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From Adolescence to Adulthood: Analyzing Multiple Perspectives on the Transition from High School to Post-School Life through a Multi-Case Study Design

by

Gregory A. Knollman

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in
Special Education
Department of Teaching and Learning
College of Education
University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: P. Jeannie Kleinhammer-Tramill, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Ann Cranston-Gingras, Ph.D.
Leonard Burrello, Ed.D.
William Black, Ph.D.

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Keywords: university based transition programs, intellectual disabilities, case study research

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, my brother and my parents who have offered their unwavering support during many of the most challenging transitions that I have faced in my life. Thank you for serving as a sounding board, a guide, and a constant source of strength and motivation as I completed this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation includes several important themes relevant to individuals who are in the midst of a transition in life. One of the themes identified through the three case studies included within this work was the concept that it takes a strong network of support to assist an individual during a time of transition. The completion of a dissertation and the transition from a Ph.D. program to post-graduate life is a major transition. It is one that certainly includes a strong support network. Although an acknowledgement offers such limited space to recognize the vast network of support and the many individuals who have taken time to serve as a guide during this important transition within my career, I want to highlight the specific contributions of a few individuals who provided meaningful assistance during this important phase in my life.

I want to specifically thank the many teachers and colleagues who have served as a strong example during my many transitions through graduate school and work. I want to especially recognize my dissertation committee members for their guidance and support during the research and writing process. The challenge of completing a Ph.D. while also continuing with a full time job is especially difficult and further complicated when it is conducted across state lines. My committee was unfailing in their support of the process and offered significant feedback and motivation during several challenges through the research and writing process. Special thanks also to my colleagues at work and to my classmates. When it felt like an end was no where near a possibility, it was nice to know that there were so many others who had been through the process to illustrate what was possible. You were fighting the good fight with me as I

battled the ups and downs that are part of every important transition in life. I also want to recognize my dissertation buddy, who provided the weekly encouragement in the final year of study to ensure that what seemed like insurmountable hurdles was nothing more than another series of objectives to complete on the way to meeting a major life goal. Thanks for offering a road map and congratulations on your recent defense and academic appointment.

I want to recognize two additional groups, those who have served as important mentors in previous transitions and those who continue to offer incredible examples of what is possible when you have a strong network of support. Thank you to my former teachers who always listened, encouraged, and offered direction when I was eager to build a future, but needed help with the footing for a solid foundation. Special thanks as well to my siblings and to my in-laws who through their incredible examples as academics, business owners, doctors and loving, devoted mothers and fathers, continue to reflect how to navigate so many transitions in life, through patience, wisdom, humility and the value of surrounding yourself with those who are there to build you up and keep you going.

Finally, I wish to thank my former students, principal, colleagues and special education director. The decision to leave teaching to pursue further academic study was not an easy choice. I left a classroom and a supportive school environment where I felt valued and for which I greatly valued those I worked with on a daily basis. The work that we accomplished together was incredible and served as a strong inspiration for this study. Thank you for your support during this incredible transition.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the transition experience of three individuals with intellectual disabilities, members of their family, their former transition program coordinator, and members of their support network including current employers or support service providers. This qualitative study used Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model and Kohler's (1996) Taxonomy for Transition to frame three case studies designed to capture the transition experience of young adults with disabilities who exited a university-based, school district funded, transition program.

Using Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological perspective, which focused on a behavior or interaction of people across multiple environments, the aim was to interview individuals from the micro, meso, and exo levels within the individuals' systems of support. The transition experience took place outside the bounds of a school and involved a broad network of support that ranged from close nuclear ties between the individual with disabilities and their family members to broader social ties between the individual with disabilities and their employer or support service provider.

A total of nineteen interviews were conducted for this study. Each interview lasted between twenty to ninety minutes in length. Individuals were asked to participate in an interview to respond to pre-scripted, open-ended questions based around Kohler's (1996) five domains of transition within the Transition Taxonomy. The nineteen interviews were transcribed, coded and organized around themes linked to the five domains of transition: student-focused planning, student development, program structure, family involvement and interagency collaboration. In

addition to the five domains of transition, five additional themes were common across members of the three case studies. These additional themes included:

- It Takes a Strong Interconnected Network
- Recognizing Narrative is Critical
- Inclusion is Important to the Community
- A Knowledgeable Transition Coordinator is Integral
- Life is Comprised of a Series of Transitions

The transition from high school to post-school life includes a focus on employment and independent living. That transition is unique and personal, but regardless of the person, a network of support is required to ensure success. The three young adults who were interviewed and around whom the case studies were developed exemplify the importance of maintaining a strong support network as you plan for and implement the transition from school to post-secondary life. Each young adult has utilized ties with family and members of their community to secure paid employment, maintain their social circles, and expand their level of independence.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

The transition from school to community life can be a challenge for adolescents approaching adulthood. Decisions involving postsecondary academics, employment, living arrangements and financial needs are all part of the transition into adulthood. For individuals with intellectual disabilities the transition to postsecondary life can include additional choices such as linkage to federally and state funded medical, financial and social services. For parents and families the transition includes additional concerns related to the lifelong support that might be needed for the care of their adult child. Preparing for this important departure from high school requires careful transition planning and analysis of all available options. This retrospective study was designed to capture the experience of young adults from their perspective and the perspectives of members of their extended support network, on the transition process that occurred as they exited a district-supported transition program.

Transition planning and the provision of transition services was first mandated as a practice for adolescents with identified disabilities in the amendments to P.L. 94-142, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), in 1990. Transition provisions remained in amendments to the law in 1997 and 2004. The 2004 amendments to the IDEA defined transition services as:

> A coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is, (a) designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement

from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation (34 CFR 300.43 (a)) (20 U.S.C. 1401(34)).

Transition services are based on the individual needs, strengths, preferences and interests of the student with an identified disability. The 2004 amendments to the federal law also mandated that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students age 16 or older must include "appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills" (34 CFR 300.320(b) and (c); 20 U.S.C. 1414 (d)(1)(A)(i)(VIII)).

While many variables affect a student's transition from school to postsecondary life, education and training play major roles in an individual's future. This important transition has been described metaphorically as a "bridge" emphasizing the link between school and adult opportunities (Will, 1984). Students with disabilities leave an organized system of supports within schools and upon exit enter a complex network of providers. Former Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) Madeline Will first highlighted the complexity of this period of transition by emphasizing the fact that no single federal agency was responsible for program assistance, evaluation or funding, but rather, transition requires collaboration across multiple agencies (Will, 1983). The differences in each transition and resulting outcomes provide a significant portrait of the uniqueness of an individual's education, growth and development. For individuals with disabilities the transition from school requires community opportunities and supports that fit their individual needs. Parents, siblings, teachers, administrators and support service personnel play a unique role in

assisting individuals with disabilities as they transition from school. Transition planning should consist of a variety of coordinated and meaningful activities that inform the decision making process and focus on the successful attainment of post school outcomes (Kohler & Field, 2003).

This study was designed to explore the unique transition experience of students with intellectual disabilities who exited a university-based transition program. It also focused on the experience of members of the broader support network The transition from high school to postsecondary life involves a complex web of supports that extend from a microsystem of parent, sibling and individual support to larger meso- and macro- systems that include community service agencies, employers, therapists, and disability rights advocates. This study developed from a conceptual framework founded on the principles of a transition focused education (Kohler & Field, 2003) and the philosophical and ecological perspectives of a constructed system of support (Bronfenbrener, 1979) in relationship to the concept of intensity of support for individuals with disabilities (Schalock & Luckasson, 2004).

The study explored the transition experiences of three young adults with intellectual disabilities who participated in the transition planning process and aged out of IDEA mandated services to pursue their post secondary goals. The young adults who were interviewed for this study exited a school district-supported, university based, transition program within the past one to five years. Using qualitative study methods outlined by Stake (2010), Yin (2009), Creswell (2009) and Maxwell (2012), interviews were conducted with the individuals with intellectual disabilities, their parents and members of their support network. The interview were transcribed and coded and a theme analysis was completed as a means to organize the information provided through the interviews related to the transition experience of each young adult with intellectual disabilities and their resulting outcomes after exiting a university-based transition program.

Research related to the transition from secondary to post school life for individuals with intellectual disabilities has evolved since Will's (1983) call to develop a bridge from school to adult life. This has resulted in many promising policies, practices and interventions (Test, Fowler, Richter, White, Mazzotti, Walker, Kohler, & Kortering, 2009a). This qualitative study offered a unique window through which to explore and understand the transition from school to adult life from the perspective of students with intellectual disabilities, their families and members of their extended network of support. There are other studies that have included a focus on the individual with a disability or the family in order to document the perspective of families who reflect on the transition from high school. These studies have focused on the evaluation of specific post-secondary education programs (Griffin, McMillan, & Hodapp, 2010; Neubert & Redd, 2008), focused interviews on individuals other than persons with intellectual disabilities participating in transition (Thompson, Fulk, Wernsing Piercy, 2000), captured specific views on an aspect of post-secondary transition such as employment (Migliore, Mank, Grossi, & Rogan, 2007) or lifelong parenting (Seltzer, Floyd, Song, Greenberg, & Hong, 2011), or considered only a select group of interviewees closest to the individual with intellectual disabilities such as parents or siblings (Grant & Ramcharan, 2001; McIntyre, Kraemer, Blacher, & Simmerman, 2004; Davies & Beamish, 2009). One study has explored the transition goals and experiences of individuals with disabilities, parents and professionals using qualitative methods, but the research focused on the reflections of a specific gender and how girls compare their experiences to boys using interviews, focus groups and vignettes (Hogansen, Powers, Geenen, Gil-Kashiwabara, & Powers, 2008).

This study explored the perspectives of young adults with intellectual disabilities who exited a university-based, district supported, transition program in order to more fully understand

their experiences. The study differed from existing work because it explored the broader ecology of the transition experience of a small group of young adults with intellectual disabilities through the perspectives of the individual in transition, the parents or siblings of the individual, the teacher who served as the program coordinator and the employer or community support staff that worked directly with the individual who recently exited school. This study used a triangulated collective case study approach to gather evidence by using semi-structured interviews across three individual case studies (Yin, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

For youth with disabilities, the transition from school to postsecondary education, employment and independent living can be difficult. Federal spending for research and model demonstrations for secondary transition initiatives began in the early 1980s through research on community based education and services, cooperative models, job training, self determination, post school follow up, follow along services, and post secondary supports (Flexer, Simmons, Luft, & Baer, 2001).At the time the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) considered the investment an important area for additional study as a bridge to assist individuals with disabilities in attaining post-high school education and employment (Will, 1983). Since that time amendments to the IDEA focused on transition planning have also emphasized the importance of improving the effectiveness of special education services and the educational achievement of individuals with disabilities (Yell, 2012). Results from several federally funded longitudinal studies that examined the transition of students with disabilities in relationship to their peers without identified disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Grigal, Hart, Migliore, 2011) highlight the discrepancy when comparing attainment of employment, postsecondary education and independent living.

In the mid-1990's at the conclusion of the first National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS1), researchers found that an individual with disabilities faced additional obstacles to a successful transition beyond those experienced by their peers (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Data collected from NLTS1 highlighted the discrepancy between enrollment rates in postsecondary education, independent living, and especially employment between individuals with disabilities as compared to their non-disabled peers. Not only were employment rates higher for individuals without disabilities, but the percentage of earnings over minimum wage were also higher when compared to individuals with disabilities. The overwhelming evidence from the NLTS1 interviews led Blackorby and Wagner (1996) to conclude that the gap in employment and earning between youth with disabilities and youth in the general population would continue to widen as the general population completed postsecondary education.

A decade after the conclusion of NLTS1 a secondary data analysis from waves of student interviews through a second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS2) indicated that rates of employment amongst individuals with disabilities had increased when compared to previous years (Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, Fowler, Kortering, & Kohler, 2009). Although there was overall improvement in the rates of employment for individuals with disabilities, the rates varied significantly between disability categories (Sanford, 2011). Within Wave 4 (2007) interviews of NLTS2, 67.8% of individuals with disabilities indicated that they were employed after transitioning from school. Of the individuals with learning disabilities 76.1% confirmed they were employed. Individuals with other identified disabilities including intellectual disabilities (39.9%), autism (32.6%) and traumatic brain injury (42.1%) did not fair as well (Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2011). When exploring the specific

attainment of goals within disability categories, however, the attainment of post school employment outcomes varies widely (Grigal, Hart, Migliore, 2011).

The use of large scale, longitudinal data collection through NLTS1 and NLTS2 offer researchers the opportunity to examine the attainment of post secondary outcomes based on a variety of variables such as demographic information, the type of preparation offered in high school classes, the amount of transition planning and the link to outside support services. The resulting multivariate analyses increase the understanding of relationships amongst comparison groups from the general population by sampling districts, offering weighted data and the use of estimation and standard error (Javitz & Wagner, 1990). The comparisons illustrate the gap between the post secondary outcomes of adolescents with disabilities when compared amongst disability categories and with their non-disabled peers. The comparisons and correlational studies offers a general picture of multiple conditions related to the transition planning process and attainment of post school goals for individuals with disabilities. These comparisons are helpful in describing a general picture of transition for individuals with intellectual disabilities and offer the possibility of generalization to similar populations, but they do not provide a full picture of the unique nature of individual transitions.

This study does not provide the basis for generalization but, as a qualitative study, seeks to add further examples of transition planning and post school goal attainment using qualitative methods. Through qualitative research the complexity of an individual student's transition can be further explored and unpacked to offer a greater sense of the experience. The aims of qualitative research have been described as understanding one thing well (Stake, 2010). Whereas the comparisons and correlations that are offered through large-scale data analyses emphasize generalizability and a movement toward cause and effect explanations, this study was designed

to explore the background of individual students' transitions in what Stake (2010) refers to as "experiential" terms. This study was designed to unpack what took place during the unique transition from school to post secondary life for a small sample of individuals with intellectual disabilities, through observation, interviews and triangulation of sources and themes.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The way educators prepare students for postsecondary life and the conceptualization of transition planning has broadened since Will's initial bridge models (Kohler & Field, 2003). The most recent IDEA amendments (2004) include a section that specifies that local education agencies (LEA) are required to create within the student's individualized education plan (IEP) measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments. The amendments also require IEPs to include an explanation of how a team comprised of parents, students, educators, and postsecondary supports would assist to provide the transition services necessary for the child to reach their postsecondary goals (Section 614, Statute 2709, VIII, aa-bb).

Through these changes in IDEA the LEA became responsible for and was held accountable for the development of IEPs in order to meet the federal statute. Kochar-Bryant, Shaw, and Izzo (2007) summarized 5 changes to the transition initiatives within IDEA 2004. These changes included: 1) a shift in the age requirement for transition planning from age 14 to age 16; 2) a shift from solely an outcomes emphasis to an orientation toward results; 3) the development of a summary of performance that offers an evaluation of the student's academic and functional performance; 4) an emphasis on interagency collaboration and support including links to services that support the student's post secondary goals; and 5) emphasis on student progress within the general education curriculum within the standards based education system.

These changes also emphasize that transition goals must relate to training, further education, employment, and independent living skills (Yell, 2012). Kohler & Field (2003) describe this emphasis on transition planning as a transition-focused education. Transition planning is viewed as a foundation for education that guides the programs, services and supports to assist individuals as they prepare to exit school.

After a thorough review of the literature through a three-phased research process, Kohler & Field (2003) described the process for developing a "transition focused education" (p. 176). Transition focused education was based on a conceptual frame entitled the Taxonomy for Transition Programing (Kohler, 1996). The taxonomy included five categories based on effective practices that Kohler identified within research related to transition practices. These five categories included: 1) student-focused planning; 2) student development; 3) interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration; 4) family involvement; and 5) program structure and attributes. These five areas articulated within the taxonomy were used as an organizational tool for transition studies. Most recently the taxonomy was used by Test et al (2009) to frame the examination of evidence-based practices in secondary transition.

Kohler's taxonomy has been used as an effective organizational tool to identify practices related to comprehensive secondary transition education and services (Test et al, 2009). The five areas or domains articulated within the taxonomy (Figure 1) served as the foundation of the conceptual frame for this study. Kohler & Field (2003) state "The practices represented and described in the taxonomy represent concrete strategies that operationalize the transition perspective and represent a consumer-oriented paradigm built on student and family involvement and students' self determination" (p. 176).

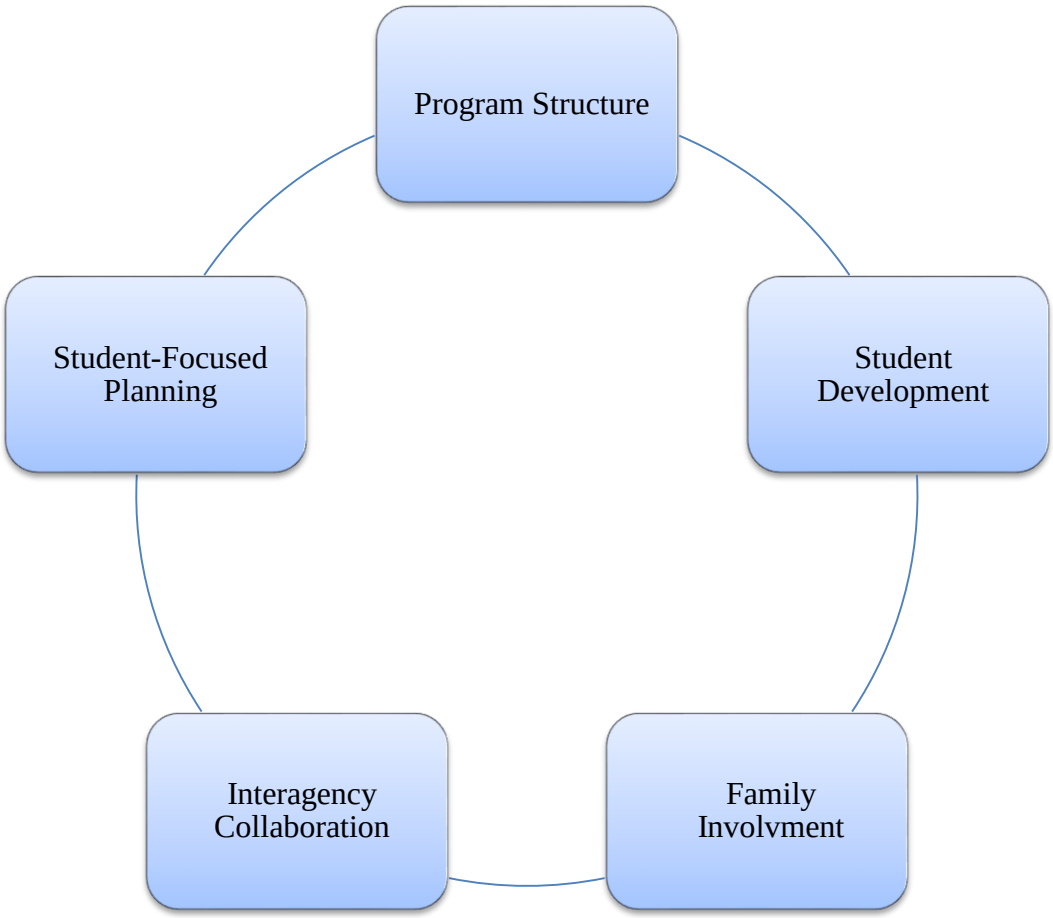

Figure 1. Kohler's (1996) Taxonomy for Transition Planning

Within qualitative research, interpretations must be based on a sound understanding of the context and situation (Stake, 2010). The Taxonomy for Transition Programing (Kohler, 1996) guides the development of a transition-focused education. The taxonomy was used within this study to inform how students with intellectual disabilities and their families prepared for each of the five transition domains. The taxonomy provided an ideal or standard for the supports students and families should receive. The taxonomy offered a conceptual frame to guide the literature review and an exploration of the transition supports within the five areas of transition.

This research study explored whether and how these supports were actually being provided to young adults with disabilities and their families. The five domains offered a heuristic around an evidence base within existing research that further informed an understanding of the transition planning process (Kohler & Field, 2003). There were many reasons to use the taxonomy, however there were limitations to a conceptual frame that was based upon a structure that existed to define and categorize. It was limited in its ability to connect the domains to the relationship between the individual with intellectual disabilities and the larger context within which the transition takes place. In order to further conceptualize how the context impacted the individual's transition outcomes, the conceptual frame needed to expand from the taxonomy of transition domains to a model that linked the individual for whom the transition process was focused to a broader ecological context.

A researcher can examine the classification of disability or difference through multiple lenses. Identifying the conceptual frame through which the research on transition was organized was only one important component of this study. It organized the exploration around the transition process. However, focusing solely on the individual with intellectual disabilities and asking the participant to describe their transition as it relates to each of the five taxonomic domains and the larger support system that was used to actively facilitate the transition and actualization of the transition within a particular ecological context. The relationship between the individual with intellectual disabilities and their extended support system within each of the five domains required further conceptualization beyond the taxonomy. In order to conceptualize how the system of support related to the individual and their ability to achieve the objectives of the transition plan in relation to the five taxonomic domains, I chose to further organize the study through an ecological perspective.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conceptualization of ecological systems offered a lens through which to explore the relationship between the systems of support and the transition outcomes. The ecological perspective offered a way to explore the perspectives or behaviors of more than one or two people within a particular environment. It was designed to examine the interaction between multiple people across multiple environments. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) conceptualization of ecological systems offered an extension beyond the taxonomy. While Kohler's taxonomy offered the initial step in defining and understanding the transition process within a specific setting; it was limiting when conceptualizing the behaviors that were not static and were situated in multiple environments beyond the immediate situation impacting the individual.

Transition takes place in multiple domains and the behavior of one individual who prepares to exit school is impacted by a broader context then the immediate school environment. Disability, like transition, is also viewed through multiple lenses and definitions for the term varies depending on one's view of an individual with an identified disability in relation to the broader environment. Before determining how an individual with an identified intellectual disability plans for and achieves specific transition outcomes, it was important to conceptualize how the disability should be framed within the context of the surrounding environment. The ecological perspective emphasized the role of strengths, including supports, in contrast to deficits. It offered a view of disability that was multidimensional and focused on functional skills, personal well-being, the provision of individualized support and the concept of personal competence (Schalock & Luckasson, 2004). Rather than viewing disability as what the individual was unable to do within a given environment, this perspective informed a definition of

disability that recognized the capabilities and supports required to intervene in order for the individual to function within the environment.

The ecological perspective is used as a conceptual foundation for the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD's) classification and terminology for mental retardation, now referred to as intellectual disabilities (Schalock and Luckasson, 2004; Turnbull, Summers, Lee, & Kyzar, 2007). It has also offered a frame for studies related to conceptualizing and measuring the family outcomes of individuals with disabilities (Turnbull, Summers, Lee, & Kyzar, 2007), as well as a model for the comprehensive development of the transition process for young children with disabilities (Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick, & Jung, 2005). The perspective is particularly useful when exploring the relationships between the individual with disabilities and the broader systems that exist beyond the educational system.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) defined the ecology of human development or the ecological perspective as,

> The scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation throughout the life span, between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives…as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded (p. 514).

The environments were conceptualized as an arrangement of structures that were described in succession from a microsystem at the core where the developing person interacts with the immediate surrounding setting and broadening to an interrelationship with additional systems that encompass other major settings, networks and relationships. The frame of this perspective expanded from a microsystem to an overarching macro system that formed the

largest concentric ring, and included institutional patterns of culture and subculture, which shaped the inner systems (Figure 2).

Individuals with intellectual disabilities who plan for the transition from high school to adult life require a network of supports that range from family members to teachers, employers, and local service providers within the community. The ecological approach illustrated the connectivity of the young adult with intellectual disabilities to the broader range of supports that were required as they transitioned from school to post-secondary life. The transition plan should be based on the capabilities as well as the needs of the young adults. These needs must be considered by all of the stakeholders within the interconnected system in order to best support the transition plan and implement effective transition practices.

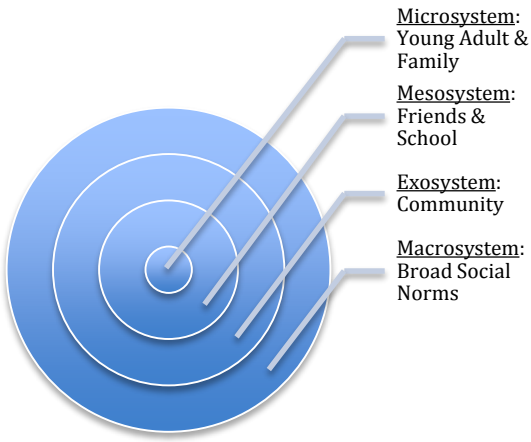

Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Approach to Human Development

The incorporation of taxonomy into the broader conceptualization of an ecological model and its relationship to the transition process for individuals with disabilities has been incorporated into the conceptual frameworks of other transition related research. Rous, Hallam, Harbin, McCormick and Jung (2005) developed a conceptual model for early childhood transitions in order to describe how complex interactions within multiple systems impacted the

transition process. The conceptual framework included two levels. The first level considered the characteristics of the child, both the nature and type of disability as well as the age, and the interaction with the child's family, community and broader social norms. The second level of the conceptual model specifically illustrated the transition process as an interaction between the preparation of the child and family, the implementation of specific transition practices, and the structure, continuity and relationships of outside agencies.

The ecological model has also been used as a foundation for the conceptualization of outcomes associated with families of individuals with disabilities. Turnbull, Summers, Lee, & Kyzar (2007) utilized Bronfenbrenner's (1977) model to illustrate the potential hierarchy that existed within environmental systems of influence that might have impacted the outcomes of the individual with intellectual disabilities and their families. The framework was used to inform the process of locating family research studies that adhered to a model as a means to inform how family outcomes could be studied. Many of the studies identified through the literature review did not identify a conceptual frame, those that did fixated on a particular environment, most often at the child or family level. The child or family was not alone in developing and implementing support to achieve a specified outcome. The child and family received support from schools, through local community agencies, from healthcare providers and even disability advocates. The interaction amongst stakeholders within multiple systems offered a way to conceptualize how a broader framework was needed to examine the contexts within which the child and family received support.

This study utilized a hybrid of Kohler's (1996) transition taxonomy and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological approach (Figure 3) to inform how interaction between

systems within a multi-level frame directly impacted the transition outcomes of the individual with intellectual disabilities as they prepared for and exited school.

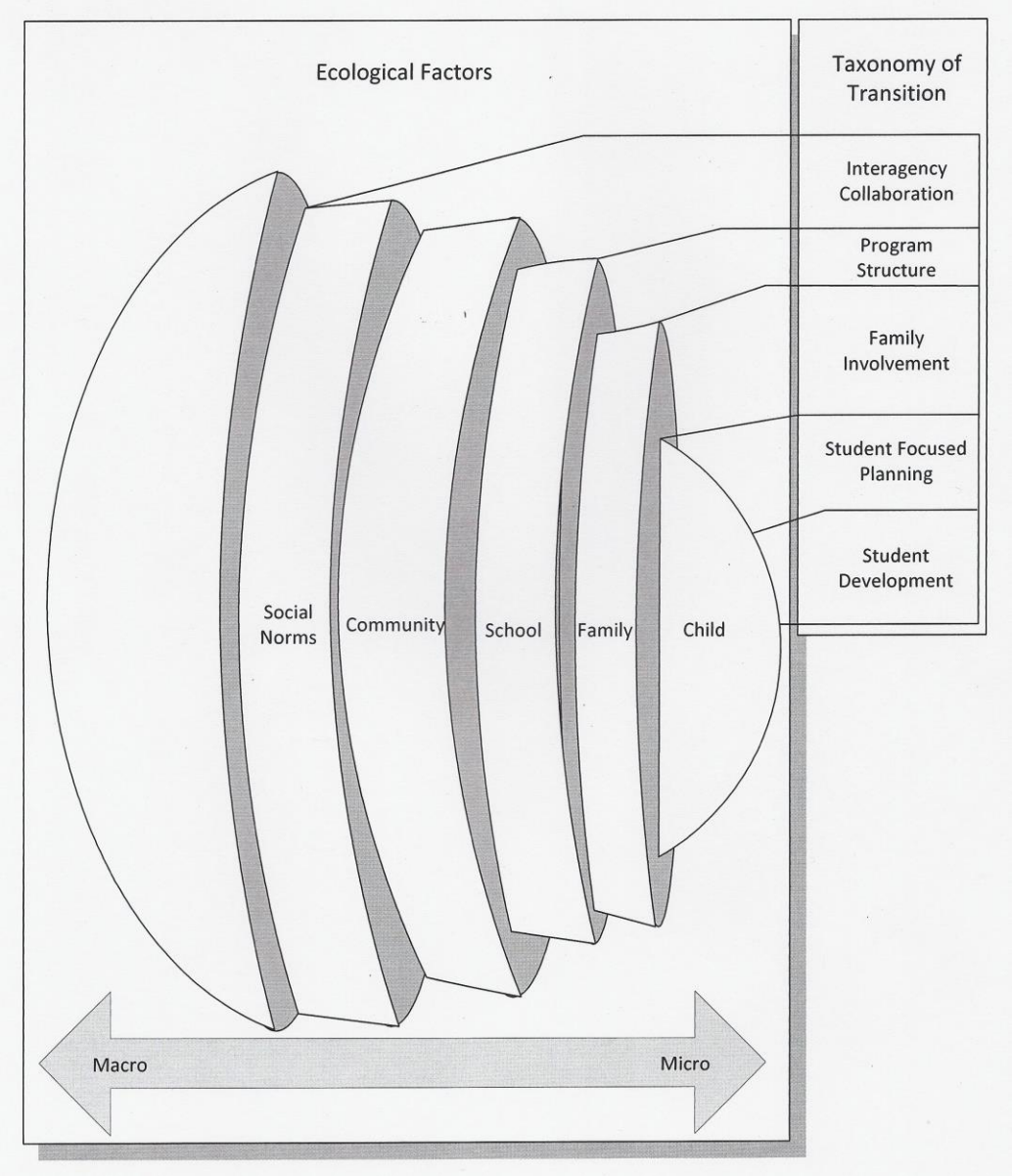

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework for Transition Experience*

*Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1977); Kohler (1996); and Kohler & Field (2003)

The transition from high school to postsecondary academics and employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities has been discussed in the literature for many years. This literature often provides guides for schools to develop transition programs and services.

Evidence that demonstrates the impact of newly created program-based community integrated models and self-determined behavior is largely anecdotal (Neubert & Redd, 2008). Little empirical evidence is available to explain whether students who complete these programs successfully find and retain employment (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).

Purpose

The transition from high school to post-secondary life for individuals with intellectual disabilities includes linkage to support service and employment. It can also include enrollment in campus-based postsecondary education programs or linkage to independent living. While prior studies have utilized qualitative methods to focus on outcomes associated with transition (Lindstrom, Doren, Miesch, 2011) or the perspectives of adolescents and their parents (Hetherington, Durant-Jones, Johnson, Nolan, Smith, Taylor-Brown, & Tuttle, 2010), this study was unique because it aimed to explore the experiences of individuals with intellectual disabilities as a part of the broader transition dynamic through interviews with parents as well as a wider network of supports who were all part of the planning and implementation of the transition. The perspectives of the individual with intellectual disabilities and their broader network of support enriched the understanding of the perspectives of individual members and their interactions with one another through the transition process and the resulting post school outcomes.

Research Questions

Although prior research has examined the transition process for individuals with disabilities, few studies have focused on the lived experience of specific subgroups of students. This study focused on the experience of the individual with intellectual disabilities and their

support network. There are still many areas within transition research yet to be explored. This study was informed by three overarching research questions.

1. How was the transition experience of an individual with an intellectual disability shaped by the broader context within the domains where the transition from IDEA mandated services took place?
2. How did members of an individual's support network as parents, teachers, employers, and community service providers contribute to the unique experience of the individual directly involved in the transition from IDEA mandated services?
3. How were the perspectives of the individual's support network within the multiple domains of transition shaped by the experience of the individual who transitioned from IDEA mandated services?

Significance of the Study

There are many different ways that schools prepare students with disabilities for postsecondary outcomes. Some students take courses in career and technical education or vocational training programs and often complete their programs of study. These students, however, can complete the program and still lack a clear direction towards avenues of postsecondary education or employment (Luecking & Mooney, 2002). Other students choose not to participate in postsecondary education or training and enter the workforce after high school. The employment outcomes for this population are sporadically reported in some states but not in others. There are also students with disabilities who enter community-based transition programs who may not attain a standard high school diploma. There is only limited information available about how rates of employment for individuals who complete these programs compare to their

peers who remain in a traditional school based setting (White & Weiner, 2004; Doren, Lindstrom, Zane, & Johnson, 2007).).

Longitudinal data provide an opportunity to compare demographic data and post school outcomes for multiple groups of students, but the experience of transition from high school to post school life is unique. The process and resulting outcomes are unique to the individual and the network of supports that impact the transition experience. This study offered a retrospective look at the transition experience of young adults who exited a district-supported transition program. It was designed to examine the transition experience from their personal perspective and the perspectives of their extended support network. It offered an opportunity to capture the process and outcomes of a unique group of respondents.

The student plays a critical role in the transition process. The unique decisions that a person chooses to make with respect to specific, personal behaviors that impact their life are referred to collectively as self-determination. Components of these behaviors include self-decision-making, problem solving, self-management skills, and goal setting (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998). Self-advocacy training and skill development in areas of self-determination are linked as predictors of post-secondary outcomes (Test et al., 2009; Wehmeyer, Garner, Yeager, Lawrence, & Davis, 2006; Morningstar, Frey, Noonan, Ng, Clavenna-Deane, Graves, Kellems, McCall, Pearson, Wade, & Williams-Diehm, 2010). This preparation in high school can impact post-secondary self-determination (Morningstar et al., 2010).

Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003) found that students with higher self-determination scores, averaged across four characteristics including, autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization faired more positively than students with low self-determination scores when compared by their post-school outcomes. The researchers also found

that participants with higher self-determination scores showed improvement in post-school outcomes over a three-year period compared to those with lower self-determination scores.

There are many factors that can impact the post school outcomes of students with intellectual disabilities. Their ability to take part in the planning process and to link their behavior to post school outcomes through self-advocacy and determination is an important component of the transition process. Many students, however, do not possess the essential employment, independent living, and social skills needed after high school (Smith & Hilton, 1994; Harvey, 2001). They need additional training and support from instructors who are knowledgeable in their career fields and who have an understanding of how to best serve students with disabilities. Without knowing what level of preparation the students receive, or the outcomes of young adults who exit, how are schools, teachers, parents and students able to make informed decisions about the ways in which to prepare for the transition from school? This study is unique because it considered the individual after the exit from school had already occurred.

