

## **Promoting Positive Transition Outcomes: Effective Planning for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Young Adults (Book Review)**

**Pamela Luft**

**Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2016**  
**320 pages, \$75 (Paperback)**

**Reviewed by Bentley Fink<sup>1</sup>**

Providing effective transition services and attaining positive outcomes for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) youth has never been an easy endeavor. Disability education law and policy, such as the IDEA and PL 94-142, guide the education and transition endeavors of DHH children with an eye on improving postsecondary transition outcomes. Yet, educational and employment outcomes for the DHH have consistently shown that DHH youth face barriers that continue to exist even with current supports (Punch, 2016). Because the DHH population is both a low incidence and linguistically diverse population, providing transition services to DHH youth presents a myriad of challenges, particularly for those unfamiliar with working with DHH youth.

Dr. Pamela Luft from Kent State University wrote *Promoting Positive Transition Outcomes: Effective Planning for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Young Adults*. Totalling 249 pages not including references, Luft explores the genesis and evolution of transition services through legislation, the state of transition services today, and issues that continue to serve as barriers. Following this, Luft introduces strategies and tools for professionals in education and vocational rehabilitation. Luft brings forth twenty years of research in the area of transition for the DHH adolescents, with publications on topics ranging from transition services to reading skill assessments to deaf education. Her expertise in this field and subject matter becomes apparent not only through how her literature covers the pertinent issues in DHH transition, but how she recognizes the crucial nuances that contribute to the DHH population's complexity.

The first few chapters of *Promoting Positive Transition Outcomes* are aimed at providing an historical overview of transition for DHH youth. First, she explores how hearing loss impacts many areas of an individual's life, particularly during childhood and early adulthood. A crucial starting point is that 95% of DHH individuals are born to hearing parents, and with that, it becomes immediately apparent that the early choices surrounding communication modalities, or lack of, can have a drastic effect on the youth's later academic and employment outcome. Following this, she explores the legislative history, which have led to the shaping of the required transition meetings for youth who are aged 16, sometimes 14, and that these transition meetings are the result of education and employment laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and its amendment in 2008. The vocational rehabilitation legislation and education legislation, although separate, have come together to inform the other with respect to mandating transition services for youth with disabilities.

A very salient message throughout these chapters is that when providing transition services to DHH youth, one cannot simply categorize hearing loss as just another form of disability among a broader range of labels used in the field. Luft explains:

Perhaps because the increasingly abstract and complex understandings are beyond the communication fluency levels of most DHH students. Accommodations provide them with access to the information but do not address missing linguistic structures, socio cultural understandings, or cognitive skills that allow DHH students to acquire and manipulate such content. (p. 51)

For those new to working with DHH adolescents, this is a crucial point. Luft continues to emphasize and drive home the point of linguistic complexity of the transition context for DHH individuals, specifically in how the IDEA specifically spells out in its requirement that transition team members must:

Consider the communication needs of the child, and in the case of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, consider the child's language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communications

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with peers and professional personnel in the child's language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs, including opportunities for direct instruction in the child's language and communication mode. (p. 44)

*Promoting Positive Transition Outcomes* then addresses the difficulties and issues facing transition outcomes in areas of employment. Employers may be unaware of their requirement to abide by specific ADA stipulations, or may have misconceptions about individuals with hearing loss that are grossly misinformed and even intentional, both which continue to pose a barrier to employment for many individuals who are DHH today. In addition, the IDEA 2004 was written to ensure that IEP transition teams have accurate data for identifying appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals, for determining and prioritizing the necessary transition services and for measuring these achievements. However, she continues to emphasize caution in utilizing assessments designed for general disability upon DHH adolescents by identifying reliability and validity concerns.

Luft emphasizes the role of Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf, or RCDs, as a crucial component of transition teams for they bring experience and knowledge of issues that face DHH individuals. Luft cites several studies that show that working with RCDs leads to improved outcomes for DHH in achieving their employment goals.

Including RCDs in transition team meetings is an important strategy to guarantee that DHH students receive the employment preparation and skills they need in order to meet adult agency and career expectations, and to balance what can otherwise be substantial pressures to focus primarily on academic outcomes. (p. 164)

After covering many of the issues that are common to DHH individuals in secondary and postsecondary settings, Luft presents the hidden fruit of the book; strategies and models for providing effective transition services. First, she presents Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, which is a common model used to help identify and explain processes and interactions proximal to individuals (i.e., family, institutions) and how they influence and shape individuals' lives. Following this, she presents a person-centered planning (PCP) approach to transition planning, and presents

concrete plans that are comprehensive, including a plan for identifying independent living skills. Readers will find this book extremely helpful with insights from an author whose knowledge and research experience with transition services is far unparalleled. Although Luft is an academic, she maintains a level of readability that is easy to understand. She draws from research evidence from a range of sources with no shortage of statistical information.

As someone who has been a recipient of transition services and IEP meetings, as well as having studied rehabilitation counseling, owned and operated a job placement services, and participated in transition team meetings, I can say with confidence that Luft covers many of the essential issues that arise when providing transition services. I am impressed with the breadth of knowledge that Luft puts forth in this book and how she incorporates a very comprehensive base of research evidence to inform her book. Further, as a Deaf individual myself, I think it is crucial to touch upon a point that that Luft honors, recognizes the importance of certain core cultural values of the Deaf community, and how these values drive their effort for advancement in a society that has long ignored, neglected or simply prevented their right for equality in education, employment and civil rights.

## References

Punch, R. (2016). Employment and adults who are deaf or hard of hearing: current status and experiences of barriers, accommodations, and stress in the workplace. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 161(3), 384-397.

## About the Author

Bentley W. Fink received his B.A. degree in Biology from Gallaudet University, and is currently a Ph.D. student at the University of Texas at Austin. His experience includes having worked as a job placement and training specialist for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. His research interests includes cognitive load, hearing loss, culture and complexity theory. He can be reached by email at: [bentley.fink@utexas.edu](mailto:bentley.fink@utexas.edu).