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Description and Service Innovation in Adolescent Transition within Kentucky State Agency Education Programs

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DESCRIPTION AND SERVICE INNOVATION IN ADOLESCENT TRANSITION
WITHIN KENTUCKY STATE AGENCY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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DISSERTATION
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Health Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

Amy Catherine Marshall

Lexington, Kentucky

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Lexington, Kentucky

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

DESCRIPTION AND SERVICE INNOVATION IN ADOLESCENT TRANSITION
WITHIN KENTUCKY STATE AGENCY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Of all Kentucky youth, state agency children are at the highest risk of making unsuccessful post-secondary transitions to adulthood. The intent of both studies comprising this dissertation was to understand and guide transition planning to make future improvements to transitions of adolescents in state agency programs.

The Kentucky Youth at Risk in Transition Study was a mixed methods study that identified and described the understandings of student transitions in state agency education programs from the perspectives of youth and administrators. The study included 105 nontraditional education programs funded and supervised by the Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC). Data collection included a survey administered to all KECSAC Program Administrators, focus group interviews with KECSAC Program Administrators, focus group interviews with KECSAC students, and individual interviews with KECSAC students. Survey data produced a description of a variety of key aspects of transition census data for KECSAC students. Qualitative data were analyzed using grounded theory. Results indicated that: transition is more narrowly defined within nontraditional schools; key strengths of transition practice are present in nontraditional schools; and coordination barriers within this inter-agency transition system are most apparent in students' frequent inter-setting transitions between nontraditional and home schools.

The second study was the "Building Enhanced Services for Transition" Study. It was designed to generate improvements to transition planning and services in KECSAC programs. Participatory action research was used so that improvements to transition services would emerge directly from the priorities of those concerned, while grounded theory sought understanding of the emerging changes in services for state agency youth across five KECSAC programs. Participants were comprised of twenty-nine education program administrators and staff members. Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews, researcher reflections, research team meetings, and observations. There were six successive coding schemes throughout the study. A primary finding of the study was the degree to which individual and structural stigmatization of state agency youth impedes successful transitions to adulthood. Understanding the operation of stigma

in these students suggests ways in which this primary barrier might be disrupted and post-secondary outcomes for these students at high risk of failure could be improved.

KEYWORDS: Adolescence, Transition, State Agency Programs, Qualitative Research, Stigma

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

In Kentucky, approximately 15,000 students are educated annually in programs

funded, operated or contracted by state agencies. These "state agency children" come

from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and present a multiplicity of psychological,

physical, behavioral, social, and educational challenges in their alternative education

settings. For state agency children, the frequency and abruptness of transitions from one

program to another is an impediment to optimum learning. To overcome such significant

challenges, it is critical that all such young people be afforded the highest possible quality

of transition planning and support.

The Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC)

was established in 1992 to meet the needs of children being served in state agency

programs as part of a statewide education reform effort. The Collaborative distributes

funding and provide oversight to education programs operated by the Kentucky

Departments of Juvenile Justice (DJJ); Community-based Services (DCBS); and Mental

Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Addiction Services (DMHDDAS). Funding goes

to school districts for teacher training, data collection, interagency collaboration, and

program improvement. There are approximately 100 KECSAC nontraditional education

programs in 54 school districts throughout Kentucky. They serve students across the state

most at risk of making unsuccessful transitions to adult life.

This dissertation offers a critical addition to research targeting transition services

to youth with disabilities by detailing its expression among youth in settings at the

extreme of nontraditional education and using participatory action research to develop

unique on-site team efforts. Occupational therapists are mandated by the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA] 2004) to provide transition services to adolescents with identified disabilities. As experts in enabling occupation and promoting participation; understanding the developmental needs of adolescents; and being aware of the necessities of adult life beyond education, such as independent living skills, careers, social communication, and self-advocacy, occupational therapists can provide a central role in providing transition supports. Despite the expertise that occupational therapists hold in these areas, however, they continue to have little involvement in providing post-secondary transition services to high school students, especially those in nontraditional settings.

The shared purpose of both studies comprising this dissertation was to understand transition planning from the perspectives of those most involved, including students, administrators, and teachers in KECSAC education programs, and to guide improvements to transitions. The first study drew on a survey, interviews, and focus groups with youth and administrators in KECSAC programs to identify and describe student transition plans and services in non-traditional, agency-based education programs of Kentucky. Grounded theory emerged from the description of perspectives on, and services supporting, transitions of state agency children. The second study comprising this dissertation, based upon the first study, was designed to collaboratively generate improvements to transition planning and services in five diverse state agency alternative education programs in Kentucky using a blended methodology. Participatory action research was used so that improvements to transition services would emerge directly from the priorities of those concerned, while grounded theory sought understanding of the emerging changes in

2

services for students across the research sites. Dissemination of the study enables replication of successful transition programming to other KECSAC programs.

Following this introduction, the first chapter begins with a review of the literature. Starting with a historical view of adolescent transition, the chapter describes legislation to promote successful transition to adulthood in a wide variety of populations of youth. In addition, key factors of successful transition, as well as barriers, are identified and described based upon the literature. This chapter defines a rationale for occupational therapy's involvement in adolescent transition services; however, it recognizes the fact that occupational therapy currently is vastly underutilized in post-secondary transition services, despite a great need, particularly in nontraditional education settings. The chapter concludes with a statement of the purpose of the research, a summary of methodologies, and a brief overview of the remainder of the dissertation.

<div align="center">**Literature Overview**</div>

A Historical View of Adolescent Transitions

The time period typically associated with adolescence is between the ages of 12 and 18. The concept of adolescence as a discrete stage of life was first constructed in the early 20th century by G. Stanley Hall. It arose as a result of social and economic conditions of that time, including the expansion of public schooling and the beginning of the industrial era. Younger teenagers became less apt to stay at home to contribute to the family, but were still unprepared to leave home and learn a new trade (Aries, 1962). During the mid-20th century, there was generally a fairly typical sequence of events leading from adolescence to adulthood. Particularly after World War II, it was relatively

easy for young men (especially middle-class Caucasians) to obtain well-paying, unionized jobs upon graduation (Berlin, Furstenberg & Waters, 2010).

Over the past two decades, researchers have found that the period of adolescence is prolonging (Berlin, Furstenberg, & Waters, 2010). The traditional indicator of adulthood, at age 18 or even 21, has to a certain extent, lost its significance. Just as adolescence was constructed in the early part of the last century as a discrete phase of life, a period of "emerging adulthood" has become legitimized as another life stage occurring between adolescence and full adulthood (Arnett, 2002). Similar to changes a century ago, shifting socioeconomic circumstances in the U.S. have redefined adolescence, making transition into adulthood increasingly prolonged, complex, and non-linear (Stephen & Squires, 2003).

The increasing expectation for, and necessity of, completing higher education as a prerequisite to employment makes it difficult for many youth to find a job. As a result of the postindustrial era, the economy has been restructured in such a way that many jobs have been outsourced, and a decline in the labor force in the U. S. has followed (Stein, 2008). Decreased job security has fragmented people's independence (MacDonald & Marsh, 2001). In this period of late modernity, as traditional structural elements, such as race, class, and gender, hold lesser significance in predicting one's life course, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of opportunities of which to choose, leading to more uncertainties and risk (Beck, 1992). This may be, in part, why 40% of American youth in their late teens and early twenties move back with their parents at least once before leaving for good (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005).

4

The period of emerging adulthood has become a time of semi-autonomy, during which time many youth remain dependent on their parents for food and shelter as well as emotional and financial support to help with expenses of job searching, post-secondary education, child rearing, or any other number of life events (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan & Ruth, 2005). Emerging adulthood is a liminal state for many youth, a time for searching and exploration. In general, 18 year olds are not expected to function independently as grown adults. While popular discourse claims that the dependence of youth is evidence of their immaturity and growing sense of entitlement, many aspects of modern life simply make the transition to adulthood more difficult and complicated (Cieslik & Simpson, 2006).

Transition Challenges for Youth with Disabilities

Despite modernity, traditional inequalities are not erased. One of the consequences of the lengthened period of transition into adulthood is that youth with fewer economic resources, education, and support from their families or communities have even a more protracted and burdensome time. Families of low or middle income have a disproportionately larger burden placed upon them, while parents with more resources can contribute to more economic and educational advantages for their children (Berlin, Furstenberg & Waters, 2010).

Transition to adulthood is consequently becoming increasingly challenging for young people with disabilities and their families, including those made vulnerable through placement in mental health, juvenile justice, foster care, or alternative education programs. Many face additive effect of multiple chronic stressors, including social, emotional, or physical challenges, which magnify their problems (Arnowitz, 2005). The

5

cumulative impact makes adversity seem more incapacitating (Gilligan, 2000). Marginalized youth are pressured to negotiate several transitions within a much shorter time frame, and with fewer resources, which is why it is necessary to pay particular attention to transitions of these youth. Some of the most common disabilities in adolescence, "high incidence" disabilities, correlate with the most frequent disabilities in youth in KECSAC settings. In the United States, approximately 6.7 million children receive services under IDEA, Part B, which is 12% of the school population (Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP], 2002). The three largest categories of disabilities in children ages 12 to 17 are learning disabilities, at 59%, mild intellectual disability, at 11%, and emotional disabilities, at 11% (OSEP, 2002). These are described below. Many youth with learning disabilities have average or above average IQ (Silver, 1998). Approximately one-half are diagnosed in their early school years (Wagner, 2003). Academic performance affected as well as functional cognitive skills of daily living (Levine & Wagner, 2005, p. 208). Often, a learning disability is referred to as an "8-hour disability" since characteristics manifest most clearly while students are in school (Silver, 1998).

Mild intellectual disability is essentially a cognitive disability, although a variety of other disabling conditions often co-occur. For example, parents have reported that over one-fourth have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Levine & Wagner, 2005, p. 209). It is typically diagnosed before kindergarten, although mild intellectual disability may not be identified until middle school when students are expected to demonstrate higher order cognitive skills.

Emotional disabilities can manifest in either internalizing behaviors, such as depression or withdrawal, or externalizing characteristics, such as conduct or behavioral disorders. According to the federal definition, characteristics include an inability to maintain relationships, inappropriate behavior, or a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. Behaviors must occur over a long period of time and to a marked degree, and adversely affect academic performance in order to be diagnosed (Bazelon, 2003). Youth with emotional disabilities are less likely than any other category of disability to receive services before adolescence (Levine & Wagner, 2010), and rarely enter school with this diagnosis. Partly for that reason, emotional disabilities are often critiqued for being a "high judgmental" disorder; that is, it is more subjective in its diagnosis (O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006). Those with emotional disabilities have the worst post-school outcomes overall.

According to the 2011 KECSAC census (Parker, 2012), 43% of KECSAC youth are diagnosed with a disability, compared to 14.2% in the Kentucky public school system. The top three most commonly occurring disabilities in KECSAC settings are: emotional/behavioral disability (EBD), at 43% of the KECSAC population; "Otherwise Health Impaired" (including, among other disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), at 21% of the KECSAC population; and mild intellectual disability, 10% of the KECSAC population. The two most prevalent racial and ethnic backgrounds of state agency children are White (72.7%), followed African-American (21.3%). By comparison, 10.6% of students in Kentucky public schools are African-American, making the rate of African-Americans in state agency programs approximately double. Seventy percent of

7

state agency youth are males. Students in middle or high school settings in KECSAC programs comprise 89.9% of the state agency youth population.

The disproportionate representation of youth in Kentucky with disabilities, particularly emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD), and African-American youth, particularly males who are educated outside of mainstream classrooms, shadows national trends. In the U.S., while African-American students comprise 18% of the population, they comprise 35% of students suspended at least once over 10 days (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Similar disparities of youth with disabilities exist. Nationally, 33.4% of youth in juvenile justice facilities receive special education services, with almost half (48%) of those diagnosed with EBD (Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirer, 2005).

Legislation Related to Transition

Transitions, according to the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), are "actions coordinated to prepare for or facilitate change, such as from one functional level to another, from one life stage to another, from one program to another, or from one environment to another" (AOTA, 1998, p. 866). According to IDEA section 330.29 (1990), transition is an outcomes-oriented process focusing on improving academic and functional achievement of a student in order to facilitate successful movement out of school and into adult life. The following section describes legislation about transition for youth from a variety of legislative standpoints.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) stipulated free and appropriate education in 1975 for all children with disabilities, after which it was reauthorized in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Public Law 101-476). This

8

legislation mandated transition services in students' individualized education plans (IEPs), illustrating the importance of planning for transition to adulthood. Since then, with the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 (IDEA; Public Law 105-17) and again in 2004 (IDEA; Public Law 108-446), the process of transition planning has become increasingly legally clarified. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) requires that the student's IEP contain, starting no later than age 16, an individualized transition plan (ITP), an individualized statement of coordinated services and supports leading to meaningful post-school outcomes, and measureable postsecondary goals, based on the child's strengths, preferences, and interests in his or her IEP [20 U.S. C. 1401(34)].

In addition, the plan must include a description of the transition services to be implemented, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community and family involvement. Goals must be written with sufficient detail, including action steps to assist the student and professionals to successfully reach those goals. The 2004 amendments added a regulation that the student must be invited to attend the IEP meeting if his or her postsecondary goals and transition services are discussed. Any agencies that are likely to provide or pay for the student's transition services should also be invited.

Foster care transition legislation. Along with IDEA, other types of transition planning have been identified as imperative for groups of youth most at risk for unsuccessful transition to adulthood. The Independent Living Initiative was passed in 1985, the purpose of which was to help prepare youth for independent living after

emancipation from the foster care system. The types of programming it funded were in education and employment assistance, counseling, and training in daily living skills (Courtney, 2009). Services were typically provided in state independent living programs (Massigna & Pecora, 2004).

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 improved upon this legislation by doubling federal independent living services by $140 million per year, allowing states to use 30% of funds for housing, and permitting states to extend Medicaid eligibility to former foster children to 21 years of age, critical because of their need for mental and physical health care services. A 2003 amendment allowed the U.S. Congress to appropriate $60 million per year to fund training and educational vouchers for youth up to 23 years of age, called the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (Courtney, 2009). Although Kentucky did not extend Medicaid eligibility through the Chafee Act, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act signed into law in 2010 allows foster care youth to continue to receive health insurance through Medicaid until age 25 (Brooks, 2012).

The Chafee Act is intended to supply vouchers for life skills, mental health training, postsecondary education and training for youth who age out of care. Although funding has doubled to $140,000,000, it is still insufficient for the approximately 25,000 youth who age out each year. According to Osgood, Foster, and Courtney (2010), this converts to less than $2,000 per person, not including the cost of administering the funds, and assumes that every dollar would go to the youth.

Since 2008, the Fostering Connections Act has financially assisted young adults up to 21 years of age as long as they are completing a high school or equivalency

program, enrolled in post-secondary or vocational school, participating in a vocational program, or working at least 80 hours per month (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). In addition, the state is required to collaboratively create a transition plan with the young adult at least 90 days before he or she is emancipated in order to determine options and needed services for employment, education, housing, and health insurance. Philosophically, as Courtney (2009) points out, it is a fundamental reform to child welfare policy, not only because of the increased funding, support, and focus on transition, but also because of its acknowledgement of the state's responsibility of supporting youth through young adulthood, and its emphasis on interdependence rather than independence in young adults' lives.

Juvenile justice legislation. Transition planning is particularly critical for youth (both with and without disabilities) in the juvenile justice system in order to prepare them for the challenges they encounter as they reintegrate into the community. Griller-Clark (2005) defined transition in the juvenile justice system as:

> A coordinated set of activities for a juvenile offender, designed with an outcome-oriented process, which promotes successful movement from the community to a correctional setting, from one correctional setting to another, or from a correctional setting to post-incarceration activities including public or alternative education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. (p. 5)

Detention centers struggle with how to meet the federal requirements for transition under IDEA (2004), not only for logistical reasons but also because of lack of funding and resources (Baltodano, Platt, & Roberts, 2005). Therefore, transition planning should start the very day the child arrives with the development of an individualized transition plan (ITP). Included in it should be not only IDEA-mandated education and

services, but also post-incarceration services in the areas listed above (Griller Clark & Unruh, 2010).

Identifying key factors of successful transition of state agency children is critical to promote the success of this highly transitory group. Due to the great diversity of the KECSAC population, it is difficult to definitively state the overall central factors of successful transition. Different supports are needed for different children, which is essential to best practices. However, there are some overarching practices that extend across systems, described below.

Best Practices in Transition Services

In such a diverse system of youth and programs, there are unquestionably different needs and different goals based on each individual child as well as the system in which he or she is placed (Lyons & Melton, 2005). However, "treating vulnerable youth as belonging to distinct groups is somewhat misleading, because the youth served by these different systems overlap to a large degree and in many combinations" (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010, p. 215). Overall, these youth are vulnerable as demonstrated by their involvement in social service and correctional systems during childhood and adolescence, a developmentally critical time.

There are various reasons for this overlap. For example, diagnoses of behavioral disabilities are typically accompanied by educational, family-based, or psychological difficulties (Lyons & Melton, 2005). Over one in three (35%) of youth with emotional disabilities are arrested as juveniles (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010, p. 215). Both incarcerated youth and foster youth have significant academic challenges, increasing the

likelihood of their placement in special education programs (Osgood, Foster & Courtney, 2010). Youth frequently cross through these systems.

There are also many similarities between youth-serving systems. As Lyons and Melton (2005) point out, "the children's service systems interlock to such a degree that consideration of them as separate systems is an artificial . . . categorization" (p. 308). Not only do the same risk factors influence involvement across systems, but also involvement in one system may intensify other problems, leading to further contact with other systems. For example, high mobility between homes and schools interrupts learning, which may result not only in special education placement, but potentially also referrals to the juvenile justice system (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010).

For all transitioning state agency youth, therefore, there are certain shared principles that promote the ultimate goal of transitioning into a meaningful life in the community in a chosen adult role. There is a large degree of overlap between youth based on common risk factors, diagnoses, and system linkages. These best practices across youth-serving systems, described below, includes strengths-based planning, skills training for independent living, practical supports for job exploration or training, preparation for postsecondary education, and an ecological approach involving family and community.

Student-centered, strengths-based planning. The first principle is student-centered transition planning, an approach for developing individualized supports for transitioning youth. It is inherently based on students' interests, preferences, values, as well as needs for support (Kohler & Fields, 2003). One such model is person-centered

planning, which helps transition teams generate approaches to provide authentic supports to transitioning youth, typically using graphic techniques (Michaels & Orentlicher, 2004).

At its most basic, strengths-based planning involves student-assisted development of goals based on relevant assessment information and student preferences, active student participation in engaging in the transition process, and student-led evaluation of progress (King, Baldwin, Currie, & Evans, 2005). Students, along with their parents, foster parents, or caregivers, as well as support networks, are encouraged to participate in, and, if possible, lead the development of their IEP/ITP and transition planning process (Griller-Clark, Rutherford, & Quinn, 2004; Michaels & Orentlicher, 2004). Through the process of student-centered planning and programming, students develop and strengthen skills of self-determination, which is a vital aspect of adult development (Kohler & Field, 2003). Self-determination refers to "both the right and the capacity of people to exert control over and direct their lives" (Wehmeyer & Gragoudas, 2004, p. 54). It is the ability to exert control over personally meaningful life choices and the means to developing into a capable and responsible adult (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998).

The ability to employ self-determined behavior is essential for youth, especially those who are particularly vulnerable, such as state agency youth, so that they can advocate for themselves as they face difficult decisions aging out of care. "Engaging youth as planners for their own lives is important because it embraces their ability to make decisions and affirms their capacity for self-sufficiency" (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Palmar, 2007, p. 430). Research has shown a strong relationship between self-determination and positive post-school outcomes. For example, evidence indicates that

14

young adults with disabilities who have high self-determination have higher rates of employment earn significantly more money, have job benefits, and live independently (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Wehmeyer & Palmar, 2003).

Skills training. To help youth prepare for success in adulthood, training in practical living skills is an essential part of transition programming (King, Baldwin, Currie, & Evans, 2006; Paul-Ward, 2008; Precin, Timque, & Walsh, 2010). This is especially critical for many youth removed from their home or biological family who do not receive the same exposure to these skills from which to learn. In studies that have asked youth what they believed to be the most necessary skills for adult living, their responses included: managing money, safe housing, and bus passes (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Palmar, 2007); practical information and assistance related to low-income housing (Jivanjee, Kruzich, & Gordon, 2008); and owning a house, paying taxes, and filling out bills (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012). Cook (1994) found that life skills training related to money management, credit, consumer, education, and employment, improved outcomes of older foster care youth discharged from care in the areas of overall life satisfaction, maintaining a job, and an ability for self-sufficiency.

However, of young adults leaving foster care, a minority report having adequate training in a variety of living skill areas for living independently (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001). This suggests that discrete training commonly provided in independent living programs (ILPs), without engagement in real-life activities, is less effective. While there is a need for learning of concrete skills, an "exclusive focus on acquisition of life skills is highly circumscribed approach" (Collins,

2001, p. 279). It is unknown the degree to which acquisition of concrete skills is actually correlated to successful independent living (Lemon, Hines, & Merdinger, 2005).

Skills training needed for independent living should not be a prepackaged curriculum. Rather, it should be customized by activities selected by youth (King, Baldwin, Currie, & Evans, 2006). Therefore, in order for independent living skills training to be effective, there must be a focus on self-determination as well, so that youth are able to make choices and decisions that best fit their life choices (King, Baldwin, Currie, & Evans, 2006). Studies indicate that the best effects of skills training occur when interventions are focused on multiple areas, when they occur for long periods of time, include multifaceted techniques, and include families (Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, & Wood, 2001).

Employment support. Along with a focus on life skills, youth should be provided with supports to explore and participate in student-centered job planning and community-based work experience. Similar to the development of practical living skills, job skill training done in isolation without preparation within authentic settings is inadequate (Kohler & Field, 2003). Job training programs should include awareness and exploration of skills and interests; development of work habits and behaviors; and collaboration within meaningful community work settings. This realistically includes: collaboration and linkages between education programs, employers, and parents or guardians; volunteer and paid work experiences that match a student with potential employers and provide them with practical job training and work experience; and job coaching, monitoring, and support while phasing into a full-time career (Lane & Carter, 2006; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). These types of opportunities and experiences

16

can be meaningful and motivating to students who are at-risk of dropping out, including those with disabilities. They should be offered as an optional adjunct to traditional academic subjects in school (Kohler & Field, 2003).