It is important to examine the various experiences and employment outcomes that students with disabilities experience after they exit school. There are many different possible transitions designed for students with intellectual disabilities preparing to exit school which include but are not limited to, transitioning from an inclusive high school setting after aging out of IDEA mandated services, aging out of district-based services within a self-contained classroom, exiting a traditional high school to enter a community or university-based transition program, or exiting out of IDEA mandated services and entering employment. This study explored how the transition process impacted the experience and outcomes of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Limitations

The purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, Richardson, 2005). While the scope is limited in its ability to represent the transition experience beyond those directly interviewed for this study, the data and results can provide an important contribution toward understanding the phenomenon of transition planning for individuals with intellectual disabilities. This study was not designed to identify the strength of a relationship between predictor variables and post school outcomes. It was limited in its ability to broadly identify the outcomes of individuals with intellectual disabilities who recently transitioned from school. It was also limited in capturing the experience of only a select number of participants from a university-based program.

Although the collective cases within this study were designed to examine a particular phenomenon across three cases, it is important to disclose that the data collected from the interviews were also limited to only a select few members of the broader transition support network developed for the individual with intellectual disabilities within each case.

The credibility and trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be significantly impacted by the limited number of data points that are collected to offer a rich description of the phenomenon studied (Brantlinger et al., 2005). As such it is important to consider holding multiple interviews to attain a robust source of data across multiple points (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2009). This study was designed to examine multiple perspectives on the transition process, but it only accounts for the perspectives of those who were interviewed. It also was limited in focusing on the experiences of only a limited number of participants with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities within a university-based transition program. The results of the analysis should be

viewed as unique to the experience of the participants in the study and not the views of all participants in the university-based program.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, these definitions were used for the following terms:

Program-based model: A group of students with disabilities are served in one postsecondary setting (Grigal, Neubert, & Moon, 2001; Hall, Kleinert, & Kearns, 2000) and features "opportunities for these youth to receive public school services in an environment with same-aged peers without disabilities who have exited high school, while continuing to benefit from mandated educational services to which they are entitled" (Grigal, Dwyre & Davis, 2006). Other terms synonymous with program-based model within this proposal include community-based model, community integrated model and community based training. These are used in various combinations throughout the literature.

Self-determination: A term used to describe behaviors that reflect evidence of a person's unique decisions. In this study components of these behaviors include self-decision-making, problem solving, self-management skills, goal-setting (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998) and postsecondary outcomes directly related to a student's exit from high school, for example whether they graduated, dropped out, or exited with employment (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997).

Special populations: "Individuals with disabilities, individuals from economically disadvantaged families and individuals with limited English proficiency" (Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act, 2006, Sec. 250, 7).

Students with special needs: Defined as a learner with a disability or 'child with a disability.' "The term 'child with a disability' means a child with mental retardation, hearing impairments

(including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health-impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needed special education and related services" (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004, Sec. 1401, 3). *Transition services*: "Coordinated sets of activities that focus on improving student academic and functional achievement and facilitate movement from school to post school activities. Those activities may include postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation" (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007).

Overview of Dissertation

This study examined the transition experience through a qualitative analysis of interviews with students with intellectual disabilities, and individuals within their support network who described the transition planning process and resulting post school outcomes upon exit from a district-funded, university-based transition program. This dissertation is broken into chapters that explain how existing research and methods inform the transition planning process. The second chapter offers an expansive review of existing literature to inform the work related to national trends in transition, the development of transition models used to assist individuals with intellectual disabilities in the planning process, the post school outcomes of individuals with disabilities in relationship to the five areas of transition outlined in Kohler's (1996) Taxonomy, and prior studies that explore the experience of family members of individuals with disabilities who have recently exited school. Chapter Three provides a detailed explanation of the methodology used to inform the qualitative analysis. It offers specific information about the participants, the data collection methods and the analysis of the data gathered from the

interviews with the study participants. The fourth chapter offers an explanation of the results from the interviews with members connected to each of the three cases along with the data analysis. The final chapter, Chapter Five, summarizes the results and includes a discussion on the implications for future research that impacts individuals with intellectual disabilities preparing for the transition from school to post-secondary life.

Summary

The transition from high school to post school life can be a challenge for adolescents and their families. The experience of individuals with intellectual disabilities is unique and involves a coordinated system of supports that are available to ensure the transition plans and post secondary goals developed while in high school are enacted upon exit. This study explored the unique transition experience of individuals with intellectual disabilities through a series of interviews with the individual who transitioned from school, their families and members of their support network. It utilized Kohler's (1996) Taxonomy for Transition within the context of an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), to inform how the cases could be framed around the transition process and the resulting post school outcomes of the young adult with disabilities and their connected support network.

CHAPTER TWO:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of the literature review is to further explain what is known about the preparation as well as the outcomes of students' with intellectual disabilities and their families during and after the exit from high school. The review of the literature involved a comprehensive search of three online research databases, Psych Info, ERIC and Google Scholar in order to identify research related to the transition outcomes of individuals with intellectual disabilities within the past ten years. This literature review is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on transition outcomes and the expansion of transition services for students with intellectual disabilities. The second section ties evidence based-practices that are identified by the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) as demonstrating evidence of promise in relationship to the five transition domains for transition planning (Kohler, 1996) and predictors of transition outcomes. The final section examines prior work that relates to the transition experience of adolescents with intellectual disabilities and their families.

In the early 1980's when Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, Madeline Will, prompted the federal government to establish a national priority to improve transition outcomes for individuals as they progressed from school to working life. Will defined transition as "An outcome oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment" (Will, 1984). She affirmed the need for a national model that would build a bridge between school and post-secondary life that would include sound preparation, adequate support and the possibility of funded services in adult life (Will, 1984).

Since the development of Will's Bridges model, federal reform has targeted post secondary outcomes and researchers have identified many variables that affect a person's transition from school to post-secondary life. Federal and state reforms in the early 1990's, including the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990, School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994, IDEA 1997, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the most recent IDEA amendments of 2004, have all promoted strategies for improving the public school programs and adolescent transitions from high school (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, and Mack 2002; Johnson, 2004). Education and training are just two variables that play major roles in an individual's future (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). The differences in each transition and resulting outcomes provide a significant portrait of the uniqueness of an individual's education, growth and development. Yet, there are major discrepancies in the way individuals are prepared for these transitions. Furthermore, there are a limited number of successful predictors of transitions programs and services that lead to successful postsecondary outcomes that result after a child has left school.

Longitudinal studies implemented since the early 1980s have focused on collecting information related to the post-secondary outcomes of a nationally representative sample of students with disabilities across the United States. Initially funded through the 1983 Amendments to the Education of Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 98-199), the first National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS1) brought attention to the needs of secondary students (Flexer, Simmons, Luft & Baer, 2001). The results also illustrated the large discrepancy between the post school outcomes of students with disabilities when compared with their peers without an identified disability. Results from NLTS1 indicated that 1 in 5 youth with disabilities were unemployed 3 to 5 years after exiting school. Enrollment in postsecondary education was also

very low for individuals with disabilities. On average only 14% of youth with disabilities reported that they attended postsecondary education compared with 53% of their peers without an identified disability (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996).

A second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS2) was developed as a follow-up to the first transition study. This study followed a nationally representative sample of students between 2000 and 2009 (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, 2005). Several studies have reported on findings from one or more waves of results from NLTS2. An analysis of Wave 1 data indicated that students with intellectual disabilities when compared with peers with learning or emotional disabilities had lower rates of participation in general education, were less involved in post secondary goal planning and were more likely to make little to no progress toward the completion of the transition goals (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Woodruff, & Dixon, 2005). Students with disabilities were also more likely to need additional support in areas related to post school planning, vocational training and transportation (Shogren & Plotner, 2012).

Bouck (2012) examined data from the first four waves of NLTS2 data and found that upon exit from school 97% of students with moderate or significant disabilities lived dependently and 93.4% had not pursued post-secondary education. Among those students 69.2% were not employed at the time of the NLTS interviews and 56.6% had never worked in paid jobs. When examining whether the curriculum that the students with moderate or significant disabilities received impacted their post school outcomes, the coursework was not a predictor of post school outcomes related to independent living, postsecondary education, or employment, (Bouck, 2012). A secondary data analysis of Wave 4 parent and youth responses indicated that only 46% of students with intellectual disabilities were employed after high school as compared to 74% of students without intellectual disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities were

also less likely to attend post secondary education when compared to their peers without intellectual disabilities (Grigal, Hart, Migliore, 2011).

Other large-scale studies also indicate that students with disabilities are less likely to attain comparable employment and educational outcomes after completing high school. Using the March supplement to the monthly U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Yelin and Trupin (2000) found that persons with disabilities were 30% as likely to be employed at any time when compared to individuals without disabilities. Furthermore, neither age nor educational level was found to have a strong impact on the probability of whether the individual with a disability would maintain a job once employed (Yelin & Trupin, 2000).

Recent record reviews and new methods for analysis have also broadened the use of causal models to predict post school outcomes for individuals with disabilities. After conducting a record review and analyzing exit interview data from students within the state of Ohio, Flexer, Daviso, Baer, McMahan Queen, and Meindl (2011), examined the effect of inclusion and participation in career and technical education and work-study on the post school employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between inclusion and enrollment in career and technical education on post secondary employment for students with certain identified disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities were less likely to be included in general education settings or career and technical education coursework. There was also wide variability in the rate of participation in post secondary employment (Flexer, Daviso, Baer, McMahan Queen and Meindl, 2011).

These large-scale studies also highlight the lower rates of employment and postsecondary enrollment in four-year universities, two-year community colleges, and vocational, business or training schools, for individuals with disabilities. The discrepancy in employment and

postsecondary educational enrollment occurs across all disability categories. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) reported that only 21% of students with learning disabilities entered a four-year college, a rate almost half of the general population, and 50% entered a two-year community college or vocational school within eight years of exiting high school (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

The results from the national longitudinal studies and other large-scale correlational research showed mixed results on the post school outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The discrepancy in post secondary education and employment outcomes varied widely amongst individuals with disabilities in certain disability categories. For students with intellectual disabilities post school employment and educational outcomes lagged far behind their peers with learning disabilities and those without disabilities. Though federal legislation since the early 1980's has emphasized the need for post secondary planning and collaborative goal setting to assist students in achieving desired post secondary outcomes, the participation rates of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the planning process remains low.

Overview of Transition Practices

Given recent legislative mandates, it is important to consider how transition programs prepare individuals for life after high school (Wehmeyer, Garner, Yeager, Lawrence and Davis, 2006). As recently as 2009, the President has stressed the importance of creating long term economic growth by asking community colleges to increase their accessibility and to award more degrees as a means of preparing diverse populations for the growing demands of the labor market (Fogg & Harrington, 2009). Colleges and school districts can work together to offer services that do not isolate individuals with intellectual disabilities (Pearman, Elliot, & Alborn, 2004). As policies have changed and options have expanded for individuals with intellectual

disabilities, support for academic, physical, vocational and social-emotional needs should be provided in a diverse range of settings including universities and community colleges (Kolb, 2003).

As federal and state laws have changed so too have the needs of educators, administrators and transition specialists who work closely with adolescents. For example, within the state of Florida transition services are offered in a number of settings. The role of the teacher has evolved to include not only the instruction of academic skills but also the coordination of transition services as students prepare for postsecondary living and employment (Lubbers, Repetto, & McGorray, 2008). The changes in legislation and evolving roles and responsibilities of teachers and administrators connected with the transition planning process for individuals with disabilities has led to an increased need for pre-service preparation. As teachers take positions related to transition coordination, new knowledge and skill is required to fulfill the many required responsibilities. Effective transition practices include consistent and timely interagency council meetings, working with state-level resources, and use of portfolios to document transition skills that are reinforced through the curriculum (Lubbers, Repetto, & McGorray, 2008).

The predominant 18-21 community based models include either program based or individual support models. Grigal, Dwyre, & Davis (2006) examined the difference between these models of support. The researchers found the program-based model supported a group of students with intellectual disabilities within a community setting, such as a college or university, while receiving mandated services from the local education agency (LEA). The functional academic, social, vocational and life skills were typically provided by a special educator or support staff member employed by the school district. The individual support model included services that were designed to meet the unique needs of an individual student who had identified

goals through a person-centered approach. Typically a team of support determined the most appropriate community setting for the individual to reach the specified goals developed through the person-centered plan (Grigal, Dwyre, & Davis, 2006).

Neubert and Moon (2006) offered a slightly different assessment of the program and individual transition models. According to these researchers the program model can be further broken down into two categories; substantially separate programs and mixed programs. These programs are distinctly different based not only on the location of the program, but also on the implementation of the services.

The substantially separate program models offer transition age adolescents an opportunity to receive instruction on functional academic, employment, independent living and social skills within an isolated community-based site. The participants of these separate program models are mainly segregated at a distance from members of the community without disabilities. Students often participate in employment internships, but these experiences are completed in separate group settings. While programs of this design still exist, they were often started prior to IDEA 2004. Neubert and Moon (2006) stress that research is needed to determine whether practices within the separate program model promote outcomes that increase the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. New programs developed using this design may not be appropriate given current legislative mandates that emphasize a renewed commitment to transition planning tied to postsecondary outcomes (Neubert & Moon, 2006).

The mixed transition program models offer services for individuals with intellectual disabilities within a community at a site alongside same-age peers without disabilities. Often these programs take place at universities or community college campuses because of the higher percentage of same-age peers within a concentrated place. This is one of the typical

environments that most young adolescents experience as they transition from high school. The opportunity for individuals with intellectual disabilities to transition to these settings is often advocated for that reason. While some instruction may take place in a separate classroom on campus, employment includes community based job training and participation in extracurricular campus social or recreational activities. A growing body of literature provides descriptive information about several mixed programs, but little research exists on student outcomes or evidence based practices (Nuebert & Moon, 2006).

There has been a recent increase in the number of LEA and college collaborative community based models. A report in a National Center on Secondary Education and Transition Information Brief cited 113 community-based 18-21 programs (Grigal, Dwyre, & Davis, 2006). In addition, programs across some 149 institutions of higher education in 39 states indicate serving individuals with intellectual disabilities (Grigal, Hart, Weir, 2012)

The implementation of community-based transition programs on college campuses provides a unique environment for students with intellectual disabilities to acquire employment and social skills. The development of these programs is encouraged within the literature, yet the reality is many local education agencies do not offer community-based transition experiences. These limited opportunities for collaboration among schools and community agencies create difficulties for students with disabilities (Johnson et al., 2002). Amongst the challenges that students and teachers face, some of the most complex and persistent include gaps in state-level infrastructure and system design, limited interagency collaboration, access to workforce development and postsecondary access as a result of changing graduation requirements, and pressure to develop person-centered transition-driven planning in an era of increased standardization (Johnson, 2004).

Even with the many benefits illustrated within the literature on community-based transition models, limited data designs and collection methods (Johnson, 2004) add to the growing pressures that schools face in considering development of 18-21 transition models. One of the most noticeable weaknesses regarding the assessment of community-based college transition models is the lack of formal program evaluation. Anecdotal evidence offers a glimpse at the purpose and procedures required to establish transition models, but research is limited and evaluations do not adequately address student outcomes or long-term financial, staffing or program guidelines (Neubert & Redd, 2008).

Community and college-based transition programs are not the only experiences that are used to prepare students with disabilities for post school life. Work experiences offer experiential learning and structured opportunities to acquire hands-on employability skills and habits (Lindstrom, Paskey, Dickinson, Doren, Zane and Johnson, 2007). Students preparing for post school outcomes need proper training in order to successfully enter the workforce. The infusion of academic, employability and self-determination skills within the high school curriculum more adequately prepares the individual transitioning to postsecondary settings (Benz et al., 2000; Wehmeyer et al., 2006; Lindstrom et al., 2007). Providing these skills in a community-based setting, particularly a college setting, provides opportunities for access to functional skills and knowledge that students need to live, work and play more independently (Wehmeyer et al., 2006). The ability to adequately prepare individuals and their families for the transition from school into post school education, employment and community-based settings does not occur without challenges. These challenges impact the implementation of secondary education and transition services (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002).

Persons with disabilities face extraordinary obstacles finding employment (Potts, 2005).

The community-based college transition model can assist with access to postsecondary employment and foster increased interagency collaboration (Crane, Gramlich and Peterson, 2004). The lack of data related to college transition models should not limit the development of future programs. However, additional research is needed to determine the clear impact that community-based college transition models have on the outcomes of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

In anticipation of their exit from school, students, parents, teachers, and community agencies should work together to build relationships with institutions of higher education that encourage and support postsecondary success. University and community college campuses offer a unique environment for transition age youth to participate in the academic, employment and social experiences necessary to foster self-determination, career exploration and inclusion within the community. The changes in laws and labor market demands increase the need for a diverse range of transition related services and supports for individuals in community-based settings.

Evidence Based Practices in Transition

The first and second NLTS studies illustrated that employment rates for individuals with disabilities lags behind their same age peers. Students preparing for post-school outcomes need proper training in order to successfully enter the workforce. The infusion of academic, employment and self-determination skills within the high school curriculum more adequately prepares the individual transitioning to post-secondary settings (Wehmeyer, Garner, Yeager, Lawrence & Davis, 2006). As the gap in the employment trends remain, it is imperative to consider the attributes of individuals with disabilities, the perceptions of employers and the activities associated with improved employment outcomes. In order to improve post school

outcomes for individuals with disabilities, practitioners must know which practices have a proven record of effectiveness leading to post school success (Test et al., 2009b).

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC), a federally funded research and technical-assistance center, compiled a list of evidence-based practices and predictors in secondary transition (Test, Fowler, Richter, White, Mazzotti, Walker, Kohler and Kortering, 2009a). The research team conducted an extensive literature review of evidence-based practices based on the Institute of Education Science (IES) "scientifically-based research criteria (Test et al., 2009a). The team started with a systematic review of the literature followed by two waves of syntheses, which encompassed twenty years of research and focused on the secondary transition of youth with disabilities (Alwell & Cobb, 2006). The systematic review was organized amongst the five domains of the transition taxonomy framework proposed by Kohler (1996). The first synthesis included research conducted from the 1980's through 2006. The first review identified evidence-based practices that were designed to teach specific transition-related skills (Test, Fowler, Kohler, Kortering 2010).

A second synthesis examined evidence-based secondary transition predictors for improving post school outcomes for students with disabilities. The second synthesis focused on a systematic review of correlational literature that identified predictors of improved post school outcomes in education, employment and independent living (Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, Fowler, Korering, & Kohler, 2009b). The review included studies from the 1980's through 2008. This review included a compilation of correlational research in secondary transition to identify evidence-based predictors of post-school outcomes (Test, Fowler, Kohler, Kortering, 2010).

The two NSTTAC syntheses offered a starting place to examine evidence-based practices within secondary transition. Thirty-three evidence-based practices were identified by NSTTAC

and categorized within four of the five taxonomic domains (Test, Fowler, Kohler, Kortering, 2010). The majority of evidence-based practices were identified in the domain related to student development and there were no evidence-based practices identified to support interagency collaboration.

Among the evidence-based practices identified, 33 practices, 26 focused on evidence related to areas of student development. Some of these practices included teaching specific functional and life skills related to restaurant purchase, employment skills, grocery shopping, teaching leisure skills, banking, self management, self determination, safety, completing job applications, social skills, cooking and food prep, and functional reading and math. There were 3 evidence-based practices that were identified within the student-focused planning domain. These studies included involving students in the IEP process, using self-advocacy strategies and using a self-directed IEP. There were also 3 evidence-based practices identified within the program structure domain including providing community-based instruction, extending services beyond secondary school and using a specific check and connect method within the transition program. Finally, one evidence-based practice was identified within the family involvement domain. This practice included training parents about transition issues.

In addition to the 33 evidence-based practices, NSTTAC also identified 16 predictors of post-school employment, education and independent living outcomes for students with disabilities based on a review of correlational research. The 16 predictors included career awareness, community experiences, exit exam requirements and high school diploma status, inclusion in general education, interagency collaboration, occupational courses, paid employment and work experience, parental involvement, the program of study a student participates in while in high school, self-advocacy and self-determination preparation, self-care

and independent living, social skills, students support, participation in transition programs, and participation in vocational education and work study. Each of these predictors was directly correlated to post school employment outcomes.

Participation in career awareness, inclusion in general education, use of interagency collaboration, participation in occupational courses, paid employment, self-advocacy courses, self-care and independent living preparation, social skills development, vocational education and support for individual student needs and transition programing were all predictors of post-secondary education outcomes. There were only four predictors of post-school independent living outcomes. These predictors included inclusion in general education courses, participation in paid employment, development of self-care and independent living skills while in high school and targeted student support. These 16 transition predictors in addition to the 33 transition practices indicate that there is a growing body of evidence to support effective transition planning, but additional research is needed within areas of group or single subject experimental research and multivariate correlational research (Test, Fowler, Kohler, Kortering, 2010).

Correlational and experimental research is used to generalize the relationship of predictor outcomes within a controlled environment, but it is limited in its ability to answer process oriented questions that gather evidence from a variety of sources over which the researcher has little control (Yin, 2009). The NSTTAC syntheses identified practices and predictors linked evidence-based transition practices with post school education, employment and independent living outcomes. The research did not focus their exploration on qualitative research. Qualitative methods could be employed to examine the transition process from the perspectives of multiple sources including the student with a disability and members of their transition support network.

Exploring the Transition Experience from the Perspectives of the Student and Family

The need remains for research that identifies the challenges facing adolescents as the process from moving from adolescence to adulthood becomes longer and more complex (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan & Ruth, 2005). Transition planning focuses on post school outcomes coordinated through a variety of activities (Kohler & Field, 2003). Large-scale correlational studies, longitudinal analyses and experimental studies can provide a foundation for the improvement of transition services (Test, Fowler, Kohler & Kortering, 2010). Exploring the experience of the transition planning process from the perspective of youth and families can also offer a framework for examining the multiple influences on the transition planning process and outcomes (Gil-Kashiwabara, Hogansen, Geenen, Powers, & Powers, 2007).

Prior studies that have explored the transition experience of youth with disabilities and their families have taken varying approaches. The phenomenon surrounding the transition from adolescence to adulthood has been examined from varying perspectives and through multiple methods. Survey instruments have been used to capture demographic information and certain preferences related to post secondary educational options (Griffin, McMillan, Hodapp, 2010), satisfaction with postsecondary outcomes after high school (Kraemer, McIntyre, & Blacher, 2003), sibling perspectives on the transition of a family member from school (Chambers, Hughes, & Carter, 2004), and parental expectations of their child's preparation for life after high school (Kraemer & Blacher, 2001; Davies & Beamish, 2009). These surveys were designed to examine parent, sibling or family preferences on the transition of a family member with an intellectual disability. They were limited in their scope and sample size. The participant and response rate varied from 218 parents across 198 schools with a response rate of 27% (Davies &

Beamish, 2009) to 52 families within a regional center system in California (Kraemer & Blacher, 2001).

Families are considered an important contributor to the transition planning process, but there is a limited understanding of parent and family expectations for their child as they prepare to transition from school (Kraemer & Blacher, 2001). Parents of children who recently transitioned from school reported that they received inadequate transition planning and limited guidance on the postsecondary options and financial constraints that they would face after their child exited school (Griffin, McMillan, & Hodapp, 2010). While the majority of parents surveyed in one study reported that their child had received work experience through high school, they were less optimistic about future work prospects for their child (Kramer & Blacher, 2001). Students often pursue employment, school, or independent living after high school, but the views of parents and family about their level of preparation for this transition indicates that there is still work to be done in assisting families with the planning process (Davies & Beamish, 2009; Griffen, McMillan, Hodapp, 2010; Chambers, Hughes & Carter, 2004).

Likert-type scales and survey instruments can be useful tools to identify attributes of a population from a small group of individuals (Creswell, 2009). Survey methods are also used to gather self-report responses from adolescents and adults with intellectual disabilities, however, reliability and validity of the responses varies depending on the significance of the cognitive disability (Hartley & MacLean, 2006). Researchers who are interested in gathering self-reports from individuals with disabilities face unique hurdles because standardized questionnaires that are developed for the general populations may be constructed in terms that are too conceptually complex (Finlay & Lyons 2001). Researchers who chose to interview individuals with disabilities must do so with a commitment to student agency and a presumption of competence

(Biklen & Burke, 2006; Knox, Mok, Parmenter, 2000). Studies that focus on the perspectives of individuals with intellectual disabilities have incorporated focus groups (Neubert & Redd, 2008; Mactavish, Lutfiyya & Mahon, 2000) or have included the perspectives of family members within the data analysis to enhance quality and trustworthiness of the data (Lindstrom, Doren, Miesch, 2011).

Two specific studies have examined the transition experience of individuals with disabilities through the use of case study or phenomenological methods by collecting interviews from individuals with disabilities and their larger network of supports. Both studies examined aspects of the transition planning process through a lens that considered the broader transition phenomenon from the perspective of more than a single person involved in the transition planning process. Each study offered a unique foundation to build upon for future research on the planning process and transition experience for youth who attempt to reach their desired post school outcomes.

Gil-Kashiwabara, Hodansen, Geenen, Powers & Powers (2007) developed a phenomenological study to explore the transition outcomes of marginalized youth. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory was used to examine the influence of individuals within the micro, meso, and exo systems using focus groups, surveys, and a randomized clinical trial across six studies that were analyzed using phenomenological methods. The research efforts specifically focused on the transition experience of Latinas with disabilities and youth with disabilities living in foster care.

Through an ecological analytic lens, Gil-Kashiwabara, et al. (2007), examined the multiple influences on the transition planning process. The study examined marginalization and disenfranchisement in relation to the development and self-sufficiency of the individual with

disabilities and their families. At the microsystem level the researchers found that youth faced a lack of opportunity and support for self-determination and instability due to unstable housing and language barriers. At the mesosystem level, the researchers found that there was limited interagency collaboration. The connection between schools and community was determined to be "culturally incongruent" (p 89). An examination of policies at the exosystem level indicated that for youth in foster homes welfare policies often hinder preparation and planning that included self-sufficiency out of concern for the child's immediate safety. Emerging from the study was the need for research and planning that attends to the needs of the parents, family members, student and teachers who are all involved and impacted by the transition planning process.

Whereas Gil-Kashiwabara, et al. (2007) examined the transition of specific marginalized groups of children within a broader marginalized population of individuals with disabilities through a phenomenological study, Lindstrom, Doren, and Miesch (2011) developed a collaborative case approach to examine transition planning and the long-term employment outcomes of young adults with learning disabilities, emotional disabilities and orthopedic impairments. The study included interviews with youth who had exited school, eight of whom graduated and one who dropped out. They also selected key informants from each of the students' lives who could provide insight on their family, high school and post school experiences (p. 425). The youth identified for the study had prior work experience and were working at the time the study began. The study continued with follow up interviews 7 to 10 years after the youth had initially exited school.

Lindstrom, Doren and Miesch (2011) found several common threads among the participants. There were significant differences between gender and career development and employment experiences. Males were more likely to consistently hold employment with minor

breaks and enter work that offered living wages. The researchers also found that youth who had engaged in postsecondary education or training also held higher wage jobs.

The transition outcomes of youth who participate in work experience and who enroll in postsecondary education shortly after exiting high school are more likely to have stable work experience with limited interruptions, but for individuals with intellectual disabilities access to postsecondary training and education can be limited (Neubert & Redd, 2008). While Gil-Kashiwabara, et al. (2007) and Lindstrom, Doren and Miesch (2011) examined critical areas of transition planning and post school outcomes using either key informants or a specific theoretical framework, neither focused their work on youth with intellectual disabilities. The post school outcomes of youth with intellectual disabilities described within the literature paint a picture of a marginalized group that are woefully underprepared for their exit from school. The methods and findings from prior research aided the development of this study, which was designed to examine the transition planning process experiences through interviews with youth with intellectual disabilities, their families, and members of their broader support network.

Summary

The literature related to the transition outcomes of individuals with intellectual disabilities is limited. There are few studies that are experimental or quasi-experimental in design. This may be due in part to the very narrow sample of individuals with intellectual disabilities who make up a small percentage of the total number of students identified with disabilities. The research that is available promotes, in broadest terms, the needs for employment preparation programs that offer employment readiness skills, planning sessions for the transition from high school to postsecondary employment, and employment internships, especially for individuals who do not plan to enter post secondary education. In addition, to employment

readiness and internships, developing a network of support that includes teachers, parents, community members and employers can help students remain connected to school and provide opportunity for added experiences that may otherwise be missed if a support network is not in place.

Recommendations from researchers like Doren et al. (2007) prompt the field to remain actively involved in conducting research to evaluate the effectiveness of transition programs. There are hundreds of programs designed to assist students with disabilities as they transition from high school to postsecondary academics and employment (Grigal, Hart, Weir, 2012). Survey research indicated that families were interested in pursuing postsecondary options for their child with disabilities, but faced a variety of barriers in understanding how to prepare for the transition (Griffin, McMillan, Hodapp, 2010). Prior research using phenomenological and case study methods indicated that marginalized youth faced unique challenges that required careful planning and connection to postsecondary education and employment while in high school or shortly after to ensure a greater chance of long term success. While research has explored the experiences of select groups of individuals who prepared for transition, this study built upon a foundation of the research conducted in transition. It utilized a previously researched ecological framework and case study methods that were used to collect the perspectives of youth with disabilities and their families. This study continued that line of research by focusing on the unique perspectives of three young adults with intellectual disabilities and members of their broader support network. The next chapter outlines the specific methods that were used to guide this study.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODS

Qualitative research is used to understand a process or the contexts that influence a phenomenon (Maxwell, 2012). According to Creswell (2009), "Qualitative inquiry employs different philosophical assumptions, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation" (p. 173). There are multiple approaches to qualitative inquiry including but not limited to, phenomenology, narrative, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory (Creswell, 2012). While there are multiple approaches to qualitative inquiry, there are guidelines that are used to ensure that qualitative research meets high standards (Brantlinger, Jimenex, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). These guidelines are used to establish credibility and trustworthiness within the study. Within each qualitative approach there are also specific techniques that are used to guide the collection and analysis of the data (Creswell, 2009).

This study was designed as a qualitative case study. The case study framed the transition experiences of three individuals with intellectual disabilities who exited a university-based, district-supported, transition program. The case study method is useful as a way to understand a phenomenon as it is encompassed within contextual conditions (Yin, 2009). This chapter outlines the methodology, data collection techniques, the approach to the data analysis, and the background of the university based program.

Research Design

The research design is a logical plan that guides the inquiry (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and assists the researcher through the progression of the research from the questions through to the conclusions (Yin, 2009). It begins with the research questions and the specific methods employed to answer those questions in order to avoid situations where the evidence does not address the initial questions (Yin, 2009).

Research Questions

This study had three overarching research questions. These questions were framed within the conceptualization of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model and Kohler's (1996) Taxonomy for Transition.

1. How is the transition experience of an individual with an intellectual disability shaped by the broader context within the domains where the transition from IDEA mandated services takes place?
2. How do members of an individual's support network as parents, teachers, employers, and community service providers contribute to the unique experience of the individual directly involved in the transition from IDEA mandated services?
3. How are the perspectives of the individual's support network within the multiple domains of transition shaped by the experience of the individual who recently transitioned from IDEA mandated services?

Qualitative Research

Prior to defining the method of data collection or analysis it was first important to consider the link between the research questions and the specific type of research that was

necessary to answer those questions. The form of the research questions is an important component to selecting the type of methodology that is used within the study (Yin, 2009). The way these questions are framed determines to an extent the research methods that are used for the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The research questions for this study were designed to explore the unique experiences of a select number of participants who transitioned from IDEA mandated services. They were not designed to explain a cause and effect relationship between the variables that might influence specific outcomes, nor were they designed to generalize the experience to a broader population of students with intellectual disabilities.

Qualitative research emphasizes personal experiences, the context within which the experiences take place and the analysis and interpretation of those experiences (Stake, 2010). The goal of most qualitative studies is not to generalize because differences exist in the settings, experiences, and interactions with people as the research takes place (Maxwell, 2012). It differs from other forms of research including quantitative and mixed methods because it is used to understand an instance, a case, or a narrative (Stake, 2010). It is not typically used to generalize findings beyond the context of the participants (Brantlinger et al, 2005). Within the multiple approaches to qualitative research the researcher must identify the biases, values, and background that might shape their interpretation of the data collected from interviews, observations, and documents provided by participants (Creswell, 2009). It includes a detailed description of the participants and the setting as well as an explanation of the methods of data collection, data recording, data analysis, and interpretation.

This study could have approached the unique individual experiences of the transition from high school through multiple qualitative approaches. The selection of a collective case

study approach was accomplished by first considering the multiple qualitative approaches that aligned with the scope of the study and then determining which approach best fit the research questions and purpose. The two other broad qualitative approaches that also fit the scope of the study were narrative and phenomenology analysis.

The narrative approach to qualitative research explores the internal and external organization of personal accounts that build an individual's story within the broader social context (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). The researcher recounts the participants' stories using structural devises within story telling such as plot, setting and theme (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2009).

The phenomenological approach generates meaning units and rich description of the significant statements within the interviews of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2009). To understand the phenomenon the researcher seeks to describe and analyze the lived experiences of participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

Qualitative research is unique from other forms of research because it focuses on the participants' personal meanings and often includes the insider perspective (Brantlinger, et al., 2005). Through both the narrative and phenomenological approaches the researcher analyzes information from the individual's perspective to attain an understanding of their lived experiences. The phenomenological approach and narrative analysis both fit the broader scope of the study, which included an exploration of the lived experience of individuals with intellectual disabilities. The case study method was selected because it offered procedures that included the collection of data to develop, a rich description of collective experiences that led to an understanding of what is happening and why or how it is happening within multiple contexts (Brantlinger, et al., 2005). The collective case approach was selected for this study to understand

both the phenomenon of transition for the select participants, and the many contextual conditions that impact the transition.

Epistemology

The methodology of a study is defined by Corbin & Strauss (2008) as a way of thinking about a certain phenomena. The qualitative methods emerge throughout the research and include open-ended questions that are used to gather data through interviews, observations and documents. The data are then organized into themes and patterns of interpretation (Creswell, 2009). However, these techniques, which are used to gather, examine and interpret data and are couched within the qualitative methodology, rest firmly upon a philosophical orientation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It is important to consider the orientation through which the researcher views the world and frames the analysis of the study.

The philosophical orientation of qualitative researchers can vary widely. A few examples of philosophical orientations that were described by Creswell (2009) include constructivist and participatory worldviews. Creswell (2009) identified worldviews as the distinctions that set one research approach from another. According to Creswell, researchers who seek to make meaning from a phenomenon and to study patterns of behavior over time hold a constructivist view; where as, researchers who seek to examine issues through a storied approach in narrative form hold a participatory worldview.

