

Relationships and Resources in Education and the Impact on Transition Planning

Blackwood provides a call to action for researchers and practitioners to begin exploring how social and cultural capital access impacts the experiences of students with disabilities.

Increasing the percentage of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with disabilities who enroll in college, obtain their college degree, and transition into a successful career remains a steady issue within the field of special education. The re-authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 requires schools to begin transition planning with students with exceptional needs at the age of 16 (*Fast facts*). Prior to the re-authorization, transition planning began at age 14, which provided more opportunities for earlier conversations to take place around self-determination, employment, and post-secondary planning. Some evidence suggests that current transition practices are not individualized or responsive to the goals that students and their families set for themselves (Trainor, 2010). Further, more CLD students with disabilities may be marginalized from successful transition planning due to

structural barriers which continue to impede successful secondary and post-secondary opportunities for some groups of students, thus impacting the likelihood of their enrollment and retention in colleges and universities.

Students with exceptional needs often face unique challenges relating to their disabilities while transitioning into adulthood. Existing cultural barriers can add another layer to responsive transition planning occurring in schools due to pre-existing bias, discrimination, and pre-conceived notions about race and culture (Trainor, 2010). Ultimately, these factors can influence how students with disabilities view themselves and their potential for transitioning into a college and career of their choice. These barriers and inequities continue to pose a vast challenge for CLD students with disabilities, dampening their potential to experience meaningful transition

planning opportunities. Due to a lack of social and cultural capital responsive interventions and strategies being used to guide transition planning for CLD students with disabilities in secondary schools, the outcome is that students may not have the opportunity to demonstrate indicators of adult success, which include reaching career and academic goals (Trainor, 2010).

Between 2011 and 2012, the *National Center for Education Statistics* reported that, based on disability status, 73.5% of CLD students who completed high school also transitioned into post-secondary institutions, compared to 88.9% of White students (*Fast facts*, 2016). Conversely, in 2011-2012, based on disability status, African American and Hispanic students made up 32.5% of students with disabilities enrolled in post-secondary institutions. The data show that CLD students with disabilities are transitioning into postsecondary institutions at lower rates than their White, non-disabled peers. Two essential explanations for this gap are inadequate transition planning experiences and the historical and present social and cultural inequities which continue to exist for CLD students with disabilities, potentially impacting their livelihood as adults.

Transition planning requires early, coordinated, student-centered planning in order for students to develop the academic

and personal skills required to successfully transition out of high school to college or career (Shaw, Madaus & Dukes, 2010, p. 5). Effective transition planning and successful student outcomes cannot occur without strategic interventions and strategies related to social and cultural education capital being incorporated into the process, which requires collaboration between students, their families, educators and the community.

Social and cultural capital access provides students with the necessary skills, values, behavior, attitudes and meaningful relationships required to navigate education and to begin planning for the future. Unfortunately, due to historical, social, political and economic disadvantages, CLD students with disabilities are prone to experience limited access to meaningful transition support, which can potentially impact their adult well-being and dampen the potential for success. Further, students who lack access to social and cultural capital assets in education are also impacted by the perceptions and behavior of essential stakeholders in the educational process, including parents, educators, the larger community and the students themselves (Kvalsund & Bele, 2010). This is largely due to cultural and racial biases, along with pre-conceived notions about certain student populations.

Collectively, Banks (2014) and Trainor (2010) have concluded that CLD students with disabilities are enrolling in colleges and universities at lower rates than their counterparts, and that one of the most impacting factors contributing to this trend is the lack of effective transition planning occurring in schools. Leveraging social and cultural capital in education is essential for all students, especially those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, in order to experience successful college and career outcomes.

To understand what barriers exist in transition planning for students with disabilities in relation to social and cultural capital, Banks (2014) examined the perspectives of African American male undergraduate students with disabilities. Her study revealed that students did not directly attribute their enrollment in college to effective transition planning. Collectively, the students shared that their transition planning experience was inadequate and challenging due to deficit ideologies, insufficient information about transition and competing cultural identities.