Ecological approach. Family involvement, including not only parents and siblings but also extended family members, foster care guardians, or even close friends, is important in facilitating successful transitions. As youth become older, parents play a more peripheral role. They are, however, still an important source of support, emotional, financial, and otherwise. Parent involvement should be central to transition planning and other services like decision-making, advocacy, and policy development. Provision of support and training to families is an important element of transition planning (Kohler & Field, 2003). Morningstar, Turnbull and Turnbull (1995) found that youth with learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disabilities, and mild intellectual disability perceived their families to play an important role in helping them to plan for the future in relation to career and lifestyle choices, including what it might take for them to live independently.

One of the most consistent themes from literature about resilience is the importance of parents and families on a child's adjustment. Parents can encourage a variety of social, emotional, and behavioral competencies in youth at risk based on modeling of acceptable behavior and supportive, structured relationships (Murray, 2003). Adolescents who have at least one strong, consistent, enduring relationship with an adult with regular contact make a more successful transition to adulthood. Naturally occurring mentoring relationships, such as those within families, have a significant impact on the resilience of youth (Spencer, Collins, Ward, & Smashnaya, 2010). In the absence of close

family relationships, a strong support network comprised of social, educational, and professional relationships is the next best option to provide the young adult with a reliable base of support (Gilligan, 2000).

Barriers to Transition

Progress has been made in the development of best practices for transition services for youth with disabilities, which result in part from IDEA's amendments in 1997 and in 2004 that specify addressing transition needs of youth. Despite knowledge of best practices, however, there are many common challenges to successful transition. The barriers described below arise repeatedly in the literature and are identified by researchers, professionals, as well as youth, families, and caregivers.

Inadequate IEP and ITP process. Despite mandates by IDEA (2004), research demonstrates that the ITP often is inadequately written for many youth. Recently, researchers analyzed 399 randomly selected ITPs in two urban school districts. They found that they exposed students to best transition practices a minimal amount of time. Only one percent of the plans referenced mentoring; seven percent referred to developing students' self-determination skills; and little over half (56%) included work experiences. The minimal training in self-determination was particularly problematic, since students were most often the ones listed as responsible for goal implementation. In fact, 22% of the time they were solely responsible, but at the same time, 14% of the time those students did not sign their ITPs, which suggested that they were not present at their ITP meeting. In addition, researchers found that there was generally little detail in the goals. On average, in the 67% that had action steps listed toward the goal, there was only one

18

step per goal, providing an inadequate degree of coaching (Powers, Gil-Kashibawara, Geenen, Powers, Balandran, & Palmer, 2005).

In a later study, forty-five youth who were in both foster care and special education were randomly selected and matched based on disability type with youth in special education. Each of the student's IEPs and ITPs were evaluated. Findings were similar to the previous study in regard to inadequate practices. Foster care youth, however, had significantly fewer goals in their transition plans than did those in the special education group. In particular, they found that foster care youth are significantly less likely to have goals that related to postsecondary education and independent living. Only 31% of plans for foster care youth had goals about post-secondary education and only 16% had goals about independent living skills (Geenen & Powers, 2006b, p. 11). Furthermore, about one in three foster care youth (29%) were not present at their IEP meeting, although they were designated as responsible for carrying out 87% of the action steps. Youth with disabilities in foster care were less likely to have advocates, such as parents, family members, or caregivers, present at their ITP meeting, and were more likely to receive a modified diploma. Only twenty-eight percent of youth in foster care with disabilities were expected to graduate with a standard diploma, while 64% of youth with disabilities anticipated on getting a standard diploma.

Poor linkages and inadequate communication between systems. Policies like IDEA (2004) for youth in special education and the Fostering Connections Act of 2008 attempt to support successful transition to adulthood. More immediate transitions of youth between agencies, however, are also concerning. A primary barrier to transition results from the isolation in which service systems mostly operate (Osgood, Foster, &

Courtney, 2010). Minimal collaboration exists across agencies, programs, or schools, to the degree to which it has be claimed that it is "virtually impossible to develop integrated service plans that support individuals in achieving school and post school results" (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Leucking, & Mack, 2002, p. 527). Discontinuities in service happen within and throughout multiple agencies, with different eligibility requirements, for example, that make it challenging to coordinate care (Griller-Clark & Unruh, 2010).

For youth in juvenile justice facilities, although successful transition to adulthood is the ultimate goal, transition between the facility and return to the community and school system is the most immediate and challenging concern (Baltodano, Mathur, & Rutherford, 2005). It is, however, also one of the most overlooked and neglected aspects of juvenile justice programming (Rutherford, Griller, & Anderson, 2000). In large part, this is a result of inadequate time, training, and resources of juvenile correctional facilities and staff (Baltodano, Mather, & Rutherford, 2005).

Juvenile correction facilities also have a unique challenge of confronting conflicting, and often irresoluble, differences between restorative and punishment philosophies that each facility holds. In a restorative sense, juvenile justice facilities offer educational and rehabilitative services to help youth successfully transition into the community. The philosophy of deterrence, however, promotes long-term incarceration with punitive policies that mirror the adult criminal justice system (Altschuler, 2005). This can create gaps in service coordination of service agencies within a single facility (Griller Clark & Unruh, 2010). Transition programming related to vocational training, independent community living, or mental health services are also more difficult to offer

when punitive philosophies dominate. In recent years, "get-tough," zero tolerance policies have resulted in increased suspensions and referrals to juvenile detention or alternative education programs, and encourage prosecution of minors as adults (Davis, Green, & Hoffman, 2009).

Lengthy delays in enrollment. Because of the significant amount of paperwork involved, and because of the frequency with which these students transfer as well as the lack of coordination between systems and different enrollment requirements, many students do not have required documentation to enroll in the school to which they are transitioning (Conger & Finkelstein, 2003; Geenen & Powers, 2006; Griller Clark & Unruh, 2010). When paperwork doesn't follow students, staff and teachers are unfamiliar with the educational needs of each student (Geenen & Powers, 2006a).

Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, and Fehringer (2012) found that among state agency youth in Kentucky, complexities of the interagency system of care resulted in significant delays of enrollment in students in transition between schools or agencies. According to school administrators, gaining access to students' prior records was a primary barrier of successful transition. This is particularly problematic for youth with disabilities, because if their paperwork doesn't follow in a timely manner, teachers have little to no information about their special education needs (Geenen and Powers, 2006a).

Along these same lines, Powers and Stotland (2002) conducted a survey of stakeholders in state child-serving agencies, requesting respondents to share their experiences, problems, and recommendations for change. The issues considered as most challenging were the fulfillment of requirements for student enrollment, and getting access to students' prior school records. Among county and private foster care providers

in one state, over one-half (56%) reported enrollment delays of over five days ad over one-forth (26%) reported delays over two weeks. Of the county agencies, 40% reported that at least one delay took over 30 days for the enrollment of the child. The group of students with the lengthiest enrollment lag was students in special education programs. Compounding this problem, the majority of respondents indicated that when enrollment is delayed, students do not receive interim arrangements for education, a problem for all students, but particularly those with disabilities.

Placement instability. Students who are more likely to transfer include those with emotional, behavioral, or cognitive disabilities (Osher, Morrison, & Bailey, 2003), those involved in juvenile corrections (Malmgren & Gagnon, 2005), or those who moved to new foster care homes or who ran away from home (Conger & Rebeck, 2001). Because of placement instability, foster care youth move between programs frequently. In one study, participants went through 15 settings on average (Paul-Ward, 2009). Student mobility between classrooms, schools, and agencies can be disruptive to the school as a whole, as well as the individual. Rumberger, Larson, Ream, and Palardy (1999) characterized the effects of frequent transfers as chaotic, impacting everything from the classroom learning environment to administrative responsibilities.

Students may also be mobile due to voluntary and involuntary school transfers (Conger & Finkelstein, 2003; Rumberger, 2003; Malmgren & Gagnon, 2005; Gasper, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2010). When a school initiates a student's transfer, it is generally because of disciplinary or academic problems. This may occur indirectly, though procedures that result in involuntary transfers, or directly, through policies related to behavior, low grades, or poor attendance (Rumberger, 2003). In these cases, typically the

22

student is transferred to a more restrictive setting. Voluntary transfers often result from students' moves, or because of concerns about school safety (Malmgren & Gagnon, 2005).

The frequency in mobility of youth in foster care makes it difficult for them to learn the skills they need for independent living (Geenen, Powers, Hogansen, & Pittman, 2007). Additionally, negative outcomes attributed to high student mobility include increased dropout rates (Adam & Chase-Lansdale, 2002), decreased academic achievement test scores (Conger & Finkelstein, 2003), school disengagement (Temple & Reynolds, 2000), and delinquent or criminal behavior (deWit, 1998). Psychosocial challenges are experienced by transitory youth, including adjustments to and developing relationships with new classmates, teachers, or curricula, getting used to different expectations, as well as missed class time (Conger & Finkelstein, 2003; Gasper, DeLuca, & Estancion, 2010). These challenges are especially difficult for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, who, by definition, encounter social and academic difficulties (Malmgren & Gagnon, 2005).

Unfulfilled graduation requirements. Often, there are challenges with inter-school and interagency transitions, especially if the schools are in separate districts. In all probability, different policies determine graduation requirements, including classes and needed credits, across districts and even schools. This is a concern throughout all child-serving programs, including schools, juvenile corrections, mental health, and child welfare. It is exaggerated due to placement instability of youth. With the disturbances that frequent moves cause, including lengthy delays in enrollment, which students with

difficulties in foster care face in particular (Powers & Stotland, 2002), students often do not earn enough credits to graduate on time.

Itinerant students are faced with the possible consequence, in part a result of transitioning so frequently, of receiving a modified or alternate diploma. When students do not have enough credits to graduate, such as those who have transitioned between multiple schools, they may be encouraged to get a modified diploma (Geenen, Powers, Hogansen, & Pittman, 2007; Gil-Kashibawara, Hogansen, Geenen, Powers, & Powers, 2007). They are not always told the implications, however, including limitations on their future postsecondary and employment opportunities. Youth in foster care are also not often aware that due to the Fostering Connections Act of 2008, they may remain supported by the child welfare system up to age 21 if they are completing their high school degree. Geenen and Powers (2006b) found that foster care youth with disabilities were slated for a modified diploma more than twice as much as youth with comparable disabilities not in foster care.

Conflicting eligibility requirements in adult systems of care. The most problematic transition for youth is from child to adult systems, at which time they are expected to make a full transition to adulthood instantaneously (Gil-Kashiwabara, Hogansen, Geenen, Powers, & Powers, 2007). When they reach the age of majority, virtually all the systems that were a part of their lives are no longer available to them. They either become ineligible or there are differing requirements for eligibility until they reapply for adult services, a long and complicated process that often results in a gap in services.

Many diagnoses of childhood are not in alignment with the adult mental health system. In order to meet the adult eligibility requirements, it must be determined whether the child's impairment is equivalent. Under Supplemental Security Income, after age 18, eligibility is different (Lyons & Melton, 2005). For example, the adult mental health system often rejects persons with substance abuse problems and disruptive behavior disorders; however, those are some of the most frequent diagnoses in the child mental health and special education systems (Davis, 2003).

Furthermore, when young adults are eligible, they rarely can find programs that are developmentally appropriate and appealing (Davis, Green, & Hoffman, 2009; Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Adult systems generally target those between the ages of thirty to sixty. They are not designed to be meaningful or relevant to adolescents and emergent adults. For example, parental involvement, although highly encouraged in the youth care system, is suppressed or stopped in adult care, because young adults are expected to quickly and independently learn the new network of systems and, depending on whether they meet the eligibility requirements, how to access that system (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). As Davis (2003) pointed out, "basically, youth served as children become ineligible for adult services because of a change in their age, not because of a change in their need" (p. 501).

In the juvenile corrections system, this shift from child to adult agencies often occurs at the same time that they re-enter the community, after being released at age 18. Service coordination is particularly challenging. Gaps between services, and differing eligibility criteria, are compounded by difficulties that occur with community reintegration, including return to the contexts in which their delinquent behaviors

emerged, as well as stigmatizing attitudes that exist for these young adults (Griller Clark & Unruh, 2010). Furthermore, as a result of their records, it is already difficult to secure loans for housing, education, and to obtain employment.

Youth Perspectives on Transition Barriers

As seen by the previous section, a large portion of the literature about barriers to transition focuses on poor communication and linkages between systems, enrollment delays, credit transfers, and graduation or eligibility requirements. Studies that have explored what youth in state agency care identify as challenges of transition to adulthood show that they have distinct views. The following section describes barriers to transition from the viewpoints of young adults, an essential perspective in order to develop meaningful transition programming responsive to youth.

Lack of positive relationships. A noticeable barrier in the literature discussed by youth and their families or caregivers is the perceived absence of caring relationships with teachers or other professionals. Youth state that having a long-lasting relationship with a caring adult is critical when aging out of the system in order to receive adequate emotional support as well as practical information to help prepare for adulthood. Overwhelmingly, youth do not feel as though they have access to these relationships in the schools they attend (Castleberry & Enger, 1998; Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012; De La Ossa, 2005; Gallagher, 2002; Geenen & Powers, 2007; Jivanjee, Kruzich, & Gordon, 2008; Lagana-Riordan, Aguilar, Franklin, Streeter, Kim, Tripodi et al., 2011; Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012; Owens & Konkol, 2004; Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007).

Studies of youth at risk for dropping out, or youth transitioning between alternative schools and home schools, express the same feelings about the importance of relationships with supportive adults. Gallagher (2002) interviewed four young adults who previously dropped out of school. No respondents described their schools as hospitable; they did not feel valued or cared for by their teachers or other school officials. Castleberry & Enger (1998) interviewed 21 students who had been placed in an alternative school setting. Students typically blamed themselves for their failure, including the inability to keep up with the fast pace within large classes, but they also attributed part of their failure to be a result of having insufficient time to interact with their teachers.

Some studies researched the differences in students' perceptions of their home schools and alternative schools. Saunders and Saunders (2001) administered surveys to students in one alternative school, asking them about their perceptions of personnel at their past (traditional) and current (alternative) school placements. They found it statistically significant that students felt more positively about personnel at the alternative school than the traditional school setting.

Other studies utilized interviews or focus groups with students who had been placed in alternative settings. Common to these studies was that most students reported that a major factor of their success was their relationship with their teacher, and conversely, that negative teacher relationships were a primary reason for their failure at the traditional schools (Gallagher, 2002; Owens & Konkol, 2004; De La Ossa, 2005; Lagana-Riordan, Aguilar, Franklin, Streeter, Kim, Tripodi et al., 2011). The cultivation of genuine relationships between students and teachers, rather than being tangential, is

27

essential for the success of students and is one of the most salient factors of successful outcomes (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004).

Inadequate preparation for independent living. Another barrier to successful transition to adulthood identified by youth, particularly those in foster care programs, is inadequate preparation and support for living independently upon emancipation (Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012; Greenen & Powers, 2007; Paul-Ward, 2009; Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007). Youth desire increased opportunities to build concrete skills in a variety of areas necessary in adult life. In a study with youth and parents or guardians, participants described the inadequacy of independent living programs (ILP) to assist in achievement of self-sufficiency for independence in adulthood. They considered ILPs to be irrelevant to real life settings due to their isolation and lack of naturalistic settings (Geenen & Powers, 2007). Caseworkers often act as the gatekeepers to access programming, rather than allowing youth to self-refer (Geenen, Powers, Hagansen, & Pittman, 2007).

In a study with youth in foster care, participants stated that they were often not given accurate information in regard to supports and services available to them as they aged out of care (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007). In another study (one of the few studies in the occupational therapy literature comprised of foster care youth), participants in focus groups and individual interviews reported barriers to independent living as a lack of opportunities to master skills needed for independent living due in part to inconsistent and uncoordinated scheduling of classes; information during classes presented in uninteresting ways, which they compared to a "laundry list of topics"; and

presentation of irrelevant skills (e.g., going to required classes on banking, yet not holding a bank account) (Paul-Ward, 2009, p. 85).

Lack of self-determination. Youth describe the importance of having some degree of control over their choices and plans leading up to transition to adulthood. Self-determination, which is required to make autonomous and informed choices and decisions about one's life, is necessary to live successfully as an adult (Wehemeyer, Gragoudas, & Shogren, 2006). Youth in all types of state agency care, however, are often prevented from making their own choices or even being considered partners in decisions related to their care. In the juvenile justice system, this is undoubtedly due to restrictions placed on youth for punitive reasons. Gil-Kashiwabara, Hogansen, Geenen, Powers, & Powers (2007) point out that within the foster care system, liability issues result from the system's stress on safety and protection of youth at the expense of allowing opportunities for youth to make their own choices. As one foster youth participant stated of caseworkers during an interview, "We need to see what's out there . . . I make my own mistakes and can learn from them. . . . They're not going to hold your hand for you when you get out, so ultimately it should be my decision, not theirs" (Geenen & Powers, 2007, p. 1090). Foster care youth feel a lack of respect when their opinions are not requested while significant decisions are being made that involve them. As Geenen and Powers (2007) stated of foster care youth, a "frustrating paradox [exists] where they have . . . no opportunity to practice skills of self-determination while in care, but are expected to suddenly be able to control and direct their lives once they are emancipated" (p. 1090).

The Role of Occupational Therapy in Postsecondary Transitions

In relation to post-secondary transitions, occupational therapy plays many roles. The overarching goal of IDEA (2004) is to prepare students for successful adult life, including further education, employment, and independent or interdependent living. Best practices in transition services, through strengths-based emphasis on abilities and on self-determination, are central to occupational therapy practice. According to official documents from the AOTA (2008a; 2008b), occupational therapy services to support post-secondary transitions of students include: supporting students' skills of self-determination, self-advocacy, and social communication to enhance successful social integration into the community (e.g., a concrete example to address this would be student-led IEP meetings); evaluating supports and recommending necessary environmental modifications for employment, postsecondary education, or participation in adult living; performing activity analyses of job requirements in the community or internships within the school, including job coaching; collaborating with vocational education or other community agencies; collaborating with the transition team to develop and measure functional goals; educating others (e.g., school, family, community) about students' needs; and consulting with the school to develop transition or life skills curricula.

Despite the wide range of interventions that occupational therapists can provide, which is closely aligned with the best practices in post-secondary transition previously identified, the lack of occupational therapy literature about this topic indicates their limited role. In recent years, though, several studies have explored this role. This has begun to expand awareness of current and potential roles, as well as barriers and

facilitators to involvement. Some current studies in occupational therapy literature are described below.

Mankey (2011) surveyed all licensed occupational therapy practitioners in a rural southern state. The study yielded a response rate of almost half, or 447 respondents, the majority (64%) with ten or more years of professional experience. The purpose of the survey was to investigate involvement and beliefs regarding participation in secondary transition planning. Slightly over one-third of respondents (37%) strongly believed that occupational therapists should play a role in secondary transition services. Only four percent of respondents, however, said that they provide occupational therapy intervention in the area of secondary transition frequently; 31% said that they provide services sometimes or once in a while; and 62% said that they almost never provide transition services. Only five percent of respondents indicated that they believe that occupational therapists have time to work with students regarding secondary transition; six percent said that occupational therapists had enough knowledge to work in this area. In regard to current involvement, well over half reported that they had never or almost never consulted with the educational team (66%) or with special educators (63%) in the secondary transition planning process. Conversely, 76% of respondents said that the educational team had never requested occupational therapy services in this area. It is not surprising from these results that some of the hindering factors to occupational therapy services as reported by respondents included lack of awareness by education team members of potential contributions of occupational therapy and lack of requests for involvement. Results indicate the need for additional education and training for occupational therapy professionals.

Gangl, Strecker Neufeld, and Berg (2011) conducted interviews with six occupational therapists as well as five non-occupational therapy professionals, all of whom provide transition services to youth 14 to 21 years of age. Of the occupational therapy respondents, a primary theme was their involvement in direct, one-to-one services with students to work on occupational performance areas, like sequencing or problem-solving; independent living skills, like cooking; or prevocational skills. One participant stated, "Unless the kids get direct services . . . I don't have any part in their transition services" (Gangl, Strecker Neufeld, & Berg, 2011, p. 159). Of the non-OT respondents, a primary theme was lack of awareness of the roles of an occupational therapist in relation to transition, as one respondent described by saying, "I couldn't even begin to describe the essential functions of an occupational therapist" (Gangl, Strecker Neufeld, & Berg, 2011, p. 158). The final theme was that occupational therapy is not viewed as a priority in transition services. Reasons for this included lack of parents' and school personnel's knowledge of the role of occupational therapy; decreased numbers of referrals as youth get older; and occupational therapists' perceived lack of time. Results indicate that when they are involved in transition planning, occupational therapists are involved only in direct, individualized or small group services rather than system-wide transition program development, consultation to existing teams, or advocacy for the profession. This study also demonstrates limited understanding of occupational therapy's role in secondary transition services by occupational therapists and other school professionals.

Kardos and White (2005) used survey methods to investigate similar objectives: that of school-based occupational therapists' knowledge of transition planning and

services; their degree of involvement; and perceived barriers to participation in these areas. Of the eighty participants, only 30% believed that they were participating effectively in transition planning, while 47% reported that they understood the overall intent of IDEA (2004). Less than half said that they conducted assessments that influenced development of transition goals. Only seven percent of respondents used formal assessments to measure occupational performance of students. Many perceived barriers to providing transition services included not only that transition services are primarily handled by other professionals, but also that there was a lack of understanding of the role of occupational therapy, funding, awareness, and time.

Studies have also been recently conducted with non-occupational therapy professionals regarding the role of occupational therapy in post-secondary transition. Mankey (2012) used open-ended survey methodology to elicit the responses of special educators about the role of, degree of involvement, and types of occupational therapy services provided in planning for post-secondary transition in their schools. Out of 41 respondents, 40 reported that there is currently no involvement of occupational therapists in post-secondary transition planning. Thirty-five percent of respondents said that there is no need for occupational therapy services in transition, while 10% reported that limited funding is the reason for no occupational therapy services in transition at their schools. Special educators' perceptions of two main potential roles for occupational therapy included assessment and planning of postsecondary services (95%) and areas of occupation, including vocational and independent living skills (59%). Other perceptions of marginally potential roles included addressing underlying body functions (12%), and supporting access to the curriculum (.05%). Almost one in three special educators (29%)

reported that they were uncertain what role occupational therapy could play. The overall lack of knowledge about occupational therapy's potential role in transition services, particularly the perception that there is not a need, was a prominent message in this study.

