Transition Planning and Programming: Empowerment Through Partnership

by Marita M. Danek, Ph.D. and Howard Busby

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Introduction

As citizens of a democratic society, we have many transition points in our lives when we shift from one role to another. Some of these transitions are predictable while others are not. Predictable transitions include entering school, leaving school, entering a career, getting married and having a family (or deciding not to), and retiring from work.

The transition from school to the world of work, postsecondary education, or adult life and living independently constitutes a major challenge for most deaf and hard of hearing students in America's schools. Although predictable-and a challenge their hearing counterparts also face-the transition process for a deaf student often involves leaving a relatively supportive special education system, complete with its complementary services and trained personnel, for the world of adult living and employment, which typically does not provide the same level of services and support. It involves letting go of the structured role of a student for the multiple and fluid roles of adulthood.

The school-to-work transition is not a single point in time but part of the lifelong process of individual development (Szymanski, 1993). In our nation today, the transition to adulthood can last a decade or more, particularly for those deaf or hard of hearing youth who have a delayed entry into adult roles due to educational or social factors.

The importance of the transition process for our nation's youth is reflected in legislation that has mandated increasing attention to transition planning, programming, and coordination, particularly for students with disabilities. For deaf and hard of hearing youth, transition services are not new (Danek & McCrone, 1989) but have only recently undergone renewed emphasis due to legislation, public policy initiatives, and the reality of a more competitive work environment.

In the complex global economy of the 21st century, deaf and hard of hearing youth will face demands and expectations that will be more exacting than they were even a generation ago. The world has changed. The workplace has changed. The United States is now one of the leading multi-ethnic nations in the world (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1996). Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the 21st century will live and work in a high-technology, information-based, transnational economy.

What changes will be required for schools to contribute to the transition process for deaf and hard of hearing youth? How can we involve students, schools, families, employers, adult service programs, and other community stakeholders in a shared vision of successful adulthood for deaf and hard of hearing youth?

This paper addresses transition for deaf and hard of hearing youth as a broad and longitudinal process that should begin at an early age through a developmental progression of experiences and activities that lead to economic self-sufficiency; self-determination in personal, educational, vocational, social, and leisure pursuits; and the opportunity to contribute to and participate in community life (Halpern, 1992). Our

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approach emphasizes the centrality of the individual in the transition process; recognition of individual needs that in turn dictate services and programs; and coordinated efforts that provide a seamless response to evolving individual needs throughout the transition process.

We propose eighteen premises that describe how parents, schools, and other stakeholders can work together with students to foster an effective transition process. These premises are based on certain assumptions:

1. Deaf and hard of hearing youth and their families represent heterogeneous populations. The systems with which they interact over a lifetime, while embedded in the broader context of society and culture, are complex and often unconnected. Yet communication, culture, and community are central to the lives of most deaf and many hard of hearing youth.

2. Deaf and hard of hearing students have learning environments that range from residential to completely mainstreamed within school systems that vary according to size, location, resources, and other dimensions. (While acknowledging the diversity of learning environments, this paper will present one set of all-encompassing premises for all deaf and hard of hearing students regardless of learning environment. Our focus is on students and a process that must be individualized and empowering, regardless of setting.)

3. Components of good transition planning and programming can be identified. These include (a) family, community, and school partnerships; (b) formalized planning and implementation of services; (c) identification of transition outcomes in terms of employment, independent living, and participation in community life; and (d) linkages with adult services and programs (Clark & Kostoe, 1995). However, no one program model will fit all students, all learning environments, and all communities. Such a model could become prescriptive and formulaic. Transition programming must be individualized according to local community standards and resources and always based on individual student needs.

4. Professionals who work with deaf and hard of hearing students and their families must understand and respect the diversity of this population and possess the requisite training and background (including discipline-specific competencies and relevant experience) to meet the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students and their families in the transition process.

This paper is organized around four issues or areas we have identified as salient to the transition process for each deaf or hard of hearing student. These are educational issues, family issues, rehabilitation issues, and environmental issues. For each issue, we propose various premises derived from a review of legislative requirements, contemporary discussion, and published research on related topics. Our intent is to stimulate discussion and challenge parents, educators, and other stakeholders to address ways in their

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communities to promote collaboration in support of excellence in transition programming for deaf and hard of hearing youth.

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Educational Issues

Education is not an end in itself (if it were, we'd all stay in school forever) but provides a means to certain ends or outcomes in the learner. Education should benefit both the individual and society by equipping the learner with tools to engage in meaningful and productive work, participate in community life, take advantage of lifelong learning opportunities, achieve in social, interpersonal and leisure environments, and adjust to adult responsibilities in a pluralistic society.

Educational reform has always been a part of this nation's history. As the workplace and society have evolved, educational reform has come to focus on methods to better prepare students for postschool outcomes, changing work environments, and a global marketplace. In 1992, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) released the SCANS Report from the U.S. Department of Labor (Whetzel, 1992). The report addressed our increasingly sophisticated marketplace and the challenges schools face in preparing our youth for entry into the workforce. This report outlined five competencies and a three-part foundation of skills and personal qualities that are needed for solid job performance:

Competencies

- knowledge of resources (time, money, materials)
- interpersonal skills (teamwork, negotiating, teaching, awareness of others' needs)
- information (evaluating data, organization, processing, using computers)
- systems (understanding social, organizational, and technological systems)
- technology (knowing equipment and tools, maintaining and troubleshooting)

Foundation Skills

- basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic and listening)
- thinking skills (ability to learn, to reason, think creatively, make decisions)
- personal qualities (responsibility, self-esteem, self-management, sociability)

These competencies and foundation skills are the cornerstone of a successful transition to adulthood for all youth. They emphasize attributes that transcend narrowly defined occupational roles and provide the foundation for an empowered, responsible, productive, and fulfilling adulthood.

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Recent legislative initiatives have buttressed the SCANS Report by providing the mandate for schools and other systems to change. Special education legislation was the first to emphasize transition initiatives. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (P.L. 101-476) included the transition from school to adult life as a critical component of special education.

Transition services are defined as:

A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to postschool activities, including:

- postsecondary education
- vocational training
- integrated employment (including supported employment)
- continuing and adult education
- adult services
- independent living
- community participation (IDEA, Section 300.18)

The definition of transition services under IDEA is deliberately broad to allow any service or program that promotes the student's movement into employment, postsecondary education, or independent living. Transition guidelines under IDEA require some restructuring of the curriculum, at least in the area of career development. IDEA explicitly requires the participation of the student in the development of his or her statement of needed transition services: "such activities shall be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests" (IDEA, 1990, sec 602). This process becomes a component of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) that must be included by age 16, at the latest.

