2020

Understanding a Transitional Educational Program for Students With Autism and Intellectual Disabilities

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

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Abstract

The number of children in U.S. schools diagnosed with autism and intellectual disabilities disorders is increasing and they face low levels of employment after graduation. Without a viable education, including work skills training, these students cannot be successful citizens. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional secondary education program designed to prepare students who have intellectual disabilities and autism to be successful in college or the workplace. The conceptual framework for this study included the theory of self-efficacy, sociocultural learning theory, differentiated instruction, and experiential learning theory. The research questions for this study were designed to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students. The participants were administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals at a transitional secondary education program. The participants were interviewed, and program documents were collected. The data was analyzed using thematic inductive analysis. The study identified four main themes including (a) the importance of understanding the teachers' beliefs and self-efficacy; (b) the significance of experiential, individualized learning; (c) the need to overtly teach social skills to these learners; (d) and the use of differentiated instructional methods to teach real-world skills. The overall conclusion was that the tiered instructional model to classify autistic and intellectually disabled students influenced all teachers' perceptions and experiences. The implication for social change is to develop new models for education for the increasing numbers of special needs learners in U.S. schools to increase their ability to work and be successful after graduation.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express a special appreciation and humble gratitude to my dissertation mentor and chair, Dr. Donna Russell. Dr. Russell, you have been a tremendous mentor for me. I am thankful for your great perceptions on my thinking and ability. You encouraged the development of my research and allowed me to grow in the area of scholar-practitioner. Your brilliant advice and expertise have been priceless. The weekly face-to-face meetings and work hours dedicated to assisting my lifelong goal were quite amazing and self-less.

I would like to express gratitude to my committee and the Walden University Center for Research Quality for supporting my endeavors in research and qualitative analysis. My life-long dream, pursuing a PhD, became a reality with your guidance. Humble Wishes.

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to students with autism and cognitive learning disabilities, their families, education researchers, and education program designers. I want to thank my students for teaching me how to be more perceptive and aware of the unique gifts and talents that every student has to offer. I dedicate this study to the young parents and aging parents with special needs children/adults and encourage you there is hope for positive change. I dedicate this dissertation to all educational researchers and designers so that this study will be implemented to ensure children with learning and development challenges become productive working citizens with real-life skills.

My father, Major Robert E. Moore USAF, my friend, and a thinker encouraged me to seek validation from no one and to ask questions even if I was the only person with a question. He supported patience and discipline in all of life's longing for answers and inspired individualism and a good work ethic. My father imparted the benefits of the philosophy of mind and world culture. I dedicate my research to my dad, who fostered learning in every aspect of life and every level of academia.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

According to the Institute for Corporate Productivity (2014), students with developmental and intellectual disabilities are underrepresented in the workforce. Many corporations seek to increase their disabled population (Siperstein, Heyman, & Stokes, 2014). In a report published by the Journal of Rehabilitation, an alarming number of people with intellectual disability disorders (IDD) are not employed (Briel & Getzel, 2014). Eighty-five percent of people with disabilities are either underemployed or jobless (Institute for Corporate Productivity, 2014). Moreover, 673,000 children on the autism spectrum will soon be at the working-age, including one in 68 U.S. children (Institute for Corporate Productivity, 2014). With the growing number of autistic children and a population of varying exceptionalities, the question remains about how education services and interventions will provide the types of transitional programs to develop autonomous adults.

Education is critically important for helping students acquire appropriate jobs (Institute for Corporate Productivity, 2014). Walker (2014) stated that by the year 2018, two-thirds of all jobs in the United States will require postsecondary education. According to Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2020), 36% of job openings will require only a high education, 30% will require some college, and 35% of all employment will need more than a bachelor's degree. Although transition programs in high school help prepare students with IDD for employment, it is critical for schools to include a larger range for career exploration (Lindstrom et al, 2014). However, there are few studies of educational programs designed to support the transition from school to a career for students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities.

Background

There are increasing numbers of children diagnosed with disabilities in U.S. schools. In 2015, a report showed that 2,419,200 of the 45,382,700 in the United States, or 5.3% of children ages 5 to 15, have one or more disabilities (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Also, 4.1% of children aged 16 to 20 have a cognitive disability.