The phenomenon of the transition from high school for a selected participant can be viewed and interpreted through multiple lenses. A researcher through a constructivist lens might argue that the perspective of each participant is uniquely constructed and links with the perspectives of other participants to form one correct description of that reality (Maxwell, 2012). Whereas a researcher through a participatory worldview might argue that the individual

narratives of the person transitioning from school, the narratives of the family, teacher and community members, and the narratives of the researcher all fit within the broader narrative of the transition story. Maxwell (2012) also explores the lens of the postmodernist who might explore the individual perspectives or lived experiences as separate realities within a broad construct, but without the acknowledgement of an objective reality. These orientations to the world, though informative and which share some commonalities with the worldview of the researcher and the orientation of this study were still limiting.

There were multiple individuals, including parents, a sibling, a former teacher who was the program coordinator, an employer, an employment specialist providing services funded through vocational rehabilitation, all within the study whose perspectives on transition shaped the reality of the transition for the young adults with intellectual disabilities who transitioned from IDEA mandated services. Each unique perspective added to the experience and the perspective of the individuals with intellectual disabilities, whose transition from school was the focus of each case study. These varying perspectives also added to the understanding of the reality of the transition experience. In other words, the participants interviewed about the transition experience of the individual with intellectual disabilities, in addition to the individual who transitioned from high school were part of the transition phenomenon that I sought to understand. Maxwell (2012) defines this view as realism in which, "Knowledge of the world is inherently a construction from a particular perspective, there is nonetheless a real world, which can be understood in both mental and physical terms, about which our constructions can be more or less adequate." (p. 20). According to Maxwell (2012), perspectives can provide a framework for understanding the relationship between actors' perspectives and their actual situations. The study of these relationships fit well within the conceptual framework in which the individual

with disabilities remained at the center of a broader system that was built upon Kohler's (1996) multiple domains of transition.

The transition experience of each individual with intellectual disabilities and the perspectives of members of their broader support network formed the basis for the three cases. Each case described the unique perspectives of the members who shaped the transition experience. Each case informed a broader understanding of the reality of transition for all of the participants involved. Caution was taken to describe in rich detail the experience of each participant within the context of his or her own transition. The purpose of the study was not to generalize findings beyond the unique experiences of the participants involved within each case study.

Case Study

Case studies are used in many social science disciplines (Yin, 2009). Case studies take many forms including use as teaching tools and record keeping in addition to the use in exploratory and descriptive research. According to Yin (2009) there are three conditions that impact a researcher's decision to select a specific method for research. A case study is selected because it: responds to research questions that search for an explanation as to how or why a phenomenon exists; does not require control of behavioral events; and focuses on contemporary events. Case studies also often involve interviews and may also include direct observations or analysis of artifacts and documents (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2012). While these conditions strengthened the rationale to select a case study approach, one of the greatest concerns for case study research is the perception that it lacks rigor (Yin, 2009). For this study it was necessary to: follow guidelines for qualitative research (Brantlinger et al., 2005); follow steps to check for accuracy and credibility of findings (Creswell, 2009); document procedures for the setup of the

case study (Yin, 2009); and include statements about past experiences that provided background and identify reflexive biases, values, a background that might have shaped interpretations in order to build credibility and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009).

There are five components of the research design that Yin (2009) explains are especially important to case study research. These five components include the study's questions, the propositions, the unit(s) of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions and the criteria for interpreting the findings. There are multiple methods for exploring a phenomenon within a context (Creswell, 2009) including unique features of the case study methodology. The case study methodology is used for exploring individuals, small groups, organizations or partnerships as well as decisions, programs, implementation processes and organizational changes (Yin, 2009).

There are several ways to design a case study. Studies are set up as single cases or collective cases. The design of a single case and collective case study share many commonalities based on the specified unit of analysis. There are benefits and drawbacks to using either form of case methodology. Regardless of the specific type of case study that is selected, careful implementation should also include a plan to build credibility and trustworthiness (Brantlinger, et al., 2005) and the use of several tactics to improve validity and reliability. The type of case, the design of the case, and the steps taken to build credibility and trustworthiness depend in part on the type of research questions that are asked, the participants that are identified and the rationale for exploring the phenomenon within the specified context.

Yin (2009) distinguishes between single and collective or multiple case studies in the following way. Single case studies are used to test the propositions of a specific theory, the documentation and analysis of a unique case, a way to inform researchers about a representative

or typical case, a means to analyze new phenomena or a way to study the same case at multiple points in time. Multiple or collective case study involves the study of a phenomenon across a series of single cases. The study of multiple or collective cases also offer a way to collect data from multiple points in order to understand what is happening and why or how it happens across multiple sites or from several personalized stories (Brantlinger et al., 2005). To attain saturation of information about the transition experience of three different individuals with intellectual disabilities who had completed the transition from the same university based transition program, the use of a multiple case design was required.

Single and collective case studies are also classified based on the unit of analysis that is identified within the case (Yin, 2009). The unit of analysis refers to the specific point or points for data collection. Embedded cases examine multiple units within an overarching structure within a specific context. In contrast, holistic cases are designed to examine a broad single unit within a specific context. This study explored the transition experience of three different individuals with intellectual disabilities in three separate support networks. The members of each support network were linked to the individual cases based on their association with the individual with intellectual disabilities who had transitioned from school. They shared a common link to the transition phenomenon, but their perspectives were unique. Meeting with each participant that was connected to the individual with intellectual disabilities offered data points that were embedded within the larger case. In this proposed study there were multiple perspectives offered by the individual with disabilities, a parent, a sibling, a former teacher who was the program coordinator, an employer, and an employment specialist providing services funded through vocational rehabilitation. Each participant who was interviewed for this study was connected to the transition experience. Some of the participants were directly involved with the planning and

transition process, others offered examples of what they had been told about the transition planning process, but who could offer specific examples of how the preparation for the transition had impacted the current experiences of the individual with intellectual disabilities who had exited the university based program.

There were several advantages to designing a collective case study that included embedded units of analysis. The design of a collective case study is considered more robust than examining a single case (Yin, 2009). It offered a means for replication of the design, collection and analysis of data across three cases. According to Yin (2009), the use of a multi-case design also offers a richer conceptualization of the theoretical frame (Yin, 2009). Selecting multiple students and multiple members of the support network increased the amount of data related to each student's unique transition experience. The three individual cases were also compared across cases to build a richer collection of perspective on the transition experience of individuals with intellectual disabilities who completed the district supported, university-based program.

Sample Selection

The study focused on three young adults with intellectual disabilities and members of their broader support network. Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) conceptualization of the ecological approach includes multiple levels of support. In order to study the phenomenon of transition it was important to interview participants that were directly connected to the participant with intellectual disabilities and who had assisted with the transition from school or who could provide additional information about the transition planning process and examples of achievements that were attributable to the transition. While the study sought the perspective of individuals with intellectual disabilities, it also required the perspective of the broader support network that assisted the individual.

The three individuals with disabilities selected to participate in this study were selected from a district supported, university based transition program. The program was developed to specifically assist individuals with disabilities to prepare for life after high school. The purpose of the university based partnership was to increase overall independence of adolescents with intellectual disabilities in an environment in which they could interact with same age peers and participate in activities with a specific academic, employment and life skills focus. The students were provided opportunities to participate in campus social experiences and campus based employment. The program was designed to increase the students' self-determination, social and communication skills.

Transitioning from School to Careers and the Community (TSCC).

Each case study centered on the transition of an individual with intellectual disability who exited a university-based, district-funded program. A pseudonym for the university transition program was provided to protect its identity and specific location; however details surrounding the history of the program, the curriculum, teaching staff, and student outcomes are provided to build a context for the participants' transition to post school life.

Transitioning from School to Careers and the Community (TSCC) was designed as a two-year program for individuals with intellectual disabilities between the ages of 18 and 22 who successfully completed at least four years of the state required high school curriculum, exited the high school program with a special diploma, and needed some additional community-based instruction to prepare for the transition to employment and community based supports. Within the state where the university-district partnership was based, students obtain a special diploma by completing the following three requirements: 1) having an identified disability; 2) earning a specified number of course credits approved by the local school board in basic general education,

career education and exceptional student education courses; and 3) mastery of state access points, which includes demonstrating completion of each standard at a functioning level appropriate to the students' abilities.

For several students and families the appeal for participating in the TSCC program included the possibility of completing individualized transition goals written into the individualized education program (IEP) on an inclusive local college campus. The program was housed on a large, urban, research-one university campus in the Southeastern United States. The program existed as a partnership between the local metropolitan public school district and the university. The partnership originated between the university's College of Education, Department of Special Education, and the local school district's Division of Exceptional Student Education. It was recognized by Think College (Hart, Grigal, Wier, 2010) as one of over 250 university-based programs around the country that were designed to provide education and supports for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The program developed out of the district's need to provide career exploration and gainful work experiences to young adults with intellectual disabilities within a community-based, age appropriate setting. It also offered university undergraduate and graduate students majoring in special education the opportunity to obtain experience working with individuals with intellectual disabilities. Prior to establishing the partnership with the university, the district provided several different community-based work experiences for young adults with intellectual disabilities. These experiences included community-based work-study programs within a large retail environment and a local hospital. Within those settings, young adults acquired job skills by rotating through a variety of positions within a single work site. The university-based setting offered a broader scope of work experiences at employment sites in and around campus. The

program also differed from other district transition programs because it offered a functional life-skills curriculum, emphasized independence by requiring all students to utilize public transportation to access the campus, and incorporated inclusive social activities for youth through Special Olympics, Best Buddies and university affiliated extracurricular activities.

The partnership between the school district and the university was solidified through a memorandum of understanding. The negotiated agreement required the College of Education, Department of Special Education to provide the classroom space and incidental operational expenses, including phones, copiers, and computer lab space. The local school district agreed to provide the program staff, curriculum, and classroom computers. The program space was nestled within a very active part of campus between the athletic fields, student recreational facilities, College of Business and the campus library. The hub for the program, where students would check in with support staff and receive academic instruction, included a large classroom and an adjoining office with conference space, located within a 5 story concrete building shared by the College of Architecture and the College of Education.

From the inception of the district-university partnership during the 2004 to 2005 academic year the program welcomed an average of seven to fifteen students ages 18 to 22 each year. By the 2014 to 2015 academic year, the program included a total of 71 students and alumni, of whom 56% were male and 44% were female. All of the students recruited and selected to participate in the program had an identified disability, with the majority identified as having a mild or moderate intellectual or developmental disability or autism. The program also included a commitment to recruiting a diverse group of students from high schools throughout the large urban school district to participate in the university-district partnership. According to a cumulative report of the first seven years of the university program filed during the 2011 to 2012

academic year, 45% of the participants identified were from a minority race or ethnic background. The 63 students who had participated in the program through that academic year were selected from 20 different area high schools within the larger urban school district. Within the first ten academic terms of the district-university partnership 89% of the 65 students who had enrolled and completed all course requirements, exited and were considered alumni of the university-based transition program.

The TSCC program was designed to offer students with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to learn and practice skills in areas related to employment, self determination, functional life skills and utilizing public transportation independently (Cranston-Gingras, Davis, Gonzalez, Knollman, Thomas & Wissner, 2015). As a program that was supported through IDEA district funds, the coordinator of the transition partnership focused on ensuring that students were meeting IEP goals in areas of functional academics, use of public transportation, and preparation for employment. To accomplish IEP goals the program coordinator enlisted the support of the local county transportation agency and partnered with several university-affiliated and private companies that served as job placement sites on and around the university campus.

While transportation is often considered a barrier to employment and independent living, especially in the early years of a career for an individual with disabilities (Lindstrom, Kahn, & Lindsey, 2013) the TSCC program in concert with a travel trainer who was employed by the local county transportation agency, ensured that all of the students participating in TSCC received travel training. A cumulative report of student outcomes from the first seven years of the program indicated that 59 of the 63 students (94%) alumni had successfully completed travel training to access county transportation to travel to and from the university. Prior to entering the TSCC program only 11 students (17%) had prior experience using public transportation. While

that percentage is low, students who did not have prior experience with the public bus learned how to access their transportation routes quickly. It took the students an average of four days to successfully complete the training and independently ride the bus round trip to and from their home to the university. Furthermore, the majority of students (54%) who learned to use the public transit system also chose to use the county bus system to access other destinations including their doctor's office, the grocery store, their job site, and the mall.

Another key component of the university-based partnership was offering students an opportunity to develop their own daily schedule. Self-determination, defined as, "A combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior" (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998; Mazzotti, Kelley, & Coco, 2015) is an integral component of the TSCC program and incorporated throughout the curriculum. Students are required to keep track of the schedules that they develop, notify the program coordinator and their employer if they have outside appointments that impact participation in school or their job, and document their daily activities in a program planner. They are also required to collaborate with their parents and the program coordinator to write their IEP goals, invite committee members to their annual IEP planning meetings, document their employment history through a skills based resume, and evaluate their progress on their functional skills and job performance. Students are also required to maintain contact with their vocational rehabilitation counselor and adult service provider or other community service agency provider to ensure that members of their support network are aware of their needs and individual education and employment goals. The opportunity to participate in the development of academic and employment goals has resulted in very unique and rewarding outcomes, including the attainment of paid job experiences and completion of the general equivalency diploma (GED).

By developing an action plan to complete GED coursework while participating in the transition program, the seven-year cumulative report cites that one student attained a GED in order to pursue higher education as a registered student at the university.

All students who participate in the TSCC program are required to complete functional academic coursework. Often courses include four core state Exceptional Student Education courses, *Career Preparation, Career Experience* or *Career Placement, Self Determination* and *Unique Skills* (Cranston-Gingras et al., 2015). The functional academic and life skills curriculum includes a focus on functional reading, writing and math necessary for daily independent living. Lessons include counting money, making change, using the next dollar strategy to pay for items, budgeting, as well as writing or providing instructions orally to complete a functional task or offer direction. Included in the functional life skills curriculum are lessons that are also linked to obtaining employment including preparing for job interviews, completing employment readiness assessments, writing a resume, and practice interacting with customers on the job as well as with individuals in the community.

Among the many activities that students complete while participating in the university-based transition program, on-the-job training and rotations through both paid and non-paid internships make up the majority of the student's daily schedule. According to a 2010 cumulative program report over the first seven years of the program, 59 of the 63 students (93%) participated in at least one internship while a majority (56%) were employed within a paid position during their experience, and 33 of the 63 (51%) exited the program with paid employment.

While a majority of students exit the program with paid employment, only 11 students (17.5%) had entered the program with prior work experience. Students who participate in the

transition program are required to interview for each position and the decision to hire the student for an internship rests with the employer, not the transition program coordinator (Cranston-Gingras, et al., 2015). Students who do not obtain paid employment while participating in the program typically work 10 to 15 hours per week, during regular program hours and rotate their positions once per quarter.

Among the many school, university and community leaders who worked together to develop the program, five areas were cited as critical to its establishment and long-term success. These areas included: 1) a shared philosophy that focused on job training, employment and the social integration of the program participants in campus activities; 2) the experience and relationships of key personnel including the transition program specialist and several of the employers who had years of prior experience working with young adults with varying exceptionalities; 3) a strong emphasis on parent support that included encouraging families to assist their children with the use of online tools and resources to help them gain independence with their daily work routines and schedules; 4) a requirement for all participants to access and utilize public transportation to navigate their way around the university, their work site, and the larger community; and 5) a strong collaboration with local employers who invested time and resources to help the students develop transferable skills and connections to other area employers (Cranston-Gingras, et al., 2015) These five components essential to the long-term success of the program were also cited as areas that were critical to the development and long-term success of the three students who participated in this study. The next section of this chapter presents accounts of each of the three young adults with intellectual disabilities, as well as members of their family, their former teacher who was the program coordinator, their employer and their community support provider. These participants offer details about their unique transition

experience and their current employment and living arrangements after exiting the TSCC program.

Selection of participants for each case study.

The three individuals who were selected for this study were former students who participated in the TSCC program between 2007 and 2012. The three former students and member of their support network were selected because of their participation in one or more years of the campus-based program. Each participant who was interviewed for each study provided his or her consent to participate. Additionally, each participant with intellectual disabilities also had a parent or guardian authorize their consent, and assent from the individuals with intellectual disabilities was also especially important given the guidance from IRB related to interviewing individuals from vulnerable populations.

According to Creswell (2009), building rapport with participants can be a benefit if the researcher is already familiar with the context within which the study takes place. The individuals who consented to participate in the study were selected to participate among a group of former participants with whom the researcher had previously worked with through a volunteer, peer support program that was offered to participants of the university-based program.

The university-based program that each of the three participants with intellectual disabilities completed focused on transition planning and preparation for post school outcomes in areas of employment and independent living. The program offered a common link to the transition planning process that each participant completed as part of his or her preparation for life after high school. Although the three participants experienced a similar transition planning process and preparation during the program, the resulting outcomes of each of the three participants were unique to their own circumstance.

The selection of participants for the case study provided some challenges. In addition to attaining IRB approval from the university, additional steps were required to receive approval from the school district where the participants attended the transition program. Although the participants were former students, they were asked to recall information about their participation in the district supported transition program. As part of the process in seeking IRB approval the researcher consulted with the university based institutional review board and determined that a second institutional review through the school district was required. The district granted authorization permitting the use of interviews with former participants and the program coordinator of the university based program. The case studies focused on the lived experience of three young adults with intellectual disabilities. Consent was provided by at least one parent in each of the three case studies, a sibling for one case, an employer for one case, the TSCC coordinator for all three cases, and an employment specialist providing services funded through vocational rehabilitation for one case within the larger multi-case study.

Data Collection

This collective case study included multiple sources of data. Data collection included purposeful selection of not only the individuals for the study, but also the type of data collected and the collection procedures (Creswell, 2009). Within each case, interviews were conducted with the student and multiple members of their support network. Brofenbrenner's (1977, 1979) ecological model offered a way to examine a phenomenon across multiple levels for analysis. Interviews were collected from sources at the micro, exo, and meso levels. Interviews were the predominant means of data collection because observation was not feasible. According to Creswell (2009), use of interviews is in necessary within qualitative studies when observations are not feasible or information is needed from a retrospective experience. Observation was not

feasible because the participants in this study were reflecting on a transition experience that was already complete.

While interviews were useful for collecting information about the transition experience, there were a few drawbacks to the use of interviews. This included the limited perspective of an individual who may or may not have a direct witness to the actions that he or she was describing as it related to the transition of the individual with intellectual disability for whom the case was based. Additionally, information provided by participants during the interview often occurred outside of the natural setting where the phenomenon, in this case the transition planning process, took place. Furthermore, the presence of the researcher within the interview can also contribute to bias within the responses from the participant (Creswell, 2009).

Although there are drawbacks to interviews, there were several steps that were taken to improve the data collection. Yin (2009) describes four specific areas of data collection that should be a formal part of case study preparation. These four areas include: 1) the screening of specific candidates or participants; 2) training for both researchers and participants who are involved in the study; 3) the development of a protocol and 4) the establishment and implementation of a pilot study.

Screening of Participants

Creswell (2009) recommends that participants and sites for the research be purposefully selected in order to assist the researchers in understanding the problems as they relate to the research questions. The participants were selected because of their prior involvement with the TSCC program and their recent exit from school district supported services. The participants knew the researcher and were willing to participate because of their prior work at the university. The pre-established rapport was helpful in connecting with the participants during the interview

process (Creswell, 2009). Though there were benefits to knowing the participants prior to the study, Yin (2009) cautions that a well developed study can still be impacted by bias. Using participants who were closely connected to the transition experience was important to the research, but additional caution was taken to ensure that bias including the specific values and beliefs of those involved in the research were conveyed prior to the start of the research. I was clear with each of the families that I had previously volunteered with the program. It was possible that I had met the participants prior to conducting the development of the study when they were participants in the university-based program. I provided a full explanation of the study along with the consent forms and required consent prior to conducting interviews with any participant.

Training of Researcher

Yin (2009) states, "Training also is a necessary step in doing case study research" (p 74). The researcher should be well trained to conduct interviews independently and who has experience with the data collection process. It is important for the researcher to review the research questions and study design with other members of the research team. The study protocol should be submitted to an Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval prior to the commencement of interviews.

For this study, I served as the researcher who conducted the interviews with members of each of the three case studies. Prior to completing this study I participated in other qualitative research in preparation for this study. This prior involvement in other research included interviewing district leaders about the capabilities approach in developing inclusive practices (Toson, Burrello, & Knollman, 2012), interviewing district leaders about their involvement in restructuring their school to be more inclusive of individuals with disabilities (Agosto, Karanxha,

Knollman, & Semon, unpublished) and interviewing employers about their beliefs about the hiring process for potential employees with intellectual disabilities (Knollman, Rademaker, Cranston-Gingras, & Hicks, under review). Each of these prior studies included a series of interviews with multiple participants across field multiple sites. The data collected for these studies included transcribed interviews that were coded and analyzed for themes. Participation in each of the studies offered additional practice to prepare for the work required to complete this collective case study on the experiences of participants of the TSCC program.

Protocol Development

The data collected from a case study may come from multiple sources. Interviews and observations are two sources that typically yield data that the researcher must be able to gather and interpret. Interviews are a particularly rich source for data, but to attain relevant information pertinent to the phenomenon, the researcher must ask good questions (Yin, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), "Interviews typically involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (p. 181). Case study protocols try to direct the focus of the question on a single data point (Yin, 2009). The protocol is important because it contains procedures and rules to be followed in addition to the shell of specific interview questions and a guide for the report. Protocols can be flexible so that questions can be modified or added as evidence from multiple sources emerges (Brantlinger, et al., 2005).

Not all interview protocols need to contain the full list of questions that are asked within the interview. Interviewing techniques vary from semi-structured lists of questions on a particular topic to minimal structures or single questions (Tracy & Robles, 2010; Creswell, 2009: Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Corbin & Strauss (2008) indicate that some of the most data dense

interviews are those that are unstructured and which do not contain a full set of predetermined questions. In fact, one of the benefits of qualitative research includes the ability to adapt questions to previous responses by an interviewee. Qualitative researchers do not seek standardization in questions in order to take account for what has been said and to identify follow up questions that fit with the context of the discussion (Tracy & Robles, 2010). Protocols can provide targeted areas for questioning and possible follow up prompts (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2009). This is particularly useful for participants who agree to be interviewed but do not provide much input when questions are initially asked (Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

Researchers also face additional methodological issues when working with participants who may have limited means of communication (Finlay & Lyons, 2001; Tracy & Robles, 2010). Qualitative researchers in areas such as disability studies have advocated for the documented perspectives of individuals or groups who have typically been excluded from studies for which the phenomenon is directly related (Mactavish, Mahon , & Lutfiyya, 2000). Collaborative qualitative research with participants who have intellectual disabilities offers an opportunity to learn from the "expert" (Knox, Mok, & Parmenter, 2000), in which the individual with a disability is involved in the research rather than simply being the subject of the research. Several qualitative studies have included the perspective of adolescents with disabilities who share their lived experience and act as collaborators within the research project (Biklen & Burke, 2006; Hetherington, Durant-Jones, Johnson, Nolan, Smith, Taylor-Brown & Tuttle, 2010; Carter, Sweeden, Walter, Moss, & Hsin, 2011; Grant & Ramcharan, 2001). Questionnaires or Likert-style surveys that are developed for the general population may not be appropriate for individuals with intellectual disabilities because the questions might be too complex or could be written in a way that makes it challenging for the participant to respond clearly (Finlay & Lyons, 2001;

Hartley & MacLean, 2006). The qualitative research protocol for interviews and observations is an important tool to help the researcher deal with challenges that might arise during meetings with participants (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009).

This study was designed to include a series of interviews with participants over multiple meetings. Interviews with parents, siblings, a former teacher who served as the program coordinator, employers, and community service providers were also used to add information to the experiences shared by the individual with disabilities. The development of the research protocol was adapted from guidelines offered by Yin (2009) and Creswell (2009) and several studies that specifically included semi-structured interviews with adolescents with disabilities (Carter et al, 2011; Mactavish, Mahon, & Lutfiyya, 2000). The protocol offered participants an overview of the project, the procedures that were used, and a list of the 10 questions with follow-up probes about the participant's perception of the transition experience (Appendix A). The protocol increased the reliability of the research by increasing the potential for replication of procedures and protections of participants across each case within the multi case study (Yin, 2009).

The case study methodology required well-developed and articulated procedures that were incorporated within the protocol. The protocol contained an overview of the study as well as guidelines that the researcher and the participants followed to ensure procedures for protecting human subjects was carefully followed. One of the main components of the protocol was the overview of the interview, which included substantive questions that reflected the actual line of inquiry for the study (Yin, 2009). This study involved semi-structured interviews with participants in each case. The protocol contained a general orientation to the questions that were

asked within the study. These questions served as major areas of focus for the interview in addition to follow up prompts that formed the structure of the inquiry (Yin, 2009).

There were several considerations that were taken to ensure the interview questions that were developed for this study fit with the semi-structured approach to each case. These considerations included developing questions that differed from the overarching research questions, but were connected to the data collection methods, ensuring that the interviews linked to the theoretical frame. Stake (2010) articulates that the quality of the interview questions can impact the quality of the evidence that is collected and analyzed. The questions must were written in a manner that were adapted to meet the individual needs of each participant (Tracy & Robele, 2010). According to Maxwell (2012), the interview questions should have a direct logical connection between the research and interview questions in order to help the researcher anticipate how the questions might work in practice. Creswell (2012) recommends an icebreaker question followed by four to five substantive questions related to the specific line of inquiry. Each main question should have probes that ask individuals to elaborate or explain responses in greater detail.

The five substantive questions for the interviews were framed within the five topical areas reflected in Kohler's (1996) five domains within the Transition Planning Taxonomy. The subsets of prompts under each broader domain were used as prompts to reduce the potential for confusion and maintain an organization to the conversation and the line of inquiry. These questions were adapted from other studies that also examined the perspectives of students and family members who reflected on their transition experiences (Chambers, Hughes, Carter, 2004; Hetherington et al, 2010).

Both the broader questions and the prompts were developed in a way that was able to be adapted for each participant within the study. The semi-structured approach helped the researcher identify the data that was being sought and ensured that the information gathered related to a line of inquiry that was captured across each case (Yin, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The study protocol and interview questions were designed to meet the guidelines for case study research (Yin, 2009). They were developed and piloted tested by the researcher prior to implementation with the participants identified for this study. The interview protocol was used as a general guide for all interviews. They were customized for participants within each ecological area (i.e. student, parent or teacher, employer or service provider).

A minimum of two interviews was proposed for each participant who provided consent to participate in the study. Two interviews with each participant were not conducted in situations where the interviewee indicated that they were unable to participate in a second interview or because the individual indicated that they had responded to all of the questions from the interview protocol and did not have additional information to share in response to the questions. Each participant was asked to follow up with the researcher if they had additional information that they wanted to share about the transition experience. In situations, where all questions were answered within the first interview and there was no additional information that the participant elected to share with the researcher, a follow up interview was not conducted.

Each interview was scheduled to run between 15 and 30 minutes in length. Interviews with the young adult with intellectual disabilities and members of his or her immediate family including the parent or sibling did run longer than 30 minutes. In two instances the interviews spanned 45 minutes to one hour. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and copies of the transcripts were available to participants if they elected to request a copy. The transcript from

the initial interview was also used to prompt follow up questions in instances in which additional clarity within a specific area of the interview protocol required follow up during a second interview. Each individual with intellectual disabilities and at least one member of his or her immediate family completed a second interview.

Pilot Case

Pilot cases are conducted to help refine the data collection plan as well as the interview questions (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) offers guidance on the development of the plot case stating, "The pilot case is more formative, assisting you to develop relevant lines of questions – possibly even providing some conceptual clarification for the research design as well" (p. 92). The selection of participants can be based on general convenience and access, and informants that provide information in the pilot case should also receive feedback from the researcher regarding their participation (Yin, 2009). Creswell (2009) also recommends that the report be written to formalize the findings from the pilot study.

The pilot case for this study included the purposeful selection of an individual with intellectual disabilities and members of the individual's family and place of employment. The participants were asked to review the interview questions from the broader taxonomic domains and a selection of some of the subset prompts. The researcher consulted with the IRB regarding approval for the pilot study prior to meeting with the participants. During the pilot study the researcher asked the participants to review the questions from the interview protocol (Appendix B) and offer feedback on the format of the questions, the manner in which they are delivered and the clarity of the questions in relationship to the scope of the study. A general discussion took place regarding the strengths of the study design and the revisions that were needed to improve the interview questions, study protocol and data collection procedures.

The participants from the study were members of the primary researcher's local community. The participants were selected out of convenience and because the researcher had a formal relationship and established rapport with each member of the pilot team. The participants volunteered their time to discuss the scope of the study and offer specific feedback on the interview questions as a means to further refine the collection methods and study protocol. The recommended revisions for the interview questions offered by participants in the pilot case were used to refine the final study protocol and interview questions used within the three cases. Specific responses to the questions by members of the pilot case were not recorded or reported. The intention of the pilot was not to seek specific answers to the protocol, but rather to assess the clarity of the questions and the connection between the scope of the study and the questions that were included in the interview protocol.

Setting Up the Case Study

After the pilot study was complete and the interview protocol was finalized, the protocol and all consent forms were reviewed and approved by the university IRB as well as a district IRB. Each of the three individuals with intellectual disabilities who responded to participate in this qualitative case study provided the recruitment letter to members of their families, their former teacher who served as the coordinator of the program, their employers, and if they were working directly with a government support service agency an adult service agency provider, an employment specialist, or a vocational rehabilitation counselor. The three individuals in this case study had all attended the district supported, university-based transition program within the past five years and in at least one year all three had participated in the program at the same time.

The three young adults who participated in the study also noted through separate interviews that they had attended the same high school prior to entering the transition program

and had remained friends after the program had ended. The three case studies were conducted separate from one another. Only one person, the program coordinator, was aware of the identities of all three individuals who volunteered and offered signed consent to participate in the case studies. She was asked to provide her experience as an important member of the transition for each of the three individuals. To protect the identity and anonymity of each participant none of the participants within each case study were provided with information about the participants in the other case studies. While information in interviews with each of the young adults revealed that they knew one another as friends or former classmates within the transition program, I did not provide information about the other participants who were not directly connected to their case.

Data Analysis

The primary sources of evidence collected within the proposed study were responses to semi-structured interviews. While interviews are viewed as a targeted and insightful source that captures participant's perceptions of a specific experience or phenomenon (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), the analysis of evidence from the interviews should be analyzed following a specific plan. The analysis plan may vary slightly depending on the epistemology of the researcher, the approach to the research and the theoretical frame of the study (Creswell, 2009). Creswell's (2009) basic guidelines for data analysis were used to guide the analysis of data within this qualitative study.

Analysis within qualitative research is an ongoing process that involves reflection on the data throughout the data gathering and analysis process (Creswell, 2009). The participants were introduced to the substantive questions of the interview protocol during the first interview. Creswell (2009) recommends a general level of analysis followed by a more specific analysis

based on the approach to qualitative research that has been selected or the study. Therefore, audio files from the first interview and the transcripts when available were analyzed prior to the second interview so that the researcher could reflect on areas for the second interview that focused on points that required additional clarification.

Creswell (2009) provides six general steps to guide the general data analysis. The data should first be organized for analysis. The interviews should be transcribed and all field notes from the interview sites should be typed up and grouped according to the interview with the participant and then categorized by the individual case. Once the data is organized and prepared for analysis the researcher should read and reflect on the overarching meaning or obtain a "general sense" (Creswell, 2009, p. 185) of the data. Creswell (2009) recommends that the researcher should write notes that reflect impressions of the depth and credibility of the information or tone. After obtaining a broad understanding of the data the researcher should begin a more detailed analysis by coding the material. The codes can be organized into themes based on a number of analytic techniques. Codes can be based on past literature, codes that are not anticipated at the beginning of the study, codes that are unusual or of conceptual interest to the reader and codes that address a larger theoretical perspective (Creswell, 2009). The codes for this study were based on prior literature that emphasizes evidence based transition practices.

According to Creswell (2009) the codes are developed prior to bringing meaning to the information and terms or labels should be based in terms of the participants' actual language. Initially the transcripts were to be uploaded coded and organized using Atlas.ti or Nvivo computer software. The software is useful in organizing codes within the transcripts and locating information linked to interrelated codes. Although, the qualitative computer packages offered through Atlas.ti and Nvivo were considered, the financial cost and the time required to master

the programs was prohibitive for this study. The audio files were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents and then the researcher completed an initial round of coding. A second round of coding and the organization of interrelated codes and broader themes were organized using Microsoft Excel.

Once the coding process for the transcripts is complete Creswell (2009) recommends that the field notes of the general description of the stetting and participants should also be organized into codes. Codes from the transcripts and field notes should be organized into a small number of themes or categories. Though there is not a preset limit of themes that a researcher should identify, Creswell (2009) and Yin (2009) recommend organizing the codes into five to seven themes or categories that represent the major findings of the study. The themes are then arranged in the analysis to include a description of the theme and the interconnectivity of a theme across multiple participants within a single case and across cases (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). For this study the themes were first organized around the taxonomic domains offered by Kohler (1996). Additional themes were identified based on codes that did not clearly fit within the five domains.

The final step in the general qualitative analysis recommended by Creswell (2009) is the interpretation or discussion of the themes in relation to the research questions and purpose of the study. The interpretation or discussion is based in part on the epistemological lens through which the researcher approaches the case study (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2009).

While Creswell (2009) provides a broad set of guidelines for analysis Yin (2009), Miles & Huberman (1994) and Maxwell (2012) offer specific guidance for the analysis of data within a case study. Categorizing and connecting strategies distinguish qualitative research analysis within case studies from other qualitative approaches. The categorizing strategy includes the generation of codes and sorting based on similarity. However, each case occurs within a

particular context (Yin, 2009) and realists believe that context is often left out during the coding process (Maxwell, 2012). While Creswell (2009) advocates that aspects of the context from the information generated in field notes remain incorporated in the coding process, research through a realist frame recommends taking the process one step further and coding and analyzing each case separately before categorizing between cases (Maxwell, 2012).

Case study research is designed in a way that offers the researcher the option for analyzing cases separately, thus ensuring the unique context is retained for each case (Maxwell, 2012). Within the specific case varying approaches can be used to capture the connectivity of codes through the grouping of themes or categories. Maxwell (2012) recommends that one way to approach the connectivity process is to develop a model of the connections or relational patterns amongst the categories of codes. The model can be used to capture the context and illustrate the connectivity of the codes within the analysis. Maxwell states, "At each point in the analysis, one can take either a categorizing step looking for similarities and differences, or a connecting step, looking for actual (contiguity-based) connections between things" (p 119). Similar to the spokes of a wheel that are connected to a hub, the analysis involves looking at the connectivity of codes identified through the analysis of the text of the transcript and linked to categories that are then linked to the central phenomenon. The transcribed interviews for each case were reviewed and a list of codes was generated to describe the phenomena. The codes were ascribed to the lines of text within the transcript and further organized according to themes. All of the interviews for each case were coded and organized by theme. The codes ascribed to the specific lines of text were organized in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that identified the participant, the line of text, and the codes associated with the line of text. In this manner the participants for each case were identified along the rows and the lines of text and associated

codes linked to each participant were organized along the columns. A separate spreadsheet was built for each theme, so that the themes and their associated lines of text and codes were arranged according to tabs at the bottom of the larger Excel file. After analyzing and organizing each case separately, a comparison was made across the three cases.

