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The Effects of Students with Disabilities Implementing Postsecondary Transition Plans

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The Effects of Students with Disabilities Implementing Postsecondary Transition Plans

by
Joseph D. Rodgers

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Joseph D. Rodgers under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Statement of Original Work

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Joseph D. Rodgers

Name

October 12, 2018

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Abstract

The Effects of Students with Disabilities Implementing Postsecondary Transition Plans. Joseph D. Rodgers, 2018: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. Keywords: educational planning, learning disabilities, individualized transition plans, community-based instruction (disabilities)

This applied dissertation was designed to examine whether or not students with disabilities (SWD) were prepared for the transition from high school to employment or to postsecondary education. Numerous reports had shown that SWD were being challenged with making the transition from postsecondary school to the next stage of their life, whether that is a full time job or attending college. To this end, the primary focus of this was to examine particular areas that were most beneficial for these students. If these areas were identified they could be used to better prepare SWD for their transition into the real world.

The researcher conducted a case study with a mixed method approach. The participants consisted of 10 SWDs who were randomly selected and had graduated from high school in the School Years 2003 and 2014 with either regular diplomas or special education diplomas. These students completed a survey via mail followed by a telephone interview. The data gathered was analyzed and was used to address the research questions.

An analysis of the data showed that overall the students had a positive experience in their education while in high school. They felt their teachers did an adequate job of preparing them for life after high school. However, the students felt that there were 2 areas that needed to be changed in the future. These areas were: (a) the need to be involved when they are planning for their future after high school, and (b) more real world experiences needed to be taught in class such as dealing with mock job interviews, filling out job applications and other post secondary items.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Students with Disabilities (SWD) have a hard time transitioning from high school to college or workforce due to not being properly prepared in their coursework. Some of this is due to the students not having the mental capabilities of learning sufficient work traits and some due to the teachers not properly preparing them for the transition. When the students graduated from high school, they should have felt they were given sufficient background information to be comfortable either going into the workforce or attending a postsecondary school (Gable, Rucker, & Smith, 1997).

Statement of the Problem

SWD are being challenged with making the transition from postsecondary school to the next stage of their life, whether that is a full time job or attending college. Newman, Madaus, and Javitz (2016) reported that of over 11,000 students who were from 500 local education agencies and 40 special schools across the United States, only 3,190 transitioned to some type of postsecondary education. For SWD trying to find a job after finishing high school has been difficult as well. According to Mazzotti and Rowe (2015) only one third of all individuals with disabilities were employed, compared to two thirds of all individuals without disabilities.

Topic. The study was conducted examining how SWD make the transition to postsecondary school or employment. The data included in this study examined the SWD point of view, whether they believed they were properly prepared for this transition or if they felt there were gaps in their education.

The research problem. The problem addressed in this study was SWD having difficulty transitioning into postsecondary placements at a much higher rate than their nondisabled counterparts. One example is “many students with learning disabilities (LD)

or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) who attend college do not complete their degrees at the same rate as their typical peers” (Hamblet, 2014). Another issue for SWD is determining if they are fully prepared to transition after high school. Gragoudas (2014) reported that employers want future employees to have higher reasoning skills, problem solving and critical thinking skills in order for the potential employees to be successful.

Background and justification. It has been documented that within two years after leaving high school, approximately 80% of all SWD are engaged in postsecondary education, employed, or in some type of employment training program (Newman et al, 2009). Further, approximately 3 in 10 out-of-school youth with disabilities were enrolled in some kind of postsecondary school. The postsecondary education and employment rate of current enrollment for youth with disabilities, respectively, is less than half (41%) that of their peers in the general population, and approximately one in five attending postsecondary school (Wagner, Newman Cameto, & Levine, 2005). As SWD transition into postsecondary settings, there are some adjustments that could be different than what they were accustomed to in high school. Wagner et al. (2005) stated:

The structure of a SWD is one of the main concerns because the student was used to a familiar school-driven schedule that has most students up early in the morning, occupied in classroom instruction until midafternoon, often involved in school-sponsored extracurricular activities after school, and engaged in homework in the evenings (p. 11).

This structure is replaced by the often more flexible schedules of college for youths who pursue postsecondary education or the structure of a full- or part-time job for those who work. Cobb (2016) contended that SWD face a great disadvantage as they

attempt to enter the job market immediately after high school because the general education course of study does not always provide adequate preparation for a successful career or thoroughly addresses all the aspects of the world of work. Morningstar et al. (2010) noted that it is the general belief of SWD that, if they were adequately taught basic skills in high school, they could have had more success early in college.

Many students assume that graduating high school automatically prepares them to step into the real world and find a job or attend college without the proper training or academic skills. According to Cobb (2016), many times, students with LD are guided toward academic schedules that do not challenge them and finish high school with transcripts that do not measure up to those of their peers without disabilities. Part of the responsibility also falls on the students because they are part of the transition team. The difference between high school and the postsecondary world is that “instead of the transition team working with the student being responsible for learning, the student alone is responsible” (Cobb, 2016).

Another part of the transition from high school to the postsecondary world is that many students with LD are unaware of the mandate of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act requiring that students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) have an exit meeting prior to their graduating high school. In the exit meeting, the IEP goals are discussed and indicate whether the students have mastered the goals for that school year. Also during the exit meeting, the summary of performance is discussed to review whether the students have met all the requirements for graduation. Richter and Mazzotti (2011) explained that the federal mandate indicates that the purpose of the summary of performance is to provide the student with a summary of academic achievement, including recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting the student in

meeting postsecondary goals.

The researcher of this study proposed to examine whether SWD were given the necessary knowledge and training to be successful in postsecondary schooling and work. According to Trainor, Lindstrom, Simon-Burroughs, Martin, and Sorrells (2008), “it is crucial to develop and use transition education practices that result in more equitable outcomes for diverse youths with disabilities” (p. 56). Often SWD have fewer opportunities for success in postsecondary schooling or work due to businesses not treating them fairly because they have a disability. For many SWD, an undifferentiated curriculum has led to a lack of student motivation and poor postsecondary outcomes.

Izzo, Yurick, Nagaraja, and Novak (2010) found that 47% of high school SWD reported that their primary transition goal was to attend college; however, only 19% of youths with disabilities who had been out of high school for up to 2 years were currently enrolled in postsecondary education, as compared to 40% of their peers in the general population. Izzo et al. also found that, regarding employment, although 53% reported that their primary transition goal was to enter employment, only 41% were employed, as compared to 63% of youth in the general population.

According to King, Baldwin, Currie and Evans (2006), when needed supports and linkages are not established to assist youth and families to adapt to new environments and expectations, students may experience difficulties in engaging in desired adult roles. Often students with LD do not get any parental support with making their decisions in regard to their transitioning. Results from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 suggested that fewer than 60% of parents expect their child with LD to graduate from high school with a regular diploma (Newman et al., 2009). Research has suggested that students whose parents have higher expectations for postsecondary outcomes have higher

grades and basic skills levels than do students whose parents have lower expectations for postsecondary participation (Newman et al., 2009). Many students find that, when they get into the real world, it is much tougher to conquer than they believed when they were in high school.

Many secondary teachers fail to cover basic tips that would allow SWD to have an upper hand when it comes to how to conduct themselves in job interviews and also how to fill out simple job applications. Thoma, Pannozzo, Fritton, and Bartholomew (2008) defined self-determination as “depending on equal parts of skills and opportunities mixed liberally with experience and adequate supports” (p. 94). Thoma et al. elaborated that teachers play a vital role not only in directly teaching self-determination skills, but also in providing opportunities and supports for SWD to use the skills they possess. Wells et al. (2003) found that students with some type of disability are prevented from achieving any of the statuses that are associated with the early transition to adulthood. When one compares the transition of typical students to SWD, there is a wide variance. Wells et al. stated, “Although a substantial number of individuals with disabilities are working, have begun families, and have pursued postsecondary education, they are doing so to different degrees relative to individuals without disabilities” (p. 807). Transitioning to adulthood for SWD is a growing problem that educators, as well as the students and parents, are trying to figure out the best option to ensure that these students will be successful when they graduate high school. The thought is that every child that graduates from high school should have a chance to succeed in life and for SWD this is getting even tougher than in years before. With the right training in high school to give students a better understanding of what is ahead of them, maybe there will be an increase of positive outcomes for SWD in the transition from high school to college or the workplace.

Deficiencies in the evidence. Chambers, Rabren, and Dunn (2009) compiled information on whether students with and without disabilities report similar perceptions of their high school preparation. Results indicated that 78% of SWD versus 70% of students without disabilities specified that school prepared them for what they wanted to do after high school. In addition, 81% of the SWD noted that school prepared them to get a job, and only 63% of the SWD stated the same. According to Skaff, Kemp, Sternsky-McGovern, and Fantacone (2016) people with disabilities tend to have significantly lower labor force participation and employment rates than individuals without disabilities. Statistics also show that people with disabilities experienced an unemployment rate double that of the population without disabilities (15% vs. 7%) and had a labor force participation rate of only 20% compared with 69% for the population without disabilities (Skaff et al., 2016).

Audience

SWD covers a wide range of disabilities and may include Learning Disabled (LD), emotional behavior disorder, other health impairment, and mild intellectual disability. LD is the most common disability among students today with the major deficit area being either low reading level or low writing levels. According to Agran and Hughes (2008), the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 referred to LD as:

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. (p. 69)

When transitioning occurs with LD students, it is especially important to pay

great detail to the outlined plan and get parents and the student involved to follow it as closely as possible. According to Powers, Geenen, and Powers (2009) parents may be concerned about their children's capacities to manage the complexity of transition planning and to successfully communicate and advocate for their needs with the myriad of professionals who are typically involved.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were defined to provide a better understanding for their usage.

Individual Education Plan (IEP). A plan in which educators and parents are involved in collaboratively creating a formalized plan for instruction that will address unique students' needs. (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014).

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). This act was designed to ensure that all children with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living. (Winnick & Porretta, 2017)

Learning Disabled (LD). The term used worldwide to indicate that there is a discrepancy between pupils' school attainments and what they might be expected to achieve given their level of ability. (Montgomery, 2003)

Students with Disabilities (SWD). Student with Disabilities 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, needs special education and related services. (Oregon Department of Education, 2017)

Transition. Activities that prepare students with disabilities to move from school to post-school life. The activities must be based on the student's needs, preferences, and interests, and shall include needed activities in the following areas: instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment and other post-school adult living skills (when appropriate), functional vocational evaluation. (Pioneer Central Schools, 2017)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem addressed in this study was student with disabilities (SWD) having difficulty transitioning into postsecondary placements at a much higher rate than their nondisabled counterparts. To this end, the review of literature focused on SWDs transitioning to post secondary school or into the workforce in an effort to validate whether the SWD are ready for this major life change. In addition, the study examined the struggles that SWD had in college with having to take remedial classes, the historical perspective of SWD in high school and how students are prepared for life after high school.

The study included a review of SWD's attending college and their outcomes of college, as well as the struggles with maintaining employment after high school, success rate of employment and the importance of work competence of SWD. The remainder of the study examined self-determination and how SWD struggled with this as well as struggled with social skills, movement of SWD into the regular education classroom and the possible benefits and shortcomings of it, and finally how productive parent and family participation affected a child's education and transition planning.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this applied dissertation was to examine whether students with LD were properly prepared for transitioning from high school to employment or postsecondary school with their course work and advisement from their case manager. The study examined which aspects were most beneficial for students with learning disabilities and also if there were items that could be improved upon to make future students better prepared for their transition to postsecondary school or employment. When students graduated from high school, they should have felt they were given

sufficient background information to be comfortable either going into the workforce or attending postsecondary school (Gable, Rucker, & Smith, 1997).

