

## Individualist and Collectivist Values in Transition Planning for Culturally Diverse Students with Special Needs

By Rhonda S. Black, Ed. D., Kathleen Dimino Mrasek & Ruth Ballinger, University of Hawaii at Manoa

### Abstract

*This article discusses transition planning for students with special needs from diverse cultural backgrounds. First, an overview of individualist versus collectivist values is presented. Then, a comparison is made between individualist and collectivist values and how they may impact transition planning with respect to family involvement, occupational choice, and independent living. The article concludes with suggestions for helping transition planners and service providers to become more culturally responsive.*

Throughout the professional literature, self-reliance, competitive employment, and independent living are considered indicators of successful transition. In fact, one of the primary purposes of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1997 Amendments (P.L. 105-17, Section 601d) is "to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living." However, these values are not shared by *all* students and families. The present article compares cultural variables of individualist and collectivist cultures and discusses implications for transition planning.

Transition planning must include an analysis of cultural variables. In this article, culture will be viewed as more than race or ethnicity. Culture will be viewed as a set of values, beliefs, traditions, and habits of thinking (Greene, 1996; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Culture also includes language, religion, patterns of social and interpersonal relationships, and family expectations. All of these variables greatly influence an individual's interests, abilities, and aptitudes, as well as preferences in residential environment, community integration, and occupational choice. Therefore, culture plays a principle role in the kinds of transition activities that will best match a student's personal and family values. We will first describe the basic differences between individualism and collectivism. This will be followed by a discussion of how

these values influence three key areas of transition: (a) family/student involvement, (b) occupational choice, and (c) independent living. Finally, we will make recommendations for becoming more culturally responsive to these values.

### Individualism vs. Collectivism

Different cultural groups have different values and goals. In the United States, this often results in conflict between the culture of school and the cultural values a student has adopted from his or her family and community (Yamauchi, 1998). While there is wide diversity within ethnic groups, students from African-American, Native American, Hispanic/Latino, Polynesian, and most Asian cultures are more likely to hold collectivist goals and values. In contrast, students with European backgrounds tend to align more closely with individualist goals and values. Individualism focuses on the separateness and unique strengths of a person (Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Trumbull, 1999b). Individualism emphasizes *standing out from the crowd*, independent enterprise, and personal accomplishments. Students and families from individualistic cultures value individual rights and opportunities, pursuing personal interests, and setting and achieving personal goals (Yamauchi, 1998). In individualist cultures, self-reliance is based on people being true to their own values and beliefs.

In contrast, collectivist cultures focus on the group, which may be family, neighborhood, or tribe. People are valued to the extent that they are able to sup-

port the group. Collectivism emphasizes helpfulness, interdependence, and group success (Rothstein-Fisch, et al., 1999b). In a collectivist culture, self-esteem is derived from what a person can contribute to the good of the whole group (Rothstein-Fisch, et al., 1999b). Self-reliance is linked to ideas and actions that advance the goals of the group and lessen the burden that the individual places on that group (Sushila, 1998). Therefore, personal goals may be subordinated to the interests of the collective group (Yamauchi, 1998).

It may be helpful to view individualist and collectivist values as part a cultural continuum with interdependence

---

**For many students from collectivist groups, the school experience is characterized by conflict, misunderstanding, and cultural mismatch.**

---

and individuality being on opposite ends of the spectrum with a range of values falling between these poles (Lynch, 1999). Largely drawing on the work of Luft (2001), Chattergy and Ongteco (1991) and Zuniga (1998), we have created Table 1 to illustrate many differences between individualist and collectivist world views.

The concept of collectivism impacts many children's lives and seems to explain much of the cultural clash that some students face in dealing with the individualistic approach highly prized within the American school system. For many students from collectivist groups, the school experience is characterized by conflict, misunderstanding, and cultural mismatch. They find it extremely difficult to conform to a system in which (a) school demands are expected to take precedence over family needs, (b) explicit

verbal interaction is the main avenue of communication, and (c) students are required to compete with and outperform their peers. An example is provided by Rothstein-Fisch, et al. (1999a) who recount an immigrant mother's experience with a parent-teacher conference. The teacher reportedly states "Your daughter is very sociable . . ." and "Your daughter is outstanding in..." The mother's response however, was unexpected.