Spencer, Emery, and Schneck (2003) surveyed special education directors regarding their perceptions of the role of occupational therapy in high school transition programs. They mailed a questionnaire to all directors in a rural state, receiving a 58% response rate. A majority of respondents (64%) stated that occupational therapists currently provide adequate transition services, although one in four (25%) stated that there were not enough services provided by occupational therapists. Among special educators, regular educators, and job coaches, occupational therapists provide a minority of work-related transition services, including job exploration and job placement. In regard to community-related transition services, occupational therapists were reported to provide only between five to eight percent of related services, such as transportation and shopping. The only other professionals who provided less services in this area were regular education teachers. In independent living skills, occupational therapists also provided the minority of services among all professionals in almost all areas. The barriers to transition planning cited by respondents were: lack of interagency planning; lack of funding; lack of parent participation; lack of qualified personnel; inconsistent transition practices; and transportation. The top reasons for no involvement by occupational therapists in transition planning were a lack of demand from parents or teachers, and the lack of understanding of occupational therapy's role in transition. This study also demonstrates the need to more clearly define occupational therapy's role in post-secondary transition planning and services.

As a whole, these studies demonstrate multiple barriers to occupational therapy's involvement in post-secondary transition planning. Some of the most commonly perceived barriers were lack of understanding of occupational therapy's current and potential role by occupational therapists and other professionals; lack of time; lack of funding; lack of demand by parents and others; and lack of knowledge.

Alternative Education Programs and Occupational Therapy

Alternative schools became popular in the 1960s and 1970s. They were part of a progressive education reform movement to meet the needs of youth alienated by mainstream schools (Sagor, 1999). Attending an alternative school was a matter of freedom and individual choice (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that alternative schools began to serve more students who displayed problems of discipline in traditional settings (Lehr & Lange, 2003a). Placement decisions became characterized by "forced choice," in which students were subtly or overtly pushed out of high schools (Lehr & Lange, 2003a; Lehr & Lange, 2003b). Alternative schools became a setting used to keep all the disruptive students in an alternate location, thereby causing less distraction to other students (Kim, 2006; Munoz, 2004). Students who attend alternative schools are generally those who are at risk of school failure. They may have behavioral or disciplinary problems, truancy, pregnancy, or are there by court order or because of school conduct code violation (Munoz, 2004). They may also have been expelled, suspended, or dropped out of traditional school (Foley & Pang, 2006). There are some strengths that alternative schools possess. General characteristics include: small enrollment, which facilitates face-to-face interaction between students and teachers; a teacher culture that promotes not only academics but also the "whole child;" self-

directed and individualized curriculum; non-competitiveness; and a community of care (Bland, Church, Neill, and Terry, 2008; Knesting, 2008; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Wehlage, 1991). Wehlage (1991) states that alternative schools are effective in the prevention of dropout through a supportive community that engages students at risk through a sense of belonging.

Significant critique exists of alternative schools as well, although schools are variable in their condition and quality (Munoz, 2004). In general, alternative schools are viewed as having deficient learning environments that do not have necessary resources, including current textbooks; classroom materials beyond books; lack of innovative teaching; and buildings that are physically deteriorating. Alternative schools overly emphasize behavioral rules so that students have little voice regarding their educational process (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009).

Furthermore, the quality of instruction that students receive can be marginal. Professional development opportunities specifically designed for alternative school teachers are generally limited; subsequently, there is often minimal innovative or alternative teaching methods (Lehr & Lange, 2003a). A focus on preparation for post-secondary education is frequently absent in alternative education programs. Indeed, a culture of remediation exists that considers students as deficient, and therefore prioritizes helping students to feel positively about themselves rather than challenging them academically. This effectively creates a "diluted academic environment" (Munoz, 2004, p. 14).

When a student with an IEP enters an alternative school, according to the law, they must continue to receive their services. In actuality, however, the IEPs may not be

closely followed. For example, a student's IEP may be re-written to decrease the amount of services received as he or she enters the alternative school. People attempt to justify this by saying that the alternative setting already inherently addresses the services called for in the students' IEPs because of the smaller size of the school, and because more individualized education can be accessed (Lehr & Lange, 2003b). Realistically, the degree and variety of services is often not attainable in a smaller alternative setting, which do not have the funding or resources (i.e., staff, hours, curriculum) that traditional schools have. There are often no certified special education teachers or related services in alternative schools (Lehr & Lange, 2003a).

Overall, occupational therapists have minimally assessed the need for and potential of occupational therapy in alternative education settings. Except in cases when an IEP is re-written, there is still a federal mandate to serve children with disabilities; thus, funding should not be considered an issue when determining need for related services, such as occupational therapy. Dirette and Kolak (2004) completed a survey with school staff at three regional alternative schools in a midwestern state. The survey instrument included content based on performance skills, performance patterns, and areas of occupation. While survey results identified perceived deficits of alternative school students falling within the domain of practice of occupational therapists, the survey design illustrated a limited conceptualization of the potential for occupational therapy services in schools. The survey focused on direct, one-to-one services including remediation of performance components such as fine motor skills, visual impairment, and sequencing.

A national survey administered to occupational therapists determined their perceptions of the need for school-based occupational therapy services for children with emotional disabilities (Barnes, Beck, Vogel, Grice, Murphy, 2003). Similar to the previous survey, this instrument included questions about specific treatment approaches used to address performance areas and performance components. The top two interventions utilized for youth with emotional disabilities, according to responses, were handwriting and fine motor control. According to survey respondents, the primary obstacles to providing occupational therapy services to school-aged students with emotional disabilities were: role confusion and limited knowledge base of occupational therapists; lack of understanding and support of occupational therapy's role by the rest of the educational team; lack of time to plan treatment and collaborate with other team members; and difficulties with parents (Beck, Barnes, Vogel, & Grice, 2006). Again, the study design did not incorporate many important considerations of student needs, using a bottom-up, component-based approach instead.

Occupational Justice

The profession of occupational therapy emerged from the moral treatment era, when humanistic values began to transform psychiatric treatment from punishment to rehabilitation. Occupational therapists believed that being occupied in meaningful activities prevented dysfunction in body and mind, and that engagement in occupation restored lost function (Wilcock, 1998). The first school of occupational therapy began at the Hull House in Chicago, Illinois. Occupational therapy's history was founded in social reform and activist principles (Frank & Zemke, 2008).

In 2001, the World Health Organization (WHO) published the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*. In this document, health is defined as an interaction between person and environment, rather than simply the absence of pathology (WHO, 2001). The *Occupational Therapy Practice Framewor*k (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2008) incorporates much of the language from the *ICF*. Both documents emphasize that health is a result of the ability to participate in meaningful occupations within his or her individual context (AOTF, 2000; WHO, 2001). More recently, the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) developed a position statement on human rights (2006), acknowledging that the ability and opportunity to engage in meaningful occupation is a basic human right. Thus, occupational therapists believe that individuals have a right to be supported to participate in a range of occupations that enable them to fulfill their potential and act as valued members of an inclusive society.

Occupational justice, an emerging theory in the occupational therapy and occupational science literature, is concerned with the measure of social equity within a society and the opportunities it affords people (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010). Occupational justice developed from the synthesis of two concepts. First is the understanding that humans are occupational beings and occupational participation is a determinant of health and wellness. Second is the concept of enablement through occupation, which informs occupational therapy practice (Townsend & Wilcock, 2003). Underlying structures, or occupational determinants, include the economy, legislation, and dominant cultural values (Wilcock, 1998; Townsend & Wilcock, 2003). These structures provide opportunities or restrictions to society in conditions such as

employment practices, education, and social supports (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010). Occupational justice provides a lens for addressing issues of social justice from an occupational perspective (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010).

Occupational injustice occurs when "some populations more than others are restricted from experiencing occupational rights, responsibilities, and liberties, either deliberately or through take-for-granted social exclusion from participation, at any point across the lifespan, in the occupations typical of their community" (Nilsson & Townsend, 2010, p. 58). Outcomes of occupational injustice include occupational imbalance, occupational deprivation, occupational marginalization, and occupational alienation (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010). These outcomes are discussed later in this dissertation in relation to the experiences of state agency youth in transition between schools.

Summary

It is important to investigate what issues youth in state agency programs face in regard to transition. Transition to adulthood is becoming more difficult due to altering social and economic conditions in the United States. Emerging adulthood has become a legitimate life stage. For youth made vulnerable by disability or long-term involvement in social service and juvenile correction facilities, this transition is even more challenging. As Osgood, Foster, and Courtney (2010) said, "if the transition to adulthood is likely to be smooth for college-bound middle-class youth, but is often rough sledding for working-class non-college-bound youth, then it can be a minefield for such vulnerable populations" (p. 210).

Best practices in transition have been identified from the literature and described here. They include student-centered, strengths-based planning; customized skill training for independent adult living; employment or post-secondary education and supported exploration; and an ecological approach involving families. In reality, however, many challenges exist for youth as they transition through multiple complex systems. A review of the literature reveals barriers to transition that many youth and families encounter, from the perspectives of both adults and youth. Although occupational therapy is well-suited to address the needs of youth in transition to adulthood, they are underutilized due to their own lack of time and sufficient base of knowledge, as well as a lack of demand based on others' misperceptions of their roles, particularly in alternative education settings.

Statement of the Research Problem

There is currently a growing body of evidence about post-secondary transition practices with adolescents; however, as evidenced by the social, economic, and educational outcomes of youth at-risk, a need remains for implementation of best practices in transition. High school graduation rates remain very low for youth with disabilities and other system-involved youth, such as those in foster care or juvenile justice facilities. Graduation has significant implications for employment, income, and opportunities for post-secondary education. High unemployment rates and low rates of college enrollment spread disproportionately among these youth, making them susceptible to poor adult outcomes. To address these challenges, it is crucial that all state agency youth be provided high quality transition planning and supports.

Occupational therapy is especially suited for service provision to adolescents, but as seen by the literature described here, school-based occupational therapists, as well as other professionals, are widely uninformed about occupational therapists' potential role in transition services, particularly in alternative education settings. This is despite IDEA's (2004) mandate to provide related services to all students with disabilities, not to mention occupational therapy's strong roots in advocacy and their background in occupational justice.

Purpose Statement

Participatory methods allow for an understanding of what participants perceive as important. The purpose of the first study in this dissertation was to discover from youth, administrators and teachers what they considered to be the key factors of successful transition of state agency youth, so that improvements of transition services and programming would emerge directly from and respond to their priorities. The second study was constructed upon the first. Its purpose was to use a participatory action research approach to create pragmatic improvements to transition planning and services in collaboration with selected KECSAC programs. Dissemination of the results broadens its impact by making results accessible to others, thus enabling replication of successful programming.

Summary of Methodology

The Kentucky Youth at Risk in Transition (KYART) Study was a mixed methods study that identified and described the understandings of student transitions in state agency education programs from the perspectives of youth and administrators. It included 105 nontraditional education programs funded and supervised by KECSAC. Data

42

collection included a survey administered to all KECSAC Program Administrators, audiotaped focus group interviews with KECSAC Program Administrators, audiotaped focus group interviews with KECSAC students, and individual interviews with KECSAC students.

Qualitative data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach, a research method that generates theory derived though systematic analysis of data. Data, which are analyzed concurrently to inform further data collection, are sorted and categorized into codes (Charmaz, 2006). Through constant comparative analysis, theory grounded in the data emerges and is continually refined until theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Refer to Chapter 2 for the article, published in *Child Welfare* in 2012, describing the KYART study (Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012).

The second study was the "Building Enhanced Services for Transition" (BEST) Study. It was designed to generate improvements to transition planning and services in state agency education programs in Kentucky. Participants were comprised of education program administrators and staff members, including teachers, principals, counselors, transition coordinators, youth workers, special education directors, and administrative support staff. Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews, audio-recorded researcher reflections, audio-recorded research team meetings, and observations. Research sites included two juvenile detention centers, one day treatment program for adjudicated youth, one residential program for youth, and one semi-private school, which was used for comparative reasons.

Grounded theory sought understanding of the emerging changes in services for state agency youth across these education programs. Participatory action research was

used so that improvements to transition services would emerge directly from priorities of those concerned, and would build upon the strengths and resources of each setting (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). Two distinct draft articles produced from this study can be found in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation.

Participatory action research is an iterative, emergent process, consisting of cycles of action and reflection leading to development of relevant knowledge about an identified problem faced by a community (Genat, 2009). All phases of the research include equitable participation from co-participants and provide direct benefits by promoting positive change through active engagement and community capacity building (Kemmis & McTaggert, 2005). An important type of validity in participatory action research include positionality (Lincoln, 1995), which recognizes that the local knowledge that emerges is more valuable than grand meta-narratives in understanding human behavior (Greenwood, Whyte, & Harkavey, 1993). "Giving voice" is another criterion for validity, although it is not adequate in itself unless it is paired with engagement in action (Denzin, 1994, p. 509). According to LeCompte (1993), "voice" is a means of recognizing a type of knowledge that cannot be obtained through traditional or positivistic research methods.

In the two studies comprising this dissertation, voices of those who usually go unheard, the adolescents, teachers, and other staff members in state agency programs, were elicited through qualitative interviews and co-participation during the research process. Gaining an understanding of views on educational practices is imperative not only in developing programming that effectively responds to real needs, but also so that research gains a degree of validity it would not have otherwise. A common, individualistic understanding of alternative school students focuses on personal deficits of

students as the origin of the problem. There is little consideration for the structural issues contributing to their difficulties, implying that schools and others have minimal responsibility to address the problem of school drop-outs (Fine, 1991; Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1993). These studies are meant to take a critical look at the variety of complex factors that contribute to school failure from the perspectives of those most involved, and to facilitate a conversation about pragmatic methods to improve transition practices in state agency education programs and thus improve post-secondary outcomes of youth at risk.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation follows a three-article dissertation format that is based on two studies. Chapter 1 is independently authored. Chapter 2 is comprised of the article from the KYART Study. It is collaboratively authored with the multidisciplinary research team. Chapters 3 and 4 are comprised of two draft articles from the BEST Study. Chapter 3 focuses on comparative analysis across the five research sites of the study and is written in collaboration with Dr. Doris Pierce. Other co-authors were active in the data collection and analysis, but did not contribute to the writing. Chapter 4 focuses specifically on the participatory action research process at one of the sites and is independently authored. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of conclusions and implications for further research and practice. Chapter 5 is independently authored.

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CHAPTER TWO:

YOUTH AND ADMINISTRATOR PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION
IN KENTUCKY'S STATE AGENCY SCHOOLS[1]

Summary

Students, a large percentage with disabilities, are at high risk for poor post-secondary outcomes in state agency education programs. This mixed methods study described the understandings of student transitions in state agency education programs from the perspectives of youth and administrators. Results indicated that: transition is more narrowly defined within alternative education programs; key strengths of transition practice are present in nontraditional schools; and the coordination barriers within this fluid inter-agency transition system are most apparent in students' frequent inter-setting transitions between nontraditional and home schools.

Introduction

This mixed methods study identified and described key components of transition plans and services in non-traditional education programs serving children who are in the care or custody of the state. The study included 105 non-traditional, or "A6," education programs funded and supervised by the Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC), which included programs supported by the Kentucky Departments of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), Community Based Services (DCBS) and Mental Health Developmental Disorders and Addiction Services (DMHDDAS). Kentucky is one of the few states in which an education collaborative is designed specifically to educate youth at risk within state agency programs. This study offers a critical addition to

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[1] The following article was reprinted with permission from the Child Welfare League of America, 2013. Marshall, A., Powell, N., Pierce, D., Nolan, R., & Fehringer, E. (2012). Youth and administrator perspectives on transition in Kentucky's state agency schools. *Child Welfare*, *91*, 95-116.

research targeting transition services to youth with disabilities by detailing its expression among youth in settings at the extreme of risk and nontraditional education.

Transition Services to Youth at Risk

In 2001, Barr and Parrett suggested that approximately 20,000 alternative education programs existed in the United States. Alternative education programs use non-traditional delivery methods and are growing rapidly. Tobin and Sprague (2000) attributed the rapid increase in alternative education programs to zero tolerance policies the 1997 amendments to IDEA (P. L. 105-17). In response to the accountability pressures of the No Child Left Behind Act, removal of less successful students to out-of-district education programs can also improve the performance scores of traditional schools. Thus far, little research has demonstrated the effectiveness of the unique education methods employed in nontraditional settings (Lehr & Lange, 2003). Carpenter-Aeby and Aeby (2001) studied the role that alternative education programs play in increasing school safety, preventing school dropout, and improving students' grades, in order to produce a more successful transition to adulthood. While these programs did help students improve their grades, it was also found that these changes were not sustained following return to a traditional school. Students in alternative education programs, with or without disabilities, struggle to meet academic graduation requirements.

Alternative education programs frequently serve students identified with learning or emotional-behavioral disabilities who are at high risk of failing to complete high school, secure gainful employment or pursue higher education (Carter, Trainor, Sun, & Owens, 2009). For students in these education programs, well coordinated transition services are a critical link to positive outcomes (Hosp, Rutherford, & Griller-Clark,

47

2001). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004), transition services are coordinated activities that improve a student's academic and functional achievements, in order to support the student's movement into post-secondary education or employment and independent living. Literature demonstrates that a successful transition requires significant planning and services that begin by 14 years of age (Kohler & Field, 2003). A significant gap exists between IDEA-mandated transition services and those being provided by state and local education agencies. Although most curricula address health, leisure, and independent living skills, academics is the primary domain evaluated by state education agencies. Johnson (2004) lists several ways to address transition challenges of youth with disabilities, including educating students to self-advocate, planning opportunities for postsecondary education and employment, encouraging parent participation in transition planning, and improving collaboration and linkages among systems involved with transition planning and services.

The literature specific to juvenile justice education programs addresses adolescent transition more empirically than does the broader literature on alternative education programs. Pollard, Pollard, Rojewski and Meers (1997) studied the types of strategies used to transition adjudicated youth with disabilities out of correctional settings, their effectiveness, and obstacles to their success. Most frequent transition interventions included individualized assessment and evaluation, basic academic skills instruction, and social and independent living skills training. Barriers to successful transition included problems in returning youth to home communities, lack of support personnel and services, lack of family support, and poor interagency collaboration. Job training is essential, especially considering these barriers that exist for youth upon their re-entry.

Vocational training programs that are the most effective are those that directly apply to the present job market and provide continuity between juvenile justice facilities and community-based services (Chung, Little, & Steinberg, 2005).

Job skills, however, are not enough. For younger persons, mentoring is one way to potentially offset negative outcomes and promote positive associations and attitudes. It has been shown that adolescents who have at least one significant mentoring relationship do better in their transitions to adulthood (Spencer, Collins, Ward, & Smashnaya, 2010). Mentoring programs that use theory-based practices are more effective than those that do not (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002). Variables that increase effectiveness of mentoring include: a relationship that endures for a significant amount of time (i.e., over one year); regular and consistent contact between mentor and mentee; and a strong match that leads to emotional connectedness, based on a structured, youth-centered approach (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). Having a high-quality, consistent mentoring relationship can have a significant effect on a youth's positive developmental outcomes as he or she transitions to adulthood.

Research Design

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe key components of student transition in education programs serving youth in the care or custody of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. In order to produce a multi-level, data-based description of the complex system of transition in Kentucky's A6 schools that was sufficiently thorough to guide planning for future improvements, a fixed and convergent mixed methods design was used (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Study Participants

During the 2007-2008 year, 19,497 students were served in Kentucky's A6 schools, which include residential and day treatment, group homes, hospital-based, partial-hospitalization, regional detention, youth development centers, and intermediate care settings. Approximately half of the schools were juvenile justice settings. Total averages for KECSAC students were a daily census of 3,422 and a length of stay of 193 days. Forty-three percent of students had identified disabilities. Of students with disabilities, 47% had emotional/behavioral disorders, 19% had non-identified disorders, 11% had multiple or severe disabilities, 10% had mild mental retardation, and 9% had a specific learning disability. Ethnic make-up of the student population was 70.5% Caucasian, 23.5% African-American, 1.5 % Hispanic, and .5% Asian, Native American, and others (KECSAC, 2008).

KECSAC students who participated in the study were from 14 to 17 years old, and were 31% female and 69% male. The most common characteristics in the student sample were low academic achievement, poor attendance, two or more grades below expected academic level at entry, a below-poverty lifestyle, a history of abuse and neglect, little or no involvement from their families, and identified disabilities, including emotional and behavioral disorders, learning disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and mild mental retardation (Powell, 2008).

The primary administrator of each KECSAC program also participated in the study.

Data Collection

This research received approval from the Human Subject Review Board at Eastern Kentucky University (See Appendix A for EKU IRB Informed Consent and

Assent Form). Contrasting data from both students and administrators were used, and from all 105 KECSAC education programs (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). Administrator data were collected in the following methods. First, an electronic census survey was given to 105 program administrators, which asked questions related to age, gender, race, disability status, to and from where students transition, and post-program outcomes. The survey was not anonymous. There was a 100% response rate, since the information is required by KECSAC. Second, researchers conducted interviews at every program. At the time the data collection period ended, 71 individual audio-taped or written response interviews were completed. The interview questions related to defining what a successful transition was, describing factors that had the greatest influence on transition success for youth, and identifying the biggest perceived obstacles to a successful transition (See Appendix B for KECSAC Individual Administrator Transitions Study Interview Guide). Administrator data also included ten audio-taped focus group interviews of nine administrators each. They were completed at an annual state coordination meeting, and all those present participated (See Appendix C for KECSAC Administrator Focus Group Interview Questions).

Program data included the following. There was analysis and coding for themes of 105 KECSAC Program Improvement Reports. These are comprehensive site summaries that include reviews of specific indicators related to school improvement. Their purpose was to ensure that state agency children received a quality, equitable program of study in compliance with state and federal standards. Second, there was analysis and coding for themes of 105 KECSAC Program Transition Plans. These included objectives specific to transition goals, strategies, and tasks that should be

completed to facilitate goals and outcome measures to determine the success of the transition planning process. Their purpose was to guide student transitions. Access was obtained to all documents because all KECSAC sites participate in this reporting process.

