (a) awareness of implicit bias, (b) concern about the effects of that bias, and (c) the application of strategies to reduce bias.

a. It is essential to be introspective and aware of our own behaviors, thoughts and feelings and how they may come across to others, how they influence our actions and decisions, and assumptions we may make because of them. See *DCDT FastFACTS: Personal Biases* for more information.

1. Become a lifelong ethnographer: Be open and share with students and families your desire to be culturally sensitive. Potential areas to reflect upon personally, and with your student and their family (Free Management Library, 2018):

a. **Assertiveness**—Does your culture encourage or frown upon being assertive? Acknowledge this behavior may vary among the cultures from which your students come. Discuss the importance and relevance of assertiveness in education, training, and employment in terms of self-advocacy and seeking accommodations.

b. **Body language and gestures**—What are some actions considered offensive by a student’s culture (e.g., thumbs up, crossed legs, palms up, eye contact, folded arms, and other hand gestures)? Equally important is awareness of how physical touch/contact and personal space are regarded (e.g., making physical contact is not acceptable in Japan and Australia, but it is in Russia and India) (Westside Toastmasters, 2018). Are students aware of their own body language and messages conveyed to others?

c. **Communication styles and direction**—Should you be direct or somewhat general in nature? Do you begin communicating at the top with leaders and work down or vice versa? Be conscious of greetings and other forms of communication as they may vary between cultures (Westside Toastmasters, 2018).

d. **Conflict**—How is conflict typically addressed? The ways in which conflict is addressed varies by culture, and we must consider our own cultural beliefs, as well, as those of our students and their families.

e. **Eye contact**—Is direct eye contact expected or socially unacceptable? In some cultures, direct eye contact could be construed as a challenge to authority while in others, it conveys a sense of respect (Bright Hub Education, 2018).

f. **Power**—Is there a chain of command to follow in the family structure? In some cultures, the males hold the power; however, in other cultures, females may hold equal power.

g. **Silence**—Is silence considered uncomfortable or expected and common? Depending on the culture, silence can be misperceived as passive understanding, anger, or uncertainty.

h. **Time**—Is there an expectation of adhering to schedules or appointment times? Do our own cultural values and beliefs align with those of our students and their families when it comes to timeliness?

i. **Wording**—What words and phrases might individuals of diverse cultures misinterpret? This category includes idioms, puns, humor, and slang.

**Culturally Responsive Postsecondary Goal Examples**

The following sample goals developed for the state of Alaska by NTACT align with the tribal presence in the state and provide examples of how culture can be considered and embedded in transition planning.

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| **Postsecondary Area** | **Example Postsecondary Goals** |
| Education | - After high school, [the student] will intern with an elder in the area of [chosen field] in order to meet his/her employment goal in local community.  - After high school, [the student] will participate in training through state job center networks to improve ability to keep a job. |
| Employment | - After high school, [the student] will be employed in [chosen field] to assist his/her tribe and family.  - After high school, [the student] will, with support, hand out programs at community performances and high school sporting events. |
| Independent Living | - After graduation, [the student] will live in the family unit and contribute to caring of the elders and young children.  - After high school, [the student] will participate in training through state job center network to improve ability to help his family at home.  - After high school, [the student] will assume responsibility for a share of living expenses by saving money earned and following a budget set by parents. |

The following annual transition goals are based on the above postsecondary goal examples.

***Employment Annual Transition Goals***

* Within one academic year, [student] will identify 3 criteria required for internship with elder by communicating with case manager 3 criteria items with 100% accuracy.
* Within one academic year, using ONet, [student] will identify 2 other jobs related to / similar local community job of interest and describe 2 ways the jobs are similar and 2 ways the jobs are different (100% accuracy) verbally or in writing to case manager.
* Within one academic year, [student] will create a list of 10 questions to ask elder or previous intern of elder about career choice, challenges of career, and successes of career. Student will share questions with case manager (must have 8 out of 10).
* Within one academic year, [student] will ask elder or previous intern of elder previously created questions about career choice, challenges of career, and successes of career. [Student] will share responses with case manager either verbally or in writing (must have 8 out of 10 described responses).

***Education Annual Transition Goals***

* Within one academic year, [student] will identify and state 3 criteria required for training through state job center network with case manager with 100% accuracy.
* Within one academic year, [student] will complete application for state job center network. [Student] will create list of any application component missing and write down how [student] plans to complete missing components (e.g. ask parent for information, look through records to find information) with 100% accuracy.
* Within one academic year, [student] will create a weekly calendar with days/times (which do not conflict with family responsibilities) that he/she can attend training through state job center with 100% accuracy.

***Independent Living Annual Transition Goals***

* Within one academic year, [student] will create a monthly calendar showing dates/times for all community performances and high school sporting events. With 100% accuracy, [student] will indicate which events he/she is responsible for handing out programs at.
* Within one academic year, [student] will greet students entering school by smiling or holding door open, for 2 out of 5 school days.

**Application for Teachers**

* Identify your own personal biases and reflect on how these may impact students in your classroom and your input in the transition planning process.
* Reach out to cultural liaisons in the community.
* When writing IEPs, talk with students and families about their vision for the future. Be respectful of cultural expectations that may differ than your expectation of independence and postsecondary success.
* Keep in mind that activities and services associated with the mainstream community are *not* always inappropriate for CELD students. Incorporating diverse experiences in conjunction with traditional mainstream transition planning can better support student and family goals for postsecondary outcomes.

**Application for Administrators**

* Lead by example and demonstrate the importance of diversity within the classroom, school, and the larger community while holding all accountable for embracing diversity.
* Establish policies or practices supporting diversity and inclusion, and promote the school/classroom’s commitment to diversity.
* Provide training and awareness in class for students, school personnel, businesses, and other partners.
* Collect and use data related to experiences and outcomes of minoritized communities.

**Application for Families**

* Promote and share opportunities for teachers, students, and staff to interact in diverse cultural settings outside of school.
* Assist educators by being a resource to teach about your culture. Share your knowledge to students in the school setting through workshops and lessons. Prepare role playing scenarios to help students and educators response through various cultural perspectives.

**Websites**

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