In the most recent (1997) amendments to IDEA, P.L. 105-17 (The IDEA Improvement Act of 1997), the definition of transition services remains the same. However, two changes have been made to transition-related IEP requirements:

(1) By age 14, and annually thereafter, the student's IEP must contain statements of transition service needs that focus on the child's courses of study and, (2) at least one year before the student reaches the age of majority under state law, a statement is required that the child has been informed of his or her rights under this title (615 (m)).

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Other transition-related legislation includes the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994 (P.L. 103-239) which was passed to assist all students (not only students with disabilities) in making a smooth transition from high school to the workplace or postsecondary education/training. This law builds on the success of previous legislation, such as IDEA, that addresses the transition needs of students with disabilities. It also complements other recent educational reform legislation such as Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 and the 1990 Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act (P.L. 101-392).

The intention of STWOA is to integrate academic and career/vocational education into a coordinated and sequenced program of study that places an emphasis on options for entry into the workforce, or further education/training at the two- year or baccalaureate level. By participating as part of larger educational reform efforts, school to work programs can provide a seamless and comprehensive system rather than repeat the fragmented and piecemeal educational and job training programs that have existed in the past.

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 involves business, industry, education, and other stakeholders in defining what productive workers need to know and do (Hoachlander & Rahn, 1994). Goals 2000 emphasizes high expectations for all students, and emphasizes literacy, critical thinking, basic academic skills, and citizenship. The legislation also attempts to blend federal, state, and local efforts into a comprehensive educational approach and not be simply another layer of programs. This legislation connects the threads of cooperation and partnership among stakeholders-including parents-and offers a vision of seamless, customer-driven services to meet individual career goals and the workforce requirements for the 21st century.

Vocational education programs have a legislative history going back to World War 1. The most recent legislation, the 1990 Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act (P.L. 101-392) represents a significant policy shift in vocational education with an emphasis that is consistent with other workforce development programs developed in the last decade for all youth, including youth with disabilities.

Current vocational education legislation underscores academic as well as occupational skills. Programs are required to coordinate vocational and academic preparation, a major departure from the single-skill focus of former programs. The legislation acknowledges that workers need general thinking, mathematical, scientific, and technical skills that can be transferred across work settings. It recognizes that vocational education should provide training in all aspects of an industry, not only in narrow, occupationally based skills (American Vocational Association, 1990).

The unifying thread across transition-related legislation is an emphasis on cooperation, communication, and collaboration among all stakeholders, including professionals, parents, students, and other systems and programs in the community such as employers, vocational rehabilitation agencies, apprenticeship programs, two year technical/vocation

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programs, and four year baccalaureate programs. All transition-related legislation stresses clear communication: conforming language for definitions of transition and supported employment, for example, help insure that all stakeholders understand terminology and program eligibility.

Premise 1: Adoption of a philosophy that recognizes the leadership role of schools in the transition process will help ensure a seamless transition to adulthood for all deaf and hard of hearing youth.

The leadership role of schools in the transition process is one we wish to underscore. No other system has daily access to deaf or hard of hearing youth over an extended period of time coupled with the myriad of resources that schools can command to make transition programming a reality. To schools that say, "Why us?" we counter with, "If not you, then who?"

Certainly, schools cannot provide transition services in isolation; they must forge partnerships in the community. However, the leadership role of schools in transition planning cannot be abrogated, postponed, or deferred.

Research in the past decade has portrayed a discouraging picture of the postschool experiences of young deaf and hard of hearing adults including (a) high unemployment/underemployment rates, (b) low rates of full-time employment among those employed and (c) low rates of participation in postsecondary education. Currently, large numbers of deaf and hard of hearing youth are receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and are uninvolved in any productive activity (Bullis, Bull, Johnson, & Peters, 1995; Bullis, Davis, Bull, & Johnson, 1997; Lam, 1994). Unemployment of young deaf adults appears to be increasing, with 24% of deaf youth in one study unemployed 3-4 years after high school and an astonishing 40% of deaf youth with additional disabilities in the same study unemployed (Bullis, Bull, Johnson, Johnson, & Kitrell, 1991).

The existence of an additional disability in itself can greatly complicate the transition process and necessitates extensive coordination and planning throughout the student's school years. Demographic studies consistently show that approximately 1/3 of deaf and hard of hearing students have educationally significant disabilities. Both the prevalence of additional disabilities and the complexity of transition planning for deaf or hard of hearing students with additional disabilities must be recognized and addressed by educators and adult service providers (T. Jones, personal communication, March, 1998).

Many deaf and hard of hearing students have limited work and other experiences from which to make informed career and life decisions. This experiential deficit can lead to occupational stereotyping and limited aspirations (Schroedel, 1992). School-based programs can provide developmental experiences to counteract such experientially imposed limitations.

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The school years offer the potential for incredible personal growth, self-awareness, and expanding career maturity over an extended period of time. In addition to academic programming, they can provide structured paid and unpaid work experiences on a continuum from school-based to community-based employment. For example, the career pathways concept as outlined by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 provides a way for students to move from skill acquisition to skill application, from observation to hands-on activities, while offering a broad approach to building competencies that can be applied to any occupation (Mooney, 1997). Once a young person exits high school, the extensive opportunity for integrated career-focused learning activities that build on existing competencies and develop new ones is often lost.

Most young adults realize this fact too late. In a 1995 survey of 17.1 million adults in the general population conducted by the National Career Development Association (NCDA), 72% of those responding would seek more information on career options if repeating the school to work transition (Hoyt & Lester, 1995). These findings can only underscore the need for deaf and hard of hearing students to participate in comprehensive career development programs during the school years that help them understand themselves, their skills, and their talents so that they can 1) acquire and refine good work habits, 2) acquire and refine good learning skills, 3) learn about career opportunities, 4) learn to make educational plans, 5) make and implement career plans, and 6) make sound career decisions (Hoyt, 1994).

Premise 2: Adoption of a philosophy, principles, and practices of self-determination and self-advocacy for deaf and hard of hearing students in the transition planning process promotes an effective restructuring of the career development curriculum.