Data showed that upon entering college, SWD had a tough time adapting to the rigor from high school coursework to the workload of college courses. According to Joyce and Rossen (2006), 63% of all SWD who enter community college are required to take remedial courses, and 40% of those entering universities will need remedial course work. One problem with SWD in high school was that they are not familiar with the accommodations that can be offered to them as part of their individualized education plan (IEP), which are there for the benefit of the students to assist in their classroom learning. Bolt, Decker, Lloyd, and Morlock (2011) found that students' perspectives of accommodations were mixed, with some reporting gains in confidence and self-efficacy from the accommodation and others reporting that the accommodations slowed them down or made them feel worse about their skills.

Historical Perspective

Post school outcomes were an issue with SWD that is a continuing issue, which raised the question about the importance of transition services. Individuals with disabilities have long experienced poorer post-school outcomes than those without disabilities (Haber et al, 2016).

Trainor (2008) defined transition service as:

The term “transition services” means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that (a) is 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; (b) is based on the individual child's need, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and (c) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (p. 148)

Transition planning was also a very important topic in special education among teachers and students. Effective transition planning adopts an approach that is sensitive to the culture and context of the family, thus empowering the family for its role in guiding their adult child with a disability (Bassett & Dunn, 2012). The transition plan determined the specific interests of students once they graduate from high school. The areas involved in a transition plan are education, employment, and independent living. Each of these areas are addressed with goals and activities in which the student was engaged in to master the goals listed. A student's transition plan could possibly change each year as the student's interest could change annually. The person responsible for writing any amendments to the student's transition plan is the student's case manager. Often people do not realize the role of a special education case manager.

Bon and Bigbee (2011) stated that special education case managers often function directly as educational leaders with significant influence over the special education programs and services provided for SWD. Case managers were also responsible for ensuring compliance with the student's IEP, facilitating dialogue, and promoting trust among family members or guardians of SWD, school systems, and classroom teachers. Another major problem with LD students is the graduation rate. Students with LD have

much lower graduation rates than their peers without disabilities.

Trainor (2002) stated, between 36% and 56% of students with LD leave high school without a diploma or certificate of completion. The cause for the low numbers in graduation involved the state-mandated tests that the student must pass in order to meet state requirements for graduation. If the students did not pass the tests, they would not complete their graduation requirements and have to either attend summer school or return to school for another year in order to graduate. This caused students to drop out of school without graduating, which counted against each school making adequate yearly progress according to No Child Left Behind. The problem that many educators had is that a student who cannot do the required work in a regular education class setting and must be assigned to special education classes and receive a special education diploma should not be penalized and be put into the same category as someone who drops out of school.

According to Trainor (2002), only 18.7% of graduates with LD were enrolled in academic postsecondary educational settings and 17.8% in vocational educational settings. One of the reasons that the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act of 1997 lowered the age at which transition planning should begin from 16 to 14 was that teachers and committees could start this process earlier in the student's life than trying to figure everything out when the student was halfway through high school. With the age change, students in middle school had to have a transition plan in place when they had their annual IEP review meeting. The high school teacher had goals that can be worked toward beginning with the student's first day in high school. A greater emphasis had been placed on mastering the transition goals. If they are not mastered within the first year, the goals had to be reviewed to see if they are adequate for the student's transition plan. If the goals were deemed to be adequate, there needed to be some adjusting to ensure the student can

master them. If the transition goals are deemed inadequate, then new goals were to be introduced. These goals had to be agreed upon between the IEP committee, student, and parents before they could be written into the transition plan.

Transition plans became an increasingly important component in the IEP because they represented a road map of what students were going to work toward to meet their postsecondary goals. The IEP committees had started preparing students to be significantly involved in the development and implementation of their IEPs, which included meaningful involvement at their IEP meetings and involvement in monitoring their own goal achievement. The IEP meetings were required annual meetings on the child's progress toward their annual goals and objectives. The skills that were taught through involvement in IEP meetings, relate directly to the components of the IEP and include (a) describing one's disability, strengths, needs, legal rights, and present level of performance; (b) evaluating one's progress, weighing alternative goals, and engaging in goal-setting and goal-attainment activities; (c) preparing for a formal presentation and advocating for oneself in a formal setting; (d) communicating one's preferences and interests; (e) accepting responsibility for areas where improvement is needed; (f) participating in discussions regarding one's post school plans and needs and (g) determining one's accommodation needs and securing appropriate accommodations (Rabren & Johnson, 2010; Test et al., 2004, 2009).

The goal of all special education teachers and committees were for the student's transition process to go as smoothly as possible while in high school and after graduating. King et al. (2005) found that successful negotiation of transitions is thought to lead to better outcomes of youth, including enhanced self-determination, higher success in postsecondary education, higher rates of employment, less poverty, greater happiness,

and greater participation in life situations (i.e., recreation and leisure, volunteerism). When teachers write a student's transition plan, they are focused on the goals that the student wishes to accomplish after graduating high school. There are three goals that were to be measured: (a) education and training, which covered any type of postsecondary school attended and any type of on-site job training toward a future goal; (b) employment, which covered any type of job the student wanted to consider pursuing; and (c) independent living, which looked at what type of living arrangement the students envisioned for themselves after high school.

The objective of a transition plan was to provide students with goals to work toward for graduation and build upon these enhanced skills while accomplishing these goals. A transition plan is not a document that cannot be changed once it has been written. Many students will change their minds up to four times, or a different plan each year of high school. This is to be expected because many ninth graders did not know what they wanted to do with their lives once they graduate. This also holds true for many 12th graders. A transition plan is not something that can be developed in 5 to 10 minutes, as it takes time to come up with the goals and completing the appropriate assessments needed to gather the needed information. A well-written transition plan should cover goals for an entire calendar year and should be geared toward what the student's plans are once they graduate high school.

King et al. (2005) stated enhanced skills include physical independence, self-determination (e.g., skills in communication, planning, decision making, problem solving, self-awareness, self-efficacy, and self-advocacy), social and interpersonal skills, employment skills (e.g., resume building), work skills (e.g., specific behaviors required to perform a job adequately), and skills in the use of leisure time. One of the reasons to

focus on goals for work placement for SWD is that the employment rate for youth and young adults with disabilities is disproportionately lower than that of youth without disabilities.

Flannery, Yovanoff, Benz, and Kato (2008) found that 2 years out of high school, only 42.9% of SWD's are employed, compared with 55% of their nondisabled peers. Seo, Abbott, and Hawkins (2008) found that youths with LD had higher employment and earning rates than their peers without LD during their early years; however, within 5 years after graduation, their peers without LD outpaced them in employment and earned income. This was not much of a surprise because students with LD may not have the desire or needed skills to stay at a job for a long period of time. Students with LD tend to have issues with staying with one certain thing for a given period of time and this could include jobs.

Shandra and Hogan (2008) stated that, for many young adults, the end of formal education is associated with the movement away from dependence on the family and a step toward the independence facilitated by paid employment. The problem was that often the students are not prepared for life after high school. Despite tremendous strides made in recent years, adolescents with learning disabilities still struggled in preparing for and successfully completing the transition from high school to postsecondary education or work and ultimately adult life (Litvack, Ritchie, & Shore, 2011).

Many students, with disabilities and without, had fewer family resources because they came from one-parent families and also came from homes in which one or both parents did not finish high school. Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, and Zane (2007) said that families have a clear influence on the career-development process for all youth, often having a greater impact than peers. It was also noted by Lindstrom et al. that

“family socioeconomic status seems to be an especially strong predictor of later access to career opportunities and options, as youth from higher status backgrounds often aspire to higher status or more prestigious occupations” (p. 348).

The IDEA of 2004 mandated schools to prepare SWD for various adult roles in employment, postsecondary education, independent living, and community participation (Repetto et al., 2011). Students had to make sure that they were taking the required classes for graduation and, the students’ teachers needed to make sure that they were teaching the necessary skills for going out after high school to find a job. Another reason that SWD had problems with employment is that most U.S. high schools emphasized college preparation, which often overshadows attention to actual workforce readiness (Levinson & Palmer, 2005). This is common because of the pressure on the school systems to raise test scores and graduation rates.

Levinson and Palmer (2005) also noted that about half of U.S. students leave high school without the knowledge or skills needed to find and maintain a job, and one third of students are not prepared for even entry-level work. When this happens, students are less likely to get into a postsecondary school and also less likely to find a better paying job. Even when the students decide to go out and find a job, it may not be one that they are interested in. The task of trying to match a job to the person is also a very difficult task.

Estrada-Hernandez, Wadsworth, Nietupski, Warth, and Winslow (2008) conducted a study for job match among persons with disabilities. The researchers explored the match between occupation and interests in relation to job satisfaction of 72 persons with disabilities who successfully attained employment through vocational rehabilitation. The results showed a significant positive relationship between interest-job congruence and job satisfaction. Earnings could also play a big factor in job performance

and longevity. Estrada-Hernandez et al. found that earnings are as important and sensitive a measure of career outcomes as employment status.

Sanford et al. (2011) found that, although gaps in post school outcomes have narrowed, SWD's still lag significantly behind their peers in access to and participation in postsecondary education (55% versus 62%), hourly earnings (U.S. \$9.40 versus U.S. \$13.20), and engagement in either postsecondary education or employment (84% versus 95%) up to 6 years following high school. SWD are more likely to try to maintain a job if they feel that they are getting paid a sufficient amount of money for the job (Sanford et al., 2011).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), the median annual income for young adults with a bachelor's degree was \$45,000, whereas the median was \$21,000 for those without a high school diploma or its equivalent. Most of this is due to lower rates of postsecondary education enrollment and higher rates of unemployment. According to Wagner et al. (2006), the following were all predictors of better postsecondary employment and education outcomes: (a) participation in vocational education classes and paid work experiences during junior and senior years; (b) competence in functional academic, community living, personal-social, vocational, and self-determination skills; (c) participation in transition planning; and (d) graduation from high school. It was also noted that inclusion in general education, paid employment or work experience, participation in vocational education classes, and transition planning were moderately correlated with postsecondary education participation.

SWD who are included in the general education curriculum will have a better opportunity to be successful in postsecondary school due to a more rigorous curriculum than the SWD who are only in special education classes. This is due to the rigorous

standards that each state has in place. In a special education classroom, students are not held to the same state standards if a student is working on a special education diploma track. Study habits are another reason that students are better prepared for postsecondary school because, for students to be successful, they have to study for their tests in each class. This is often overlooked, and some students with and without disabilities do not have the necessary study techniques to be successful. Involvement in vocational classes is also a huge advantage to SWD if they can be involved due to the work skills that they learn while taking the class.

Some of the skills that are learned include being able to work with hands-on activities, collaborative learning, and independent learning. Lee et al. (2012) found that the efficacy of instruction would promote component elements of self-determined behavior, including interventions to promote self-advocacy, goal setting, and attainment, self-awareness, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills. Many of the elements mentioned have to be taught to SWD because many are not cognitively able to pick up on these on their own. If they are discussed and reviewed thoroughly in class, there is a better chance for the students to understand what they are and how important they can be when talking about transitioning to adult life.

SWD Attending College

In the past ten years there has been an increase in the numbers of SWD attending college or receiving some level of postsecondary education after high school. Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, and Shaver (2010) found that, between 1990 and 2005, there was a 19% increase in the numbers of SWD attending college or receiving some level of postsecondary education within 4 years of leaving high school. The mandate of least restrictive environment has resulted in large numbers of secondary SWD participating in

college preparation courses and has encouraged secondary school personnel, parents, and students to carefully consider postsecondary education as a realistic goal for SWD (Shaw & Dukes, 2013).

