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Transition from school to adult life: what have we done to support students with disabilities?

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Transition from School to Adult life:
What have we done to support Students with Disabilities?

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ABSTRACT

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As a legal component of an individual's IEP, a transition plan essentially should

represent and include activities to prepare individuals with disabilities for postgraduate

experiences. Activities should be individualized and relevant to each individual intended

post school environments. Though a legal requirement, much research reports negatively

on transition planning implementation. Some negative findings listed in research are as

follows: lack of collaboration among individuals involved in the transition process; lack

of student involvement in planning; ineffective design of students' goals and objectives;

lack of linking students with adult agency providers for post graduate support services,

and overall negative post school outcomes.

This present study used qualitative research methods to examine transition planning

and outcome from the perspectives of individuals involved in the transition process. The

participating individuals included 5 individuals with disabilities, 5 parents of individuals

with disabilities, 5 staff members of the services agencies, 5 employers of individuals

with disabilities, with a total of 25. An interview together with a survey was conducted to

examine the various roles of those participants in transition planning and their views on

such a process. Each interview lasted approximately 35- 45 minutes. The results showed that effective transition planning and collaboration is not occurring for most students with disabilities and their families, though there were many singular examples of positive transition planning and outcomes. The findings of this study confirmed earlier research findings that the transition process needed collaborative efforts of all individuals involved, including school personnel, businesses and agencies, together with families and the students with disabilities. Recommendations are offered based on the examples of positive transition practices and experiences from the participants.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

<u>Statement of the Problems</u>

Transition planning and practices were legally mandated for individuals with

disabilities in 1990 when the Education for All Handicapped Act (EHA, 1975) was re-

authorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In order to

understand the complexity of transition planning, it is imperative to review the official

definition on Transition Services stated in the IDEA, Public Law 101-476 (1990).

Transition services are defined as follows:

A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed with an outcome oriented process,
which promotes movement from school to post school activities, included post secondary
education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported
employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and
community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall take in account the
students preferences and interests and shall included instruction, community experiences,
the development of employment, and other post school adult living objectives, and when
appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional evaluation. (Brolin, 1995,
p.27).

According to Hasazi, Furney, and DeStefano (1999), transition planning and

implementation is a "multi dimensional and complex process" (p556). Though transition

policy has been legally mandated for approximately twelve years, there still remain grave

concerns regarding the school-based implementation of transition practices. In his

research, Patton, Cronin, Jairrel (1997) presented some of the concerns regarding

negative adult outcomes for individuals with disabilities, such as, unemployment, low

paying jobs, frequent job changes, non engagement in the community, independent

functioning limitations, and restricted social lives. Morningstar and Keinhammer (1999)

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report young adults with disabilities also have a higher drop out rate and do not pursue post secondary education. A more recent report by Thoma, Baker, Saddler, (2002) listed the findings of a Louis Harris Poll (2000) confirming previous concerns of the well being of individuals with disabilities, such as adult lives without employment, lack of recreation and leisure activities, and limited community living options. According to Householder and Jansen (1999), the economic and educational problems of youth with disabilities are not new, and the prevailing economic conditions and "socio cultural" philosophy influence society's response to these problems (p. 52). In addition, poor post school outcomes can be attributed to inadequate transition planning (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001).

Transition practices and policies across the country show a range of minimal to comprehensive services for individuals with disabilities (Patton et al, 1997). Many barriers to the effective transition implementation have been identified. Some concerns involving transition include lack of student involvement in transition planning, inappropriate or expired transition goals and objectives, inadequate links with outside agencies, and delegation of transition responsibilities in inclusive educational settings. According to Zhang and Stecker (2001), the lack of student involvement in the transition process can be attributed to two factors. First, some student may develop a "learned helplessness" impairing their capability to participate in their transition planning. Secondly, significant individuals may feel that the student is not capable of participating in this process.

Steere and Cavaiuolo (2002) revealed some areas of concern, such as, vague outcomes and goals, unrealistic and outdated goals and objectives, unclear relationship between the

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goals and objectives, and no action plans. Student's interests, preferences, strengths and needs were not reflected in the goals of their individualized transition plans (ITP's), (Shearin, Roessler & Schriner, 1999).

The coordination of transition activities through the assignment of responsible personnel has been identified as a major problem in the transition process. The responsible school personnel for delivery of transition activities are often missing from the transition component of students IEP's (Shearin et al, 1999). Also, many students with disabilities are not linked to adult and community agencies. In addition, ineffective interagency collaboration is another serious concern (Morningstar and Kleinhammer, 1991; Hasazi, et al, 1999).

Householder and Jansen (1999) describe the challenges families are facing regarding adult community service agencies. Unlike school settings with accessible service departments, many adult community services agencies have "many layers" which are difficult for families to navigate through (Householder & Jansen, 1999, p.51).

It was found that though IEPs may complied "technically" with IDEA mandates, key components were absent from the process, and thoughtful planning was missing (Zhang & Stecker, 2001). In addition, some schools have incorporated simplified transition paperwork practices for legal compliance purposes. Procedural legal compliance has been achieved by creating transition documents and procedures, which result in a "check off", or "add on" approach to transition services (Kohl, 1998, cited in Morningstar's et al, 1999).

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Inclusive educational settings present another challenge for the implementation of

transition practices and services. The current educational trend to include students in the

least restrictive environment through inclusion is not fully supported in literature.

The tone of an article written by Horby (1999), "Inclusion, and Delusion" truly reflects

the cynical views on inclusion practices. Some concerns were raised by Ferrell (1997),

and Manset and Semmel, (1997) indicating that "inclusion efficacy is inconclusive and

no clear evidence shows wholesale inclusive programming is greater than more

conventional special education service delivery model". Brolin's reflections (1995) are

cynical and pessimistic regarding the transition history with inclusion practices in mind:

"having seen one full cycle of transition interests, and having researched previous cycles,

I am stuck with the gnawing thought that some of the youth of today may be no better off

than their counter parts were 15 years ago". (p. 430).

Inclusion in secondary schools can be problematic for individuals with disabilities.

Some researchers question if this practice allows for appropriate transition practices and

possibly contributes to high rates of high school dropouts of the special education

population. It is suggested that the high school level integration could adversely affect

their career development and post school outcomes for those individuals with disabilities,

due to a single core curriculum focus. High stake testing requirement of those included

(i.e. special education students) at the high school level has been attributed to higher rates

of dropouts (Brolin, 1995). The high stake competency testing may contribute to a higher

rate of student with disabilities ending high school prematurely (Mastropieri & Scruggs,

2001). According to Morningstar & Kleinhammer (1999), inclusion of secondary

students with disabilities into the general academic curriculum does not allow sufficient

time to incorporate transition activities, such as, community -based activities of employment or independent living skills. Thus, transition-planning instruction on the necessary skills and appropriate behaviors needed for successful vocational and community adjustment is neglected to fulfill the prerequisite classes for high stake competency testing.

This composite of problems contributes to "uneven" transition mandated implementation (Hasazi, et al, 1999,p.556). There are increasing concerns, according to Morningstar & Kleinhammer (1999), that transition planning simply becomes an "administrative activity" without considering the individuals' goals and desires. In order to solve the problems, Janowitz and Cort (1999) suggest schools must be prepared to offer a variety of academic and vocational options for individuals based on their interest, abilities and needs. Knight and Aucoin (1999) stress the need for work site experiences, life skills, affective skills, and employability skills training, as well as academic training for students with mild disabilities who may comprise a sizable percentage of potential skilled workers. The challenges encountered throughout the transition process are more manageable when students are involved in the planning process making their own choices (Steere & Cavaiuolo, 2002).

Background

Transition services were legally mandated in 1990 in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The reauthorized IDEA in 1997 included major changes for the field of special education. A significant change was mandated to provide transition services from school to adult life for individuals with disabilities. According to the law, an individual's IEP (Individual Education Plan) is required to include a statement of

transition services no later than the age of 16, and such services could begin at 14. In 1997, the IDEA amended transition services and required a statement of transition services at the age of 14, and actual program implementation directed by the IDEA of 1997 by the age the 16.

Though IDEA (1990) mandated transition services as a positive initiative for individuals with disabilities, some researchers felt this was fortunate and unfortunate because of a federal mandate for the career development and the functional skills needs of our students with special learning needs to be more adequately addressed (Brolin, 1994). Other researchers felt the law simply illuminated transition activities that were already occurring in special education settings. Halpern (1992) compared transitioning to "old wine in new bottles" (p. 202), in that current transition concepts originated in the Work/Study movement of the 1960's, then, and to the subsequent the Career Education Movement of the 1980's. Also, Brolin (1995) stated that the concept of transition, particularly that of school- to- work was related to the career development that had been theorized and implemented in various educational and agency settings for many years. Thus, transition planning and practices were not innovative concepts, but had been in effect for quite some time.

The first formalized educational movement to concentrate and develop work related skills of individuals with disabilities was in the 1960's .The Cooperative Work Study Programs of the 1960's effectively met the needs of individuals with disabilities through formal agreements between the schools and out-of-school rehabilitation agencies. The collaboration between these two entities facilitated substantial community job placement and promoted effective post- graduate referrals to outside agencies for individuals with

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disabilities. This collaboration dissolved for two reasons. First, inherent management issues surfaced regarding teacher's time distribution and responsibilities. Effectively, teachers were dividing their workday between school-based activities as classroom teachers and community based activities as work/ study coordinators. Technically, in the community teachers were actually being paid by their local school districts to perform what was considered rehabilitative services. Thus, schools could not pay in effect for teachers to perform job- related duties in the community. Schools were not required to provide such services as employment training and these services should be considered as a rehabilitation agency's responsibility. Thus, it was determined that vocationally related services were the responsibility of rehabilitation agencies and not educational institutions. In 1973, the legal distinction was determined the agency's responsibility as written in Rehabilitation Act to provide job related skills and services to individuals with disabilities. In 1975, however, with the passage of PL 94-142, job related skills became formally the school's responsibility because of the mandated transition plans in the students IEP's serving as one of component of "free, and appropriate education" (EHA, 1975). Thus, work related education and opportunities became appropriate and were required.

In 1970, the U. S. Department of Education declared career education a major educational priority, prompting federal distribution of grant funding. This career education movement could be viewed as an expansion of work/study programs (Halpern, 1992). The focus of this initiative was to provide services for the general school population. However, as the movement progressed individuals with disabilities gained political and public attention particularly when the Council for Exceptional

Children formally endorsed this movement (Halpern. 204), implying the need of career education for the disabled population. The career education movement continued to gain political and public awareness with the passage of PL 95-207, the Career Education Implementation Act in 1977. This act specifically listed individuals with disabilities as one of the target populations to receive career education. Unfortunately, the initial funding for the career education initiative was not replenished, and the career education program was intentionally disowned as a federal initiative (Halpern, 1992).

Halpern (1992) notes the importance of the Regular Education Initiatives proposed by Will in 1984, which inspired the transition movement again. Will's proposal outlines the post secondary transition needs of individuals with disabilities, including support services and ideal objectives. Will used the terminology "bridges" to describe the extent of actual support service the individuals with disabilities may need for post school adjustment. Her proposal seemed to limit employment outcomes, at the expense of other important variables, such as personal and leisure objectives. Will (1984) suggested that non-vocational aspects of adult adjustment be only important if they contribute to employment outcomes (Halpern, 1992). When the IDEA was reauthorized in 1997, transition services became a broader perspective to prepare individuals with disabilities for successful post school adjustment and began to include many important variables contributing to positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities to succeed.

Many terms were used in the past decades to describe transition, such as career education, life skills education, and post graduate adjustment. Regardless of the terminology, career education, transition planning, and life skills education are

addressing the same important educational goal, i.e. "preparing students with disabilities to successfully live and interact in their community", (Brolin, 1995, p. 431)

Significance of the Study

Despite the evolution of legislative support throughout the years, outcome data on social well being and employment continue to indicate poor results of individuals with disabilities (Stuart & Smith, 2002). To date, much transition research focuses on a singular disability and its relevant outcomes. For example, meaningful transition planning for the severely disabled provides the post-secondary transition needs (Stuart & Smith, 2002), as well as learning disabled students (e.g. Levinson & Ohler, 1998) and self-determination skills of students with mildly mental retardation (Zhang, et al, 2001). Reviewing the literature, it is found that many of the transition studies emphasize employment outcomes only, neglecting other areas of adult adjustment such as social well being, community living, and adulthood experiences (Patton et al, 1997)

This present study will attempt to provide individuals' perspectives on the transitioning planning and practices at a local level. It will include a sample of individuals with different disabilities to represent the diversity of the population. It attempts to reveal local implementation of transition practices and policies for the various students with disabilities in special education programs and post secondary programs by interviewing various representatives of agencies and business companies. Finally, this study will hopefully reveal exemplary transition practices and compliance in schools.

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to conduct qualitative research to examine how Transition practices and policies are implemented at the local level. This study will examine the multi dimensional elements of transition planning and practice and their impact on individuals with disabilities. Comprehensive data of this qualitative research provided a comparative analysis of different educational environments to pursue an appropriate preparation of students with disabilities for the multi dimensional demands of adulthood. (Patton, 1997). This study also evaluated individuals' overall social well being within their communities they live.

Research Questions

In distinguishing this study as a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional analysis of local transition practice in educational settings, the following questions were studied:

1. Are there any differences in transition services and preparation between the public school and the private education environment?

2. Do effective communication and collaboration exist internally among school personnel, and externally with adult service agencies, such as Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and businesses, which employ individuals with disabilities?

3. Do Businesses, which employ individuals with disabilities, receive support and education to maximize these individuals' success?

4. Were or are individuals with disabilities possessing in self-determination

5. How do individuals view their transition experiences?

6. What are the overall outcomes of transition practices for individuals with disabilities, personally, and   vocationally?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter reviews related literature published in various professional journals to discuss the many facets of transition process. The focus of this review is to identify key elements that have been determined for successful transition planning for individuals with disabilities. The literature indicates recurring dominant themes regarding successful implementation practices. The major dominant themes attributable to the successful transition planning and implementation are students' roles, collaboration between schools and agencies, family involvement and effective transition practices for students with disabilities.

The Student's Role in the Transition Process

According to the definition of transition services as defined in the (PL) 94-142 (IDEA), Sec. 602(a)(19), (1990) the process of transition planning must be based on the individual's needs, taking in account the student's interests and preferences. Therefore, the most important individual in the transition process is the student with disabilities. In order to achieve student focused transition plans, some schools adopt student- centered planning models and/ or self-determination models. The concepts of student centered planning and self-determination are prevalent in transition literature as synonymous terms. However, for the purpose of this literature review self-determination will be emphasized as a correlation to successful transition outcomes for individuals with

disabilities. Steere and Cavaiulo (2002) have defined self-determination as: A combination of skills, knowledge and attitudes promoting effective choice making, problem solving, goal setting and attainment, risk taking and safety, self regulation, self advocacy or leadership, and self awareness or self knowledge. Acquisition of such skills should develop overall independent behaviors to promote student involvement in the process of transition planning. With self-determination skills, the individuals act as the primary causal agent in their life (Thoma, et al, 2001).