"My tendency as a Mexican mother was to feel very happy she was sociable; after all, that was what I was fostering. However, I did not know what to do about her being outstanding; I had tried to show my daughter not to *show off*, but it seemed that it was not working."

Understanding this type of parental reaction is important in transition planning. Family values and beliefs must be considered in making career preparation and adult living plans.

Age-appropriate behavioral expectations may also differ. In individualist cultures, developmental milestones are based on promoting self-reliance (e.g., walking, talking, toilet training, and later working, and moving out of the family home) (Luft, 2001). Many Anglo-European families expect many independence and self-care skills by the time the child enters school at around age five. During the primary school years, schoolwork and extracurricular activities are the child's major priority. And by the time the child leaves secondary school, employment and some movement towards independent living is expected. Rarely do adolescents assume substantial responsibility for things such as family finances, or caregiving of younger siblings and elderly relatives.

In contrast, families in col-

lectivist systems focus more on developing interdependency in children. Physical contact is important and adults place few demands on young children in a manner that Anglos might consider *indulging* the child. However, the roles and responsibilities of children change over time. As the children get older and more capable, they are expected to assist the family by babysitting, doing chores, or working with other family members (Zuniga, 1998). Often the oldest son is given more authority and responsibility than his younger siblings. Supporting the group may be more important than school, and family responsibilities may take precedence over academic and after-school extracurricular activities such as vocational student organizations, youth apprenticeships, and other school-based work experience opportunities.

Children from collectivist cultures often interact differently at home with their parents than they are expected to act in school. Children do not ask a lot of questions or dialogue with adults at home. This often leads to miscommunication and misunderstanding in the classroom (Chattergy & Ongteco, 1991; Losey, 1995). Children from collectivist cultures also are more sensitive to nonverbal communication in interpersonal interactions than children from individualist cultures (Chattergy & Ongteco, 1991; Zuniga, 1998). Furthermore, children from collectivist cultures are expected to respond to nonverbal behaviors with warmth, attention, and respect. This underlies the individual's responsibility in being aware of and responsive to the needs of the family and neighborhood without having to be explicitly told (Zuniga, 1998). Linked to this is the requirement of emotional control; positive feelings are encouraged,

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of Individualist and Collectivist Values**

Values	Individualist	Collectivist
Family Goals and Priorities	<p>To support one's individual interests and goals.</p> <p>To promote and support family members in their individual realms of achievement and career goals.</p> <p>In childrearing, parents will provide (or will pay to have it provided).</p> <p>One's identity is defined by personal and career accomplishments.</p> <p>Equality is emphasized, democracy and equal representation are stressed.</p> <p>Educators are viewed as equal partners with family in making educational decision.</p>	<p>Individuals receive and are obligated to offer extensive social, economic and personal support.</p> <p>Where there are conflicting commitments, family and neighborhood demands transcend school and work requirements.</p> <p>Community (or neighborhood) will take responsibility for children without prior notice.</p> <p>One's identity is defined by family/group membership. There is a shared identity and sense of place within a hierarchy.</p> <p>Family hierarchy is defined by age and gender. Relationships are complementary—parent-child, leader-follower, teacher-student, boss-subordinate.</p> <p>Educators are viewed as the experts. It is disrespectful to question or talk back to elders or those in authority.</p>
Career Preparation	<p>Extension of one's individuality.</p>	<p>Will benefit group goals.</p>
Education—Secondary and Postsecondary	<p>Volunteer responses.</p> <p>Learn by discussing, asking, questioning, and verbalizing.</p> <p>Ask for help.</p> <p>Review book, comment and critique (Chattergy &amp; Onteco, 1991, p. 150).</p> <p>Preparation for becoming a good citizen.</p> <p>Teach independence and autonomy. Do your own work. The sooner you're on your own, the better (Chattergy &amp; Onteco, 1991, p. 150).</p> <p>Task-orientation.</p> <p>Individual achievements most important aspects of education.</p>	<p>Speak only when spoken to.</p> <p>Do not ask too many questions.</p> <p>Listen and do as I say.</p> <p>Learn by observing (Chattergy &amp; Onteco, 1991, p. 150).</p> <p>Preparation for being a good family member.</p> <p>Work with others. Help one another like you do at home (Chattergy &amp; Onteco, 1991, p. 150).</p> <p>Relationship-orientation.</p> <p>Social relationships are most important aspects of education.</p>
Living Arrangements	<p>"Nuclear family units with little reliance on extended family. Use of professional assistance and services when issues cannot be resolved within the nuclear family unit" (Luft, 2001, p. 134).</p> <p>Group home and supported living arrangements acceptable and desirable.</p>	<p>"Extended family or group and blood kinship lineage. . . family and group identity may be of primary importance and contribute to family's reputation, status, cohesiveness, and sense of collective (group) responsibility" (Luft, 2001, p. 134).</p> <p>Reliance on external agencies is seen as shameful. Group home and supported living arrangements would be viewed as a failure of the family to meet group obligations.</p>