Carter et al. (2010) found the emphasis on this preparation has been driven by at least three factors. First, the pervasiveness and persistence of disappointing post school employment outcomes for young adults with disabilities have prompted ongoing concerns about the availability, relevance, and efficacy of secondary transition services. Second, obtaining work experiences during high school is among the most prominent and well-documented predictors of favorable post school employment outcomes in the transition literature. Third, working during high school can make sizeable contributions to positive adolescent development by (a) enhancing students' autonomy; (b) influencing their vocational identity; (c) shaping their career awareness and aspirations; (d) developing their workplace values, skills, and knowledge; and (e) promoting collateral skill development.

Trainor, Carter, Owens, and Swedeen (2008) found that, during summer months, only 31.6% of youth with cognitive disabilities, 10.9% of youth with autism, and 18.6% of youth with multiple disabilities were reported to have worked. States now have to annually report post school employment and postsecondary education. Reasons for this include evaluating transition planning and implementation, identifying additional assistance needed by students, evaluating curriculum, and identifying the need for more planning (Chambers et al., 2009). The special education community and the general public were alarmed to learn that important adult outcomes such as employment, independent living, and community integration remained unattainable by many youths with disabilities (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010).

Chambers et al. (2009) examined three questions: Do students with and without disabilities report similar post school outcomes? Do students with and without disabilities report similar post school barriers? Do students with and without disabilities report similar perceptions of their high school preparation? Results for the first question indicated that the percentage of students working 1 year after high school involved 73% of the SWD and 74% of the students without disabilities. Results for the second question showed that 65% of SWD and almost 78% of the students without disabilities reported they had experienced no problems while working on their job. Results for the third question showed that 70% of the students without disabilities expressed that school prepared them for what they wanted to do after leaving high school, whereas 80% of SWD indicated they felt school prepared them for a job.

For schools to be successful in properly preparing SWD for their next step, administrators need to address future planning, social development, leisure activities, and life skills. Gil (2007) found that students need to learn self-determination while in high school because this involves knowing and believing in oneself, making decisions, and initiating action to reach goals. Gil also found that these skills can be developed through direct instruction and by providing opportunities for students to practice the skills they have learned. Often these go overlooked because there is more of an emphasis on academic accountability now due to high-stakes testing. Teachers now feel that, if they do not properly prepare the students for their high-stakes testing and the students perform poorly on the test, then their jobs could be on the line. Therefore, there are fewer opportunities to gain the full range of skills needed for the many roles held as adults.

Gil (2007) also stated that postsecondary disability service providers can assist in skill development through collaborative transition planning, such as during the IEP

meeting, but that may not always be possible due to time constraints. In this case, it is very important for a collaborative relationship between the postsecondary disability service provider and the high school special education teacher because they can work together to create strategies for further skill development as well as different study skill strategies for help with course work. With the standards that each state must cover in such a short period of time, it often takes the focus away from what is really important to SWD: becoming productive citizens.

One of the best ways for students to get the needed skills to become productive citizens when they graduate is to have a job that allows them to get the introductory skills needed to be successful when they get their first job. These introductory skills need to be taught before a student gets to the age of getting a job. Shandra and Hogan (2008) said that school-based and work-based transition programs share the intention of preparing students for the challenges of the workplace through several possible mechanisms. First, when a student participates in the school-to-work initiative, it can provide a simulated job experience for building a student's resume and also giving them an idea of possible future tasks they may have to complete.

After the first phase of the program, the students go out into the community and have a supervised job where they have a job coach that assists them while on the job. Finally, at the end of the period of time, a student could get skill certification that is not traditionally provided in standard academic curricula. Shandra and Hogan (2008) found that, with the implementation of this school-to-work transition, there was an increase in individuals' motivation to study and work toward a career, a greater understanding of the skills needed to succeed in job tasks, and better knowledge of specific career interests. However, more importantly, they also found that students reported gains in their

understanding of disability-related work accommodations and a greater knowledge of their legal employment rights.

High schools are now calling on secondary schools to offer educational experiences that integrate a rigorous academic curriculum with relevant and authentic learning experiences (Joselowsky, 2007). Many times, when students enter postsecondary schools or the workforce straight out of high school, they are not prepared for the task that is ahead of them because they have not been properly trained. Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Swedeen, and Owens (2010) found that early work-related experiences during high school represented one of the most consistent predictors of post school employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. Research (Bassett & Dunn, 2012) has indicated that school-sponsored work experiences, vocational education enrollment, and after-school jobs are all empirically linked to more favorable employment outcomes during early childhood. A major problem with youth with disabilities is that they are exiting school without the skills, attitudes, and experiences necessary for them to have success in the work world.

Carter et al. (2010) noted that only 25% of young adults with intellectual disabilities, 32% of youth with autism, and 36% of young adults with emotional behavior disorder were employed 2 years out of high school, compared to 46% of youth with learning disabilities, 58% of youth with speech-language impairments, and 63% of youth without disabilities. When comparing the employment rates of the 46% of youth with learning disabilities to the 63% of youth without disabilities, the biggest difference is that the youths without disabilities have a better chance of finding and securing a job due to having the available classes offered in high school. That is not to say that SWD could not take those same courses; however, if they were not on track to graduate and are having to

retake classes to have enough credits for graduation, they are more under the gun to finish their needed classes. Bassett and Dunn (2012) found that most students with LD spend much of their time in general education classes in which little attention is devoted to transition.

Attributes of SWD's

Many SWD's have problems with employment retention. One reason for not being able to maintain a job is that, if the job is not something that can hold their interest or they become bored, the SWD will not have any desire to come to work on a daily basis and be productive. When it comes to work for SWD, it does not necessarily mean working in the highest paid profession or the most glamorous. Wehman (2013) looked at six major themes to help students' strive toward independence and creating a positive future: self-determination and self-advocacy, social skills, work competence, general education, parent and family participation and postsecondary education.

Self Determination

Self-determination involves the capacity to choose and to act on the basis of those choices (Wehmeyer et al., 2012). Self-determination is a characteristic that lacks in SWD's because these students do not see the importance of trying to map out what they are going to do in the future. Self-determination is also the ability to make personal choices related to vocation, education, and independent living and explore how it can positively affect the post school outcomes of individuals with disabilities (Roth & Columna, 2011). Research has also shown that adolescents with disabilities who are more self-determined when they leave school are more likely to be employed and live independently than are their peers who are less self-determined (Lee et al., 2011, 2012).

Self-advocacy is another skill that is very important to SWD, especially when

they turn 18 years of age and become legal adults. When SWD turn 18 years old, they are their own advocates when it comes to their IEP and making decisions based on their education, hence, the reason behind legislation mandating that schools make coordinated efforts to get SWD into classes with their peers without disabilities as much as possible throughout the school day. Carter, Lane, Pierson, and Stang (2008) reported the results of a study that showed how often educators taught the seven skills associated with self-determination: choice making, decision making, goal setting and attainment, problem solving, self-advocacy and leadership skills, self-awareness and self-knowledge, and self-management and self-regulation skills. Each of these areas was scored as being taught: sometimes to often-in classrooms. Problem solving was the only domain that more than two thirds reported frequently teaching in their classrooms.

Self-determination has been referred to as a person's freedom to make decisions independently. It is often hard to let someone experience freedom for the first time because of the fear of failure. It would be a hard change for some students to experience failure, especially if it is the first time. With this said, it could also work to the benefit of someone to experience failure to be able to look back and see what he or she needs to do differently the next time. Often when SWD have the chance to sit down and come up with their own plans after high school, without the help of their family, it often gives them a sense of accomplishment knowing that they are getting a chance to plan their future entirely on their own (Martin, Woods, Sylvester, & Gardner, 2005). Bassett and Lehmann (2002) found that, in addition to the seemingly good fit between promoting self-determination and mitigating negative postsecondary outcomes, special education philosophically supports the idea that individuals with disabilities have the right to be self-determining, as is evidenced in person-centered approaches to educational

programming.

Trainor (2005) stated that encouraging students with LD to set goals, make choices, and self-assess-key components of self-determination models may increase their successful transition into adulthood. It also helps with the transition planning if the student has an idea of what he or she wants to do after high school. Martin and Diehm-Williams (2013) indicated that, to facilitate the transition from high school to further education or employment, students need to learn to self-manage their IEP meetings by first participating, then learning to develop the IEP, and finally, managing or leading the IEP process. One of the major problems with students and their IEP meetings and transition planning is that they are very passive when it comes to their meeting and will not get involved by asking questions. This can occur because the atmosphere of the meeting is more agenda oriented and adult focused than student centered or student directed (Lee et al., 2011). Many times, the case manager will forget that the meeting is about the students and their best interests and will totally dominate the meeting and not let the students have a chance to express any feelings or opinions they may have.

Martin and Diehm-Williams (2013) explained that students can easily be engaged in the IEP transition planning process by inviting friends and team members to the IEP meeting, taking the seat at the head of the IEP planning table, and leading the actual IEP meeting with support provided by educators, parents, or friends. Many times, students do not feel comfortable speaking in front of their teachers and, they could also feel overwhelmed when entering a room that is filled with adults that they may not have contact with on a daily basis, such as the principal or assistant principal who may be sitting in as the local education advocate. One thing that could put students more at ease is to let them know that the meeting will involve talking about positives to their teachers

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Morningstar and Liss (2008) suggested, “Students should take the lead in gathering data, interpreting results, and creating goals” (p. 48), as this allows them to “participate in assessment planning; to advocate for themselves in interpreting results; and in planning for, and directing, their individualized transition services, goals, and needs” (p. 48). Woods et al. (2010) stated that, to determine student preferences and interests, special educators at IEP meetings typically ask students what they want to do after graduation, yet few facilitate assessment strategies such as role playing or student-centered discussion of employment, postsecondary education, or adult-living dreams and goals prior to the transition IEP team meetings. Ultimately, it is the role and responsibility of the students’ case manager to provide insight on how the transition process will go for the student.

Woods et al. (2010) documented the case manager also needs to let the students’ parents know that there is a possibility that some of the goals that are going to be listed in the transition plan could be worked on outside of school and need to be documented. Other roles for the case manager are to oversee the IEP process, which includes setting up the annual IEP meeting, conducting the IEP meeting, writing the goals for the students IEP, and also monitoring the plan and to ensure program compliance with all teachers involved. Case managers can also help to guide the student with setting goals for their transition from high school to adulthood as well as keeping up with their classes to ensure they are getting their work completed in a timely manner and also making good grades in their classes.

Social Skills

Social skills involve being able to speak to peers and adults and carry on a conversation. Carter and Hughes (2013) noted that displaying appropriate social skills and behavior in an array of social situations can make the difference in successful outcomes in the workplace, at home, and in the community, especially when peer buddies can be involved. Students with good social skills are more likely to be successful in a job simply due to being able to ask questions if they are confused or do not understand and also because they could be more at ease while at work because they have made friends. Hillier, Fish, Siegel, and Beversdorf (2011) found that many agree that social competence skills, such as getting along with others and having good interpersonal skills, are critical to a successful life. Researchers have looked into the possibility that poor social skills could be caused by increased anxiety levels.

Beauchemin, Hutchins, and Patterson (2008) noted that the poor performance of anxious individuals is a result of problems with attention focus, concern about competence, and a preoccupation with self-oriented and negative thoughts. This is a topic that is still to be debated but could carry some merit in the issues that SWD have with poor social skills. Social skills, with some SWD, are a major hurdle that needs to be cleared before becoming successful in everyday life, whether that is in the classroom or in the work place. Beauchemin et al. (2008) found that, generally speaking, the social-skills deficit characteristics of LD students have been conceptualized as social manifestations of disorganized auditory and visual-spatial functions.

Often these students are not taught the proper way to interact with peers and adults in either a work setting or a more relaxed social setting. One of the best ways for these students to get experience in interacting with peers and adults is to have different

scenarios that are brought up and discussed in class. A classroom teacher could also have mock interviews with the students to give them a better idea of what type questions could be asked if and when they have a job interview. Beauchemin et al. (2008) also stated that meditation and relaxation training may reduce anxiety and promote attention factors, these changes may be accompanied by enhanced social skills.