The concept of self-determination should change the overall dynamics of educational planning and meeting processes. For example, individuals become actively involved in transition planning process but not passive participants. Whereas, professionals previously made the decisions now students learn to make decisions independently with professional support (Morningstar & Kleinhammmer, 1999). With self-determination models, the student is in control and becomes "owner" of the transition process, i.e. to become responsible for "steering" his own educational planning meetings (Devlieger & Trach, 1999). This involvement should be welcomed and encouraged throughout the transition planning. Students must be given the opportunity to assert and advocate for themselves, identifying their personal desires (Chadsey-Rusch & Rusch, 1996). Participation should be viewed as a "golden opportunity" in which students "shape their own academic destinies" by examining their disabilities and advocating for themselves (Brinckeroff, 1996). Ideally, self-determination skills allow individuals to assume roles "equal" to adult partners throughout the transition planning process (Knight & Aucoin, 1999).

Some researchers believe self-determination skills are not only essential for transition planning, but for the individual's future endeavors as well. For example, effective transition planning begins with student's abilities to articulate their goals through the skills of self- determination (Thoma, et al, 2001). Challenges encountered throughout the transition process are more manageable when students are involved in the planning process by making their own choices (Steere& Cavaiuolo, 2002). Secondly, self-determination skills transcend the dimensions of the transition planning process and transition years. These skills assist individuals with disabilities throughout their lives. Self-determination skills, such as effective choice making, self-advocacy and self-monitoring can be generalized to a variety of settings in one's life. The value of self-determination can result in a better quality of life and greater transition outcomes (Morningstar & Kleinhammer, 1999). Personally, self-determination skills can help individuals monitor their progress of goal attainment (Chadsey-Rusch & Rusch, 1999).

Some researchers proclaim that self-determination education should begin early in childhood and continue throughout an individual's life. (Thoma, et al, 2001, Zhang & Stecker, 2001). Levinson and Ohler (1998) indicated that student involvement should start early as 8th grade, with the individual's knowledge of their disability and its educational and vocational impact by the 9th grade. It is found that self-determination opportunities should be provided for students throughout their daily activities and infused within the curriculum. Self-determination should not be a one-time expression at educational meetings, but should be promoted before, during and after transitional planning meetings (Zhang & Stecker, 2001)

Though the concept of self-determination has been in practice for some time, it is evidenced that this concept has not changed the face of transition planning for individuals with disabilities, nor, does self-determination education insure student participation at educational meetings. There does not appear to be a correlation between a self-determination activities and student participation and involvement at educational meetings. In spite of self- determination activities practices in school, most students with disabilities did not demonstrate the skills at their transition planning meetings (Zhang & Stecker, 2001; Thoma et al, 2001). Lack of student involvement in the transition process can be attributed to a variety of factors. First, it appears that students may not have been able to generalize self-determination skills from a classroom setting to a meeting environment. Some students may develop a "learned helplessness", impairing their capability to participate in the transition planning meetings (Zhang & Stecker, 2001). The inability to demonstrate self-determination skills at educational meetings may also be impacted by external emotional variables. Thus, other factors, such as school policies and school personnel, outside agencies connections, all determine the degree of student involvement in his transition planning meetings. Although teachers claimed their self-determination activities revealed their students' interests, these interests were not incorporated into the transition plan (Zhang & Stecker, 2001). Also, transition planning meeting participants, such as teachers, parents, and educational support staff, account for the overall supportive tone to promote positive interactions among these individuals. It is found, however, at the transition meeting students' preferences were ignored in spite of teachers' support for student self-determination (Thoma, et al, 2001). It is also reported that inadvertent teacher behaviors are detrimental to student participation, such as,

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interrupting students at meetings and providing limited community-based instruction. The reality of self-determination implementation and practices of student involvement may be based on uncontrollable external variables. These can be referred to as the overall "ecological factors" impacting the meeting's dynamics (Thoma, 2001).

A teacher may serve as the facilitator of self-determination education and activities. Teachers working with student with disabilities must provide students with opportunities to exercise self-determination skills. It is suggested that self-determination activities be incorporated in both the student's curriculum and daily routines (Zhang & Stecker, 2001). These activities should not isolated, but should be planned to involve students in the process of decisions making. While listening to students and encouraging their participation, teachers will play an important role to promote self- determination throughout both the transition process and educational programming.

Collaboration Between Schools and Agencies

Although substantial literature prescribes effective collaboration in transition practices, there is minimal evidence or limited research validating its existence. Unlike concrete, tangible data, such as high school proficiency test statistics, studies on transition collaboration appear to be an intangible component. There are several concerns regarding transition collaboration. First, though there are few studies providing broad transition collaboration perspectives, most research obtained is limited in it perspective. Research is limited in that studies examine a singular aspect of the transition collaboration process for one particular demographic area. Thus, results may not reflect actual transition collaboration practices at a national level. Therefore, findings in those studies are difficult to generalize. The second is existing collaboration practices may only

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be inferred from the outcomes of individuals in the transition process. Therefore, inferences regarding actual collaboration practices may be inferred from data.

Factors Impacting Interagency Collaboration. Johnson and associates (2003) sought to evaluate collaboration of 33 stakeholders among nine Ohio state departments. The study was prompted by various interagency transition problems in previously conducted research. Some problems of transition collaboration or interagency barriers were: lack of interagency communication and knowledge; lack of understanding each agency's transition policies and incompatible collaboration definitions. A result, their study highlighted 13 factors contributing or hindering collaboration within their state. Of the 13 factors, the following factors were rated the highest relating to unsuccessful collaboration: lack of leadership, lack of common goals, and lack of commitment of parties. Concurrently, the following factors were rated the highest in regard to promoting collaboration: willingness to work together, strong leadership and a common vision (Johnson, Zorn, Kai Yung Tam, 2003)

A similar study conducted by Hasazi (1999) and her colleagues also presented both positives and negative factors impacting collaborative practices. Through cross case analysis, nine locations across the United States were examined to reveal "model" transition implantation sites. The " model" sites were schools with superior transition practices, such as effective interagency collaboration. Five of the nine locations met the researcher's criteria. The remaining four sites, identified as "representative" sites, demonstrated progress in some areas of transition practices, yet challenged in the transition collaboration. The representative revealed the need for a greater interagency collaboration and support services for individuals during the transition process.

A recent study conducted by Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking and Mack (2002), addressed transition services delivery. The transition planning challenges addressed in this article, reflect a broader perspective or representation of current practices. The authors indicate the process of transition implementation has been too slow, with many states failing to achieve even minimal compliance levels. Their findings reveal: limited levels of services coordination and collaboration between schools and community service agencies, ineffective, or non-existent interagency agreements and unidentified post-graduation service personnel.

Osterloh and Koorland (1998) also revealed negative collaboration in their study on school personnel relationships, specifically 50 educators and mental health professionals working with individuals with emotional disorders in Florida. Minimal positive collaboration aspects were addressed. It was found that school personnel and the mental health professionals did not collaborate effectively due to communication issues, conflicting meeting times, and incompatible treatment philosophies (Osterloh & Koorland, 1998).

Frank and Sitlington (2000) conducted a comparative study to examine the outcomes of individuals with mental disabilities from 1985 and 1993. Their overall findings were that individuals with disabilities from 1993 experienced greater success in many adult areas than that of those in 1985. In particular the class of 1993, 20% more young adults were satisfied and adult service providers assisted individuals to attain their current job. In a similar outcome analysis multi- agency, and community – based collaboration and networking accounted several positive outcomes of individuals with severe disabilities (Liberton, Kutash & Freidman, 1997). During 1982- 1995 individuals with severe

emotional disorders experienced the following positive gains/ outcomes: 60% increase in high school graduation, 16% decline in high school drop out rates and 100% decrease in out of state residential treatment centers. In addition, family involvement was increased due to positive collaboration among agencies.

In Hagner, Helm, and Butterworth's study (1996) six individuals with moderate to severe mental retardation was evaluated for student centered planning meetings. Positive transition collaboration was revealed. The transition-planning meeting was collaborative with many diverse participating individuals, such as, teachers, job coaches, family, friends, school-based peer buddies, Special Olympic coaches and adult service providers. They attended each meeting to discuss the student's transition plan and process. This collaborative effect might have contributed to the student's transition success.

In contrast, outcome assessment regarding collaboration and transition practices has rendered negative findings. Hitchings, Luzzu, Ristow, and Horvath (2001) assessed the transition planning process for 97 mid western college students, who previously received special education services in high school. Unfortunately, only 20% of the 97 surveyed students recalled transition planning and/or having a transition plan. And only 8% recalled meeting with their high school counselors. In a similar study reviewing the post school outcomes of individuals with disabilities, ineffective collaboration during the transition process accounted for students are ill prepared for the transition from school to post school environments. Quigney and Studer (1999) also reported that lack of collaboration prevented students from being prepared for the transition from high school to post school environment. And finally, in a 2-year follow –up study on transition of individuals with learning disabilities, Rojewski (1999) found students did not benefit

from a collaborative transition process in high school. The study reported individuals with learning disabilities did not understand their disability and often made inappropriate decisions in their career choices.

Successful transition planning is contingent on interagency collaboration and coordination (Knott & Asselin, 1999). Collaboration and coordination do not occur naturally, but must be an active process among all parties involved in the transition process. According to Brinckeroff (1996), effective transition planning and program include collaborative efforts among several parties, such as, the student, families, employers, school personnel, community agencies and adult service providers. A team effort is emphasized. For example, it is the responsibility of all "stakeholders" to insure the individual needs are achieved during the transition process (Knott & Asselin, 1999; Householder & Jansen, 1999). It is school's responsibility to initiate collaboration and communication with outside agencies for effective transition planning. Schools need to enhance their efforts linking the school with adult services agencies (Knott & Asselin, 1999). Transition planning must be considered in cooperation with adult agencies (Brolin, 1995). A meaningful transition is achieved by developing links between the school settings and the post school services (Stuart & Smith, 2000).

Effective collaboration and communication during the transition process should be an active, engaged process of all parties involved. Hasazi, Furney and DeStefano (1999) identified "ideal" transition implementation sites, where collaboration and communication among individuals were active processed. Through systematic professional development, the exemplary, or "model" transition sites provided such activities as, cross training interagency informational/ educational activities, pre-service

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and in-service training workshops and summer educational institutes. The educational opportunities were available to all individuals in the transition process, such as, educators, adult service providers and employers.

Timely initiation of collaboration and communication with outside agencies benefits the student during the transition process and throughout post-graduation opportunities. Collaboration between schools and various state and local agencies reduces barriers a student may encounter while pursuing various services (Morningstar & Kleinhammer, 1999). The collaboration of these services does not have to be delayed until postgraduate years. This collaboration may begin while the student is still in high school. For example, Householder and Jansen (1999) suggest individuals with disabilities qualify for vocational rehabilitative services as young as 16 years of ages. Jolivette, Stichter, Nelson, Scott, and Liaupsin (2000) describe, "wrap around plans", in which individuals with disabilities and their families are matched with necessary outside community agencies before high school graduation. Established community supports for individuals with disabilities prior to graduation should promote post school success. Essentially, schools must exhaust all efforts to insure that students with disabilities are linked to outside agencies.

The Teacher's Role in Transition Collaboration. The teacher's role in transition planning and collaboration varies according to the student's needs. Regardless of the population served, it is important teachers become empowered and become stakeholders in the transition planning process (Stuart & Smith, 2002). As increased number of special education students are being served in the regular education classroom a collaborative relationship is required between regular education and special education teachers (Brolin,

1995). For a positive collaboration, teachers may be involved in many activities, such as, curriculum development, participation in teacher and family training, planning, and job coaching. With administrative support, the teachers or the " front line individuals" are to be "implementation level practitioners" for transition planning and implementation (Stuarts & Smith, 2002). Due to their first hand experience, teachers have the power to inform policy makers of the need for transition policies and outcomes. In the spectrum of special education services, the special education teacher's role in the collaboration will vary. In regular education arrangements, collaboration will begin initially with the regular education teacher for transition planning implementation. For example, in inclusive environments, special education teachers may make suggestions on how to infuse career and vocational objectives into the regular educational curriculum (Brolin, 1995). While in special schools, such as private school settings, the special education teacher's role seems more prominent. According to Heward and Orlansky (1992), transition planning through career awareness and vocational skill training should begin in the elementary years of students.

Regardless of students' disabilities, there are common responsibilities regarding a collaborative transition process for specials education teachers. First, the teacher should implement a meaningful transition program, which equips students with skills necessary for post school outcomes. It is necessary for the teachers to be aware of each individual's post school goals. Collaboration for transition planning requires the teacher to work with many individuals, primarily, with parents. In order to collaborate effectively with parents, teachers should be informed of post school agencies that may serve the student. As professional, teachers must become aware of these agencies. In order to promote

effective transition for students with disabilities, teachers must extend their knowledge beyond the confines of a classroom. Morningstar and Kleinhammer (1999) suggest teachers be knowledgeable of related transition services and outside agencies that assist students with disabilities for their transition process. Such knowledge results in effective quality of transition programs (Knott & Asselin, 1999).

Collaboration Between the School and Family. Family involvement is important to the positive student outcomes of transition. This is critical for individuals with disabilities to succeed. It is found that for individuals with disabilities, parental involvement would enhance better school attendance, lower drop out rates and increased positive attitudes (Morningstar & Kleinhammer, 1999). Families possess background knowledge of the individuals with disabilities and visions for future outcomes of their children. In terms of transition planning, Brolin (1995) suggested *only* the family and the student have the right to make decisions about where they live and work. Supports should be provided to encourage active parental involvement during the transition planning process. Parents should be involved early in every aspect of the transition planning (Janowitz & Cort, 1999). For example, professionals have the ability to promote parental and student involvement at educational meetings. As adolescents transition into their adulthood, they should be in charge of their transition planning, with professionals acting as facilitators. Professionals should assess to what extent families want to be involved in the transition process (Morningstar & Kleinhammer, 1999). After gathering information on desired parental involvement, professionals then can begin to provide supports for parents throughout the transition planning process. Kraemer and Blacher (2001) found positive family involvement during the transition planning process. As a result of their

study, 88.5% of the 52 families reported they were part of a "transition team" and 77% of families reported they were very satisfied or satisfied with their involvement in their child's transition planning.

Unfortunately, the parent's role is not as active as it should be in the transition process. Parents are often "passive participants" at transition meetings (Morningstar & Kleinhammer, 1999). Some factors may contribute to the lack of parental involvement. These factors are: 1) some parents feel overwhelmed by technical terminology referenced at meetings, 2) meetings were professional driven causing distances between parents and students, preventing their active participation, and 3) professionals assumed the role as information providers, but not communication facilitators (Thoma, 2001).