There were three distinct cases within this research study. Since the five taxonomic domains were incorporated in to the substantive interview questions, there were already broad themes that the categories of codes were linked. While these domains offered a starting place for categorization the categories were not restricted to the broad taxonomy. The codes and categories that were generated were based on the uniqueness of the participants' actual language. These categories were all connected to the central phenomenon of the study, the transition experience.

Credibility, Trustworthiness, Reliability and Validity

This study was designed to examine the experience of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Prior studies have illustrated that there are many variables that can impact the transition from school to post school life. These studies, largely correlational in nature, isolate predictor variables and describe their relationship to post school outcomes. In correlational research as in other forms of quantitative analysis the researcher remains objective and removed from the design of the research. In qualitative research however the researcher cannot remain completely removed from the design. In qualitative research it is important for the researcher to remain explicit in personal positions and perspectives (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

A researcher examining the collective case study through a realist epistemological lens attempts to bracket subjectivity by clearly disclosing involvement in the study and sharing assumptions and biases during the analysis process (Maxwell, 2012). It is not possible to remain objective within the study because, just as the participants' actions and reactions to the interview

questions were dynamic and based on personal experiences, the researcher was also subject to a constantly evolving context and new understanding of the participants' experiences. In addition, to disclosing assumptions and beliefs within the study design and analysis, there were also steps taken to promote the credibility of the work.

Credibility measures in qualitative research include triangulations, collaboration, member checks, audit trails and thick, detailed descriptions within the analysis (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell, 2009). One of the reasons for selecting multiple members of the individual with disabilities support network was to triangulate the details of the experience with others who also participated in the planning and implementation of the transition process. Triangulation involves the use of evidence from multiple data sources (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2009). Yin (2009) recommends gathering evidence from multiple sources, taking case study notes during the interview process, and maintaining a chain of evidence that link the interview questions to the citation of evidence in the results. A chain of evidence was established for this study and an audit trail included member checks. Participants were asked to review information from their transcripts and send clarifying remarks or questions to the researcher if there was anything additional that should be included with their interviews. The use of member checks and audit trails within this study increased the ability to replicate the interview protocol over multiple cases as well as the organization of the codes and themes across cases in an effort to as Yin (2009) highlights, increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the implementation.

Limitations

The purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize the results or discussion of a phenomenon as an application to the larger population (Brantlinger, 2005). Researchers using qualitative methods and a realist frame view certain aspects of the phenomenon in more general

terms (Maxwell, 2012). While the scope of the qualitative study is limited in its ability to represent the phenomenon beyond those directly interviewed for the study, the data and results can provide important contributions toward understanding the general concepts or principles connected with the phenomenon in broader terms. In this study for example the specific outcomes that were linked to the transition experience of the individuals interviewed for each case were limited to their individual cases. However, components of the transition experience are more broadly connected to the transition domains and contribute to the larger conversation related to the transition planning process for individuals with intellectual disabilities. This study was not designed to identify the strength of a relationship between predictor variables and post school outcomes. It was not designed to broadly generalize the outcomes to all young adults with intellectual disabilities who have transitioned from school. The case study was designed to examine a particular phenomenon across a designated number of cases. Data collected from the interviews were limited to only a select few members of the broader transition support network.

Brantlinger, et al. (2005) note that the credibility and trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be significantly impacted by the limited number of data points that are collected to offer a rich description of the phenomenon studied. The time and resources available to complete this study and the number of participants who consented to participate for each case limited the total number of data points that were collected. To increase the credibility and trustworthiness, Yin (2009) and Creswell (2009) recommend holding multiple interviews to attain a robust source of data across multiple points. To increase the credibility and trustworthiness of this study, multiple interviews were conducted with each participant, when necessary to increase the number of data points.

This study was designed to examine multiple perspectives related to the transition planning process for three individuals with intellectual disabilities, however, it only accounts for the perspectives of those who were interviewed. While this limits the ability to understand the transition process for a large number of the graduates who exited the university-based program, it does provide insights on how a support network comprised of individuals with disabilities, members of their family, their teachers, employers and members of the community all play a vested role in their transition from school. The results of the analysis should be viewed as unique to the experience of the participants in the study and not the views of all participants in the university-based program.

Lens of the Researcher (Values and Beliefs)

One of the strengths of implementing a qualitative approach is the ability to examine things that hold particular meaning or value to the researcher (Stake, 2010). The collective case study offered an opportunity to explore the phenomenon of interest within the setting in which the phenomenon took place (Yin, 2009). In order to closely examine data gathered from these collective cases it was important to establish a rapport with the participants (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2009). To establish rapport, Yin (2009) recommends meeting with participants within the environment in which the phenomenon exists, prior to the study. While I was unable to meet with participants within the environment prior to the study, once consent was received, emails were exchanged to set up interviews to take place within the homes or community of each participant. Furthermore, because I had volunteered previously with the university-based program prior to this study, I was familiar with the procedures that were followed by the families as they prepared for the transition planning process and exit from the program.

Students with intellectual disabilities who transition from high school to postsecondary services face a number of challenges including linkage to education, employment, and community services (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). The challenges young adults with intellectual disabilities and their families face as they transition from school are not unique to the researcher. As a former high school special education teacher and a sibling of young adult with intellectual disabilities, I am aware of the unique challenges that families face as they prepare for the transition from high school.

I am a member of a support network that has worked closely with members of my family, local employers, and community service providers to develop a transition filled with meaningful connections to employment and links to the local community for my sibling, who transitioned from high school in 2010. Prior to entering graduate school, I also developed a program at a high school to provide transition services for individuals with intellectual disabilities. These services included employment internships, links to adult services, and IEP planning that focused on a student-centered, capabilities-based approach to post school preparation.

After entering graduate school, I volunteered my time with the students identified as participants for this study. They were enrolled in a university-based transition program that offered connections to employment, transition planning, and links to the community. While volunteering with the university-based program I had the opportunity to work with the teacher who coordinated the TSCC program and the university faculty member who provided the critical link between the TSCC program and the university. I also spent time interacting with the students. The majority of my time was spent playing sports with the students during their free time on Fridays. Through these interactions I had the opportunity to establish a familiarity and rapport with the program and the students who consented to participate in this study. I was also

able to learn about the history of the program and the broad outcomes students who exited the program over a ten year period. While these interactions increased my knowledge of the program and familiarity with the study participants, it is important to also disclose this information as a consideration of how my participation impacted the lens through which I viewed the transition experience.

As a sibling, a former transition specialist, and a volunteer for a university-based transition program, I have had several opportunities to witness how coordinated planning can impact the type of services individuals with intellectual disabilities access and the post school outcomes they attain. I believe that planning and linkage to education, employment and community services prior to the exit from school can impact the postsecondary outcomes of students and families.

This study was designed to explore the experience of students whom I have had the opportunity to interact with as a peer. I intended to learn more about their unique transition experience and to follow up with members of their support network whom I had not met during my time volunteering with the program. The questions developed for the interview protocol were based on prior research and the study was based on a transition framework that has been used in multiple studies. Additional precautions were taken during the coding and theme analysis to ensure that the voices of the participants were the focus of the study.

The participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts as a fidelity check. When possible, the codes developed and the themes generated from the codes included actual wording from the transcripts. These methods were incorporated into the case studies to improve the credibility of the results. My unique experience with the transition process established trust and built rapport with the participants.

Ethical Considerations

The use of a qualitative approach to this study presented many benefits to exploring the transition experience of young adults with intellectual disabilities. The approach presented a unique set of challenges. Within case study research there may arise situations where changes must be made, either within the case or to the case as a whole. In this instance it is important for the researcher to remain focused on the purpose of the study and be willing to adapt procedures or plans without change the overarching design (Yin, 2009). It is also important to adhere to clear standards for research with human subjects that are reviewed and approved by an institutional review board.

Given that the case study involved interviews and covered contemporary issues relevant to personal experiences, all of the participants who agreed to participate were required to provide informed consent. Working with participants with intellectual disabilities included a unique set of challenges, not just in terms of the need for additional accommodations to ensure that the interview questions were clear and understandable, but that care and sensitivity was taken to ensure that information remained private and confidential. All participants were required to give informed consent and participants received a copy of the interview protocol prior to their participation. Some family members elected to remain in the room when the participant with intellectual disabilities was interviewed. In all three cases there were certain parts of the interview with the individual with intellectual disability, in which the parent who accompanied the individual, also addressed a question or provided additional insight to further clarify what was shared with me during the interview. Although the interview questions were designed to seek a general picture of the transition experience and were not based on particularly sensitive information, the participants had the right to refrain from answering questions if they felt

uncomfortable or did not have information to contribute about a particular line of questioning. During the study none of the participants refrained from answering questions due to the nature of the question. A few participants including the employer, the employment specialist and the TSCC program coordinator did not answer certain questions because they could neither recall details, nor include relevant information related to a line of questioning.

The study protocol was provided to the institutional review board (IRB) at the university where the research was conducted. The protocol was approved prior to the initial contact with the participants. Additional caution was taken to ensure that all of the information from the interviews and personally identifiable information, including the names of the participants their places of employment and references to other members of their community were secured and only shared with the participant in the form of their specific transcript as a record of their interview. All personal identification within the transcripts was removed and the names of participants and places referenced in the interviews, including the name of the transition program, were altered for this write up.

Summary

This study was designed to increase understanding about the lived experience of a select group of students from a university program for students with intellectual disabilities who transitioned from school to post secondary life. While prior research has examined the experiences of parents, family members and students with disabilities using similar methods, little research exists on the specific perspective of parents, teachers, employers and individuals with disabilities from a collective case approach. This study considered the importance of maintaining a high level of credibility and trustworthiness. While findings from the research are limited to the participants within the transition program, there is much to gain from learning

about the unique transition experience of these three young adults with disabilities and members of their broader transition support network.

CHAPTER FOUR:

RESULTS

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected through the semi-structured interviews with each participant connected to the three case studies. The analyses of each case study are reported as separate and distinct from one another. Each case includes general information about the participants who consented to participate and information relevant to the five taxonomic domains of transition programming. These areas included: student focused planning, student development, program structure, family involvement and interagency collaboration. In addition several other themes also emerged through the analysis and coding of the interviews with each participant within the three case studies. These additional themes included: actualization of post-secondary goals, vision and planning for life long goals, challenges experienced after the transition from the TSCC program, and the use of extended support networks to accomplish both program and post-program goals.

The three young adults and those individuals that they considered to be integral to their transition from school and who agreed to participate in interviews for the study, responded to questions that were specific to the five taxonomic domains (Kohler, 1995; Kohler & Field 2003). Every attempt was made to maintain anonymity of the transition program, the individuals with intellectual disabilities whose experience forms the basis for each case, as well as the privacy of all persons and places of employment referenced in the interviews. The specific person or place of employment named in a response is changed within this document to protect the identity of the program and the study participants.

Case Study One: Rob

Rob exited the TSCC program during the same year as Cole. He currently lives with his mom and dad in a residential neighborhood, within a congested suburb lined with housing complexes and strip malls, fifteen to twenty minutes northwest of the university where he attended the transition program. He currently holds a job as a dishwasher at a restaurant within the fast casual sector of the food service industry. The restaurant focuses on serving customized deli sandwiches, soups and salads. The restaurant opened within five miles of his parent's house shortly after Rob had exited the TSCC program.

Rob continues to reside with his parents in his childhood home. His two older siblings also live relatively close to his home and place of employment. They often check in with Rob and provide him rides to or from work and offer opportunities to hang out on the weekends.

Rob, his mom, and the teacher who served as the program coordinator, all participated in interviews for this case study. Approval to conduct an interview was received by Rob's supervisor at his place of employment, however, due to conflicts with schedules, his employer was unavailable for a face-to-face interview and was therefore not able to be included in this study.

Student Focused Planning

Rob and his parents had an expectation that after high school, he would participate in some form of postsecondary preparation. For Rob attending college, participating in classes, and obtaining employment like his peers from high school were all very important. While preparing for the transition to the TSCC program, teachers from his high school, including a teacher that supervised community based employment training, helped convince him of the importance of planning for the future. Rob noted, "My teacher…was really convincing because he was one of

the teachers that helped me with job training; called CBT...Community Based Training." For Rob's mom, it was the support received from both a knowledgeable administration and a special education staff that was willing to offer inclusive classes and individualized programs that made the difference in designing his class schedules during high school as well as preparing for life after school. According to Rob's mother,

> "When we went to [the high school] then what I was impressed with was the principal there had previously been an ESE teacher so that was one thing that was really good because she was very much about inclusion in whatever way was most helpful to each student. I mean they were very much about what does this student need. Here's this student, not you know okay well here's this group of kids who are autistic and this is what they can do or here's this group of kids with Down Syndrome and here's what they can do. They very much looked at kids on an individual basis."

Rob's family played an important role in his education and inclusion in many school functions. Rob's mother participated in all of his IEP meetings, and made a point to call and email with his teachers while he was in high school and as they planned Rob's involvement in the transition program. According to Rob's mother, the IEP planning process was always important. She recalled several examples of opportunities to advocate for his needs and educational goals while he was in high school. At one point in the interview she and Rob both recalled one noteworthy example of a time when she advocated for a new program. For Rob this was a moment that was filled with pride. At the end of the exchange during the interview Rob reached out and congratulated his mom with a celebratory high five as they recounted the story. Rob's mother stated,

> I was able to meet [Rob's ESE teacher]. I don't think that women ever slept because she worked so hard. I was really impressed with her and so I had that initial meeting with her and I just told her how things worked with [Rob] all the way through school and so then when we met to try to design his schedule…She said 'I never have really done this before' and she said 'you know this is like blazing a whole new trail.' And I was glad for that. And I was glad that you know I had the opportunity to say 'Let's try this step'…I told her, and I tell other parents, 'The best thing you can do is you have to establish the fact that you are very willing to be part of a team. That you know that it takes more than one person and that while I understand that you want to do your best you have to understand that I am the expert on my child because I am the one who has advocated for him his whole life.'

At this point Rob extended his hand toward his mother in a celebratory motion and exclaimed, "Yeah that's right" as they clapped a loud high five. The importance of teamwork and the recognition that it takes more than one person is an important aspect of Rob's transition that he and his mother both expressed through their interviews. While he and his mom recounted the IEP planning process, they continued to share examples of how friends, neighbors, community members, employers and extended family members all played a role in Rob's development during his many transitions through school from early childhood to the final exit from the university based program.

Rob's two older siblings, for example, were involved in assisting him with the IEP planning process. Rob's mother did not specify whether they would attend his IEP meetings, but they did offer support by listening to Rob discuss his employment

experiences. This was helpful as they assisted Rob working through both the challenges and the triumphs that he encountered on the job, which in turn helped Rob and his mother craft ideas for IEP goals during his involvement with the transition program. Rob's mom recalled,

> [His siblings] take an active interest in what [Rob's] doing. And so, you know he would always share about his job experiences, you know and what he was doing and if he was having issues with a certain job or not being successful in some way they would give him some suggestions at times and then from their suggestions sometimes we would incorporate those into his IEP goals.

Along with the support of his siblings and his mom and dad, as he grew older and prepared for his transition from high school, Rob also began taking an active role in his IEP planning process. He talked about learning how to craft meaningful goals that were realistic and that fit with his skills, abilities and interests. He explained that he met with the TSCC program coordinator who helped him through the IEP meeting. She provided guidance on the difference between dreams and goals and how the IEP goals would help him not only improve in areas of need, but also keep him focused on what was realistic based on his abilities. In one example Rob recalled,

> [The TSCC Program Coordinator] and I had this little discussion that I want to do some job training with the police force. And I want to do that because I had computer skills and I learned how to file and all those kind of stuff I did back in high school, [working in the office for] student affairs, that helped a lot. And [my teacher] said that in reality that is not a job so I stayed in reality and know that

okay I know that this is not a good dream to have but it's just willing to find the next step.

Rob learned how to use his vision for his future, to develop a meaningful transition plan. He worked with his high school teachers to identify the skills that he had learned through prior work experience in the student affairs office, such as to identify how those skills could be incorporated into jobs that also matched his vision. Although, he learned from his teachers that he did not have the necessary credentials to be a police officer, he was willing to use the work experience he had and the skills he acquired to determine the next steps to working ensuring his dreams could be translated into specific goals. Rob and his mother spoke about the specific goals that they developed through the IEP planning process during his two years after high school when he participated in the TSCC program.

Rob: I had other goals…Let's see one was a full time job and one was finding a job…

Rob's mother: One was time management.

Rob: And another one was time management. And time management for me is kind of difficult to do…

Mother: Well but you did the goals…so that you would be able to decide how long it took you to get to the job where you were training on campus. How much time you had to get there? You know to know when your breaks started and when your breaks ended.

Rob: Yeah

Mother: And your other goal was about answering questions...that you needed to be more succinct in answering just the question that was asked you...So that when

> you had an interview with maybe a prospective employer that maybe you would answer…just exactly what was asked of you and not talk too much.

In addition to the support of his family and the TSCC program coordinator, several other members of the school district and publicly funded transition staff were available to provide information during the IEP meetings. While these individuals did not address the specificity of Rob's IEP goals, they were able to offer information about the services that could be provided to assist Rob in reaching his post-secondary employment goals once he exited the transition program. When asked who attended his IEP meetings at the end of high school and during the TSCC program, Rob and his mom noted that members of the IEP team included his high school special education teacher, also known as an Exceptional Student Educator (ESE), the TSCC program coordinator, and a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. The TSCC program coordinator also noted that the IEP team also consisted of a Local Education Agency (LEA) transition specialist. When asked to clarify the role of the transition specialist the TSCC program coordinator explained,

> They [transition specialists] serve many different high schools and middle schools and, attend IEP meetings or prepare the teachers and educate the teachers on what types of resources are available in the community and for the middle school students they work on just making sure that their goals and their vision is to plan ahead.

The diverse members of the IEP team were all available to assist Rob with his transition from school. While the support of team members provided Rob with a significant amount of information and resources, through interviews with Rob, his mother and the program coordinator, it was the support of those closest to Rob that provided the most assistance in

structuring his IEP goals and assisting with his understanding of how to set a realistic vision for life after the TSCC program ended.

Student Development

Rob and his peers in the TSCC program had a unique opportunity to engage in multiple employment opportunities each quarter. Prior to the start of every academic year the TSCC program coordinator would reach out to business leaders on and around the university campus to identify places of employment for students to train in unpaid internships. The internships were located at businesses in a variety of employment environments, to ensure that there was an assortment of generalizable and business specific skills that students could acquire by working across four to six sites every year. The students were required to develop a resume, practice their interview skills, and complete several employment interest surveys and employability assessments prior to selecting a short list of internship placements. Once a student identified a placement, the TSCC program coordinator and the student would work with the employer to set up an interview and solidify the internship placement that would last approximately nine weeks or longer depending on the employer's needs and the interests of the student. Rob reflected positively on one specific work experience that he completed while interning with the university's physical plant during one of the quarters of the TSCC program. The intern site included an environment where Rob felt he added value to the job and worked well with his colleagues. The work site included natural supports where employees working along side of Rob taught him to complete work responsibilities by providing step-by-step instructions.

I did have successful jobs back in the past in the [TSCC] program…

That was physical plant building maintenance.

> That job really helped a lot. [My teacher] helped me through it and I almost got hired for the job because they loved me and they said that I make them laugh and all that. And it was really great so I got along really well with the older guys and kind of learned new things and that was really cool. So, you know, I am more interested in working with my hands…I learned how to… take light bulbs out, the long ones out and put the new things in and that was awesome. I got to vacuum.

While attending the TSCC program Rob successfully completed four internship rotations. Rob shared his resume and indicated that in addition to working for the university women's basketball team and the university maintenance department, he also processed incoming and outgoing mail at the university mailroom and assisted with food prep and dessert station set up and service at that university café.

The employers who elected to provide internships worked closely with Rob and the TSCC program coordinator to ensure he was a strong match for the position and that he was benefiting from the employment training. The training positions were viewed as an important piece of preparation for students who were working to obtain competitive employment after the TSCC program. The program coordinator insisted that the internships were not only designed to benefit the student, but also to serve a mutual purpose to assist the employer.

Students were required to look through a list of possible internships that were available each quarter. They were required to complete a job application and interview for the position. The job preparation helped Rob understand the facets of not only searching for employment, but the challenges that might be faced when striving to land a job. Rob reflected on the experience of trying to obtain an internship with a restaurant that offered full service, fine dining to students, faculty, and alumni, on campus.

Rob: One of the challenges when I was in [the TSCC program], I went into a job interview… and I thought I was going to get the job but I actually didn't because someone had to put me into my place. It was like okay I thought I was going to get the job, because you know, of my character and who I am and they don't see it.

Rob's mother: Well but that is how real life is too, right because you apply for different jobs and you don't always get what you want. And the type of jobs you try to get, right and that is why you had several different interviews in several different places.

The TSCC program was designed to help participants understand that not every job that an individual applies for leads to the acquisition of employment. Furthermore, not every student who applied to an internship and started a quarterly rotation with the employer, was required to end the internship at the end of the quarter. In fact, several students in the TSCC program successfully transitioned from a non-paid internship with the employer in one quarter to a paid position with the employer in a future quarter or over the summer when the TSCC program was not in session. The opportunity to obtain employment was a huge benefit for many students who attended TSCC, especially for those who had never landed a paid job. The program coordinator wanted to ensure that both employers and students understood that job-site development was an important part of the student's development.

Students who were not completing the work responsibilities or the time and attendance policies required by the job site were subject to loosing their internship. This was also an important part of both student and job-site development. Obtaining employment, practicing daily job skills specific to the selected work environment, and following a daily work routine as a team

member for an employer provided students the opportunity to acquire work experience in a safe environment. As part of that environment, after completing their shift, students attending TSCC met with the program coordinator and their classmates to celebrate their successes and reflect on those parts of the job or daily routine that might have posed some specific problems or challenges.

Rob's mother reflected on some of the challenges Rob experienced during one quarter after landing an internship with the university bookstore.

> He got one job at the bookstore and [it] was frustrating because he lost that job but they had given him a variety of responsibilities. So there wasn't a focus area and they gave him way to much latitude and it ended up causing him to not be successful and…you know I guess that was a good thing for me to see in a sense, you know just knowing what was going to be the best things for him going forward and for him being able to work with a voc. rehab person in finding him a job, knowing that he wasn't going to be able to do multi-tasks, you know, they were going to have to like focus him on one thing. And then you know give him a schedule to move from one thing to another. I think that was the benefit of working closely with [the TSCC coordinator] and with the jobs that he was given at the university to see how things were done; how it was orchestrated; what kind of responsibilities he had; and where was he most successful.

The loss of a job was a challenge, but one that taught Rob several important lessons. The jobs that Rob had discovered were most interesting were those where his colleagues were supportive and took the time to engage in conversation. He also liked jobs that offered variety in his daily activities and included step-by-step instructions on how to complete the new work

responsibilities. The loss of a job during the training program was not only a challenge for Rob and his mother, but it also had an impact on the TSCC coordinator. The TSCC program was designed to teach students how to prepare for competitive employment, so it was a challenge for the employer and the program coordinator to determine how best to teach the students the consequences that would result from not following their work responsibilities. The TSCC program coordinator shared her experience working with Rob and his mother as they wrestled with the loss of one of his internship positions.

> [Rob's] one of, not a whole lot, but a couple of my students, who had gotten fired from job training…I recall having a conversation with his mother and her being extremely upset. ... He felt bad you know that he got fired…[Rob's mom] really felt like…the only thing it was teaching him, is that he was failing you know, and…I tried to explain to her that all of this is a learning process, and that it was important that, you know, he experienced this so that he understands that…since we give the students…a lot of opportunity for the supervisors to sit with them and say, 'If this happens again, you know, we are going to have to ask you to leave,' and if it happens again and we don't ask them to leave, then what message are we giving the student. You know we are giving them the message that when you get a real job you know expect that that you could get a whole lot of people reminding you, you know, that you better not do this again, so um, that's the only thing that really stuck out.

For both Rob and his mother, the loss of the job helped reinforce the need to identify positions that provided strong natural supports from colleagues who were not only accepting of Rob, but who also offered assistance by providing guided practice and step-by-step instructions.

As Rob reflected on the skills that he acquired through his participation in the TSCC program, he shared how the experience shaped his understanding of his needs and abilities. This was especially beneficial to his development at his current job, now two years after exiting the TSCC program.

Rob works at a fast casual restaurant only a few miles from his house. He described some of his work responsibilities and his enjoyment for the work he completes with his colleagues. Rob shared that he was excited to work in an environment where he is accepted. He believes he adds value to the company with his positive attitude and friendly demeanor toward his colleagues. He shared some information about the work responsibilities that he has acquired while working at the restaurant.

> Rob: I learned how to do the grill. And I learned how to do the breading. And I learned how to make salads…I, got to meet a lot of new people who you know, work there and, their first reaction to me was, 'Who is this kid, (chuckles), you know?' 'Is he normal just like us?' And they accept the fact that I am different and they were, giving me a new perceptive...
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> Rob's mother: And so, [Rob], one of the things that works well for you at work, is that you meet new people and they seem accepting of you.
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> Rob: Yes.
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> Rob's mother: Even with your differences.
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> Rob: And I am really open to reach people at [the restaurant]...I give all my bosses or friends that I work with nicknames...because, that makes their day and every time I come up to them I want to give them a big hug and they really accept that…and it gets them off to a really great day.

The TSCC Program provided an environment that was supportive not only for students to acquire job skills, but it also improved their functional academic and social skills. Rob was quick to point out a number of skills that he learned while participating in the TSCC program. Many of the accomplishments he shared were tied directly to the program's structure. The accomplishments included a stronger understanding of how to independently manage a schedule, including both his chores and his free time, how to apply functional math skills, such as counting coins for use in situations he encountered in the community, along with improvements on how to use a computer and navigate the bus system. Among the many accomplishments that Rob and his mother identified as a result of participating in the TSCC program, was a continued improvement in his ability to be more independent.

When asked to provide both past and present examples of situations in which Rob displayed independence, Rob's mother reflected on the training that Rob received through the TSCC program and its impact on his independence at his current job. She saw how the prior work experience had positively impacted his ability to navigate the rules of his current workplace. It helped him to understand the importance of completing his daily responsibilities independently, with minimal assistance.

> I would say that the training really did help him…. Now it helps for him to be in a supportive employment environment where they are very accepting and willing to work with him and, you know, actually his boss had made a comment to me, you know, I don't have to remind him anymore than I have to remind some of the other employees as well, you know, I mean everybody just needs to know that they have to keep going, keep working, keep doing this, not being idol, that kind of thing. So I do think that [the TSCC program] did help him in terms of what

kinds of things are appropriate in the workplace and then appropriate on the things that you would do and wouldn't do and I think that he has done a good job of accomplishing that.

Rob's mother also shared that Rob continues to show personal accountability with his required responsibilities around the house, as well as increased confidence in independently navigating his neighborhood.

I also think that he has continued to try to find ways to be more independent. I think taking on more responsibility in the house, especially with his own (sic) room. He hasn't ventured out necessarily and volunteered to clean the whole house, you know, but, he does not like to take out the trash, but that is probably a universal thing in most young men or young women …I was talking to my husband the other night and I think there is a degree of maturity that has happened. I mean I think we might see another degree maybe around that 30 age. That seems to be another big milestone as far as a lot of individuals are concerned that is kind of what I have seen, just from talking to different people, but, I can see some growth and I think that all those, or many of those are a direct result of having the independence, having to do the time management, having things that they needed to accomplish each day that they were responsible for and that there was somebody that they had to report to, so I think those were really beneficial skills for him to get.

Rob also described his comfort with navigating the community independently to meet up with friends or work out at the local YMCA within his neighborhood. After participating in the TSCC program, Rob and his mother reflected on his level of

independence in planning outings with his friends, hanging out independently in the community, and participating in extracurricular activities like Best Buddies.

> Rob's Mother: …You continue to be more independent. You know, he will go out with his friends and do more things. He hasn't just stayed home. You go to the Y on your own, you guys [Rob and his friends] go out to dinner on your own, you go to movies, you know, sometimes they will talk [Rob's father] into taking them all bowling on Sunday. They will go bowling you know…
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> Rob: When [my friend] does like a group text to me and [my other friend] and uh, he will say, 'Hey guys think about going to see a movie after dinner, um, maybe um, spend the night at my house or [my other friend's house]…'
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> Rob's mother: Well the other thing…that you have done since he has been out of [the TSCC program], even though he still goes to the Best Buddies meeting and stuff and sometimes he has taken the bus and gone there earlier than everybody else and met your buddies there.

While an increased sense of independence is difficult to measure and attribute directly to Rob's participation in the TSCC program, there were many opportunities for Rob to explore the campus and the community around the university. Access to public transportation, multiple campus internships, as well as social gatherings with university students at lunch, through Best Buddies, and during free-time on Fridays after program requirements were complete all provided opportunities for Rob to increase his comfort in multiple social, employment and community settings. While the program offered a structure for Rob to practice new job and living skills, his teacher and his family acknowledged that there were contributing factors outside of school that

were also crucial to his postsecondary success. This included the significant role that Rob's family and the network of interagency support played in Rob's ongoing development.

Program Structure

The TSCC program provided Rob two additional years of preparation for the transition from school to adulthood. The program was designed to offer preparation in areas related to functional academic, living and employment skills. Students, like Rob, who were accepted to the TSCC program arrived at the university campus weekday mornings via public transportation and departed between 2:30 and 3:00 each afternoon. The TSCC program coordinator who also served as the primary teacher assigned to develop each student's daily schedule noted that many of the activities that the students concentrated on during the day related to employment. The focus on work experiences not only prepared students for long-term employment after they completed the program, but also offered opportunities to interact with enrolled students who were taking classes and working on and around campus. The program coordinator offered details about the program's structure and its focus on employment, by describing how students completed their internships and evaluated their job skills.

> A lot of it was based on employability…and being exposed to various different departments and different job sites and working with students, being able to interact with them in the work setting…Typically what we tried to do, especially the first year, we evaluate the students, [to] see how well they do; their interests in different jobs…[Students hold] one job for the quarter. So for eight or nine weeks they are at one job and then they have to interview for another job...So they don't automatically get placed. They have to interview, just like you do with a regular job, and try to get the position…"

Rob also recalled the program's focus on job training. In interviews with Rob and his mother, they were both able to recall several work experiences that he participated in while attending the TSCC program. One example included working for the university's women's basketball team. Rob was able to land an internship with the team because of his prior work experience as a manager for his high school basketball team. Rob shared his experience landing the job with the women's team.

> Rob: I had a lot of job trainings. And I had a connection with umm [the university] women's basketball.
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> Greg: Okay, tell me a little bit about that.
>
> Rob: My coach from, you know, [my high school]… He talked to [the university women's basketball coach] and [told him] to give me a job working with the women's basketball. He put in a good reference for me. I was manager for the [high school] men's basketball team. And I did [that] about four years. And then I started, you know, job training with [the university women's basketball coach]; and that brought out a really great timing; because I love sports; and doing that, and that was a lot of fun.

In addition to the interviews with Rob and his parents, Rob provided his resume to highlight opportunities he experienced rotating through internships in several employment settings during his participation in the TSCC program. The internship opportunities included work in areas of retail, food service, maintenance, mail delivery, child care, and work within the university library. While job training was an integral element of the TSCC program, there were several other important curricular components of the program. Rob and his mother reflected on

several of those, integral components including generalizable skills such as time management, organization, and working independently.

> Rob: And everyday was like okay, …'Get on the [bus]' at this time and then … I am going to 'My Job Training' at this time and when I have 'Lunch' at that time. And then it goes on okay 'Go to Computer Lab' and then okay at the end of the day 'Grab your Stuff,' all that and 'Go Home.'
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> Rob's mother: Right so she [the TSCC coordinator] had you do that every day so that when you had a job, how was that going to help you?
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> Rob: It will help me to get a better job…
>
> Rob: And organize my time.

When students were not attending to their work schedules on their job site, they were meeting with the program coordinator or a paraprofessional to work on functional academic skills. The functional skills included working with money, making purchases, signing up for an email account, sending emails, organizing a daily physical and digital calendar, practicing job skills that were required on the job site, reading and following schedules, and improving social skills. These skills were incorporated in the daily routine. The TSCC program coordinator explained that while not all of the daily assignments were especially challenging to complete, the primary goal was to challenge the students to work independently. Many of the students were transitioning from high schools where the environment was far more dependent on teachers and paraprofessionals who provided direct assistance and sometimes even one-on-one support. For students whose transition and postsecondary goals included functioning independently or semi-independently in employment and daily living, learning to work independently and advocating when assistance was needed were important and necessary skills. The TSCC program

coordinator shared information about the students' daily schedules as well as their reactions to first learning how to work independently.

> A lot of the activities dealt with consumer buying… A lot of functional kinds of Internet questions, like look up your movie theater and what times, and reading schedules and those kinds of activities. It was real important that once it was introduced, the students would get in the habit of doing the activity on their own…So a lot of the activities were simple, you know, it was not very difficult tasks; however, the difficult part for most of my students, they are so used to having someone prompt… Most if not all of my students resist [working independently without assistance] tremendously. Even when, we work for several weeks on them just signing in at the library, that's a big deal. So when I see them doing it toward the end of their two years it's very rewarding because I know how that is a big deal in and of itself, just going to the library and trying to find a computer… You know just being assertive enough to look and then once somebody gets up, knowing that you go right away, somebody's not going to call you and say well okay here's a computer, here's where we can't wait for that prompt.

The ability to work independently, organize a daily schedule, follow a standard work routine and seek assistance when needed are all important functional skills that are necessary for the transition from school to adult life. The TSCC program offered a semi-structured routine that reinforced the connection to independence in employment and daily living. It was a cornerstone of the program's vision and was listed as the number one program goal on their annual program performance reports. The TSCC program coordinator and support staff introduced students to the

concepts of independent living and employment in many ways. Students were required to ride the public bus to school, they worked in internships on job sites around campus with job coaching that was integrated into the employment setting through natural supports, and they required students to navigate the campus and complete daily assignments outside of the primary TSCC program classroom and offices. The program coordinator explained the process of orienting new students to this daily routine by discussing how students learned to navigate to the campus library independently as one example.