**Table 1 (cont)**  
**Comparison of Individualist and Collectivist Values**

Values	Individualist	Collectivist
Social Goals	<p>“Society (and public schools) encourage doing better than others as proof of mastery; games are based on having a winner and loser, winners in a variety of activities are regularly rewarded” (Luft, 2001, p. 134).</p> <p>Self-reliance; being true to, and standing up for one’s personal/individual beliefs.</p> <p>Initiative and competition.</p> <p>Activities outside the family/neighborhood are encouraged.</p> <p>Individuals are responsible for their own actions.</p> <p>Call attention to inappropriate social behavior and censure the person.</p>	<p>“Cooperative societies work together to achieve a mutual goal; children may be taught to wait until everyone has finished so that no one is embarrassed; individual achievement is likely to be less motivating in comparison to roles as family member and group or community pride” (Luft, 2001, p. 134).</p> <p>Interdependence and helpfulness, maintaining rapport and acceptance.</p> <p>Group decisions and cooperation.</p> <p>Relationships outside the family/neighborhood configuration should not dominate intra-familial and neighborhood affinities.</p> <p>Group responsibility.</p> <p>Inner-directed embarrassment arising from inappropriate social behavior.</p>
Social Interaction Style	<p>Take turns talking.</p> <p>Encouraged to self-advocate and speak one’s mind.</p> <p>More reliance on explicit verbal instructions.</p> <p>“Tendency to be direct with a topic, factual and impersonal. There is an expectation to identify and address difficulties and conflicts directly, including expression of related concerns and use a highly verbal style” (Luft, 2001, p. 135).</p> <p>Loud talking and laughing are acceptable and often seen as enjoyable.</p>	<p>Simultaneous talking.</p> <p>Avoidance of direct conflict, expression of beliefs are only appropriate when advocating for the group.</p> <p>More sensitive to nonverbal communication.</p> <p>Value placed on smooth interpersonal relationships, especially in public. May answer yes to be compliant rather than express personal feelings.</p> <p>Problems addressed by allowing time to pass.</p> <p>Sensitivity to insults or criticism, seen as attack on personal dignity, honor and self-respect; offense taken to sarcasm.</p> <p>Loud talking may be seen as rude or offensive.</p>
People with Disabilities	<p>Medical origin of disability—lies within the person; disability spoken in terms of diagnoses, levels of severity.</p> <p>Teach independence.</p>	<p>Religious/spiritual origin of disability—disability results from spiritual or moral imbalances in the family—therefore, family must provide care as part of spiritual quest.</p> <p>Will be provided for, there is a role to be played within the familial community</p> <p>Understanding and compensating for others’ limitations</p>

while negative ones, such as anger, are discouraged from being expressed. Thus, students and parents may not express dissatisfaction with various educational and social goals and objectives formulated for them by those in authority (e.g., educators and school administrators) (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). This is especially important to recognize in developing transition goals and objectives.