The Role of a Transition Coordinator. Transition planning requires the coordination and collaboration of various individuals and agencies to serve individuals with disabilities. Communication and collaboration is essential in facilitating effective transition supports and services (Brinckerhoff, 1996; Knott & Asselin, 1999, Brolin, 1994). Due to the complexity of the transition process, centralization of transition planning and services is suggested. Various terms are used to describe the role of the individual or team of individuals responsible for coordinating transition activities. Some of those terms used to describe a transition coordinators are: transition team leader (Brinckerhoff, 1996), transition specialist (Knott & Asselin, 1999), case manager or transition coordinator (Brolin, 1995). The concept of transition teams to coordinate the duties and responsibilities associated with the transition process is referred to as "school based" planning teams to be responsible for transition planning and interagency agreements (Knight & Aucoin, 1999). A "trans disciplinary team" is also suggested to

take responsibility for initial transition evaluation due to the magnitude of the responsibilities involved in the transition process and assessment (Levinson & Ohler, 1998).

Though the transition coordinator or transition team concept is indicated in literature, implementation of these practices does not always occur. It is noted that only the special education teacher continues to be responsible for transition planning.

Internal and external collaborative efforts have been identified as key components to successful transition planning (Patton et al, 1997). It is the school's obligation to establish collaborative relationships with outside agencies, according to the IDEA transition mandate. Thus, schools must develop relationships with community agencies that may potentially serve individuals with disabilities after high school graduation. It is the local education agency's responsibility to "initiate linkage" with outside agencies during the transition process (Brolin, 1995). Written interagency agreements are suggested to formalize transition activities ensuring the knowledge of roles and responsibilities of individuals involved in the transition process (Chadsey-Rusch & Rusch, 1996). This written agreement should include transition goals and objectives and responsible personnel to implement those goals and objectives. Formalized plans among the various individuals such as parents, schools and community agencies, help ensure proper delivery of transition services (Householder & Jansen, 1999). Most importantly, the statement of interagency responsibilities should be established *before* the student leaves school (Brolin, 1995)

In the past, some concerns were raised regarding the coordination of transition meetings. For example, meeting times and places were not compatible for all intended

transition participants; meetings were scheduled during hours incompatible with parent's work schedule. It is the transition coordinator's role to schedule meetings and locations compatible with all parties involved in the transition process. Due to the complexity of transition planning it would seem beneficial if the transition coordinators focus specifically on transitioning of individuals, instead of being responsible for other educational aspects. Effective transitioning should not be a supplemental duty or responsibility of educational personnel.

Transition Practices of Students With Disabilities

Transition of Students with Mild Disabilities. Because of the inclusive education movement in education systems as a reform to advocate integration of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms with their non-disabled peers, it is necessary to examine the impact of inclusion on transition planning and practices at high school level for individuals with mild disabilities. For the purposes of this literature review, mild disabilities at the high school level would include individuals with learning disabilities and mildly cognitive impairments (i.e. mildly mental retardation). Students with mild disabilities have experienced the majority of their education in public school settings such as, a resource setting or center or an mainstreamed environment with support. There are many educational challenges at the secondary level for those students. In general, high school students are expected to possess independent study skills, adhere to a fast pace curriculum, and complete high stake competency tests. Inevitably, if the student with disabilities does not develop independent study skills during elementary or middle school years, he/she will have difficulty developing these skills at the high school level. Many students with mild disabilities have difficulty with prerequisite skills adhering to high

school curriculum expectations (Mastropeiri & Scruggs, 2001). Due to the fast paced nature of general education classes in high school the time does not allow for remediation of content materials and compensation for deficit knowledge or skills. Another area of concern for those students is high stake testing (Mastropeiri & Scruggs, 2001; Brolin, 1995). Brolin (1995) indicates adherence to a single core curriculum focusing on competency standards through standardized testing could increase the drop out rates of special education students and eliminate the special education gains achieved in the last 25 years. The "high stakes" testing may result in inappropriate placement and set unrealistic expectations for those individuals (Mastropeiri & Scruggs, 2001). The inability to understand the relationship between the disability and its impact on one's learning and career choices is another concern regarding effective transitioning. For example, though some learning disabled students may attend college, they do not understand their disability and how it affects their learning (Brinckerhoff, 1996). With educational assistance and guidance, individuals with learning disabilities can learn about themselves and make appropriate occupational decisions based on their abilities (Levinson & Ohler, 1998).

Transition of Students with Severe Disabilities. Individuals with severe disabilities possess unique characteristic differentiating them from other individuals with disabilities. According to the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHY, 2002) individuals with severe disabilities are those who have traditionally been labeled as severely or profoundly mentally retarded, and possibly possessing additional complications such as, physical mobility limitations and, or behavioral complications.

According to Brolin (1995) individuals with severe disabilities require considerably more accommodations than those with mild disabilities.

It is important to note successful transition maybe assessed on an individual basis. Though there is no singular definition of transition success in literature, Kraemer and Blacher (2000) identifies the common domains in their transition outcomes as: residence, education, employment, and social environment. An individual may achieve success or independence in all of these transition outcome areas or one area and still be considered successful in regard to their transitioning. For example, Kraemer and Blacher (2000) considers individuals who continues to live at home, yet is employed and maintains social relationships as successful in transitioning. Thus, transitioning for individuals with severe disabilities is personal and relevant to the individual and not dependent on attainment of success in the four domain areas.

The common curriculum focus is on functionality (NICHY, 2002, Kramer and Blacher, 2001, Heward & Orlansky, 1992). The premise of functionality transcends all programming goals for individuals with severe disabilities. Kraemer and Blacher (2001) found that certain program variables contribute to successful transition experiences for individual with severe disabilities. Those variables are functional community referenced secondary curriculum, vocational training and employment. Heward and Orlansky (1992) also stress that functional and vocational skills must be an educational priority for those individuals. Skill acquisition for transition planning must be relevant to the individual's home and community environments (NICHY, 2002).

In order to teach individuals with severe disabilities functional skills in the various

domains previously listed, "task analysis" in instruction of vocational skills, academics and social skills are suggested (Heward & Orlansky, 1992).

Individuals with severe disabilities are often characterized with inappropriate behaviors and lack of positive skills needed for both the classroom and community transitions (Heward & Orlansky, 1992; Jolivette et al, 2000). Thus, social skills are important for those individuals. Accordingly, social skills training should compliment all instruction and should be one of the most effective interventions for challenging behaviors. This may be considered as part of transition program to prepare those students for successful transition.

Preparation for Successful Transition

Education Preparation. Transition preparation and planning should be a careful and methodical process. Maintaining a continuous and dedicated focus during the transition process helps to insure attainment of transition outcomes (Chadsey-Rusch, Rusch, 1996). Methodical and careful planning considers the strengths and an abilities of the individual within the context of his personal preferences, interests and desires. Brinckerhoff (1996) suggests transition planning should be a balance of capitalizing on the student's strengths, whiles simultaneously compensating for his weaknesses (1996). Though there are several mass-market prefabricated "transitional / related life skills" curricula available, there are dominant themes or objectives transcending textbook materials to prepare individuals for the transition to post graduate experiences. One important theme is the objective of "functionality" of the skill or objective being implemented (Patton, et al, 1997). Functionality depends on the individual's future use of a particular skill in subsequent environments. For example, public transportation education is functional, if

and only if the student will access and use public transportation in postgraduate subsequent environments. Another example of functionality would be test taking or study skills for the college bound student with disabilities. What is functional and appropriate for one individual in subsequent environments may not be functional and appropriate for another. Thus, any formal mass marketed "Functional" curriculum series must be assessed for individual relevance when planning the transition. The curriculum skills or objectives for individuals with disabilities are functional when based on the individual's need. However, some "functional" skills should be applicable to all students. For example, the goals for every high school student should be to develop employment skills, such as time management, personal hygiene, and social and interpersonal skills (Stuart & Smith, 2002).

Another dominant theme in planning and achieving transition goals is referred to as an "outcome oriented" or a "top down" approach (Patton, et al, 1997; Shearin et al, 1999). In such an approach, outcomes are identified first, and skill development focuses on achieving those outcomes. Essentially, in order for students successfully transition from school to adult life, they need to know "where" they are going and "how" to get there (Shearin et al, 1999). There are variety of methods to incorporate a life skills or functional orientations to include transition objectives. First, schools can establish a separated life skills transition oriented curriculum for individuals with disabilities. Students would attend one class that covers specifically life skills/ transition or transition topics. Secondly, schools can adopt methods that integrate transition related skills or topics into pre-existing classes. For example, a general math course could be complimented with meaningful activities such as managing personal finances, checking

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or budgeting. Most importantly, however, transition related curriculum goals should be locally reference, based on the immediate environments student will transition to (Patton, et al 1997). It is imperative to consider the student's subsequent environments and their need to apply the skills.

Morningstar and Kleinhammer (1999) described a postgraduate transition program called: "Commencement". In this program, student with disabilities participate in transition activities between the ages of 18 to 21, following their normal graduation activities at age 18, however, they receive their high school diploma at age 21, when their eligibility for special education services ends. During the ages of 18-21 students receive transition planning and support completely within the community. Activities are coordinated between the student's school and adult agency personnel. This transition-planning program attempts to address each individual's goals within community-based environments. This postgraduate transition planning strategy allows for the uniqueness of each individual's future environment. For example, one student may be receiving academic instruction from a community college and another may be receiving support in a community-based employment. According to Morningstar and Kleinhammer (1999), a supportive educational environment is composed of a community of leaders, teachers, and counselors that value the needs of the non-college bound students.

Integrating transition goals and objectives within a curriculum can be challenging for educational practitioners. Academic expectations due to both local school objectives and standardized testing implications impact the implementation of transition objectives. Unfortunately, it was found in some schools, students who chose a transition related academic program would not receive a standard diploma. Students are expected to choose

between academic programs ending in a standardized achievement test resulting in a standard diploma or a community-based program leading to a certificate of completion (Hasazi, et al 1999).

Early planning for effective transition is suggested. Due the high drop out rates of learning disabled population, transition planning should begin much earlier than current practices and legal requirements (Brinckerhoff, 1996). Secondly the transition-planning meetings are independent of the individual's IEP meeting. IEP goals are usually academic in nature, whereas transition goals are of life skills in focus. Goals addressed in transition plans should assist the student to deal with the demands of adulthood. An appropriate and comprehensive transition plan identifies the individual's need with disabilities (Patton, et al, 1997). For most individuals with disabilities, transition goals encompass a wide range of objectives that may not necessarily be covered within a textbook or within a classroom setting. Transition legislations require schools to emphasize curricula beyond academics and prepare students for the demands of adulthood (Chadsey-Rusch & Rusch, 1996).

IEP And Transition Planning. The written transition component of the individual's IEP has been identified as a major concern (Steere & Cavaiuolo, 2002). It appears that individual's transition goals and objectives were deficient in many respects. For example, transition goals were not based on the student's preferences, but were vague, outdated and unclear. Student's interests, preferences, strengths and needs were not reflected in those goals. Thus, true individual goals and aspirations were not addressed (Shearin, et al, 1999; Thoma et al, 2001). Other negative findings regarding IEP compliances include unclear education goals, lack of linkages with resource agencies, unidentified responsible

personnel to implement goals and objectives, and lack of time lines. Also, many important areas such as family planning, personal care, and safety areas were not in the transition plans.

It is suggested along with a separate transition meeting, a separates transition document compliment the students' IEP, should list transition goals and objectives, such as an Individual Transition Plan (ITP). The ITP specifically lists goals and objectives, responsible individuals to implement the goals and objectives, and relevant supports needed for the individual to achieve these goals. Thoma (2002) suggests that compliance to the transition law and adherence to the actual wording of the law, teacher preparation and in service programs are needed to promote teachers' knowledge of students preferences and interest while developing a transition plan.

Community Preparation. Successful transition education *requires* pre-vocational training programs that include natural employment training (Stuart & Smith, 2002). Preparing for community-based experiences for individuals with disabilities is two fold. First, individuals must be prepared to transition into the work place. Secondly, a relationship must be established with businesses to accept individuals with disabilities in the working environments. Individuals with disabilities experience successful work experiences when business companies have adopted a philosophy supporting employment of individuals with disabilities. There are several large national corporations to formally accept and include employment of individuals with disabilities. For example, Pizza Hut Incorporate has adopted a corporate program called "Jobs Plus", to support managers who employ, train, and support individuals with disabilities (Householder & Jansen, 1999). The "Jobs Plus" employment program provide managers with training and

education on working individuals with disabilities, as well as rewards and recognition for their development of employees with disabilities. By employing individuals with disabilities, local communities benefit from additional tax revenue, while those individuals become successful as independent community members.

Natural work environments with natural supports are preferred over classroom-simulated experiences. Community placement during the transition process allows individuals with disabilities to gain from "hands on learning" experiences (McKenna, 2000). Thus, off campus community jobs are more valuable to the transition of students than simulated classroom activities (Brolin, 1995). A variety of community work experiences allows for individuals to assess their likes and dislikes. Multiple and quality employment options allow individuals to discover their work preferences (Houseleheolder & Jansen, 1999). Also, community work experiences allow for natural support, the development of independent skills and behaviors needed in such environments. All efforts should be made to place individuals in community-based employment with natural environment supports (Frank & Sitlington, 2000).

Along with the educational institutions, parents play an important and active role to provide support for their children. Parents can help facilitate and support community-based experiences for their children in a variety of ways. First, parents could share their feelings about work experiences and independent living with their children (Janowitz & Cort, 1999). Secondly, parents can organize summer employment opportunities, camp experiences, or volunteer opportunities, so that students with disabilities can continue to discover their overall interests and abilities (Brinckerhoff, 1996).

In sum, the value of community- based work experiences is supported throughout

transition planning. There are many factors contributing to the success of community-based employment, such as effective collaboration among various individuals and the needs of the community. Community- based employment is developed based on the needs and resources within that community (Brolin, 1995).

Although opportunities have been enhanced for individuals with disabilities, widespread employment of individuals with disabilities is not occurring (Householder & Jansen, 1999). To establish business partnerships to promote employment of those individuals, business sector involvement in transition planning and implementation is necessary. Quality business partnerships with schools depend on communication of the business sector's needs. Therefore, business needs and expectations may be reflected in a school's curriculum (Knight & Aucoin, 1999). It is also important for schools to interface with the business companies to get feedback on student job placements.