Student self-determination and self-advocacy should be the primary focus of transition services and the career development curriculum. These skills must be taught and supported by the school and parents from the earliest years. Schools must position students to live personally meaningful lives, through a K-12 developmental progression of experiences that enhances decision-making skills and life options and provides opportunities to enrich and expand life experiences and challenges (D.Schuett, personal communication, January, 1998). Schools must recognize that successful students are those who are equipped to guide their own destinies (Cashman, 1995). Also called person-centered planning, this philosophy puts the person at the center of transition planning (Perlroth, Pumpian, Hesche, & Campbell, 1993). The shift toward person-centered planning means leaving behind the "one size fits all" system-wide planning that reflects service availability rather than individual needs (Beach Center on Families and Disability, 1997).

Transition is about growth. Growth will include growing pains, and the opportunity to learn from both success and failure. Students must have opportunities to learn about choice, practice problem-solving and help-seeking skills, and begin to define their identity as competent deaf or hard of hearing people in incremental stages before they can master transition planning and goal setting skills (K. Wiecki, personal communication,

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January, 1998). Today's workplace has changed rapidly and will continue to change with advancing technology. A developmental approach prepares students to adapt to these changes as they encounter them over their lifetimes.

This perspective may require a paradigm shift for many schools. The school, parents, and community must be guided by a presumption of ability that assumes that the student can achieve employment and self-sufficiency if the appropriate services and supports are made available. Positive expectations and an emphasis on strengths by parents and educators can be a powerful force for sustained commitment to educational and career goals (Conyers, Koch, & Szymanski, 1998).

The beginning point for a successful transition process must be the support of parents and school staff in promoting student self-determination and self-advocacy. Students can then begin to assume responsibility for decisions about life and career plans, maintaining a career portfolio, completing a self-assessment, exploring career options, and participating in life and work experiences outside the school. In this way, the responsibility for informed, realistic choices shifts to the student over time.

The school or career counselor should be involved in this aspect of the transition process, since his or her training and competencies are appropriate for nurturing self-determination, self-advocacy, and related developmental skills in the student. Similarly, counselors trained with a comprehensive developmental counseling and guidance focus could help the school change from traditional guidance and counseling programs to programs that empower students. These programs can incorporate changes in society and the world of work into transition planning. Rather than focusing on occupational choice as a one-time activity, counselors can empower students with lifelong coping and decision-making skills through a longitudinal career development perspective (Szymanski, 1994). This leads to the next premise.

Premise 3: Adoption of a comprehensive developmental guidance model will provide an appropriate framework to support the career development process of deaf and hard of hearing students in transition.

Career development should be considered the core of a successful transition program (Szymanski, 1993). The career development process can play a key role in a school's educational program and should be integrated throughout the curriculum.

Career choice-even in the most general sense-is intimidating. While some deaf and hard of hearing students know exactly which of the approximately 22,000 careers available in the United States today they plan to enter, most are overwhelmed by the options. Many choose a path of least resistance-following choices made by family, friends, or professionals, and never find their unique role and identity in life. Many others restrict their options by narrowing their choices too quickly. Regrettably, others may decide that current disincentives to work such as SSI (often received by eligible students in high

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school or enrolled in other types of training) are more attractive than entering the work force.

The study of career development dates back to the work of Frank Parsons in 1909, who proposed in his book, Choosing a Vocation, a model of career choice as a one time matching process. Since that time, the field has come to recognize the developmental nature of career decision making that hinges on multiple aspects of the individual interacting with his or her environment over time (Herr, 1997; Super, 1990; Szymanski, 1993). Career choice today is not a one-time occupational choice process but a lifespan coping and decision-making process.

There are several models of career development that recognize the complexity of choosing and entering a satisfactory career. For example, Hershenson's (1996) theory of work adjustment posits:

1. Work personality: the individual's personal system of work motivation and self-concept as a worker. Work personality develops primarily during the preschool years and is influenced mainly by family;

2. Work competencies: the individual's work habits, physical and mental skills applicable to jobs, and work-related interpersonal skills. These develop primarily during the school years and are influenced by the learning environment; and

3. Work goals: the individual's career objectives at any one time. These develop typically during later school years and are influenced by family and learning environments as well as the socializing environment (peer or reference group). Obviously, these domains interact with each other as the individual develops.

A comprehensive guidance model recognizes that all students pass through specific stages as they mature. The National Career Development Guidelines, for example, support activities that nurture competencies from K-adulthood in the areas of self-knowledge, educational and occupational exploration, and career planning. This model is preventative and educational. It provides for student development, age-appropriate skills, and informed choice, rather than clinical or intervention-based assistance. Most importantly, it serves not as an ancillary focus but as an integral part of the overall school curriculum. This model also encourages extensive collaboration among teachers and counselors, thus integrating classroom concepts with developmental issues, including career and work-based learning. Counselors should be involved as facilitators for this knowledge transfer that makes the school-work relationship a part of the developmental process for the student.

Premise 4: School counselors should have representation on committees and work teams that focus on school restructuring, strategic planning, and implementation of transition initiatives.

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Counselors who keep up with trends and developments in the work world are a valuable resource for school and curriculum planning groups and policy makers. Their involvement in the planning and implementation of such programs is critical. Counselors have the competencies to tie curriculum issues to career development issues and possess the skills to work with resources, people, information systems, and technology.

School systems today strive to meet multiple mandates. Often they tend to be reactive, not proactive, and focus on problem students or the superstars while the average student struggles with career choice and preparation issues. If school counselors in these systems are freed from routine clerical and administrative duties, they can help infuse a comprehensive career development perspective into transition programs for those students immediately entering the workforce as well as those going into post secondary programs.

Comprehensive career development programs must incorporate individual and group strategies for delivering career awareness, exploration, and preparation to all students. Counselors can work with teachers to tie academic curriculum issues to career development issues. They can help school curriculum committees incorporate approaches for developing decision-making and problem-solving skills, job search skills, employability skills, interviewing skills, and resume development into a comprehensive program.

The inclusion of all students in career development programs is essential to the credibility and acceptance of such programs.

Premise 5: Schools must recognize their responsibility to prepare non-college bound youth for the workforce or entry into appropriate technical-vocational training.