Few researchers have investigated the experiences of CLD students with disabilities in secondary programs, including the transition planning and their post-secondary experiences in college and or career as it

relates to social and cultural capital access in education. Thus, the purpose of this article is to expand the conversation about effective transition planning to include social and cultural capital access in education as a major impacting factor of post-secondary outcomes of CLD students with disabilities. First, in order to contextualize this issue, the concepts of social capital and cultural capital access as they relate to education and diverse student populations are explained. Second, challenges associated with social and cultural capital in education and the critical role that educators play in fostering relationships with parents and students are discussed. Third, the conversation turns to recommendations regarding the surrounding school community. Lastly, implications for research and practice are provided.

Social and Cultural Capital in Education

Social capital is defined herein, based on a concept developed by Bourdieu (1986), as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 249). While Bourdieu’s social capital theory was based primarily on classism, Putman refers to social capital as the connections among

individuals, and argued that social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them become social capital (see Smith, 2009). Social capital access in education has long-lasting effects, enabling students to gain access to educational resources and assets to develop social relationships. This is done by assisting and improving their life chances and leading opportunities for high educational attainment.

Cultural capital includes the ideas and knowledge that people draw upon as they participate in social life. Cultural capital is created when values, traditions, beliefs and language become the currency to leverage other types of capital (Smith, 2009). Social and cultural capital in education are driving forces behind successful transition planning for CLD students with disabilities in that they both are inclusive of positive relationships with teachers and counselors and the greater community as well as meaningful life experiences. For the purpose of this article, Putnam's definition of social and cultural capital is used as the basis for the ideas and concepts presented.

Why and how can social and cultural capital impact the success of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities? A lack of equitable access to social and cultural capital is often the macro-

level challenges and barriers CLD students with disabilities and their families face when it comes to postsecondary planning. The assumption that non-White students with disabilities are less likely to be academically and behaviorally successful relative to their careers in secondary and postsecondary education can be supported with research and history. Research has shown that children from diverse social and economic backgrounds are historically marginalized from equitable social conditions, impacting their educational experiences (e.g., Sommerfeld & Bowen, 2013).

Since the push for educational reform (e.g., *A Nation at Risk*), the United States has developed educational policies and laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, aimed at providing some level of access to students with disabilities. However, despite policies and laws aimed at addressing these issues, the fact that the achievement gap persists further suggests that inequity in education continues to plague our CLD students, especially those with disabilities.

Chu (2011) offered perspectives in understanding the schooling and achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, suggesting that culturally and linguistically diverse students are excluded from the

mainstream and sometimes “avoid” learning skills associated with White middle and high class culture. Chu argued that, because of prior experience, students from diverse backgrounds disproportionately identified as special education students, automatically perceive that they will not receive opportunities to further their academic achievement. CLD students with disabilities have a right to be taught transferrable skills in order to access social capital and leverage cultural capital and other resources to use toward furthering their education, obtaining employment in favorable careers, and achieving independent living success.

Closing the low achievement loophole at the secondary level for CLD students with disabilities remains a challenge across school districts—from the classroom to the state level. High school educational success, including transition planning, is a precursor to student success in the school and labor force (Banks, 2014; Trainor, 2010). In relation, Sakura-Lemessy, Carter-Tellison, and Sakura-Lemessy (2009) offered a perspective about curriculum placement, race, class and gender differences in wage growth among non-college workers. The study shows that human and social capital access are predictors in the school and labor outcomes of African American students. More specifically, there are disparities in

curriculum placement which also show discrimination against race, class, gender and subgroups.

Further, Kvalsund and Bele (2010) expressed that CLD students with disabilities experience high levels of social marginalization. Social capital in education has both individual and collective aspects. Being identified as a special needs student can marginalize students with disabilities, automatically limiting their access to social capital. For example, CLD students with disabilities may not be afforded the same opportunities to take advanced level courses, or be placed in the classes taught by the most highly qualified teachers, due to discrimination or cultural bias as compared to their White non-disabled peers. This limits their access to social capital.

Research has shown that there is a disconnect between teachers and CLD students with disabilities due to a lack of knowledge or awareness, as it relates to culturally equipped teachers able to transfer their training into the classroom; limiting a teacher’s ability to teach self-determination and facilitate culturally responsive conversations centered around transition planning. In *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, Hammond (2015) provides a framework about cultural pedagogy, which directly connects to the concept of education

being a forum for the development of social and the understanding of cultural capital through teacher and student interaction. Further, there have been a number of studies showing the disconnect between teachers of culturally diverse students within special education and the behavioral success of African American and Latino males' disproportionality placed in these sub-groups (Ford, 2014).