The key to the successful community-based employment in transition process is twofold. The first is for schools to establish business partnerships within community. The local educational institution must support business partnerships within the community. In some communities, business relationships must be initiated and fortified, and in other communities, business partnerships are based on an accepted corporate philosophy to employ individuals with disabilities. Quality businesses partnerships may be developed by contacting business companies that have had succeeded in employing individuals with disabilities. This can serve as a resource for potential employers to learn about the employment of individuals with disabilities (Householder & Jansen, 1999). To gain the support of community businesses it may also be necessary to provide employers training and support. When employers are informed, educated, and involved, positive outcomes

may occur to allow those individuals with disabilities to succeed in their career development. The second key component to the successful community- based employment is to provide necessary supports. For example, third party job coaching can be considered on an individual basis. Thus, individuals can be monitored in their transition from the classroom into community.

Summary

There are many factors contributing to successful transition planning for individuals with disabilities. Regardless of an individual's disability, transition planning outcomes must be based on his/her desires and needs. Third parties may not truly reveal actual transition practices from the vantage point of the consumer, the individual with disabilities. Sadly, this fact was highlighted in the study conducted by Hitchings and colleagues (2001) regarding the inadequate transition outcomes for college students. In addition, collaboration and communication is essential to successful transition planning. Formality of the process must be achieved through organization and written agreements of all parties involved in the transition process. In terms of the individual's success, too much is at stake without proper delineation of duties and responsibilities in the transition process. Individuals with disabilities must be linked to outside service agencies prior to high school graduation, with transition planning beginning early in high school. Community business partnerships are key to successful integration of individuals with disabilities. Partnerships must be developed and fortified with the support of schools and agencies. Community integration depends on social acceptance of individuals with disabilities. In such, individuals with disabilities need social skills as well as vocational skills to work and live successfully within the community. And finally, transition

planning should start early in one's educational career. However, delayed transition planning will seriously impact individuals on the transition from high school to their post school environments.

In order to investigate transition practices of individuals with disabilities, it is necessary to examine transition effectiveness from all parties involved in the transition process. This present study attempts to reveal transition success from various perspectives such as: a) individuals with disabilities, b) employers of individuals with disabilities, c) parents of individuals with disabilities, and d) third party service agencies which serve individuals with disabilities. Ultimately, this study hopes to reveal relevant information regarding collaboration among individuals in the transition process to support students with disabilities in their readiness for post school environments. This study also will examine the current status of student transition practices in Southern New Jersey and report existing concerns and problems.

Chapter 3

Methods

This study examined transition planning and activities from the individuals involved

in the transition process, including parents, individuals with disabilities, business

managers and representatives of third party adult agencies. Data were collected and

analyzed to provide different perspectives of those individuals. Qualitative research

methodologies were used to analyze data based on individual interviews and self-report

surveys.

Participants

Business Managers. Business representatives were informally solicited for this study.

Efforts were made to gather a cross section of businesses that employ individuals with

disabilities. Business participants were found from a variety of sources, for example,

some were recommended by adult agencies that provide community-based, supported

employment services, as well as school personnel. A total of 5 business companies

participated in this study. Three of the 5 business companies were large-scale regional

franchises, and one was a large-scale national franchise. One business was a small

privately owned establishment. Of the 5 business companies, 3 employed individual with

disabilities a minimum of 5-9 years, 2 employed over 10 years. The percentage of

individuals with disabilities compared to non- disabled employees ranged from 3% to

17.6% of the total employee population. Table 1 provides general information of the

participating business companies.

Table 1: General Information of Participating Business Companies

Employment/ Business	Regional – Chain Convenience Store	Privately Owned Local Business	Local /Regional Large Food Store Chain (A)	Local Large Food Store Chain (B)	National Retail Store
Years Employing Individual with Disabilities	+10 Years	5-9 Years	+ 10 Years	5-9 Years	5-9 Years
Number of Employees	17	30	65	260	36
Number of Employees with Disabilities	3	2	1	8	3
Percent of Employees with Disabilities	17.6%	6.7%	1.5%	3%	8.3%

All business representatives held managerial positions with their respective

companies, 3 female and 2 male managers. They had been with their current company

from 4 to 17 years, with their experiences working with individuals with disabilities from

4 to 17 years. Table 2 provides general information of the participating business

representatives.

Table 2: General Information of Participating Business Managers

BUSINESS/ MANAGERS	GENDER	YEARS WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES	POSITION AT COMPANY	YEARS WITH COMPANY
Regional – Chain Convenience Store	M	15+	Store Manager	4
Local Business- Food Based Privately owned Store	F	4	Store Manager	13
Local /Regional Large Food Store Chain (A)	M	4	Store Manager	15
Local / Large Food Store Chain (B)	F	17	Assisting Store Manger, Front End Supervisor	17
National Retail Store	F	7	Store Manger	12

Agencies. School personnel were initially and informally solicited by phone calls to recommend agency representatives. An introduction of the study was provided to each participant and tentative commitments of the third party agencies were attained. A total of 5 representatives participated in the study. Of those, 2 were state agencies, 1 was a college representative, 1 was a high school representative, and 1 was a privately owned consulting agency, 3 males, and 2 females. All agency representatives worked with individuals with disabilities, with a minimum of 16 years and a maximum of 33 years experience. Table 3 presents general information of the participating agency representatives.

Table 3: General Information of Participating Agency Representatives

AGENCY DESCRIPTORS:	GENDER	YEARS WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES	POSITION WITH AGENCY	YEARS WITH AGENCY
State Agency # 1	M	16	Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor	15
State Agency # 2	M	18	Habilitation Plan Coordinator	17
College Representative	M	33	Director of Special Needs Services	7
Private Third Party Agency	F	25	Owner/ operator	2
Regional High School Counselor	F	17	Adult High School Counselor	8

Parents. Parent participants were referred by a third party agency and school personnel. A total of 7 parents, 2 male, 5 female, of which both parents of two students, and one parent of 3 students participated in the study. The age range of participating parents was 40- 60 years. Of those, 1 parent attained a high school diploma, 5 parents had completed 4 year college programs, and 1 completed one semester at a community college. Table 4 provides general information of the participating parents in this study.

Table 4: General Information of Participating Parents

Parent/ Parents	Sex	Age Range	Level of Education	Children	Other Children
#1	M F	50-55	College College	One Child, 22 Specific Learning Disability Mild / Moderate	None
#2	M F	45-50 50-55	College + College +	One Child, 20 Down Syndrome	2 Siblings
#3	F	40-45	High School	One Child, 22 Cerebral Palsy Wheel Chair	3 Siblings
#4	F	50-55	Community College 1 Semester	One Child,19 Learning Disabilities	None
#5	F	55-60	College	One Child, 20 Learning Disabilities	1 Sibling

Individuals with Disabilities. Individuals participating in this study were referred by

third party adult service agencies or school personnel. All individuals participants were

female between the ages of 19 to 22. Of the 5 participants, 4 had graduated from high

school. One participant was planned to complete her transition program in school in June

2003. Table 5 provides general information of participating individuals. The disabilities

of individuals participating in this study range from mild to severe disabilities. These

individuals attended a variety of education settings. Two individuals attended vocational

school programs, two individuals were mainstreamed in public school settings and one

attended a school for special needs students only.

Table 5: General Information of Participating Individuals with Disabilities

SEX	AGE	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION:	DISABILITY DESCRIPTIONS	SCHOOL SETTING
FEMALE	22	June 2002	Specific Learning Disability syndrome Moderated Mental Retardation	Private Special School
FEMALE	20	June 2003	Down syndrome-Moderate Mental retardation	Mainstream Setting Public school
FEMALE	22	June 2002	Cerebral Palsy Limited mobility -Wheel chair	Mainstreams Setting Public School
FEMALE	19	June 2002	Learning Disabilities	High School & Vocational School Combination
FEMALE	20	June 2001	Learning Disabilities	High School & Vocational School Combination

Measurements

Survey. Survey items were developed based on the research findings of Chadsey–Rusch

& Rusch, (1996); Thoma, Rogan and Baker, (2001); Patton, Cronin, Jairrels, (1997);

Hasazi, Furney, Destefano, (1999); Morningstar & Kleinhammer, (1999); Zhang &

Stecker, (2001); Steere & Cavaiuolo, (2002); Kraemer & Blacher, (2001); Knight &

Aucoin, (1999); Heward & Orlansky, (1992); Stuart & Smith, (2002); Knott & Asselin,

(1999) cited in transition literature. Each survey item attempted to obtained participants'

responses related to transition planning and activities. A total of 10 items were included

in the survey designed for individuals with disabilities with 8 yes/no, and 2 opened end

questions. A total of 16 items were developed for the parents with 12 "yes/no" 4 "open

ended" questions. The business survey included a total of 11 questions, with 5 "yes/ no"

and 6 open ended questions. Figures 1,2,3 present the survey items.

Figure 1: Individual Survey

Please circle the appropriate response:

1. Did you participate in your IEP/ Transition meetings?   YES   NO

2. Did you have a transition plan?   YES   NO

3. Are you informed about transition plans is?   YES   NO

4. Did / do team members understand your interest and desires?   YES   NO

5. Did? Do you discuses Post secondary education?   YES   NO

6. Did or do you discuss post secondary livings arrangements?   YES   NO

7. Did or do you discuss Adult life issuers?   YES   NO

Circle Areas, which you have discussed regarding Adult Life Issues:

Independent living   Financial   Transportation   Community Agencies Support

8. Were goals and objectives geared towards your   YES   NO
    Future post school outcomes?

9. Mark the area which best describe your current Post secondary School status:

School ___   Not working ___   Working___ Not in school___

10. Mark the areas which best describe your social / recreational time:

___ Very involved   ___ Somewhat involved   ____   Would like to be more involved

___ Not involved in recreational activities

Figure 2: Parent Survey

1. PARENT'S NAME: _____

2. CHILD'S INFORMATION:

2.1. AGE_____

2.2 PRESENT / PREVIOUS SCHOOL SETTING:
___Public ____ Private Special Education School

1. Do you feel transition planning began in timely fashion?   YES   NO

2. Are / were you well informed of the various support adult agencies
   To serve your sons and daughters?   YES   NO

3. Are you satisfied with the overall transition process with your child?   YES   NO

4. Were community based employment   opportunities made available?
   To your son or daughter?   YES   NO

5. Did you have actual transition plan?   YES   NO

6. Were you aware of transition plan were?   YES   NO

7. Did / do team members understand your child's' interest and desires?   YES   NO

8 Did you discuses Post secondary Options with your child such as:
   ____ Livings arrangements ____Independent living ____Financial
   ____Transportation   ___Community Agencies Support

Figure 2: Parent Survey (continued)

9. Were goals and objectives geared towards your child's future?
   Post school outcomes?   YES   NO

10. Mark the areas which best describe your child's current post secondary
    And / or work status:

____School   ____Not in School   ___ Working Not working ___

11. What best describes your child's Recreational/ leisure status:

___ Very involved ____ somewhat involved

___ Would like to be more involved ____ Not involved

12. At educational meetings, your interests, and questions were
    Acknowledge appropriately?   YES   NO

13. At educational meetings, was technical jargon used
    That you are unfamiliar with?   YES   NO

14. Does your school have a transition coordinator?
    (One person who was responsible for transition planning?)   YES   NO

15. Did you have an opportunity, organized by your school?
    To interact with adult service provider?   YES   NO

16. At educational meetings, communication among individuals was:

___Excellent ___Satisfactory ____Not Satisfactory

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Figure 3: Business Survey

1. Approximately how long has your business employed individuals with disabilities?

_____ Less than 1 year _____ 1 - 4 years ___ 5. - 9-year ___more than 10 years

2. What is your approximate total number of non-disabled employees?
   What is your total number of employees with disabilities?
   _____ Less than 5 ___ 5- 19 _____ 20-34 ___ 35-49 ____50-64 ___ 65-79 __ 80-94 ___ over 100-

3. What are the approximate ages of your youngest individual?
   With disabilities and your oldest individual with disabilities?

4. Did the individual possess adequate prerequisites skills?
   Prior to employments?   YES   NO

5. Are you satisfied with the supports provided for the
   Individuals with disabilities?   YES   NO

6. Have your questions or concerns regarding employment
   Issues been handled appropriately with responsible
   Job coaches or schools?   YES   NO

7. Mark the which best applies to the individuals with disabilities
   Which you employ:

___High school program ___outside adult agencies _____ other-

8. Would you recommend employing individuals with disabilities to other business?
                                                                      YES   NO

9. Would you be willing to mentor new business partnerships?
   For business that would like to employ individuals with disabilities?   YES   NO

10. What areas of successful employment of individuals with disabilities do you consider worth noting?

11. What areas of employment do you feel are necessary to best serve the needs of individuals with disabilities and the needs of businesses?

Interview. The interview protocols were designed with "opened end" questions in order for participants to elaborate on previous experiences regarding transition planning and activities. Interview protocols were developed based on the findings of Chadsey–Rusch & Rusch, (1996); Thoma, Rogan and Baker, (2001); Patton, Cronin, Jairrels, (1997); Hasazi, Furney, Destefano, (1999); Morningstar & Kleinhammer, (1999); Zhang & Stecker, (2001); Steere & Cavaiuolo, (2002); Kraemer & Blacher, (2001); Knight & Aucoin, (1999); Heward & Orlansky, (1992); Stuart & Smith, (2002); Knott & Asselin, (1999) cited in transition literature. The intent of the interview protocols was to inspire participants to elaborate transition issues noted on the survey. Each interview protocol consisted of 6 to 8 questions. The interview protocols for individuals with disabilities consisted of 6 questions, 8 for business participants, 7 for parents, and 6 for agency representatives. The interview protocols are presented in Figures 4,5,6 and 7.

Figure 4: Interview Protocols for Individuals with Disabilities

1. What type of transition activities or educational experiences did you have while in school? (Promotes if needed) or what types of activities or educational experiences did you participate in that help you prepare for adulthood?

2. Tell me about your transition meetings. Did you attend any of your transition meetings?

3. How were your personal interest and desires considered in the meetings?

4. Tell me about your future goals? (Work, living....)

5. Where do you feel you have been the most successful to date?

6. Did you feel you were able to make independent regarding your future, career, and activities during your transition meetings? Did you ever discuss or participated in self-determination exercise/ activities?

Figure 5: Interview Protocols for Parents/ Guardians

1. Please tell me about how your school prepared your son or daughter for adulthood.

2. Do you feel you were informed of the various support adult agencies, or the next steps following high school graduation?

3. Did you attend transitions/ educational meetings for your son or daughter? Please describe for me transitions/ educational meetings you attended?

4. What areas of transition planning do feel your school was successful in?

5. What area of transition planning do you feel needed improvement? Or what would you have done differently regarding transitioning for your sons or daughter?

6. What accomplishments do you hope for you son/daughter in the next 5 years?

7. What steps are necessary for your son or daughter achieves these goals? Are you aware of the agencies available to assist you in helping y our sons or daughter achieve these goals?