> "We don't just throw them in and say you have to do this. We work with them, showing them what to do when they get to the library and basically when they do it on their own, that's the real test. And usually I am hiding somewhere, you know, and seeing how they are handling it. And some of them, just the thought of standing there and waiting is just too much anxiety that they'll immediately look around, and they will, start walking to the classroom, and I will step out and say, you know, you only waited ten minutes, where are you going?"

While the program offered opportunities for students to learn how to develop, organize, and follow a daily routine, it also stressed the importance of independent problem solving. This was especially important to the TSCC coordinator. She talked about her early vision for the program and a requirement that she had negotiated with the school district and the local county transportation board to ensure all students received travel training with the goal of independently riding the public bus to and from the campus based program.

> "When we first started the program they asked me, 'how do you envision the students getting to your program', and they suggested that we have a meeting point or two or three because we have students coming from all over the county.

So if we have an East [point], in other words for them to catch the school bus like they had when they were in high school… parents would drop them off at this hub, and then they would get the bus and come over. I was extremely adamant about them not doing that. I really thought that it was an injustice to our students and, [riding public transit] would be a great transitional skill."

The ability to navigate the public system was an integral part of the program's structure. It not only required student's to focus on accessing public transportation, which was sometimes the only means to attend the university-based program, but it also served as a source of pride and accomplishment for the students. Rob talked about how he learned to problem solve independently by accessing public transportation, especially if that meant learning how to solve a problem when accessing the wrong city bus. When asked to describe some of his accomplishments Rob and his mother shared certain elements of the TSCC program that taught him how to manage his time, utilize the computer to access information, and ride the bus to access the community independently.

Rob's mother: So what else in [the program] was good? Let's see time management, how about your computer skills, they got better…He is pretty savvy with his computer skills. And your independence you know, being able to navigate the buses even when you had that one problem when you ended up on the wrong bus…

Rob: Yeah. I was like, 'whew'…Yeah that's a story. Okay, what happened was…I um, went all the way down to where the bus station was and I was like… 'Wait a minute'…and I called my mom and I was like 'Mom, Yes, This is a real bad idea.' And my mom said, 'Where are you?' 'Um, I am down at the

[professional football stadium] across the street.' And my mom was like, 'what?' (laughing)

Mother: (laughing) Well, first he said he was across from the stadium… And I was like, 'Well…what is around you.' And he said, 'Well just the stadium,' and… I said, 'Well just stay where you are. I am coming,'

Rob: And one of the bus drivers who um, is really, really, nice and took care of me… Um, he was nice and I was like 'mom, mom, first off relax' (laughing)…

Mother: And he was like here talk to the bus driver…well by then I was already on my way down there. And I was talking to him and he said you know, that he was fine and he told me where he was... That was the only time he missed, considering all the transferring that he had to do and everything like that. He pretty much navigated that system pretty well. So I would say that was one of the things that really was a good plus for [the program].

The structure of the program provided Rob the opportunity to navigate a daily schedule that was designed to meet his individual transition goals in a semi-independent, semi-structured environment. The foundation of the program was described as if it were set upon a three-legged stool. The primary components included: 1) employment or job development; 2) functional academic and living skills that reinforced independent or semi-independent living; and 3) opportunities for social engagement or peer interaction. This third component was as integral to the TSCC program coordinator as job training and functional skill development. She envisioned a program that included opportunities for the students attending TSCC to participate in university courses. Although the program did not offer opportunities for students to live on campus or regularly attend college courses at the university, there were several opportunities for students

who attended the TSCC program to interact with students on campus. During some semesters students attending TSCC had the opportunity to participate in courses alongside university students who were completing teaching practicums within the College of Education or medical rotations with the College of Medicine. During other semesters students participating in the TSCC program strengthened their knowledge of personal fitness and nutrition by completing training sessions with university students preparing to be physical trainers and nutritionists within the university's exercise science program. These opportunities offered the students attending TSCC a structured number of program hours over the course of the school year, in which they were included in university programs and classes. Reflecting on some of these activities the TSCC program coordinator shared,

> I felt it was important for the students to participate in the classes here at [the university] to be included in the projects, and just be able to interact in different levels with, the college students… I was trying really hard to break those barriers and introduce different types of activities.

There were also less formal opportunities for interaction between the students attending TSCC and the university students. On Friday afternoons students who were not working on a job site were offered an afternoon of unscheduled free time to participate in campus activities of their choosing. These activities casually referenced as 'Free Time Fridays' by Rob and his classmates included hanging out at the campus bookstore or student union, playing basketball on the outdoor courts next to the university soccer fields and track, or attending Best Buddies meetings.

Rob spoke very highly of his involvement in Best Buddies. The program, a national social club for individuals with intellectual disabilities and college-age peers, partnered students

attending the TSCC program with a university peer 'buddy.' The two students would meet once a week for lunch or social events on or near the campus. For the TSCC program coordinator, these opportunities for social interaction were extremely important. She stated,

> We also had Best Buddies, which was very successful, especially with [Rob], with his personality. He was a perfect fit for that type of club. Not all of the students gravitate to those kinds of activities or feel comfortable being in Best Buddies, but in [Rob's] case he was, and he flourished because of it.

Rob's mother also recalled the interest that Rob had in participating in Best Buddies. One of the clubs annual functions included speaking on campus at events to promote the end to the use of the word 'retard' as a term to describe individuals with intellectual disabilities. Rob was very active with these events. He worked closely with his peer buddy to arrange campus meetings and set up events where he would share information about the national 'spread the word to end the word' campaign. These opportunities were important to Rob and his family because it provided an opportunity for Rob to remain involved with his same-age peers who attended the university. According to Rob's mom,

> He would go with his Best Buddies... So anytime he had the opportunity to be involved in a way that gave him an opportunity to be with typical students and to see what they were doing actively in that setting. We made sure he got to be a part of that.

Participation in Best Buddies and campus events were an important part of the program that Rob and his mom both expressed as beneficial to his growth and development. Rob's mother shared that he continues to remain involved with Best Buddies even though he no longer attends

the TSCC program. He continues to have a 'buddy' on campus and seeks permission from the program to return every year to participate in the 'spread the word to end the word' campaign.

The structure of the program, although varied day-to-day and customized for each student, remained set on expanding the knowledge and skills of program participants as they transitioned from the highly rigid and tightly supervised program offered in high school to a post-school environment that for some students would include living and working independent of the structure of school or family. The activities and events coordinated by TSCC staff and university advisors helped many of the students' transition into paid employment and friendships with their classmates and campus peers that extended beyond their two years in the program.

Family Involvement

The need for family and the support that parents and extend family members provide is an important part of the education planning and transition process. The transition from a daily routine developed around the individualized education program entitled by law, to an eligibility based alternative upon exit from school can be overwhelming for parents and their adult children with disabilities. The process for preparing families for the transition from school is also not always easy. For the TSCC program coordinator, the responsibility of preparing a student and their family for the exit from district-supported services was a challenge. When asked to share some information on how she prepared not only the youth, but also their families for the transition from the TSCC program, the program coordinator noted,

> Helping the parents I guess letting go is…difficult, and not totally letting go, because most of the students still live at home, but there are definitely things that we do naturally with our children once they grow up that…we don't even realize that we are doing, you know, allowing them to…go with some friends and hang

> out, or driving, or you know curfews. And all of those things, our kids need help on doing, and if we don't give them help in doing that, then it's not going to get done.

The program coordinator further articulated that the program provides several suggestions for families to consider in preparing their youth to remain independent and practice living a semi-independent lifestyle upon graduating from the TSCC program. The coordinator shared, "If the parent…tends to really follow through, not all of the parents, but some of the parents will follow through with some of my suggestions as simple as, 'don't make their lunch anymore, they don't need you to make their lunch, they should be making their own lunch,' um, and many of them do follow through." The coordinator believed that her role was to not only to provide encouragement for the youth to prepare for the transition from school but to also encourage the parents to actively prepare for the transition from school. When asked how the parents react to her suggestions the TSCC coordinator stated, "I don't think I have a parent that doesn't think that I am their young adult's best interest. That everything I do is related to improve the quality of their lives."

Rob has received support from his mother and father throughout his transition experience. His mother described her active involvement in his education as an advocate for inclusion in general education and social settings since he was a little boy. She has helped him transition from each education setting from early childhood services through elementary, middle, high school, and the TSCC program. She has been actively involved in the community also speaking to other parents who have young children with intellectual disabilities. She described some of her experiences advocating for Rob's needs while he was in school. She also talked

about her work advocating alongside of other families who also had children with disabilities who needed support.

> I can tell you things that are important for his learning that you don't have to reinvent the wheel so if you present yourself as a knowledgeable individual, but you also put yourself out there in that respect then I think there is a different way that they [the school districts] approach you and they also know that they just can't railroad you. I mean the friends that I have had to help are the soft-spoken ones. And they go 'well that must be.' And I go 'no it doesn't have to be that. What do you see for your child' and I have others who have said 'my child is much more involved then [Rob] and this is really the best road for us and the best avenue we are going to take' and I said 'you know what as long as you feel that you are doing what's best for your student, your child then that's good because that is why they have a variety of paths they can take.'

Rob's mother also described her own challenges in first learning to advocate for Rob's needs. In reflecting on her early experiences working with school and community support teams, she also noted that at one point she was the quiet one in the room. However, her experience over time led her to become more vocal and outspoken. She was concerned for his well being and actively involved in planning for is education and his transition from school to ensure that he had the supports he needed to be successful.

> I had to educate a lot of people while I was educating myself and it is so funny because I was always the very meek, quiet, shy, kind of person, but you know I had to put myself out there in terms of what was going to be the best for him…

His siblings have also been active and involved in his education and ongoing development after exiting school. Rob shared that his siblings take him to and from work, invite him over to interact with their significant others and their children, and also invite him to social functions like hockey games.

> My family has been involved in my activities really well because um, my brother…sometimes we plan a day and I hang out with him, so we do pizza and movies and whatever and he will teach me how to cook every time I come over and that is pretty awesome. And I have spent time with my sister and my brother-in-law and my niece and my dad … and that was a lot of fun. And my mom is the sweetest mother in the world because I love her so much.… And my sister is driving me to work and umm… I give her like $5 or $10 for you know gas and you know whoever gets off around my time takes their time to, you know, take me home.

When asked to follow up on some of the ways that his mom and dad have played a role in his transition experience Rob explained, "My dad's really great. Really great supportive worked with me all these years and I love him a lot well I have to give him a little hard time because that's my job (laughs)..." Rob was also quick to highlight some specific examples of how his parents continue to emphasize independence and preparation to live on his own now that he has exited the TSCC program. When asked to share information about his parents involvement in his transition from school, Rob stated, "

> Rob: My mom is the number one mom that I love the most…
>
> She helped me um like vacuum, [make] my bed, and vacuum my room, dusting my room, and has been really a great role model for me and she

raised a wonderful young adult; and has been my life support all these years…

Rob's mother: …What about teaching you some cooking skills?

Rob: …And also that too…

Rob's mother: …Taught you to do your laundry, even though…you don't like to do that.

Rob recognizes family is one of the most important components of his life. His family is very close and even his siblings live in close proximity to Rob and his parents, so they visit with one another often. This tight knit family has provided a strong, positive, and supportive transition experience. He expressed sincere appreciation for the assistance that his family has provided. His love for his family was evident as he described his hopes and dreams for the future.

My biggest goal is that if I make a lot of money I can pay off the house, pay off the rent, pay the bills, pay off the taxes for my mom and dad so they don't have to do it because I am sharing my love and I love them so much and I want to be there to help my mom and do a lot of stuff and it is really great to have my family involved because I have a big family that really loves me and that includes my cousins, my aunts, my uncles. They have been really great supporters of my parents handling me and they are really very great. I love them so much and family is so important to me.

While the TSCC program provided Rob an opportunity to meet friends, obtain generalizable skills that were important to daily living and employment, and increase his confidence in his ability to complete daily responsibilities semi-independently, after exiting the program, it is Rob's family who have remained his primary source of encouragement and

support. The love and support he has received from his parents and siblings was reflected in the examples that he and his mom shared about his life after exiting the TSCC program. Rob's love for his family was also exemplified through the outpouring of support he shared for family. His mom described the family's support for Rob and his future in the following way,

> Everybody proximity wise is close so, usually there is a couple nights where they [Rob's siblings] are over here for dinner. So we are hanging out. The nieces love him. They want him to play with him all the time. He is usually chilling out. Everybody in the family is very supportive and extended family I would say the same thing. Everybody is very much very positive.

Rob's mother shared that as Rob has transitioned through many different stages of school, and during those important stages of transition, she often looked to other families for support. She sought advice from those who had already experienced the transition into adulthood and those who had younger children making their way through the school system. Although, these individuals were not blood-relatives, such as siblings, aunts, uncles, or grandparents supporting Rob during his transition, they were part of a larger family, a community that shared the similar experience of preparing their young adult children with intellectual disabilities for the transition into adult life. Rob's mother reflected on many of his stages of transition and in thinking about the many stages of development, schooling, and preparation that she experienced, she shared, "You know the people before us cut a trail and we cut a trail. You know and everybody helps each other along the way. But it was a big learning curve for us, and there was a lot of frustration for us in the beginning." That frustration however, was part of a learning experience that Rob's mother now shares willingly with other families. She talks about her

experience as a parent and shares with other parents about how to stay active and involved in advocating for their child's needs.

> So now you know others call me and you know I am also a parent liaison for the pediatrician's office and for the hospital so they say, 'if there are people that want to talk to somebody, can we given them your name?' and I am like, 'Yes.' So, I am that person. And I love that opportunity…

Rob's mother continues to advocate for his needs and maintains communication with his current employer to ensure that they maintain a positive relationship so that Rob can remain successful at work. This support is also exemplified through the relationships that Rob and his mother have developed with agencies and community supports that offer ongoing supports to meet Rob's needs now that he is no longer tied to the resources offered through the TSCC program.

Interagency Collaboration

Interagency collaboration is noted as an integral part of the transition experience and an important link to services supporting postsecondary goals (Kochar-Bryant, Shaw, & Izzo, 2007), but there are limited examples of effective partnerships and no current evidence-based practices to support interagency collaboration (Test, Fowler, Kohler, & Kortering, 2010). Although, there is limited information about effective evidence based practices to support interagency collaboration models, multiple examples of interagency collaboration were evident in Rob's transition from the TSCC program. Several partnerships with government agencies and community groups had developed while Rob was participating in the program. One important example of a partnership that developed during his time attending the university included working with a travel trainer from the county transportation department who instructed Rob and

his classmates on how to access and use the public bus system to get to and from school. Rob and his mom reflected on the training experience that Rob received, noting that he was still using public transportation from time to time to travel home from work on days his family members or friends were unable to assist.

> Rob's mother: So what about umm training on the bus? Who was the guy who helped you out?...
>
> Rob: …He was awesome. He helped me get through five days of riding the bus and on the fifth day he got in his car and then he followed the bus and …[He was] willing to do that. And that was awesome. I sometimes take the Flex home. But it takes forever...[I] wait for like an hour for the Flex.

In addition to the partnership with the county transportation office, the TSCC program coordinator also highlighted several other partnerships with agencies including Vocational Rehabilitation, area Adult Service providers, university faculty and other community supports. Although the TSCC program was established to provide work experience and supported employment for the individuals enrolled in the program, some students who were working in paid positions received additional coaching assistance from employment assistance programs provided by services agencies supporting adults with disabilities. These coaching hours were funded through vocational rehabilitation or Medicaid waiver supports.

> So we've got lots of nonpaid positions, but yes, I have had job coaches that have come in for my students that have been on paid positions… So they have got the job down pat and it's just little tweaking issues, like whether it is reading the time clock or it is changing their schedule, or the bus schedule because of their work

shift. You know especially if there are various different times that it is not a set time, and in the restaurant business it usually does change quite a bit.

When asked to share information about the partnership that the program coordinator had developed with area service providers who were providing job coaching for students receiving supports through Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicaid waivers, or other funding sources, the coordinator shared a specific example about a student in the program who had received coaching during a paid work experience.

> If there is anything that the job coach wants me to work on, whether its a resume, or its interviewing skills [for example] I have one student that's right now employed, and they have military time [at the place of employment], and he is really getting confused signing in and out, and reading his schedule, you know, in military time. So if you have a good relationship with your job coach, the job coach can call, the transition component and say… 'I need some help with providing either a cheat sheet or something where he can easily translate or convert military time to regular time, so that's just one example of many.'

Rob and his mother also shared some examples of the type of job coaching that he received on paid positions that he acquired after exiting the TSCC program. While it was not evident from conversations with Rob and his mother or in conversations with the TSCC program coordinator that Rob had worked with a job coach while attending the university, Rob's mother indicated that he received support from vocational rehabilitation to fund a job developer to prepare him for paid employment after exiting the TSCC program.

> When we had [an employment specialist] for a period of time, she was very good and what I liked about her was that she was all business, you know, 'You need to

> be groomed… You need to have this together and you need to have that together. You need to get your resume…and when we go to interview you have to answer questions succinctly. You can't go off on a tangent and tell about your whole life's story'. And, you know, she worked with him very professionally. And she didn't cut him any slack. And that is what we needed.

The support Rob received in preparing for the job changed once he landed a job at the restaurant. The employment specialist assigned to work with Rob provided a set number of hours to assist him in acquiring the job related skills necessary to ensure he was successfully completing his assigned work responsibilities. Rob's mother shared how Rob transitioned into his role as a dishwasher at the restaurant and the type of ongoing support that he received from his co-workers after the one-on-one support from the employment specialist had faded.

> The [employment specialist], who helped him with the job, helped him with the training. She was the one who oversaw him at [the restaurant]. When he got his 150 hours completed and he graduated so to speak from needing that service, he [now] has, there is a gal that's, available to us should we need it, like she said if he transitions into a different position in [the restaurant] and they want somebody to come back and work at retraining him then, um, they would do that, so we have that opportunity to do that, but right now we are not really using any voc. rehab services.

Asked to provide some additional details about whether there were service providers who helped Rob with other aspects of his daily life, such as cooking or daily independent living skills, Rob and his mother indicated that the support he received targeted his employment goals. It was also evident that the strongest support that Rob received while working at the restaurant

developed through natural relationships that he formed with his colleagues and managers at the restaurant.

> Rob: At my job there is (sic) a lot of trainers. If you see white hats they are the trainers and [one of my co-workers] has been teaching me a lot, with the food prepping and…
>
> Rob's mother: Right, so there are people at work that help you do that. They don't really need the voc. rehab. They haven't needed any outside resources since [the employment specialist] was there. And in terms of home, we pretty much are the ones that are training him to do the different life skills stuff.

The support from vocational rehabilitation that funded a job developer and an employment specialist or job coach was important in helping Rob acquire the specialized skills required to complete his daily job responsibilities, but through conversations with Rob and his mother, the broader network of support that developed organically through friendships that he developed through his participation in Best Buddies while attending the TSCC program and the relationships that he built through his interactions with his co-workers at the restaurant exemplified a very different and very important type of collaboration. Rob's network of friends, neighbors, siblings, co-workers and community members served as active partners in his transition. Rob's mother recalled hearing from parents who had adult children what life was like for adults with intellectual disabilities who had transitioned many years prior. Their transition experience was vastly different than the experience that Rob had after exiting school. Rob's mother stated, "It's more than just family now and it used to be just you know your nucleus and that's what I remember reading and I thought, that's not good." Rob and his family have a strong

network of support to ensure that he remains successful on the job, engaged during his free time when he is not at work, and active, safe, and healthy as he continues to transition into adulthood.

Case Study Two: Ben

Ben, the first to exit the transition program among the three case study participants, lives with his mom and dad in a neighborhood fifteen to twenty minutes northwest of the university where the TSCC was based. Ben currently holds a job twenty-five minutes south of his house in the heart of a large urban center, processing paperwork and providing administrative assistance to a processor's office within the county judicial system. He is very close to his two older brothers, who reside within the city; and Ben interacts with them on a weekly basis.

Ben shared the information about this study with his parents, his family members, his former teacher and his employer. Interviews were conducted with Ben, his mom and dad; one of his two older brothers; his employer; and the TSCC program coordinator.

Student Focused Planning

Ben's transition to the TSCC program and the transition planning process started prior to his exit from high school. As he grew up, Ben became more involved in planning for his individualized education program. The school provided Ben the opportunity to participate in the meetings and his family was supportive of his attendance. His father noted that Ben first began attending and speaking at his annual IEP meetings when he was in middle school, "I think they gave him a role in the meeting. Yes. And I think as he got older, especially high school and college, especially at [the TSCC program] level, he was very active... More so probably than in high school and in high school he was more active than grammar school for instance."

Ben has two older brothers who attended college. Many of his friends from high school transitioned to college. The opportunity to attend a transition program within a college setting

was very important to Ben. As Ben advanced through high school, he had a strong desire to go to college. His mother described the process of discovering and applying to the TSCC program. Although there was a waiting list for individuals who were eligible to attend the program, Ben's family worked with his high school teachers to gather letters of reference and complete the application process.

> We heard about the [TSCC] program from…the ESE specialist there and we knew there was going to be a long waiting list so I said, 'Well what can we do as parents to get him in?' And they said well go ahead and get letters of recommendation from his teachers and things like that. So we got that all together filled out the packet and just held our breath. And luckily he got in because [the TSCC program] does take I think the 18 high schools in this area…I was afraid he wasn't going to get in. We had no other opportunities for him after high school so it was like now what is he going to do. And he wanted to go to college so bad, so this was the closest we could get. And once he got in, we were thrilled.

Ben's family served as a source of encouragement and support. They worked with Ben and his teachers to ensure that his dreams, aspirations and goals could be actualized as he transitioned from high school. His father described these plans and the support provided to Ben by his family and his high school teachers throughout the planning and application process.

> [Ben] has always had plans since he was young about the things he wanted to do all along the typical spectrum of what people want for themselves for life. You know, he always wanted to go to college. That was a very big thing as he saw his older brothers go. And he knew that he should be able to go someday and it was a major dream of his to be able to do that. And for the [TSCC], program to come

> along and provide…the opportunity was just a God send for our family because we didn't know that such a thing existed… [Ben] discovered the [TSCC] program that they were working with there and he became very interested and he was a candidate very early according to the special educators at [his high school] due to his capabilities. So from the time he was in tenth grade the educators at [his high school] started to introduce [Ben] to the [TSCC], program…by taking various field trips to it once a year…and it became a real goal for [Ben] to be able to meet the guidelines that allowed him to be eligible…So by the time he had graduated high school he was set to go to [TSCC]… He went through the interview process…and was successful in obtaining a position… It was really great so that was really a major goal of [Ben's] from when he was younger and he was able to meet that goal and it really provided him with an awful lot of self-esteem and feeling and accomplishment that a lot of people wouldn't have that opportunity in his position.

The transition to the TSCC program was a major accomplishment for Ben, but his dreams, aspirations, and goals did not stop after his acceptance to the program. Ben described his primary goals during his participation in the program as, "goals for advocacy, independence, and part of growing up." Ben shared specifics about those skills that he needed to reach his goals. The program assisted Ben in preparing to be more independent by developing transportation and employment related goals and activities. The TSCC program coordinator described the goals that she was working with Ben to accomplish during his participation in the program. These goals included "Employment, specific goals such as being successful on the job and employment,

transportation was also another goal, some functional academic goals, using money, time management."

Among those goals, one very specific aspiration was to prepare for employment. For Ben, that preparation involved landing a position as a manager for a baseball team. While he set his sights very high at the professional level, his parents and the TSCC program coordinator worked with Ben to find a position assisting the university's men's baseball program.

Ben had incredibly large aspirations to reach the major league. While he did not possess some of the skills or qualifications necessary to accomplish that goal, his family and teacher worked with him to ground the dream in reality. They let Ben know that it was not realistic to set his sights on the major league, but they did not discourage him from figuring out a way to get involved with the local baseball program. They were very supportive in helping Ben make the necessary connections to a local team to ensure that he was successful as a volunteer assistant with the men's university baseball program. His mom described the process of helping Ben shape his goals, so that it matched his vision and could also be realistically attained within the scope of his local community.

> Ben's mother: As parents we have had to have a reality check with him and explain to him… He wanted to run a baseball organization because that is where his interests is, but we said there are other ways that you can be involved, but you can't do what you hoped to do because you don't have the experience and you haven't played…
>
> Ben: I wanted to do something in baseball.

> Ben's mother: But we had to really explain to him that you can't be a manager of baseball, so we let him be part of baseball. Well we didn't, but the coach did, so he is in the dugout a lot.
>
> Ben: So now what I am doing about baseball is that I am the team manager for the [university] baseball team and my brother is a part of the [university] baseball team and …when I was in [the TSCC program], I job trained with coach…and then he said the year is coming up. I want to take you on as team manager. I said of course, I took that job and I have been there ever since.

The purpose of the TSCC program was to prepare the participants to live a full life as independently as possible upon exit from school. The TSCC program coordinator was actively involved in Ben's transition planning meetings, and worked with Ben and his family to ensure that he had ample practice to work toward the completion of the goals set forth in his IEP. Ben's mom noted that while the program only existed for each participant for a limited period of time, and that the lifelong goals to be more independent can not be accomplished over the course of two years, the TSCC program coordinator did as much as possible to ensure Ben was more prepared than if he had not entered the university-based transition program.

> [The TSCC program coordinator] was great, but you know its cut off once you are done and her responsibility is done. She gave him a great two years. And she really, really, pressed the independence and you make your decisions and you go with it and you finish what you start and not everything is going to be fun, and sometimes you just have to work through it and she instilled a lot of great qualities in her students.

Ben accomplished many of his transition goals by participating in the TSCC program. He was able to attend classes and develop new friendships at a university. He was able to participate in a number of paid and nonpaid internships, which prepared him for his current job. He learned to ride public transportation, providing he and his family confidence in his ability to navigate the community independently. He aspired to be the manager of a baseball team, and remains active as an assistant with the university baseball program.

Ben's hopes, dreams and goals did not stop when he completed the TSCC program. He still has several important aspirations now that he has transitioned from school. His brother shared some of those goals,

> "He talks about um, getting married and different relationships with uh friends and girls and he talks about, staying active on an individual basis and being included in different extracurricular activities…and staying close with his tight knit group of friends… In regards to his goals he is always talking about that stuff. He is always mostly focused on those things he puts his mind to. And with a little help and guidance, he is able to achieve, which is a big success for him."

Ben also shared his current goals in the interviews. Although Ben and his family do not specifically look back at the plans that were created in the transition plan through the IEP process, Ben continues to set his sights on a number of important milestones.

> Greg: What were some of the things that you wanted to do after [the TSCC program]?
>
> Ben: After? Hopefully um, I [would] be more independency (sic).
>
> Ben's Mother: You wanted to be more independent?

Ben: Like more independent. Or maybe try to get like my own apartment, or something. Like in a living facility that I can go into with two of my best friends.

Ben's father summarized his remaining major life goals. These two important milestones are very important to Ben and echo the same aspirations that were so clearly articulated by Ben, his mother, his brother, and the TSCC program coordinator. While Ben has met many of his goals for academics, employment and community involvement, he still desires to one day live independently. Ben's father states, "He has come to realize his goals, many of his goals thus far, and the next one would be living independently on his own and getting married, so he has two big ones left." Given Ben's efforts and his extensive support network, these are goals Ben is likely to achieve.

Student Development

The TSCC program offered multiple opportunities for Ben to hone the skills necessary to accomplish the goals developed for his IEP. Employment, independence, use of public transportation, interpersonal communication and ongoing development of functional living skills such as time management and use of money were all facets of the TSCC program.

Ben's mother talked about some of the skills that Ben acquired participating in the TSCC program. There were several job preparation skills that he practiced while completing both non-paid and paid internships.

We practiced interviewing and [the TSCC coordinator] would help and encourage them to go put in applications everywhere. And he did. And of course he needed our assistance in filling them out. We would get letters of recommendations from her and she really tried her hardest to make sure they were employed somewhere. So we were lucky enough that he did get employed, but the transition out was sad

> for him, and me, because like now what do we do. It was that heightened anxiety that he felt like what is he going to do now. So if you are a typically developing kid you go to college or you go find a job and it's easier for them to find a job than it is for this population.

Ben's father also shared how preparing for and obtaining the internships impacted Ben's development and readiness for the transition from the program to adult life. The preparation was not manufactured, students were selected for internships based on their skills and released from internships if they were not putting in the time or effort required by management on the job site. For Ben, the internships offered opportunities to prove that he could tackle the responsibilities that were required on-the-job. His father described the important lessons that Ben and his classmates received by completing job training through the TSCC program.

> I mean this was all uh a boost for [Ben] individually because he just didn't have mom and dad around to tell him what to do or his brothers. He had responsibilities that he had to meet in the jobs for instance that he had at [the university]. People were fired. [Ben] never got fired from any job there, because he did what he was supposed to do, but there were other students at [TSCC], that when they didn't meet what they were supposed to do they didn't meet the expectations they were fired and that's the way the [TSCC], director wanted it, and it was very good that it was like that because they got to experience for themselves the students what the real world atmosphere is, and that there is responsibilities, and consequences of not meeting those responsibilities, so I think it elevated their level of concentration, their level of workmanship, all of and it was set up to have them

> succeed not just there at [the TSCC program], but later on in life; so it was very important to their own personal development.

Ben was asked to provide a list of those jobs that were most meaningful to him as he completed his internships through the TSCC program. He listed several positions including work at the campus bookstore where he folded clothing and stocked merchandise, working in the dining hall, and stocking shelves in the library. He pointed out that his favorite internship included working with the men's baseball team. Ben's former teacher was also asked to share a few more details about the positions that Ben held while completing the TSCC program. She described some of his work responsibilities and the skills that he acquired while working for the baseball team, the student union restaurant, and other places on and around campus.

> [Ben], uh, worked for the athletic department. With the baseball team, and in fact, I believe he is still involved with the baseball team. He goes to all of the home games. So what he would do there is he would work with the coach on setting up for practice. He worked at the [health sciences] library as a library aide. He worked at [the campus bookstore] in retail. He worked at [the student union restaurant] as a dining room attendant and in food prep is what he did there. [A family-friendly, casual restaurant on campus] he also did some food prep. [At the health sciences] mailroom he delivered mail on campus to specific buildings on campus. And he also worked at the campus recreation equipment maintenance department. So he was very involved. He loved being with the athletes and we gave him several opportunities to do that as well...So it was well rounded and I was happy about that and that just builds up a lot of his self-confidence and that

> just gave him the opportunity to get a lot of exposure and meet a lot of people and become more comfortable with his work skills.

Ben shared that he learned a variety of job skills while working at the internships. These skills were transferable and were even used when he transitioned from the university-based program. For example, on one internship site, Ben worked in a food prep position in the kitchen of a family-friendly, casual, sit-down restaurant on campus. Ben was asked what type of responsibilities he was required to learn while working in food prep. He stated, "Basically, what I did was food prep…Food prep means, I put the sour cream and the condiments with the other condiment stuff…I used to weigh the chicken and to do all the dressings." One of the first paid positions that he landed after exiting the program was with a family-friendly, casual, sit-down restaurant near his house. He was able to take on similar responsibilities that he had first acquired through the campus internship. Ben now works for the county judicial system. He explained that his internships at the university helped him in many ways to prepare for his current work.

> It built up my confidence and I am going out and get something big…Going out and getting something big like I have got right now…The more jobs that I got through job training the more it built my confidence up because I was kind of shy at first and, once I saw progress and my confidence and that's how I have become bigger and bigger. The more confidence I got the more I got to know people. The more I got to explore.

Ben's mom described another internship experience that paid big dividends for Ben after his transition from the program. The relationships that he has formed with the university men's baseball team provided an outlet for Ben to stay connected with the campus and his areas of

interest. His mom shared some of the unique facets of Ben's development and the development of the team that grew out of his responsibilities through his internship.

> Ben's Mother: The baseball thing was a very important component for him. He loved the internship and out of that internship grew a lot of good relationships with the baseball players, he loved to be around them and they basically…
>
> Ben: Took me on…
>
> Ben's Mother: …loved to be around him, which is good. And if he misses a game, they ride him. You know, 'What are you doing. You can't come to the baseball game?'
>
> Ben: They really know how to bust chops.
>
> Ben's mother: So it's good they don't see him as a kid with [a disability] they just take him in and that boosts him up…He is always welcome in the dugout and they are strict about who is allowed in the dugout, but he just comes right in and sits and he is allowed and that makes him feel important.
>
> Ben: More a part of the team. More a part of the VIP.

While the internships offered Ben many opportunities to build his self-confidence, practice his ability to advocate for his needs, and travel to and from campus independently, the acquisition of these major life skills were not without its challenges. Ben and his mother and father were asked to talk about some of the challenges or obstacles that Ben faced while participating in the program.

> Ben's mother: What were some of the challenges? I don't know…
>
> Ben's father: Getting acclimated to working I think.
>
> Ben's mother: Yeah.

Ben's father: I mean he always did pretty good, but still he had never worked at a job before …

Ben's mother: Yeah, but he worked through all that. He needed support wherever he went.

Ben's father: The challenge at first was taking the bus.

Ben's mother: But he learned that. He got support and he learned that…Being able to handle himself in the different working environments, but with support you know, [the program coordinator] made sure that he had the support and once he learned what he needed to do he didn't have that many challenges that way.

After rotating through several internships, Ben was better prepared for work responsibilities and job opportunities. His preparation has landed him several paid positions now that he is no longer participating in the TSCC program. Ben and his family were also asked to share other goals that Ben was proudest of accomplishing along with the skills that he had acquired as a result of participating in the TSCC program. Ben and his mom talked about his ability to navigate the community transportation system independently. According to Ben's teacher, Ben was able to pick up the travel training in only a couple of days. Ben and his mom reflected on his experience, first learning to take the city bus to and from campus.

Ben: I have always been bold.

Ben's mother: And it was tough. I was better at it than my husband. My husband followed the bus the first couple of days.

Ben: The first couple of days because I did not know what to do; my father kind of trailed behind the whole way.

Ben's mother: Yeah it made him feel better knowing that his father is following him sitting on the bus by himself [his first year] because…his friends came the following year… He was on his own and it is a good 45-minute bus ride...

Ben: That showed a lot of independence.

Ben's mother: Right… They really pushed that your child be independent and I was a little nervous about that, but that's how you grow and stretch. And he became very good at it.

Ben's older brother also talked about Ben's level of independence. Ben was the first of his high school friends to participate in the university-based program. Ben was able to relay his positive experiences to his friends, who eventually applied and also participated in the program. Ben's brother shared, "Independence. It gave him a sense, not a sense, a real life event that he could do on his own and then in turn help his peers, do it as well. And I think that is a sense of accomplishment and independence for him." Ben shared that he was proudest for just getting in to the TSCC program, but he and his mother also talked about the job skills and academic skills that he acquired through the program.