The number of U.S. children diagnosed with autism has increased to include one in 45 children (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). A global study through United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2017) stated that children with disabilities are denied their right to education even in developed countries. U.S. educational programs are struggling to provide these children with the potential for viable employment after high school (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2018)

Education in the United States has a history of supporting learners with disabilities. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Education, U.S., 2016) was first passed in 1965 in response to President Lyndon B Johnson's "War on Poverty." The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was passed in 1975 to help ensure local schools educate students with disabilities (Beyer, 1989).

The problem this study addressed was that students with autism and intellectual disabilities are not graduating with the career or college-ready skills necessary to obtain employment and live independently. An alarming number of people with IDD are not employed (Briel & Getzel, 2014). The gap between the employment rate of working-age people with disabilities and without disabilities is 43.1%. Additionally, 27% of individuals with disabilities live in poverty compared with 11.6% of people without disabilities living in poverty (Briel & Getzel, 2014).

Siperstein et al. (2014) stated that progress in promoting meaningful employment for people with intellectual disabilities had remained the same for 25 years. They also found that despite the federal government's investment of billions to promote employing people with IDD, there has not been a change in the percentage of IDD in the workforce (Siperstein et al., 2014). They recommended designing educational programs to include early work experiences within the school and outside in the school's community (Siperstein et al., 2014).

With increasing numbers of U.S. students diagnosed with a learning disability, career skills education is critically important for helping these students acquire appropriate jobs (Institute for Corporate Productivity, 2014). Transition educational programs are designed to help prepare students with IDD, including those on the autism spectrum, for employment (Lindstrom et al., 2014). In this study, I aimed to understand how educators experienced the implementation of an innovative transitional educational program designed to support learning disabled students to gain employment.

Problem Statement

Education is critically important for helping students acquire appropriate jobs (Institute for Corporate Productivity, 2014). Traditional, transitional educational programs are designed to help prepare students with IDD, including those on the autism spectrum, for employment. However, transitional educational programs are not increasing the hiring of these special needs learners (Carnevale et al., 2020; Lindstrom et al., 2014). The US Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (2010) found that 85% of students with autism and intellectual disabilities are either underemployed or unemployed despite educational transition goals in high school, postsecondary transitional services, and

vocation resources for individuals with disabilities. In this study, I developed new understandings of how educators implemented an innovative transitional program designed to support the development of work skills for students with intellectual disabilities.

In 2001, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law by President George W. Bush. NCLB impacts the instruction and assessment of students, the training of teachers, and the money allocated to U.S. public schools. It provides money for extra educational assistance for poor children in return for improvements in academic achievement (DOE, OSER, 2010). In 2004, Congress found that low educational expectations and a lack of research-based methods of teaching hindered the education of students with disabilities (Yang & Tan, 2016). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was updated to the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA) so that specially designed instruction will meet the needs of children with disabilities and ensure their progress in general education (Yang & Tan, 2016).

Educational policy, focused on standardized assessments, relies on traditional teacher-directed instruction and has left alternative educational programs and their learners at risk (Jamgochian & Ketterlin-Geller, 2015). Additionally, research on traditional educational programs has revealed that the programs are not effective methods for supporting learners with cognitive disabilities (Sortino, 2014; Stolar-Martz, 2016). There are few studies of innovative transitional educational programs designed to understand the perceptions and experiences of educators implementing a nontraditional transitional program for learners with intellectual disabilities.

The Transition Program is a new program that was the research context for this study. The Transition Program (TP), a pseudonym, is an innovative alternative educational program

that is in a College of Education at a Southeastern state in the United States and benefits from multiple university collaborations. The instructional model is experiential learning, using on-campus field trips, mentoring by students and faculty from multiple colleges at the university, and using off-campus mentoring by community-based organizations and businesses to prepare the students for the workforce or higher education. The TP was designed and implemented by an educator leader at the college of education.