Youth data were collected in the following methods. Five program sites were selected through purposive sampling for maximum variation. The team used specific characteristics to maximize the variety and comparative contrast across sites, including type of students served, funding agency supporting the program, the size of the program, geographic location, and quality of current transition services. Volunteers were recommended by administrators, and through convenience sampling, the research teams selected recommended youth. Written informed assent was obtained from all youth participants prior to their participation (See Appendix A for EKU IRB Informed Consent and Assent Form). Data were first collected in five audio-recorded focus group interviews, each at a different program and with five students per group (See Appendix D for Focus Group Interview Questions of Youth in KECSAC Programs). Later in data collection, ten students completed individual interviews, again selected through convenience sampling (See Appendix E for Individual Interview Questions of Youth in KECSAC Programs). The questions focused on youths' understanding of their plans for transition. For example, they were asked if they knew what a transition plan was, if they knew what their transition plan said, if they helped to create it, what they would change to help them do better once they leave their programs, and whether they felt they could achieve their goals. All students received a ten dollar gift card to a national discount food and merchandising chain as an incentive for participation in the study.

Analysis

Qualitative and quantitative data collection and descriptive analyses were carried out without interaction between the two strands. The separate results of the two analyses were brought together in the interpretation phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989).

The survey data were analyzed using SPSS, a computer program for statistical analysis, producing a detailed quantitative description of a variety of key aspects of transition census data for KECSAC students, including: student demographics; the types of schools to and from which students transitioned; and post-program outcomes. Since the study's intent was descriptive, no statistical predictions or inferences were made (Kachigan, 1986).

Qualitative data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach, a method that rests on constant comparison to produce a theoretical description that is substantive, yet detailed enough to guide practitioners (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Analysis began immediately after data collection started and was supported by *HyperRESEARCH* software. The discovery of new understandings regarding transition in KECSAC students, which is a hallmark of excellence in grounded theory research, was demonstrated in the production of five successive coding schemes over the period of one year, as well as multiple explanatory themes, in order to refine the produced description. A series of summary memos were produced from coding reports and presented to the research team, which was comprised of the authors of this article, for critique, discussion, and revision.

Results

A Statistical Description of the Transitions of State Agency Children

The study's statistical description of the transitions of Kentucky's state agency children is presented first. This state-level, quantitative sketch of students' movement into and out of educational settings revealed a high level of system fluidity and inter-agency complexity.

Of students who transition out of a state-wide A6 program, 85% attended another pre-kindergarten through high school educational setting, while 15% did not transition to any other education program. When KECSAC students did transition from their A6 settings to another education program, 61% moved to a traditional A1 school, 16% transitioned to a district-wide alternative A5 program, and 23% transitioned to another A6 program. Of the 23% of youth who transitioned from an A6 program to another A6 program, 40% transitioned to a DJJ program, 42% to a DCBS program, and 18% to a DMHDDAS program. The survey also detailed differences between state agency programs in Kentucky, in regard to the percentage of students transitioning to another type of education program from an A6 program. Figure 2.1 shows outgoing transitions of KECSAC students to another education setting.

Survey data indicated the types of schools students had been attending before they transitioned into Kentucky's A6 programs. Fifty-two percent of students in A6 programs came from a traditional school, 17% from a district alternative school, 29% from another state agency school, and 2% had not been previously enrolled in any educational program. Overall, 42% of students in A6 programs are in their first A6 placement. However, within each agency category, there is a range from 37% for DCBS programs,
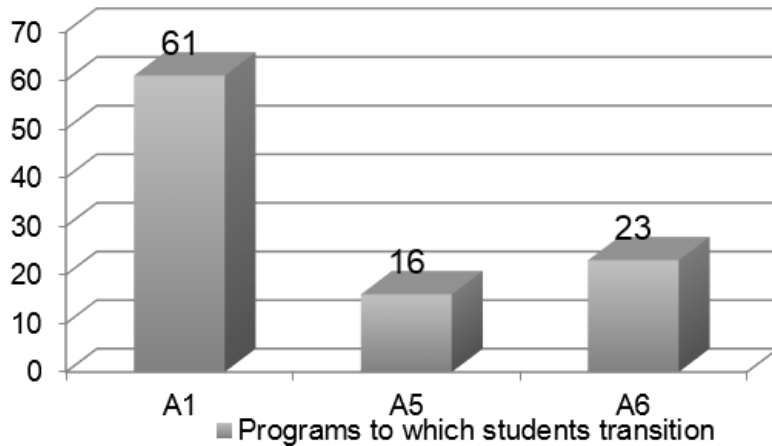
Figure 2.1. Outgoing transitions of KECSAC students to another education setting.

to 44% for DJJ programs, to 69.5% for DMHDDAS programs. Of those students who

entered an A6 program directly from a previous A6 program, 46% came from a DJJ

program, 37% came from a DCBS program and 15% came from a DMHDDAS program.

Review of these large-scale quantitative patterns of student movement into and

out of educational programs operated by Kentucky state agencies demonstrates the

complexity and fluidity of secondary transitions in this group of youth at high risk for

poor post-secondary outcomes. Key findings in the quantitative data include the

recognition that inter-setting transitions are a key factor in the educational success of

students at risk and that movement between A1 and A6 schools is a critical juncture in

the education of students at risk. It is also apparent that there are unique groups of A6

students, still to be fully described, such as those students from A1 settings who have

single A6 placements of short duration, and those who spend extensive time moving

solely between A6 settings.

A Qualitative Description of Transitions for State Agency Children

The study was designed to describe planning and programming for post-

secondary transition in Kentucky's nontraditional, state agency schools. Yet, as was also

55

true in the quantitative results, the qualitative analysis showed that the views of transitions of students and administrators in these settings were focused on the more immediate, and frequently occurring, transitions between secondary educational programs.

Student entry. Student entry practices were primarily described by administrators as an important aspect of transition. There was typically an established student entry protocol in each A6 program that was adhered to in varying degrees. At minimum, this process included a referral, an assessment, a records request, an intake meeting, and an orientation period. Student assessment usually occurred at initial entry and primarily focused on academic skills. Assessments that focused on the transition to adulthood, such as a career plan assessment, were less frequently used. Administrators described their desire for more ideal entry practices, including: academic and transition planning that begins in a *"timely manner,"* well before students' entry and discharge, and teachers well prepared for relevant work for the student, including any remedial needs. One administrator commented, *"You've got to plan for discharge at entry."* More often, administrators experienced and described unplanned entry into their programs. *"Students leave one program in the middle of the night, go to another program the next day, and they just show up on the doorstep of the teacher the next day."* When they did mention entry, students stated that they were treated well at entry but that programs did not seem to expect their arrival. *"In the morning you go to class and they just call everybody's names. And they say, 'Whose name didn't I call?' And you raise your hand and they ask for your name, and then you just get put in a class after that."*

Records transfers and requirement mismatches. Administrators perceived problems of access to student records to be a primary barrier to successful transition. The length of time between the students' arrival and when records were transferred ranged from a few hours to a few weeks, and limited the educational effectiveness of programs. Kentucky is moving to an online Individual Learning Plan (ILP) to help students plan for, and base their coursework on, their individual post-secondary goals. Although designed to expedite the records transfer process, KECSAC programs reported problems with the online ILP, including limited or restricted Internet access by students in many programs. A6 programs also report difficulties in successfully transferring student records to the next school. Student movement out of a program can happen abruptly and without information as to a student's destination. "*When you don't know they're leaving, there's no time to prepare,*" noted one administrator.

Lack of consistency between districts and schools in academic requirements and curriculum programming was also a significant barrier to successful inter-setting transitions. Administrators in the study often remarked that there was little curricular alignment of their program with that of different students' home schools or districts. In addition, they reported that receiving school districts were less flexible about what classes or credits they would accept upon the return of a student from an A6 program. One administrator explained, "*Kids are further penalized once they get back to their regular school for having spent time in detention. Sometimes grades are accepted, sometimes they're not. We try to work with school districts, but [it's] at the individual district's discretion.*" In addition, students enrolled in vocational education in their home

57

districts usually cannot complete that curriculum while in most A6 programs and work instead on assignments that do not result in graduation.

Transition programming. An original focus of the study and the interviews was description of programming that prepared students for post-secondary life. It was immediately evident that, instead, transition programming was conceptualized in terms of planning for students' exit from the A6 programs. Administrators and students were often unable to identify either academic or non-academic programming within A6 programs that was intended to facilitate successful transitions to adulthood. Administrators rarely thought of transition in terms of non-academic programming, such as life skills training. Instead, they focused on credit recovery and accurate record-keeping. Types and amounts of transition programming also varied greatly between programs. Some examples of transition programming named in interviews included: *"parenting classes," "money management," "job interview skills," "balancing a checkbook," "phone skills,"planning a garden,"* and *"cooking."*

Transition plans were rarely discussed with students. Most students did not know if they had a transition plan and those who did were unsure of what it included. A few were able to vaguely describe their transition plans, saying, for example, *"the achievements you want to make and what goals you want to succeed."* They were usually unable to describe transition plan goals. *"My transition plan,"* one student said, *"is to do whatever they tell me to do so I can get out of here."*

Need for staff collaboration. On-site collaboration between treatment and education staff of A6 programs was widely recognized by administrators as both challenging and necessary to support successful futures for students and to treat *"the*

whole child." As one administrator said, "*It's important for all stakeholders to see the value in education and treatment. Sometimes we're too segmented.*" Since transition programming was not the primary domain of either group, it required an integrated team approach. Specifically, it was suggested that treatment and education staff collaboratively administer pre-tests, integrate their curricula, develop shared goals, and spend more time together on a daily basis. Some on-site transition collaboration did occur in meetings, in-services, preparation for student exit from a program, and work with the records clerk. While cited as very important to transition success, collaboration between sending and receiving schools was primarily described as a barrier to successful transition.

Characterizations of student identities. The ways in which students were characterized expressed perceptions of students' likely transitions into adulthood. Students most frequently characterized themselves or other students using negative labels, including "*probation violator,*" "*drug user,*" "*troublemaker,*" "*party-er,*" "*delinquent,*" "*drop-out,*" "*don't care about anything,*" and "*ballistic.*" In particular, students often identified themselves as angry or aggressive. Some students did describe themselves positively by identifying things they enjoyed doing, such as cooking, working on bikes or cars, playing sports, or skateboarding.

Both administrators and students recognized high recidivism rates and remarked on the frequency with which students move from facility to facility. "*Back and forth they're coming. Our place is a revolving door. They'll go there for a couple of weeks, come back to our school. Go back, come back.*" Often students have been in and out of trouble for many years, have multiple offenses, and have been in three to ten different

59

schools. Administrators also described the apparent institutionalization of some students and their tendencies to *"self-sabotage"* in order to remain in a placement.

Youth relationships with adults and peers. The importance of relationships with both peers and adults was a very strong theme in the youth interviews. Although youth identified many barriers, their relationships were one area about which they spoke very positively. In the smaller settings of alternative education, students typically received more individualized attention from adults than in their previous school settings. *"In regular school, it seems like they really don't have time or they just don't really . . . care about you as an individual. It seems like here . . . they really do care and are trying to help us better ourselves."* Students valued the small class size and teachers' availability to them. *"They are here for you. And they care about whether you learn or not. . . . They actually take time out to help us."* Some students described feelings that certain teachers helped to *"raise them."* They often perceive their successes to be a direct result of these important relationships. *"I feel that what we need, it's not just about the school work. You need to build relationships."* Although students emphasized the importance of positive relationships with adults, some students did describe what they considered to be a lack of respect from teachers and staff. Students also relied on each other for academic, social, and emotional support in these nontraditional settings.

School cultures. The culture of an education program was perceived to greatly influence a student's transition experience. Students identified their current A6 programs as much more structured than their previous schools, as well as feeling less pressure to wear the right clothes, have the best grades, and be identified with a particular peer group. Despite the presence of more rules, regimentation, and behavior systems in

alternative education programs, students overwhelmingly stated that they felt the increased structure helped to keep them out of trouble and succeed. Students also reported boredom in alternative education programs as a result of the limitations of the structured system.

Both students and administrators identified the cultures of receiving home schools as a significant barrier to successful transition. According to administrators, returning students were often identified as "*losers*," "*bad kids*," and "*trouble*." The receiving schools "*still have a target on the kids' backs*." As one administrator stated, in regard to students returning to their home schools after a nontraditional education placement, *"It's almost like they walk back in with a 'Scarlet A' on their chest, and they have to start fighting all the obstacles that are thrown at them*." They perceived the receiving or sending schools as viewing the A6 programs as "*holding tanks*" or "*babysitters*" and should *"cure"* or *"fix"* students with emotional, behavioral, or academic problems. In addition, both students and administrators believed that, at best, the receiving schools give students very little leeway upon return and may do everything they can to get the student quickly removed from school. Students identified issues with the culture of receiving schools at a personal level. They described negative experiences with other students in their home schools, with one student saying she would rather not be around those students so that they "*could not judge us*."

Students' future plans. Students' short-term goals for their futures included such aspirations as getting out of a current placement, staying out of trouble, graduating, and getting a job. Their long-term goals were varied: *"social worker,"* *"cosmetologist,"* *"nurse,"* *"tattoo artist,"* *"OBGYN,"* *"gas station attendant,"* and *"pro-football player,"*

61

for example. They also had hopes for changes in living arrangements and education programs, such as *"going to an independent living facility,"* *"culinary school,"* and *"getting my own place to live."* Most administrators felt that they did not do an adequate job of tracking students once they left their programs, so they encouraged students to call and update them following a move. Administrators' criteria for the transition success of students ran the gamut, from *"staying out of trouble"* and *"not seeing them again,"* to specific hopes for students' careers, entry into the military, or marriage.

Discussion

This study focused on the understanding and description of perspectives on post-secondary transition for students at risk in state agency education programs in Kentucky. Together, the study's quantitative and qualitative results portray the typical transitions of Kentucky youth as they move into and out of the state's most nontraditional education placements. Demographically, these students are those within the state that are at highest risk of failure in both educational attainment and productive adulthood. They are primarily male, and African-American youth are highly overrepresented, which mirrors national trends of disproportionate representation of African-Americans in child welfare agencies (Cross, 2008). Nearly half of the youth have identified disabilities, many lack family and community supports, and over half have entered the juvenile justice system. These are the students for whom transition planning and programming are most critical.

Aspects of alternative education transitions that youth found valuable provides evidence of potentially effective transition practices (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). The youth in this study made it clear that they valued and sought out the assistance that was offered to them in their nontraditional settings. In

comparison to their home schools, they found the greater structure of the nontraditional schools supportive and reassuring. They understood why rules and restrictions were important to their success. A supportive school environment with clear expectations and standards promoted engagement of students at risk for dropping out (Wehlage, 1991).

A surprising finding of the study was that, within the system, transition is atypically defined. According to IDEA (2004), transition planning and services are long-term preparations for post-secondary aspirations and the challenges of adulthood. This is backed up by evidence that demonstrates that the opportunity to develop skills in the areas of education, employment, and independent living improves adult outcomes for youth at risk (Montgomery, Donkoh, & Underhill, 2006). For these state agencies, however, transition was defined as a successful exit from a current education placement. The most critical transition appears to be the inter-setting transition for students in nontraditional education programs. Further, for the majority of students, inter-setting transitions are not a one-time placement into, and then out of, a nontraditional education program. Instead, a pattern of repeating inter-setting transitions over a multi-year cycle was common. Frequent changes of adult and peer support networks can negatively impact students' academic success and increase behavioral complications (Malmgren & Gagnon, 2005).

The greatest issues lay at the inter-setting transition, including difficulties obtaining records, the unpredictability of student entry, the transfer of earned credits, and the negative culture of the home school toward a returning student. The lack of collaboration between disciplines and agencies is cited by administrators as being a significant hindrance to successful transition. Students, on the other hand, thought of

63

transition supports in terms of key personal relationships with teachers or peers who valued them as individuals and demonstrated an emotional investment in their unique futures. Particularly for vulnerable youth, relationships with adults that are characterized by acceptance, consistency and caring are vital, especially during times of transition (Collins, Spencer & Ward, 2010). Without continuity between services, programs, as well as the social networks of youth, transition to adulthood is less likely to be successful (Altschuler, 2005).

Strengths and Limitations

In order to develop a valid, trustworthy, and detailed description of KECSAC youth transitions, the study used diverse data sources and analytic strategies (Charmaz, 2006), a collaborative large team analysis (Guest & MacQueen, 2008), a carefully constructed analytic path, qualitative analysis software to support examination of large quantities of data, and member checks to insure that participants agreed with study findings (Nolan, Pierce, Powell, Fehringer, & Marshall, 2008). However, because this study describes the unique perspectives on transition of students and administrators within an interagency collaborative unique to the Commonwealth of Kentucky, generalization of its findings to other populations of youth at risk should be made with caution.

Recommendations for Service Provision

The literature clearly demonstrates that relationships between youth at risk for educational failure and adults have substantial positive impacts (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002). Having an adult speak in a caring way to or about them, hearing that successes were recognized and expected from them: these experiences seemed to sink

64

into the psyches of the adolescents in this study in a way that core curriculum, assignments, or transition planning could not.

Mentoring has the potential of promoting positive connections and creating opportunities for positive social networking for these youth. While mentoring cannot fully offset all risks, having a relationship with one or more adults can significantly impact positive developmental outcomes (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). Mentoring can occur informally, such as in after-school programs, sports teams, or youth groups, as well as through more traditional mentoring programs, where youth are matched with an adult. Considering the importance youth placed on relationships with adults in this study, settings serving foster care youth would be well-advised to encourage and cultivate mentorship between adults and transitioning youth. Also, changing the language of negative characterization of youth in these settings may be beneficial.

Despite the study's intent, one of the least described aspects of transition was post-secondary transition programming in nontraditional schools. Rather than describing what was working well in transition practices, students and administrators mostly described barriers to transition. Although a handful of administrators stated that their students had transition plans, few could name or describe the programming that they used to prepare students for transition beyond those aspects directly related to academics. Investment in state agency schools in life skills, vocational training, community linkages, and other types of best practice transition programming could be highly beneficial (Carter, Trainor, Sun, & Owens, 2009).

Recommendations for Policy

The review of the literature suggests that there is a great need for organized transition services in programs for students at risk in other states around the country (Carter, Trainor, Sun & Owens, 2009; Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Leucking, & Mack, 2002; Wehman, 2006). Difficult policy decisions are required at the level of state departments of education in order to reduce the degree to which high variability of curricular requirements between schools create unavoidable barriers to youth at risk who move erratically through this fragmented system. The Commonwealth of Kentucky, as in other jurisdictions, could better serve its youth at risk by developing local, interagency, and statewide systems of effective transition planning and services. Improved supports to the continuity of a student's transition and education plans as they move between settings would enhance students' educational success and decrease the need for nontraditional placements.

Recommendations for Research

The potential for research to support these efforts to improve transition practices are many. Descriptive research could further document key aspects of the system, such as inter-setting transitions between nontraditional and home schools, or further an understanding of types of student movement through the system. This would support informed and successful improvements to systemic transition programming, as well as policy and resource recommendations. Research that surveys education settings of all types for their compliance with state and federal requirements would strengthen policy by increasing accountability. Research on the outcomes of best practice transition planning and services could also demonstrate their value, in measures of the quality of the post-

secondary lives of students, and in terms of the cost that accrue to other citizens when students do not successfully transition to adulthood. Exemplary demonstration program research could illustrate how pragmatic strategies for youth transitions can be implemented, in order to disseminate such enhancements across the system.

Conclusion

The study describes a complex, chaotic system of youth transitions between typical and nontraditional schools. These youth are challenged with disability, poor academic performance, and troubled family backgrounds. That the system itself is so uncoordinated in its policies, inter-agency relations, and implementation of federal requirements is a great disservice to children already struggling mightily against the odds. It is hoped that this study will encourage additional research on, policy development for, and transition services to, this group of underserved students at highest risk for poor post-secondary transitions to productive and satisfying adulthoods.

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CHAPTER THREE:

"A VICIOUS CIRCLE": THE IMPACT OF STIGMA ON
STATE AGENCY YOUTH IN TRANSITION[2]

The Importance of Transition Planning for Vulnerable Youth

The "Building Enhanced Services for Transition" (BEST) Study was designed to generate improvements to transition planning and services in state agency education programs in Kentucky using a blended methodology. Participatory action research was used so that improvements to transition services would emerge directly from the priorities of those concerned, while grounded theory sought understanding of the emerging changes in services for state agency youth across all research sites. A primary finding of the study is the degree to which individual and structural stigmatization of state agency youth impedes successful transitions to adulthood. Understanding the operation of stigma in the psyches and settings of these students suggests ways in which this primary barrier might be disrupted and post-secondary outcomes for these students at high risk of failure could be improved.

Stigma: A Multidimensional Attribute

Stigma is a complex phenomenon, experienced in multiple ways. According to Goffman (1963), it refers to an attribute that deeply devalues an individual in others'

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eyes. The attribute, or "mark" (Goffman, 1963, p. 4), reduces one from "a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). All of the attributes of the stigma bearer are seen in light of his or her stigmatizing marks, whether or not they are outwardly visible.

Self-stigma occurs when an individual accepts and applies negative cultural stereotypes to him or herself (Corrigan, Watson, & Barr, 2006). A central concern is that stigma predisposes individuals to poor outcomes (Yang, Kleinman, Link, Phelan, Lee, & Good, 2007), including depression (Link, Struening, Rahav, Phelan, & Nuttbrock, 1997); diminished self-esteem (Corrigan, Watson & Barr, 2006); poor health (Schnittker & John, 2007); and decreased quality of life (Wright, Gronfein, & Owens, 2000). Isolation caused by stigma can limit employment, education opportunities and potential income (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Stigmatization increases people's vulnerability to negative outcomes, not because the stigma itself is a causal factor, but as a result of the damaging side effects of labeling (Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout, & Dohrenwend, 1989; Wright, Gronfein, & Owens, 2000). While Goffman (1963) viewed stigma as residing primarily within the individual; that is, a static attribute that one possesses, modified labeling theory is based upon a symbolic interactionist view that an individual is not the main location in which stigma occurs; rather, it is a force that operates through social interactions (Yang, Kleinman, Link, Phelan, Lee & Good, 2007). Interactions with those who continually label them negatively impact the self-concepts of stigma bearers (Moses, 2009), making stigma a "double burden" (Wright, Gronfein & Owens, 2000, p. 69).