Work Competence

Work competence is a skill that must be taught to the students before leaving high school. Wehman (2013) found that unpaid and paid work experiences are by far the most important practice associated with good transition outcomes. Guy, Sitlington, Larsen, and Frank (2009) conducted a study to determine the number and characteristics of employment preparation courses offered by districts across the state of Iowa. Results indicated that 73.2% of the employment preparation courses were offered through Career and Technical Education and that only 61.3% of SWD had taken them. Further only 19.8% of the employment preparation courses combined school-based and work-based learning. Schools must emphasize skills and competencies related to employment rather than continuing to focus on isolated academic skills. Many SWD cannot pick up on these work competencies while on the job because jobs are more difficult for them to find than those of their peers without disabilities.

Lysaght, Cobigo, and Hamilton (2012) stated that work is an important social and financial involvement for SWD and provides a potentially rich venue for social inclusion; supported employment has become an accepted best practice in employment of persons with disabilities. SWD can become better rounded while working through supported employment, which can go through the state Vocational Rehabilitation. Supported employment is when the students can work with a job coach, who will help them get their

feet wet on their new job and eventually will phase out while the student gets more comfortable.

To be successful in any job or anything outside of high school, students need to set goals. Lee, Palmer, & Wehmeyer (2009) found that goal setting is a major key that students need to understand is a necessity to be productive in society. By setting goals, a student will have something to strive for, and this could be something as simple as getting a job. Many high school students have very little knowledge of the components for getting a job. Hitchings et al. (2001) stated, “Many adolescents and young adults with disabilities, therefore, lack an awareness of career options, have limited knowledge of the career decision-making process, and lack adequate skills for employment” (p. 8). Some of the shortfalls of SWD could range from not knowing how to properly fill out a job application or typing a resume for perspective employers.

Hitchings et al. (2001) found that a major attribute for personal success among highly successful adults with learning disabilities is a strong sense of control over career-related events and a conscious decision to take charge of one’s life. There are many ways that special education teachers try to ensure that SWD have the knowledge needed when they graduate high school to be successful in a higher educational setting or the workforce. One of the ways that educators try to make sure that these students are properly equipped for their transition is through service learning. Service learning is defined as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (Dymond, Renzaglia, & Chun, 2007, p. 227).

Through the service learning approach, “students participate in service activities

that simultaneously benefit the community and link to the curriculum, thus providing the context for real-life applications of learning” (Dymond et al., 2007, p. 232). Service learning is being advocated for more thorough education in an inclusive setting because it meets the needs of all students in the classroom. Service learning provides an opportunity for SWD to work with their peers without disabilities and also to give the SWD a sense of accomplishment when working on tasks with peers without disabilities. Another positive outcome of service learning is that it teaches LD students to use critical thinking while performing different tasks. With No Child Left Behind mandating that most special needs students must receive a regular high school diploma, service learning will take on a much larger role than in the past. One of the main reasons that the legislation called for more SWD earning a regular high school diploma was that students who received a special education diploma counted as dropouts, which subsequently counted against the school from which they graduated.

General Education

Inclusion into the general education classroom is a movement that has taken off in the past few years due to No Child Left Behind’s mandate of SWD to be included as much as possible into the regular education classroom settings to be with their peers without disabilities. This has evolved into collaborative teaching in which there is a special education teacher in the general education classroom setting teaching alongside the regular education teacher. Although many schools have ignored these students in accountability systems, schools must now ensure access to the curriculum on which universal standards for all children are based (Bon & Bigbee, 2011). Collaborative teaching is very beneficial to SWD and also peers without disabilities because it provides another teacher in the classroom to assist with answering questions and providing further

instruction to the students.

Jackson, Ryndak, and Wehmeyer (2009) explained that, although challenges persist, the important fact is that collaborative teaching opens up the doors for SWD to have more and higher quality interactions with nondisabled peers and general education teachers. Inclusion is a major change from just 10 years ago when SWD were mainly in resource settings in which they were taught in a small classroom setting with other SWD. Now most SWD are in collaboratively taught classes with only a small number of students in self-contained classes.

Parent and Family Participation

Parent and family participation is one of the most important factors in a child's education and also their transition planning. Parental involvement means the parents are aware of what is going on with their child's education and also they are involved in the meeting process to determine what school and employment options are available as their child goes along in high school. Larocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) noted that higher levels of parental involvement have been associated with better student attendance, higher math and reading scores, higher graduation rates, and less grade retention. Parents can also point out some needs that may not be seen at school that could be beneficial in the planning. Parents are very important when it comes to the planning stage because it takes a total team effort to make the transition planning a success and this also goes for getting the child through high school. Larocque et al. (2011) also stated that parental involvement has benefits for families, too, as they become better informed about teachers' objectives and the needs of their children.

Employment

Research on the well-being of SWD has revealed that employment is positively

related to various dimensions of quality of life, including economic resources, job satisfaction, positive self-perception, active social network, recreational activities, and preferred living arrangements (Ju, Zhang, & Pacha, 2012). The Office of Disability Employment Policy (2009) reported an employment rate of only 19.8% for SWD aged 16 and above compared with 64.6% for individuals without disabilities. Many of the problems that exist with SWD and low employment rates results from individuals not having the necessary work-related skills and work-related personality attributes.

Some of these attributes include poor attendance, punctuality, and little to no employability skills. Employability skills refer to general and nontechnical competencies required for performing all jobs, regardless of types or levels of jobs. They are not job specific but are considered attributes of employees that make them an asset to employers (Mansour, 2009). The main problem with SWD taking on a new job is that they do not always stick with the job long enough to see if it is going to work out, and they sometimes have problems getting along with others in their workplace, which can cause major problems.

The problem that some SWD don't realize is that gaining employment is associated with increases in an individual's sense of self-esteem, sense of fulfillment, quality of life, and sense of worth as a productive member of the society (Steere, Rose, & Cavaiuolo, 2007). When students get jobs and start earning their own money, it gives them a sense of accomplishment and they have a better understanding of spending money. Gaining employment for a SWD can also give them a chance to work with people that they may not know to help build social skills and meet different people. SWD often have social skill issues, and they may not initiate a conversation with an adult unless they are familiar with the person.

Postsecondary Education

Postsecondary education is very important for SWD, specifically the students with the ability to go to postsecondary school and finish a degree program. By taking classes toward a degree in a postsecondary setting, the students will learn new skills, identify new interests and hobbies, make new friends, and have lifelong learning experiences, as well as have the ability to earn more money than someone with only a high school diploma. Getzel and Thoma (2008) noted that approximately 25% of SWD participate in postsecondary education after exiting high school. Many students and parents do not realize that the modifications they had in high school will follow them to a postsecondary school, which could greatly aid them in being able to finish a degree program.

Another alarming number is that only 19% of SWD are participating in postsecondary education compared with 40% of students in the general population. Flannery et al. (2008) stated that barriers to obtaining postsecondary education and training include (a) lack of awareness of postsecondary education opportunities and requirements; (b) lack of academic, transition, and self-advocacy skills; (c) lack of responsiveness by postsecondary programs and personnel to comprehensive needs of individuals with disabilities; and (d) lack of partnerships between secondary and postsecondary schools, the business community, and adult agencies. Often the skills training programs that are in place at community colleges are typically not organized in a manner that would address the needs of individuals with disabilities, especially those youths who are in transition from high school to postsecondary education and employment.

Leake, Burgstahler, and Izzo (2011) stated that a widely shared goal in the field of

transition has been to increase the proportion of youths with disabilities who go on to postsecondary education, whether it be at 2-year, 4-year, or vocational-technical institution. The researchers reviewed interviews with different subgroups and asked “Did you have a mentor during high school?” The results showed that, of 27 American Indians, 18 had a mentor in high school but nine did not have one. The Asian subgroup had 11 with a mentor, one that did not, and one who did not know if he or she had a mentor. The African American subgroup had 29 people with a mentor, 17 who did not, and nine who were not sure if they had a mentor. The Hispanic subgroup had nine participants with a mentor, three who did not have a mentor, and one who did not know. The Pacific Islander subgroup had five who previously had a mentor and five who did not have a mentor.

The White subgroup had 26 students with a mentor in high school, 18 students whom did not have a mentor, and six students who were not sure if they had a mentor. The multiethnic-other subgroup had 21 students who previously had a mentor in high school, eight students that did not have a mentor, and one student that could not remember. There were two additional subgroups that were put together: students in college and students not in college. Eighty-three college students had a mentor while in high school, 46 of those students did not have a mentor, and 17 students didn’t know whether they had a mentor. Of the students that were not in college, 36 of them had a mentor, 15 of those students did not have a mentor, and one student did not know. Overall, the results were skewed toward having a mentor; 60.1% of the students had a mentor while in high school, 30.8% did not have a mentor, and 9.1% did not know about having a mentor while in high school

When one talks about SWD transitioning from high school to adulthood, it is “viewed as a long-term process, rather than a more time-limited event” (King et al., 2006,

p. 155). Cobb and Alwell (2009) found that best practice in transitioning included (a) interagency collaborations among schools, community service agencies, and employers; (b) programs for SWD's; (c) transition personnel preparation; and (d) self-determination skills training for youth with disabilities. Preparing for transitioning to adulthood requires many different aspects, such as goal setting, planning, and taking action because, increasingly, jobs that provide greater advancement opportunities, higher potential earnings, and a broader range of benefits require some form of postsecondary training (Weiss, Hutchins, & Meece, 2012). The more postsecondary training SWD have, the better chance they have of being successful.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), the median annual income for young adults with a bachelor's degree was \$45,000, whereas the median was \$21,000 for those without a high school diploma or its equivalent. Most of this is due to lower rates of postsecondary education enrollment and higher rates of unemployment. According to Wagner et al. (2006), the following were all predictors of better postsecondary employment and education outcomes: (a) participation in vocational education classes and paid work experiences during junior and senior years; (b) competence in functional academic, community living, personal-social, vocational, and self-determination skills; (c) participation in transition planning; and (d) graduation from high school. It was also noted that inclusion in general education, paid employment or work experience, participation in vocational education classes, and transition planning were moderately correlated with postsecondary education participation.

SWD who are included in the general education curriculum will have a better opportunity to be successful in postsecondary school due to a more rigorous curriculum than the SWD who are only in special education classes. This is due to the rigorous

standards that each state has in place. In a special education classroom, students are not held to the same state standards if a student is working on a special education diploma track. Study habits are another reason that students are better prepared for postsecondary school because, for students to be successful, they have to study for their tests in each class. This is often overlooked, and some students with and without disabilities do not have the necessary study techniques to be successful. Involvement in vocational classes is also a huge advantage to SWD if they can be involved due to the work skills that they learn while taking the class.

Some of the skills that are learned include being able to work with hands-on activities, collaborative learning, and independent learning. Lee et al. (2012) found that the efficacy of instruction would promote component elements of self-determined behavior, including interventions to promote self-advocacy, goal setting, and attainment, self-awareness, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills. Many of the elements mentioned have to be taught to SWD because many are not cognitively able to pick up on these on their own. If they are discussed and reviewed thoroughly in class, there is a better chance for the students to understand what they are and how important they can be when talking about transitioning to adult life.

Trainor (2005) stated that encouraging students with LD to set goals, make choices, and self-assess-key components of self-determination models may increase their successful transition into adulthood. It also helps with the transition planning if the student has an idea of what he or she wants to do after high school. Martin and Diehm-Williams (2013) indicated that, to facilitate the transition from high school to further education or employment, students need to learn to self-manage their IEP meetings by first participating, then learning to develop the IEP, and finally, managing or leading the

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Through the service learning approach, "students participate in service activities that simultaneously benefit the community and link to the curriculum, thus providing the context for real-life applications of learning" (Dymond et al., 2007, p. 232). Service learning is being advocated for more thorough education in an inclusive setting because it meets the needs of all students in the classroom. Service learning provides an opportunity for SWD to work with their peers without disabilities and also to give the SWD a sense of accomplishment when working on tasks with peers without disabilities. Another positive outcome of service learning is that it teaches LD students to use critical thinking while performing different tasks. With No Child Left Behind mandating that most special needs students must receive a regular high school diploma, service learning will take on a much larger role than in the past. One of the main reasons that the legislation called for

more SWD earning a regular high school diploma was that students who received a special education diploma counted as dropouts, which subsequently counted against the school from which they graduated.