Teachers of CLD students with disabilities must use their relationships with students to build their capacity as learners and to influence postsecondary planning and educational success. As mentioned earlier, CLD students with disabilities often face challenges in academic settings, which may impact their transition planning processes and enrollment in post-secondary institutions. Uusitalo-Malmivaara et al. (2012) presented the results of a qualitative study, analyzing disabled students' perceptions of happiness. Their findings indicated that students with disabilities were less happy within their school when compared to their normal achieving peers. Student perception of their academic ability as well as access to teacher support (social capital) has significant implications for transition planning. Schools have a difficult time meeting the academic and social needs of culturally and linguistically diverse

students, which calls for a different approach by providing a close-knit culture and community of achievement.

Wells et al. (2011) offered a perspective about the mismatch in education in their study which followed and surveyed the same students from high school to their transition to postsecondary outcomes (college, career work or both). They found that CLD students with poor social capital access to social networks and meaningful relationships experience disproportionately lower rates of successful post-secondary outcomes. Additionally, for CLD students with disabilities, the surrounding community plays a large role in the social development of these students, which can ultimately impact transition planning and the academic success of students. This concept is unpacked in the following section.

Social and Cultural Capital through Family and Community Networks

Education stakeholders (e.g., school community, community members), in collaboration with CLD families of students with disabilities, should ultimately employ a different approach to meeting the needs of students who suffer from historical social injustice. For example, determining which basic needs of students and their families exist, and working collaboratively to meet

those needs, can lead to positive outcomes and impact students' social and cultural capital access. Unfortunately, the families of CLD students are often grouped together, and the outcome of the success of these students is pre-determined by social, political and economic trends and concerns of urban settings.

Olivos, Gallagher, and Aguilar (2010) offer a perspective about the importance of fostering collaborative relationships with parents of CLD students with disabilities. The authors state that one of the barriers to successful post-secondary outcomes for CLD learners was the lack of social and cultural capital, including access to resources and collaboration among schools and families of students with disabilities, which is evident by the research of Yosso (2005). Furthermore, it is contended that despite institutional and personal barriers, collaboration is possible because educators and parents share the same goals for student outcomes.

Byun, Meece, Irvin, and Hutchins (2012) examined the role of social capital in the educational aspirations of youth. This study included a review of a national survey of high school students (general and special education) to investigate the relationship between social capital and post-secondary aspirations related to transition planning. The investigation showed that family and

social capital, both in parental expectations and teacher educational expectations, plays an essential role in shaping postsecondary aspirations and outcomes. This research speaks to the preconceived notions or assumptions about diverse families. Too many educators may believe that CLD families from low-income neighborhoods are uninterested in their children's performance and academic future based on their lack of presence and engagement.

On the contrary, research has shown that parents of CLD students, especially in urban communities, may resist involvement because of cultural and communication differences (Ford, 2014). Further, educators may lack knowledge of and respect for the ethnicities and cultures of the children they teach, which may send the message that parents are not valued in the educational process. Cultural capital is about the relationships which lead to positive influence and growth of student outcomes, and these relationships should begin with the teachers and parents (Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar, 2010; Smith, 2010).

According to several researchers (e.g., Richardson, 2012; Sadovnik & Davidson, 2011), when considering the education of students CLD with disabilities, the school community must engage the surrounding community to promote a mindset of shared

responsibility in order to impact the lives of those students. Collaboration in the form of informal and formal meetings about student progress, forums for discussion about community issues and problem solving rallies between the school and the community, allows for socio-economic factors to be used as an asset to drive transition planning and post-secondary success.

Ovink and Veazey's (2011) case study on social support through intervention programs for minority students found that CLD students with disabilities remain underrepresented among those who seek graduate and professional degrees due to a lack of psychological and social support. Through targeted intervention programs for CLD students with disabilities aimed at socialization in community and networking skills, CLD students with disabilities are more likely to experience positive post-secondary outcomes in academics and careers. Further, the explicit coaching of how to impact the student achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities, as well as the extent of community involvement needed as it relates to the education of these students, remains two very broad topics of concern.