Considering that adolescence is central to identity development, the impact of stigma during this time is significant (Bell, Long, Garvan, & Bussing, 2010). Negative labels may be obtained formally, such as through the court system, or informally, through those given by teachers, peers, or parents (Ray & Downs, 1986). A self-fulfilling prophecy is a reciprocal process in which an untrue belief in one person leads to its realization in another (Merton, 1948). Labels can produce a deviant identity, which, over time, not only stabilize, but also increase levels of deviant behavior (Ray & Downs, 1986), sometimes referred to as "secondary delinquency" (Adams, Robertson, Gray-Ray, & Ray, 2003, p. 182). Research demonstrates that self-labeling predicts delinquent behavior in youth (Adams, Robertson, Gray-Ray, & Ray, 2003; Ray & Downs, 1986).

The literature on stigma has focused on individual stereotyping (Yang, Kleinman, Link, Phelan, Lee, & Good, 2007). Its causes, however, extend beyond the individual or interpersonal context. Link and Phelan's (2001) conceptualization of stigma includes discrimination. While individual discrimination is an act of overt bias, structural discrimination occurs "in ways not explained by the direct psychological effects of an individual's bigoted views and behavior" (Corrigan, Markowitz, & Watson, 2004, p. 481). It may be intentional, including enforcement of policies that intentionally restrict opportunities, or unintentional, which occurs through accumulated institutional practices that inadvertently work to the disadvantage of people, even without the presence of individual discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2001). Either way, stigmatization does not occur at just an individual level. It is not only "a thing that individuals impose on others"; rather, it stems from broader systemic forces (Parker & Aggleton, 2003).

Vulnerable Youth in Transition to Adulthood

In Kentucky, more than 14,000 students are educated annually in programs funded, operated, or contracted by state agencies. The Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC) provides funding to 54 school districts that educate approximately 2,700 state agency children per year. State agency children are committed to the Kentucky Department of Community Based Services (DCBS); the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ); or the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental or Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID). Nontraditional educational programs include juvenile justice facilities, residential treatment homes, community-based shelters, or mental health day treatment programs, among others.

According to the KECSAC 2011 census, 45% of youth in Kentucky state agency programs are diagnosed with a disability, compared to 14.2% in the Kentucky public school system. Close to half (43%) are diagnosed with emotional or behavioral disabilities. Twenty-one percent of youth are diagnosed as "Otherwise Health Impaired" (including, among other disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder); and 10% are diagnosed with mild intellectual disabilities. The two most prevalent racial and ethnic backgrounds of state agency children are Caucasian (72.7%), followed African-American (21.3%). By comparison, 10.6% of students in Kentucky public schools are African-American, making this rate approximately double (Parker, 2012). The disproportionate representation of youth in Kentucky with disabilities, particularly emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD), and African-American youth, particularly males, shadows national trends (Cross, 2008).

71

Many challenges exist for system-involved youth during their transition to adulthood. For example, the high school graduation rate of youth with disabilities is 28%, and for those diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders, nearly half (44%) drop out of school (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). Furthermore, 37% of youth in foster care have not completed high school or earned a G.E.D. by age 20 (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001).

High school graduation has significant implications for employment, income, and opportunities for post-secondary education. Of youth enrolled in special education, not much more than half, approximately 57%, are employed three to five years after graduation (Levine & Wagner, 2005). Of youth diagnosed with emotional or behavioral disabilities, only a little over one in five are enrolled in a four-year college (Wagner, Newman, & Cameto, 2004). Only about one-third (31%) of formerly incarcerated youth either work or attend school one year after their release (Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller, & Havel, 2002). Abysmal outcomes such as these spread disproportionately across a wide range of system-involved youth.

Schools are generally a very important resource for students, who not only gain academic knowledge, but also technical skills, career decision-making, and college admissions preparation, among other knowledge necessary for successful post-secondary and adult life. The development of relationships with institutional agents is key to accessing resources and opportunities. This is known as social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Over time, accumulation of social capital promotes school achievement and mobility.

Rather than a pathway to success, however, schools act as networks of barriers for many youth. Exclusionary structures that can impede success include curriculum

72

tracking, grade retention, and long-term placement in alternative or special education classrooms (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Trainor, 2008). These structures constrain students' access to opportunities and resources that schools typically provide (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The relegation of certain students to alternative schools or classrooms has sometimes been referred to as "forced choice," and occurs more frequently in the era of high stakes testing (Lehr & Lange, 2003, p. 61).

Transition Needs of Vulnerable Youth

To overcome the challenges that state agency youth face as they transition to adulthood, it is crucial that they are provided high quality postsecondary transition planning. In order to promote successful transition, supports for vulnerable youth should include individualized transition planning, training in skills for self-determination, as well as instruction in life skills like home management, access to and participation in post-secondary education, and employment preparation (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010). Fundamental to skill training is that it occurs through direct experience using appropriate supports (King, Baldwin, Currie, & Evans, 2006).

Although successful transition to adulthood is the ultimate goal, more immediate transitions of state agency youth between schools and districts are in dire need of attention. There is a lack of shared information on students across agencies and schools, where differing policies often determine class, credit, and graduation requirements. Systems often function independently of each other (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Transfers of student records and information between schools or agencies are often slow (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Leucking, & Mack, 2002). Because of the significant amount of paperwork involved in a student transfer, many students do not have required

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documentation to enroll in the school to which they are transitioning (Geenen & Powers, 2006; Griller Clark & Unruh, 2010). In a survey of child serving agencies in one state, over half of respondents reported their students experience an enrollment delay over five days, while more than one in four respondents indicated students have school enrollment delays of more than two weeks (Powers & Stotland, 2002). In the Kentucky Youth at Risk in Transition Study (KYART), which drew data from KECSAC alternative program administrators and students, a primary concern regarding transition was poor coordination of procedures and requirements between sending and receiving schools (Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012).

Another barrier to successful transition described in the KYART Study resulted from the negative cultures of home schools upon students' return. Youth returning from alternative placements perceived negative labeling to be intensified at their home schools. Administrators reported that students were repeatedly identified by teachers and school staff as "losers," "bad kids," or "trouble" (Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012, p. 108). Youth participants internalized these negative labels, as evidenced by their use of the following words and phrases during the interviews to describe themselves: "troublemaker," "delinquent," "drop-out," "ballistic," "don't care about anything," and "bad kid" (Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012, p. 106).

Research Methods

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to create improvements to transition services in KECSAC education programs in order to provide examples to other KECSAC programs. Institutional review board approval was received prior to beginning the study. The

KECSAC BEST Study used a methodology that blended grounded theory and participatory action research to improve transition planning and services in state agency education programs. The focus of this paper is on the key analytic theme of stigma, which emerged primarily from grounded theory methods.

Participatory Action Research: Data Collection, and Analysis

A participatory methodology was used so that the improvements surrounding transition services would emerge directly from the priorities of those concerned and would build upon strengths and resources of each setting. Participatory action research values collaborative and equitable partnerships between co-participants (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). It is an emergent process that recognizes and works to build upon the experience that a group or community already has through iterative cycles of research (Genat, 2009). All phases of the cycles include equitable participation between researchers and participants (Kemmis & McTaggert, 2005).

To represent the variety of KECSAC education programs in the state, initial site selection occurred through purposive sampling (Luborsky & Rubenstein, 1995). The Research Team at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), which consisted of five members from the College of Health Sciences and College of Education, used characteristics to maximize variety and comparative contrast across sites (Patton, 2002). These characteristics included type of students served, funding agency supporting the program, size of the program, and geographic location. During a series of on-site orientations to some selected education programs, including discussions of results from the KYART study (Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012), opportunities to develop and participate in research-based improvements of an aspect of transition at their programs,

and potential areas of transition that each program might most value improving, EKU Research Team members invited individuals to participate in the research, resulting in a total of five programs.

Participants were comprised of twenty-nine education program administrators and staff members, including teachers, principals, counselors, transition coordinators, youth workers, special education directors, and administrative support staff. Upon agreeing to participate, written informed consent was obtained from participants. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary (See Appendix F for the EKU IRB Informed Consent Form for Administrators). Additionally, the research team members provided participants training in participatory action research methodology. Through a network selection process (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), initial site teams ultimately selected additional staff members to participate.

At the start of data collection, site co-researchers were invited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. They occurred in a private office or classroom setting and lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. Questions focused on their perceptions of what is necessary to promote student success, barriers to promoting success, and what would make a difference in students' transitions (See Appendix G for the KECSAC BEST Individual Interview Guide). Researchers also completed observations at research sites in classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias, among other locations, especially initially in the research process. These initial observations helped to obtain data to help shape the direction of the research.

Throughout the research process, site teams trialed and continually improved selected aspects of transition planning and services at their sites. The EKU KECSAC

BEST Research team regularly developed memos to describe and summarize findings from the data analysis. The KECSAC BEST Research Team considered these memos to make recommendations in regard to improvement processes. They were brought back to participants at each of the research sites and incorporated into discussions or meetings. This data analysis process served to provide methodological support and a broader perspective of the research to each of the five sites. Projects completed at each site were intended to serve as models for other KECSAC programs' transition planning and services through eventual dissemination. Table 3.1 provides a summary of the five research sites and resulting projects based on participatory action research.

Grounded Theory: Data Collection and Analysis

The KECSAC BEST Research Team met every three weeks for one-half day meetings over a period of approximately one year. Discussions, which were audio-recorded, included reflections about methods across the five research sites, strengths and challenges of team formation, and comparative analysis of transition improvement projects between sites. Responses to bi-weekly reflection questions were audio-recorded by each of the five site researchers, offering an ongoing opportunity for reflection on the evolving projects, methods, and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Four reflection question schemes were developed and revised across time, addressing research progress, methods insights, and challenges confronted, and were audio-recorded by researchers (See Appendix H for an example of Researcher Reflection Questions).

There were four two-hour audio-recorded roundtable discussions that occurred during the research period. These discussions, in which all participants across the five sites gathered at one location to discuss their research projects, were a way to feedback

Table 3.1. PAR Project Results at Research Sites

Setting	Research site type	Projects
1	Secure juvenile detention center, urban	*Post-Secondary Employment and Education Options*: Programming guide.
2	Program for post-adjudicated youth, non-metropolitan	Professional Development for district educators: Day-long trainings to raise awareness and establish viable process, including constructive classroom behavior management techniques, to ensure students' positive return to public school
3	School on campus of non-profit youth residential treatment facility, rural	"Where the Heart Is": Built a statewide network of advocates at schools to create a transitional safety net for state agency youth; promoted a recognizable logo denoting "safe spaces" in schools; and created a resource guide for students in crisis
4	Secure juvenile detention center, rural	"A Model of Healing": Creation of a document to be used as a manual for the creation of a successful juvenile detention center that explains how a facility functions through the lens of transitions, from entry to exit.
5	Semi-private K-12 laboratory school located on EKU campus	Incorporated transition planning into academic curriculum; developed work and community linkages for students soon to graduate; fostered opportunities for peer mentoring to create an environment where relationships are as important as academics

emerging data to participants to ensure accurateness of data representation, raise

questions, and offer an opportunity to provide alternate points of view (Esterberg, 2002;

Patton, 2002). These discussions also emerged into a way for participants across the five

diverse sites to discuss their experiences, discovering common constraints preventing

students from fully participating in school. The sharing of this knowledge among the

participants gave them a new sense of the problem and served as a way for people to

consider actions that they could take within their particular location. In this way, the roundtable discussions helped to shape the direction of site research projects.

The study used grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to seek understanding of the emerging changes in transition services for state agency youth. Although each site designed unique research-based programming, data analysis compared similarities and differences across sites. Analysis occurred concurrently with data collection, which was supported by *HyperRESEARCH* qualitative data analysis software for storage and retrieval.

Transcribed data from both participatory action research and grounded theory methods yielded over 500 pages. Initial open coding crossed all sites and produced 26 codes, with approximately five to ten sub-codes under each. Through constant comparative analysis of data from different sources, initial codes were collapsed into a more focused coding scheme and applied to the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). There were six successive coding schemes throughout the study. Some of the most productive focused codes included relationships (student to adult; student to student; community; and family); school climate; program resources; and program policies.

Forty pages of memos were produced, discussed and critiqued during research team meetings (Charmaz, 2006). Identification of relationships between emerging data categories helped to refine the comparative grounded theory regarding potential improvements to transition planning and services, and the process by which this occurred. Through the process of category identification, stigma emerged as a crossing theme, which came to be perceived as a primary barrier to successful transition for state agency youth. Theoretical saturation was reached when comparisons among categories in the

data yielded no new illuminations of the emergent theory. In this article, only a select portion of the data related to the stigma theme is presented to highlight one focus of the overall study findings.

Prolonged engagement in the field, along with a detailed audit trail, contributed to the degree of trustworthiness (Krefting, 1991). Utilization of different data collection methods (i.e., interviews, observations, researcher reflections), different data sources (i.e., researchers, teachers, administrators), and different time periods allowed for multiple varieties of data triangulation. Emerging data were brought to the site teams on a regular basis and to the four roundtable discussions for member checks. Presentations at state and local conferences ensured that participants and community members had opportunities to provide additional input and feedback (Marshall, Brewster, & Ferguson, 2010; Marshall, Painter, & Brewster, 2010).

Findings

Through the discoveries from the grounded theory analysis, a primary theme was the cumulative impact of stigma on youth. The following data described three categories within that theme. The first category is the reinforcement of negative self-identity through stigmatizing labels that both teachers and peers give students as they transition to their home schools from alternative schools. The second category is the "vicious circle" of deviant behavior as a result of self-fulfilling prophecies that the youth hold. The third category is the cumulative impact of uncoordinated and exclusionary institutional policies and practices that worked to the disadvantage of state agency youth transitioning between education settings.

Reinforcement of Negative Self-identity through Stigmatizing Labels

Students often view traditional schools as inhospitable, uncaring, fast-paced, and irrelevant (Laguna-Riordan, Aguilar, Franklin, Streeter, Kim, Tripodi et al., 2011). Alternative school settings, on the other hand, often have small enrollment sizes, which facilitate face-to-face interaction between students and teachers; a culture that promotes academics as well as the whole student; and a non-competitive community that engages students through a sense of belonging (Bland, Church, Neill & Terry, 2008; Knesting, 2008; Lehr & Lange, 2003, Wehlage, 1991). In general, youth value the encouragement, care, and personal relationships they experience in alternative schools (De La Ossa, 2005). This difference led one participant in this study to recount:

> When these kids come in . . . they're ghosts out there, they go from class to class, they may never see the teacher. They come in to our environment and I get to know [them] . . . I'm talking to [them] and [they] are telling me, you know, what [their] needs are . . . it's like all of a sudden they feel valued where they never felt valued before. (Administrator interview, Setting 1)

One of the biggest challenges of youth transition is stigmatization upon return to home schools because of their alternative school placement. When they return, their deviant labels, such as "troublemaker," follow them, and they are not welcomed by teachers, administrators, or peers. "They're a target going back and . . . the [teachers] are looking for something all the time" (Site team meeting, Setting 2). "A lot of [students] are scared of the labeling when they go back" (Interview with transition coordinator, Setting 2). Based on preconceived expectations, teachers resist having students return to their classrooms. One alternative school staff member said of home school teachers:

> It's like, instead of saying, "It's a clean slate, welcome back, I know you've been to this program and you can start over," which is what [students] need to hear, they hear, "You're on the short list already. You

81

make one mistake and you're out of here." (Participant, roundtable discussion)

Another noted that there is little support available for students as they transition into a new school setting:

> When they go back, a lot of kids go there with a bull's-eye on them. And they're not accepted back into the school with a welcoming . . . committee or [even] one person. A lot of times it's like, "OK, I'm watching you. If you mess up, you're gone." (Participant, roundtable discussion)

Almost half of state agency youth are diagnosed with disabilities, as previously described. These students do not always receive adequate supports and services to help them succeed in the traditional classroom. Teachers or other school professionals who do not receive training about how to serve youth with disabilities are more likely to hold stereotypical views of students (Bell, Long, Garvan, & Bussing, 2010). As one alternative school staff observed:

> It seems like people are not equipped to deal with these students in the home schools. . . . To see that this behavior . . . is not out of the bounds of who they are, and sometimes out of their control. Especially some of the students who may speak out a lot in class. . . . It would be good for teachers and other people to understand they can't help that. I think sometimes it's just, "Sit down, be quiet, be still, listen." And sometimes it's difficult when you have ADHD. . . . Some things [teachers] would say: "Well, he wouldn't sit down and do his work." Well, he has ADHD, and he has these other issues going on, and maybe that's why. (Transition coordinator interview, Setting 2)

Another observed that home schools expect the alternative schools to remediate or "fix," students:

> They think the kids should just act better when they come back. They don't realize that they're not going to be cured over there, and that they're still having problems at home and they have other major issues, like mental health issues, learning disabilities, whatever it may be. . . . And sometimes the kids do mess up . . . I know that they're not perfect and they are going to make mistakes. (Participant, site team meeting, Setting 2)

82

As students return to their home schools, they encounter negative perceptions from teachers, administrators, and peers. Their labels follow them in a "halo of stigma" (Harris, Milich, Corbitt, Hoover, & Brady, 1992, p. 48). Teachers and other school staff are often not adequately trained how to effectively address and manage students' disabilities or behavioral challenges in the classroom. Negative expectations of students work to perpetuate the cycle of stigma.

Self-fulfilling Prophecies in the Classroom

When students internalize negative labels, they come to accept them as true (Parker & Aggleton, 2003). Teachers' negative expectations of the behavior and performance of some students create self-fulfilling prophecies impacting students' academic success (Bell, Long, Garvan, & Bussing, 2011). They expect that regardless of what they do, teachers will not change their negative opinions of them. In addition, cumulative effects may occur. If students hear similar labels applied to them from multiple adults, it can reinforce their behavior (Madon, Guyll, Spoth, & Willard, 2004). This is referred to as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Bell, Long, Garvan, & Bussing, 2011). After hearing negative labels about themselves so often, they began to identify with them and anticipate rejection. An alternative school staff member described the process of a self-fulfilling prophecy in this way:

> If you walk into a [school] that welcomes you and gives you that chance, you know; if you blow it that's on you, but we want . . . to say, "We're giving you a kid now that's on their feet and that cares about what happens to them, that wants a future, that's willing to try." Then we want somebody on the other end to be there to say to that kid, "Hey, we're here for you. If you have problems I'm here; if you want help I'm here." And for that kid to know . . . they won't go back in [the classroom] and [hear], "Oh, I don't want you in my class, I remember you, you're trouble." Because when you tell a kid they're trouble, they are going to be trouble. (Transition coordinator interview, Setting 3)

Research suggests that self-fufilling prophecies may be even more powerful among individuals who are part of a stigmatized group (Jussim & Harber 2005). One participant observed how state agency youth are targeted:

> [These students] come from backgrounds that are very different from the other kids. And those kids . . . they are targeted, they are treated differently. . . . Some of the kids are provoked to anger. They are singled out. . . . They are under a magnifying glass, and a lot of times there are people who are pressing their buttons. . . . They don't want them in there in the first place. (Participant, roundtable discussion)

Once a child has been labeled with a bad reputation, it can result in receiving less instructional support (Eisenburg & Schneider, 2007). Teachers and others may consciously or unconsciously separate themselves from students they perceive to be difficult or intimidating (Moses, 2010). Thus, students with challenging behaviors caused by emotional or behavioral disabilities, for example, are more likely to encounter teachers lacking in encouragement and approachability (Hughes, Cavell, & Jackson, 1999).

When students' needs are not met, they are less likely to succeed academically. Already predisposed to poor outcomes, the cycle of stigma is exacerbated. A study participant said: "[Students] shut down because they've given up, and then the behavior comes . . . and then they start being disruptive and it's this vicious circle" (Transition coordinator interview, Setting 4). Teachers' negative preconceptions of students' abilities, real or perceived, have the effect of reinforcing problematic behavior. The students who need the most supports in the classroom, in effect, are provided with the least. With insufficient supports, recidivism rates remains persistently high. State agency youth are thus often educated outside of mainstream classrooms for a large portion of their academic careers. Given the disparate outcomes of these youth, it should be questioned whether students' persistent exclusion is a contributing factor.

Cumulative Impact of Institutional Practices and Policies on Transition

Beyond negative labels state agency students receive, they also are discriminated against at a broader level by institutional practices and policies that impact their transitions. Intentionally punitive disciplinary policies such as zero tolerance, meant to punish disruptive students by removing them from the classroom, target many of these students. In an era of high stakes testing, there is increased pressure on schools to remove low-performing students in order to maintain high test scores (Losen, 2011).

In addition, schools engage in accumulated practices that have the effect of negatively impacting students. Whether or not these policies and practices intend to be punitive (Corrigan, Markowitz, & Watson, 2004), they still impede students' ability to succeed. In this study, constraining institutional practices that were observed included: 1) lengthy delays in school enrollment as a result of uncoordinated exchange of information about students (which were compounded by students' high mobility rates); and 2) inconsistent academic requirements and curricula between schools and districts, which impacted students' ability to graduate on time, if at all.

Unreliable access to students' prior school records with lengthy delays. State agency youth have frequent and complicated transitions from one facility to the next. Because of the large amount of paperwork involved in a transfer, paired with poor coordination between schools, agencies, and district systems, many students who transition between education programs do not have the required documentation to enroll in a timely manner.

In this study, the time it took to transfer records and paperwork was a significant barrier to transition. Without adequate documentation, schools may be unaware of

85

students' educational needs, including supports stipulated in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). As reported by participants, some schools do not accept students who are enrolled in special education if all their records are not with them at the time of their entry. Additionally, when enrollment is delayed, students may not receive arrangements for education in the interim. A transition coordinator, commenting about difficulties of inter-school coordination, said:

> We often don't get all of the information we should get when kids come . . . their IEPs . . . their behavior intervention plans. . . . This is the first year I can remember that we've actually had [students' records] show up at the transition meetings. I mean, I don't ever remember in the past years, ever [having] contact back and forth with that school. (Site team meeting, Setting 2)

As another participant explained, because of students' high mobility, it is frequently a question of:

> How to guarantee that these kids do not lose ground. . . . As always, these students run the risk of getting lost in the red tape of placement. And the end of the year is particularly difficult because credits can be lost or not conferred because the district has not been designated. . . . It is an intense juggling act. (Researcher reflection)

Program staff described the difficulty with tracking and monitoring students post-release, a critical element of transition planning. One staff member explained, "A kid will leave our building. See, we're just day treatment, and we don't know where they've gone to. They don't tell us. The only way we find out is when they request their educational records" (Participant, roundtable discussion). Although privacy is essential, it may also inadvertently create further barriers for youth who so frequently transition between settings. There is a need to balance confidentiality with the ability to share basic information about a student to sensitize caregivers to needed services and supports.