Historically, the United States as a society has shown little interest in promoting the transition of high school graduates into the workforce (Educational Testing Service [ETS] 1990). Rather, the emphasis has been on a baccalaureate degree for all, or at least some, postsecondary training. Even worse, schools typically view the career education "track" or the vocational preparation "track" as a failure (R. Jacobs, personal communication, 1998). Those who cannot or do not wish to continue into college are typically relegated to second class citizenship. Schools have reinforced this theme by often focusing the lion's share of their transition services and resources on preparing students for postsecondary college level education. This philosophical bias, unfortunately, has not been advantageous for the large percentage of deaf and hard of hearing students who either do not enter postsecondary programs or drop out without completing a postsecondary program (Lam, 1994). It encourages students and schools to enter into a type of magical thinking that says real life is years away and there are many years to acquire the skills of adulthood while continuing to be educated. Worse, it encourages schools to abrogate their leadership responsibility for the transition process.

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Premise 6: Adoption of an interdisciplinary curriculum that is outcome-oriented will promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are important for productive and satisfying lives for deaf and hard of hearing students.

As stated previously, current initiatives in educational reform, economic development, and workforce preparation respond to the age-old question, "Education for what?" An interdisciplinary curriculum that is part of a comprehensive K-12 program can help teachers move beyond concerns over subject matter and focus on what the content of that subject matter will add to the totality of an individual's life. Transition cannot and should not be compartmentalized into one department, program or subject area. Transition should never be "their" job; rather it should be "our" job¾the job of all students, counselors, teachers, parents, support staff, and community stakeholders (M. Brother, personal communication, March, 1998).

An interdisciplinary curriculum will include strategies for helping students identify general career goals, taking into account students' interests and previous work experiences. Broad career goals can then guide instructional and paid and unpaid work experiences in school.

General career goals to guide instruction are necessary but not sufficient. Indeed, transition programming is in some ways the logical outgrowth of the work-study programs of the 1960s (Szymanski & Danek, 1985) and the career education movement of the mid to late '70s (Hoyt, 1980). However, future demands on our deaf and hard of hearing youth require more comprehensive approaches.

In the 21st century, our lives will become increasingly complex. If deaf youth are to access the social systems they need, become self-advocates, develop healthy lifestyles, and meet the demands of the workplace, they must learn basic skills for life: interpersonal, decision-making, and coping skills, in addition to learning about and trying out careers. A curriculum driven by concepts that are important to students' lives will include skills to reduce stress, increase self-control, teach ways to develop friendships, and access support systems to reduce isolation. It will address conflict resolution, life-skills training, parenting skills, opportunities for community service, and related skills. In other words, transition programs must prepare students to confront and master the full range of issues they will encounter as successful adults. These programs must support students as they implement, evaluate, sometimes revise, and then realize their life goals.

How do schools carve out such programs from an already crowded curriculum? The successful program will find the resources to hire staff who are solely responsible for transition programming and activities (Benz & Lindstrom, 1997; Krieg, Brown, & Ballard, 1995). The job title for this position is not as important as the responsibilities, background, and training of the transition coordinator or specialist.

The transition coordinator/professional will serve as the leader for the transition initiative, not as an isolated initiative but as an integral part of the academic and vocational

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programming within the school. This individual can serve as a systems change agent by educating parents, administrators, and staff on the importance of career development and transition initiatives (M. Downey, personal communication, March, 1998). The coordinator should be responsible for program organization and development as well as direct services to students. For example, on the programmatic level, this person can establish transition teams, develop program goals, coordinate linkages, establish follow-up of graduates, and provide leadership in staff training and "best practices" in transition. On the individual level, the coordinator can schedule and conduct Individualized Education Program/Individualized Transition Plan (IEP/ITP) meetings, and assume overall responsibility for transition programming and activities while continuing to work collaboratively as a team member facilitating individual student outcomes. Coordinators can develop and monitor linkages and collaborative services with community partners and serve as the point of contact for the school's transition initiatives.

Transition specialists should have a background and training in counseling with deaf or hard of hearing students from a developmental perspective. Often, individuals with career or rehabilitation counselor training and backgrounds can be hired to provide the necessary school-based leadership to a transition program since they have expertise in working with community partners such as employers or postsecondary programs (K. Wiecki, personal communication, January, 1998).

As stated previously, schools cannot restructure curriculum and provide leadership in transition-related programming without collaboration from parents and community stakeholders, working in collaboration with students.

Premise 7: Schools should include parent and employer participation in all aspects of an interdisciplinary curriculum, career development programming, and transition activities.

Parental involvement has long been considered an essential component of K -12 educational programming and IEP/ITP development. The IEP/ITP is an educational map for students that can provide the framework for planning for the transition to community life and employment. More recently, educational reform proponents recognize that student workforce preparation needs can be met, in part, by incorporating employer characteristics and expectations (geographic, cultural, and economic), regional labor market trends, local community employment needs, and other realities into a comprehensive career development/transition program.

Employers are an integral part of the school-parent-community partnership. Employers and parents can both benefit from understanding one another's perspectives and the needs of deaf and hard of hearing youth (PCEH, 1987). One possibility for participation is a formalized Employer-Parent Advisory Committee (D. Morton, personal communication, March, 1998). An employer is in business to make a profit or further the goals of the organization. Their commitment to hiring, accommodating, training, maintaining, and

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promoting a deaf or hard of hearing employee may be short-lived or wavering without appropriate awareness and support from schools and parents.

Employers will need information about the communication needs, expectations, and rights of deaf and hard of hearing workers; support for making job modifications and accommodations, such as the use of assistive technology and interpreters; and expertise in providing awareness training to coworkers when necessary. Parents, supported by school and adult service personnel, can bridge this information gap to employers. Hiring deaf and hard of hearing youth may not be of foremost concern to employers, but maintaining a productive workforce will be. When concerns are addressed in a supportive environment, employers can make the connection to a win-win situation for all.

What many schools overlook is that parents also work, own businesses, or have careers. Many parents can be recruited as potential employers, career role models, mentors, or resources for career development or supported employment activities. Schools can enhance their transition programming by actively recruiting parents and other community members as employers, by supporting their involvement, and by incorporating their expertise in the continuum of work-based learning (e.g., job shadowing, job developing/coaching, mentoring, structured work experience, and paid work experience).

The involvement of parent-employers, deaf or hard of hearing community members or employers in general in schools will not occur without planning. Schools, school counselors and other school personnel will need training in employer development strategies; organizational culture, employee selection, training and development; placement of students; workplace supports and follow-along; and the development of work-based learning. Parents who serve as employers will need additional training in sensitive ethical areas such as confidentiality, dual relationships, and the like (P. Power, personal communication, March, 1998).