Collectivist conceptions of disability vary from one cultural group to another but, in general, are closely aligned with religious beliefs. A child born with a disability may be seen as having had a curse placed upon them, as a punishment to the parents for wrong-doing, or as a test of the family members' faith and worthiness of rewards in the next life. For others, disability is viewed as a misfortune, as an act of God, or as a part of life that is difficult but must be accepted. Many times, little emphasis is placed on the child's education or development. Children with disabilities are commonly conferred "disabled" status and are not expected to work or live outside the family home. The focus is on protecting, indulging, and collectively caring for the child (Luft, 2001; Zuniga, 1998). This conflicts directly with the goals of transition planning which focus on educational and developmental progress, maximizing independence, and functioning in the community as a self-determined individual.

## Family/Student Involvement in the Transition Planning Process

Perhaps the most important cultural implication for transition is family/student involvement in the planning process. "The family is a cultural group, unique by virtue of the values, beliefs, and experiences shared by its members" (Dennis & Giangreco, 1996, p. 107). These authors state that educators must be aware of the following factors that shape the priorities and perspectives of individuals and families:

- The emotional climate of racial, religious or ethnic discrimination.
- The implications of poverty.
- Differences in family composition.
- Family work practices and roles.
- Neighborhoods and living environments.
- The nature, degree, and duration of acculturation into the dominant cultural group.
- The experience of living in a family with a child with special needs. (p. 104)

Collectivist cultures place a high value on the family, with the family being the source of social, economic, and personal support. Intra-familial and neighborhood affinities take priority over school and work obligations and relationships (Zuniga, 1998).

Family input is especially important because they may be

the only people who have had continuous contact with the student throughout the entire transition process (Everson & Moon, 1987). However, there is often a lack of involvement of culturally diverse parents in educational planning for their children (Boone, 1992; Harry, 1992). Barriers to participation of culturally diverse parents in the transition process are often related to socio-economic circumstances, language, and cultural/ideological values. For example, Boone (1992) discusses the influence of culture on parental behavior in transition planning meetings. Parents from Asian and Hawaiian/Polynesian groups have established patterns of interaction characterized by roles based on hierarchy, deference to authority, nondirect confrontation, and maintenance of harmony and good relations. Dennis and Giangreco (1996) state that in Asian and Latino cultures educators are highly valued and asking questions may be viewed as questioning the teacher's authority. These communication patterns are contradictory to the transition literature that stresses equal partnerships of parents and educators in the decision-making process and an assertive "say what you think" communication style.

The transition literature also emphasizes student choice, self-advocacy and self-determination. However,

*Hawaiian children are not given much personal choice/control in the family. They are*

---

Kalyanpur and Harry (1999) outline the following differences between individualist and collectivist view of disability:

### Individualist

- \* Disability is a physical phenomenon.
- \* Disability is an individual phenomenon.
- \* Disability is a chronic illness.
- \* Disability requires remediation or "fixing."

### Collectivist

- \* Disability is a spiritual phenomenon.
- \* Disability is a group phenomenon.
- \* Disability is a time-limited phenomenon.
- \* Disability must be accepted.

*“seen but not heard.” They are expected to be responsible for personal self, take care of younger siblings, respect their elders, contribute to family chores, and not ‘embarrass’ the family by drawing attention to themselves. They are very protective of each other.* (Dennis & Giangreco, 1996, p. 108).

*“In many Hispanic families, control of important decisions remains with the parents (or grandparents) until the child reaches adulthood or marries and moves away from the family. . . . To assume that the student with disabilities’ choice supersedes that of the parents may violate the cultural patterns of the particular family and inject conflict into the family system (p. 108).*

Kalyanpur and Harry (1999, pp. 25-29) highlight several differing perceptions between collectivism and individualism with respect to concepts of self, choice and equality. First, the idea of an individualized education or transition plan (IEP or ITP) might be contrary to beliefs that individual identity cannot be separated from the group, and individual needs are subservient to the group. Second, parents might perceive that their children have little authority to make decisions for themselves, especially in the areas of occupational choice and living arrangements. Third, the idea of equality is not shared among all cultures. In many collectivist cultures people are assumed to play different roles and have different statuses owing to their different backgrounds. Finally, some families may not accept the principal of “integration/inclusion” for children with disabilities. They believe that the opportunities and outcomes for a child with disabilities will be different, just as the opportunities and outcomes

for an older child or a male child will be different from younger and female children.