Inconsistent academic and curriculum requirements. Credit recovery is a problematic issue during transition, especially when schools that students attend are located in separate districts. Because different policies determine graduation requirements, "every district is different with their credits and classes" (Transition coordinator interview, Setting 4). Different districts require different numbers of credits and different curricula for graduation. Furthermore, transfer of earned credits is problematic. Very frequently, students' home schools do not honor at least some credits that students received at an alternative program. As one person commented, "A lot of high schools did not think we were significant enough to process our grades" (School administrator interview, Setting 1). Another participant said,

> It is hard [to ask the school system] to issue credits for students who have only been here for a week. On the other hand, when the schools get rid of them, they are not always willing to bend the technicalities of a school enrollment for credit issuance. (Researcher reflection)

The result is that students often do not receive credit or even recognition for work completed. One staff member at a juvenile detention center said, "Some kids are here two or three weeks and they go back to their school and we never hear from anybody . . . I don't think [schools] really count them as absences, but they just don't request their grades" (Transition coordinator interview, Setting 1). Students have no control over this and yet it has a significant impact on their ability to graduate.

With the disturbances that mobility causes, including lengthy delays in enrollment, as well as the frequent problems with credit transfers, it is not uncommon that students cannot graduate even upon return to their home schools. This is due to not getting the credits from their alternative school settings accepted:

> The students often don't get credit for the time that they're in school here. . . . [The staff] will hear back from kids that they didn't get their credits

and then they ended up not getting credit for the semester or the class and getting discouraged and then . . . they ended up not getting their high school diploma. (Researcher reflection)

A policy in many school districts is that when students placed in state agency facilities return to their home districts, they are automatically sent to the district alternative school for several days to a month before being allowed to return to their home schools. Some districts argue that the reason they do this is because returning directly to the home school presents too many challenges for the student. Others say the reason is that teachers are more comfortable with accepting students after they have been in the alternative school for a period of time. Generally, a mandatory alternative school assignment upon return to the home district is allegedly a "trial period" to determine and measure if students' behavior, attendance, and grades are at par. Unfortunately, for many students, being sent to a school, where there are many other students with similar challenges and behavioral profiles, exacerbates their problems and presents them with even more difficulties in the return to their home schools.

Furthermore, if students graduate from an alternative education program, they may be ineligible to receive a standard high school diploma. Instead, they are only eligible for a modified diploma (Geenen, Powers, Hogansen, & Pittman, 2007). Graduates of one program in the study qualified only for a generic district diploma. Students are not always told what the implications of a modified degree are, though, including limitations on future postsecondary and employment opportunities.

Conclusions: Cascading Negative Effects
of Stigma for State Agency Youth

Stigma is a mutually reinforcing mechanism from individual to institutional levels (Link & Phelan, 2001). It causes systematic disruption in the lives of those who are

affected, making its cumulative negative effects challenging to overcome. Some students are perceived as perpetual troublemakers who are too disruptive or potentially dangerous to be taught in the same classrooms and schools as other students (Lehr & Lange, 2003). Many of these students have a disability (especially emotional or behavioral disabilities) but do not receive the supports needed for success in the classroom. Once a student is marked with deviancy, the mark itself becomes the basis for further exclusion. Its effects often linger long after the event originally causing the stigma occurred (Goffman, 1963; Ray & Downs, 1986).

The process of interpersonal stigmatization was observed in this study through the interactions between school staff members and students returning to their schools. Teachers' preconceived notions of students' behavior exacerbated the problem by distancing themselves from students rather than providing needed extra supports. By being constantly exposed to negative expectations, students live up to their negative self-labels. Poor outcomes connected with self-stigma, such as depression and decreased self-esteem, compounds the poor prospects these youth already have in a vicious cycle. Stigma functions "not merely in relation to difference, but to structural and social inequalities" (Parker and Aggleton, 2003, p. 18). Structural stigmatization can occur whether or not individual discrimination is present (Corrigan, Markowitz, & Watson, 2004). Structural determinants of stigma in the school system include exclusionary policies and accumulated practices that restrict opportunities for some students. Patterns of accumulated practices observed in this study include unreliable and untimely access to student records, problems with credit recovery and curriculum alignment between districts and schools, and the granting of modified instead of regular high school

diplomas. While not always intentional, these policies and practices have the effect of reinforcing the marginalization of students who are most often educated outside of mainstream classrooms.

Implications

In order to be effective, the response to stigma must be multilevel (Link & Phelan, 2001). At the interpersonal level, education can reduce stigma. Learning effective practices for working with challenging youth through training, professional development, and exposure can better prepare school professionals to meet students' unique needs (Bell, Long, Garvan, & Bussing, 2010). Addressing school discipline using a strengths-based approach can effectively prevent or at least decrease classroom management difficulties. Osher, Bear, Sprague and Doyle (2010) suggest the use of ecological approaches to classroom management, school-wide positive behavioral supports, and the use of social and emotional learning to promote self-discipline. By understanding and using best educational practices, it is less likely that teachers or others will feel it necessary to remove disruptive or poorly performing students from classrooms (Losen, 2011). This will also help effectively address students' mental health or behavioral needs.

Modified labeling theory tells us that stigma does not exist within a person; rather, it is created by social and structural processes. Therefore, individual strategies such as education are likely to be ineffective if structural models are not taken into consideration as well. In order to strategically respond to stigma and disrupt the cycle in the lives of state agency youth, both intentional and unintentional effects of policies must be identified within a broader context. Moving beyond the deficit perspective, in which students are blamed for their educational failure, offers a broader understanding of the

90

role stigma plays in reinforcing exclusionary structures in the schools, including curriculum tracking, inconsistencies of curriculum and credit requirements, and uncoordinated paperwork transfers, as well as exclusionary disciplinary policies. These must be taken into consideration when addressing the impact of stigma in state agency youth.

This study shows that state agency youth experience stigma upon their return to home schools. This is one of the largest barriers to successful transition, both inter-setting transitions as well as long-term preparation for adult lives. To respond effectively to stigmatization of students, priorities should be generated directly from those who are most affected. In this study, participants collaboratively began to develop a transformed understanding among themselves about the issues underlying stigma. A primary barrier of student transition, stigma, came to be viewed not as an individual issue, specific to single students and school settings, but as a common barrier, similar across students and schools, having far-reaching effects as students prepare to enter adult life. Addressing the stigma of state agency youth should be a priority in order to create an educational system that reaches all students and does not discriminate against those who are already at highest risk of poor adult outcomes.

CHAPTER FOUR:

"WHERE THE HEART IS": CREATING A MODEL PROGRAM FOR
TRANSITIONING STATE AGENCY YOUTH THROUGH
PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH[3]

Introduction

This article describes the process of a collaborative research project that was

designed to generate improvements to transition planning and services in a state agency

education program in Kentucky. The program is funded by the Kentucky Educational

Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC). KECSAC has 105 programs and

serves approximately 20,000 children annually in nontraditional education programs

funded by the Kentucky Departments of Juvenile Justice, Community-Based Services,

and Mental Health Developmental Disability and Addiction Services. Facilities include

group homes, psychiatric residential treatment programs, juvenile detention centers, day

treatment programs, and mental health day treatment programs, among others (Parker,

2012).

Of all Kentucky youth, state agency children are at the highest risk of making

unsuccessful transitions from secondary education to adulthood. For example, among

foster care youth, who comprise a large portion of state agency youth, high school drop

out rates are extremely high. Well over one in three (37%) aged 17-20 do not earn a high

school diploma or G.E.D. (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001). In a

large-scale outcome study of former foster care youth, while one in six completed a vocational or technical degree, only one in fifty obtained a baccalaureate degree or higher (Pecora, Kessler, O'Brien, White, Williams, & Hiripi, 2006). When foster care youth age out of the system at age 18 or 21, they typically lose housing and medical assistance. A higher proportion are in the criminal justice system; approximately one out of four end up homeless; and more than 60% of young women have at least one child within four years of aging out (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007). Outcomes such as these illustrate many challenges these youth face along the path to adulthood.

The KECSAC BEST Study: A Background

The study described here was one in a multi-site response to the Kentucky Youth at Risk in Transition (KYART) study (Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012). The purpose of the KYART study was to discover from youth and administrators in KECSAC nontraditional education programs what they consider key factors of successful transition. In the study, administrator data were collected through an electronic census survey given to all 105 administrators, 71 individual audio-recorded or written response interviews with KECSAC administrators, and 10 audio-recorded focus group interviews with nine administrators each. Program data included 105 KECSAC Program Improvement Reports and 105 Program Transition Plans. Youth data included five audio-recorded focus group interviews with five youth each, and 10 audio-recorded interviews with 10 youth.

Survey data from the KYART Study produced a quantitative description of key aspects of transition census data for KECSAC students, including demographics, the types of schools to and from which students transition, and post-program outcomes.

Qualitative results from focus group and individual interviews indicated that: transition is more narrowly defined within alternative education programs; key strengths of transition practice are present in nontraditional schools; and coordination barriers within the fluid inter-agency transition system are most apparent in students' frequent inter-setting transitions between nontraditional and home schools. A key finding of the study was that students' return to their home schools was a crux of unsuccessful transition.

The current study moves from descriptive results to development of innovative programs responding to the KYART study. In the KECSAC BEST Study, participatory action research was used to develop improvements to transition services emerging directly from priorities of state agency education programs. "Where the Heart Is" was a project that was planned, designed, and carried out with administrators and teachers in Ramey-Estep High School, a KECSAC residential education program. The project involved networking with other Kentucky schools, developing a resource guide to be used with transitioning youth, creating a recognizable logo denoting safe spaces within schools, and disseminating the project to others through conference presentations and professional development opportunities for schools and districts. The project culminated in a full-day conference to network with and train school district educators about the needs of transitioning state agency youth. The project's main focus was to promote positive relationships to create a sense of belonging for state agency youth in transition.

Relationships: A Significant Factor in School Success

A network of relationships typically surrounds a child, including biological family, friends, neighbors, and teachers. For state agency youth, this also includes formal systems of caregivers, such as foster parents, caseworkers, and therapists. Stable

relationships at various levels of this network provide youth with a reliable base of support and have a significant impact on positive youth development (Arnowitz, 2005).

At school, a caring and supportive relationship with a teacher or other adult can improve academic performance and lead to increased school engagement (Klem & Connel, 2004; Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012). Positive relationships serve as safety valves that enhance students' confidence and morale and strengthen their likelihood of acquiring a high school diploma (Croninger & Lee, 2001). In recent years, increased attention has been given to relationships in schools (Knesting & Waldron, 2006). In one study of over 11,000 students across approximately 1,000 schools, students who reported receiving encouragement and support from teachers were less likely to drop out of school than students who did not (Fredrickson & Rhodes, 2004).

Many youth feel alienated in school. They view their schools as overcrowded, fast-paced, and inflexible to their needs (Laguna-Riordan, Aguilar, Franklin, Streeter, Kim, Tripodi, et al., 2011). Students perceived to be outside the norms are frequently excluded or victimized by peers. Over 15,000 youth skip school every day in the U.S. due to fear of bullying (Vacca & Kramer-Vida, 2012).

Youth in state agency care are especially vulnerable to harassment because of differences related to race, family structure, self-esteem, and disabilities (Vacca & Kramer-Vida, 2012). Most stigmatizing are the conditions that impact adolescents' behavior, such as emotional and behavioral disabilities, attention deficit disorder, or mental illness (Hinshaw, 2005; Moses, 2010). Research also indicates that students with emotional, behavioral, or cognitive disabilities are more vulnerable to disciplinary practices causing suspension or expulsion (Osher, Morrison, & Bailey, 2003). This may

95

result, in part, from the negative expectations of teachers about a student's performance due to their educational or social backgrounds (Vacca & Kramer-Vida, 2012).

The high mobility rates of state agency youth also detract from school attachment. Youth from foster care, single parent, or low-income families more frequently move between homes or families (Rumberger, 2003). On average, foster youth attend five high schools (Murray & Klefeker, 2012). Schools also initiate transfers as a result of students' disciplinary or academic problems (Malmgren & Gagnon, 2005). In state agency programs, youth often stay for only a few days (Parker, 2012).

School transfers are challenging and stressful for students, not only because of missed instruction, but also because of disruptions of support networks (Gasper, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2010). There is little consistency with teachers and guidance counselors, making it difficult to plan out students' educational plans because of unfamiliarity with their personal circumstances and abilities (Vacca & Kramer-Vida, 2012). Transitioning students must make adjustments to expectations of classes, teachers, and peers (Rumberger, 2003).

Research demonstrates that student mobility impacts academic performance, drop out rates, and criminal or delinquent behavior (Gasper, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2010). Students returning from alternative school placements often encounter stigmatizing attitudes from peers and teachers (Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012). Many foster children report feeling terrorized when they return to their home school after placement at an alternative school (Vacca & Kramer-Vida, 2012).

Thus, supports are particularly critical for vulnerable populations during times of transition (Collins, Spencer, & Ward, 2010). The literature recognizes that receiving

96

schools should provide some type of supports (Malmgren & Gagnon, 2005). One example of promoting development of relationships in transitioning students is the creation of a "welcome committee," comprised of other students to orient and provide social connections during the first few days of a student's return (Vacca & Kramer-Vida, 2012, p. 1808).

Focusing on relationships with school staff is also imperative. Students state that the way a teacher initially interacts and relates with them will determine how their relationship will grow, whether positively or negatively (Cothran, Kulinna, & Garragy, 2003). This does not necessarily demand a great deal of extra time. Students report that "simply greeting them at the door, knowing their names, asking them questions about their activities, or the occasional 'hello,' make them feel more welcomed in class and disposed to learn" (Bernstein-Yamashiro, 2004, p. 68).

Methods

Purpose: Responding to Findings of the KYART Study

The purpose of the KECSAC BEST Study was to create improvements to collaboratively identified aspects of transition planning and services in multiple KECSAC education programs. This participatory action research project explored the ways in which supportive relationships could be facilitated between state agency youth and teachers or other school staff. The study occurred in response to the KYART Study's findings. Dissemination of the results of the KECSAC BEST Study to other KECSAC programs will broaden its impact by making its results accessible to others.

97

The Five-Site KECSAC BEST Study

The KECSAC Building Enhanced Services for Transition (BEST) Study was developed in partnership with four KECSAC programs and one non-KECSAC program. These included two Kentucky juvenile detention centers, one day treatment program for adjudicated youth, one residential program, and one semi-private school on the campus of Eastern Kentucky University (EKU). Institutional review board approval was received prior to the start of the study.

The KECSAC BEST Research Team was an interdisciplinary team composed of six people. The leader for the conceptualization of the KECSAC BEST Study, the advisor of this paper's first author, obtained grant funding from the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). After initiating the study, she delegated leadership to the first author. Five site researchers provided most of the data for the overall KECSAC BEST study, including Research Team meetings, one-on-one interviews, site team meetings, and bi-weekly reflections. They collaboratively designed the interview questions and bi-weekly reflection questions. The KECSAC BEST Research Team met for a half-day meeting approximately every month throughout the study to discuss the research process and comparatively analyze data from the five research sites. All six members of the Research Team shared in the analysis and reporting.

Setting and Participants

The educational program within which supports to transitioning youth were developed and described in this paper is Ramey-Estep High School. The school is on the campus of Ramey-Estep Homes, a private, non-profit residential treatment facility

located in rural Kentucky. A part of its county school system, the high school was awarded the Alternative Education Best Practice Site by KECSAC in 2011.

The Ramey-Estep Project Advisory Team was ultimately comprised of 12 people. These included the Ramey-Estep principal, transition coordinator, three teachers, the KECSAC Director, KECSAC Associate Director, KECSAC Training Coordinator, a KDE Title I administrator, DJJ Title I administrator, a DJJ staff member, and the external researcher, who was the first author of this article and who served to facilitate and support the Ramey-Estep Project Advisory Team. The Project Advisory Team provided the majority of data for this study and disseminated the project through presentations as described in this paper.

Use of Participatory Action Research at Ramey-Estep High School

A participatory methodology was used in this study so improvements of transition services would emerge directly from and realistically respond to the priorities of Ramey-Estep High School, including its strengths and resources as well as challenges. Participatory action research is an approach that values collaborative and equitable partnerships between co-participants throughout all phases of the research (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). Participatory action research is an emergent process that uses cycles of action and reflection to produce knowledge situated within a particular context. The research approach recognizes and works to build upon the experiences that a group or community already has through iterative research cycles (Genat, 2009).

In general, there are two important outcomes of participatory action research. The first is that knowledge generated through research cycles is directly beneficial to participants, creating meaningful social change. The learning builds long-term capacity,

so that the group or community of researchers can continue to engage in collaborative action based on their emergent knowledge (Reason, 1994). The second primary outcome of participatory action research is that the research is transformative for those involved. Through dialogue and collaboration, participant researchers gain a "bigger picture of the issue at hand," (Genat, 2009, p. 110), and become increasingly aware of how underlying mechanisms constrain them or others from fully and actively participating in their communities.

Initially, the Ramey-Estep Project Advisory Team was composed of the school principal, the transition coordinator, and the external researcher. At an annual statewide educators conference, the principal and transition coordinator attended a presentation given by the external researcher describing findings from the KYART Study (Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012). Based on their own experiences, the Ramey-Estep High School principal and transition coordinator enthusiastically expressed agreement with the findings. After engaging in a discussion about the overall research goal of KECSAC BEST, the Ramey-Estep principal and transition coordinator agreed to participate in the KECSAC BEST Study.

A primary focus of the subsequent orientation meeting at Ramey-Estep High School was to establish a potential research direction they might take. The meeting was audio-recorded, and written consent forms were explained and signed (See Appendix F for EKU IRB Informed Consent Form for Administrators). The external researcher facilitated a guided discussion about issues related to student transition. A written list of reflective questions was provided to elicit concerns related to successful student transitions at their school, efforts currently in place to facilitate student transition, and

areas of transition that they or others might most value improving. In addition to this discussion, the external researcher provided initial training about participatory action research methodology.

Through this discussion, two broad research objectives were identified based on their concerns. These were: 1) to change the public's perceptions about students who attend alternative education programs, and 2) to impact the vision for state agency youth across Kentucky. One of the primary concerns of the principal and transition coordinator was how state agency youth experience inter-school transitions, particularly as they return from Ramey-Estep High School, or other state agency programs, to home schools. They said that many of their students reported feelings of fear and anxiety, along with a lack of acceptance, upon their return to home schools. They said some students are bullied not only by peers, but also by teachers. In addition, they described various credit recovery issues upon students' return, including that credits earned at alternative schools are sometimes not accepted. They also described unofficial policies in some school districts, such as not accepting students in special education programs if their records are not with them upon their return.

After additional conversations at subsequent meetings, the Project Advisory Team developed two potential methods of addressing their research objectives. The first method was through networking, not only with teachers and staff in schools across the state, but also with other participants in the KECSAC BEST Study. By identifying and networking with teachers and staff at receiving schools, transitioning youth could be connected with someone invested in developing a relationship with them upon their return. The second method was to develop a project that would designate safe spaces for state agency youth

101

upon their return to home schools. Both of these were chosen to improve the experience of students' transitions to their home schools.

Summary of KECSAC BEST Study Data Collection and Analysis

In order to come to a better understanding of the key issues facing Ramey-Estep High School students in transition, data were gathered through a variety of methods over the next year. Collected data included audio-recordings of: semi-structured interviews with the transition coordinator and school principal regarding experiences and aspects of their jobs (See Appendix G for KECSAC BEST Individual Interview Guide); the Project Advisory Team meetings; and bi-weekly reflections by the external researcher about the evolving project and its strengths, barriers, and main activities (See Appendix H for KECSAC BEST Researcher Reflection Questions). In addition, during several day-long school visits, the external researcher observed both individual meetings as well as small group sessions of the Ramey-Estep High School transition coordinator and students.

Within several months, three teachers at Ramey-Estep High School joined the Project Advisory Team. The Advisory Team met at Ramey-Estep High School, typically in the principal's office, approximately once per month, for a total of 17 meetings. Each meeting lasted approximately 1.5 to 2.5 hours (and are described below in greater detail). Over this time period, there were more frequent meetings at the school, attended by two or more site team members. A distance of over 100 miles between the University and Ramey-Estep High School precluded more frequent full Team meetings.

Data analysis, supported by *HyperRESEARCH* qualitative data analysis software, occurred concurrently with data collection across the five-site KECSAC BEST Study.

Grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) was used to comparatively examine action research cycles across all five research sites, highlighting emerging changes in transition services.

Identification of relationships between emerging data categories helped to refine the comparative grounded theory regarding potential improvements to transition planning and services across research sites and the process by which these occurred. Transcribed data and clustered results of data analysis were regularly brought back to co-participants. They were incorporated into Ramey-Estep Project Advisory Team meeting agendas to shape the direction of meetings and organize discussions. Data analysis served to provide methodological support and a broader comparative perspective to the Ramey-Estep Project Advisory Team in regard to their own team efforts to inform their own work.

The Development of "Where the Heart Is": Cycles of Reflection and Action

A primary objective of the Ramey-Estep Project Advisory Team was networking with other schools to establish connections with teachers and others concerned about the transition experiences of state agency youth. Initially, the Project Advisory Team discussed where and how to initiate community outreach. As part of this process, the Advisory Team submitted a proposal and was accepted to present at a state education conference focusing on dropout prevention. Our proposal discussed the vision for transitioning state agency youth and the personal and system-wide barriers that youth face as they return to their home schools. At the presentation, we invited audience members and recruited conference attendees to become involved in the emerging project, handing out sign-up sheets to get contact information of interested people.

Networking with stakeholders, including co-participants in the KECSAC BEST Study, was critical to meeting the research objective of the Ramey-Estep Project

Advisory Team. Therefore, the Advisory Team developed an idea to meet with research co-participants, which eventually evolved into a series of Roundtable Discussions among all five KECSAC BEST research sites. Each of the four Roundtable Discussions, held at EKU, were planned to coincide with a presentation series of regional and national transition experts sponsored by the EKU College of Education.