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Family Issues

Parents and family members of deaf or hard of hearing students represent a diverse population. The concepts and premises underpinning effective family-school relationships for deaf and hard of hearing youth have been addressed in a previous Sharing Ideas paper (Bodner-Johnson & Sass-Lehrer, 1997).

Family involvement in transition is the culmination of years of negotiation with and involvement in the school and multiple related systems (Rizzo & Varrin, 1997). The family's expectations and resources, history of relationships with schools and other systems (collaborative or contentious), and other factors within the family unit will impact the quality of family involvement in transition planning (Rizzo & Varrin, 1997)

Parental or family involvement should not fade during the transition planning and implementation years; rather the family should be a major partner in transition planning (Szymanski et al., 1988; Wehmeyer and Davis, 1995). Outreach to parents by the school is essential to maintain involvement, particularly as the student enters adolescence (J. Pray, personal communication, March, 1998; Watson, 1997).

Family involvement consistently has been found to positively impact transition for youth in general (Sinclair & Christenson, 1992). Similarly, family support and encouragement were found in at least one study to be a major factor in transition success for young adults who were deaf or hard of hearing. Yet family involvement can easily decline across the grades unless schools work to involve parents in positive ways, recognizing that efforts to involve families must address geographic and work schedule problems.

To the extent that they are willing and capable of participation, all families should have the opportunity to be partners with the school. Parents are the one constant variable in a lifetime of changing schools, employers, service agencies, and professionals. Parents must be active, not passive, participants in transition planning. Parents must learn about the transition process, must recognize their role in the transition process, and must actively participate in the process. Fortunately, the 1997 amendments to IDEA increase parental involvement in decisions about their child's education, thus enhancing the likelihood that parents can comfortably become and remain partners in transition programming.

Family members can fill many roles as active participants and partners with their children and the school in the transition process: serving on curriculum committees and work-study councils, mentoring students, serving as role models, developing community liaisons, strengthening employer contacts and collaborative activities, and in general, providing suggestions, support, and involvement during transition programming.

The early years can provide many antecedents to school-based transition activities. The development of the individual's work personality, work competencies, and work goals during the early years can be strengthened by interactive play with peers (Szymanski,

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Turner, & Hershenson, 1992), exposure to realistic role models, and the use of career-related fantasy (Super, 1990). The development of work personality and competencies can be enhanced by responsibilities for home chores and, later, school chores (Szymanski, Turner & Hershenson, 1992). Often deaf or hard of hearing youth are not held responsible for chores at home or school, thus diminishing opportunities for skill development, interaction with others, team participation, a sense of contributing, and the development of a self concept as a competent individual.

All adolescents flourish when they have a family life characterized by mutual respect, including parents who show ongoing interest in their lives and communicate high expectations for achievement and ethical behavior. Schools can help strengthen families who are vulnerable or lack skills to support their children's development through strong K-12 parent education programs. At the same time, individuation from parents is part of the adolescent passage that roughly corresponds with the transition phase of education. Many adolescents, including deaf and hard of hearing adolescents, can become alienated from parents during this time (Long, 1990). Alienation of deaf youth from parents can be exacerbated by distances from the school and communication barriers.

Unfortunately, school policies and teacher attitudes often discourage parental involvement in school activities beyond the elementary school years. Then again, as their children age, parents experience their own individuation process-a parental transition to independence. To keep parents participating during these years, they must have meaningful, collaborative roles, such as the Employer-Parent Advisory Committee mentioned earlier. Parents who participate in transition planning and programming must feel useful, develop confidence in their relations with school staff and community partners, and use the schools as family resource centers, particularly in communication training. Schools should provide parents with specific information on assisting with learning activities, real life work exposure and participation, and be committed to including parents beyond the IEP/ITP contact. Schools also can and should address parent concerns such as loss of SSI benefits which remains a strong disincentive to work for many deaf and hard of hearing youth (F. Bowe, personal communication, March, 1998; J.Schein, personal communication, March, 1998).

Premise 8: Shared goals and expectations of deaf and hard of hearing youth and their parents will lead to greater transition success, particularly if these expectations are based on realistic and careful planning.

Recent research (Bullis, Bull, Johnson, & Peters, 1995) suggests that deaf students in their last year of high school and their parents have similar expectations regarding postschool plans. However, one year after leaving high school, deaf students' actual life experiences are frequently not consistent with their or their parents' earlier plans. For example, deaf students who plan to enter postsecondary education or live independently often fail to attain these goals. This discrepancy is greater than that for hearing students and suggests a deficit in family involvement in transition planning and/or assessment for deaf youth.

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These findings again raise the importance of ongoing communication and involvement with parents by schools. Parents in another study (El-Khiami, Savage, & Tribble, 1991) mentioned a need for timely and accurate information from schools. These parents, primarily a middle class sample, believed they could not readily access information about educational options and programs available for their children or jobs and careers suitable for their children. Realistic expectations must be reviewed and incorporated into IEP/ITP planning.

Premise 9: Qualitative assessment of interests, abilities, aptitudes and other transition-relevant competencies offers a flexible, open-ended, holistic, and empowering approach to helping deaf and hard of hearing youth know and understand themselves.

Many deaf and hard of hearing youth have experienced years of standardized tests that have compared them to others in an age or norm group. Few standardized career assessment instruments focus on all of the major areas necessary for an integrated, comprehensive career evaluation of deaf or hard of hearing individuals.

Qualitative assessments use information gathered in a variety of environments-interviews, observations, historical records, educational records, and similar information to develop a holistic study of the individual. The flexibility and adaptability of qualitative methods make them attractive for working with deaf and hard of hearing youth who may differ in significant ways from the groups on whom standardized tests are normed.

Qualitative methods of assessment have several qualities that make them useful in transition counseling (Goldman, 1992). They can provide a level of self-awareness that can involve the student directly and actively in decision making. Qualitative methods also incorporate a developmental framework that implies growth through learning about oneself.

More importantly, qualitative methods of assessment are empowering and person-centered. These methods cast the student as a collaborator by emphasizing learning about oneself and understanding oneself within the context of different environments. For example, career portfolios are one way to provide linkages between school-based components of evaluation with work-based components. A career portfolio is a tool that allows students the opportunity to collect a great deal of information about themselves, document competencies, and record accomplishments and achievements (McDivitt, 1994). A portfolio may be used as both an assessment and counseling tool by pointing out existing skills, interests and values, progress toward goals, and changes or new initiatives in education or career goals that should be considered, among other uses (Szymanski, Fernandez, Koch, & Merz, 1996).