Transition planning is also a very important topic in special education among teachers and students. Effective transition planning adopts an approach that is sensitive to the culture and context of the family, thus empowering the family for its role in guiding their adult child with a disability (Bassett & Dunn, 2012). The transition plan determines the specific interests of students once they graduate from high school. The areas involved in a transition plan are education, employment, and independent living. Each of these areas is addressed with goals and activities in which the student will be engaged in to master the goals listed. A student's transition plan could possibly change each year as the student's interest could change annually. The person responsible for writing any amendments to the student's transition plan is the student's case manager. Often people do not realize the role of a special education case manager.

Bon and Bigbee (2011) stated that special education case managers often function directly as educational leaders with significant influence over the special education programs and services provided for SWD. Case managers are also responsible for ensuring compliance with the student's IEP, facilitating dialogue, and promoting trust among family members or guardians of SWD, school systems, and classroom teachers. Another major problem with LD students is the graduation rate. Students with LD have much lower graduation rates than their peers without disabilities.

Trainor (2002) stated that; between 36% and 56% of students with LD leave high school without a diploma or certificate of completion. The cause for the low numbers in graduation involves the state-mandated tests that the student must pass in order to meet

state requirements for graduation. If the students do not pass the tests, they will not complete their graduation requirements and have to either attend summer school or return to school for another year in order to graduate. This can cause students to drop out of school without graduating, which counts against each school making adequate yearly progress according to No Child Left Behind. The problem that many educators have is that a student who cannot do the required work in a regular education class setting and must be assigned to special education classes and receive a special education diploma should not be penalized and be put into the same category as someone who drops out of school.

According to Trainor (2002), only 18.7% of graduates with LD were enrolled in academic postsecondary educational settings and 17.8% in vocational educational settings. One of the reasons that the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act of 1997 lowered the age at which transition planning should begin from 16 to 14 was that teachers and committees could start this process earlier in the student's life than trying to figure everything out when the student was halfway through high school. With the age change, students in middle school now have to have a transition plan in place when they have their annual IEP review meeting. The high school teacher will have goals that can be worked toward beginning with the student's first day in high school. A greater emphasis has been placed on mastering the transition goals. If they are not mastered within the first year, the goals have to be reviewed to see if they are adequate for the student's transition plan. If the goals are deemed to be adequate, there may need to be some adjusting to make sure the student can master them. If the transition goals are deemed inadequate, then new goals are to be introduced. These goals must be agreed upon between the IEP committee, student, and parents before they can be written into the transition plan.

Transition plans have become an increasingly important component in the IEP because they represent a road map of what students are going to work toward to meet their postsecondary goals. The IEP committees have started preparing students to be significantly involved in the development and implementation of their IEPs, which includes meaningful involvement at their IEP meetings and involvement in monitoring their own goal achievement. The IEP meetings are required annual meetings on the child's progress toward their annual goals and objectives. The skills that can be taught through involvement in IEP meetings relate directly to the components of the IEP and include (a) describing one's disability, strengths, needs, legal rights, and present level of performance; (b) evaluating one's progress, weighing alternative goals, and engaging in goal-setting and goal-attainment activities; (c) preparing for a formal presentation and advocating for oneself in a formal setting; (d) communicating one's preferences and interests; (e) accepting responsibility for areas where improvement is needed; (f) participating in discussions regarding one's post school plans and needs and (g) determining one's accommodation needs and securing appropriate accommodations (Rabren & Johnson, 2010; Test et al., 2004, 2009).

The goal of all special education teachers and committees is for the student's transition process to go as smoothly as possible while in high school and after graduating. King et al. (2005) found that successful negotiation of transitions is thought to lead to better outcomes of youth, including enhanced self-determination, higher success in postsecondary education, higher rates of employment, less poverty, greater happiness, and greater participation in life situations (i.e., recreation and leisure, volunteerism). When teachers write a student's transition plan, they are to focus on the goals that the student wishes to accomplish after graduating high school. There are three goals that are

to be measured: (a) education and training, which would cover any type of postsecondary school attended and any type of on-site job training toward a future goal; (b) employment, which covers any type of job the student wants to consider pursuing; and (c) independent living, which looks at what type of living arrangement the students envision for themselves after high school.

The objective of a transition plan is to provide students with goals to work toward for graduation and build upon these enhanced skills while accomplishing these goals. A transition plan is not a document that cannot be changed once it has been written. Many students will change their minds up to four times, or a different plan each year of high school. This is to be expected because many ninth graders do not know what they want to do with their lives once they graduate. This also holds true for many 12th graders. A transition plan is not something that can be developed in 5 to 10 minutes, as it takes time to come up with the goals and completing the appropriate assessments needed to gather the needed information. A well-written transition plan should cover goals for an entire calendar year and should be geared toward what the student's plans are once they graduate high school.

King et al. (2005) stated enhanced skills include physical independence, self-determination (e.g., skills in communication, planning, decision making, problem solving, self-awareness, self-efficacy, and self-advocacy), social and interpersonal skills, employment skills (e.g., resume building), work skills (e.g., specific behaviors required to perform a job adequately), and skills in the use of leisure time. One of the reasons to focus on goals for work placement for SWD is that the employment rate for youth and young adults with disabilities is disproportionately lower than that of youth without disabilities.

Flannery, Yovanoff, Benz, and Kato (2008) found that 2 years out of high school, only 42.9% of SWD's are employed, compared with 55% of their nondisabled peers. Seo, Abbott, and Hawkins (2008) found that youths with LD had higher employment and earning rates than their peers without LD during their early years; however, within 5 years after graduation, their peers without LD outpaced them in employment and earned income. This is not much of a surprise because students with LD may not have the desire or needed skills to stay at a job for a long period of time. Students with LD tend to have issues with staying with one certain thing for a given period of time and this could include jobs.

Another alarming number is that only 19% of SWD are participating in postsecondary education compared with 40% of students in the general population. Flannery et al. (2008) stated that barriers to obtaining postsecondary education and training include (a) lack of awareness of postsecondary education opportunities and requirements; (b) lack of academic, transition, and self-advocacy skills; (c) lack of responsiveness by postsecondary programs and personnel to comprehensive needs of individuals with disabilities; and (d) lack of partnerships between secondary and postsecondary schools, the business community, and adult agencies. Often the skills training programs that are in place at community colleges are typically not organized in a manner that would address the needs of individuals with disabilities, especially those youths who are in transition from high school to postsecondary education and employment.

Leake, Burgstahler, and Izzo (2011) stated that a widely shared goal in the field of transition has been to increase the proportion of youths with disabilities who go on to postsecondary education, whether it be at 2-year, 4-year, or vocational-technical

institution. The researchers reviewed interviews with different subgroups and asked “Did you have a mentor during high school?” The results showed that, of 27 American Indians, 18 had a mentor in high school but nine did not have one. The Asian subgroup had 11 with a mentor, one that did not, and one who did not know if he or she had a mentor. The African American subgroup had 29 people with a mentor, 17 who did not, and nine who were not sure if they had a mentor. The Hispanic subgroup had nine participants with a mentor, three who did not have a mentor, and one who did not know. The Pacific Islander subgroup had five who previously had a mentor and five who did not have a mentor.

The White subgroup had 26 students with a mentor in high school, 18 students whom did not have a mentor, and six students who were not sure if they had a mentor. The multiethnic-other subgroup had 21 students who previously had a mentor in high school, eight students that did not have a mentor, and one student that could not remember. There were two additional subgroups that were put together: students in college and students not in college. Eighty-three college students had a mentor while in high school, 46 of those students did not have a mentor, and 17 students didn’t know whether they had a mentor. Of the students that were not in college, 36 of them had a mentor, 15 of those students did not have a mentor, and one student did not know.

Overall, the results were skewed toward having a mentor; 60.1% of the students had a mentor while in high school, 30.8% did not have a mentor, and 9.1% did not know about having a mentor while in high school

Society

There are more problems with SWD in the workplace besides social needs that involve job training. Joshi, Bouck, and Maeda (2012) reported that employers perceive SWD as requiring more training and additional supervision. Morgan and Alexander

(2005) also found employers may be concerned about employee safety, quality control, reduced productivity, and behavior problems when hiring individuals with disabilities. Many of these problems can be solved for students who are involved in a community-based education classroom setting, which is a self-contained classroom in which the students have local job sites in which they go during the school day for a given period of time and work in a given location. The jobs the students would be responsible for would be actual jobs the employees perform.

For instance, if a community-based education class had a job site at Wal-Mart, the departments that the students work in as well as the specific jobs they have on a weekly basis would go through the store manager. The students would go to their designated areas and perform whatever job is needed. This could include putting up stock, sweeping or mopping floors, preparing food in the deli, and taking returns and putting them back on the sales floor. The students are under constant supervision by their classroom teacher as well as the store worker they are assigned to on that given day. Allowing these students the opportunity to work outside of the school is beneficial to give them the exposure to different job skills that cannot be worked on in the classroom. The odds are that, if students can do these jobs during the school day and have an opportunity to work on specific job skills, they will have a better chance of getting a job and maintaining it once they graduate from high school.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine if SWD are properly prepared when they graduate high school to make the transition to college or entering the job place. The study will examine whether the student's teacher properly prepared them for life after high school with their coursework and also with information that was included in their IEP and

transition plan over the course of their years in high school. Interviews with former students will have open-ended questions to gather information for the study. The former students will also complete a survey that will ask them their thoughts on how they felt their high school experience prepared them for life after high school.

Summary of the Literature

When one spoke about SWD transitioning from high school to adulthood, it is “viewed as a long-term process, rather than a more time-limited event” (King et al., 2006, p. 155). Cobb and Alwell (2009) found that best practice in transitioning included (a) interagency collaborations among schools, community service agencies, and employers; (b) programs for SWD’s; (c) transition personnel preparation; and (d) self-determination skills training for youth with disabilities. Preparing for transitioning to adulthood requires many different aspects, such as goal setting, planning, and taking action because, increasingly, jobs that provide greater advancement opportunities, higher potential earnings, and a broader range of benefits require some form of postsecondary training (Weiss, Hutchins, & Meece, 2012). The more postsecondary training SWD have, the better chance they had of being successful.

Research Questions

Based on the review of the literature, the answers to the following research questions emerged fitting to address the purpose of the proposed study:

1. What are the outcomes for SWD in the areas of employment, postsecondary education, or independent living after leaving high school?
2. How satisfied are SWD with their quality of life in the postsecondary environment in the areas of employment, postsecondary education, and independent living after leaving high school?

3. What aspects of the public school's transition plan translated into postsecondary outcomes as perceived by SWD?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology and procedures that were used to guide the study. The purpose of this research was to present a detailed report on whether the SWD felt they were prepared when they graduated high school to make the transition to college or employment.

Participants

The participants were male and female students with LD who graduated between 2003 and 2014 with either a regular diploma or a special education diploma from the targeted high school. The city in which this study will take place is a rural northwestern Georgia town that has a population of 7,500. It is located 40 minutes southwest of Chattanooga, Tennessee, and 30 minutes north of Rome, Georgia. As of 2009, the estimated median household income was \$27,227; the city offers employment in retail sales, fast food, and appliance manufacturing at Roper, which is with the Whirlpool Corporation. Specifically, the participants for this study will have graduated from a rural high school in northwestern Georgia with a total student population of 1,200 students with approximately 150 students, or 12.5%, served in special education. During the 2016-2017 school year, the graduating class had 217 students, which translates into a 86% graduation rate for that group of seniors (M. Stultz, personal communication, July 19, 2017).