The TP opened its doors to students (11 to 22 year old) with intellectual and cognitive disabilities in 2017 and was located in the College of Education at a university. This innovative and instructional school introduces transition planning in middle school, embedded throughout the program, to ready students for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. There is a plethora of opportunities on campus to learn the work and communication skills needed for employment.

The TP staff collaborates with the university's community to design and implement instruction in academics, art, music, behavioral science, and health sciences. There are opportunities to explore a variety of on-campus employment skills through campus jobs, field trips, and classes for students with autism and intellectual disabilities. In this study, I sought to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional program working at this school.

Understanding the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional secondary education program provided information that filled a gap in the research. More importantly, results revealed in-depth knowledge from the teacher's view on what they are experiencing while teaching these students with autism and intellectual disabilities. I found no

known studies that used the generic qualitative methodology to understand the experiences and perceptions of teachers implementing an innovative transition education program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional secondary education program designed to prepare students who have intellectual disabilities and autism to be successful in college or the workplace. The experiential and social learning concept design of this innovative transitional program created the learning and instructional setting. The title, TP, was a pseudonym for this study.

TP is a new transitional program at a southeastern U.S. state university's college of education. The purpose of the program is to support special needs learners to find a job, be autonomous, or enter college. The students are in the sixth through 12th grade. Students move through the program in cohorts based on grouping according to learning assessments of academic, behavioral, and cognitive abilities. The teachers hold several certifications, including special education.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?
2. What are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for my study was based on four foundational concepts linked to each research question. To understand Research Question 1, what are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional program for the intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school student, I used the experiential learning instructional model and the sociocultural learning theory. To understand Research Question 2, what are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students, I used differentiated instruction model and self-efficacy theory.

Experiential learning theory (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001) helped provide an understanding of the instructional model for the program. Differentiated instructional theory helped provide an understanding of the process of individualized instructional processes (Hall, 2002; Tomlinson, 2000). Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural learning theory supported the understanding of collaborative learning and mentoring in the program.

A second theory important to this study is Bandura's (1995) self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy is a positive psychological model of self-belief that plays a part in the successful outcome of the educators in this school and their students. The educational program engaged the students in experiential learning and differentiated learning responses to develop the knowledge and skills needed by the students to acquire a job or transition to college.

Nature of the Study

The methodology of the study was a generic qualitative. According to Percy, Kostere, and Kostere (2015), when traditional qualitative designs such as grounded theory or case study cannot be adapted to the research topic and inquiry, a generic qualitative design is most

appropriate. Percy et al. described how a generic qualitative study can define the experiences of the participants using multiple sources of data and when the researcher has expertise in the subject area.

This generic qualitative case study expanded the understanding of an innovative transition education program through the experiences and perceptions of the educator participants. I conducted a semi structured interview with eight participants who were the teachers, administrators, and mentors in this innovative transitional education program and reviewed curriculum documents describing the educational goals and mission for the new TP. I used thematic inductive analysis to define the themes related to the two research questions.

Definitions

The definitions for this study are listed below.

Autism: Autism is most often a lifelong disorder, though there are more cases of children with ASD who eventually function independently, leading full lives. The information here focuses primarily on children and adolescents. Autism differs from person to person in severity and combinations of symptoms. There is a great range of abilities and characteristics of children with ASDs — no two children appear or behave the same way. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and often change over time (Silverman, Galanter, Jackson-Triche, Jacobs, Lomax, Riba, M. B., ... & Yager, 2015).

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD): ASD is a complex developmental disorder that can cause problems with thinking, feeling, language, and the ability to relate to others. It is a neurological disorder, which means it affects the functioning of the brain. The effects of autism and the severity of symptoms are different in each person. ASD is characterized by persistent

deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts, including deficits in social reciprocity, nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, and skills in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Characteristics of ASD are communication problems, including difficulty using or understanding language. Some children with autism focus their attention and conversation on a few topic areas, some frequently repeat phrases, and some have very limited speech. There may also be difficulty relating to people, things, and events, including trouble making friends and interacting with people, difficulty reading facial expressions, and not making eye contact. In addition, there may be repetitive body movements or behaviors, such as hand flapping or repeating sounds or phrases (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Career and technical education (CTE): CTE provides students of all ages with the academic and technical skills, knowledge, and training necessary to succeed in future careers and to become lifelong learners. About 12.5 million high school and college students are enrolled in CTE across the nation to prepare for employment with workplace skills. Academics are incorporated in the experiential context (Brand, Valent, & Browning, 2018).