Dennis and Giangreco (1996) suggest that special educators must do the following to conduct culturally sensitive family interviews:

- Appreciate the uniqueness in each family.
- Be aware of the influence of your role as a professional.
- Acknowledge your own cultural biases.
- Seek new understanding and knowledge of cultures.
- Develop an awareness of cultural norms.
- Learn with families.

The following list of questions for establishing respectful and trusting relationships with families of culturally and linguistically diverse students may best summarize this section (Greene, 1996, p. 27, modified slightly):

1. What language is spoken in the home and by which members; what is the literacy level of family members?
2. What are the family’s expectations for the personal and social development of their child with a disability (e.g., the degree of independence encouraged)?
3. What are the family’s residential and work-related goals for the child?
4. What are the family’s views on disability and how does this affect their view on [vocational] education for their child?
5. How is the family conceptualized (e.g., common mainstream American concept of a nuclear unit which views individual health as belonging to the individual, or a more extended family structure which conceptualizes health of an individual in terms of the family as a whole)?
6. What are the family’s child

rearing practices (e.g., authoritarian and hierarchical in which elders hold the decision making power, or equal and individual rights-oriented).

7. How much legal knowledge about parental rights and advocacy does the family possess?

## Occupational Choice

In *Theories of Career Development*, Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) explain that most career development theories view a person’s occupational choice as a highly individual-centered activity, based on individual preferences, an opportunity for self-expression, and as part of one’s personal identity. These career development theories, however, are based on Anglo-European culture which is characterized by “individualism, competition, achievement, time-consciousness, a nuclear family structure, and the valuing of written tradition, scientific method, and a direct assertive style of verbal and nonverbal behavior” (p. 276).

Many young people “come from cultures where competi-

---

**Individuals from collectivist cultures often view career choice in the context of potential contributions and obligations to the group (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).**

---

tion, individualization, and strict adherence to time is not common” (Correa & Tulbert, 1991, p. 21). These young people are concerned with the social environment. They are influenced by support or doubt from others, and prefer activities and occupations that allow for more personal relationships and working cooperatively with others. Therefore, these individuals are not as likely to perform well in work settings involving competition, individual task completion, and timed assignments (Correa & Tulbert). Indi-

viduals from collectivist cultures often view career choice in the context of potential contributions and obligations to the group (Osipow & Fitzgerald,

**It is important for educators to recognize that parent/family influence may be especially strong in the career choice and aspirations of individuals where the acceptability of one's career to parents may be more important than whether one's career is a reflection of individual fulfillment and self-realization.**

1996). Therefore, many students view their home, family, and community as the center of their existence rather than their career or occupation. It is important for educators to recognize that parent/family influence may be especially strong in the career choice and aspirations of individuals where the acceptability of one's career to parents may be more important than whether one's career is a reflection of individual fulfillment and self-realization. This fact further confirms the need for parental involvement in transition planning.

Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) describe how various factors influence career choice for members of collectivist minority groups. For example, the influential role of families of African-American students (including the extended family), the important role played by the Black church and similar community organizations, and a historic interest in social occupations may influence career decision-making. For Asian American students, parents play a large role in deciding what careers are acceptable for their child. For Latino students, issues dealing with English language skills, or migrant family work patterns may come into play.

Native Americans typically have close ties with the reservation, and home, family and community are viewed as more important than one's career. Therefore, issues such as relocating away from the reservation and obligations to the group may influence career choice.