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Rehabilitation Issues

Work is a central aspect of human existence. Ideally, all learners should effortlessly master those developmental tasks that equip them to assume adult roles in society, particularly the role of a worker. Realistically, many deaf and hard of hearing students do not master these tasks-inside or outside school-especially in today's complex and rapidly changing environment.

In recent decades we have witnessed a continuing shift from agriculture and manufacturing to high-tech and service jobs. Over half of all new jobs created in the past decade require more than a high school education (Wirth, 1992). Tomorrow's workers will need to adapt to career changes, downsizing, technological innovations, and be able to respond to new learning situations. They will need to work productively on teams, engage in problem solving and decision making. These are daunting skills for all youth to attain, but particularly challenging for many deaf or hard of hearing students to master.

The shift to a knowledge-based economy, new technology, population shifts, and the globalization of the marketplace (Drucker, 1993; Thurow, 1993) means that many deaf and hard of hearing youth may find themselves relegated to dead-end low status jobs. Many available jobs are part-time with no benefits or opportunities for advancement (Hope & Rice, 1995). Job change will often be a part of life in the 21st century (Petras & Petras, 1993). Deaf and hard of hearing youth must be equipped with skills not only in getting and keeping a job, but also in coping with job changes or possible loss .

The failure of our schools to blend academic learning with workforce preparation is perhaps most evident in the myriad of programs that remedy lack of readiness to enter and remain in the workforce. Currently, there are somewhere between 168-175 federal programs for job training costing over 25 billion dollars yearly.

One of the best known and most successful vocational and independent living programs is the state-federal vocational rehabilitation program. For over 70 years, rehabilitation legislation has assisted people with disabilities in becoming employed through vocational and related educational services (Jenkins et al., 1992). Long before the current legislation mandating transition planning for special education students, the state federal rehabilitation system provided vocationally related services to eligible deaf and hard of hearing students who were ready to graduate or leave school. However, transition linkages between special education and rehabilitation were often weak and depended upon the goodwill of the systems involved (Danek & McCrone, 1989). The quality and quantity of services for transition varied from state to state-and even within states-were subject to available funds and other constraints. As recently as 1988, formal written cooperative arrangements between a special education program (or LEA) and vocational rehabilitation agencies were disappointingly low (Allen, Rawlings, & Schildroth, 1989). The 1992 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, (P.L. 102-569) provided greater specificity to requirements for cooperation between special education and rehabilitation. While adopting the same transition definition as IDEA, the 1992 Rehabilitation Act

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Amendments went a step further and required formal cooperative arrangements with state education officials. These formalized arrangements addressed the determination of lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services.

In 1998, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-220) added consultation, technical assistance, and procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities to the responsibilities of state vocational rehabilitation agencies. In addition, state rehabilitation agencies are required to inform all applicants, through appropriate modes of communication, that they have the opportunity to exercise informed choice throughout the vocational rehabilitation process.

Although we will never completely eliminate the need for training or retraining adult workers, the sheer complexity of transition planning and preparation reinforces our bias toward the need for developmental career preparation during the school years, with gradual transfer of responsibility to adult service programs when necessary or appropriate.

Premise 10: Adoption of the perspective that not all students can or will benefit from later adult service programs increases the likelihood of school leadership in transition activities.

Transition in the broadest sense and as described in IDEA provides for programming that includes transition to employment, independent living, and community participation (Halpern, 1985). A successful transition is much more than getting that first job or starting a postsecondary program-it includes the personal and social skills to adapt to the work and community environment. Social skills, rather than specific job skills, often make the difference in a successful transition to an adult work life (Schmitt, Cartledge, & Growick, 1988; T. Jones, personal communication, March, 1998). These skills, along with ancillary skills such as self-regulation of attention, emotion, and behavior, are the product of a developmental progression that begins in early childhood. They do not miraculously appear after a few weeks or months of social skills training in adulthood.

Most adult service programs provide time-limited, cost-effective programming that does not address the comprehensive needs of the deaf or hard of hearing individual. State vocational rehabilitation agencies, despite a renewed emphasis on cooperative transition planning, tend to focus on employment outcomes rather than broader indices of independent functioning. For example, the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) used by vocational rehabilitation agencies is written with a specific vocational goal and services necessary to achieve that goal.

Adult service programs such as the federal-state vocational rehabilitation system, in comparison to special education, remain eligibility systems, not entitlement systems. Recent attempts to liberalize eligibility requirements for rehabilitation services do not confer automatic access to these programs. Unlike special education, the services rehabilitation programs provide are not always free, sometimes not accessible or

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appropriate, and may be constrained by state requirements, waiting lists, an order of selection, funding issues, and similar real life issues. Parents and many special educators are often unaware that adult service programs do not provide a seamless extension of the system-wide supports encountered during the school years.

Premise 11: Clarification of a vision of postschool success for students will provide rehabilitation and other community service providers with guidelines for effective transition and postschool services.

Transition goals and objectives are ineffective if they do not show a clear relation to postschool outcomes. The ITP is a plan for services to achieve these outcomes. The gradual transfer of responsibility from the school to the vocational rehabilitation agency (for those students who need adult services) can be incorporated into the ITP. By including rehabilitation services personnel in the planning of each student's ITP, information about resources and opportunities, plans for the transfer of responsibility, and an ongoing relationship can be forged.

As a member of the student's transition planning team, the rehabilitation professional would have access to the student's personal profile prior to the student leaving school and could use this information to develop the IPE with the student prior to exiting school. The implementation of the IPE, including exploration of postschool options, identification of assistive technology, and other resources would be pursued prior to and immediately after the student leaves school, thus providing a measure of continuity in services, particularly during the crucial first year after exiting school.

Research indicates that students in special schools tend to have more involvement with rehabilitation agencies in their transition planning than do students in local schools (Allen, Rawlings, & Schildroth, 1989). Deaf or hard of hearing students may be dispersed throughout local schools, making it difficult for rehabilitation professionals to locate and become involved with transition planning for these students, despite good intentions or formalized cooperative agreements. As local schools assume greater responsibility for educating deaf and hard of hearing youth, it becomes more imperative that they take steps to involve rehabilitation professionals in transition planning. Local schools and local education agencies (LEAs) must make concerted and sustained efforts to contact and involve the local office of the state vocational rehabilitation agency in their area.