Quantitative. A permission document was sent to the students and family for their participation in the study before proceeding with any questions or interviews. The selections of students were based on their diploma track while in school and were not selected due to socioeconomic status or race. The students completed a survey and participated in an interview. The survey was mailed to the participants for them to

complete and the interviews were conducted via telephone. The participants were selected randomly from a list of students with LD who have graduated. There was a minimum of 10 participants for this study. The survey consisted of short response questions that were asked about the students' experiences while in high school and if they felt they were properly prepared for transition before graduating from high school. The second part of the research was an interview that was conducted via telephone. These questions were more specific about what happened after graduating from high school. Once the surveys and interviews were completed, the data was compiled into the final report.

Qualitative. The selected students were asked to take a 5 point Likert-type survey in which they were given 4 questions that had responses of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The last question was a rating scale with choices from 1-5 (1 being worst, 5 being best). The purpose of these questions was to get information from the former students on their feelings toward their former teachers. The data from these questions showed how the students felt after completing their course of study in high school and if they felt the teachers properly prepared them for their transition to postsecondary school or employment.

Instruments

This study used a student survey, which consists of two sections. One section contained questions based on a 5 point Likert-type scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree (see Appendix A). The second section contained interview questions that examined the path each student took after graduation and also their thoughts on their education in high school. Both of these surveys were taken from published dissertations. Permission to use the instruments was

granted by the publisher (Olea, 2016). The instruments that were used included a student survey, which has agree-disagree questions as well as a rating scale question (see Appendix A). There also were interview questions that were asked that were used from a published dissertation (see Appendix B). Permission to use the interview questions was granted by the publisher (Queener, 2015). Each participant completed an interview with questions that were conducted by telephone.

Procedures

This study utilized a mixed-methodology approach that involved quantitative and qualitative data. The data was gathered over a two-month period. The data collected consisted of a student survey that contained five questions and a student interview that contained 10 questions. The quantitative data was established from the student survey, while the qualitative data came from the 10-question student interview that was conducted. The information gathered from interviews and surveys was used to answer the research questions, which were adapted from a published dissertation (Queener, 2015):

1. What are the outcomes for SWD in the areas of employment, postsecondary education, or independent living after leaving high school?
2. How satisfied are SWD with their quality of life in the postsecondary environment in the areas of employment, postsecondary education, and independent living after leaving high school?
3. What aspects of the public school's transition plan translated into postsecondary outcomes as perceived by SWD?

Quantitative data. The participants in the study were both male and female participants. The individuals were LD students who graduated with either a regular education diploma or special education diploma between 2003 and 2014. Each participant

was given a rated survey asking questions in which they rated their experience while in school from 1 to 5, with 1 being the worst and 5 being the best. The data that was collected showed how each student felt about their time spent in their special education classes. This showed whether or not the student felt they were properly prepared for life after graduation. Castellán (2010) stated that, in a quantitative study, numerical data are generated to represent the social environment, and statistical methods and deductive reasoning are utilized to analyze data. Silverman (2011) found that quantitative research is often concerned with meanings, and questionnaires or surveys are commonly designed to establish how people see themselves or others. Castellán also said that the benefit of utilizing a quantitative approach to data collection is that the results of a quantitative study can be labeled as evidence.

Qualitative data. The instrument that was used to collect qualitative data was an open-ended survey and also personal preference questions in an interview format that are used from a published dissertation. The data that was collected and analyzed examined student perceptions about whether the teacher(s) properly prepared the students for what they needed after graduation from high school. Wheeldon and Faubert (2009), Opendakker (2006), and Brantlinger (1994) stated that researchers can collect qualitative data through the use of observations, interviews, and document or artifact review. Silverman (2011) listed some simple characteristics of qualitative research: (a) often begins with a single case, chosen because of its convenience or interest, (b) often studies phenomena in the contexts in which they arise through observation or recording or the analysis of printed and Internet material, (c) hypotheses are often generated from the analysis rather than stated at the outset, (d) there is no one agreed way to analyze the data. Multiple research models exist (e.g., grounded theory, constructionism, discourse

analysis) and sometimes conflict with each other; (e) where numbers are used, these are usually in the form of simple tabulations designed to identify deviant cases and do not lead to statistical correlations or tests.

Data analysis. It was anticipated that the results of the applied dissertation would determine whether the transition plans and course work that the students completed while in high school properly prepared them for their transition to either college or work after graduation. Sappington et al. (2010) stated that action research allows participants to collect data, which will potentially impact their local work environment. This is very important because, if enough information can be gathered and the previous students did not gain enough knowledge to be successful in their transition to either postsecondary school or work, there would be changes made so that future students will not have the same fate. Hopefully, the information can be used to look at what needed to be changed or determine other ways that teachers gathered the needed information across to SWD before they graduate (Sitlington & Clark, 2006; Westat, 2000). The mixed method research questions were addressed through the student survey data as well as the student interview questions. The data that was collected represented the feelings that the SWD had towards their education and it gave them the areas of expertise to utilize it transitioning into postsecondary school or employment.

Limitations

Some possible limitations existed in the study. First, the sample size of students participating could possibly be too small to gather a clear picture of the total SWD transitioning to postsecondary levels. Secondly, the number of years since the SWD graduated could also be a factor due to the students not having a clear memory of their education and if their education prepared them for transition to postsecondary levels. Also a

third limitation may have been a number of the students that have moved away from the area. A fourth limitation may have been that the participants are students with learning disabilities. This could factor into the pool of students surveyed because if the SWD had a primary disability of Other Health Impairment (OHI) they would be excluded from the survey since only students that were classified at LD are eligible for this study. Finally, the last limitation would be that the school is located in a rural area, and the findings may not be generalizable to the whole population. The target school was a Title I funded school and the socioeconomic status of many of the surrounding population could affect the outcome of this study. According to Public School Review (n.d.) there was a total of 1206 students at the target school and 63% of those students were eligible for free/reduced lunch.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter summarized the qualitative data collected from former student interviews on their work history and also their feelings of preparedness for transition when they graduated high school. The researcher conducted telephone interviews with former students as well as a student survey to explore their feelings towards their courses they participated in high school to examine if they felt the courses prepared them for transition after high school. To give a clear representation of the background of each of the former students, the researcher gave a description of each participant's background and how it relates to their transition. The researcher then provided an analysis of the student interviews and student surveys. There were three themes that were consistent with the data that was collected from the interviews and surveys: (1) some material could be addressed in a more efficient manner in the resource/inclusion setting at the school in the study, (2) some positive experiences that occurred in the classroom for a portion of the subjects, and (3) overall the subjects had a rewarding experience in high school and had some background knowledge of what they needed to be successful after graduating high school.

Description of the Participants

Ten students were selected to participate in this case study. All ten participants graduated from the same high school, which is located in Northwest Georgia. The students fulfilled the requirements of participating in this study: an SWD that graduated high school.

Student 1. Student 1 graduated high school in 2010. He worked at Wal-Mart for seven years, Toys R Us for 1 month, and a few different fast food jobs for a couple of months total. At the time of his interview he was not employed and had not enrolled in

any type of college program since graduating high school.

Student 2. Student 2 graduated high school in 2013. He worked at United Synthetics (polyester fiber manufacturer) for 3 months and Volkswagon for one year. At the time of his interview he was employed at Volkswagon as a security guard and had not enrolled in any type of college program since graduating high school.

Student 3. Student 3 graduated high school in 2008. She worked at Wal-Mart for eight years as an assistant manager and is currently employed at CHI (Catholic Health Initiative) Memorial Hospital in registration. Student 3 did attend Georgia Northwestern Technical College where she completed an associate's degree in dental assistant but has not been employed in that field.

Student 4. Student 4 graduated high school in 2008. He worked in construction for one year, Hibbett's Sports for seven months, Mt. Vernon Mills for eight months, Shaw Corporation for four and a half years, and is currently employed at Roper Corporation where he has been employed for four years. Student 4 did not enroll in any type of college program after graduating high school.

Student 5. Student 5 graduated high school in 2014. He worked at Yates Towing and Recovery for two years and is currently employed at Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) as a security guard for nine months. Student 5 did enroll in Georgia Northwestern where he took welding classes and also spent time at Miller-Motte Technical College where he studied Criminal Justice but did not complete a degree in this field.

Student 6. Student 6 graduated high school in 2008. He has worked as an Recreational Vehicle technician for eight years and is currently still employed in this field. Student 6 enrolled at RV Tech training in Clearwater, Florida where he completed his certification program.

Student 7. Student 7 graduated high school in 2007. He has worked at Yates Bleachery for four years, in different types of construction/driving for 2 years, City of LaFayette (Ga), and Shred It where he is currently employed and has been with this company for two years. Student 7 has not been enrolled at any colleges since graduating high school.

Student 8. Student 8 graduated high school in 2003. Student 8 has not been employed or enrolled at any colleges since graduating high school

Student 9. Student 9 graduated high school in 2008. He has worked at FedEx for two years, Roper Corporation for two years, Mohawk Corporation for six months and is currently employed for a Uniform Company in which he has been employed for three years. Student 9 did enroll at Brewton-Parker College where he played basketball and attended for one year while majoring in Early Childhood.

Student 10. Student 10 graduated high school in 2015. She has not been employed since graduating high school, as she is a stay at home mom. Student 10 did attend Georgia Northwestern where she started a degree program in nursing but did not complete the program due to having a baby.

Results of Telephone Interviews

Three themes emerged from the qualitative data obtained from the interviews: (1) materials could be addressed in a more efficient manner in the resource/inclusion setting, (2) some positive experiences occurred in the classroom for a portion of the subjects, and (3) overall the subjects had a rewarding experience in high school and had some background knowledge of what they needed to be successful after graduating high school.

Theme 1: Materials could be Addressed in a More Efficient Manner in the Resource/Inclusion Setting

SWD's learn in different manners and this can be a stumbling block for classroom teachers. The key to a successful classroom is for the teacher to determine the best method for SWD's to learn the materials being presented. Classroom teachers are being asked to differentiate the instruction in the classroom to accommodate the different learning styles of not only SWD's but also non-disabled students. Tomlinson and Jarvis (2009) defined differentiation as: an approach to curriculum and instruction that systematically takes student differences into account in designing opportunities for each student to engage with information and ideas and to develop essential skills.

Differentiation provides a framework for responding to differences in students' current and developing levels of readiness, their learning profiles, and their interests, to optimize the match between students and learning opportunities. These three dimensions of student difference can be addressed through adjustments to the content, process, products, and environments of student learning, and each is justified by a research-based rationale.

Student 1. Student 1 discussed his thoughts on his time in high school as a positive experience but there were times of struggle in his SPED classes. He stated that he is a visual learner and can comprehend more efficiently in this manner. He said that his academic teachers were more auditory with note taking and class discussions and this caused him to struggle in some classes. He did mention that he had more success in his Economics class because it was more visual with examples written on the board and more hands on experiences. He stated that he could have benefited from smaller group work instead of a majority whole group. He said that there were times that he fell behind in his learning because of the pace of the class.

Student 2. Student 2 discussed his thoughts on his time in high school as a positive experience and felt that overall his teachers did a good job in the classroom. He also stated that his struggles in class stemmed from being more of a visual learner, which was not an issue in math due to being a visual class with examples being hand written on the board and his paper. Student 2 mentioned that his ELA class was the most difficult for him due to his low reading levels and difficulty in taking notes in class.

