

### **Culturally Responsive Parent Collaboration Process**

**In some cultures, special education is not dealt with as openly or proactively as in the United States. What recommendations do you have for counseling resistant parents into understanding how special education services may be a viable option?**

Recognizing that other cultures differ in their understanding and interpretation of disabilities and special education services is a starting point. However, it is necessary for educators to have a clear understanding of the cultural assumptions that guide their own thinking. In addition, educators also need to explore and listen, in an inclusive and respectful manner, to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) parents' concerns and perspectives.

Author and researcher, Dr. Beth Harry states that we should not think of CLD parents as being resistant or in denial, but as having a different understanding or perspective.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Harry recommends "cultural reciprocity"<sup>2</sup> as an approach for building and enhancing home-school communication, understanding, and collaboration with CLD families.

Effectively using the process of cultural reciprocity includes four steps:

**Step 1:** Identify the cultural values underlying interpretations of the situations involving youth and families. The key to this step is to ask, "Why?" For example, why might it seem important and natural to recommend that a youth with developmental disabilities, who is in transition, move from his/her family home to supported living and, eventually, independent living? Through self-reflection, the answer might turn out to be that independence and self-sufficiency are strongly held values that may or may not be shared by the youth and his/her family. Self-reflection is a continuous process and the question "Why?" needs to be asked in each situation with each youth and family in order to understand and respond appropriately to each particular case.

**Step 2:** Explore the extent to which values and assumptions are recognized and accepted by the youth and family. If the youth and family do not view independent living as a milestone to adulthood, then this may not be an appropriate transition goal.

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<sup>1</sup> "Making Sense of Disability: Low-income Puerto Rican Parents' Theories of the Problem", (1992) Council for Exceptional Children, Volume: v59 Source Issue: n1 [www.freepatentsonline.com/article/Exceptional-Children/12593940.html](http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/Exceptional-Children/12593940.html)

<sup>2</sup> For Additional Information:

Essential Tools: Improving Secondary and Transition Education for Youth with Disabilities - Cultural and Linguistically Implications for Transitional Personnel (2005), National Center On Secondary Education and Transition, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. An Ideas That Work, U.S. Office of Special Education document. <http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/diversity/partIV.asp>

Kalyanpur, M. and Harry, B. (2012) Cultural Reciprocity in Special Education: Building Family-Professional Relationships, Brooks Publishing.

Warger C. (2001) Cultural Reciprocity Aids Collaboration with Families, Council for Exceptional Children, <http://www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=4227&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CAT=none>

**Step 3:** Acknowledge any cultural differences, and explain to the youth and family how and why American mainstream culture promotes different values. For example, the educator might explain the value of independent living and discuss ways in which this value has benefited other youth and families.

**Step 4:** Collaborate with the youth and family to determine the most effective way of adapting professional interpretations and recommendations to the family value system. For example, if parents understand the reasoning of personnel—that there will probably come a time when they won't be there to support their child—then they may be more likely to want to develop a transition plan that enhances skills for independence and self-sufficiency.