

DETISCH, ELIZABETH WEHRER, Ph.D., December 2007

EDUCATIONAL
FOUNDATIONS
AND SPECIAL SERVICES

PARTICIPATION IN TRANSITION WITHIN A FAMILY SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK
(229 pp.)

Co-Directors of Dissertation: Robert Flexer, Ph.D.
Penny Griffith, Ph.D.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of families of transition-aged students on the importance and influence that their family's attitudes, beliefs, and values had on the nature and level of their participation in the transition process. For consistency of the sample and to examine perspective from a similar group of families, each of the six families interviewed had a child diagnosed with Down Syndrome aged 16-23 who was in or who had completed the high school to adult world transition.

Active, collaborative family involvement in the special education transition process is supported through legislative mandates, research, and best practice. Unfortunately, families are still often viewed by educators as not having equal status or power in the decision-making and are not perceived as actively involved in the special education decision-making process.

Gaining an intimate, real life understanding of families' experiences of involvement in the special education transition process was the focus of this study. As all family members experiences affect the other members, this study was grounded in family systems theory.

The following overarching themes emerged from this study. The issue of active family involvement and participation in special education and transition has been and continues to be an issue of great importance. Secondly, the unique beliefs, values, attitudes, customs, and characteristics of each family are part of their individual family system and do affect the family's level and nature of involvement in the transition process. Thirdly, families indicate that educators have the most important role to play in supporting family's active involvement and participation in the transition process.