Community programs and organizations play a key role in serving the

needs of CLD students with disabilities and their parents by helping to meet the basic needs of students and by providing extended day support in the areas of social and cultural capital. Ultimately, a community organization's collaboration with the families of CLD students with disabilities, as well as the teachers' and administrations' support of these students, can lead to positive outcomes for transition planning. Richardson's (2012) study on the critical role that male coaches serve in the community helps to solidify how essential relationships within a community impact the social and cultural capital in education of CLD students. For example, Richardson found that Black male coaches serve as social and cultural capital for inner-city adolescent African American males who do not have traditional access to social capital. Black coaches, through increased and continued mentoring, engage youth in social trust, social obligation and the exchange of information to produce positive post-secondary academic and behavioral outcomes. The author ascertains that there needs to be a partnership that exists to educate parents, provide community services and to meet the needs of the surrounding community through a wraparound services approach.

Additionally, Sommerfeld and Bowen (2013) found that CLD students from urban environments provided with early targeted interventions and programs, which emphasize social and cultural capital development through a values-based curriculum, have a more successful chance at degree attainment and experiencing postsecondary outcomes. Many students find themselves building long lasting relationships with adults who serve as guides for their academic future. The benefits of community organizations is that they serve as the cornerstone to social and cultural capital for all students, especially for CLD students with disabilities.

Implications for Research

Successful transition planning leading to favorable secondary and postsecondary outcomes of CLD students with disabilities is often impacted by a lack of social and cultural capital access to educational resources (Banks, 2014). In order to understand the experiences of CLD students with disabilities within the transition planning process, researchers must first examine student and family perception of social and cultural capital in education (Ford, 2014). Close examination and understanding of how inequitable access may influence student lives and collaborating to develop responsive

strategies and relationship building to impact student transition planning and post-secondary success are essential. Relationships within the families themselves, as well as the function of relationships with the school community, are often pre-determined by cultural norms and values (Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar, 2010). The implications for this research would be aimed at addressing the issues in the PK-12 school community by providing school leaders and educators with focused culturally responsive strategies and interventions to use with CLD families of students with disabilities.

Second, further research should include a close examination of the critical role of school and community programs as cultural capital leverage for CLD students with disabilities and how community programs and interventions can have a long lasting impact on a student's postsecondary success. Addressing the needs of CLD students with disabilities through continued mentorship has local community and societal implications, as schools would have the opportunity to expand collaborative efforts to address the needs of students during their earlier stages of development (Richardson, 2012).

Implications for Practice

Social and cultural capital relationships, resources and access to educational opportunities through classroom teachers is essential for the academic growth and ability of CLD students with disabilities (Banks, 2014; Trainor, 2010). As school systems continue to steadily grow to accommodate an increasingly diverse population of students, culturally responsive education, and a shared partnership between all stakeholders, especially teachers and students, are important drivers for successful transition planning. In order to ameliorate this problem, educators must examine and reflect on racial or cultural bias they themselves have in order to understand why CLD students with disabilities may experience challenges navigating the educational system and transitioning to post-secondary outcomes (Yosso, 2005). Deepening conversations about how racial, cultural, social and economic barriers influence lives could lead to positive outcomes within a school community. Teachers would have to understand why and how social and cultural capital leverage and cultural diversity influence student perspectives and outcomes for success and for courageous conversations (permission to be honest and forthcoming) surrounding social injustice to be included as a mainstay in teacher professional

development. Further, teachers would have to be trained on how to employ social and cultural differences as leverage to strengthen relationships with students, parents and the school community to improve transition planning and postsecondary outcomes.

Teachers must integrate dialogue about transition planning into the curriculum and foster an inviting classroom culture to improve the transition planning experiences for CLD students with disabilities. Student-teacher relationships can open the door to earlier conversations about educational opportunities. Addressing the needs of CLD students with disabilities by teaching them to understand how to develop and use as leverage social and cultural capital networks in education in order for adequate transition planning to occur would greatly impact their lives. This would require a comprehensive and collaborative approach from parents, schools and community stakeholders. Bridging the gap between families, the school and the larger community by enabling school systems to be strategic about their approach to engage families in the transition planning process is essential to student success. In conclusion, I have suggested that teachers foster meaningful relationships with students and use their knowledge of their student differences as a way to begin conversations about transition planning.

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