Figure 6: Interview Protocols for Business Managers

1. What factors have contributed to the success of employing individuals with disabilities?

2. How would you describe the support of out side agencies or job coaches (if applicable)?

3. From your experiences form working with individuals with disabilities, do you feel individual possessed adequate prerequisites skills?

4. How did you train the individuals with disabilities?

5. What would you recommend other businesses that plan to employee individuals with disabilities? What would your suggestions be?

6. What should schools do to better prepare individuals with disabilities to work in the community?

7. What do you think businesses could do better to assist employment of individuals with disabilities?

8. Regarding employment of individuals with disabilities, do you have any further comment or suggestions?

Figure 7: Interview Protocols for Third Party Adult Service Agencies

1. What factors do you feel contributed to successful collaboration with schools? What factors do you feel contributed to successful collaboration with business?

2. What are the factors hindering this collaboration?

3. Where do you see the need for service improvements?

4. Describe knowledge of your services among the population to be served? Do you feel the public is aware of your services? Why? Why not?

5. Once qualifying for your agency's services, how would your describe generally weakness and strengths individuals possess regarding transitioning into adulthood, or the next post graduate experience?

6. What do you expect the school to do in preparation for transitions activities?

Procedures

Survey. The survey was forward to participants prior to each interview for their review. At the time of the interview, the participants could ask questions if they needed any clarification. The survey was completed when the researcher arrived for the interview. Reading assistance and clarification of questions were provided if needed during the survey.

Interview. The interviews were conducted at flexible times and convenient locations for the participants. The most appropriate settings for interview/survey sessions were determined based on individual relevance to the study. For example, business surveys and interview sessions were conducted in business company settings. Individuals with disabilities and parents were interviewed at their homes. Agency representatives were interviewed at their offices. The author developed initial rapport with the participants prior to the interview process. This was accomplished by general topical conversation, acknowledging acquaintances, or talking about the weather. Each interview lasted approximately 35- 45 minutes in an area without distractions. Continuous prompting to the participants was provided throughout the interview process in order for participants to completely elaborate their responses. For example, if a participant responded, "that job didn't work out", the researcher prompted, "please list some of the reasons 'why' that job did not work". A tape recorder was used during the interview for data collection accuracy.

Data Analysis Data were gathered and analyzed using an emergent theme approach. All survey questions were calculated using percentages according to "yes" and "no"

responses. All interview tapes were transcribed.   The results of surveys and interviews were organized into themes associated with transition practices.

The Business Community

An interview together with a survey was conducted to 5 managers of 5 different companies. Overall factors contributing to the employment of individuals with disabilities were the major focus during the interviews. These factors include external and internal measures, such as, support of outside agencies or job coaches, the individual prerequisite skills and abilities, and job training. Recommendations for schools and businesses were also included.

Survey. A survey consisting of 11 questions was provided to each participating businesses manager. There were 3 questions regarding general information on basic employment statistics of their employees with disabilities, such as number of employees with disabilities that have been displayed in Tables 1 and 2 in Chapter 3. The survey also provided 5 "Yes/ No" questions regarding employment of individuals with disabilities. The Table 6 presents the business participants' responses.

Table 6: Survey Responses of Business Managers

QUESTIONS	YES	NO	UNCERTAIN
Did individuals with disabilities possess prerequisite skills?	60%	40%	
Were you satisfied with supports?	100%		
Were educational issues addressed properly	100%		
Are you willing to mentor other businesses	50%	40%	10%
Would you recommend other business to employ individuals with disabilities?	100%		

All business participants were satisfied with outside job support for their individuals with disabilities. When asking business managers about their satisfaction regarding outside job support from schools or job coaches, business manager indicated their questions and concerns were sufficiently addressed from educational institutions or third party agencies. Though not all participants would be willing mentor other business companies, all participants would recommend other businesses to employ individuals with disabilities. The majority of the participants indicated those employees with disabilities possessed prerequisite skills prior to their job placements.

Interviews. Community business members were informally solicited in person by the researcher. An introduction was provided including an overview of the study and its intended purpose. Contact persons' names and telephone numbers were obtained to arrange convenient meeting times for the interview. The interview consisted of 8 questions designed to elicited information on business's perspectives on the overall employment and transition activities of individuals with disabilities within the community. Some major areas addressed were: general factors contributing to the success of individuals with disabilities in the workplace, individuals' prerequisite skills and abilities, business companies' training methods for individuals with disabilities, and suggestions for schools and agencies to better prepare individuals with disabilities for community-based employment. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. A cassette tape recorder was used during each interview for accuracy. Though each business was unique in its services and consumers, successful employment of individuals with disabilities was attributed to both internal and external factors, personal characteristics and psychological and sociological factors. Internal factors were

workplace acceptance, job modifications and instructional strategies, and overall positive acceptance of individuals with disabilities. The external factors considered were job-coaching and communication between businesses and families.

Internal Factors Impacting Transition Success

Workplace Acceptance. Business participants noted patience, tolerance and flexibility and open-mindedness as necessary elements to successful employment for individuals with disabilities. One business manager described his philosophy, as well as his view of the "general public perception". He stated, "a lot of people (the general public) don't think they (individual with disabilities) can learn. They can... you just start slow, constantly work with them". One business manager said, "you must be open minded.... Other people figure they can't learn, they can with help and time.". Another business manager urged, "you have to be opened minded, all people deserve a chance...everyone should have a 'shot' (at working in a job)". And finally he concluded, "don't write them (individuals with special needs)...give them the opportunity to try...we shouldn't discriminate". One manager shared her personal experience regarding negative predictions and low expectations to a new employee with disabilities. She described her hesitation, " I remember, I thought to myself, this kid is NOT going to work out!". As it turned out, this particular individual far exceeded her initial expectations with guidance and support of the job coach. She finalized her experiences, "you have to be optimistic". Another manager described a similar experience of accepting and understanding individuals with disabilities at the worksite. This manager acknowledged how she " unfairly" compared the two employees with disabilities placed by the same private school. The first employee was a "very high functioning " individual. " This was a super

star... with the exception of the register, which she could do, (the register) but she was very shy.... She just could do anything we showed her. She excelled at everything." Contrary, the second student employees "were not like 'Mary' (the super star), the productivity was not there". She explained how her understanding and perceptions of individuals with disabilities changed, " *I* have to learn to be flexible and especially *I* have to learn to understand kids are at different levels, ...I also learned it would take longer (to learn) and most importantly, some kids won't be able to take it (a job duty) to another level. I learned to appreciate the differences among employees with disabilities." She stated, " Still at times, I have to remind myself that they (the two employees from the same school) are different and know I shouldn't' compare the individuals". In regard to expectations, one business manager indicated, " you should always be realistic."

Job Modifications and Strategies. Though all business employers used various strategies to direct individuals with disabilities, 2 of the 5 participants made unique comments. These comments include an overall theme inherent in the strategies and job modifications for individuals with disabilities. One participant summarized," We train them (individuals with disabilities) just as others. They go through our one day training like everyone else at our training center, and once they are in the store, I train them (individuals with disabilities) like the other individuals, but with awareness to the individuals' limitations". The most common comment on training strategies was "taking time to train". One business manager indicated the importance of "investing training time" with individuals. He stated, " You *must* spend time with the individuals. Start slow, constantly work with them". Another business manager also stated "you must take one step at a time". She added, "*wait* to multi task". "You have to go step by step",

the other manager indicated. One business manager also emphasized, "you must first put the kids in an entry level positions". A second manager noted, "you must modify task and expectations". While another business manager agreed, " It is very important to provide 'hands on, one –on- one' training." He continued, " you just can't *tell* them (individuals with special needs) what to do, you have to *show* them."

Individualized instruction. In addition to generic job modifications, business managers tailor job training to individual's abilities. For example, two business managers indicated they provide task lists for individuals to follow. One used "little job cards" (index cards) with the employee's jobs/ duties written on them. Another used a clipboard with written instructions to avoid a misplacement. "Because it can't be lost as easy as a paper", she added. Different strategies were used to help a non-reader employee. She explains, "I use little Mnemonics with him...such as finding the 'M' in that aisles and you will find meat." Also, she helped one employee with disabilities learn deli slicer safety. "Though he had the ability of physical hand coordination, he lacked cognitive skills to block distractions", according to his employer, and she said, " He would get side tracked by outside dialogue". Through assertive exercises and practice over time, the individual learned to politely tell customers or fellow employees to "PLEASE do not talk to me while I am slicing!" And another manager stated, " You should always provide prompts when needed" to individuals with disabilities.

External Factors Contributing to Transition Success

Job Coaching. Though each job-coaching scenario was different, 5 business managers indicated that on site job coaching was a contributing factor to successful employment of individuals with disabilities. Those business managers acknowledged one particular

private school for its superior job coaching and follow-up support. In fact, two students with disabilities who graduated from that school have been employed since their graduation. The relationship between the school and the company has been established so that the company could "unofficially" contact this particular private school if they ever needed support or provide advisement regarding their graduates. In contrast, 2 managers indicated the inefficient job coaching support of a third party agency. The same complaint was noted from each business, such as, the agency representative would visit the stores to monitor their " client" (the employee with disabilities) at incorrect work times, even when the business managers and fellow store representatives provided (repeated) correct work schedules of the " clients". Excessive turnover rate of job coaches of the agency was noted problematic to all business companies.

Job Training through School Based Job Simulations. Two business mangers note prior job simulations opportunities assist individuals with disabilities when transitioning to community- based employment One manager noted a local private school's program: "They (the school) have everything right there (at the school). Though they (individuals with disabilities) go through "our" training (the stores), they still learn a lot about the job right at school. Once they come here I can help them in their weak areas. It's still a little different out here in the real world". Two employers indicated lack of prerequisites skills could be attributed to the actual "real life experience of on the job training". Though business managers acknowledged school based job simulations, they agreed the multitude of variables in real life situations that can not all be replicated in classroom models. For example, the one manager indicated that sometimes the lack of skills could be something

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" inside" the individuals said, "kids may be nervous about being out in the community for the first time."

Parents' Ongoing Support. During the interview, 3 business managers surveyed noted the importance of parental involvement and communication. A positive rapport between business managers and families promotes solid and supportive relationships with parents. According to those managers, parental contact is essential for employment success of individuals with disabilities. Each of them indicated, in particular, parent contact is important when job coaching has completed. For example, each business manager thought parental communication is crucial especially when an individual has medical issues that may impact their job performance. A contact with the parents will reveal a possible understanding of the individual's behavior changes, such as medicine changes or home- based scenarios.

Psychological and Sociological Factors Impacting Transition Success

Community Acceptance. During the interview, one business manager discussed community acceptance of individual with disabilities. This manager noted the different attitudes towards individuals with disabilities in different communities when her store moved from one community to another. She noted customers from the community with the higher income status "didn't seem too readily acceptable or be patient" with individuals with disabilities. Customers would "complain" about the employees with disabilities. A common customer service complaint was "they (employees with disabilities) were 'too slow or not bagging right'. In contrast, customers at her current store, located in a more financially diverse community, are more acceptable to

individuals with disabilities. To date she has not had any complaints during her management period at the new location.

Social & Emotional Supports During the interview, business managers mentioned store based supplemental counseling to support employees with disabilities. For example, one store manager stated, "first, you must manage with support from the department head." The same store manager added, "we also set up a peer buddy system and provide counseling as needed when there are problems". A different store manager noted the need for sensitivity to the emotional status of individuals. He elaborated, " As well, you must talk calmly when an individual gets upset".

Personal Attributes. Two business managers indicated an individual's personality and character attributes promote employment success. One manager noted, " Though kids (individuals with disabilities) may lack some prerequisites, they have other skills which contribute to their success." For example, he explained, " I can train on certain skills, like stocking shelf and cleaning, but I can't train a kid to be dedicated. Dedication to work is a plus. I can't teach that." Another business manager agreed on this when describing his work environment, " people (individuals with disabilities) want to be here. They like, and enjoy, being out in the work environment." The other manger reported, " I have a person with a physical disability. He moves around like everyone else, he doesn't miss a beat. We look forward to seeing him, he makes us laugh, he sings for us, we *all* get along, and we all help each other".

The managers agreed basic intangible beliefs and or opinions regarding the acceptance of individuals with disabilities are crucial factors contributing to positive community

work experiences for individuals. These factors are overall acceptance of individuals with disabilities, community acceptance, and ongoing support services.

Two business mangers made recommendations transcending actual practices and or strategies. One noted, " schools could help by letting 'regular' kids (students without disabilities) to work with the special education kids more at school". I would *think* this would help with people understanding." The other major recommendation was based on the practices of one international fast food company. According to this manager who previously worked for this company, stated, "it *was* corporate philosophy to employ individuals with disabilities." He explained how this company developed jobs with specific tasks tailored to individuals with disabilities. The jobs this company developed were individualized in such that employees with disabilities could successfully complete tasks in natural environment. Also, jobs were developed in such that both managers and non disabled fellow employees could assist in job training.

The Opinions of the Third Party Agencies

An interview was conducted to 5 participants of different third party agencies. They were 1 representative from a college special service department, 2 from state agencies, 1 from private service agency, and 1 from a high school. An introduction call was made to describe the interview and purpose. A consent letter was forwarded to each representative and retrieved at the time of the interview. Each interview was scheduled based on convenient times for the participants.

During the interview, 6 open- ended questions regarding transition outcomes for individuals with disabilities were asked. Those questions were focused on factors contributing to successful collaboration. Some areas investigated were: factors

contributing to, or prohibiting successful collaboration among individuals in the transition process such as parents, school officials and third party agencies; post graduate skills required for individual with disabilities; public awareness of agency services, and the roles and responsibilities of schools in transition preparation. Each interview lasted approximately 35-45 minutes and recorded for accuracy. The interview results are summarized into the following themes.

Successful Collaboration

All participating representative noted "knowledge" as a basis for effective transitioning. Successful collaboration for effective transition planning must include knowledge of the individual with disabilities, knowledge of agency's services, and knowledge of businesses' needs and accommodations. Each representative stated the importance of understanding the individual's personal attributes. According to one representative, "it is crucial to have a common knowledge of a person's strengths and weaknesses...we must maximize on their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses prior to agency referrals".

Knowledge of the individuals may be obtained from personal philosophies. As two representatives noted, collaboration is difficult when there are "conflicting philosophies" or " different perceptions" of the individuals with disabilities. One representative indicated that parent's perceptions and philosophies may also impede the collaboration of the transition process. He said, "some parents have an old view about life for their kids after school. They (parents) can be overprotective of their children and not let them try different jobs. They want to shelter them from the world".

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Employers' philosophies or perceptions can impede the collaboration of the transition

process. Two representatives indicated negative perceptions of the individuals with

disabilities can be detrimental to successful transition outcomes. One representative

noted, " sometimes people (employers) see the disability rather than the individual

without truly understanding them." The college representative indicated that an

employer's philosophy may also negatively impact the successful transition of

individuals into the work place. He elaborated, " lack of knowledge fuels misperceptions

and causes fears of employing individuals with disabilities in the workplace... they

(business) see them as costing money. With businesses, it's all about bottom line. They

don't know statistically and in research, individuals with disabilities have overall better

attendance rates and better attitudes. They don't see all the positive aspects."