Therefore, when educators are assessing career-student cultural match, the following factors may be addressed and questions asked:

-Individual vs. group achievement; cooperation vs. competition—*Does the student's family/culture value cooperation rather than competition? Would a specific job that values individual, independent achievement conflict with the student's values and patterns of interpersonal interactions?*

-Family job traditions and expectations—*Is the student expected to work in a family business or traditional family occupation? Does the family have certain expectations as to what occupations are and are not appropriate for their child?*

-Exposure to types of occupations—*Has the student been exposed to a wide variety of careers, or has most of his or her observational learning consisted of family members' jobs that are all in the same occupational cluster? Does the student know the requirements of different jobs outside of what family members do?*

-Acceptable occupations—*What jobs are valued? Are some jobs seen as inappropriate or shameful? Are certain occupations unacceptable for (a) males or females, (b) those of certain ages, or (c) those with various levels of social status?*

-Communication and personal interaction style; verbal vs. nonverbal—*Does the student*

*have well-developed interpersonal verbal communication skills? Does the student prefer to remain relatively quiet and "speak only when spoken to"?*

-Family view of disability—*Does the family believe that people with disabilities should not have to work outside the home? Does the family view it as shameful to accept help (including job training, placement and follow-up) from outside agencies?*

-Responsibilities to the family, nuclear and extended—*Does the student have responsibilities at home that supercede work and school expectations outside of the home?*

-Educational aspirations and financial realities—*Does the family have certain expectations about the type of postsecondary education appropriate for the student? Does the family want the student to attend a certain kind of school after high school (e.g., university vs. technical school)? Considering the career goals of the student/family, would a community college or technical school provide a more appropriate education at less expense to the family?*

-Willingness to relocate—*Does the extended family view moving away as unacceptable? If so, teachers may have to look for occupations that exist in the student's community. Valuable time and effort could be wasted on vocational education for skills that cannot be performed in the student's immediate community if the student is unwilling to relocate.*

In addition to family and individual values, environmental conditions and events, past learning experiences, how the student approaches tasks, and preferred learning style are also important in determining a per-

son-occupation match. All of these factors must be considered in transition planning.

### Independent Living

Throughout the transition literature, independent living is viewed as an indicator of *successful* transition. However, families with collectivist values may not share this view. An extended family orientation (of many Polynesian and Asian groups) with emphasis on sharing and communal property runs contrary to the dominant culture's beliefs that grown children should establish independent lives and residences (Boone, 1992). Dennis and Giangreco (1996) interviewed special education professionals about their perceptions and experiences as members of cultural minority groups. Several of the interviewees identified important family priorities:

*Hawaiians believe in keeping the family together. As future generations are born, the family becomes an extended family (O'hana). It is not unusual to have three or four generations living in the same household, with kupuna (elders) caring for the grandchildren while the parents work to support the family. (Dennis & Giangreco, p. 107)*

*An Asian family may not define independence in terms of personal choice and control, nor may they perceive it as a valued life outcome. Indeed, it may conflict with their beliefs. Often Asians regard independence as becoming rebellious, and they do not desire that their children be encouraged to make decisions for themselves. (p. 108)*

In many cultures, it is believed that the family should *take care of their own*. Their willingness to accept assistance

from outside agencies, especially independent living agencies, may not be acceptable and may be viewed as evading family responsibilities. A family's view of disability may also make them unwilling to accept help from disability services agencies. Taking care of a family member with a disability may be seen as *a family matter*, where help from outside agencies is seen as an intrusion.

In some cultures, individuals with disabilities are not expected to work or to live independently. They are expected to assume certain roles within the family that are seen as

---

**In some cultures, individuals with disabilities are not expected to work or to live independently. They are expected to assume certain roles within the family that are seen as equally valuable.**

---

equally valuable. Expectations of males and female roles and responsibilities to the family and the group may also prohibit independent living. Practitioners must be sensitive to these values. They should not impose personal values by making plans for individuals to work or live independently without first consulting the family and eliciting their views. The following from Kalyanpur and Harry (1999) illustrates this point very well. Rani was a 22-year-old Native American woman with moderate developmental delays. She enrolled in a series of courses designed for people with disabilities offered by the local community college. These courses included money management, independent living skills, and one self-advocacy class titled "The New You." Rani's parents decided to pull her out of the program because these courses were making her *rebellious*. This situation could have been

avoided if professionals at the community college would have acknowledged that (a) moving out of the parent's home, off the reservation, and into a group home was not acceptable (even her nondisabled siblings still lived on the reservation), and (b) interdependence (as opposed to independence), and taking care of one's own would have been more closely aligned with this family's values. A transition plan that involved supported or competitive employment on the reservation with Rani staying in the home of her parents or siblings would have been much more acceptable to all concerned.