Intellectual developmental disabilities (IDD): For this study, IDD is the identifier for all the related terms throughout the paper. Intellectual disability defines the problems in both intellectual and adaptive functioning. Intellectual functioning is assessed with an exam by a doctor and through standardized testing. While a specific full-scale

Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test score is no longer required for diagnosis, standardized testing is used as part of diagnosing the condition. A full-scale IQ score of around 70 to 75

indicates a significant limitation in intellectual functioning. However, the IQ score measures the context of the person's difficulties in general mental abilities. Moreover, scores on subtests can vary so that the full-scale IQ score may not accurately reflect overall intellectual functioning. Intellectual disability involves problems with general mental abilities that affect functioning in two areas: intellectual functioning (such as learning, problem-solving, judgment) and adaptive functioning (activities of daily life such as communication and independent living). The symptoms of intellectual disability begin during childhood or adolescence. Delays in language or motor skills may be seen by age 2. However, mild levels of intellectual disability may not be identified until school-age when a child may have difficulty with academics (Grohol, 2018).

Employment outcomes [29 U.S.C. Sec. 705(11)]: Employment outcome means, concerning an individual (a) entering or retaining full-time or, if appropriate, part-time competitive employment in the integrated labor market; (b) satisfying the vocational outcome of supported employment; or (c) satisfying any other vocational outcome the Secretary of Education may determine to be appropriate (including satisfying the vocational outcome of customized employment, self- employment, telecommuting, or business ownership. (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

High functioning autism spectrum disorder (HFASD): A person diagnosed with an IQ of 79 and below (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation, 2017).

Inclusion: Since 1975, Federal law mandates that students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment. Over the years, this mandate has been strengthened through reauthorizations of IDEA and the No Child Left Behind Act to create a presumption in favor of educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom, providing these students

with access to the general education curriculum and ensuring that they make progress in that curriculum (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation, 2017). The term inclusion communicates an all-embracing societal ideology. Regarding individuals with disabilities and special education, inclusion secures opportunities for students with disabilities to learn inside mainstream classrooms. Mainstream classrooms in which students with disabilities learn are known as inclusive classrooms (Hallahan, Kaufman, & Pullen, 2017).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation, 2017).

Individual Education Plan (IEP): A legal document that articulates a student's services, goals, and accommodations in special education (OSERS, 2017).

Intelligence quotient (IQ): People who score between 70 and 130 are within the normal range of IQ functioning, where 100 is the theoretical average. Those scoring 130 and above are significantly more intelligent than the average population, and those scoring 70 and below are significantly less intelligent than the average population. (Grohol, 2018).

Least restrictive environment [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(5)(A)]: Least restrictive environment means that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removals of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occur only if the nature or severity of the

disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation, 2017).

Mainstream: The IDEA, enacted in 1975, mandates that children and youth ages 3 to 21 with disabilities be provided a free and appropriate public-school education in the least restrictive environment (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Preemployment transition services [29 U.S.C. Secs 705(30) and 733]: Preemployment transition services are (a) in general from the funds reserved under section 110 and; (b) any funds made available from state, local, or private funding sources, each state shall ensure that the designated state unit, in collaboration with the local educational agencies involved, shall provide, or arrange for the provision of, preemployment transition services for all students with disabilities in need of such services who are eligible or potentially eligible for services under this title (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Secondary school [20 U.S.C. 1401(27)]: Secondary school means a nonprofit day or residential school, including a public secondary charter school, which provides secondary education, as determined under state law, except that it does not include any education beyond Grade 12 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Self-contained classes: Self-contained classrooms are classrooms designated for children with disabilities. Children's placement designation with more serious disabilities who may not be able to participate in general education programs are self-contained programs.