Representatives suggested the need for positive and optimistic attitudes towards

individuals with disabilities. For example, one agency representative urged, "you must be

positive in your approach from the beginning. You must believe that individuals continue

to learn throughout a lifetime". This opinion was expressed by other participants as

noted, " we never give up on the student, even if they seem to give up";

" We just keep trying, if one job doesn't work out we get back on the saddle and try

again. But we always make sure the client feels good about himself or herself. And they

know it's okay!"

As the third party consultants, they play a role to collaborate with schools and

business companies. They noted, "it is a twofold process, you need to understand their

needs (business) and you need to understand of the individual's needs." One agency

representative indicated, " transition preparation begins only when you know individual's

vocational skills and abilities, medical status and social, emotional status." An appropriate match is needed between individuals with disabilities and business companies. Being an agency consultant, one should know both the business environment and the needs of the individuals with disabilities. As one representative described, " you must know the employment setting". Another representative stated, " you must know the business limitations, and what accommodations are available for the person". Another agency representative provided a recent work- based problem of one of her clients. She explained it took her several months to teach her client a task with 16 steps to complete a job in a restaurant. One day a co-worker decided to add tasks that were unfamiliar to the individual. She told her "with our kids (individuals with disabilities), you just can't change things at the mid-stream".

Parents' Role. All agencies noted the important role parents play in the transition process. The college representative stated, "Sometimes you have extremes. You have parents that are overly involved, then, you have parents who are not involved at all. They trust schools will automatically do ' what' they are suppose to do". Most importantly, he noted, " we have to promote students to speak for themselves". He added, "It's a delicate balance. We are respectful of family support. We need family support, yet we have to give opportunities to kids to speak for themselves. It is truly a delicate balance ". He described a typical scenario indicating "too much parent involvement". He described a typical high school transition meeting when the questions "so, what do you want to do?" was directed to the student. He warned, " the silence is awkward, but eventually the student figures out that he (the college representative) really wants to hear from him (the student), not his parents, not his teacher just him, the student". By developing positive

parent rapport and trust, that the college representative referred to as one of the many "social variables" of the transition process, they (college special service department) can slowly introduce the skills of independent decision making and provide opportunities for those students with special needs. He emphasized, " However, it is always a delicate balance of many variables, you never want to offend anyone, particularly those parents who have traditionally steered education meetings at high school level. Also you don't want the student feel uncomfortable".

During the interview, 2 representatives indicated "parents need to be realistic in their expectations for their children". Parents also need to support their children. One representative emphasized, "parents have to allow kids opportunities to explore different options". He also added, "sometimes parents are overprotective of their children and limit their career options and overall emotional growth opportunities".

Transition Preparation

Schools' Role. All agencies identified schools as the entity responsible for transition related activities and services. The school's role in transition preparation and activities include coordinating transition meetings, providing transition education and activities and informing parents of various post school agencies. Transition planning and activities should be administered in a timely and efficient fashion. Effective transitioning planning for post school outcomes begins with early planning involvement and interventions by parties involved in the transition process. The adult high school representative noted, "By the time they (individuals with disabilities) are involved (their agency) it's too late to remediate certain skill areas. Schools should try to prevent the students from dropping out of school in the first place". Two representatives indicated the importance of early

contact with students with disabilities for effective transition planning. Both representatives agreed, " we must be involved before a student's senior year. One representative noted, " you don't want to see them (individuals with disabilities) later than 16". Another representative urged, "I would like to see the kids early, early, in their junior year, at the latest". Sadly, one representative described "the traditional scenario" in transition planning, as a "spring courtesy" meeting, because it is a last minute meeting during the spring of the student's senior year. " By then, it is really late to make a good transition for the student for the following year", he said, "we have to get into the school early!".

All representatives noted that the school is the primary entity responsible for transition related activities. All parties indicated transition planning and coordination is the responsibility of either the school's child study team (CST) and, or the school social worker. One agency specified, " The school's child study team should be primary coordinator and linking unit." The other agency suggested, " transition activities could be shared by both the CST and the school's social worker".

Transition Education and Activities. According to third party agency representatives, individuals with disabilities are deficient in functional life and work skills. From post school assessments, one representative specified, "kids need more living skills like writing checks, budgeting money, and the real world applications". Another representative emphasized the need for community-based instruction (CBI). She distinguished, "Community experiences are not limited to work-based skills. Of course you need to do normal work related skills, but, have to have other life skill training

experiences, such as bus training, public transportation, how to use a payphone or even ask for help."

This third party agency noted her observations of the differences between graduates of a private special education school and public high school in regard to transition related skills. She noted, " It seems the special education school graduates are great at work-related skills, such as cleaning, and mopping, but, don't have good social or good communication skills. Whereas, the regular high school kids (individuals with disabilities) don't have good work skills, they don't know how to mop, or line a trash can but are very social and have good communication skills." The high school representative indicated "the home school must teach study skills and other ways to try to keep kids from failing in the first place."

All agency representatives reported individuals with disabilities possess weakness in a variety of personal and social domains necessary for successful transition. They noted individuals' weaknesses to make their own decisions or speak on behalf of themselves. One agency representative suggested, "students may lack independence and decision making skills because they leave a very structured educational environment (high school). They were in a places where people did a lot for them... bells rang to tell them it was time to go, a lot of adults made decisions for them." Another agency noted similar issues, " some of my clients even have qualms about what to order at a restaurant, or how to introduce themselves during a scheduled interview. They are used to people making decisions for them and telling them what to do." She concluded, "it's not good when this happens". The college representative confirmed college students also demonstrate weaknesses in independent decision making skills. He noted, "we (college

special needs department) gear our services to meet the students where they are functionally, but often times students can't even articulate their special needs and don't understand their disabilities' impact." He noted, " All individuals are at different levels of emotional development. We have to support them (individuals with disabilities) where ever they are". He stressed, "we (educators, families, outside agencies) have done students a disservice if they (student with disabilities) graduate with a perfect GPA, but they can't pick up a phone to make an appointment." He urged, " kids have to learn to speak for themselves… you know that expression: if you teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime; if you give him a fish he eats for a day. We have to let kids begin managing things for themselves."

The high school representative noted social and personal issues impact her students. She explained, "a lot of the students have low self esteem, since they failed at their home school, and they don't follow through with commitments". She also noted external social economic issues, such as unemployment, poverty, lack transportation and lack of child care impact her students' transition success.

Knowledge of Services. Knowledge of agency's services varies according to the participating representatives. One agency noted, " I am beginning to get (see) a few younger clients (before their senior year), but I am not sure why". He noted, overall, the public is unaware of his agency's services. He added, "I have gone to schools on my own (without solicitation from the schools) to make presentations, people really don't know about us (his agency) ". He clarified, "many individuals come to us after the fact (high school graduation)…they (students/ families) become aware, but not at the right times (while in high school)". The second agency representative said, " it's 50-50, some

people know us , some people don't know us. But unfortunately, the bulk of the people who know us, have misperceptions. They (general public) don't understand what we do. They see us as a bill paying service". The representative also noted "bad referrals are due in part to lack of knowledge of their service, both on the school's and parent's part". The representative of the private agency noted her agency is not publicly noticed. Currently she markets her services to local high school child study teams, and is developing a "word of mouth" client base.

The adult high school representative noted individuals are aware of their services for two reasons. First, the high school where the student "dropped out ", provides an information packet on their services. Secondly, the local cable station runs informational commercials about their services for the surrounding county areas.

The college representative proudly stated college students with special needs know about his department services. In the last six years he managed the special services center, he noted, " our client base has grown from 28 clients (students with special needs) to over 300". Their department was promoted at various functions, such as " college first night" and "open houses". Secondly, the client base grew through "word of mouth". Students shared information about their department services. And finally, he attributed growth of his department service to "overall administrative support"

He elaborated about administrative support and collaboration:

We (college personnel and departments) are sensitive to the various student needs. This is a very supportive and nurturing culture here at this college. We work in a decentralized and seamless fashion... we count on every faculty member to assist in this process. We all try to help the special needs student. During registration each department helps the individuals with various registration procedures, like admissions and financial aid. Also faculty (teachers) are actively involved in identifying and assisting student's with disabilities. Sometimes the faculty and student even walk down to our office

together, to find out what we can do to help the student. It's is all about people helping people. We count on everyone (college staff) doing the right thing.

The most valuable recommendations was rendered by the college representative summarize the collaboration and involvement of three entities, schools, businesses, and agencies. He stresses, "We are not utilizing our tremendous resources.... We must let communities, families and businesses into the schools. We all have to work together!".

Parents' Perspectives

An interview together with a survey was conducted to 5 parents of individuals with disabilities. Parents were referred to the researcher by a third party agency. An initial contact with parents was in person or via a telephone call. Parents were informed of the purpose of the study and commitment time for a home interview. Interview sessions were at convenient times for the participating parents. A consent letter was sent to each parent and collected at the time of the home interview. Each interview lasted approximately 35 to 45 minutes. A tape record was used for the accuracy of data collection. Interview questions were related to their personal experiences in regard to their children's transition education and preparation. Interview results were generated into several factors including parent's involvement in the transition process, parents concerns on their children's transition preparation, transition meetings, and their recommendations to improve transition activities. Recommendations for transition planning and services delivery were also discussed.

Survey. The parent survey consisted of 16 questions, of which, 12 questions required "yes/ no" responses, 4 generated open ended responses. Parents' responses regarding their children' transition and education experiences are listed in Table 7 and 8.

Table 7: Parents' Responses to the Survey

Question:	YES	NO	Unknown
Do you feel Transition Planning began in a timely fashion?	20%	80%	
Were you well informed of Adult Agencies to serve your son or daughter?	20%	80%/	
Are you satisfied with the overall transition process for your child?	40%	60%	
Were community- based employment opportunities available to your son or daughter?	40%	60%	
Did your son or daughter have a Transition Plan?	20%	80%	
Were you aware of Transition Plans?	40%	60%	
Did team members understand your child's interest and desires?	40%	60%	
Were goals geared towards child's future?	40%	60%	
Were your interest and questions addressed appropriately?	60%	40%	
Was technical jargon used at educational meetings?		100%	
Does your school have Transition Coordinator?	20%		80%
Did your school organize an Adult Service Provider meeting?	20%	80%	

In response to the open ended questions one parent indicated her child had a transition

plan and attended transition meetings coordinated by a transition coordinator. Two

parents indicated their children participated in community- based experiences, and the

goals were related their children's interests. Of the parents 80% reported their children

did not have a transition plan, and were unaware if a transition coordinator is at their

child's school and transition activities were not completed in a timely fashion.

Also, 80% of parents were not informed of agencies for post graduate services, thus they

did not attend the Adult service provider meeting. All parent indicated meetings were

familiar, and technical jargon was not used by professionals.

Table 8: Parents' Responses on Questions of Their Children's Transition

Parent	Child's Age	Disability	Previous School Setting	High School Graduation	Child's Living Status	Child's Working Status
#1	Female Age: 22	Specific Learning Disability Mild / Moderate	Private Special Needs school	2002	Home	Part-Time
#2	Female Age: 20	Down Syndrome	Public High School	2003	Home	High School Transition Program
#3	Female Age: 22	Cerebral Palsy Wheel Chair	Public High School	2002	Home	Part time & Volunteer
#4	Female Age: 19	Learning Disabilities	Public High School Vocational school	2002	Home	Part-time
#5	Female Age: 20	Learning Disabilities	Public High School Vocational school	2001	Home	Part time & Adult High School

Interview

Parents Involvement in the Transition Process. Only 1 parent described what would be considered as a transition meeting. This parent recalls, "meetings were good, teachers were always exceptional". This parent described a formal transition meeting, arranged by a designated transition coordinator, and the meeting's focus was specifically on transition related issues. The parent recalls, "the school (a private special school) was nice enough to call in DVR, and DDD, without me asking for this". The 4 remaining parents note IEP meetings, but nothing known as a "transition meeting". Also, these same parents indicated they unaware if their school employed a "transition coordinator", and if there was one specific school representative responsible for transition activities.

Two parents who did not recalled " official transition meetings" noted singular school based transition activities. For example, one parent recalls, "my daughter had one brief meeting with her home school principal. One question was asked, " What do you want to do after high school?" My daughter responded by saying what she thought they wanted to hear, " I think I want to go to college". The mother noted, " that was it, end of discussion." Another parent who recalled, " my daughter had a one brief meeting with someone on the interview process. This was a one meeting. There was no formal follow up."

The majority of parents reported they were not provided adequate information regarding adult agencies and related services for their children after highs school graduation. Only 1 parent reported their school informed him about contacts to post school agency for his daughter. However, he had previously known about these agencies due to his own research. Four parents noted " no or limited knowledge of

adult agencies". Of these 4, 1 parent claimed the "school mentioned DVR, and DDD, but never provided followed up on anything". At the time of this research, 2 parents reminded unaware of possible agencies for their children and 4 parents indicated their respective schools did not prepare their children for post high school transition. Only 1 parent was completely satisfied with transition preparation from the school. His daughter attended a special needs school where students between the ages of 18-21 participated in a program called "Transition- Co-op". Transition activities are imbedded within the school's curriculum, which is supplemented with community- based activities. His daughter was involved in job sampling for three years, allowing her to discover her " likes and dislikes". He notes, "since she graduated last year she has been at "xxx" restaurant for almost 11 months and only missed 2 days because of a family emergency."

One parent, who noted lack of a formal transition plan, credited the vocational school for preparing her daughter with "vocational skills in (baking and pastry arts), and helping her to work with others, ". However this parent was "shocked" when she discovered her daughter did not know the basics of completing a job application or maintaining a checkbook, which would have been part of her daughter's regular public high school program. This parent subsequently taught her daughter these skills, and continues to address life skill deficits as they arise.

The parents of a child with Down syndrome who was mainstreamed in her school noted, "just recently we are seeing improvements in Jane's' transition program". The transition program at their daughter's school is relatively new. They attribute improvement to new school officials (child study team and superintendent) and the

services of third party consultant for individuals with disabilities. The parent's reported, " Overall, throughout her education, it seemed people made many promises but never carry through on".

Parent Concerns On the Transition Process.   The majority of parents indicated their concerns for their children's transition planning were not addressed effectively or efficiently by their respective school districts. Parents of an individual with Down syndrome noted their initial concerns were "ignored or play down". The parents explain, " from very early on, we always would ask about Mary's (their daughter) future". In fact, the parents claimed their yearly questions and concerns regarding their daughter's future elicited the following response from the school representatives: " oh, we have plenty of time...we will talked about it next year" and then handed them "that book" (NJPRISE). The parents continue, "next year came and went, and now she's leaving the school system".