The two-hour roundtable discussions were initially facilitated by the external researcher, who asked open-ended questions to all members of the five KECSAC BEST research site team related to evolving participatory action research projects at their programs, anticipated research outcomes, and possible best practices and potential solutions to identified transition concerns (See Appendix I for Roundtable Discussion Prompts). Eventually, participants departed from these specific prompts and discussed issues of their own choice. As the participants learned more about others' experiences at their respective programs, a bigger picture began to emerge of students' transition experiences. Participants critically questioned the ways that seemingly disparate experiences of their students were related. For example, participants across research sites discussed the ways in which students were received upon re-entering their home schools, and common issues that students faced, including a lack of acceptance. Some began to question prior assumptions about the reasons for their students' troubles upon their return, seeing them as a symptom of a larger uncoordinated and discriminatory system, rather the fault of any one student or other individual. Turning their "personal stories into public issues" (Genat, 2009, p. 110) helped participants to reflect on concrete steps that could be taken to work toward solving systemic problems. In addition, the discussions provided an opportunity to feed back emerging data to partners. It was hoped that these

104

discussions would generate a larger inter-program alliance among individuals who rarely have an opportunity to engage with one another.

The second research objective of the Ramey-Estep project was to create, publicize, and promote the distribution of a recognizable logo to schools across Kentucky that would effectively denote safe spaces for students. The idea was based on the National Safe Place Program, an early prevention program in which community locations are designated with a recognizable sign posted in a window. These locations designate a safe location for youth in which someone is available to provide assistance as needed, and the locations serve as access points to resources (Walsh & Donaldson, 2010).

In the Ramey-Estep High School project, a former student designed the logo. Its design depicts the idea behind the program. A heart, symbolizing a close relationship, is enveloped within a safe and supportive house-like structure. The logo is meant to be displayed on doors, in classrooms, or in the offices of staff who have identified themselves as available for transitioning students in need of assistance, or to just provide a place that they can go and know that they are safe and accepted. The hope was that students who see the logo will know that associated teachers, counselors, or other staff and community resources are accessible to them if needed. This is particularly important during the initial and most challenging phases of students' return. See Figure 4.1 for an image of the Where the Heart Is logo.

Within a period of one year, the principal and transition coordinator at Ramey-Estep High School began to provide professional development opportunities in their home district and surrounding districts regarding transition needs of state agency youth and the project in development at Ramey-Estep High School. By doing so they were also

Figure 4.1. Where the Heart Is logo.

able to network and provide publicity about the project and logo. They also presented at

the Kentucky School Board Association meeting in Frankfort, Kentucky. By this time,

the KECSAC staff members, including the Director, Associate Director, and Training

Coordinator, were involved with the research. They agreed to provide support and

funding for an all-day training conference about the emerging project developed at

Ramey-Estep High School. It was also during this time that the DJJ Title I Program

Administrator; the KDE Title I, Part D Program Administrator; and a DJJ staff member

jointed the Ramey-Estep Project Advisory Team. The full Ramey-Estep Project Advisory

Team gathered for a half-day meeting at Ramey-Estep High School to develop a plan for

106

action. At this key meeting, the logo design was finalized and the project was officially given the name, "Where the Heart Is."

"Where the Heart Is" conference. A full-day, Where the Heart Is training conference was developed over a period of approximately six months. Audio recording of Project Advisory Team meetings was suspended at this time, but a team member wrote up and distributed detailed minutes following each meeting. The conference was initially conceived of not only as a method to raise awareness of the issue of transitioning state agency youth to educators in Kentucky, but also as a way to initiate development and training of an emerging statewide network of school contacts, who would serve as student advocates. The intended audience of the conference was superintendents, principals, guidance counselors, directors of special education, and teachers.

In the six-month planning period, all the elements of the conference were collaboratively developed among team members during the meetings. KECSAC advertised the conference and managed the registration. At these meetings, we decided upon final objectives for the Where the Heart Is program, finalized a guiding mission and vision, developed drafts of the conference agenda, created an informational brochure, and created a "toolkit" of materials. This toolkit consisted of a brochure and flyers; laminated copies of the Where the Heart Is logo for posting; contact cards for transitioning students with the logo and a place to add contact information, such as a transition specialist or teacher; and a 70-page spiral-bound resource guide that we developed during this time. The resource guide provided school staff members with contacts for local, regional, and statewide resources to help students in crisis.

The Where the Heart Is conference was held on EKU's campus in May 2011. After opening remarks by the Associate Director of KECSAC, the morning agenda included an overview of the Where the Heart Is program; a keynote presentation by the Director of KECSAC; and a student panel of six state agency youth speaking about their personal experiences with transitioning between schools, the difficulties of developing relationships with adults and peers, and what they perceived would help them with transition. The afternoon consisted of an expert panel of seven advocates and teachers from a variety of KECSAC education programs, who spoke about their experiences with state agency youth and the need for a relational perspective when working with youth (Ferguson, Gibson, Ginter, Kinsler, Marshall, Mattingly, & Maynard, 2011). The day concluded with training on how to use the Where the Heart Is model in their schools. The toolkit was distributed to conference attendees during this training period, and following the conference, toolkit materials were made widely available on the KECSAC website.

In addition to these outcomes from this research, the process itself produced additional benefits. New knowledge was created and disseminated regarding skills and programs to enhance schools' transition capacity, and to support transitioning state agency youth. Useful resources were shared with a wide variety of personnel (teachers, counselors, administrators, youth workers) at conferences, trainings, and Roundtable Discussions. In addition, the research process provided an opportunity to network with partners and advocates at conferences, at local and statewide trainings, and at the Where the Heart Is conference. Finally, the establishment of new partnerships occurred through professional development trainings that Ramey-Estep Project Advisory Team members conducted in their home districts and statewide.

Current actions. The Ramey-Estep principal, transition coordinator, and others continue to receive requests to provide trainings to schools across the Commonwealth about Where the Heart Is. A major focus is to continue to develop statewide recognition and use of the logo. In November 2011, at a U. S. Children's Bureau meeting, the KDE Title I Program Administrator provided information about Where the Heart Is. As a result, the Kentucky Department of Community Based Services incorporated Where the Heart Is in the *Action Plan for Child Welfare, Education and the Courts: A Collaboration to Strengthen Educational Successes of Children and Youth in Foster Care*. Included in the action plan is a short-term goal of partnering with KECSAC to further develop and expand the Where the Heart Is Program. This has impacted state-level policy and hopefully will bring about long-term sustainability of Where the Heart Is in Kentucky schools.

Limitations

Collaboration that occurs at all phases of the research process between partners in participatory action research is ideal. In this study, the decision to conduct the overall study was initially made by the KECSAC BEST Research Team, who completed and submitted the IRB and funding proposals. The research projects that took place at Ramey-Estep High School and the other four sites, however, were decided upon and carried out by the site research teams. This design made it possible for participants to lead the research as they chose, with co-ownership and joint responsibility among all participants at a single site. Furthermore, given the intensive time demands and specialized knowledge involved in data analysis, the KECSAC BEST Research Team led the organization, coding and categorization of the data. This was not perceived as lack of

109

involvement by others, but rather, as a way to respect the availability and priorities that participants brought to the research (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). This research is unique to the transitions of students within an interagency collaborative within the Commonwealth of Kentucky, so generalization of its findings should be made with caution.

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**Creating Model Transition Programming
for State Agency Youth**

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The central purpose of participatory action research is to successfully generate useful action and change, commonly referred to as pragmatic validity (Kvale, 2002). The long-term test of the validity of this study will be the extent to which teachers and school staff throughout Kentucky focus their attention and efforts on the unique needs of state agency youth and specifically incorporate the Where the Heart Is model into their transition plans and programs.

The design of research using participatory action research was effective to make specific improvements to the complex and problematic process of transitions of state agency youth. Starting with the knowledge of those most directly involved with the youth influenced the direction of the research, and provided an understanding of transition practices that are often overlooked or even discounted. Supporting this involvement allowed participants to not only shape the direction of the research, but also informed their future capacity to act on this issue. Where the Heart Is emerged directly in response to participants' daily experience with the challenges that state agency youth face as they transition to home schools following an alternative education placement.

The importance of relationships upon academic success cannot be overlooked, especially for this population of state agency youth. These students are significantly at

risk for unsuccessful transitions to productive and satisfying adult lives, not only because of their troubled backgrounds but also due to the stigma they face in their daily experiences in school. Although is ideal that all youth have secure relationships and a primary attachment with an adult, attachments of lesser significance can serve as a protective factor when such supports are not in place, such as teachers or others at school. In fact, for a child "without a viable secure base in their . . . family of origin, a network of social support based on work, social, educational, recreational, and professional helping relationships is probably the best practical alternative" (Gilligan, 2001, p. 40).

The KECSAC BEST research study provides concrete steps to address the many challenges youth face in diverse educational settings across the Commonwealth. Where the Heart Is provides a portion of that critically important support to state agency youth, made vulnerable by lack of family support, disabilities, or high mobility rates. The research described here represents an uncomplicated but important concept that does not take a great deal of extra time or resources to establish and maintain at any given school, an important asset in the current era. "Ensuring that every child has this fundamental protective system is a policy imperative" (Gilligan, 2001, p. 45) and an urgent priority to which this research responds.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and discuss the results of the two studies comprising this dissertation. The studies' findings are considered in relation to relevant interdisciplinary literature. Implications for occupational therapy practice are described in light of the conclusions. Finally, possibilities for future research are explored.

Summary of Dissertation Studies

Students in nontraditional state agency schools, a large percentage of whom are diagnosed with disabilities, are at high risk for poor post-secondary outcomes. The intent of both studies comprising this dissertation was to understand the experiences of transition as perceived by students, administrators, teachers, and other school staff in order to guide future innovative service improvements. The first study was the Kentucky Youth at Risk in Transition (KYART) Study. The purpose of this study was to discover from youth, administrators, and teachers in KECSAC nontraditional educational programs what they considered to be the key factors of successful transition. Data were collected through a survey, focus group interviews, and individual interviews. Survey data produced a quantitative description of a variety of key aspects of transition in census data for KECSAC students, including demographics, the types of schools to and from which students transition, and post-program outcomes. They demonstrated the fluidity of student transitions within a system of multiple programs and agencies. Qualitative results from the focus group and individual interviews indicated that transition is narrowly defined within alternative education programs, key strengths of transition practice are present in nontraditional schools, and the coordination barriers within the inter-agency

112

transition system are most apparent in students' frequent inter-setting transitions between nontraditional and home schools.

The second study was developed in response to concerns identified by the KYART Study results, moving from descriptive results to the development of innovative programs. The "Building Enhanced Services for Transition" (BEST) Study was designed to collaboratively generate improvements to transition planning and services in state agency education programs in Kentucky. Participatory action research was used across five education programs so that development of and improvements to transition services would emerge directly from the priorities of those concerned. Concurrently, grounded theory sought understanding of the emerging changes in services for state agency youth across all research sites. Programs included two juvenile detention centers, one day treatment program for adjudicated youth, one residential program, and one semi-private school. All were KECSAC programs except the semi-private school, which was included primarily to enhance comparative contrast across sites. Participants included program administrators, teachers, principals, counselors, transition coordinators, and other program staff. Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews, observations, researcher reflections, and research team meetings.

Transition service improvement projects varied across the research sites. One juvenile detention center developed a transition manual to clearly define stages that youth move through while at the detention center, for use as a model for juvenile detention centers in Kentucky. The second juvenile detention center worked to improve students' ACT scores in order to promote admittance to, and increased funding from, the community college system. In the day treatment program, trainings were established and

provided for educators and administrators, in order to strengthen the process for students transitioning from the local day treatment center to the county's traditional high schools. The semi-private school incorporated transition services into the school's curricula, including development of work and community connections for students and opportunities for peer mentoring among students.

Ramey-Estep High School, the program described in detail in this dissertation, built a statewide network of advocates for state agency youth throughout schools to provide a safety net for students returning from state agency schools to their home schools. This included a recognizable logo denoting safe spaces in schools, where someone is available to students for help or support; a resource guide for students in crisis; and a statewide conference and professional development opportunity for school district educators and administrators.

A primary finding of the comparative analysis of the KECSAC BEST Study was the degree to which individual and structural stigmatization of state agency youth impeded successful transitions to adulthood. Understanding the operation of stigma suggests ways in which this barrier might be disrupted and post-secondary outcomes for these students at high risk of failure could be improved. These discoveries will be discussed later in this chapter, particularly focusing on implications for occupational therapy intervention.

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**Discussion: The Stigmatizing Experience
of State Agency Youth**

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"At the heart . . . is that stigma predisposes individuals to poor outcomes by threatening self-esteem, academic achievement and mental or physical health" (Yang, Kleinman, Link, Phelan, Lee & Good, 2007, p. 1526). Stigma is associated with a

number of negative outcomes, including decreased self-esteem, depression, and hesitancy to seek services (Corrigan, Watson, & Barr, 2006), as well as limiting opportunities for employment and education (Link & Phelan, 2001). This is particularly relevant for state agency youth because of their already heightened risk for poor adult outcomes.

The studies comprising this dissertation demonstrate that one of the most significant barriers to successful transition, particularly as seen through the eyes of students, administrators, and staff members in KECSAC nontraditional education programs, is the stigma students experience upon returning to their home schools. The studies provide an illustration of the mechanism through which stigma works. State agency youth are largely excluded from educational opportunities, not only because the individual stigma that youth experience, but also because of structural discrimination.

Youth and Modified Labeling Theory

Scheff (1966) hypothesized that stigma is a causal factor of mental illness. He contended that once a person is labeled as such, the label becomes internalized, resulting in mental illness. Scheff's theory has been widely critiqued because of these claims of causation. Modified labeling theory describes how stigmatization causes greater vulnerability to negative outcomes, not because the stigma itself causes the illness, but due to the damaging effects of negative labeling (Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout, & Dohrenwend, 1989; Wright, Gronfein, & Owens, 2000). The theory turns the focus of stigma from what is seemingly a static attribute within the stigmatized individual to societal forces that influence the ways in which a person becomes devalued. The individual is no longer the "primary locus" in which stigma occurs; rather, it operates in "the social sphere" (Yang, Kleinman, Link, Phelan, Lee & Good, 2007, p. 1527).

115

Modified labeling theory highlights the way in which people incorporate deviant labels into their identity (Ray & Downs, 1986). It is relevant to alternative school students as they return to home schools, as seen in the two studies of this dissertation. Students are sent to alternative schools for multiple reasons, including not only poor academic performance, but also conduct code infractions, pregnancy, and truancy (Lehr & Lange, 2003a). Through this, they become labeled and identified as deviant by teachers, peers, and others (Link & Phelan, 2001). The label may be officially sanctioned, such as juvenile delinquent, or it may be unofficial, such as "troublemaker." Whatever the type of label, however, students become marked as one who has violated social norms. Once a student is issued a deviant label, the label itself becomes the basis for further exclusion (Goffman, 1963; Ray & Downs, 1986).

As individuals are repeatedly labeled, they internalize those messages and adopt them in self-descriptions (Ray & Downs, 1986). Students interviewed in both studies described the ways in which their stigma, reinforced during their attendance at alternative school settings, was intensified when they returned to their home schools. Administrators of KECSAC programs repeatedly reported that teachers and school staff identified students with labels such as "losers," "bad kids," and "trouble" (Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, Fehringer, 2012, p. 108). Researchers observed how the young participants internalized these negative labels through the interviews. Labels they self-identified with throughout the interviews, without being prompted, included: "troublemaker," "delinquent," "drop-out," "ballistic," "don't care about anything," and "bad kid" (Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012, p. 106).

116

Such negative self-labeling can result in further self-deprecation, feelings of shame, and withdrawal (Fife & Wright, 2000). Stigma becomes a "double burden" (Wright, Gronfein, & Owens, 2000, p. 69). Not only is the student dealing with the factors that placed him or her at risk, but also he or she must cope with rejection from teachers, peers, and others. Secondary delinquency is in part caused by this negative alteration of one's identity (Brezina & Aragones, 2004). Because of stigma's invasive qualities, it contributes to the poor post-school outcomes of youth at risk. The more students act in ways that reflect their labels, the more they continue to be excluded from activities such as educational and employment opportunities. As students behave in ways according to their internalized identities, secondary deviancy can worsen the situation considerably. This propagates a downward cycle of stigma, causing systematic disruption in youths' lives, making its cumulative negative impacts difficult to overcome.

Structural Discrimination and Occupational Injustice

The experience of stigma can be understood through the theory of occupational justice (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010). One outcome of occupational injustice, occupational marginalization, occurs when individuals or groups are socially excluded and unable to experience autonomy in their daily lives. It is a result of explicit or implicit discrimination based on contextual factors including gender, age, ability, or socioeconomic status. Occupational marginalization "often operates invisibly, through expectations of how, when, where, and which persons should participate" (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010, p. 339).

State agency youth are largely excluded from access to resources and services provided to mot students in mainstream educational settings. The experience of school

marginalizes them. Rather than receiving needed supports for success, including those with disabilities, they are penalized through exclusion from mainstream opportunities that classes or settings provide. Upon their return to their home schools, rather than arriving with a clean slate, they continue to be unaccepted by others. As one Roundtable Discussion participant in the KECSAC BEST Study said of the situation facing transitioning state agency youth, "When they go back a lot of them go there with a bulls-eye on them. A lot of times its like, you mess up, and you're gone." A lack of positive relationships impedes their progress toward success in school and adulthood, continually threatening their marginalization.

In recent decades, the concept of stigma has extended from Goffman's (1963) theory. The main focus of most previous research was on individual stereotyping rather than on the myriad structural conditions that cause exclusion (Yang, Kleinman, Link, Phelan, Lee & Good, 2007). Stigma was seen as "something *in* the person, rather than as a designation that others attach *to* that individual" (Parker & Aggleton, 2003, p. 15). In recent years, however, the focus is "no longer on the labeled but the labellers" (Scambler, 2009, p. 448). Discrimination is seen as a part of stigma, both at the individual as well as the structural level (Link & Phelan, 2001). Whether intentional or unintentional, it "affects people in ways not explained by the direct psychological effects of an individual's bigoted views and behavior" (Corrigan, Markowitz, & Watson, 2004, p. 481).

Examples in these two studies of structural discrimination included the cumulative impact of school policies and practices on student transition, including unreliable access to students' prior records with lengthy delays; curriculum

misalignment; and inconsistent academic requirements that unintentionally exclude students or restrict them from opportunities that schools provide. Policies that intentionally remove students from schools include zero tolerance policies as well as accountability standards as set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act (Losen, 2011). Historically, there has been a disproportionate representation of minority students and students with disabilities, particularly emotional-behavioral disabilities, affected by these policies (Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirer, 2005). This suggests that stigma functions "not merely in relation to difference, but to structural and social inequalities" (Parker and Aggleton, 2003, p. 18). In the theory of occupational justice, these broad forces are the underlying occupational determinants (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010). A broader view promotes movement beyond a "deficit perspective" of stigma (Trainor, 2008, p. 151), and instead emphasizes wider forces - or occupational determinants - that reproduce structural inequalities (Parker & Aggleton, 2003) and negatively impact occupational performance (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010).

Limitations

In order to develop a valid, trustworthy, and detailed description of KECSAC youth transitions, the KYART Study used diverse data sources and analytic strategies (Charmaz, 2006) to support examination of large quantities of data, and member checks to insure that participants could offer their reactions to study findings. Because this study described the unique perspectives on transition of students and administrators within an interagency collaborative unique to Kentucky, however, generalization of its findings to other populations of youth at risk should be made cautiously.

119

Collaboration that occurs at all phases of the research process between partners in a participatory action research project is ideal. In the KECSAC BEST Study the decision to conduct the overall study was initially made by the Research Team at Eastern Kentucky University, who completed and submitted the IRB and funding proposals. The action research project that took place at Ramey-Estep High School and the other four sites, however, were decided upon and carried out by each of the five site teams. The design made it possible for participants to lead the research as they chose, with co-ownership and joint responsibility among all participants at a single site.

Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice and Youth at Risk

A limited grasp by both occupational therapists and other educational team members of the potential contributions of occupational therapy inhibits their involvement in transition service provision, particularly in high school settings (Gangl, Strecker Neufeld, & Berg, 2011; Mankey, 2012). Barriers cited by occupational therapists and other professionals include: a lack of understanding of occupational therapy's current and potential role in post-secondary transition services; perceived lack of time to adequately address transition; lack of a knowledge base; and limited demand by parents and others for occupational therapy services (Gangl, Strecker Neufeld, & Berg, 2011; Kardos and White, 2005; Mankey, 2011; Mankey, 2012; Spencer, Emery, and Schneck, 2003).

As previously described, however, occupational therapy has strong potential for successfully intervening in the lives of adolescents in transition to adulthood as they prepare for education, employment, and living arrangements. To inform and support best practices, occupational therapists need to be familiar with and contribute to the existing evidence about transitions to adulthood that youth with disabilities experience.

120

Occupational therapy practice domains are in accord with best practices in transition identified in the literature, including strengths-based practice and support for skills of self-determination; provision of practical supports to participate in adult living; focus on job exploration or training; preparation for post-secondary education, and use of an ecological, collaborative approach involving community linkages, school-based transition team members, and family. Underlying principles of IDEA (2004) as well as other federal legislation in mental health, foster care, and juvenile justice provide guidance to occupational therapists for supports and services to a diverse population of youth in preparation for adult living. This awareness not only advocates for youth, but also for the occupational therapy profession (Mankey, 2012).

Occupational therapy in nontraditional education settings. Occupational therapists have much to offer in the area of practical living skill development, which is especially valuable since the large majority of school-based professionals focus primarily on academics. A recent study by Shea and Giles (2012) compared and analyzed the differing beliefs of teachers and occupational therapists in regard to assisting students at one continuation alternative high school. They found that while teachers emphasized students' academic achievement and postsecondary education transition, occupational therapists focused on life skills, development of self-awareness, and maintaining personal goals. For youth who are likely to have little experience or practice in and knowledge of these areas, who are less likely to have parental and family support, and who are obliged to emerge into independent adulthood sooner than many others are expected, a focus on life skills is critical to postsecondary success.