Student 3. Student 3 discussed her thoughts on her time in high school as a positive experience due to the help she received in class from her teachers and the motivation that her teachers gave her. Student 3 stated that she was more of an auditory learner and she didn't have many struggles in her classes except that it took her longer to process items, which caused her to take longer to complete her assignments/tests than her peers. She mentioned that she could have benefited from more small group assignments for the one-on-one assistance from her teachers.

Student 4. Student 4 discussed his thoughts on his time in high school as an average experience due to him not taking his education serious at the time and regretting it later in life. He did say that he felt it would have been a positive experience if he would have taken it serious and put more effort into his class work. Student 4 explained that, besides his lack of motivation, his major issue in class was that he was more of a visual learner because of his low reading levels. Student 4 said that his math class was his best subject from the visual aspect of having more items put in front of him and on the board.

Student 5. Student 5 discussed his thoughts on his time in high school as being average because he felt there were too many students in his classes, therefore he didn't feel that he received enough support from the classroom teacher. Student 5 stated that he is an auditory learner and the issues he had in class were dealing with comprehension, not

completely understanding materials presented in class. Student 5 thought that his comprehension issues might not have been such a huge issue for him in class if he could have received a printed copy of class notes to look over when needing to study. He said that he had a difficult time in hearing his teacher during lectures and actually being able to transfer what he heard to writing notes on his paper.

Student 6. Student 6 discussed his thoughts in high school as a positive experience but he had struggles due to extensive absences from school. He stated that he was a visual learner and he felt that his classroom teachers did a good job of incorporating enough visual aspects for him to have a decent understanding of materials. He did mention that he could have used more small group interaction with assignments and that could have possibly made a difference in the understanding of materials.

Student 7. Student 7 discussed his thoughts in high school as a positive experience but had issues with a short attention span in his academic classes and this caused him to fall behind on a consistent basis. He stated that he's an auditory learner and that was an advantage for him in his academic classes because his teachers did a good job of taking extra time to explain things to him in a manner that he could comprehend. Student 7 said that small groups was a major boost for him in completing his work, even though it took him longer to complete his work than his peers in class. He also needed some tutoring in his academics due to him falling behind in his work.

Student 8. Student 8 discussed her thoughts in high school as being a positive experience but she also explained that she had issues in her academic classes due to a low reading level and having issues with her comprehension of materials. Student 8 indicated that she was more of a visual learner and this was a benefit for her in some of her academic classes. She said that small groups were very helpful to her success in the

classroom because she had issues with completing work in a timely manner and this would cause her to fall behind on a regular basis.

Student 9. Student 9 discussed his thoughts about high school and felt he had an average experience due to not feeling that his academic classes prepared him for transition after high school. Student 9 said that he learned more visually than auditory and that was an advantage in his classes due to his teachers doing a better job of giving him visual examples of items. He felt that he could have benefited from more small group work so he could have understood the materials better.

Student 10. Student 10 discussed her thoughts about high school and felt that she had a positive experience. She stated that she was an auditory learner and the majority of teachers that she had were auditory teachers so this benefited her. She did have struggles in math due to the work being more visual plus this was one of her weaker subjects. Student 10 stated that she would have liked to see more hands on projects/assignments because this is something she enjoyed and felt she did a good job with.

Theme 2: Positive Experiences in the Classroom

Student 1. Student 1 stated that some of his positive experiences that he had in class revolved around the extra time and the assistance that his teachers gave him that helped him make it through high school. He said that his teachers did an excellent job in discussing the progress he was making in class and also the progress towards his IEP goals. He also was pleased with the extra effort that some of his sped teachers gave him helping him study for his high school graduation test.

Student 2. Student 2 said that his positive experiences revolved around what he felt were extra effort from all of his teachers. He felt that sped case manager took extra time to check in on him to see how things were going and always felt that she had his

best interest at heart for his school outcome. He was also appreciative to his Social Studies teacher who would work with him after school for extra practice and assistance.

Student 3. Student 3 said that her positive experiences came from her teachers because she was very thankful for the extra assistance that she was given and also for the motivation she received from them. There were times, she explained, that were very tough for her with academic struggles and she felt that without the help from her teachers that she would not have made it through high school.

Student 4. Student 4 described his experience in high school as above average and this was due to his teacher's willingness to work with him to better understand the materials being presented. He was also grateful for his teachers having patience with him because he did not take his education serious and stayed behind in his work on a consistent basis. He felt that if not for his teacher's assistance that he would not have been able to graduate high school.

Student 5. Student 5 described his experience in high school as being average, due to his feelings that there were too many students in his classes, which in turn led to less help that he could receive. Student 5 was very appreciative to a couple of his teachers that would take the time to help him after school with studying for his tests. He felt that without the help of those teachers that he wouldn't have had enough knowledge in that course to pass his End of Course test and receive credit.

Student 6. Student 6 described his experience in high school as above average. He had very high remarks about his teachers that assisted him along the way to ensure he had enough knowledge to pass his graduation tests and allow him to graduate. He stated that his case manager did a fantastic job checking in on him to see if he needed any

additional assistance outside of the classroom and also assisting him in filling out job and college applications to send off.

Student 7. Student 7 said that his experience in high school was excellent. He was very grateful to his teachers for the time and effort they gave him in his learning. Student 7 did say that he was not one of the easiest kids to teach due to him talking in class and staying in trouble a majority of the time. He thought that he was prepared to make the transition to college/work due to his teacher's efforts.

Student 8. Student 8 said that her experience in high school was excellent due to the efforts of her teacher's in assisting her make it through. She thought that without their help she would not have been able to finish her requirements due to her extremely low reading levels and her lack of motivation to come to school on a daily basis. She also was thankful to the tutoring that her math teacher gave her after school because math was a weak subject for her.

Student 9. Student 9 said that his high school experience was average but was grateful to his sped case manager for meeting with him on a daily to weekly basis to ensure that things were going good and also to see if he needed any extra assistance in his academic classes. He felt that this assistance would benefit any student that took advantage of it while in school.

Student 10. Student 10 felt that her experience in high school was excellent due to the help she had from her math teacher, which was also her sped case manager. She said that her case manager would talk to her during class about things outside of school and this made her more comfortable when something came up to discuss with her math teacher. She said that her math teacher gave her confidence to do well in her classes and passing her graduation test.

Theme 3: Rewarding Experiences & Background Knowledge Leaving High School

Student 1. Student 1 said that there were a couple of different things that he left high school with fond memories of, his Economics and English classes. He said that his Economics teacher, Teacher A, became a “good friend to me while I was in his class and kept that relationship after I finished his class.” He went on to say that Teacher A was always checking in on him to see how things were going and to see if he needed any type of assistance. Student 1 also said that his English teacher, Teacher B, was a great influence on his high school career because she “always stayed on me to do my best.” Teacher B was also his sped case manager so she made sure that he had appropriate academic goals as well as transition goals that he worked on.

Student 2. Student 2 said there were two fond memories he had of high school, graduation and passing his Social Studies final. Student 2 stated “I was the first in my family to graduate high school so that was a very big deal for me and my parents.” Obviously graduation is a proud moment for parents and students but when you are the first in a family it holds a more special place. Student 2 then went on to discuss passing his Social Studies final. He stated “this class was one of the hardest classes I had in high school so when I found out that I had passed the final exam I felt like I had accomplished something.” He went on to talk about how much he appreciated the extra time and effort that his Social Studies teacher put into helping him study after school for his test. He felt that without that extra assistance there would have been a greater chance of him failing the test. Student 2 also said that he felt high school prepared him for his job after graduation with how to communicate with people and also how to be professional. He said that his study skills class did a good job of covering these topics and he felt gave him adequate background knowledge of these aspects.

Student 3. Student 3 said the one major thing that left a lasting impression on her from high school is the amount of assistance she received in her classes and the motivation given to her by her teachers. Student 3 said “high school was hard for me because of my academic struggles and my lower reading levels plus the last semester of school I was pregnant.” She was very grateful for Teacher C, who was her case manager and also her math teacher for 2 years. Student 3 went on to discuss how Teacher C had helped her during some tough times with extra help and also just giving some motivation for her to finish strong. She also said that there were times that she felt like giving up and dropping out but from the assistance of Teacher C and her other teachers they talked her into finishing up with her diploma. Student 3 also said that she felt her high school education prepared her for transition with the interview skills that was covered in her study skills class. She said that they took two to three weeks to go over many different aspects of interviews, such as different questions that may be asked, how to dress, and proper responses to questions.

Student 4. Student 4 said that one thing that he was grateful for and that he will always remember about high school is his teachers having patience with him and willing to work with him. Student 4 said, “I was not the easiest kid to teach because I liked to goof around in class and not pay attention.” He said that his teachers went above and beyond what he could have ever imagined them doing for a kid with the extra assistance that he received. He went on to discuss that he received more one on one assistance to ensure that he understood what was being covered in class. There were also two things that student 4 took with him after leaving high school and that was to do things right the first time and to always give 100% to anything in life. Student 4 said, “I wish I would have taken sports and classwork more serious when I was in school because I now know

there are life lessons involved.” He felt that if he had dedicated more time to school that he would have been more successful and possibly wanted to attend college.

Student 5. Student 5 said that his math and writing played a key part in his transition to college and now to his work. He said that without these he would have struggled in college, even though he did not complete a degree program. Student 5 was pleased with the daily living skills that he learned in his study skills class. He explained that in that class they discussed interview skills as well as finances (balancing checkbooks and writing checks) and this helped him tremendously when he began living on his own. He said that he felt that learning how to balance a checkbook was something that many teachers overlooked.

Student 6. Student 6 said that he used his math and his social studies on a daily basis due to his job. His job includes traveling on a consistent basis with servicing RV’s in different parts of America. He felt that his education prepared him for transition to a basic job and this gave him some knowledge going into trade school for his current job. He also said that without his math classes that he would not have been able succeed in his current job.

Student 7. Student 7 stated that he was very appreciative of his teachers giving him their time and effort in his learning and which he felt was very instrumental in him graduating. He went on to add that his construction class that he had was very important considering that he has worked in construction since graduating. Student 7 went on to add, “I truly feel that if not for my construction class and the help of my teachers that I would have dropped out of school and not amounted to anything in life.”

Student 8. Student 8 has not had a job or any type of schooling after graduating. She did say that there were a couple of aspects of high school that were rewarding, even

though she hasn't had a job. She said that her math class taught her how to write checks and to balance a checkbook, which she uses on a frequent basis. She also expressed her appreciation to her teachers that she felt "went above and beyond" for her to try and teach her how to read because she was a very low reader when in high school. She felt that she did learn to read at a higher level when she graduated than when she entered high school.

Student 9. Student 9 felt that when he graduated that he was ready for his transition to college/work. He was very appreciative of his sped case manager and the extra work that he put in with him during the course of his senior year. Student 9 stated, "Teacher A made sure that I knew how to fill out college applications and stayed on me to do the best that I could in my classes because he knew I wanted to go to college and play basketball." Student 9 was very happy with felt that he would be successful in college due to his classes in high school.

Student 10. Student 10 said that she felt that without the help of her math teacher that was also her case manager that she would not have been able to make it through high school and graduate. She added, "Teacher D was great for me in high school because she cared about how I did in class and she was a dear friend to me when I had some struggles in my personal life." Student 10 said that her knowledge of math has helped her tremendously since graduating. She said that she is a stay at home mom after enrolling in school for nursing but was very thankful for the effort of her high school teachers to get her to this point in her adult life.