Special education [20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401(29)]: Special education means "specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a

disability, including (a) instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and other settings and; (b) instruction in physical education". U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Transition: Transition describes a change in a student's school or program. A student must have a transition goal and plan before the age of 16 that outlines the transition to life beyond high school (OSERS, 2017).

Transition individualized education plan (TIEP): A transition individual education plan (TIEP) is a written statement for a student with a disability age 14 and older, developed, reviewed, and revised following Rule 6A-6.03028; F.A.C. Parents are partners with schools and district personnel in developing, reviewing, and revising the IEP (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Transition services [20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401(34)]: Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability designed within a results-oriented process that focuses on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to postschool activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities based on each student's needs, considering the student's strengths, preferences, and interests, includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, the acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Assumptions

An epistemological assumption is that qualitative research is a naturalistic, inductive, and emergent procedure to the study of people in their habitat to discover and explore the connotations that individuals tie to "their experiences of the world" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312). For my study, I used interviews to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators. A related assumption is that the participants are truthful in their responses during the interviews. I established an interview protocol that provided the participants with a secure location to reduce any risks associated with privacy. Privacy and confidentiality are an important assumption because the credibility of this generic qualitative study depended on the participants' truthful responses (Wargo, 2015).

Qualitative inquiry associated with a relativist ontology informs that reality is subjective and multiple, as viewed by the participants in the study (Yilmaz, 2013). To answer my research questions, I developed new understandings of the experiences and the perceptions of the educators as they implemented their innovative educational program. I interviewed the participants who have experienced the implementation of this new transitional program.

Another philosophical assumption is axiological. The axiological assumption of qualitative inquiry is that the researcher will bring their values to the proposed research study (Yilmaz, 2013). One of my assumptions was that there is a remedy for helping students obtain employment. Another assumption was the transitional services available for students with intellectual disabilities and autism would provide positive outcomes. Memoing is a tool to set aside biases and preconceptions and remain nonjudgmental during the research process (Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Astedt-Kurki, 2015). For this study, I used memoing to identify my preconceived

ideas so that my biases would not influence my analysis of the participants' responses and data. Additionally, I identified my personal biases by maintaining a reflexive journal during the research process to ensure trustworthiness.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this generic qualitative study was to explore and interpret the experiences of educators working at an innovative nontraditional educational program, sixth through 12th grade, for children with autism and cognitive disabilities located on a university's College of Education in the southeastern United States. The problem this study addressed was that students with autism and intellectual disabilities are not graduating with career or college-ready skills necessary to obtain employment and live independently. There are many aspects of complexities involving the attainment of a career by students with challenging disabilities such as autism and intellectual disabilities. For this study, I focused on understanding the experiences and perceptions of educators who have designed and implemented a new transitional educational program.

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study are aspects of the study that were not possible in this context (Creswell, 2009). A delimitation of my study was the focus on one educational context during one school year. The students were all students with special exceptionalities. Each student had his or her abilities and disabilities. The educators and professionals worked at the innovative private school on a campus of a private university, and the school is not a part of the public education system. The teachers are highly qualified and certified in special education but

excluded was the professional development of these teachers. Also excluded was a focus on the curriculum design; instead, I focused on the educators' experience.

Limitations

The limitations of my study were related to the research design. This study had limitations because it was a generic qualitative study. According to Wargo (2015), limitations are the areas the researcher has no control over. The study was bound or limited by the period, the participants, and the documents or resources collected. The size of the school limited the number of participants. The participants for this study included two administrators, three teachers, and three mentor student teachers at an innovative educational setting who may or may not be experts at meeting the needs of students with cognitive disabilities and ASD. I did not interview the other university educators who collaborated with the educators in the College of Education that designed and initiated the new program. offset this limitation by including individuals with multiple educational roles in my study to define the differences in the experiences of the varied participants.

Another limitation was researcher bias. As a special education teacher with many years of experience, I might have attached words to teachers' interviews or embellished the research. I reduced bias through multiple data collection, member checking, memoing, and reflexive journaling. Also, all the interviewees were not known to me personally and professionally, which ensured that their responses to the interviews were more valid (see Wargo, 2015).