121

Essentially all of the studies in the occupational therapy literature have occurred in traditional school settings. Occupational therapists have very limited work thus far in alternative schools. Although Dirette and Kolak (2004) and Barnes, Beck, Vogel, Grice, and Murphy (2003) published research in this area (described in Chapter 1), the studies were designed primarily with a focus on component-based practice areas. A primary theme emanating from recent occupational therapy literature about transition is the need for change in the service delivery model in order to address system-wide needs. Rather than a liability, this could be viewed as a favorable opportunity for occupational therapists to collaborate with others and develop new programs, such as, for example, community-based programming focused on vocational exploration or post-secondary educational participation. As Gangl, Streker Neufeld, & Berg (2011) acknowledge, "If a state's education goal is for students with disabilities to be employed or enrolled in continued education one year after graduation, there are clear roles for occupational therapy services" (p.165). Based on occupational therapy's areas of expertise, occupational therapists can make a significant impact in this area of practice (Gangl, Streker Neufeld, & Berg, 2011).

Occupational therapists cannot assume, however, that there is no need for occupational therapy services at alternative education programs in their districts just because they are not getting referrals. Because of IDEA's federal mandate (2004), it is practitioners' responsibility to determine whether their services are required by students in these alternative settings and if so, to find a way to address them. This includes following students with disabilities who transfer to a state agency school. As previously described, post-secondary transition planning is critical for youth in alternative education

settings. Students potentially have a great deal to gain from occupational therapy services. Therefore, it is a professional responsibility of occupational therapists to rise to the challenge to explore and define their roles in alternative education high school settings. Occupational therapists should view this as an opportunity to develop programming and collect evidence to foster system-based reform (Fehringer, Marshall, Summers, & Pierce, in press; Gangl, Strecker Neufeld, & Berg, 2011).

Occupational therapy and stigma. It is evident from the research described in this dissertation that labeling theory applies to the experiences of transitioning state agency youth. As previously stated, stigma is not only linked to the disability or condition that initially provoked the stigma. Institutional stigmatization and discriminatory attitudes also impact their treatment by others. To be effective, therefore, the response to stigma must be multilevel (Link & Phelan, 2001). One such example of a multi-level approach to impact stigma is through the public health model of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. This moves from a traditionally focused individualized model "to a whole population strengths-based approach (Bazyk, 2011, p. 12). Its goal is to intervene when necessary, but to help prevent problems before they occur. It differentiates between universal prevention for all students, targeted interventions for select students, and intensive, individual-level interventions.

As demonstrated in both studies of this dissertation, positive relationships are one of the biggest contributors to successful transitions of state agency youth. Conversely, the lack of positive, respectful relationships with adults and peers was perceived by students to be one of the most significant barriers. Research shows that students who have supportive relationships at school report more engagement and a positive attitude at

123

school, linked with better academic performance (Klem & Connel, 2004). Additionally, a primary reason for disciplinary problems is created by a lack of opportunities to form these relationships (Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & McHatton, 2009). A positive school climate is essential to cultivation of caring and respectful relationships, particularly with students at risk. Thus, creating a "relational school" is at the core of school success, particularly for vulnerable students (Noam & Malti, 2008).

Future Research

In the KYART Study, we intended to explore key programmatic factors that facilitated state agency youths' transition into postsecondary life; however, of primary concern to many respondents were issues of inter-school transition experiences, including access to and movement of records, curriculum alignment, credit recovery, and planning for graduation. We found in the study that participants (at least the administrators) conceptualized transition programming in terms of planning for students' exit from their current education program. They rarely thought of transition in terms of non-academic programming (e.g., life skills training) that would promote successful transition to adult life. An important discovery of this study was the degree to which a lack of inter-setting coordination and interagency collaboration significantly impacted the transition experiences of state agency youth, which appeared to then negatively impact transitions to adult life.

Therefore, a significant need exists to further document and examine key aspects of the school system, such as inter-setting transition practices between nontraditional state agency schools and home schools. Development of exemplary programs could demonstrate, for example, methods of facilitating records transfers, tracking systems,

124

interagency linkages, and welcoming procedures into schools. This would support informed and successful improvements to systemic transition programming, as well as policy and resource recommendations for improvements.

In order to provide effective postsecondary transition services to youth and impact post-school outcomes, continued research should also be done in order to understand, identify, and describe students' needs as they transition from school to adulthood. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial to determine both the facilitators and the barriers that impact post-school outcomes. Understanding the characteristics of young adults would allow more accurate predictions of what correlates with negative outcomes, and conversely, what promotes positive outcomes in state agency youth. Beyond specific markers, such as education, employment, and marriage, occupational therapists have a strong understanding of indicators for successful adult living, including quality of life, participation in and contributions to community and society, and satisfaction in relationships (Stewart, 2013).

System-involved youth all face many of the same challenges to their transitions to adulthood, due to common risk factors, similarities between youth-serving systems, and overlap between systems. Unquestionably, there are different needs and goals for each youth and the system in which he or she is placed (Lyons & Melton, 2005). Therefore, it may not be appropriate to treat KECSAC youth as a homogenous group. Future research could tease out different characteristics of KECSAC youth based on different factors, such as presence and type of disability, the system in which they are placed (e.g., foster care or juvenile corrections), length of time spent in care, and gender or ethnicity.

Future research could also survey KECSAC education programs of all types about the degree to which they utilize best practices described in the literature, as well as for their compliance with state and federal requirements, such as use of individual transition plans and levels of transition services for youth. This would increase accountability and allow for a better understanding of the impact of best practices.

It is essential that future research include young people, as well as caregivers and families. Future research should continue to identify and describe factors of transition programming that are perceived and experienced as most important and meaningful in helping youth achieve their transition goals, as well as what factors hindered successful transitions. Without the youth's perspective it would be difficult to design occupation-based, strengths-based programming. These studies would be likely to use qualitative approaches and could also occur in combination with quantitative research. Questions that would be important to include in interviews or focus groups with state agency youth include how they are preparing for transition to adulthood and types of formal transition programming they are using. It would also be useful to conduct research with older youth or emerging adults to understand their experiences of challenges to reaching independence to adulthood and additional services that they perceive would be helpful, based on their own perspective after having aged out. Findings of these studies will help to identify and support the need for changes in service delivery.

The inclusion of participatory methods can be beneficial to any research. The opportunity to dialogue with participants can produce pragmatic knowledge about the situation being researched. In regard to the KECSAC BEST Study, there are a number of directions that participatory action research could take to continue to improve transition

practices for youth at risk in a variety of settings. Future research should include youth as participants. In the BEST Study, youth were not included in the research, despite IRB approval. If the BEST Study were replicated at different KECSAC programs, it would be beneficial to have youth participate in advisory teams. Their perceptions of how to generate improvements to the schools would add a critical and unique perspective.

Youth can take on a variety of roles in participatory action research: participants in consultations, recruitment, data collection, assistance in data analysis, writing or other dissemination, implementation in action, or participation in evaluation (Rudman, Hubbersty, Barlow, & Brown, 2005). Not only does their inclusion improve the research itself, but also, it gives "voice" to these previously silenced individuals and groups. It allows the inclusion of diverse perspectives. This is particularly important since state agency or other vulnerable youth have traditionally been underserved and underrepresented, and such research participation recognizes their capacity for leadership (Checkoway, Dobbie, & Richards-Schuster, 2003). Potential future studies could also utilize participatory action research methods involving youth and recently graduated young adults as co-researchers to identify needs and to develop, organize, and implement useful improvements to young people's preparation for transitioning to adulthood, such as, for example, a peer mentoring and training program. Coming from their own experiences and perspectives, this could be especially beneficial.

Research should be done by occupational therapists to contribute to the evidence supporting effective post-secondary transition services in both traditional and nontraditional education settings with adolescents and young adults. There are many settings in which occupational therapists have minimal experience providing services,

such as alternative schools or juvenile justice facilities. Gathering data in these settings is important to frame intervention. Studies could include single subject research, case studies, pre-post evaluations of programming, or longitudinal studies to measure outcomes.

Conclusion

Youth in state agency programs face uncertain futures. The communities to which they return are often marked by poverty, family instability, and few opportunities for employment. This is compounded by youths' life histories of disability, neglect, or abuse. The two studies comprising this dissertation suggest implications of effective transition services for adolescents in state agency programs in Kentucky. Designed in collaboration with students, administrators, teachers, and other school staff, the studies provide an understanding of issues confronting youth at risk as they transition into adult life.

It is an issue of human rights for all youth to be supported to participate in occupation and to be valued as contributing members of society. With expertise in enabling meaningful occupation, promotion of social participation, background in advocacy, and understanding of occupational justice, occupational therapists can play a central role in providing transition supports and services to state agency youth and others at risk. Continued research ensures that occupational therapists will develop and implement effective transition services for youth of all ages and in all settings who may benefit.

ASSENT/CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
IN A RESEARCH STUDY

KECSAC TRANSITIONS

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study identifying key factors of successful transitions of students from nontraditional schools into the community. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are a student at a Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC) educational program. You have valuable insights to contribute to this research project. If you take part in this study, you will be one of about 45 youth to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Doris Pierce, PhD, OTR/L of Eastern Kentucky University. Doris is an occupational therapist who has spent her career working with children of all ages who have school challenges. There may be other people on the research team assisting her at different times during the study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

By doing this study, we hope to learn what the key factors are in adolescents making a successful transition from a state agency school to a home community, other school, or place of employment.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The interview will be conducted at your KECSAC educational program, in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. You will meet with the researcher at your school one time, for about one hour. You may do this in a group of about five peers or you may be interviewed on your own. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately one hour during the 2007-2008 school year.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to sit for about an hour with a researcher, and answer questions related to transition from your school setting. Some of the factors that may be discussed include what makes a successful transition for you, what you think the most important factors of transition are, what the greatest obstacles in the way of a successful transition, and what additional support you need in order to have a successful transition from your current educational program to your home, community, school, or job. Your answers will be looked at and analyzed by the researcher in order to better understand the key steps of successful transitions for youth.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no reasons why you should not take part in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, there are no risks to participating in this study. The researcher will not ask you to discuss anything that would make you uncomfortable. The things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life or school activities.

WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no guarantee that you will get any personal benefit from taking part in this study. However, benefits to youth and KECSAC administrators may include the improvement of the transition process in the future, resulting in greater transition success for youth in the future. We cannot and do not guarantee that you will receive any personal benefit from this study.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

IF I DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study

WILL I RECEIVE ANY PAYMENT OR REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

You will receive a $10 department store gift card for taking part in this study. If you should have to quit before the interview is through, you will still receive the full amount.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?

The interviewer will record the interview on audiotape. When the written record of your interview is made, your name and the names of other participants will be replaced with participant identification numbers. Your name will be kept separate from the information you give, and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key.

Your information will also be combined with information from other students taking part in the study. When we write up the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about this combined information. You will not be identified in any way except participant

identification number. All of the information you give will be seen only by the research team and will not be shared with administrators of your educational program, family members, or anyone else outside the research team. A few quotes of what youth say in the interviews may be used in state and national research meetings to explain what youth think about transition, but your name will not be revealed if a quote form your interview is used.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to take you off of the study. They may do this if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for scientific reasons.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I GET HURT OR SICK DURING THE STUDY?

If you believe you are hurt or if you get sick because of something that is done during your interview, you should call Doris Pierce immediately. It is important for you to understand that Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for the cost of any care or treatment that might be necessary because you get hurt or sick during your interview. That cost will be your responsibility. Also, Eastern Kentucky University will not pay for any wages you may lose if you are harmed by this study. Usually, medical costs that result from research-related harm cannot be included as regular medical costs. Eastern Kentucky University is not allowed to bill your insurance company, Medicare, or Medicaid for these costs without first getting permission. You should ask your insurer if you have any questions about your insurer's willingness to pay under these circumstances.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Doris Pierce, PhD, OTR/L at (859) 622-6302. If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University at (859) 622-3636. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

The Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children is providing financial support and/or materials for this study.

You will be told if any new information is learned which may affect your condition or influence your willingness to continue taking part in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____
Printed name of person taking part in the study

_____   _____
Signature of legal guardian of study participant   Date

_____
Printed name of legal guardian of study participant

_____
Name of person providing information to participant

APPENDIX B

KECSAC INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR
TRANSITIONS STUDY INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Where do your students typically come from?
   a. Can you describe those settings more?
2. Where do your students typically go after they leave your program?
   a. Can you describe those settings more?
3. Based on your years of experience, what is a successful transition?
4. What factors have the greatest influence on transition success for youth in your program?
5. What are the biggest obstacles to a successful transition?
6. Please describe the typical transition into your program.
   a. Transition plan
   b. Assessments and transition
   c. Other?
7. To what extent does your academic curriculum influence transition of students into and out of this program?
   a. Describe how this is done
   b. Other examples:
      i. Core content/program of studies
      ii. Life skills
      iii. Vocational training
      iv. GED instruction
      v. Technology and transition, including ILP
      vi. Character Education
      vii. Other?
8. To what extent does your non-academic program or other factors beyond the core curricular content influence transition of students.
   a. Describe these factors.
   b. Other examples
      i. Treatment
      ii. Family
      iii. Community involvement
      iv. Mentoring
      v. Other?
9. How well, or not so well, do education and treatment staff collaborate on transition
10. Please describe the typical transition out of your program.
    a. Describe *Individualized* transition plan—please provide a copy of one
    b. Transition coordinator—please provide copy of job description
    c. Individual follow-up/after-care programming
    d. Other?
11. Is there anything I haven't asked you that would be important for us to know about transition in your program?

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW OF KECSAC PROGRAM
ADMINISTRATORS (SACSAA FALL MEETING)

(10:35)
1. Based on your years of experience, what is a successful transition?
(10:45)
2. What key factors would you study in order to describe successful and unsuccessful transitions of youth at risk in Kentucky?
   a. What questions would you be asking in relation to transition
   b. Who would you talk to/interview
(10:55)
3. Describe some key components that currently support the transition planning and implementation process for youth?
   a. Outgoing/follow-up
   b. Academic-during
   c. Non-academic-during
   d. Incoming
   e. Collaboration between treatment and academic staff
(11:05)
4. Describe some of the greatest problems impeding successful transition
   a. Outgoing/follow-up
   b. Academic-during
   c. Non-academic-during
   d. Incoming
   e. Collaboration between treatment and academic staff
(11:15)
5. In an *ideal* transition system for KECSAC youth, what would be some of the critical components? (Set aside all current constraints)
(11:25)
6. From your experience, describe any identifiable patterns in the transitions of KECSAC youth at your setting?
   a. Predictability/unpredictability
   b. Seasonality
   c. Come from, go to
   d. Characteristics of the youth
(11:35)
7. From your experience, describe the types of movement patterns of a youth moving through the system.
   a. Number of placements,
   b. aging out,
   c. One time and then back on track
(11:45)
8. Is there anything I haven't asked you that would be important for us to know about transition in your program?
(11:55 – Closure)

134

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS OF YOUTH
IN KECSAC PROGRAMS

Verbal instructions:

Confidentiality (personal or family)

Don't have to answer anything that makes you uncomfortable or should be kept personal

1. How many different schools have you been in?

    - Numbers
    - Describe the different schools
    - Which schools do you think did the best job in preparing you for your future? Why?

2. Where were you before coming to this program?

3. Do you know what a transition plan is?

    - Do you have one?
    - What's in it?
    - Who made it?
    - What does it say you need to do before you go?
    - What does it say you should do after you go?
    - Does it give you names of specific people or resources for you to contact in the community?
    - Do you think you can reach your goals?

4. What would you change that would help you do better when you leave here?

5. What are you doing here that is going to help you when you leave

    - Academic
    - Non-academic

6. Is there anything I haven't asked you that would be important for us to know about transition?

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS OF YOUTH
IN KECSAC PROGRAMS

Verbal instructions:

Confidentiality (personal or family)

Don't have to answer anything that makes you uncomfortable or should be kept personal

1. Describe yourself. What are the things you like to do when you're not in school?

2. Tell me about why you are in this school. What led you here?

3. Do you know what a transition plan is? [If not, describe to them what it is.] If so, do you know what yours says? Did you help make it?

4. What are your goals for the future?

5. What are you doing at this school to help prepare you for your future?

6. What do you wish you could do to help you prepare for your future that you're not doing now?

    - classes
    - life skills
    - other

7. Do your classes and teachers help you prepare for your future goals? If so, how? If not, what do you wish they would do to help you?

8. If this isn't your first placement, describe the times that you have changed schools. What was it like for you?

9. Tell me about your experiences when you entered this school. Did the administrator and teachers know you were coming? Describe how you were treated by the administrator, teachers, and other students.

10. What kind of help do you need that you're not getting here?

11. Describe a typical school day here. What is your school day like?

12. How is this school different from other schools you have been to?

13. What are your favorite classes or parts of the school day? Why?

14. Who are your favorite teachers? Why?

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF
KECSAC MODEL TRANSITION SITES**

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about developing best practices in adolescent transition in KECSAC alternative educational programs. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you work at a KECSAC program that was chosen as a model site. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 50 people to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Amy Marshall, MS, OTR/L of the University of Kentucky Department of Rehabilitation Sciences Doctoral Program. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Doris Pierce, Endowed Chair of Occupational Therapy at Eastern Kentucky University. Other people on the research team include Dr. Norman Powell, Elaine Fehringer, Karen Summers, and Dr. Rebecca Painter.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?
The purpose of this study is to contribute to statewide efforts to create solutions to collaboratively selected aspects of the transition challenges faced by KECSAC youth. The results of this study will be shared with KECSAC programs as well as the Commonwealth of Kentucky so that best practices in transition once identified can be disseminated.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You should not take part in this study if you do not want to. Participation is completely voluntary and there will be no repercussions for not taking part if you choose not to.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted at each of the five participating KECSAC educational programs: Ramey Estep High School, Fayette County Juvenile Detention Center, Madison County Day Treatment, Model Laboratory School, and Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center. You will need to be present at this program setting for 1 to 30 days, depending on your desired level of involvement in the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is up to 180 hours over the remainder of the 2008-2009 school year, depending on your desired level of involvement in the study

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- View and discuss a presentation of just-completed research entitled *"Transitions in KECSAC Youth, as Perceived by Students and Administrators,"*
- Collaboratively select one aspect of the transition process that you would like to work to improve within your program,
- Develop a collaborative team that will work on the development of the selected aspect of transition you wish to improve that includes at least one staff member and one researcher,
- Work together to plan, discuss, and revise the targeted improvement to transition processes for youth served in your educational setting,
- Gather data from staff and students of your educational program to inform the development of the improvement to transition processes,
- Share your successes to the degree you wish to be involved, through presentations, publications, or service as a demonstration site for other KECSAC programs

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. Taking part in this project is completely voluntary and you can skip activities or withdraw from the entire project at any time. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have at work if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will benefit by taking part in this research by having the opportunity to share your experiences with your fellow workers, with other KECSAC programs, and with the Commonwealth of Kentucky. You may benefit professionally by allowing you to reflect on your service with state agency youth. In addition, you will gain the satisfaction that you are contributing to best practices in the area of transition for youth. The results of this research have the potential of informing the development and improvement of transition processes for state agency youth.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

You can decline to take part in this study or withdraw at any time without risk of repercussion. If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You may feel free to decline the invitation to participate and no one will look unfavorably upon you. If you choose not to take part in this study, your decision will have no ramifications upon your job.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except for you to not take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?
Information provided by you will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other people, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information about the school private. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. Confidentiality will be maintained through the use of participant identification numbers to represent the participants in any public use of the data. Each participant will be randomly assigned an identification number to identify his or her data, from a master list kept in locked storage. Data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's (locked) office. Data will be kept for 4 years and then destroyed. Data on paper will be shredded and on computer will be deleted.

We will keep private all research records that identify the student to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused. Also, we may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you choose to take part in the study you have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently at your workplace if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Amy Marshall, at (859) 622-5896. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff

in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky at (859) 257-9428 or toll free at (866) 400-9428. You can also call Dr. Ronnie Nolan, Acting Director of KECSAC, with any questions or concerns. His phone number is (859) 622-6552. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form.

WHAT IF NEW INFORMATION IS LEARNED DURING THE STUDY THAT MIGHT AFFECT YOUR DECISION TO PARTICIPATE?

If the researchers learn of new information in regard to this study, and it might change your willingness to stay in this study, the information will be provided to you. You may be asked to sign a new informed consent form if the information is provided to you after you have joined the study.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

Eastern Kentucky University, the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice and the Kentucky Department of Education are providing financial support for this study.

_____   _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____   _____
Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent   Date

_____
Signature of Investigator

APPENDIX G

KECSAC BEST INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Why do you think I am interviewing you?

- What does your job description say that you do (the one from Human Resources)?

- In what way does your job description address transition services and plans?

- How do you describe your job?
  o How does it differ from the job description from Human Resources

- Highlight the positives and negatives in each description

- Now, what do you actually get to do in this job?

- What do you feel you need to or should be doing?

- What are some barriers that stop you from doing what you think you should be doing?

- What would best help facilitate your achievement of what you think you should be doing?
  o In relation to transition

- What would make a difference in transition services here in this program?

- If you pick one or two things that would really make a difference in the youths' lives in order for them to transition out of this program and into adulthood, what would you pick?

- What kind of documents do you have that you think I need to review to understand your program better?

APPENDIX H

WEEKLY REFLECTION QUESTIONS
FOR SITE TEAM LEADERS

09.05.01

Say your name and date of this recording.

- Describe the meeting:

    o Date
    o Length
    o Place
    o Attendees
    o Tenor
    o Focused/digressed
    o What was the agenda
    o What was actually discussed

- How well is team functioning?

- What are the primary strengths of this research team?

- What are primary barriers for research right now?

- Describe other activities that occurred this week

- Surprising insights—what are you thinking about now that is new?

- Next steps

- Other

KECSAC BEST ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

09.11.04

2:00-4:00 p.m.

Regent's Room

- 2:00-2:15
  - Preliminary remarks (Amy)
    - Thank you for being a part of this study
    - Introduce research team members
    - Thank you to our funders
    - Purpose of the BEST study – give all of them (why we're doing this)
    - Design
    - 5 research sites
    - Next steps

- 2:15-2:45
  - Introductions (Everyone)
    - Who you are
    - What you do
    - One aspect of your program that you feel is successful
    - A major concern you have about transition in your program
    - What you are doing in the BEST study and what you hope the outcome will be

- 2:45-3:30
  - Facilitated questions (Norman)
    - What commonalities exist across your programs in regard to transition?
      - Challenges
      - Issues
      - Best practices
    - How can we help each other?
    - How can we build a network between key sites?

- 3:30-4:00
  - Unstructured time to network and visit

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154

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161

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