### Discussion

Understanding the importance of family is one of the keys to understanding the experience of collectivist students in school systems within the United States. The predominance of the family, the neighborhood, and the expectations, duties and obligations that surround them appear to be the basis for a substantial proportion of the discord that culturally diverse students feel in the United States. More specifically, the function of the individual to maintain, support, and cherish the family often clashes directly with school-related demands and expectations. Even though many of the characteristics of the individual's role within the family could serve to enhance attitudes towards school, such as respect for authority and the responsibilities given children, these assets seem to get lost in the overall struggle between school requirements and family obligations. This is especially true in transition planning as the focus moves toward life after school with the school's expectations of independent work and living. To complicate the issue, language barriers may exist between educators and parents/students in-

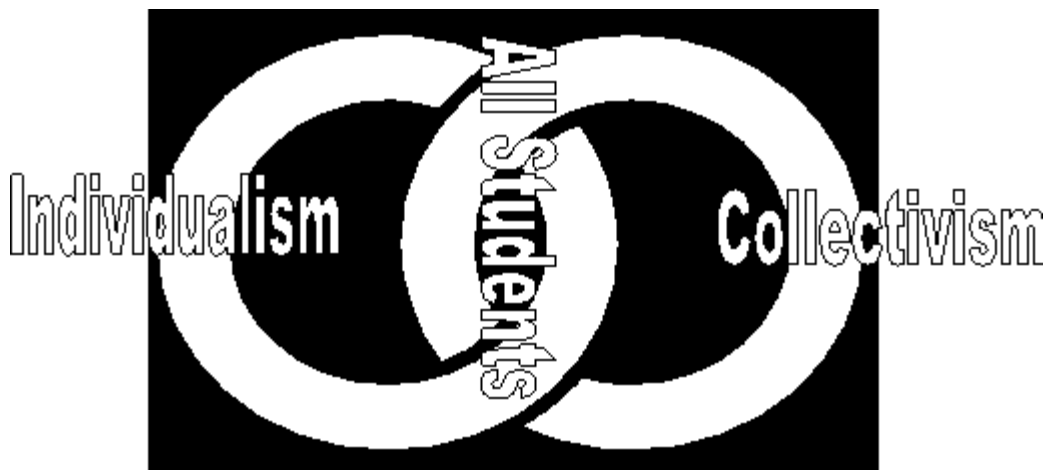
cluding foreign languages and nonstandard English, and differences in nonverbal communication, social interaction patterns, and expectations for school interaction patterns.

The special education transition planning system falls short when it comes to accommodating characteristic collectivist values and behaviors. Co-

operation and group orientation are highlighted in many cultures and de-emphasized in transition planning for competitive employment and independent living. This can be extremely disconcerting for students, for example when asked to always respond with “I” instead of “we” when stating goals for the future. This orientation

towards the group may also be the basis for a student’s “shyness” in comparison to his or her peers who are more likely to be assertive and competitive. Assertiveness and competition are the languages of many occupations in the labor market. Therefore, educators must prepare students for understanding how their personal values fit

Figure 1  
Comparison of Student Needs



Students with Individualist Values	All Students	Students with Collectivist Values
Task-oriented	Feels efforts are appreciated	Relationship-oriented
Individual accomplishments	Feels valued	Group accomplishments/harmony
Competition	Feels included	Cooperation
Independence	Feels accepted	Helpfulness/interdependence/sociality
Success in school/career	Feels successful at something	Importance of duty to family
Explicit/verbal communication	Communicates with others easily; feels communications are understood	Implicit/nonverbal communication
Emotional honesty	Feels emotions are understood	Emotional control
Time consciousness	Needs to understand what is expected and when	Time is flexible
Individual makes own decisions, including career	Feels good about decisions made	Family involved in making decisions, especially about career and living arrangements

into *workforce culture*. First, educators can explicitly explain individualist concepts as simply another way of conducting oneself, making sure that students feel that their own way is equally valid. This can be followed by providing students with opportunities to practice such behaviors in the form of a game, such as teaching resume-writing through pretending they were writing a chapter in a book about famous people, rather than showing off or drawing attention to oneself. Another effective method of assisting students is allowing them to practice skills, such as interviewing, in a private one-on-one situation so that they feel free to behave in a manner that might be interpreted negatively by members of their group.