The principles of a successful cooperative effort in transition are obvious. We know what should be done and what is now required by law. Implementation and commitment are required to make these principles a reality.

Premise 12: Clarification and negotiation of roles, responsibilities, and policies among special education and adult service agencies on an ongoing basis will promote the implementation of appropriate and effective transition services for deaf and hard of hearing youth.

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Transition remains a noun, not a verb, until it is implemented. Despite legislative and public policy mandates, good intentions, and papers such as this, transition will be remembered as an ideological buzzword until the "nuts and bolts" of designing and implementing services become a reality throughout our nation. To implement transition, schools must become partners with families, communities, and adult service agencies such as vocational rehabilitation, but take the lead in clarifying responsibilities, supporting each others' efforts, facilitating the delivery of appropriate services, and providing resources, such as staff consultation and technical skills. Schools must assume leadership for connecting with adult service programs in the community and making them accessible to deaf and hard of hearing students. School personnel, particularly residential school personnel, can lend expertise to adult service programs in the areas of communication accessibility, assistive technology, awareness of Deaf culture, and related areas.

Communication among diverse systems, agencies and individuals poses many challenges. Partnerships among community stakeholders must be driven by the specific needs of each student and recognition that these needs change over time.

State vocational rehabilitation agencies have diverse practices and policies regarding assisting deaf and hard of hearing applicants for their services (Stewart, Schroedel, & Watson, 1991). Although guided by federal legislative parameters, state rehabilitation agencies can mold their practices to local standards and fiscal constraints. In theory, this principle should allow flexibility to meet individual consumer needs. In practice, it can lead to the perception of inconsistency when consumers and their families compare notes.

The frustration some students and their family members experience in accessing adult service programs, particularly rehabilitation services, is widespread (Mendelsohn & Brown, 1989). Some recent research evidence suggests that deaf consumer dissatisfaction with vocational rehabilitation agencies is the result of unfamiliarity with or misunderstanding of rules, regulations, and the scope of responsibility of these agencies (Bullis, Davis, Bull, & Johnson, 1997; Lam, 1994).

Early and ongoing involvement in the transition process by vocational rehabilitation agencies would address many currently existing misunderstandings and concerns. Often, minor logistic arrangements can make a difference; for example, schools can provide office space for a rehabilitation counselor with the local agency, thus insuring closer working relationships. Or professionals in deafness from area agencies and schools can have monthly lunches rotated among sites (with parents invited) so that all stakeholders can understand program missions and mandates on a personal level.

Consumer (and professional) education about adult service rules and responsibilities should occur within the context of transition planning. State coordinators of services to deaf and hard of hearing consumers (SCDs) within state vocational rehabilitation agencies can serve a crucial role in helping consumers and allied professionals understand and access rehabilitation services. The SCD can be instrumental, for example,

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in developing a state plan of services to deaf and hard of hearing consumers and cooperative agreements with local education agencies (LEAs). Another important role could be in developing informational brochures, media and other consumer-friendly, communicatively accessible resources that explain how vocational rehabilitation procedures, policies and practices apply to deaf and hard of hearing consumers. Some states have developed exemplary materials that can serve as models for others.

We do not wish to appear pessimistic about vocational rehabilitation involvement in the transition of deaf or hard of hearing youth because this system offers enormous potential, albeit sometimes unrealized, to be a partner in the transition process. It is up to students, schools, parents, and community stakeholders to harness the potential of vocational rehabilitation.

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Environmental Issues

Environmental factors provide the context for a successful school to work transition for deaf and hard of hearing youth. Environmental issues are those legislative, economic, attitudinal, and evaluative factors that impact on the effectiveness of transition programs in schools and adult service programs for deaf and hard of hearing students. Environments can be both immediate and distant. Family, school, peer group, adult programs, and workplace are inevitably embedded in, and influenced by, conditions and events in the broader societal and cultural context.

Deaf and hard of hearing children develop in multiple contexts and each context can provide the foundation for competency and the opportunity for success. During the school years when individual factors such as interests and abilities are developing, limiting effects of a deaf or hard of hearing child's environment can be particularly harmful. Deaf or hard of hearing students may be less engaged in paid work activities or may be held less responsible for chores at home or at school. Yet these activities are the very ones that enrich life, enhance self-esteem, and promote autonomy and independent decision making in the adolescent. Deaf and hard of hearing youth who successfully negotiate the transition process typically have had year-round paid work experiences while in school (Bullis, Davis, Bull, & Johnson, 1997).

Schools can never fully compensate for a diminished environment but can lessen its deleterious impact by enriching the educational environment, harnessing resources available in the community, and providing students with the information, tools, and strategies to participate in community life. At the same time, the central role of the individual should not be lost in our desire to provide environmental support for transition. Students can easily become dependent on systems for continued support and intervention, rather than becoming empowered to be responsible for their own choices and the consequences of such choices (Szymanski, 1994).

Premise 13: Schools should develop a continuum of transition activities that take advantage of various legislative provisions ranging from school-based learning to work-based learning.

High school students do not always make a connection between their work outside school with their academic learning or school programs. Counselors can provide that connecting link by helping students expand their awareness of self and understanding of the options available to them. Counselors can put work-based learning into perspective for deaf and hard of hearing youth and thus facilitate the transfer of learning across settings. For example, in the broad occupational goals category, work-based components might include paid work experience, volunteer work experience, technical and production skills work, and health and safety issues training while school-based learning components might involve career exploration, selection of a career, career counseling, and periodic review and evaluations of needs and interests.

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Some educators may be concerned that transition programming will detract from the acquisition of basic academic skills. If mastery of such skills is considered an outcome of transition programming, this concern is unjustified. Indeed, in a meta-analysis of career education interventions for hearing adolescents, career education interventions had a positive impact on overall academic achievement (Evans & Burck, 1992). It is highly probable that such interventions would yield similar benefits for deaf and hard of hearing youth. Yet Schroedel (1991) noted great variability in career education offerings for deaf and hard of hearing youth with over 90% of all residential schools in one study lacking a career education instructor and only 5% of all seniors in that study having been enrolled in a career education class.

Research relative to the career education offerings for deaf and hard of hearing youth in mainstream settings is scarce. It is probable that the findings of such research would not be encouraging. Some school districts are reported to provide a ratio of one transition coordinator per 8,000 special education students (S. Starnes, personal communication, March, 1998)

Premise 14: Transition programs that include provisions of the school-to-work initiatives build partnership bases for its students.