A second parent reported her early concerns for her daughter's needs were not met beginning in elementary school. In fact, after 5 years of parental urging, her daughter was *finally* classified in 7th grade and began receiving special education services. The school's apology for *"their"* negligence did not compensate for the delayed identification of severe learning disabilities. The parent firmly believes this delay eventually caused her daughter to "drop out of school". This parent continued to be shocked when the school made no effort to support her daughter when she terminated her high school career.

A parent of an indiduval with Cerebral Palsy noted she had "fought for several life skill things" at yearly meetings at the public high school. This parent recalled, "I fought

for years to have Jane learn the basic stuff, life skills, functional skills, such as banking and making a bed, and work skills". She also noted she "fought" for extended summer education programs for her daughter. Her annual requests were always denied. She summarized, " her needs were not met, I was talking to a wall! She was just pushed through the system (school)".

The fourth parent, though extremely dedicated in " helping her daughter with social emotional issues in high school" admitted, she was "passive" in regard to her daughter's education. She assumed, " I just assumed those in charge (i.e. teachers, schools, counselors) were doing the right things for Sherry (her daughter)". "After all", she described, " they are the 'experts', they will take care of her in that way (preparation for post school activities)".

The final parent firmly believed his concerns and issues were always met due to his personal, self–taught knowledge of available services for his daughter. Through his assertiveness and knowledge, he noted, " the school knew they couldn't pull one over on me".

Support Agencies: Inaccessibility and Inefficiency.

Parents reported negatively on third party support services. The common complaints among parents were: accessibility and convenience of the services, the extent of complicated paperwork, and inefficiency of the service delivery. One set of parents recall, " I don't know how people do it if they don't have flexible schedules (work). Fortunately, my husband is able to take off from work to go to these places, like SSI". The same parent commented on the paperwork, " the paper work is not easy, in fact, it is

pretty complicated, I remember my husband and I, we're both college graduates and couldn't figure it (paperwork/forms) out!".

Three parents noted the inefficiency of a transportation service designed and funded specifically for individuals with disabilities. One parent noted, "It's crazy, you can *never* get through on the phone lines, and then when you do, they (the transportation representative) either talk too fast, put you on hold. I feel bad for those people that don't have a phone, I don't know how you would do it if you had to use a pay phone." Two other parents noted the actual service delivery of this agency. One parent said " it was a nightmare, we could never get compatible, or convenient pick up times; they were either late coming or going, or never pick us up at all!" Another parent rendered the same complaint. "They said they (Transportation Company) would be there at a certain time, and they didn't show up to almost an hour and a half later!" After this occurred several times, the father personally investigated the situation by waiting with his daughter at her job for the "pick up". The father called the agency after waiting with his daughter for approximately an hour. The agency informed him, "our driver was already there, but the rider (his daughter) was not." " Oh really?" the father continued, " *I* was there with my daughter waiting. NO ONE came to pick her up! ". Dishearten and angered by this event, he now provides his own transportation for his daughter to and from work. Essentially, he felt his daughter was purposefully deceived and exploited by the bus company representatives due to her disability.

Another concern voiced by parents was potential assisted living arrangements coordinated and funded through state and federal agencies. Three families noted their children were on "waiting lists" for housing. However, they do not know "where" they

are on the "waiting list". Parents were questioned the "actual criteria". One parent noted, " I *think* you get "urgent status, if one parent is a certain age, or one parent is very sick". Another parent suggested there " must be actual versus real criteria". He explained this as "what the book says, and what actual practice is; what really is happening" in regard to housing placement. The parent further elaborated, "I don't know where we are (the waiting list) but Patty (his daughter) is fine with us right now. But I don't know how "Joey" (his daughter's former special school classmate) got housing and my daughter didn't. I've met his mom before, she is young and not sick. I don't' know how they (parents) got him in (assisted/ independent living apartment). Another parents also noted, " We've been on a waiting list since Jane was a baby". They were inspired to process paperwork early when they would see "old people with their older handicapped children". Currently, all parents were concerned for their children's' housing placement/ arrangement.

Parents Voices

Recommendations. Though this parent was satisfied overall with the transition outcomes of his daughter, he would have liked his daughter to have sample even more jobs. "Unfortunately", he noted, "the school did not have enough jobs for *all* the kids"

The second parent reflected, "they wouldn't have done anything differently" for their daughter with Down syndrome. Though they were within blocks of a highly recommend special school, they chose to fully mainstream their daughter in a public school in their affluent suburban neighborhood. Proudly reflecting, they claimed their daughter was " a trail blazer of sorts". They noted, "she (their daughter) was the first inclusion student and the, and the first special education student in the latchkey program". The parents

reported, however, " it (the educational experience) was great in the beginning, everyone (teachers, and other staff) were very supportive and helpful, It seemed like there were a lot of socialization opportunities for 'Jane'." Unfortunately, the parents stated, " as she moved up in school, the gap grew larger between her and her peers". The parents justified this occurrence, " we expected that (the gap) would happen". Currently, they are satisfied with the additional support for their daughter due to an outside third party consultant interfacing with school officials. Though recently "satisfied" with transition activities due to the outside school liaison, they have evaluated their daughter's educational success in terms of socialization and social acceptance. Through the parent's request for a "formal school buddy" never materialized, their daughter was always included in school based special events, such as pep rallies homecomings and proms.

One parent noted, "schools need to prepare for other options" after noting her daughter's "horrible" one semester at a local county college. One parent stated, " It (education and the transition process) would have been a whole lot easier if these schools and agencies coordinated activities and meetings for paperwork and all other necessary requirement ". Though one parent expressed his satisfaction with his daughter's overall transition outcomes, he indicated three areas of importance. First, more opportunities for students, he wished his child had "more job sampling". Second, " it is important to find a fit for your child ", he said. Through job sampling, his daughter was able to find her likes and dislikes. This father noted several jobs " that just didn't work out". He explained, "Ellie is a people person, she can't be isolated from people". He provided a few examples, "Ellie is a people person, you can't stick her out in a lobby all by herself, or in a cold freezer for hours. That's NOT her!" He also noted, "you need to find a place

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(job) that will be supportive." In acknowledging his daughter's current employer he stated, " Everyone is great there, they always help Ellie. If she's falling behind they (fellow staff) pitch in. It's been a great place for her. Also, a lot of these kids (young employees) are going to school for special Ed, and I think that really helps to". And finally, he appreciated his rapport with the restaurant manager, " He is great, whatever we need, we just talk to Mike, and he always works with us".

Future Goals for Their Children. All parents would like their children to live independently or in supported living arrangements within the next 5 years. All parents indicated they would like to see their children earn more money. In addition to "making a little more money" one parent would like see his daughter have more responsibilities at work. Two parents hope their children will be financially independent "to help pay for car insurance ". Another parent indicated, " I would also like to see her have a job making more money, as well as getting medical benefits. Once she turns 21, I can't have her under my plan (medical) at my job". One parent hopes her daughter will attain her high school diploma.

Two parents want their children living independently in their own apartment within the next 5 years, and 3 parents whose children would qualify for assisted or supported state funded housing noted as such. They also indicated maturity growth in their children. One parent noted, " We just recently felt comfortable leaving Jane alone. She accomplished a lot in the last year, she really has grown up in a lot of ways". This parent admitted, " I do have the tendency to 'baby her', in part because she's an only child. I knew I had to let her grow up. I had to let her make her own meals, and things like that, she is capable of so much". Though financially, his daughter is able to "handle

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money", and "set" due to a recent inheritance, this father noted, "emotionally, she is not ready to leave mom and dad yet, and that's okay". Another parent who envision his daughter in a group home, also noted her recent maturity growth. For example, they noted a recent simple scenario with their daughter. "Out of the blue, she decided to walked to school herself... we were shocked and asked her 'what would you do if '....". She confidently answered all her parent questions and proudly walked to school *alone*. In addition, she is now learning to cook through a third party agency. The other parent similarly noted her daughter's recent maturity. She explained how her daughter "on her own" found a volunteer position at a local special school to compliment her part time job.

Individuals with Disabilities

The survey/ interview process designed for individuals with disabilities attempted to answer several questions regarding their transition experiences. Those questions were focused on, 1) the individual's involvement in their transition planning, 2) their transition education and related activities, 3) their personal interests and desires within the planning process, and 4) individuals' current post school status and future goals

Survey. A survey was provided to each participating individual with disabilities prior to the interview on site. This survey consisted of 11 questions related to transition with 8 "yes/ no", and 3 open ended questions to provide responses regarding the individuals' transition planning, transition activities, and current post secondary status. The results are presented in Tables 9,10,11.

Table 9: Participants' Responses to Survey Questions on Transition Planning

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES YES	RESPONSES NO
Did you participate in your IEP/ Transition meetings?	80%	20%
Did you have a transition plan?	40%	60%
Were you informed of transition plans?	40%	60%
Did team members consider of your interests or desires in planning?	60%	40%
Did you discuss post-secondary issues?	80%	20%
Did you discuss self-determination?	20%	80%
Were goals & objectives in the transition plan related to your post school goals?	40%	60%

Of all the participants, 4 of the 5 (80%) indicated "meeting participation".

However, meeting participation did not correlated to personalized educational planning.

Individuals noted educational goals were not geared towards future goals, nor did the

planning include their interests and desires. Though 3 individuals (60%) did not have or

were aware of a formal transition plan, their educational experiences did include

transition related activities. Further questions in the survey asked individuals to respond

to transition related activities in high school. The results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Participants' Responses to the Questions on Transition Activities

Transition Topics Discussed in School:	Yes	No
Independent Living	60%	40%
Financial	60%	40%
Transportation	80%	20%
Community Agencies	20%	80%
Post Secondary Education	20%	80%
Adult Issues	40%	60%

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It is found that most individuals participated in activities related to independent living, financial planning, and transportation. Post secondary education and community agencies were not included in transitional activities for the majority of individuals. Table 11 shows the individuals' post school status.

Table 11: Participants' Post Secondary Status

Living Status		Working Status		School Status			Social Status		
Living with Parents/ Relatives	Living Alone	* F/T	* P/T or less than P/T	In School Post-Secondary	Not In school	** Other	Very Involved	Somewhat Involved	Not Involved
100%	0	0	80%	0	0	20%	60%	20%	20%

Note: *   F/T: Full- time, P/T: Part- time
** Other: High school transition program for individuals ages 18-21

All individuals live at home or with a relative. The majority of individuals (80%) work at least part -time and engaged in social and recreational activities. Those who were not engaged in social activities indicated they would like to be more involved in social / recreational activities.

Interview.   An interview was conducted at each participant's home following the survey lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. Each interview consisted of 6 questions designed to elicit information on the individuals' overall transition experiences supplemental to the survey. A tape recorder was used during the interview for the accuracy of transcribing data.   The questions in the interview protocol (See Figure 4, Chapter 3) allowed individuals to elaborate on questions from the survey, serving as supplemental data for the study. The interview data were generated into the following topics

Transition Planning and Educational Activities

Transition Planning. During the process of transition education 3 out of 5 participants (60%) the majority of individuals, 60%, were unaware of a transition plan, and, or did not have a transition plan to compliment their IEP's. Two individuals noted having a transition plan. One individual was from a private special education school, with an established transition program. Another individual, a graduate of a vocational high school stated "oh, that was what I was going to do after high school". Though individuals indicated meeting participation, overall goals and objectives were unrelated to their desires, interests and future goals. Their involvement in transition planning varied. Though 4 individuals indicated they " participated " in their meetings, only 3 reported their interests and desires were included to their goals and objectives, and 2 noted self-determination activities. One individual elaborated on her self-determination education, as well as her school experiences. She claimed, " my school was different than my friends' schools". She reflected on her vocational school staff: "they were caring and supportive…they (her team members and guidance counselors) really cared (about me), they helped me through some pretty emotional things… like they knew when I was feeling down, they would set me up with a counselor, they really helped me through it." Most importantly, she added, "they made me feel good about myself and what I wanted to do in life." Another individual indicated that they had a " green book" with self-determination activities in it.

Educational Activities. Though 3 out 5 participants (60%) lacked formal transition plans, they noted some form of school -based transition activities. All individuals described a variety of activities ranging from very structured transition programs with

formal curricular to informal curricular with brief exposure of transition related topics. Of 5 students, 2 participated in educational programs specifically for transition activities for individuals between the ages of 18 to 21. One individual completed a program at a private special education school, titled " Transition/ Co-op" which has been established for many years. This program includes specific transition related components, such as, independent living skills, cooking, personal finance, and survival vocabulary in reading. Community- based instruction and employment were the major objectives of this school program. The individual described, " we would go food shopping, cook meals and take tours of different jobs, like in a hospital or post office. Every Friday we would walk up town, we had a lot of fun!" Another individual described her public school- based transition program. This educational model is also designed specifically for special education students between the ages of 18 to 21. It is relatively new, and not as structured as the program of the private school, according to her parents. In part, as her parents indicated, transitioning programming activities at the public school has " improved' due to the inspiration of a new child study team, new superintendent, and an outside consultant. Her transition program combines school-based activities with an outside community -based job coach paid by the school district. Also, she is receiving instruction on home- based supplemental living skills, such as cooking and food shopping from a private agency.

Two graduates of a vocational high school expressed their different experiences. One recalled experiences with school personnel, such as teachers and guidance counselors. She noted they would discuss a variety of issues, such as independent living skills, transportation and financial issues. The other graduate did not recall an actual "transition

plan or activities", yet remembered her vocational skills learned there. "The only 'real' life stuff I got was in my vocational school, where I learned baking and pastry arts for two years. I loved it, I loved the teacher, it was great and we learned a lot about working together to get things done", she stated.

An individual with severe disabilities who graduated from a traditional public high school reported negatively on her overall educational experience. "They (school personnel) pushed me with academic stuff, no "real' life skill type stuff". She continues, "they (the school) didn't know what to do with me, I was the only kid in a wheel chair ". Because her school was not equipped for a wheelchair access, she was sent out of the district to another public school equipped with an elevator. She did note school based marketing club as " the only thing related to the real world". Sadly, she concluded, " just getting through high school was my biggest accomplishment! I didn't think I'd ever get through!" Of all 5 students, only 1 individual was efficiently informed of post school services agencies while in high school. Another individual recalled "they (school counselors) mentioned something about Access Link, but never followed through with anything".