Ben: I also got a job. I got a job that I can really handle and I can do a lot on my own.

Ben's mother: Oh, I know. What was one of the goals that you really wanted to do that you have accomplished is be able to use a debit card remember.

These examples also reiterate the level of independence that Ben gained by participating in the TSCC program. Ben's desire to set and obtain new goals has not concluded now that he is no longer in the TSCC program. He continues to develop new skills on his current job site. He

has additional goals and aspirations that he has yet to accomplish. His parents shared some of those major life goals including developing new friendships and possibly finding a girlfriend.

Program Structure

The structure of the TSCC program was designed to meet the individual needs of each student according to his or her IEP goals. There were several common elements included in the program that were shared across all TSCC program participants. Where as the functional skills and job development were customized for each student, participating in non-paid and paid internships, inclusion in campus social activities and completion of academic coursework was common across all students. Ben shared some of the specific elements that he participated in during the TSCC program.

> What I did was mainly academically and job training… Like out in the community, buying stuff, or either dealing with money, or math, or reading…and checkbooks and all that. [The TSCC program coordinator] would send me out in the community to buy stuff… and we did a lot on the computer stuff, which was mainly all the daily assignments…I still have my same email address. My email address is still [the one created from the TSCC program].

Ben's teacher shared that he was also involved in several inclusive programs throughout his time participating in the TSCC program. The TSCC program offered social activities through the campus chapter of Best Buddies, a non-profit dedicated to fostering friendships through mentoring and partnering activities between, individuals with disabilities with their non-disable peers. They also offered opportunities for the students to participate in extracurricular courses with the university students on campus. These activities included shadowing pre-service teachers in their teacher education course, participating in physical fitness and recreation courses with the

university students working toward degrees in sports medicine, exercise science, and physical therapy, and working with medical students on issues related to patient care and treatment of young adults with disabilities. While Ben participated in the TSCC program, he and members of his cohort took golf lessons at the university golf course. They received training from the golf pro and members of the university golf team. The TSCC coordinator described some of the activities that the students participated in while they took golf lessons at the university.

> [Ben] was involved in golf lessons. He was involved with Best Buddies, which he…participated in all of the events and he was very much involved in that. He was very interested, let's put it that way in that part of the program... I can't swear to it, I am almost sure that he was, several of my students used to take golf lessons with a professional golf instructor. So, we also had been pairing up with some of the golf team and they… paired them up and they just played a couple of holes together… and he really enjoyed that.

There were other opportunities for those participating in the TSCC program to interact with their same age peers enrolled at the university. Often at lunch and during free time on Friday afternoons they would spend time socializing with friends at the student union or at one of the many dining halls or fast food restaurants on campus. Ben and his mother shared that the TSCC program coordinator encouraged the students participating in the program to get out and explore the campus. The free time was provided as a way to further the students' comfort and confidence in independently exploring the university and getting involved with campus life.

> Ben: [The teacher] said, 'where can you [go to] lunch? Like, go, explore, go anywhere, go do this or go do that. Be free.'

Ben's mother: She didn't want them to be in the same rut. Like always sit and eat here. She wanted them to go and eat in different sections and mingle and just be part of campus life…

Ben: She [the teacher] was like non stop.

Ben's mother: She really wanted them to be independent and she did a great job with that.

The focus of the TSCC program was on employment and job readiness. For the individuals who enrolled in the program, they were preparing for the full transition to adulthood and the workforce. The program offered students exposure to a number of work settings through both paid and non-paid internships. The program participants, who were placed in non-paid internships, completed a set of work responsibilities two to four hours a day up to five days a week. The internships would last from six weeks to a full semester. Although the TSCC coordinator secured the internship sites in advance of a student participating on-the-job, the student was required to apply and interview for the position at each internship site.

Ben was very interested in the internship opportunities. When asked to share some of the positions that Ben participated in while on campus, the TSCC program noted there were too many options to recall immediately during the interview. She stated, "[Ben] um, was very open to apply or try for any of the jobs offered. He never said no, he was given a list that he couldn't make up his mind because all of them seemed good to him."

Ben's father also recalled the importance that work played in the daily structure of the TSCC program. The opportunities to participate on campus in work related settings included participation as an assistant to the coach of the university baseball team. A relationship that

began during participation in the TSCC program, and that Ben and his family have maintained years after his exit from the program.

> [The TSCC program] provided a great deal of access to all of the departments really and he even worked in the athletic department and that is how he got himself in the baseball managerial position with the team that he is in now so to speak. So yes, the development that took place at [the TSCC program], was very important to his development as he moved into adulthood really and into a young adult. He went from high school to college and from college to now he is in a college atmosphere [with] college peers.

The family looked very favorably on the structure of the TSCC program. There were many opportunities for Ben, while he was on campus. These opportunities would not be available to Ben had he not received acceptance into the program after high school. Ben, his father and older brother shared their support for the program. They noted the impact that the program had on Ben's development and only wished it was available to others across the country.

> Ben's father: I would just say the overall program is phenomenal. It is a great thing to have there. And I would prefer to have seen it across the United States in something that has become a very common thing to have at all universities. What a great experience…
>
> Ben's brother: …On a national level…
>
> Ben's father: …For young students coming out of high school…
>
> Ben: With disabilities…

> Ben's father: …That have disabilities to be able to say that I can go to college too, and it really means a lot. And I mean I had never heard of it before we heard of [the TSCC program]. And never heard of until he was halfway to high school…And [his mother] has been in Special Education her whole career since we were 21 years old coming out of college you know, so to not know that that existed and to have it exist was just a gold mine find for us and so what I would like, I would like to see that the [TSCC program], experience become a common national occurrence at as many universities as you could possibly have.

The TSCC program provided Ben the opportunity to experience college life at the same time his same age peers also transitioned through their own college experience. He was able to participate in job opportunities and student life on the same campus his older brothers attended and on which his younger brother now attends. Although the students that participated in the TSCC program were unable to attend a full day of college courses, they were included on campus in many of the same social and opportunities as those who attended the university to receive a degree. The experience was invaluable. It was the family involvement that continued to offer the necessary support for Ben after his transition from the university to adult life.

Family Involvement

Ben's family contributed considerable time and energy to ensure that he reached his life goals. There were many examples that were discussed by Ben, his teacher, his parents, his brother and his employer that indicated the high level of involvement the family had in Ben's daily life. Some of the examples of their involvement included helping Ben prepare for his job, working with him on functional academics, transporting him and his friends to social activities, reinforcing skills related to time management and organization, and maintaining close contact

with the TSCC program coordinator while he participated in the program. They also maintain open communication with his current supervisor at his place of employment.

Ben's former teacher, the TSCC program coordinator, shared some specific examples of how Ben's family assisted Ben while he participated in the program.

> They made sure that they supported some of the things that we were trying to do here. They didn't sabotage it by you know, enabling him or anything, they were really supportive, if he would go home and complain about one of the supervisors, [his parents] would back us up, and that was very helpful. [They would also provide] networking for some of my other students too, as well as fundraising.

The family's commitment to the TSCC program has continued even after Ben exited the program. Although his mother does not assist directly within the classroom or connected social activities, the family has continued to make donations to the program. Ben and his mother were asked to share some examples of how the family was involved with the program while he was in school and also now that he is no longer involved with the program.

> My husband and I have made donations to [the TSCC program], just because it was such a good experience for him that we want to make sure that other children or young adults can be part of that so we have made donations and I have touched base with [the program coordinator]…I have made sure that he has gone back for Best Buddies, the [university] chapter. But that's really it; I haven't been back to the classroom or anything like that.

The TSCC program coordinator indicated that the support that Ben's mother and father offer to Ben extends well beyond their support of the classroom. They were integral in helping Ben get connected to his current job. They also are his transportation to and from work. The

program coordinator explained, “I believe that they helped him get his job now…so that was one way that they helped him tremendously was helping him find that position and um, they help him a lot with his social kinds of things, wherever he needs to go, when it is late at night and it is not feasible to use the bus, they will take him. They care for him.”

Ben was asked to share some examples of how his family was involved in assisting him with his job search after he completed the TSCC program. Ben talked about the extensive network of support that he and his family have with neighbors, friends and community members. These connections helped him land his current position with the county judicial system.

Greg: Who helped you find that job that you have now?

Ben: Um, my brother had a friend. My brother played high school ball with his son…My brother was the captain…and…

Ben’s mother: [His brother’s friend’s] father is an attorney.

Ben: [His brother’s friend’s father] said to [my employer]…I have a candidate if you have a job opening. And that’s how I got the big interview… I had to put together a big resume. And I go in there and do the interview and they said (claps hands) you’re hired... And I have been there ever since (claps hands)…So basically how I got the job was through [my brother’s friend’s father].

The family’s involvement in assisting Ben with the job search and job development after the TSCC program was also cited by the TSCC coordinator as well as by his current employer. When asked to share how Ben’s family was involved in his transition from the program, the TSCC program coordinator stated, “They did a lot of networking and, they, continued to encourage him to be employed. Employment was a big issue. Financially that wasn’t necessarily a need for that family, but they knew that was important for [Ben].” Ben’s employer shared how

Ben's family, and his mother in particular was involved with his transition from school to employment. Ben's employer stated,

> "They are very supportive…they have been really involved. When he first got his job, his mother and I have a good relationship that you know, if he is experiencing problems we kind of work as a team to get him back on track… if I have a problem, we communicate. I call her right away and we discuss. I tell her the action that I took and then she backs me up when he gets home."

Ben and his mother were asked to also share how his family is involved in his daily life now that he is no longer participating in the TSCC program. They also shared examples of the family's commitment to supporting Ben at his current job. Ben will come home and share what has taken place on the job. In a dialogue between Ben and his mother, they talked about the open communication between his family and his supervisor at work.

> Ben's mother: You share the good things. But sometimes…
>
> Ben: But sometimes if I run into like little small little problems at work and I don't tell my parents because I don't want them to know, but they have to know so they force me to get it out.
>
> Greg: Do they talk at all with your employer?
>
> Ben: Yes…because my mom told [my supervisor] that if there is a problem, just call.
>
> Ben's mother: That way we can help work it through.
>
> Ben: So that we can work it through and so we can resolve the problem and then it is over with.

> Ben's mother: And she is very open to that. And he is very blessed to have someone like that, that can reach out to me or [his father] and just say here is the situation can you help me work through it and we, we've always done it and that is good and she keeps me posted. So that's good. She will email me once in a while or give me a call, so that is good. Open communication. So he has got a support system that can help with his employment too.

Ben's supervisor described the open communication that is encouraged by his family. His mother wants to know what is working well and what the family needs to continue working on when Ben gets home to reinforce the appropriate behaviors and necessary skills. Ben's other family members are also involved with assisting Ben on various aspects of his job. The employer shared one example of how Ben's older brothers were involved in assisting Ben when his parents were away for an extended weekend.

> I know his brothers are really involved because his parents went out of town and, I had to call because I was having some issues with him and his brothers too are very, very, supportive so, anytime I have had any issues that I have to share I give them a call.

The supervisor noted that issues on-the-job were rare, and no different than issues that other employees that she supervises might face. The family is committed to ensuring Ben is successful within his work environment. They provided transportation to-and-from work. His father works in an office minutes from Ben's office. He drops Ben at work. His mother is available to pick him up from work in the afternoons. His older brothers are also available to provide support and check in with Ben when his parents are away.

Ben's family did not increase their involvement after his transition from the TSCC program. They have always been involved in helping Ben reach his goals. As Ben got older his family continued to assist him with his goals, by helping him network with people to locate jobs or practice the academic skills he was learning through the TSCC program. Ben's mother has been a constant support, encouraging him to work hard and be more independent. Ben shared, "[My mother] was my main stream in school… reminding me to do my homework straight through sophomore, junior, senior and mostly through [TSCC]…she is always, wanting me to do more…and get out there."

When first learning to ride public transportation independently, his mother described a situation in which Ben was excited to independently navigate the community, while his father got in his car and quietly followed behind the public bus to ensure Ben reached his final destination. The family listened to Ben's interests and offered direct support, but only when needed. Ben's brother described this support as peripheral. His parents and siblings are there to lend a hand for situations when Ben is unable to physically do something, like reach a destination, which requires driving a car, but they provide that support in a manner in which Ben is still able to complete his goals as independently as possible. This level of independence applies to work and his social life. His brother shared some examples of Ben's comfort in being independent. He shared that Ben is viewed as a leader, especially through in social situations within extracurricular programs, like Best Buddies, that were loosely connected with the TSCC program. His brother shared,

> [Ben], did a lot of the stuff independently. We [the family, his siblings] were only there on a peripheral standpoint sometimes to help with transportation and things like that but for the most part he's always been a leader. He has always been

somebody that his peers look up to and follow him and I think he liked that role and he thrived in that position and he didn't need us to help him or guide him a lot of the time, so no, as far as on a day-to-day or event-by-event involvement on our part we were kind of on the outskirts of it and that was okay…not because we didn't want to be involved in it but it was part of I think he wanted to be able to do it on his own and in part we wanted him to be able to do it on his own. I think it was a growing and learning process for him. Obviously we do a lot of things…as family and things like that and we are very involved in those type of things, but specifically speaking, no we let him do his own thing, and he liked it and he is a leader, and we didn't have to worry about him because he can stand up for himself and he doesn't really need our help or guidance to be looking over his shoulder a lot. He does it on his own, which is good.

Ben's positive personal qualities or characteristics including self-determination, independence, and goal setting, detailed in several conversations with Ben, his family, and his teacher and employer, may be inherent within Ben, but those characteristics were fostered and reinforced by his family from a very young age. His mother shared, "we have always tried to get him involved. We always start at the top and get him involved in sports things like that and then if I think he is unable to do it, then I will go to a more restrictive area." This commitment to encouraging independence and self-determination was also expressed by Ben's father and older brother.

Ben's father: He's learned a lot…

Ben's brother: A lot of the credit comes from her. (Points to Ben's mother)

Ben's father: Right.

Ben's brother: From a very young age of developing him.

Ben's father: …Of making him do things, we have always been, people who have made him go and do things for himself too. He was always part of everything we did, but we always encouraged him to stand out there when it was time to speak up for something he had to do it. We tried not to always step in for him.

Ben's father also shared that Ben has the inclination to take initiative and advocate for his interests. He wants to get involved. He wants to be independent. Although the family provides encouragement, support, and transportation, Ben is driving his transition through life.

He has the ability to recognize and be interested in, he will talk to us and say 'hey this is what has come available; and what do you guys think?' and we will talk about it as a family but it is his decision and like Frank said we leave it to him and we don't try to get involved and we don't try to get involved for any other reason than that it is his own independence. It's his thing.

Interagency Collaboration

The TSCC program coordinator works closely with families as they prepare to transition from the program into adult life. At the exit meeting, a representative from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is invited. For families that have qualified for employment services or are working directly with an Employment Support Provider, those individuals are also invited to the exit meetings. Some of the individuals who exit the TSCC program are connected with these services and continue receiving support, locating employment or on-the-job coaching. Ben and his family met with a representative from Vocational Rehabilitation and a local Employment Service Provider during his exit IEP meeting. However, the support that was offered by these adult service agencies was not necessary once he landed his job at the county judicial system.

Ben's employer provides the natural supports needed for Ben to be successful at work. After the first few weeks on-the-job he was able to complete his daily work responsibilities independently and rarely needed direct support from his supervisor. If issues arise at work his supervisor communicates directly with Ben and his mother, to ensure that the problems can be quickly resolved. The family has not required long term support from an external service provider or rehabilitation agency. Ben's mother described the involvement with Adult Services.

> The [TSCC Coordinator] made sure that the [employment service agency] and the job coaches were lined up and then she was like passing it off to them hoping that they would take the ball and go with it. And we had one individual that was really good, but…right now he is in a job where his supervisor is his main go to man. He doesn't need assistance from job coaches. [His supervisor] is there…all I would have to do is pick up the phone … and if there were issues she speaks with him and then if it doesn't get resolved then she calls and says maybe you could help me explain it to him better. So in our personal situation we don't need the job coach.

Although the TSCC program coordinator was unable to recall if a job coach was present at [Ben's] exit IEP, she did recall that a representative from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation was present. Ben also shared that in his first few jobs after exiting the TSCC program a job coach was available to assist him in learning his work responsibilities. Ben stated, "I had a job coach...That helped me with the vocational. He said, 'there is an opening for [a fast food restaurant] in [my neighborhood].' And I was like, 'get me in there because I am right there. I am close there. I can ride my bike to and from.'" Ben's mother recalled that the individual from the employment service agency that helped Ben acquire the position at the fast food restaurant

was helpful; however, the agency sent several different people, because they had a hard time keeping staff at the agency.

> There was always a different person and they don't stick with the job very much. There was one individual man that helped him get the job at [a local fast food restaurant]. He came to the house. He interviewed him. He asked about his likes and dislikes. He asked him, 'what would you like to do?' At that point [Ben] just wanted to be busy and he basically helped him get the [fast food] job and then he went on to another job and then someone else came in and they would help because he didn't really like [the fast food restaurant] at all. He was working below his level and he knew it, but it was something to do, something to get him up in the morning. And he knew he didn't want to do that. And really they weren't much help. Right now we are with [an employment service agency] and they basically will contact us every few months. But he is solid…with his job.

Although the employment service agency provides little assistance in his current job with the county judicial system office, he will receive a phone call or a site visit from a job coach hired through the agency on a limited basis. Ben recalled that a job coach has stopped by to check on him every couple weeks. When asked to share at what times the coach arrives and what takes place while the coach is visiting his job site Ben stated, "like while I am working and I get on break to see how I am doing… Yeah and every once in a while like every couple weeks."

When his supervisor with his current employer was asked to share information about the support that she receives from the employment service provider or job coach she stated, "He had a coach that came one time...but that was it. You know, they said they were going to be involved. I don't know if they are involved anymore. I never saw them again. They said they were going to

come back regularly and I don't know what happened with that." While Ben only receives contact every few weeks, his supervisor has provided the natural support needed on-the-job to ensure that he is successful. Ben's supervisor is not the only individual outside of his immediate family members who have offered support. It is in fact, a broader community of support that has assisted with acquisition of employment and further opportunities to become more independent.

Ben's first job after exiting the TSCC program was with the local fast food restaurant that he acquired through support from a job coach. Ben did not work at the fast food restaurant very long because he was looking for a position that would offer more responsibility and greater challenges. While working at the fast food restaurant he was also able to secure employment at another restaurant, through connections with a neighbor. Ben worked at a family-friendly, casual, sit-down, restaurant. Ben described the process of networking with his neighbor to secure his job.

> I was also working for my next-door neighbor who owned a [family-friendly, casual, sit-down restaurant]. So I got a personal thing going in there. So [when I first exited TSCC] I have (sic) been on during the week [at the fast food restaurant] and weekends was [at my neighbor's restaurant] so that was all lined up.

Ben's neighbor served as just one of several examples of individuals within his support network that have assisted with an aspect of his transition from school. Ben's father noted that aside from his family, his high school special education teacher, the TSCC program coordinator, and the head coach of the university baseball team have all played important roles in Ben's development and transition from school.

> His teachers are probably the next level of people that have made the biggest influence in his ability to reach into a social capacity. At [his high school] he had a particular woman that was in charge of his program and she's the one who connected him to [the TSCC program]. So when you had [the TSCC program coordinator], and her assistant...helping him to move…around campus…The head baseball coach [at the university] has provided an avenue for [Ben] to you know, participate in something that physically he could never do...you know, his employer has supervisory people, management people that he reports to and they understand that he will need certain direction from time to time in his job and they will get on the phone and call us with areas of help or need that he needs to improve on and so would [the TSCC program coordinator].

Ben is pretty independent and does not require a significant amount of guidance on-the-job. His family is available to assist him when needed to reinforce the steps he must complete on-the-job. His family has maintained a positive relationship with his employer that involves open communication. Ben's father noted that the coordination that takes place between Ben's supervisor and Ben's mother has helped Ben remain successful. It has improved his ability to complete the responsibilities that are required at his job site. When Ben's father was asked to provide some specific examples he shared,

> For instance if [Ben's supervisor] saw some kind of a trend developing, she would coordinate with my wife if certain things were occurring and so we would help him get things corrected and back on track you know, and so I think that whomever he has worked with or under in the sense, all of them have been

> comfortable enough to reach out to [his mother] and I to say. '[Ben] could use some help in these particular areas and let's see if he could use some help there?'

Ben's brother was also asked to share examples of how members outside of his immediate family have helped Ben with his transition from school. Ben's brother echoed much of what Ben's father had shared, but also noted that Ben has always been pretty independent. He has not needed a lot of support. Often if he needed assistance, his teacher or employer could communicate their needs to Ben and he would make sure to tell his family. In situations, where this wasn't possible his family was open to receiving direct communication from the school or his employer to assist Ben. Ben's brother shared,

> He has always expressed their concern and guide him individually without having to talk to him either if it was something he could handle but if he wanted to express their concern to my parents to back it up, they always felt free to do that and, there was nothing ever way out of line by any means. So it was always little things or little adjustments that may have needed to have been made so sometimes it needed to be addressed and talked about immediately and sometimes it was a gradual thing that you work your way through but overall he didn't need a lot of guidance.

Ben had a support network that included members of his family and his community that provided assistance in his transition from the TSCC program. Ben communicated several goals that included his desire to hold a job and be independent. Although he is no longer connected to the TSCC program, he remains connected to the university through relationships he formed with members of the men's baseball team. He has accomplished several of his goals to hold a job and be independent.

Case Study Three: Cole

Cole currently bags grocery at a grocery store located within the community where he resides with his mom and dad. After exiting high school Cole attended a private, chartered, transition program prior to receiving acceptance to participate in the TSCC program. Cole resides with his parents in a home fifteen to twenty minutes northwest of the university. His younger brother is currently studying at the university where the TSCC program is located. At the time of the interviews with Cole and his family, Cole indicated that he had recently obtained employment at the grocery store and was continuing training with the assistance of an employment specialist after transitioning from a job at a fitness center located close to the shopping plaza within which the grocery store was situated.

Cole's shared his transition experience from the TSCC program. In addition to interviews with Cole, this case study also included interviews with his mom and dad, his former transition teacher, and the employment specialist, who served as a job coach and trainer in his new position at the grocery store.

Student Focused Planning

Cole, his mom, and his dad attended his Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings while he attended the TSCC program. When asked about their level of participation, Cole's mother indicated that the transition planning meetings that were part of the IEP process through the TSCC program were more inclusive of Cole than previous IEP meetings. Cole's mother stated, "[He] was a big part of it, which was really very nice. We sat together and [he] had input. More so there, than at any other time in the past." In addition, to his immediate family members, his mother recalled that a representative from the district's administrative team, in addition to his teacher who served as the TSCC program coordinator, were also present. The

meetings were designed to be open to any member of Cole's transition team who would support him as he transitioned from the TSCC program to post-school life. According to the TSCC program coordinator,

> Everyone is welcome to attend and I always state that in the letter. When we had the parents coming in they could bring whomever they want to. And also we had an LEA representative and it was typically… a transition specialist always inviting a vocational rehabilitation representative, if they are APD [Agencies for Persons with Disabilities] clients we invite them as well. And typically those students were referred for Medicaid Waiver and those are my Med Waiver students. Now I don't believe, but I can't swear to it that [Cole] was a med waiver client, but if he was, or is then he would have definitely had his case manager attending the IEP as well.

While neither Cole nor his mother could recall whether a representative from Vocational Rehabilitation attended the IEP meetings, the focus of the meeting was on Cole's post-school goals, including employment. Throughout the academic year, Cole's mother recalled receiving weekly evaluations filled out from employers to help Cole and his family tracked his progress on the many job sites that he rotated through as part of his job development internships. The evaluations were helpful in planning for employment. At the IEP meetings, employment was a topic of conversation. The goals focused on employment and independence. There were discussions about his progress on the job sites and his ability to independently navigate the campus. One of the specific job areas that Cole's dad recalled discussing in the IEP meetings was preparing for a job in health care or food preparation. While the conversation would include

a range of possibilities, the team focused on employment within the food service industry rather than within care taking or health services. According to Cole's dad,

> "We had talked about food prep. We had talked about health care…I know that we had talked about what type of areas that [he] would be best in and my thinking was always health care but not from a viewpoint of working in food prep, but most of the conversation involved food prep in those IEP meetings. That we thought [he] would be best at food prep area. Um, I was more hopeful that there would be a care taking area."

As he reflected on prior experiences attending IEP meetings Cole's dad also noted that he and his wife had been attending meetings for Cole since he was four or five years old. Prior to the IEP meetings with the TSCC program, Cole's dad described the meetings as contentious rather than collaborative. During the transition planning meetings through the IEP process during the TSCC program there were common goals. These included planning for the future after Cole had exited the program. This was an important contrast to the meetings when Cole was younger where the focus was on the assistance that Cole needed to support his academic development in school.

> The IEP meetings were for years and years, contentious nervous things that we would walk in to, especially in the elementary and junior high years where we were requesting an aide. My wife would get very uptight and we would go in and play good cop and bad cop…[my wife] would know the roles because she was a teacher. And I would you know, sort of hold her back and keep things a little bit on track. But, she really knew what was going on…so usually from our viewpoint it was contentious. [In the TSCC program], it did not come off as contentious at

all. It was cooperative. And it was truly a feeling that there was a cooperative common goal, as opposed to when he was in most of public school.

The content of the IEP, the mood within the room of team members who were present, and the timeline for planning, were not the only differences shared about the transition meetings, when asked to talk about the student planning meetings, the TSCC program coordinator shared that the focus of the meetings were always on post-school preparation. As the program evolved over the years, so had the rules that accompanied the transition planning sessions.

The TSCC program coordinator explained that shortly after Cole exited, the TSCC program, the district moved the TSCC program from the jurisdiction of the K-12 district office to an Adult Education Program office. The change ushered in new rules surrounding the development of the transition plans and some additional flexibility in who was admitted to the program and the length of time that an individual was permitted to participate in the program. According to the TSCC program coordinator, Cole participated in the program for a shorter period of time because he was ineligible for additional planning years due to his age. At the time the program was tied to the provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Since Cole's departure, the funding for the TSCC program is not directly tied to IDEA mandates. The program is now housed under adult education within the school district and students have the flexibility to participate in the TSCC program through age 24 or 25. According to the TSCC coordinator, "We had an exit meeting with [Cole], with the transition specialists, and um went over the things that he had accomplished and um because at that time we were not under Adult Ed, the student was only able to stay until age 22."

Although, Cole was only able to participate in the TSCC program for a year, the planning process was important in helping Cole's family plan for his transition. Now that he is no longer

in school, his mom notes that she no longer looks at his IEP plans. However, they do, utilize some of the services that were discussed during the exit meeting. Cole's mom stated, "I don't use [his] IEP. We just do life. I call his Vocational Rehabilitation [counselor]. We use the services available to us." The documents prepared during the IEP planning process were also not utilized by his adult service provider or Vocational Rehabilitation counselor. When asked, the employment specialist that works with the adult service agency selected by Cole and his family noted,

> We don't receive an IEP or anything from the school board… unless the parents want to provide it or it's through vocational rehabilitation. Voc. Rehab. does their own study they send people to psychologists… and doctors and make sure that the person is prepared and able mentally and physically to work and we get that report.

The employment skills that Cole acquired while participating in the TSCC program and the connection to employment services that his family made during the transition year were important and meaningful for his life. Cole still utilizes the employment skills and services now that he is no longer in school. He has also continued to apply those skills in new settings and in new career plans developed in collaboration with his family and employment specialist. His employment specialist stated,

> We develop a career plan looking at the supports in the client's life there past experience their attitude disposition and how well they interact with others to determine what a good place for this person would be. If they don't work well with others we don't put them you know, in a customer service position…We

build up a career plan is what we call it and sort of later on we have a customized employment plan; an IEP of sorts that we have.

Although the plans may look different, the components between the career plan and the IEP plan are similar, and are applied in a similar manner. Both are used to frame actions around the services that Cole receives to assist him as he acquires employment and semi-independent living skills that can be applied at home and on the job site. Cole and members of his transition team shared several important skills that he practiced while participating in the TSCC program.

Student Development

While Cole attended the TSCC program, he participated in a number of internship experiences to help prepare for employment after his exit. Cole noted that he worked in several positions that provided kitchen training and food prep. While on campus he also worked at the student bookstore on campus. When asked to share more information about his internships, Cole expressed enjoyment with his many experiences working as a dinning attendant and kitchen support staff. These positions were offered in a diverse set of dinning environments from the student dining service halls, to a fast-casual restaurant on campus, and an upscale restaurant located within the student union. Cole described some of the jobs that he completed while working in food prep. He stated, "I cleaned tables and I put the sugars in [the holders]. I push in the chairs then I wiped down the coolers. And then I fill up the soda machines.

The focus on employment was not only specific to acquiring an understanding of how to complete the tasks required on the job site, but it also was designed to strengthen Cole's generalizable employability skills. These skills included: time management; pace; navigating campus independently to travel to his job site; and use of receptive and expressive language. Cole and his mother discussed some of the challenges that he faced while on the job, and the

strategies that his teachers and his parents implemented to work with him on improving his generalizable skills. They also connected how the practice he completed through on-the-job training during the TSCC program transferred to his current work experience now that he had transitioned from school.

> Cole's mother: I think the challenges for [him], was to… quicken his pace at work. It was challenging for him to work fast enough to get a job done to please an employer at times. So I think it caused him a little bit of stress. It still does now to some degree and he is a little self-conscious about it. So he tries hard and he is doing good...
>
> Cole: …I am trying to say is I am always trying to be quick for my day and it's being on it, getting ready for work...
>
> Cole's mother: And he has done a good job. He times himself. He uses his [cellular phone alarm]…
>
> Cole: yep.
>
> Cole's mother: …He uses his [cellular phone alarm] and he sets it and he looks at his time that it takes him to get ready for the day. Initially it could have taken him two hours.
>
> Cole: I don't take two hours. (chuckles)
>
> Cole's mother: (Chuckles). Not anymore. Now it takes him maybe 45 minutes, so that is a goal of his, so he is aware um that it is a challenge of his…I think his teachers did an excellent job…I think [the program assistant] would observe him in the work setting and she would give him a card or some type of reminder on

what to do or just cue cards or just those types of things; um, that would, you know, give him a little bit of help.

The TSCC program provided opportunities to practice employment readiness skills such as time management and personal hygiene, while on-the-job training in a semi-independent, supervised environment increased Cole's confidence to complete his daily routine with less direct support. After exiting the program Cole used a combination of natural supports within his surrounding work environment, coaching support funded through vocational rehabilitation, and readily available assistive technology, through cellular phone applications, to further his independence on-the-job. Cole's father reflected positively on the training that he received during the TSCC program. The program instilled confidence within Cole to tackle challenges with less direct assistance as he prepared for his transition from school. Cole's father stated,

> I think he received confidence in the activities necessary to obtain a job, and the behaviors necessary to perform at a job. I think it fertilized [Cole] for the outside world. It sort of set him down and said it gave him an idea of what a job was like. [The] program…gave him a firm footing on what to expect about a job, so when we talked to [Cole] about getting a job, he has an idea of the things he has to do, he understands the interview process. We talk to him about an interview and he understands the timeliness and the necessity to meet the job requirements. [He] will take his jobs very seriously. He gets ready for his job. He looks very good. He is very clean, well shaven…appropriately dressed, well mannered… And I think that he learned that in part because of his time [within the TSCC program].

When asked how she prepared Cole for employment and semi-independent living, the TSCC coordinator also noted that she was focused on ensuring that certain skills were

emphasized that included teaching Cole to advocate for himself whether he lived at home or in the community.

> I worked with him the entire time that he was here…on specific skills that I felt were going to be necessary for when he was on his own as independent as possible, whether he lived at home or not at home, but working out in the community and being able to advocate for himself whether it is in leisure activities or making decisions, helping him with choices, encouraging him to make his own choices and not depend on mom or parents to make all those choices for him.

Cole's teacher also worked very closely with his employers on campus to ensure they were also giving him opportunities to assert himself on the job. The uses of natural supports on the job site were especially important to both Cole and his colleagues. Ensuring that his co-workers and managers took a role in teaching Cole how to complete specific job skills made them part of the teaching experience and emphasized to Cole that he was part of the team.

> They [the employers on campus] taught him specific skills pertaining to the job, whatever the job training was…I think that they also developed a co-worker kind of relationship with him, mutual respect, and so teaching…the specific skills on the job, and relating to him more as a co-worker instead of a student, or client or whatever was extremely beneficial.

Cole's teacher worked on a number of other skills that were important for his development on the job. This included building a resume, practicing for job interviews and reinforcing applied functional academic skills involving reading bus schedules, emailing, handling money, and using a computer. One specific example that the program coordinator noted

that was customized for Cole's individual support needs was the use of email and online calendars to keep track of appointments. The TSCC coordinator stated, "I worked with him a lot on emailing and trying to get him to communicate with agencies or resources on campus. I helped him with appointments, keeping appointments and planning those appointments."

The curriculum was designed to provide a supportive environment where students could acquire and apply skills that would be beneficial in everyday life. It was an extension of what they learned in a functional life skills program in high school, but it was provided in a setting that opened opportunities for real world application. When discussing how the program specifically helped Cole with his preparation for employment and independent living, the TSCC program coordinator noted,

> I think it [the TSCC program] provided him a safety net, however, not to the extent of what it was in high school and I think it was a really neat step toward getting employed and what it takes to be an employee in the community. So I think his experiences provided him with a lot of opportunities to do things and to fail, and I don't even like to say fail, but it didn't work out as he had planned or how his parents had planned, and just triumph from some of those experiences.

The additional practice navigating the campus, completing functional academic classes and completing internships on job sites around campus were facets of the program that increased Cole's confidence in his ability to work independently and his parents' confidence in his future after completing the TSCC program. Cole's mom recalled being afraid of the level of autonomy that it would take for Cole to navigate the campus using public transportation independently. She stated, "Initially I was kind of afraid to have [him] enter into a program and have him ride buses

or walk, and this is such a large campus, by himself, but he loved it and he just did it. And it was just a great experience I think."

Reflecting upon the experience Cole's father also noted that the program increased the family's confidence in his abilities as they reflected upon his development and the goals that he had accomplished through the completion of the TSCC program, "They supported our mindset with respect to understanding the challenges of the type of activities that you do to get [him] gainfully employed… we talked about such things as where [he] would best fit in, which sort of geared us along certain lines or gave us our confidences." Cole's mother was also asked to reflect on the preparation Cole received while participating in the TSCC program. She responded, "I think [the TSCC program], and [his teacher], and [her support staff]. They were probably the best preparation that Cole had."