Results of Student Survey

After completing the telephone interviews, the researcher administered 10 student surveys that were either mailed or sent via text/Facebook Messenger to the study

participants. The researcher received 100% response on the telephone interview as well as 100% of the student survey. There were four of the student surveys that were mailed back, whereas six of the surveys were submitted via telephone/email. There were 4 questions in which the possible responses were: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The responses were assigned a point value for statistical use: strongly agree-1, disagree-2, neutral-3, agree-4, and strongly agree-5. There was also one scaled score question with answers ranging from 1 to 5 (1-worst, 2-below average, 3-average, 4-above average, and 5-excellent). The data was compiled into a table that is located in Appendix C. The mean responses for the survey questions were very positive: Question 1 ($M= 4.7$, $SD= 0.48$), Question 2 ($M= 4.6$, $SD= 0.69$), Question 3 ($M= 4.5$, $SD= 0.84$), Question 4 ($M= 4.8$, $SD= 0.42$) and Question 5 ($M= 4.4$, $SD= 0.84$).

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine whether SWD felt adequately prepared for their transition from high school to postsecondary school or employment at the time of their graduation from high school. The study explored whether the classes the students took and the materials covered in their classes were sufficient enough to prepare them for their transition after high school. The study also explored if the SWD felt that their transition plan was clearly written and contained appropriate goals that led them into their desired field upon graduation. Kellems et al., (2016) stated that one measure of the effectiveness of a student's transition plan is to examine the student's outcomes after exiting school. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) (Newman et al., 2011) completed a 10 year study and found youth with disabilities who had received special education services found these youth less likely than their peers in the general population to:

- Enroll in postsecondary programs (60% vs. 67%).
- Earn an income comparable to the general population (an average of \$10.40 per hour vs. \$11.40 per hour).
- Live independently (45% vs. 59%).

Findings and Implications

Research Question 1. What are the outcomes for SWD in the areas of employment, postsecondary education, or independent living after leaving high school? The majority of participants for this question, 90%, stated that they had been employed at some point since graduating high school. Bouck and Joshi (2016) supported this claim with their findings that within 2-4 years after graduating high school, 93% of SWD's had

been employed at some point. The participants stated that it wasn't necessarily easy finding employment to begin, taking an average of 1-3 months before finding steady employment. Many of the problems that exist with SWD and low employment rates result from not possessing the necessary work-related skills and work-related personality attributes. Some of these attributes include poor attendance, punctuality, and little to no employability skills. Employability skills refer to general and nontechnical competencies required for performing all jobs, regardless of types or levels of jobs. Employability skills are not job specific but are considered attributes of employees that make them an asset to employers (Mansour, 2009).

Since graduating high school only five of the participants stated that they had attended some type of postsecondary school. SWD's attendance in post secondary is not uncommon according to Bouck and Joshi (2016), within 2 years of graduating only 6.2% of SWD's were attending post-secondary education, although 30.4% had attended at some point. Only one participant finished with a degree, while the remaining subjects that attended postsecondary school had differing reasons for not completing their program. Prince, Hodge, Bridges, & Kaysiyannis (2018) added that although 60% of youth with disabilities enroll in postsecondary education within 8 years after leaving high school, only 23% finish their program. Postsecondary education is very important for SWD, specifically the students with the ability to attend to postsecondary school and finish a degree program. By taking classes toward a degree in a postsecondary setting, the students will learn new skills, identify new interests and hobbies, make new friends, and have lifelong learning experiences, as well as have the ability to earn more money than someone with only a high school diploma. Getzel and Thoma (2008) noted that

approximately 25% of SWD participate in postsecondary education after exiting high school..

Independent living is another area where SWD's can have issues. To adequately function living on their own, SWD's need to have a few necessary skills: personal management skills, daily living skills, financial management skills, and self-management of health care/wellness needs (Tankersley et al., 2015). To no surprise, nine of the subjects for the study reported that they had lived independently at some point since completing high school. Even though this was a small sample size for the study, it is a larger outcome, Bouck and Joshi (2016), noted in their findings that 40.2% of SWD were living independently within 2-4 years of graduating. Some of the subjects reported that they struggled in the beginning with the financial management due to not having to manage their finances previously. One subject reported that he has not lived alone because he had to take care of his mother who was in bad health.

Research Question 2. How satisfied are SWD with their quality of life in the postsecondary environment in the areas of employment, postsecondary education, and independent living after leaving high school? The subjects reported that overall they were satisfied with their quality of life after leaving high school. Papay and Bambara (2014) validated this point with their findings that two years after leaving high school 72.4% of SWD reported enjoying their life, while between 2-4 years after graduating 74.2% reported enjoying their life. In the area of employment, the subjects had mixed emotions about the job choices they had made, either a job they had in the past or their current job. The subjects reported that 60% were pleased with their current jobs, while the other 40% were not working in the field they had initially planned on entering. The subjects that were not pleased with their employment choice had different reasons such as: not being

properly prepared for the job coming out of high school, being too overconfident and not taking training seriously, lack of focus in class, and not having the common knowledge of everyday skills. One of the subjects stated that he felt that he would have been better suited for a job straight out of high school if he had more “real world” experience with job training in some of his high school courses. The majority of young adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities need schools to provide vocational training and internships for young adults with disabilities in the final years at school and appropriate job placements in the transition from school to work (Holwerda et al., 2015). Often the lack of proper employment training can lead to SWD being underemployed when they make the transition from high school to an everyday job. In 2015, the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities was 10.7% compared to the rate for those without a disability at 5.1% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Post secondary education is vitally important for SWD’s. Southward and Kyzar (2017) reported that students who participated in post-secondary education were almost two times more likely to secure competitive employment than those who did not pursue post-secondary education.

In the area of attending post secondary school, the subjects reported that 50% had attended post secondary school while 50% did not attend any post secondary school. Papay and Bambara (2014) stated that in their studies that within 2 years after graduating only 17.8% of SWD enrolled in postsecondary education, while within 4 years of graduating the number increased to 34.5% enrollment. The 50% that did not attend post secondary school all stated that they had no aspirations of attending any type of post secondary school after high school because they felt they would not perform well based on their struggles in high school. Gregg (2007) reported that SWD are less likely to

receive an academically rigorous curriculum in high school. Therefore, SWD's may not be challenged academically where their non-disabled peers are in the classroom and are not prepared for the transition to post secondary school. Gothberg et al., (2015) stated that only 41% of SWD who enrolled in a 2-year college and only 34% enrolled in a 4-year program completed their studies. To fully prepare SWD's for postsecondary success, IEP teams should consider building annual transition goals centered in the five nonacademic categories-behavioral, social, communicative, functional, and operational skills (McConnell, et al., 2013).

The subjects discussed their preparedness for independent living after graduating and 80% felt that they were prepared to only 20% that didn't feel prepared to live on their own after graduation. The 20% that didn't feel they were ready to live independently said they felt they needed a good, steady job before attempting to live on their own. Both subjects also said they didn't feel that they were mature enough to attempt living independently at the time because they couldn't manage their finances well enough to pay their bills. The 80% that reported that they felt they were ready to live independently after graduating high school all felt that they had some background information given to them in classes during high school. Half of the students said that during their resource math class they had a unit that covered money management where they discussed monthly budgets, credit card use, and interest on checking and savings accounts. They felt that this helped them in preparation for independent living because it gave them an idea of what to expect with bills and other instances where they would have to allot a specific amount of money each month. Two of the students stated that they had been living on their own or with a sibling when they graduated high school so the transition had already occurred for them and they felt very comfortable with the situation.

Research Question 3: What aspects of the public school's transition plan translated into postsecondary outcomes as perceived by SWD? Half of the subjects felt their transition planning did not properly prepare them for transition into the "real world" due to not having any exposure to any type of money management goal or lessons. Southward and Kyzar (2017) reported that SWD's who participated in the development of their IEP goals and helped monitor progress were more likely to secure competitive employment upon high school completion and they also reported that students that took part in their transition planning were five times more likely to be employed up to four years after graduation from high school. The subjects felt early exposure to finances would have given them a better idea of how to set up a monthly budget, paying bills, and saving money. The subjects said that balancing a checkbook should be a priority because they had no idea how to write a check, make a deposit, or how to correctly balance a checkbook. Another area of concern was the lack of employment skills that were taught. The subjects stated that they had no exposure to how a job interview was conducted, nor how to fill out job applications. Lindsay et al., (2015) found that a job interview is often the first challenge to overcome in getting paid employment. Job interviews require candidates to demonstrate social competence and experience or skills specific to the position.

The subjects that felt their transition planning translated into positive outcomes noted they felt a better understanding of what type of questions would be asked during job interviews and also felt comfortable filling out job applications due to previous exposure to them. One of the resource language arts classes designed a two week unit and focused on interview skills and filling out job applications. The administration at the school was very helpful in the interview process as they would set up a time when the

students could go into one of the assistant principals office and perform a mock interview with the students to give them an idea of how interviews are conducted. The administrators would give feedback on how the students performed on their interviews and the classroom teacher would then focus on their strengths and weaknesses for future interviews.

Conclusion

The researcher's goal in this chapter was to examine the factors that led to the subjects responses on the student survey and the telephone interview. The subjects for this study were very flexible with their time and effort in answering all of the questions on the telephone interview and also the promptness of returning the student survey that was administered. The final results of the study show there were some items that could be addressed in a more efficient manner in the resource/inclusion setting at the school in the study. The subject's responses did show that there were some positive experiences that occurred in the classroom for a portion of the subjects. Overall the study showed that the subjects had a rewarding experience in high school and had some background knowledge of what they needed to be successful after graduating high school.

Post Limitations

Some key limitations of the study were that the researcher had a small sample size due to a low response from possible applicants that either did not want to participate or were non responsive to the request. The student survey contained 5 items that were a Likert Scale response. Although this was a very short instrument, it was possible that respondents might have gone through and marked responses without giving thought so they could complete the instrument quickly. The telephone interview questionnaire contained 10 questions and there was a possibility that each subject did not fully

remember their feelings vividly. Conditions also might have been different for respondents because some might have been taking the survey while completing other tasks, and, thus, distractions may have altered the results.

Recommendations

In order to further the development of this research, future researchers could use the results to gain more information in the transition of SWD's. Researchers could also develop new questions for the student survey and the telephone interview. Ultimately, the study provided detailed findings, and additional studies would allow researchers to gain insight into the factors involved in the transition of SWD's to determine if other areas need to be addressed in a resource/inclusion setting to ensure that these students are ready for their transition.

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Appendix A
Student Survey

Student Survey

1. I am satisfied with the support I received from Special Education.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree
2. My special education program helped me feel successful.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree
3. My teacher addressed my educational needs as they came up.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree
4. My teacher communicated my educational progress to me.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree
5. Circle the number that best relates to your overall experience in Special Education from 1 to 5 (1 being worst, 5 being best)
1-worst 2-below average 3-average 4-above average 5-excellent

Appendix B
Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Since you have completed high school, what have you been doing?
2. Are you currently employed? If so, where and what is your job?
3. Since you completed high school, have you enrolled in any type of school or college? If so, when and where?
4. Did your education prepare you for your job? How?
5. Since you completed high school, have you lived on your own?
6. What do you remember most about your Special Education program at LaFayette High School?
7. Tell me your thoughts about how prepared you felt to enter the workforce when you left high school.
8. Tell me your thoughts about how prepared you felt to continue your education when you left high school.
9. Tell me your thoughts about how prepared you felt to live on your own when you left high school.
10. Do you have anything you want to add that we have not talked about?

Appendix C
Summary of Student Survey

	I am satisfied with the support I received from special education	My special education program helped me feel successful	My teacher addressed my educational needs as they came up	My teacher communicated my educational progress to me	Rate your overall experience in special education (1-worst, 2-below average, 3-average, 4-above average, 5-excellent)
Subject 1	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	5
Subject 2	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	4
Subject 3	Agree	Neutral	Neutral	Strongly Agree	3
Subject 4	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	5
Subject 5	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	5
Subject 6	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	4
Subject 7	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Agree	3
Subject 8	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	5
Subject 9	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	5
Subject 10	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	5
Mean Score	4.7	4.6	4.5	4.8	4.4
Std. Dev.	0.48	0.69	0.84	0.42	0.84