Partnerships between schools and businesses, colleges and governments should ensure lifelong opportunities for learning for everyone involved in those partnerships. Students learn through work experience, employers come to understand the needs and capabilities of deaf and hard of hearing people; policy makers gain heightened awareness of the contributions deaf and hard of hearing people make to the community and the economy.

Premise 15: By expanding membership on a student's IEP/ITP team to employers, adult service personnel, placement specialists, and other community-based support services personnel, attitudinal barriers to gainful employment for deaf and hard of hearing students can be minimized.

Attitudinal barriers, including misunderstanding about accommodations and lowered expectations, still present obstacles to full community participation on the part of deaf and hard of hearing students. Although deaf and hard of hearing people today have more visibility in the media and more protection of rights under the ADA and other legislation, subtle forms of attitudinal discrimination through stereotyping still exist. Many employers are concerned about the costs of accessibility or the competencies of their deaf and hard of hearing workers.

The ITP component of the IEP is a written record of the student's long term goals, employment needs, independent living objectives, and how they will be met. By participating on the IEP/ITP team, community stakeholders can be sensitized to the needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals, become aware of possible adult services such as supported employment (Danek, Seay, & Collier, 1989), and become educated about the

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abilities of these students so that their needs will not be overlooked once the student once they exit high school.

Premise 16: The American workforce will become more diverse in the next century. Transition programming for deaf and hard of hearing youth should include culturally sensitive activities and strategies for living and working in a multicultural, multiethnic society.

As we approach the 21st century, the American public is becoming increasingly heterogeneous. White non-Hispanic men are becoming a smaller percentage of the labor force, and women and minority group members are comprising a larger share (U.S. Department of Labor, 1996). By 2050, close to 50% of the entire American population will be African American, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Latino/Hispanic.

Deaf and hard of hearing individuals are as heterogeneous a group as hearing people. Allen (1994) noted that although the overall numbers of students in the Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth (AS) had declined by 12% between 1984 and 1994, the number of Hispanic deaf or hard of hearing youth had increased by 28%.

Among transition-age deaf and hard of hearing youth, fully one-third are now from non-European backgrounds. Both race and gender interact with context. We know from research that black or Hispanic deaf youth have poorer transition outcomes (Allen, 1994) and can predict by extrapolation from these findings that the successful transition from school to work for deaf and hard of hearing youth will become more, not less, problematical as we move into the 21st century.

Premise 17: Effective transition programming for minority deaf and hard of hearing youth will require sustained efforts to reach this population and their families.

For minority students, the family and surrounding environment have attributes that must be taken into consideration in any transition program: 1) the values and attitudes it transmits; 2) the behavioral expectations it presents; 3) the resources it contains, and 4) the barriers it presents. During the early years, culture can influence work personality through role models, parental expectations, and through societal treatment of one's cultural group.

Many cultures have differing values regarding work and education. These values may be at odds with those of the majority culture. Minority students may come from families that are economically disadvantaged. Their parents may be unable to take off work or arrange child care for siblings in order to participate in school meetings and activities. Culturally sensitive school personnel must work with and respect cultural values and behaviors while reaching out and finding ways to incorporate the minority student and his or her family into the broader community of school, work and society.

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Individual and societal belief structures are important components of transition planning. Students in transition must have exposure to believable deaf and hard of hearing role models (including gender and ethnicity). Professionals must recognize that culture influences the relative acceptability of transition goals. For example, students who hold collectivist beliefs (e.g., Asian, Native American Indian) may feel that family and community interdependence are more important than personal independence. Interdependence, family unity, and cooperation can be harnessed by using a family-centered, person-planning strategy that respects and incorporates cultural values (Beach Center on Families and Disability, 1997). At the same time, professionals must avoid stereotyping on the basis of ethnicity or culture-not all students or families of any one background will have exactly the same values, beliefs, or perceptions.

While it is important for professionals to be sensitive to parents' beliefs and values, deaf students may be linguistically isolated from their parents (M. Downey, personal communication, March, 1998). Unlike other minority groups, many minority deaf or hard of hearing students have a double language barrier, if they come from a home where English is a second language (Schildroth, Rawlings, & Allen, 1991). Without adequate communication at home, the deaf child may consequently become assimilated into the Deaf community and develop quite different beliefs and values from those of the parents.

Premise 18: An ecologically sound transition program includes peers as positive role models and mentors.

As we have stated previously, deaf and hard of hearing adolescents must master competencies in many domains: the ability to adapt to a changing workplace, the ability to belong to and contribute to a group, interpersonal and decision-making skills to make appropriate choices in life, to name a few.

Often overlooked as a transition and career development resource are peers, particularly peers who are school alumni and can serve as knowledgeable mentors. Peers are an important part of the socializing environment. Although the term "peer pressure" is often used pejoratively, particularly for adolescents, positive peer pressure can be used as a teaching, modeling, and enculturation strategy (Carroll & King, 1985). Peers can have an influence on life choices, particularly in situations where parents are communicatively or emotionally unavailable. Peers can provide a sense of community and identity, and can contribute to self-esteem and achievement.

Peers can provide a safe and relevant vantage point from which to view the transition process. They can support, inform, encourage, confront, and communicate in ways that adults rarely can. They can model success, validate frustrations, combat isolation and demoralization, and provide direction when life appears ridden with stumbling blocks (Lynch & Lynch, 1997). Then, too, peers who have worked with adult service agencies such as vocational rehabilitation can help demystify a sometimes confusing process of accessing help from such agencies, when necessary.

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Although peers should not be used to replace professional involvement, they can be a powerful adjunct to group strategies that address coping skills, a positive self-image, overcoming barriers, working with interpreters, advocating for accessibility, and related needs.

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Conclusion

This paper is a beginning, not an end. It is our hope that it will provide support for those who believe, as we do, that there is a critical need to focus on new ways of preparing deaf and hard of hearing youth for the transition to successful adulthood. The next step involves local efforts to design and implement successful transition programs for deaf and hard of hearing youth. These community-based programs should incorporate program evaluation and dissemination of evaluation findings to stimulate further implementation of models and "best practices" to reach all deaf and hard of hearing youth in the 21st century.

Appropriate transition programming for deaf and hard of hearing youth can harness the resources of all environments: family, learning, socializing, and adult service programs through partnerships that recognize and respect individual choice and options, learning styles and abilities, cultural diversity, and lifelong learning.

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