Program structure

The TSCC program's curriculum was tied to broad functional living principles. In discussing Cole's experience in the TSCC program his parents and his teacher shared how his development was tied to the IEP goals and the content delivered through functional academics in the classroom and computer labs and through employment on the internship sites around campus. The program coordinator stressed that among the most critical learning experiences that she was intent on ensuring students obtain while participating in the TSCC program was the ability to complete tasks independent of assistance within an inclusive setting. Cole had opportunities to demonstrate his ability to complete job responsibilities, on the job and in the community. Cole's teacher talked about the structure of the program and the specific work with Cole to wean him from the support of one-on-one assistance while working in the community.

> While he was here things that we did to help him transition to adulthood was to provide him with learning experiences and not just job experiences but also learning experiences here on campus that he would have to interact with nondisabled peers and do some things that he didn't typically do in high school, such as running errands in the community, in the beginning with a partner and then weaning him off of that and then doing it solo.

The structure of the TSCC program was customized for each student. While daily routines, such as arrival times and review of the day's schedule, and check-ins with the teacher and support staff were consistent parts of the program; each student followed a unique schedule often determined by their internship. Cole provided a few details that were specific to his daily schedule when he participated in the TSCC program. Cole stated, "Sometimes for my teacher, she teach the whole class to do the assignments and um walk around the campus. What I liked the best is um, my job."

The structure of the TSCC program was such that except for a shell of a daily schedule that included common start and end times for all program participants, each student followed a customized schedule with daily activities, based on their interests, academic needs, and internship hours. This was a vastly different experience than other transition programs that were not university-based, which were offered in other parts of the city south of the university. In fact, Cole's father pointed out that Cole had participated in a competing transition program for a few months prior to his acceptance in the TSCC program. Cole's father noted that after one semester in a competing program, Cole was able to transfer to the university-based program, which was more adept at preparing Cole for life outside of a more traditional compensatory school setting. Cole's father stated,

> [A rival transition program] was not preparing specifically [Cole]. Perhaps it prepares other people for transition but I don't think [it] was preparing [Cole] with his skills for transition. I think [TSCC], was much more appropriate as far as adapting to [Cole's] specific abilities with respect to transition into the real world, the non-academic world of paychecks.

Cole's mother also discussed some of the components of the program's structure that were unique to the university-based transition program. She described a variety of activities that combined employment and functional academics within a semi-structured setting that included time for interaction with peers with and without disabilities who attended classes on campus. The daily routine differed each day for each student, which offered opportunities to exercise choice, and traverse the campus independently. On days when Cole's mom would stop by campus to pick him up at the conclusion of the workday, she would arrange to meet him at various places around the 1,900-acre campus. According to Cole's mom,

> Outside of, the in class activities, such as the computer work and preparing for the day, and that sort of thing, he would go to the College of Education and make copies, run errands, he would meet me at the library or he would meet me at the [student union]. So it was just the level of independence around his same age peer group that was, for me, so important.

The structure of the program was helpful for Cole. Even after exiting the program, the employment specialist that Cole worked with at his new job, has verified that the TSCC program was beneficial. Although, the employment specialist was unable to verify some of the daily activities that took place while Cole participated in the TSCC program, he noted that the attributes of the program in partnership with the support of his family were beneficial to Cole's

ongoing development. As a result of participating in the TSCC program, the employment specialist noted that Cole was adapted well to new environments and was prepared to try new things. Cole's employment specialist stated,

> Whatever, they did worked, I mean his family, he is a great kid, he is very friendly and outgoing, he doesn't seem to be afraid to try new things and that is a big step for somebody who's disabled. Sometimes they don't want to jump out in the community, but whatever support he has gotten up to this stage has made him a very outgoing happy person.

The program offered structure and routine, but allowed students the opportunity to customize their individual education, based on their goals, job needs, and interests. It was an Individualized Education Program actualized outside the bounds of a traditional secondary school setting. For Cole, it was this environment, when compared with other more traditional transition programs that provided the services in a way that fostered growth and furthered his comfort with navigating the environment independently.

Family Involvement

Family involvement is a vital component for post-secondary preparation. Each person who was interviewed recognized the involvement of his family as integral to his successful transition from school. Cole's parents were a driving force in advocating for his needs. They were available to provide transportation from the program or to a job site. They provided job leads to the TSCC program coordinator. They described how they worked with Cole on job skills that needed to be practiced to ensure that he was ready for his daily routine on the job. When asked to talk about ways that his family continues to support his needs, Cole noted some of the areas of his daily routine where his parents challenge him to be more independent.

> My parents help with this; wants me to speak up; quicker in my day; doing my routine. Sometimes I can do things on my own. I can fix myself some lunch. And, breakfast. And sometimes I do, I serve myself or prepare dinner.

Cole's mom emphasized the importance of fostering inclusion, independence and self-determination. These are core values for the family. The need to focus on these areas of development did not start and stop only during TSCC program hours, and they did not end when Cole transitioned from the TSCC program. His family believes that opportunities for growth and development must continue even though he is no longer participating in the TSCC program.

> Our drive to just have him being included and live a life that is good for him, you know, we want him to be able to work and bring home a paycheck…feel valued and validated…I think it is a continuous effort when you have a child with…any type of disability you basically do what you think is in their best or appropriate, best or most appropriate for them.

There were several notable examples of how members of the family provided support after Cole exited the TSCC program. Cole's father noted,

> After [the TSCC program], the planning was, you know, getting together a résumé and helping him look for jobs. For instance his job at [a fitness center] was one of his post [TSCC program] jobs and I encouraged him to apply there because we had joined and they had just opened and I talked to the manager about the possibility since they were hiring and they were new and that is the type of thing I do.

Cole's dad also shared that he played a role in networking with local employers to locate employment for Cole after his position was eliminated at the fitness center due to budget

constraints. Cole's mother noted that his aunt is also very supportive, often checking in with Cole through telephone conversations or visits on days when Cole is home alone. The TSCC program coordinator also indicated that Cole's brother, who attended the university where the TSCC program operates, stopped by the classroom to provide brotherly support. Although small, the family network, and in particular, Cole's mother and father, played a significant role in his development. When asked about the type of support the family provides, the program coordinator noted,

> I am confident to say that whatever he needs, [Cole's parents] are going to give it to him. And whatever he needs to be independent and be, not whatever he needs like a kid needs; whatever he needs to reach his highest level of independence they will do.

The employment specialist that provided support for Cole at his current place of employment also emphasized the support Cole's parents provide, now that he is no longer participating in the TSCC program.

> His parents are great. I mean I get clients with no support from any family. So his family, his dad picked him up, where usually I would have to provide transportation to-and-from. His family is, well they directed us to where to apply. They helped out. They were very, very, active in his life and I think that led to his two quick placements of employment.

The employment specialist offered several specific examples of how Cole's parents differed from many of the other clients that he works with through his contracted work through Vocational Rehabilitation. Cole's parents were involved in every part of the employment process.

> They gave me lots of leads. They helped with transportation. I mean these things are just not an issue for him. They had half a resume ready for him to go. If there is anything that needs to be done his parents are there to help him… If every client had that kind of family support this would be a really easy job.

Cole's father also shared that even as Cole trained for specific responsibilities on the job, time at home was spent practicing the skills needed for him to remain successful. While working at a fitness center, Cole had some difficulties working the scanner for guest check-in at the front desk. Cole's father located a scanner, brought it home, and worked with Cole to practice holding items at a 90-degree angle to ensure that they were scanned properly. Using household items, the two worked on scanning, so that he would be prepared for the responsibilities at the worksite.

Cole's parents also recognized the need for support beyond the family unit. They reached out to employers in the area and tried to use exiting community supports to assist Cole with the transition from the TSCC program. This too involved a commitment of time and effort from the family. Cole's father shared that the connections made with employers after Cole left the TSCC program were developed through his contacts or through the work of the employment specialist. The extra time and attention helped Cole obtain paid employment relatively quickly after leaving the TSCC program. Even during transitions between different places of employment, the family connections and community support assisted Cole and the employment specialist in locating new opportunities.

Interagency Collaboration

Cole and his family recognized the support of the TSCC coordinator and the teaching assistant that were available to assist him while completing the program requirements and his

employment internships at the university. As Cole and his family prepared to transition from the program, they used support offered through Vocational Rehabilitation to identify an employment specialist to support ongoing job development and on-the-job training. Cole's teacher noted, "Before he left we made sure that he was hooked up to Vocational Rehab and to a supported employment agency."

Cole's family decided to work with Vocational Rehabilitation and an employment service provider after he had concluded the TSCC program to locate paid employment. While the TSCC program offered several opportunities for the students to rotate through a diverse range of employment environments, many of these opportunities include temporary non-paid internship placements. Cole and his classmates who participated in the TSCC program received support from the program coordinator, the program assistant and through the natural supports of managers and employees at each of the internship sites. While the program offered opportunities to build employment skills and work experience, Vocational Rehabilitation was brought in to assist the IEP team in offering information to assist the individual as they transitioned to paid employment. Cole's teacher recalled talking with the family about Vocational Rehabilitation and post-TSCC program employment services.

> I think [his] parents really wanted him to wait until he finished the program and that was something that I would encourage all of the parents to do before [they exit] because it is a good transition for the students to actually be employed while they are here… I know he was referred to VR. I know that we worked on several different job skills.

Cole had several unpaid internship opportunities through the TSCC program. As Cole transitioned from the program, he and his family were looking for additional employment

opportunities. The family worked with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and his Employment Service Provider to first identify additional training opportunities followed by paid employment. His first paid position after transitioning from TSCC was with a fitness center. Only a few weeks prior to the interviews with Cole, his family and his employment service provider, Cole had left his position as a front desk attendant at the fitness center and transitioned to a bagger and customer service attended at a grocery store. Cole's mother described the assistance that the family received after exiting the TSCC program.

> We have called voc. rehab. and they have been very instrumental in getting us [connected to the] training center…That is just a great service that they provided. He has been a little nervous starting at [the grocery store], so the shadowing that they do has really helped him, sort of ease into it with less worry. Initially it was a little overwhelming. [The grocery store] is a big store, there is a lot going on, and it makes him a little nervous, a little tired, but he knows…[the employment specialist] will be there to help him. So that has just been invaluable.

Cole's mother and father affirmed the support that they received from Vocational Rehabilitation after the transition from the TSCC program. According to Cole's dad, "Voc. Rehab assumed that [Cole] was being taking care of by [the TSCC program], and therefore they could take a step back during that period of time...After [the program], they became more visible. And they remain visible today." After exiting the TSCC program, but prior to landing a paid position, Cole and his family met with Vocational Rehabilitation and identified an Employment Support Provider that provided Cole assistance through a job-training program and offered one-on-one job coaching. In addition to the one-on-one coaching support that is offered on-the-job, the employment specialist also assisted Cole with the job search process, resume development,

and submitting applications to places of employment through developed job leads. When Cole's father and mother talked about the support that the employment specialist provided they highlighted the assistance that Cole received completing applications, practicing interview skills, and working with Cole's employer to ensure he was successful on the job site. While the family did not utilize many other services to assist Cole because they had the means to support Cole, the employment specialist provided benefits that are not easily measured by the cost or number of hours worth of coaching support. According to Cole's mom,

> The greatest support they [employment service provider] have given him is one-on-one attention during the interview process or the application process. The interview process they will drive [Cole] there. They will accompany him during the interview…I don't think there is anything they have given us. Not that we would need anything else. There are no other supports that we are not able to pay for…but that support has just been huge. It keeps me from having to go with him to an interview and I don't really think that is appropriate for a young man to go with his mother to an interview. So they bring a job coach and it is just great.

The employment specialist that works with Cole provided assistance preparing for the job and then provided direct support on-the-job. Cole and his family expressed appreciation for the support that they were receiving. The employment specialist also acknowledged the work that the family was doing to keep Cole active and engaged. When the employment specialist was asked to share any information about the TSCC program or the manner in which he had interacted with staff from the program, the specialist noted that while he had worked with a few clients that had exited from the program, he had not worked directly with the TSCC program coordinator. The employment specialist provided details of his general responsibilities working

with Cole and the interconnectedness of his role with the support offered through Vocational Rehabilitation.

> I have to report to voc. rehab. I get [Cole] as a client and I have to work with him and justify the time that I spend with him usually its pre-employment, post-employment, and then during employment. What do we do? Well we are building up inter and intrapersonal skills, professional skills, all the ways that he can work...as far as that goes I answer to voc. rehab but that only lasts 150 days once he gets employed. When he gets employed… we stay after 150 days of successful employment and stabilized employment.

The employment specialist also described the interconnected role between the support he provided directly to Cole and the amount of time allotted to provide the direct support, which is funded by a blend of state and federal resources. The interconnected nature of the funding provides assurance that Cole will have a certain number of allotted hours for employment support, but the amount of time and the specific type of support can vary.

The employment specialist described the desire to want to offer support to his clients beyond the 150 days of successful and stabilized support, if needed, but that can be a challenge if his clients do not qualify for the extended services or supports.

> We prefer to maintain communication and assistance and support long term but again in his situation…[Cole] didn't have any support in place eventually he was picked up by GR. General Revenue is what we call it which is supported by the state, so the Med. (Medicaid) Waiver, which is federal and they are giving him a certain number of hours a month that he is giving to me so that he can maintain his employment.

The scheduled number of hours and the type of employment support can vary by client. For Cole, who had only just started his new job at the grocery store during the interviews, the employment specialist was an open line of communication between the family and the employer. Cole's mom noted that communication was key and if the employer communicates information to Cole it may not always be relayed to his family after the conclusion of his shift. While the employment specialist is available, there will be some things that he can set up to help facilitate communication between the family and the employer. It helps to strengthen the relationship and foster natural supports on the job. Cole's mom noted, "There are some things that they [the employer] may communicate to [Cole] and if I ask him when he comes home, he might not be able to communicate that back to me. So I am hopeful and I think I will talk to the job coach before they you know, let go. I will ask them to facilitate that." This open communication between the employer, the job coach and Cole's parents is especially helpful as Cole begins his new job bagging groceries and his neighborhood grocery store. Although, he has only just started, Cole was happy about the position and excited for the opportunity.

Greg: You seem pretty excited.

Cole: (Chuckles). I am. I am…I like the best is bagging. [My co-workers] They are nice… if I am not working…I will hang around the house and be bored.

Greg: That's very honest. I completely understand. Yeah, if I didn't have work to do, I would be bored too.

Cole: Yeah. (laughing)

Interagency collaboration can be a challenge for families of young adults with intellectual disabilities because of the limited hours of availability or the constraints on the type of services available. However, when the family finds an employment service provider that is able to

provide job coaching while also strengthening the relationship between the family and the employer, it has the potential to benefit all parties involved.

General Themes Across All Three Case Studies

The transition from the TSCC program for Ben, Cole, and Rob occurred within close proximity to one another. Ben exited the program one year prior to Cole and Rob. All three former TSCC program participants remain close. They each described opportunities to hang out after work. Once a week the three get together to go out to dinner, or see a movie, or go bowling. They remain involved with the TSCC program through their connection to the university's Best Buddies program. Each also attends an annual weeklong summer camp program in Washington DC for young adults with intellectual disabilities. After completing the interviews, I learned all three had grown up together. Their families knew each other and offered support to one another as the young men transitioned through school. All three attended the same high school prior to transitioning to the TSCC program. Each family lived within close proximity to one another. In some ways although, the transition experience was unique to each participant within each of the three separate case studies, the three cases have some interconnected members and common themes within their narratives.

Case Study Profiles

After completing the interviews, a case study profile was developed for the three cases. The profile provided in Table 1 highlighted some of the characteristics of each case. Similarities included the ages of Ben, Cole and Rob at the time of transition from the TSCC program, the type of non-paid internships they participated in through the TSCC program, the successful completion of travel training and their involvement with Best Buddies during the TSCC program.

Table 1. Characteristics of Three Cases during the TSCC Program

Case	Age at Time of Transition	Number & Type of Non-Paid Internships	Number & Type of Paid Internships	Completed Travel Training	Participated in Social Activities
Ben	Early 20's	7; university athletics department – men's baseball team; health sciences library; campus bookstore; student union restaurant; health sciences mailroom; family-friendly casual restaurant on campus; campus recreation center – equipment maintenance staff	1; clerical work at a science and engineering firm	Yes	Yes, Best Buddies
Cole	Early 20's	4; university dining hall; student union restaurant; campus bookstore; family-friendly casual restaurant on campus	0	Yes	Yes, Best Buddies
Rob	Early 20's	6; campus physical plant – maintenance; family-friendly casual restaurant on campus; campus bookstore; student union restaurant; university athletics department – women's basketball team; health sciences mailroom;	0	Yes	Yes, Best Buddies

There were also several similarities between the three case studies after the individuals exited the TSCC program. Table 2 describes the post-TSCC transition characteristics across the three cases. Shortly after exiting the TSCC program, each participant located paid employment. Although the number of paid positions that they have held since exiting the program differed across the three cases, each participant was employed at the time of their interviews. The three case studies also included common participants. All three individuals identified members of their immediate family to participate in the interview. Furthermore, each participant requested that their former teacher, the TSCC coordinator complete an interview about their transition experience, finally all three participants had asked a member of their current employment network to complete an interview. In two of the three cases an employer or employment specialist was available to talk about the individual's current employment.

Additional characteristics that were similar across all three case studies included participation in multiple community or social activities. Each participant remained involved in the university chapter of Best Buddies. All three were also participants in a summer camp for young adults with disabilities. Two of the three participants were also active members of the YMCA. Through the interviews with each participant and members of the transition team it was apparent that the three individuals knew one another and spent time socializing with one another on a regular basis both during their participation in the TSCC program and after they completed the TSCC program. Although, the research team did not disclose who was participating in each study, information provided in the interviews indicated that the three participants were friends.

Table 2. Characteristics of Three Cases Post-TSCC Participation

Case	Individuals Interviewed About Transition	Number & Type of Employment Opportunities Post-TSCC	Currently Employed in Paid Position	Current Type of Employment	Currently Participating in Community or Social Activities
Ben	Ben, Ben's mother, Ben's father, Ben's older brother, TSCC Program Coordinator, Ben's supervisor at his current job	3, restaurant work, fast food and family-casual dining, clerical work	Yes	County Judicial System, Clerical work (database management, filing, and document processing)	Yes, Best Buddies, Annual Summer Camp for Young Adults with Disabilities, YMCA
Cole	Cole, Cole's mother, Cole's father, TSCC program coordinator, Cole's employment support service provider	2, fitness center, grocery store	Yes	Grocery Store, bagging and customer service	Yes, Best Buddies, Annual Summer Camp for Young Adults with Disabilities
Rob	Rob, Rob's mother, TSCC program coordinator	1, fast-casual restaurant	Yes	Fast Casual Restaurant, dish room & food prep	Yes, Best Buddies, Annual Summer Camp for Young Adults with Disabilities, YMCA

After reviewing the cases linked to each of the five domains of transition (Kohler, 1996; Kohler & Field, 2003) there were commonalities or themes across the three cases that were not clearly articulated within the conceptual framework for transition captured by Kohler's (1996) Transition Taxonomy. These themes included:

- It Takes a Strong Interconnected Network
- Recognizing Narrative is Critical
- Inclusion is Important to the Community
- A Knowledgeable Transition Coordinator is Integral
- Life is Comprised of a Series of Transitions

It Takes A Strong Interconnected Network

Predominant among the interviews across the case studies was the idea of a need for a strong interconnected network of support that exists beyond the scope of any one person or organization. In other words, as the old adage states, 'it takes a village to raise a child,' it also 'takes a village' to effectively assist that individual with their transition to adulthood. Ben, Cole and Rob all had strong networks of support that assisted with their transition from school. Through the interviews with the members of each case study, central to each transition was a network that included members of the community, neighbors, and friends, in concert with the transition coordinators from the school system and employment specialists funded through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation that provided the support and connections to meaningful post-secondary employment outcomes. These networks varied in size and scope for each of the three young adults, but Ben, Rob, and Cole each noted support from more than their nuclear family, their TSCC program coordinator, or their approved service provider. Each case offered

examples of members outside of those present at their transition planning meeting, who supported their needs or assisted with an aspect of transition in post-school life..

Ben and his family had built a relationship with members of the baseball team that he was working with first as an intern through the TSCC program and later as an assistant to the coach after transitioning from the university. Through these connections Ben continued to build friendships and gained access to areas of interest with his work with the team. It was also through baseball that his family met and became friends with other families, one of which had a business connection that helped Ben obtain work with his current employer. Although approved to receive job support through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Ben and his family strengthened their relationship with his supervisor through open communication and did not require support from a job coach while he was learning his daily work responsibilities. Without the use of a job coach, Ben and his family built natural supports within the workplace, rather than relying on the support of outside service agencies.

Cole's family used the support of an employment specialist to assist them with their job search, but the specialist did not land a job for Cole. Cole's family was committed to helping Cole locate employment. Even though both his parents and his employment specialist were looking for positions for Cole, it was a manager at a local grocery store that noticed Cole was looking for a job. After recognizing Cole from his prior position at a fitness center, where the grocery store manager also completed her workouts, Cole had the necessary recommendation to be hired by the grocery store. The connections were not made by Cole's family or the employment specialist, but rather through a combination of both their efforts and the support of a community member who recognized Cole and was willing to give him a chance when he was looking for new employment opportunities.

Rob also had multiple connections to help him acclimate to a work environment that provided a good fit for his skills and his interests. Rob had siblings and extended family that worked in the restaurant industry. Their connections within the community that Rob resided in helped Rob locate a position with his employer. Although Rob initially had some support from an employment specialist, it was the connection between Rob's family and members of his extended family and the community that linked Rob with his job.

Employment is only one aspect of the transition from school to adult life. While an integral component for many individuals, reliance on the services of a government-funded support may not be enough to land the job. Furthermore, when securing employment, networking and generalizable skills including social skills are key. It may take a broader network of family, friends and community members to find a job that meets both the needs of the employer and the skills and interests of the individual in transition. It takes a village; and building a network of support to exchange ideas, resources or stories is just as important as securing postsecondary services. Ben, Cole, and Rob had other family members, community members, or each other to turn to for support. They learned how to transition from the TSCC program from a variety of sources. In some cases, members of their family provided direct support to one another. They did not solely rely on the external support from the TSCC program coordinator or from outside providers who had a limited understanding of their daily life. Their support network included their family and friends, who had long been part of their life and who could connect their capabilities and interests into post secondary employment and living settings that were a natural fit.

Recognizing Narrative is Critical

A second theme that was common across all three cases was the power of narrative presence, defined among these case studies as the, individual voice of those experiencing the transition from school to adult life. This was true for both the parent and the young adult with disabilities. Offering each person an opportunity to highlight their involvement in the transition planning process and the execution of the transition plan enriched the discussion of the needs, interests, challenges and successes of the young adult who was engaged in the transition to adulthood.

Self-determination is an important component of the individualized transition plan. In all three case studies, the young adult was invited to share their dreams and work with their family and broader support network to develop their goals. The three young men each shared examples of their strengths. They shared positive examples of the skills they obtained through participation in the TSCC program. They also expressed a favorable view of their current work experiences. Each of the three participants willingly shared their experiences during the TSCC program and their transition after exiting the university. Given the opportunity to speak, they had important contributions to add to their transition narrative.

Offering individuals who are preparing to transition from school an opportunity to speak and to share their stories is empowering. Fostering opportunities for self-advocacy and self-determination also appeared to reinforce a sense of positive self-worth. All three participants shared positive stories about their skills and abilities. Each expressed pride in their family and their work. Each also expressed value in connecting with other social activities, like Best Buddies, that allowed them opportunities to take on leadership responsibilities among their peers.

These opportunities for leadership and social participation among peers is also linked to a third common theme on the benefit of inclusion.

Inclusion is Important to the Community

A third theme that was unified across all three case studies was the idea that inclusion is beneficial for more than just an individual with a disability. Through interviews with Ben, Cole, Rob and members of their transition network, multiple examples were shared that highlighted the benefits of inclusion on the university campus. The inclusion on the campus was not just beneficial to Ben, Cole and Rob it also had an effect on the students who were accepted and attending classes at the university.

As Ben described his ongoing involvement with the men's baseball team at the university, he shared stories about the friendships that he made through his involvement with the program. His parents also highlighted the impact that he had made on members of the team. When he did not attend a game, the team wanted to know what led to his absence. When he was in the dugout assisting the team, he kept the team positive serving as an active teammate and manager from the sideline.

Rob also described a similar relationship between he and his colleagues at work. He is very social and enjoys hanging out with his co-workers. He joined his co-workers for work parties and bowling outings. His supervisor has even catered events for his social activities like Best Buddies. These relationships do not exist as a benefit solely to Ben, Cole, or Rob. These relationships are mutually beneficial to members of their team, their co-workers, and members of their community. The baseball team, the employers, the co-workers all get something through their relationship with Ben, Cole and Rob.

The inclusion in the places of employment in and around campus, through the non-paid internships is also juxtaposed with the segregated setting that appears between the TSCC classroom, where students receive functional academic instruction, and the typical college course. Although the program was located on a college campus, the students who participated in the TSCC program were unable to attend university classes. These missed opportunities to shadow classes may be disappointing to those in the program that were intent on attending class, but it should not overshadow the experience of working on a college campus and with peers who applied and were accepted to the university to complete a degree. The students who participated in the TSCC program were included in many aspects of university life. They provided service to the university through their internships. They interacted with peers through programs like Best Buddies. They even interacted with the university students in some of their courses or extracurricular events.

The TSCC program coordinator shared that Ben was involved with the golf team through a series of golf lessons that were provided to TSCC program participants at the university golf course. Rob's parents highlighted the importance of inclusion at both the high school level and during his participation in the TSCC program. Cole's parents talked about the desire to maintain inclusion in the community as an integral component of employment now that he had transitioned from school.

Inclusion was beneficial to the individual with disabilities as well as their peers, their employers, and members of the community. Students who volunteered through the Best Buddies program and the free time Friday events and those students, who provided volunteer services through the campus recreational classes or the medical courses, interacted with their peers with and without disabilities. Through these interactions they obtained a new perspective on the lives,

interests and capabilities of other members of their university and community. These interactions expanded opportunities for Ben, Cole and Rob. It added to their social network, but it also built a broader, stronger, network with members of their community. Friends, neighbors, former high school teachers and coaches all became references and contacts for new employment and social opportunities. Co-workers became natural supports on the job site, replacing the direct assistance provided by an outside job coach or employment specialist.

Inclusion also increased the social connection and extension of care to one another. Rob and his mother talked about the importance of giving back to the community and completing volunteer service. The care reflected through the volunteer work Rob has completed has also led to additional social and professional opportunities on several occasions. Rob has been invited to speak at multiple fundraising events for Best Buddies and other associations. His current employer has also donated food or support to these organizations as an extension of the commitment to service in the community that is integral to the restaurant's mission. Inclusion becomes an important win-win for the individuals with disabilities and for their peers. Each person grows and develops as members of the same interconnected community.

The students who participated in the TSCC program who were unable to attend courses, or who did not live on campus, did miss out on opportunities for additional life skill training. These missed opportunities were available to students participating in other transition programs across the country. It served as an important marker for possible improvement in the future. However, as Ben's father pointed out the TSCC program is still in some ways in its infancy and there are many areas of the country where transition programs are still not located on university campuses. The opportunities to experience the transition to adulthood along side of same age peers was an important component for the three case study participants. Bound in some ways by

the structure of the program, and unable to attend college courses, it was the TSCC program coordinator that helped the three young men locate opportunities for inclusion in campus life.

A Knowledgeable Transition Coordinator is Integral

The transition program coordinator played an integral role in the transition experience of Ben, Cole, Rob and their families. The coordinator was not involved with the lives of these three young men now that they have exited the TSCC program. However, her involvement with the students while they attended the program set them on a path to semi-independent living, by offering multiple opportunities to practice skills acquired through the program and non-paid internships.

Kohler's Taxonomy (1996) incorporated the importance of the classroom teacher in aspects of the transition relevant to the domains of student development; student led planning; and the structure of the transition program. After talking with Ben, Cole, and Rob, it was apparent that the TSCC program coordinator who served as their primary teacher spent a considerable amount of time developing opportunities for her students to practice independence. Through the coordination of access to public transportation and identification of paid and non-paid internships around campus, the program coordinator pushed for opportunities that would further the abilities of each of her students.

The aim of an individualized transition plan within the IEP is to create meaningful goals that target areas of need to assist the individual in successfully transitioning from the resources offered by the school to the supports available to the individual in adulthood. As an adult there are few entitlements. Programs and services are provided to individuals based on eligibility. The teacher understood the value and importance of fostering independence in her students. Ben, Cole and Rob each shared examples of ways that their former teacher kept them grounded in

reality, but continued to push them to be as independent as possible. She advocated that all students participate in travel training with local public transportation. She understood that while the district could utilize existing resources to provide regional bus service with district school buses, the use of the public transit system furthered the ability for TSCC participants to practice independent living skills that would be crucial to their success once they exited school. The TSCC coordinator also built relationships with employers and the vocational rehabilitation counselors within the community because she knew these would be the individuals and organizations that would serve as a critical support system for the TSCC participants after they exited the program.

Although, there are courses that an individual can take to prepare to teach individuals with disabilities, the skills that the TSCC coordinator possessed existed outside the boundaries of the material learning one acquires from a textbook or standard practice. She recognized the capabilities of her students and challenged members of the district, the university and the community to further support the needs and capabilities of the individuals within the program. The strong vision for the TSCC program, led to significant postsecondary outcomes for all three of the young adults featured within this study.

Life is Comprised of a Series of Transitions

A final theme that was connected across the three case studies was less about the transition from the campus-based program and more about the ongoing recognition that life is comprised of a series of transitions that everyone goes through. These transitions exist beyond the bounds of a structured high school or college program. Everyone experiences a transition from high school or college to postsecondary life. Important transitions also occur during other

developmental periods, whether it is earlier in life from childhood to adolescence, or later in life through the multiple phases of adulthood.

Each case study participant shared stories of their transition from high school into the TSCC program. Rob and his mother chose to also reflect on early transitions from elementary school, where they participated in segregated special education classes to middle and high school where the programs were integrated. Cole's father talked about the ongoing transitions that he and his son have made from different jobs that Cole has secured after exiting the TSCC program. For Ben and his family, they continue to look at the transitions that are yet to come. While Ben, Cole and Rob are friends, they desire to expand their social circles. Ben and Rob talk about wanting to start relationships or find a girlfriend. Ben's family talked about his desire to live on his own and one day get married. These are common elements of transition for most adults. These transitions take place most often after the transition from compensatory schooling.

The services and support set up for young adults with intellectual disabilities preparing for their transition from school disconnect once the youth has exited IDEA mandated service. The transition into adulthood does not end once participation in a program concludes. There is still a great deal of life left to live and many opportunities to grow and develop, dream, and enact new plans. For Ben, Rob and Cole, those plans are constantly changing. All three shared that they did not look back very often at the formal IDEA mandated transition plans they made while participating in the TSCC program.

Every person regardless of age or ability experiences transition. The participants in each of the three case studies share their perspective on a specific transition – the transition from a university-based, district-funded program. The students on campus who were not going through that experience could have easily talked about their own transitions to college, or navigating life

after college. The structure and support may look different, but there exist the commonality to feel validated, to feel supported, to experience success, which exists for all going through periods of transition. Perhaps Cole's mother put it best when asked about how she views his current phase of transition now that he is no longer assisted by the structure of the TSCC program.

> We have always wanted Cole to live a good life, just like we would like to live, be validated and so I keep that always in mind. It is just not something that happened after [the program], it is just a continuum of effort... we just love our kid...We will do everything we can to help him live a great life.

Transitions exist on a continuum across the lifespan. The support that one requires during those key transitions also requires a continuum of effort. Some individuals may need more support than others. More support is necessary during some transitions in life than for other periods of transition. Regardless, of the age or stage of development those who are making a transition require a network of support to successfully navigate the obstacles and celebrate the successes associated with the change.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the transition experience of three individuals with intellectual disabilities, through a collection of interviews with the young adult, members of their family, their former transition program coordinator, and members of their support network including their current employers or support service providers. This study used Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model and Kohler's (1996) Taxonomy for Transition to design an interview protocol to capture the transition experience of young adults with disabilities from their perspective and the perspectives of members of their network of support.

The study included interviews with three individuals with intellectual disabilities who had exited a university-based, school district funded, transition program. Each participant with intellectual disabilities that formed the center of the case study requested other members of their transition team to contact the researcher to answer questions about their transition experience. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological perspective, which focused on a behavior or interaction of people across multiple environments, the aim was to interview individuals from the micro, meso, and exo levels within the individual's systems of support. The transition experience took place outside the bounds of a school and involved a broad network of support from close nuclear ties between the individual with disabilities and their family members to broader social ties between the individual with disabilities and their employer or support service provider.

A total of nineteen interviews were conducted for this study. Each interview lasted between twenty to ninety minutes in length. Individuals were asked to participate in an interview

to respond to pre-scripted, open-ended questions based around Kohler's (1996) five domains of transition within the Transition Taxonomy. Kohler (1996) posited that there are five major areas of transition planning for students with disabilities. These areas or domains include student focused planning, student development, and the structure of the transition program, family involvement and interagency collaboration. The domains were designed to operationalize the transition perspective and represent a consumer-oriented paradigm built on student and family involvement and students' self-determination (Kohler & Field, 2003). The interview protocol required each person, connected in some way to the transition planning process or the resulting transition outcomes associate with the transition of the individual with the intellectual disability to reflect on questions related to each domain of the individual's transition experience. This provided an opportunity to triangulate information about the individual's transition experience .

Each person was offered the opportunity to interview twice for this study. If there were questions from the protocol that were not covered in the first interview, or if individuals who were interviewed once were interested in providing follow up information, they were asked to participate in a second interview. Of the 13 participants who completed interviews for this study, each young adult who had transitioned from the university experience completed two interviews. Second interviews were also conducted with Ben's mom and Rob's mom. Cole's father provided an interview about Cole's transition and Cole's mother also was interviewed about Cole's transition. The TSCC program coordinator was interviewed on three separate occasions on three separate days. Each occasion was designated for questions and responses pertinent to only one of the three individuals who had transitioned from the TSCC program.

The interview questions outlined in the interview protocol were designed to explore how the participants, through the transition planning process, developed their transition plans and

enacted those plans through participation in activities during the TSCC program. The study was intentional in gathering information about the planning process to understand how the multiple transition domains were connected to the exit from school and resulting post-school outcomes. The questions from the interview protocols were framed around the five transition domains, which also offered an opportunity to explore the effective practices those members within each of the three cases completed while the young adult was in the TSCC program. It also offered an opportunity to collect information from the participants about the activities that they were continuing to participate in after they had exited the program. The resulting information collected from the interviews with participants from each case study were transcribed, coded, sorted and logged according to the five transition taxonomy domains. The case studies were organized around the five transition taxonomy domains that included: student-focused planning, student development, program structure, family involvement, and interagency collaboration.