Employment Experiences. At the interview, 4 of the 5 individuals (80%) were part-time employed. The unemployed individual was a new mother, but planned to attend a community college in the future. Job coaching assistance was currently being provided to 3 of the 4 working individuals. The remaining individual works independently, and provides her own transportation. Two individuals with severe to moderate disabilities noted a variety of job experiences. With the assistance of her father, the one individual noted some of her job experiences arranged through her private school. She reflected, "

Oh boy, did I hate 'xxx' (a regional convenience store), all they did was to keep me in the freezer all the time!" She continued, " and I did not like 'xxx' (an international fast food restaurant), they had me all by myself out in the lobby, doing trays and tables. I hated it". Currently, she has been employed for almost a year at a large restaurant franchise. Throughout her vocational experiences, she stated, "I don't like to be by myself". Her father agreed, "she is a people person, she needs to be around other people". Also, the father added her current employer is "great". The father continues, " all the kids (the young adult employees) help my daughter, they (employees) look out for her". The father also added "a lot of the kids there are going to school for special education and are really supportive of her. If she falls behind, they *always* help her."

One individual with moderate disabilities had approximately 4 jobs, including her current job in less than a two- year's period. Some of her jobs were: an "up scale" deli, a national multi- item retail store, a regional large food distributor, and women's retail store. She described, " I really liked 'xxx' (national multi- item retail store), but 'we' had the money problems". Her mother explained that the company was going through bankruptcy. One vocational school graduate had a job as lifeguard for approximately 5 years. However, due to internal personnel issues, she regrettably terminated that job. She indicated, " I loved the job. I really loved the job, and most of the people were great. But one manager constantly criticized me. I could never do anything right. She also kept trying to get involved in my personal life. I would leave work crying." Currently, she works in the food industry for a large restaurant chain. She is working several hours, and attempts to get sufficient hours to qualify for medical benefits. She described her current work experience, "at first, I was scared. But, it turned out the managers are great. They

show you how to do things. They don't just 'throw' you in a job. And, I am learning something new every day. I like the people I work with, and I like the managers. They (managers) make you feel good about being there. It's really working out".

Post-Secondary Status. When asking individuals' about their post school living arrangements, employment and social/ recreational status during the interview, it was told that all of the individuals were either living at home or with a relative. Three reported they were actively involved in social activities; two were members of youth groups structured for individuals with disabilities. One youth group member listed some of her diverse activities: "We went away overnight to the Pocono's and to the shore. We have another trip to.... We go bowling, to the movies. We do a lot of things." Another individual was involved in her church. She also listed the variety of activities she participated in, " I do a lot at church. I sing in the choir and attend bible studies. I also help out for fund raising. And, anytime they need anything cooked, I am there to help ". Individuals reporting in the survey they are " somewhat involved or not involved" indicated that they would like to be involved more in social activities. One individual was not involved in social activities at this time due to her new job. She explained, " I try to get all the hours I can get". The other individual who thought herself " somewhat involved" in recreational activities raised her concerns on wheelchair access. She explained, "I really want to get out of the house, but our van broke, plus my mom is having problems lifting me now, and the 'xxx' agency (a state funded transportation company for individuals with disabilities) is a not dependable. They have forgotten about me many times!"

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Future Goals. Individuals' personal employment and residency goals were based on their skills, abilities, interest, and previous work experiences. When asking about their future goals, all participants described goals related to their personal attributes and previous employment experiences. For example, one stated, " I would still like to be at 'xxx' restaurant, it's great there. They (employees and mangers) help me when I need help. I would like to learn some more jobs there, though". Another individual stated, " I love to cook. I cook at home, I cook for church. I also had marketing and hospitality (classes) at my vocational school. I would really like being a restaurant entrepreneur. " The individual who wanted to be a photographer stated, " I always like to take pictures. I took a photography class at the local community college. I would like to buy some equipment this fall." When asking about independent living goals, all participants' goals included independent or supported living arrangements. Individuals expressed they would like to live in state assisted group homes or supported living apartments if approved for these services. Table 12 presents individuals' goals of independent living and employment in 5 years.

Table 12: Individuals' 5 Year's Goals for Independent Living and Employment

INDIVIDUALS AGE DISABILITY	CURRENT JOB PLACEMENT	5 YEARS' EMPLOYMENT GOALS	5 YEARS' INDEPENDENT LIVING GOALS
FEMALE AGE: 22 Specific Learning Disability syndrome Moderated Mental Retardation	National restaurant franchise	Same company, more responsibility.	Assisted living/ apartment
FEMALE AGE: 20 Down syndrome-Moderate Mental retardation	Nursing home/ cafeteria assistant.	Fashion/model	Assisted living/ apartment
FEMALE: 22 Cerebral Palsy Limited mobility -Wheel chair	1 day volunteer/ 1 day at Specialty Center	Retail Store	Assisted living/ apartment
FEMALE AGE: 19 Mild Learning Disabilities	National franchise restaurant	Photographer	Apartment and married .
FEMALE AGE: 20 Mild Learning Disabilities	N/ A- new Mother with newborn	" be a restaurant entrepreneur"	Rent her own apartment or purchase a home.

Chapter 5

Discussions

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of transition practices and the policy at the local level. It attempted to provide a substantial overview of the transition process from the perspectives of different individuals who were involved in the practices. They were business employers, adult service agencies, parents and individuals with disabilities.

The first research question sought to reveal if any differences existed between transition services and preparation at public schools versus private special education schools. Though the number of participants representing both the public school and the private school was limited, it appears that a local private school excelled in transition planning and activities. The perspectives and reports form the various participants confirmed these findings. For example, business representatives acknowledged and praised a local private school for their job simulation models and job coaching support services. Agency representatives also reported that the same school's transition program and the solid work- based functional skills its' graduates possessed. Also a parent of a child who attended that same private school commended the school for its transition program. This parent was the only parent completely satisfied with his daughters' transition outcomes. In such, he reported positively on school-based transition activities, including an identified school-based transition coordinator, and a formal transition meeting with outside agencies.

The second research question addressed the existence of collaboration for transition planning and activities. Unfortunately, based on the findings of this study, collaboration among individuals in the transition process did not seem to exist at all levels. Collaboration, in effect was scattered within the communities and the schools. Though some agencies noted organized efforts with some school representatives, overall, the effective collaboration and communication did not exist. There appeared no organized methods of referrals or distribution of correct and timely information on post- school agencies. Most parents and individuals were not informed on adult agencies for post school, and had misperceptions of agencies' services. Though school personnel were not included in this study, one can not ignore the opinions of participants that urged schools to play crucial roles in the transition process and become the primary entity responsibly for transition planning.

The third research question revealed the perspectives of businesses regarding the employment of individuals with disabilities. All business participants indicated their support in employing individuals with disabilities and overall knowledge in job training. The participating employers were cognizant of maximizing individual's strengths to compensate their weaknesses through job modifications and varied performance expectations. It appeared a natural acceptance and an overall positive work environment contributed to the employment success of individuals with disabilities. All business participants were satisfied with support for individuals in the workplace. Though, there was not one specific reason "why" managers were so supportive, it is the opinion of this researcher that prior job coaching relationships contributed to this overall supportive environment for individuals with disabilities. Through job coaches, personal

relationships can be developed and fortified with businesses, which ultimately benefit all employees with disabilities.

Self- determination activities were addressed in the fourth research question. Self-determination activities were used minimally across school settings. Both parents and individuals did not recall self- determination activities. Third party agency representatives noted lack of self -determination skills as one of the major weaknesses of individuals with disabilities when making independent decisions. The findings in this study confirmed the research findings on students' and their ability to make independent decisions. According to business representatives, lack of self determination skills can result in the individual's lack of self confidence when transitioning from school based job simulations to community- based employment settings.

The research Questions 5 and 6 are addressed simultaneously due to the relationship of the questions and subsequent responses. Question 5 required individuals to reflect on their transition experiences, in light of their current post- school status, which was Questions 6. Positive outcomes were achieved for this individual with disabilities in our study contradicted the negative post school outcomes cited in research (Stuart & Smith 2002; Levinson & Ohler, 1998; Morningstar & Kleinhammer, 1999). In such, despite overall ineffective transition planning, and lack of linkages with outside agencies, individuals in this study achieved success in one or more of the adult domains, such as employment, recreation and independent living. Individuals reported positive outcomes such as part –time employment and social/ recreational activities within their communities. Parent opinions were positive regarding their children's current status and future goals, regardless of similar negative reports regarding transition planning. Though

parents noted lack of knowledge or proper transition planning in high school, and lack of proper notification of post school agency contacts, through self-knowledge and a third party consultant families were beginning to benefit from transition services.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this study. First, the school administrators were excluded from the participants. Though this study attempted to provide a substantial overview of the transition process from several perspectives, in effect, it did not because it did not include the important views of school officials. As the school's role evolved as the crucial component in overall transition success of individuals with disabilities, school participants should have been solicited. Schools were identified as the primary facilitator of transition planning and related activities according to the perspectives of families, individuals with disabilities, businesses and agencies. Unfortunately, schools were not include in this study due to the nature of administrative approval for such research. First, and foremost, if a true, holistic perspective on transitions planning was to be studied, schools should have been included in the research.

Another limitation was the limited number of participants in this study. Though a variety of individuals with disabilities from varied educational settings participated in this study, the limited number of participants from each category does not necessarily represent that particular population of individuals with disabilities. Thus, generalizations of data should be cautious. For example, the experience of the individual with Downs Syndrome, who was mainstreamed in a public school may not be a representative of that population as a whole.

In addition, the small number of participants of business companies, adult agencies, and parents also limited the findings of this study. The qualitative method of survey and interview as conducted in this study presents results based on self- report only without valid data to be evidenced.

Recommendations for Future Research. The effectiveness of transition planning must be continued to be studied and evaluated on different levels. Most importantly, as previously noted, schools must be included in order to discover their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in the transition planning process. Secondly, a research design could attempt to examine the transitions planning and practices from the perspectives of a singular disability category, such as individuals with learning disabilities who have been mainstreamed in public school settings. Further research may be needed to include observation and evaluation of a group of individuals with disabilities during their post transition years, and examine all transition variables related to their particular situation. For example, one participating parent and child who were completed satisfied with their school's transition activities and process would be a viable candidate in developing a "model" transition scenario. This would be similar to a study conducted by Hazi and her colleagues(1999), by first identifying "model transition sites with superior transition practices". In addition, with the parent's' approval, the researchers could interview the business where his daughter was successfully employed for almost a year.

Discussions

This study confirms the findings of Hasazi and associates (1999), that transition planning truly is a multi-dimensional complex process. However, the complexities of transition planning are manageable through effective collaboration and communication

among all individuals in the transition process where transition planning is not be viewed as an administrative burden. Schools must initiate linkages for parents with adult agencies in timely fashion, while being responsive to parents' concerns regarding their children's' education and related transition activities. Though school personnel are inundated with multitude of both internal and external demands, transition planning must not be reduced to a form or a checklist in hope of a legal compliance or to be delayed to a student's final year in high school. Schools must become innovative in their approach to transition planning when considering the many factors which impede this crucial process. The most logical solution to school based transition planning is to employ an individual specifically responsible for transition planning and coordinate all aspects of transition planning activities.

In addition, transition education and activities must also be approached innovatively. Without inspiration and direction, transition topics can not be integrated into curricular. Thus, transitions activities should either be infused in already existing curricular, with benefits to regular education and special education students, or develop separate transition curricular only.

Parents. Parents are the vital component in effective transition planning. Transition planning is legally mandated by the law, however it does not seem to be implemented properly. Schools are not proactive in transition planning and mandates, but react when parents become advocates for their children. Thus parents must become proactive in their pursuits to help their children with disabilities. Parents need information of the laws and knowledge of the services which will enhance the lives of their children. Schools are receptive when parents voice their opinions and expectations for their children's

education. There are many variables parents can not control or change in the transition process. For example, parents can not change levels of complicated paperwork, or procedures of adult agencies . However, parents can initiate the change by playing active roles in their child's education. Knowledge empowers parents in their pursuits to access transition services for their children. Whether parents have always been knowledgeable, or recently informed of agencies and related services, they appeared empowered once knowledgeable of services. Thus, an active approach is imperative in maximizing their children's' education. In this particular study, if parents were knowledgeable of the laws and available services for their children, perhaps they would have been able to receive better quality transition services for their children while in high school.

Agencies. If schools are not initiating linkages for parents of individuals with disabilities, agencies must take an active role in connecting with students with disabilities. Agencies must become assertive in their roles to "get into the schools", as one agency representative indicated. Thus, agencies can define and restructure the transition planning process on their terms to most effectively serve students with disabilities, regardless of how "it's been traditionally done...last minute at Senior spring meetings", according to an agency representative.

Collaboration. Model partnerships should be established among agencies and schools. Transition planning and preparations are very important to individuals with disabilities. Those individuals must not pay the price for inefficient communication among personnel who are trained and educated to provide services. The lines of communication must be opened and relations must be fortified. Formalizations of collaborative efforts including

the roles and responsibilities of individuals involved in the transition process must be established between schools and agencies. Formalization and services delivery confirmation can be achieved by written agreements to identify the roles and responsibilities of transition members, as Hazi and her colleagues (1999) suggested in their study. Effective transition practices must include and support collaboration of all individuals involved in the transition process. As the previous research suggested partnerships must be developed and fortified between families and employers (Householder & Jansen, 1999). One participant in this study best summarized the solution to transition planning in regard to collaboration: " we are not utilizing our tremendous resources... we must let communities, families and businesses into the schools.... We all have to work together."

In conclusion, it is necessary for all individuals in the transition process to realize their roles and responsibilities in guiding the futures transition of individuals with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are entitled to quality and enriched lives, and must be prepared and supported in order to reach these goals. Transition planning must be viewed as an important step in one's education, that must not be neglected or postponed. As the participants in this study confirmed schools should be the primary entity responsible for initiating and directing transition planning and activities. Through collaborative and organized efforts, effective transition planning can be attained and community connections and partnerships can be achieved to benefit individuals with disabilities.

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Appendix

CONSENT LETTER FOR ROWAN GRADUATE STUDIES

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student at Rowan University in the processes of completing my masters' thesis Special Education. My graduate research project will examine transition practices for individuals with disabilities within our communities from the perspectives of the various individuals involved in the transition process.

My intended purpose is to reveal how schools, community agencies can best serve individuals with disabilities as they prepare for transition into postgraduate experiences and the demands of adulthood. I will be interviewing individuals, parents, businesses, adult services agencies, and schools to gather information about transition services.

Your voluntary participation in a brief interview/ survey, no longer than one hour, will allow me to complete my thesis project. I will ensure our meeting is compatible with your time constraints and meeting needs. In no form will this project cause physical or mental harm to participants.

All information obtain during this project will remain confidential and anonymous. No individuals will be exposed regarding personal names or personal opinions. The information obtained is only for my thesis-writing project.

If you have any questions regarding this form prior to signing please contact.
My numbers are: Home :(856) 464-8273 or Work Phone: (856) 468-1445 ,
 you may also contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Xin, at Rowan University at (856) 256-4747.

Again, thank you for you anticipated cooperation and participation in my project.

Sincerely,

Ann T. Adams

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I am willing to participate in the Transition interview _____

I am not willing to participate in the Transition interview_____

Signature_____ Date_____