In summary, we recommend that educators and disability service providers: (a) learn the concepts of collectivism, (b) include activities that promote cooperation, as well as competition, (c) utilize family ties and support networks in working with students, and (d) make the curriculum relevant by providing opportunities to engage in projects that will help their communities. Figure 1 is a representation of the diverse needs of children within any given classroom. Needs of children from collectivist and individualist cultures are outlined along with the common needs of all children.

By understanding the basic values and behaviors of collectivism, educators can minimize the potential for miscommunication, misunderstanding, and conflict with students and families from collectivist cultures. If educators can expand their views of acceptable transition goals, they will be better equipped to assist students and families in achieving the post-secondary school goals that are

the most appropriate for their own beliefs, values, and lifestyles.

## References

- Boone, R. S. (1992). Involving culturally diverse parents in transition planning. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 15, 205-221.
- Chattergy, V. (1992). Bridging two worlds: The teacher and the immigrant Filipino student. *Kamehameha Journal of Education*, 3 (2), 23-28.
- Chattergy, V., & Ongteco, B. C. (1991). Education needs of Filipino immigrant students. *Social Process in Hawaii*, 33, 142-152.
- Correa, V., & Tulbert, B. (1991). Teaching culturally diverse students. *Preventing School Failure*, 35 (3), 20-25.
- Dennis, R. E., & Giangreco, M. F. (1996). Creating conversation: Reflections on cultural sensitivity in family interviewing. *Exceptional Children*, 63, 103-116.
- Everson, J. M., & Moon, M. S. (1987). Transition services for young adults with severe disabilities: Defining professional and parental roles and responsibilities. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 12, 87-95.
- Greene, G. (1996). Empowering culturally and linguistically diverse families in the transition planning process. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, 19 (1), 26-30.
- Harry, B. (1992). *Cultural diversity, families, and the special education system*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kalyanpur, M., & Harry, B. (1999). *Culture in special education: Building reciprocal family-professional relationships*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Losey, K. M. (1995). Mexican American students and classroom interaction: An overview and critique. *Review of Educational Research*, 65 (3), 283-318.
- Luft, P. (2001). Multicultural competence in transition planning processes. In R. W. Flexer, T. J. Simmons, P. Luft, & R. M. Baer (Eds.), *Transition planning for secondary students with disabilities* (pp. 120-160). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Lynch, E. W. (1999). Developing cross-cultural competence. In E. W. Lynch & M. J. Hanson (Eds.), *Developing cross-cultural competence* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (pp. 47-86). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Osipow, S. H., & Fitzgerald, L. F. (1996). *Theories of career development* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Rothstein-Fisch, C., Greenfield, P. M., & Trumbull, E. (1999a). Bridging cultures with a parent teacher conference. *Educational Leadership*, 56 (7), 68-70.
- Rothstein-Fisch, C., Greenfield, P. M., & Trumbull, E. (1999b). Bridging cultures with classroom strategies. *Educational Leadership*, 56 (7), 64-67.
- Sushila, N. F. (1998). Individualism-collectivism revisited. *Cross Cultural Research*, 32 (4), 315.
- Yamauchi, L. A. (1998). Individualism, collectivism, and cultural compatibility: Implications for counselors and teachers. *Journal of Humanistic Education and Development*, 36 (4), 189-198.
- Zuniga, M. E. (1998). Families with Latino roots. In E. W. Lynch & M. Hanson (Eds.), *Developing cross-cultural competence* (pp. 209-249). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Address correspondence regarding this manuscript to Dr. Rhonda Black, Department of Special Education, College of Education, 1776 University Avenue, Wist Hall 127, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822.