The interview protocol, the methods followed to recruit and select participants, and the procedures used to gather information from participants who consented to participate in the study were purposeful and followed in close accordance with methods outlined by Yin (2009) and Creswell (2009). Emerging from the interviews, however were additional pieces of information about the transition experiences that were not expected. Information from the interviews did not always fit within the five transition domains. Some of the participants were unable to speak about the transition planning process because they had limited involvement in the planning process during the young adults participation in the TSCC program and instead were able to speak about the current outcomes realized from the plan. Others were unable to speak to the plan because it was not a document that the families continued to use after the participation in the TSCC program was complete. Among the pieces that were not directly linked to the transition

planning process was additional information common across all three cases, but not easily categorized into one of the five transition domains within the transition taxonomy. Five additional themes were identified using information that was common across all three case studies. Among those five themes was information reported from the participants that offer additional opportunities for exploration in future studies. This concluding chapter includes a discussion of the information that emerged from the study that was not expected, but could be further explored in future studies as well as limitations within this study that should be considered when conducting future research. This chapter includes a discussion of the following four areas: 1) the link between the theoretical frame used to guide this study and the study implications; 2) the link between existing research identified within the literature review and implications for future research; 3) the limitations of this study to consider in terms of the impact on future research; and 4) the impact of the research on the values and beliefs of the researcher. The four section of the discussion are followed by final conclusions.

Linking the Theoretical Frame to Study Implications

The Taxonomy for Transition Planning was developed out of a response to hundreds of surveys that represented, "a group perspective of transition programming rather than that of one individual" (p ii). Kohler (1996) specifies that transition is not an add-on activity, but a foundation from which a program and activities develop, linking research to practice through a transition perspective, and actively involving the student in the transition planning process. Through the transition perspective a plan for the transition from high school to post school life becomes a foundation for the: identification of post school goals; development of activities and experiences that are built in to the curriculum to prepare the youth to reach the goals; and a

gathering of individuals connected to the youth who together work to identify and support the transition the goals and activities (Kohler, 1996).

The transition taxonomy evolved from several prior transition models that focused on specific aspects of transition. Early models emphasized the transition from school to employment (Will, 1984) or the transition into the community (Halpern, 1985). The taxonomy for transition planning was not developed to provide detailed steps for implementation of specific goals or activities, but rather to create a broader conceptual frame that was inclusive of multiple components for which there was a link to post school outcomes. The taxonomy continues to be used as a foundation to explore the link between research and successful practices leading to post school outcomes.

The three cases that were completed as part of this research project offered multiple and varying examples of how transition planning inclusive of all five domains of the taxonomy can be useful in assisting youth and families preparing for post-school employment and community life. The domains developed from the identification of practices that were perceived to be effective in assisting with the transition from school and linked to post school outcomes. In each case the youth who participated in the TSCC program and members of the transition team that had participated in the transition shared specific examples that encompass effective practices linked to each domain of the taxonomy. The effective practices that are linked to each domain and positive post school outcomes are important to consider as part of the broader transition planning process.

The domains are also linked in several ways to the broader ecology of the actual transition from school to adult life. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological approach to human development was incorporated into the theoretical framework for this study. It grounds the

exploration of the transition experiences of the three youth across the multiple systems of support that were available and who aided in the planning process. The study was unable to capture the full scope of the systems for each youth. While parents were available and willing to participate in the interviews, additional family members, neighbors, close friends, and employers or work colleagues were not interviewed for this study. The time frame and costs were prohibitive, but expanding the number of interviews and the breadth of interviews across members present within each system could add further information about the transition process for each youth who participated in the study.

The ecological approach also kept the cases tied to the interconnected systems that are involved in supporting the youth's transition into post school employment and community life. By interviewing members outside of the micro youth and family systems, turning attention to other members within the meso system, that included the former program director, and members of the broader exo system, including employers and service providers, additional pieces of the transition narrative were collectively shared. The rich information from sources within each of these systems offered additional clarity on both the way the youth at the center of the case study prepared for the transition from school and how members of the broader ecological systems not only assisted with the planning, but continued to provide ongoing support after the exit.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) specifies that one of the most challenging requirements for investigating the ecology of human development is the examination of the environmental structures and the process that takes place within and between them (p 518). Interviewing members of the transition planning process including the youth, parent, sibling and former TSCC coordinator, in addition to members of the current support network post school including employers and service providers offered an opportunity to look holistically at the transition

planning process and resulting post school outcomes. The interplay between the micro, meso, and exo systems connected to the membership of the individuals interviewed within these three cases indicated that to reach post school outcomes such as employment or semi-independence within the community, there is a need for connectivity among members across multiple systems. While there were allusions to how the youth and the family or other systems interacted and treated one another during the transition from the TSCC program and the resulting post school outcomes, the interview questions did not require the participants to specifically reflect on the macrosystem or cultural norms. Among some of the additional themes that were identified across each of the case studies, two themes specifically addressed the macrosystems that are related to the transition that was experienced by each of the youth and their families. These themes included the concepts that it takes a strong interconnected network to assist an individual through the transition from high school to post school life and that transition is a part of life for everyone. The transitions experienced throughout life take a continuum of effort for which some periods require more support than others.

The transition from high school or college into adulthood is an experience that all youth, not just individuals with intellectual disabilities experience. This transition to adult life includes more than just the conclusion of an academic program. Young adults experience transition into careers, options for living arrangements, choices around relationships and connections to social groups within their communities. These transitions continue well into adulthood as changes in relationships, childrearing, changes in jobs, relocation to other places in a community or to new communities exists as just a few possibilities. Planning for these transitions involves an interconnected system of support that also changes over time. There are cultural norms associated with the relative age that a young adult transitions into adulthood. There are also

cultural norms or pressures that were identified by some of the case study participants based on what they had observed as commonplace within their own family. While this was described by participants across all three case studies, the clearest articulation was raised by, Ben's father and his brother when they both shared Ben's interest in wanting to live independently and to one day get married. These are cultural norms that are typical of most young adults. Ben's family shared that they are very close and fully supportive of Ben's capabilities. They listen and serve as a sounding board for Ben when he expresses interests or looks for advice on the direction to take when making important life decisions. This type of planning does not always require a formal written program. For individuals without an identified disability, it is not even a requirement for preparing for life after high school. Whether formally written out, verbally communicated, or simply enacted through a chronology of life events, transitions are experienced by everyone and it takes a larger interconnected system. That system can include those closest such as family and friends, or a broader cast of characters including employers, teachers, or members of the community, to assist with the planning and active process of transitioning to an outcome.

Relevant to this discussion is a second theme that the support required for individuals in the process of a transition requires a continuum of effort. This was also a theme linked to a possible macro system or societal norm that was highlighted by participants across all three cases, but most clearly articulated by Cole's mother. The transition from high school or college to adulthood requires planning and support. For Cole, his primary support network included two parents who actively provided for Cole's needs through economic and social assistance. Cole's employment service provider stressed that Cole's parents were very active and most of the clients that receive assistance have families that are as actively involved in planning for and preparing their children for employment. Cole's mother specifically expressed that this was how

she viewed her role as a mother. She believed that providing support to her child included a continuum of effort as he entered adulthood, but it was not atypical, rather it was just an expectation that comes with being a parent. It was described in terms similar to a manifestation of the love that a parent has for their child. Whereas most individuals who transition into adulthood require less assistance from their parents as they did when they were transitioning through earlier stages of development, it is not uncommon for a person to seek the support of others when experiencing challenges in life. Ben, Cole and Rob may require more direct assistance in making certain choices or obtaining certain life goals, but the assistance required is a part of broader continuum of effort, in which during certain life stages an individual may require more assistance by others and in other life stages that same individual may need to provide more assistance to others in need. This need for give and take across a continuum of effort is part of the interconnectedness experienced by those linked to the young adult who is actively transitioning through just one of many transitions they will experience throughout their stages in life.

The ecological perspective has been used in prior work to frame the definition of disability. The perspective emphasizes the roles of the strengths of the individual with a disability and the provision of individualized support (Schalock & Luckasson, 2004). It has also been used in studies that explore the relationship between individuals with disabilities and their broader system of support. In this study, the TSCC program was established to further enhance the youth's participation in the community by recognizing and elevating their capabilities. Ben's father even referenced Ben's capabilities as a particular facet for selection in the program. The transition from school to employment and community life is made difficult by cognitive and environmental limitations. The members of the young adults support network interviewed for

this study did not focus their attention on the limitations of each young adult, rather they focused on the strengths that each possessed and shared specific examples of how capabilities elevated their inclusion in the TSCC program, connection to social activities on and around campus, access to and independent navigation of public transportation, and linkage to employment. In contrast to historical views or societal norms about disability that include an emphasis on limitations and needs, the role of capabilities elevates the conversation to focus on what a person is able to do and be.

Nussbaum (2011) describes capabilities as a kind of freedom that include not just the abilities residing within a person, but the freedom of opportunity created in combination with the abilities of the person and the political, social and economic environment (p. 20). The recognition of individual's capabilities is not limited to what the individual can do, but the willingness to recognize those abilities and the freedom to choose what to do with the capabilities. During the transition planning process, Ben, Cole and Rob met with members of their support network to develop a plan that included their input and actualized what they wanted for their life after exiting school. None of the families use the transition plans that were created during the TSCC program now that they are no longer enrolled in school, but there were examples within each case study of how the members of each support network listen to, engage with, and help plan for steps to help Ben, Cole and Rob, obtain new jobs, seek new opportunities for community participation and continue to offer access to a broader social environment that is also supportive of their capabilities and their interests.

The ecological approach and the taxonomy for transition planning work well together as a conceptual framework because it emphasizes the capabilities and freedom of the individual preparing for the transition to make active choices in planning, preparing and accomplishing the

goals set forth by the youth and their support network. For Ben, Cole and Rob, participation in the program was first and foremost an interest that they wanted to pursue. They described their interest in attending a university-based program. They wanted to be included in social opportunities with same-age peers in settings that they had seen modeled by friends and family members who had exited high school to enter college. They expressed an interest in wanting to obtain employment and being included with peers during and after participation in the program. They each had individuals within their support networks that included family members, teachers, community members and employers that also wanted to work with them to make those interests a reality. The support networks were formed within a broader environment that was built around the willingness to assist and support the capabilities of the young adults, rather than emphasizing the need to compromise, sacrifice or limit. While each expressed challenges in further expanding their social networks or employment options, it was viewed as aspirational and not as a limitation because of their disability.

Ben, Cole and Rob shared their transition outcomes framed within the context of their capabilities. Each expressed an interest in wanting to obtain employment. Each exited the TSCC program and located paid employment opportunities within their community. Ben and Cole held more than one paid job after exiting the TSCC program. All three expressed an interest in wanting to participate in a university-based program and each shared specific examples of how the TSCC program prepared them for post-secondary life. While participating in the program all three completed non-paid internships. All three received travel training and learned to ride public transportation independently to and from campus. Ben and Rob continue to navigate their community independently. While they do not utilize public transportation very often, both ride their bike from home to the YMCA to work out. Each of the three young men remained involved

with social activities on campus through the Best Buddies program. Ben also continues to stay active in campus life through a volunteer position with the university men's baseball program; a position that he secured while interning with the athletic department during his tenure with the TSCC program.

The broad taxonomic domains emphasize the primary components that are necessary for the development and implementation of a successful transition plan, however, the domains are limiting in their ability to capture other nuances of the planning process. For each of the young adults, it took a broader network of community and extended family support to ensure success as the individual exited school. For Ben, Cole and Rob, the transition from the TSCC program did not end immediately after graduation. Through a series of jobs and job changes, they eventually settled into a place of employment. The transitions that Ben, Cole and Rob experienced were also shared by members of their community beyond the few individuals who were present within their small planning committees. Their future employers, extended family and close friends including former program supports such as the university baseball coach all played a role in the successful transition from school.

Linking Existing Research & Implications for Future Research

The impact of this study on transition research includes the need for further studies that examine the transition experience of young adults who transition from other university-based programs. According to Think College, (Hart, Grigal, Wier, 2010) there are over 250 university-based programs around the country that are designed to provide education and supports for individuals with intellectual disabilities. While the structure of the TSCC program differs from other university programs that offer student housing or inclusion in college class there are many attributes of the program that had a positive impact on Ben, Cole and Rob as they prepared to

transition to adulthood. The three young adults each shared several positive attributes that they believed they obtained as a result of participating in the TSCC program. Each young adult and members of their support network highlighted the added level of independence and self-confidence that they noticed after completing their IEP transition goals through the TSCC program. Each also noted the important role that the TSCC program coordinator played in placing them in internship positions and helping them stay grounded with their goals and aspirations. Although the TSCC program coordinator did not stay connected with the young men after their exit from school, each had members of their family or extended family or family friends who helped them connect with social and employment opportunities within the community.

It was evident through the interviews with each participant that the TSCC program provided additional freedom and opportunities to improve on functional academic, living and employability skills that were not otherwise available, had they not participated in the university-based program. The TSCC program opened doors for Ben, Cole and Rob, but these doors would not have been available had it not been for the work of the program coordinator. As a strong advocate for the needs of the young adults and the needs of the program, the coordinator pushed for an inclusive setting with multiple opportunities to reinforce independence. Building ties with the public transit system, establishing working relationships with university programs within the College of Medicine, College of Education, and College of Sports Science, and fostering collaboration with business on and around campus provided a multitude of opportunities for Ben, Cole, Rob and their former classmates. This study emphasizes a need for additional research on the impact that a transition specialist, coordinator or knowledgeable teacher can have on not only

the transition planning process, but the post-secondary outcomes of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

A secondary analysis of nationally representative samples of students through the National Longitudinal Transition Study indicated that students with intellectual disabilities had lower rates of participation in general education and were less likely to make progress toward the completion of their transition goals (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Woodruff, & Dixon, 2005). A second study from the NLTS2 data indicate that students with disabilities are more likely to need additional support with post school planning, job training and access to transportation (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). For individuals with significant disabilities the outcomes were even more dramatic. In one study of the NLTS2 data, 97% of students with moderate or significant disabilities were dependent on others for support after their transition from school, 93.4% had not pursued post secondary education, and nearly 70% were not employed after their transition (Bouck, 2012).

These studies provide a broad picture of the state of transition for young adults with and without disabilities. It offers areas for researchers to examine the significance of relationships among multiple transition variables to advance inferences as to what might be effective in helping young adults with disabilities in their transition from school. It also highlights the need for practices that would increase the positive outcomes for youth who will soon make the transition from school to adult life. Theses analyses are limited in their ability to capture the unique perspective of youth outside the bounds of the aggregate numbers collected through the advanced survey methods used to guide the study.

The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (Test et al, 2010) has identified evidenced-based practices that are linked to four of the five taxonomic domains outlined by

Kohler (1996). Several of these practices were identified as practices that were adopted and included within the TSCC program. The curriculum that was taught within the TSCC program included a focus on specific functional and life skills related to employment skills, banking, self-management, self determination, safety, completing job application, a focus on social skills and the incorporation of functional math and reading lessons. In addition, evidence based strategies within the student development and program structure domains including community-based instruction and self-advocacy were also emphasized as components of the TSCC program.

According to Test et al. (2010) there are 33 transition practices and 16 predictors that lead to positive post school education, employment and independent living outcomes. Based on interviews with Ben, Cole, Rob and members of their transition support network several of these practices and predictors were included in the TSCC program. While it was not certain whether the TSCC coordinator was familiar with the current academic literature on transition, the practices that were emphasized including participation in career awareness and employment internships or work-study are linked practices and predictors of post school employment. The interviews cannot provide a specific link to the strength of the relationship between the participation in the TSCC program and the post school employment outcomes of Ben, Cole and Rob, but each exited school and shortly thereafter found a paid employment position. Each continues to access public transportation. Each continues to access the campus to participate in social activities with Best Buddies.

Ben, Cole and Rob each navigated the transition from a university-based, district-funded transition program to post-school lives that include semi-independent living, paid employment, social activities with friends and each has remained close with one another and with their respective families. While the three young adults who participated in the study continue to have

aspirations to obtain further independence by one day living on their own and expanding their social networks to include a broader group of friends and possibly even relationships with members of the opposite sex, there are still many stages left to their transition.

Apparent in this study, is the notion that the transition from high school or college to post-secondary life is not a final transition in life. There are a multitude of transitions that take place across the lifespan. The transition from school is important, but the likelihood of obtaining employment or independent living immediately after school may not always be realistic. There are countless reasons why individuals, regardless of ability, do not exit school with a job. Ben, Cole, and Rob each indicated that a paid job was important. They wanted to work. They felt productive. They did not want to sit at home. Employment was an important milestone in their transition from school. While this study was not designed to determine the success or failure of the transition from school, it has provided the unique perspective of three young men who have navigated their way from school to adulthood.

The use of interviews to gather multiple perspectives surrounding the planning process and resulting outcomes post transition from the TSCC program was useful to learn how three young adults prepared for their exit from school. The use of interviews offered one way to capture the narratives of a few of the individuals who participated in the TSCC program. These three case studies, offer only a narrow perspective of the transitions that young adults with intellectual disabilities experience as they exit school. It also only captures the perspective of individuals within each of the three young adults networks that volunteered and consented to participate in the interviews. While this study offers a significant amount of information about the transition experienced by three young adults, this study has several limitations.

Limitations

This study was designed to better understand the transition experience of individuals with intellectual disabilities who prepared for and completed the transition from school to adult life. The unique perspectives of the individual with disabilities, their parents, former teacher, employer, and service provider offer narratives that provide a rich description of the TSCC program and their transition experience. Additional studies could focus on the transition experience of additional classmates within the TSCC program or of individuals with intellectual disabilities who participated in other transition programs.

When looking at the lives of the three young adults who were interviewed for each of the three cases there were several similarities. Through the interviews with the young adults and their family members it was apparent that each of the families knew one another. The young adults also indicated that they had attended the same high school. The three young adults who were selected to participate in the study were selected because they were the only three that had responded to the open letter to participate, consented to participate, and had received consent from their families.

Although each case was separate and distinct, the three young adults and their families shared information that illustrated the importance that the parents played in helping their child prepare for the exit from school. Each case included parents or family members who expressed the ability to support their young adult children after they exited school. Each youth continued to live at home, each had parents who were willing to continue offering assistance whether by connecting them with employers, offering transportation to and from work, keeping them connected with adult services or other means of assistance. Future studies should consider looking at whether the social capital, often tied to results that are linked to the expansion of

social networks and community involvement impacts the transition outcomes of youth with intellectual disabilities transitioning from university based programs. While this study did not intend to select three young adults with active families who each had strong ties with each other and with members of their community, it was evident that these social ties had a direct link to the employment and social outcomes articulated within each of the cases.

Ben, Cole and Rob shared that they remained friends after exiting the TSCC program, in two of the cases Ben and Rob indicated that they were friends with one another prior to starting the TSCC program and each shared which high school they had attended. It turned out that all three young adults had attended the same high school prior to entering the TSCC program. The TSCC program accepts high school students from over twenty schools across a large urban area, but the three young men that responded to the request to participate in the study happened to transition from the same high school. Additional studies should consider whether the transition from a particular high school program directly impacts the transition planning process of young adults with disabilities.

In order to obtain approval to conduct interviews with former participants of the TSCC program, I was required to complete to IRB reviews. One IRB review was conducted and approved by the university. A second IRB review was conducted and approved by the school district that funded the university-based TSCC program. During the review and approval process the full committee review highlighted some of the issues that a researcher encounters when conducting interviews with individuals with intellectual disabilities. In order to receive approval for the study and to further protect the anonymity of the individual with intellectual disabilities and members of their transition support network, I did not collect information about their specific disability diagnosis, age, race, ethnicity or socio-economic status. While this did not

serve as a factor for consideration when recruiting participants for this study, it was a limitation to consider when thinking about the implications for further research.

Interviewing young adults with intellectual disabilities and members of their transition support network offer an opportunity to explore similarities and differences that youth and their families experience as they prepare for the exit from school. This information could be useful to researchers, transition specialists and policy makers that are considering the components of effective transition to consider when developing new programs. It would be useful to conduct interviews with young adults from a broad range of backgrounds including those from different racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. It would also be important to consider the differences between the transitions experienced by young adult males versus young adult females. Further, study of a specific group of individuals with a similar disability diagnosis or of similar ages may also be important to consider in future studies.

Impact of the Research on the Values & Beliefs of the Researcher

A component of qualitative research includes an exploration of the values and beliefs of the researcher. While the values and beliefs of the researcher were unpacked in the methods section of this paper in Chapter 3, it is worth noting some of the dynamics of the research and its impact on the researcher. It is a challenge to share a great deal about my own story as a sibling of a young adult with an intellectual disability, and as a former transition coordinator whose role included preparing youth and families for the transition from high school to adult life. I was familiar with the transition domains and the effective practices linked to the taxonomy for transition planning prior to this work because I had used it to inform the way that I prepared youth and their families to transition from high school to post school life and it was the same

taxonomy that I used as a framework to help my family as they prepared for my siblings transition for high school.

It was striking to hear the stories of the transition experiences of Ben, Cole, Rob, their families, and their support network because it was so similar to my own. I too was an active participant in the transition planning process for a young adult sibling of similar age to those I interviewed for this study. As a sibling I was called upon to be an active participant in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Individualized Transition Program (ITP) planning meetings. As a team member on a team comprised of my sibling, his teachers, my parents, and a representative from vocational rehabilitation, I sat through Person Centered Planning (PCP) sessions to build a road map for my brother's transition from school to post-secondary life. As a family we tried to involve friends and extended family to encourage my brother to think about a path to employment and community participation as he prepared to exit school. As he approached his transition from high school, he expressed an interest in going to college as his elder siblings and several of his high school friends had done. We grew up in a community, where a university-based transition program was not available. Although, my brother expressed an interest in participating in college, my brother experienced academic, economic and environmental limitations that made it prohibitive for him to achieve that goal. The planning process did offer an opportunity for the whole team to listen as my brother addressed many of his interests and capabilities, which were channeled into opportunities for employment and community participation. We worked as a team to assist my brother in identifying and following up on job leads. Shortly after his exit from school he landed a position at a community civic and fitness center, where he had the opportunity to work daytime shifts in a position with responsibilities that he enjoyed.

Listening to the TSCC program coordinator share the many ways that she worked with Ben, Cole, Rob and their families, I could not help but also think back to my time as a transition specialist within a school district. While my role as a transition specialist included a different environment within a high school rather than on a large urban college campus, I too interacted with young adults with intellectual disabilities and their families to assist with the planning and preparation for post-school life. For some of the students I taught the focus of the meeting was on the interests and capabilities of the young adult who would soon exit school. The team rallied behind the interests of the youth and work collaboratively to identify employers and outlets within the community that were closely tied to the plans articulated by the youth and their family. In other instances, the planning process was complicated because the youth experienced challenges articulating their vision, or parents or family members were unavailable or unwilling to participate in the transition planning process. In these instances, it was more difficult to make the necessary connections within the community to build opportunities for the young adult after they exited high school.

The transition planning process that Ben, Cole, Rob and members of their transition planning team and broader support network articulated were not dramatically different than the process that we used to prepare young adults with intellectual disabilities in their transition from school. It was not a transition planning process that was that dissimilar to the process that my family experienced as we prepared for my brother's transition from school. There were nuances however, that were especially important. The way that Ben, Cole and Rob were able to use their existing family and broader social networks to connect with employers after exiting the TSCC program and the unique relationship that they had with one another after exiting school are two important facets that were unique and important to their exit. This study offered a unique

opportunity to explore the type of transition planning that takes place for individuals with intellectual disabilities in one university-based transition program, yet it also offers an interesting starting point to explore and compare the experiences of other young adults experiencing transition in other parts of the country.

Conclusions

The qualitative work completed through a study of a small number of young adults from one specific program has offered insight into practices that were most effective for members of their support network. It cannot explain what characteristics or variables may have impacted their transition prior to their participation in the program, nor can it explain which specific variables impacted their social and employment outcomes upon exit from the study. The study does, however, highlight, the unique aspects of the TSCC program and the interaction that members of three different transition teams had with one another. For Ben, Cole and Rob, each with their own skills, interests, abilities, and backgrounds develop unique plans that kept them actively employed and engaged with their communities after their exit from school.

There is a need for more case studies to highlight the transitions of other youth and their families. Additional research is critical to helping parents, transition specialists, and policy makers determine effective practices that may be beneficial in helping with the transition planning process of young adults with intellectual disabilities preparing to exit school. Currently, the federal government is funding multiple transition to post secondary education grants to train personnel to become transition specialists and researchers in the areas related to the transitions of young adults with disabilities. Additional federal funds are used to examine whether specific interventions that include effective transition practices will have an impact on young adults who are collecting Supplemental Security Income (SSI) as they transition from school. Still other

funds are used to develop and expand post-secondary programs for young adults with intellectual disabilities on university campuses across the country.

The transition from high school is a critical step between youth and adulthood. It requires significant planning. It also has implications for the outcomes that youth may achieve as they reach adulthood. Heavy investments by federal or state governments and even programs enacted by local education agencies as evidenced by the funding of the TSCC, illustrate that transition remains an important area for study. The three case studies completed within this qualitative study offer only a small sample of the many unique experiences that are available to those who take the time to listen, engage and consider the narratives of individuals with intellectual disabilities and members of their broader support network preparing to transition from school to adult life.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Study Protocol

Title: From Adolescence to Adulthood: Analyzing Multiple Perspectives on the Transition from High School to Post-School Life through a Multi-Case Study Design

Purpose:
The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the transition that individuals with intellectual disabilities experience as they exit high school and enter post-secondary life. This will be accomplished through a collective case study of three unique cases that explore the facets of transition from the perspective of the individual with disabilities, their families and their broader support network consisting of teachers, employers and community service providers.

Rationale:

For youth with disabilities, the transition from school to postsecondary education, employment and independent living can be difficult. Federal spending for research and model demonstrations for secondary transition initiatives began in the early 1980s through research on community based education and services, cooperative models, job training, self determination, post school follow up, follow along services, and post secondary supports (Flexer et al, 2001). Since that time amendments to the IDEA that focus on transition planning have also emphasized the importance of improving the effectiveness of special education services and the educational achievement of individuals with disabilities (Yell, 2012). While there is an increased emphasis on educational achievement and post school goals, a gap remains between post school outcomes in areas of employment, education and independent living remain. The National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2) found that in Wave 4 (2007) interviews only 67.8 % of individuals with disabilities were employed. This number is even more staggering when percentages are broken down by disability category. Of the individuals with learning disabilities 76.1% confirmed they were employed. Individuals with other identified disabilities including mental retardation (39.9%), autism (32.6%) and traumatic brain injury (42.1%) did not fair as well (Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2011).

Individuals with intellectual disabilities who plan for the transition from high school to adult life require a network of supports that range from family members to teachers, employers, and local service providers within the community. The transition is based on the capabilities and the needs of the young adults. These needs must be considered by all of the stakeholders within the interconnected system in order to best support the transition plan and implement effective transition practices. This study seeks the perspective of the student who recently transitioned from school along with members of his or her extensive support network, which includes parents, teachers, employers and community service providers. These unique perspectives offer important information about the transition experience of young adults who recently transitioned from school.

Research Questions: This investigation seeks to answer the following three research questions:

1. How is the transition experience of an individual with an intellectual disability shaped by the broader context within the domains where the transition from IDEA mandated services takes place?
2. How do members of an individual's support network as parents, teachers, employers, and community service providers contribute to the unique experience of the individual directly involved in the transition from IDEA mandated services?

3. How are the perspectives of the individual's support network within the multiple domains of transition shaped by the experience of the individual who recently transitioned from IDEA mandated services?

Study Methods/Procedures:
This exploratory study is designed to investigate the transition experience of three individuals with disabilities who recently exited from a university-based transition program and members of their support network including parents, teachers, employers and community service providers. The proposed study will utilize a qualitative approach and will involve face-to-face, in-depth interviews of 15 to 30 minutes in length within a setting agreed upon by the participant, in a context connected to the transition (i.e. the participant's home, place of employment, or the university where the transition program was based). The interviews will be transcribed, coded and analyzed for themes and context, which provide a rich picture of the transition experience for three distinct cases. The aim is to understand the phenomenon of transition that these three individuals with disabilities experienced. Individuals identified for the study will:

- Participate in two face-to-face interviews that will be digitally recorded on an audio recorder, lasting approximately 15 – 30 minutes and consisting of a predetermined list of ten open-ended questions with additional prompts (attached). The proposed research will be conducted at the employer's place of employment.

- All audio recordings and typed transcripts of the interview will be coded for themes. The information collected from the interview will be stored for up to five years after the final report is submitted under lock and key in the College of Education, Department of Special Education.

Total Number of Participants:
About 10-15 individuals will take part in this study at employment sites on the university campus. A maximum of 25 individuals will participate in the study at all university-based employment sites.

Principal Investigators*: Greg Knollman, M.S. Educational Leadership
*The Principal Investigators is a doctoral student at the University of South Florida and is being guided in this research by Drs. Jeannie Kleinhammer-Tramill and Ann Cranston-Gingras, Professors of Education at the University of South Florida.

Appendix B: Young Adult Interview Protocol

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the transition that individuals with intellectual disabilities experience as they exit high school and enter post-secondary life. This study will include interviews with a student and members of their support network, which include parents or family members, former teachers, employers and community service providers. The interviews will include 15 to 30 minute sessions that will be audiotaped and transcribed.

The interviews will include a list of semi-structured, scripted questions. The following questions are based on prior research related to five major areas of transition planning (Kohler, 1996). The questions cover topics related to student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family involvement, and the program structure used to prepare students for the transition from high school. The interview questions involve an overarching question related to each of the five transition areas and additional prompts that support the specific topic.

Student-Focused Planning:

1. How were you involved in planning for your transition during the IEP meetings?
    1.1. What were some of the goals that were developed to help you transition from school?
    1.2. Who attend the IEP meeting?
    1.3. How did members of the school (teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals) assist with the planning for your exit from school?

Student Development:

2. What activities were you involved with at the university program that helped you prepare for your transition from high school?
    2.1. What opportunities did you have to meet with other students on campus? Were you involved with any social clubs on campus?
    2.2. What were some of the jobs that you participated in at the university?
    2.3. How did your work training and classes at the university prepare you for your transition from school?
    2.4. What additional services (OT, PT, speech, travel training) did you receive when you participated in the program?
    2.5. How did those services help you prepare for your transition from high school?
    2.6. Describe some of the assignments that you completed at your university program that helped you learn about the skills that you had and the types of work that you would like and would not like doing after high school.

Interagency Collaboration:

3. Who helped you prepare for your life after high school?
    3.1. How did your parents help you prepare for life after high school?
    3.2. How did your teachers help you prepare for life after high school?
    3.3. How did your employer help you prepare for life after high school?
    3.4. What challenges did you face when you were attending the university program?
        3.4.1. How did your parents help you overcome those challenges?
        3.4.2. How did your teachers help you overcome those challenges?
        3.4.3. How did your employers help you overcome those challenges?

3.4.4. How did members of your community or your vocational rehabilitation counselor help you overcome those challenges?

3.5. What goals did you accomplish when you were attending the program?

3.5.1. How did your parents help you achieve those goals?

3.5.2. How did your teachers help you achieve those goals?

3.5.3. How did your employers help you achieve those goals?

3.5.4. How did your members of the community or your vocational rehabilitation counselor help you achieve those goals?

Family Involvement:

4. How did members of your family help you prepare for your life after high school?

4.1. What did they say during your IEP meetings?

4.2. Describe the type of help or support that your family provided you to help you with your goals when you were in school.

4.2.1. How did they help you with your job?

4.2.2. How did they help you with transportation?

4.2.3. How did they help you with your schoolwork?

4.3. Describe the type of support that your family provides you now that you are no longer in school.

4.4. Describe the people that your parents worked with to help you prepare for your transition from school.

Program Structure:

5. How did the university program assist you with your transition from high school?

5.1. What did you learn while attending the program?

5.2. What did you do during a typical day on campus?

5.3. Who did you work with while you were attending the program?

5.4. Were you connected to vocational rehabilitation or a community service provider while you were in school?

5.5. If you were working with a vocational rehabilitation counselor or a community service provider, what did they do to prepare you for your transition from high school?

Other information:

6. Is there any additional information that you want to share about your transition from high school?
7. Do you have any additional questions for me before we conclude the interview?

Appendix C: Introductory Letter to the Study

February 10, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

Members of the University of South Florida, College of Education, Department of Special Education are interested in conducting a study entitled: *From Adolescence to Adulthood: Family Perspectives on the Transition from High School to Post-School Life.* We are seeking your permission to interview you about your experience transitioning from high school to post high school adult life. The research team is comprised of a doctoral student and university faculty members who are interested in conducting two 15-30 minute interviews with you and members of your support network including members of your family, your former teacher, an employer and a community service provider at a place where you would be comfortable in meeting within your community.

The purpose of the work:

- Explore the transition that individuals with intellectual disabilities experience as they exit high school and enter post-secondary life.

- Collect personal experiences from three former students who have recently transitioned from high school. Members of each student's support network including a parent, former teacher, employer, and community service provider will also be asked to provide their perspective on the transition experience

- Analyze the information on the transition experience to identify common themes that might be unique to each student's transition experience and compare that information across the three different student experiences.

The information contained within the interviews will remain confidential. Any personal information will not be used within the final report. We would like to receive your permission to conduct interviews within the next three months. We have enclosed a letter of support, that grants permission for us to commence with the research process.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Greg Knollman, M.S.

Jeannie Kleinhammer-Tramill, Ph.D.

Ann Cranston-Gingras, Ph.D.

Appendix D: IRB Approvals

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

10/21/2013

Gregory Knollman, M.S.
University of South Florida
College of Education, Special Education
4202 East Fowler Ave.
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: Full Board Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00013384
Title: From Adolescence to Adulthood: Analyzing Multiple Perspectives on the Transition from High School to Post-School Life through a Multi-Case Study Design
Study Approval Period: 9/23/2013 to 9/23/2014

Dear Mr. Knollman:

On 9/23/2013, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Study Protocol

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
Assent Form.pdf
Minimal Risk Consent Form.pdf
Proxy Form.pdf
*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John A Schinka, Ph.D.

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

USF
UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

9/19/2014

Gregory Knollman, M.S.
Teaching and Learning
4202 East Fowler Ave.
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: **Full Board Approval for Continuing Review**
IRB#: CR1_Pro00013384
Title: From Adolescence to Adulthood: Analyzing Multiple Perspectives on the Transition from High School to Post-School Life through a Multi-Case Study Design

Study Approval Period: 9/23/2014 to 9/23/2015

Dear Mr. Knollman:

On 9/19/2014, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Study Protocol

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John A Schinka, Ph.D.

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board