Significance of the Study

The TP is a new alternative educational program housed in a College of Education and benefits from multiple university collaborations. The instructional model is an experiential

learning model using on-campus field trips, mentoring by students and faculty from multiple colleges at the university, and using off-campus mentoring by community-based organizations and businesses to prepare the students for the workforce or higher education. These multiple collaborations create a unique opportunity for special needs learners to acquire new work skills by interacting with professionals in these fields to develop authentic work skills.

Current educational policy's focus on standardized assessments relies on traditional teacher-directed instruction, which has left alternative educational programs and their learners at risk (Jamgochian & Ketterlin-Geller, 2015). Additionally, research on traditional educational programs has revealed that these are not effective methods for supporting these learners (Sortino, 2014; Stolar-Martz, 2016). Kucharczyk et al. (2015) indicated that "almost every systematic literature review addressing students with ASD illustrates the limited attention given to youth and young adults in high school" (p. 1).

There were few studies of transitional educational programs designed to support the transition from school to a career for students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities while obtaining and understanding the teachers' perspectives and experiences when educating these students. This study helped fill a gap in the research as I focused on developing new understandings of the teachers' experiences in an innovative instructional model. This study is also important for social justice as it provided new understandings for other educators who are working to provide effective career and job skills for individuals with intellectual disabilities so that they can find work after graduation.

Summary

There are a growing number of young people who are unemployed because of their disabilities. It is important to develop educational programs that support their transition to career or college to reduce the rate of unemployment among this group. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional secondary education program designed to prepare students who have intellectual disabilities and autism to be successful in college or the workplace. Through this study, I developed new understandings on the perceptions and experiences of educators who are implementing an innovative transitional educational program for special needs students.

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature organized to include a review of transitional education and resources that supported the conceptual framework and methodology. The literature review reveals insights of the research of educators' experiences in transition education and the gaps to further the need for this study. The selected articles are organized in topics that provide insight into the complexity of transitions and the students with autism and intellectual disabilities. Articles in this study include qualitative research methods using a conceptual framework.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional secondary education program designed to prepare students who have intellectual disabilities and autism to be successful in college or the workplace. The research questions were What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students? and What are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

The problem this study addressed is that students with autism and intellectual disabilities are not graduating with career or college-ready skills necessary to obtain employment and live independently. This chapter is a review of the literature and includes a description of the search strategies used to conduct this literature review. The conceptual framework is described in more detail. Current research studies were analyzed and synthesized concerning the following topics (a) attributes of the IDD and the autistic learner; (b) K12 traditional educational programs; (c) postsecondary educational career and college programs; (d) transitional education programs and services, and; (e) experiential transition education programs. Finally, I conclude the literature review with a summary of findings on the themes and gaps found in this review.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the following databases to conduct the literature research to find current studies within the past five years: Google Scholar, Academic Search Premier, Dissertations and Theses Global, EBSCOhost, Education Research Complete, ERIC, ProQuest Education Journals,

ProQuest Psychology Journals, Sage Research Methods, and Sage Journals Online, all found on Walden and the American Psychological Association Databases. I accessed the U.S. Department of Education for reports and statistics on employment and disabilities and went on websites for autism, such as the National Institute of Mental Health. Websites for vocational transitions also informed this literature review. All literature was limited to current studies from 2016-2020. The search for the conceptual framework included the works of seminal psychologists and theorists, so the timeframe extended beyond 4 years of the primary literature review.

The literature search terms used included *experiences of the teacher* and *transitional education, teachers' perceptions, transition for students with autism, students with an autism spectrum disorder,* and *students with intellectual disabilities.* Other key terminology used included *learners with intellectual disabilities, talents of students with cognitive disabilities, educating students for employment, transition* and *education, special education* and *curriculum design, skills for transition* and *employment for students transitioning*. Theoretical search words included *social learning theory* or *Vygotsky* and *transition education theory* or *learning theory.* Additional search words included *experiential transitional programs, transitional theory,* and *special education.* The journals, articles, and dissertations provided information on the complexities that occur with students who have autism and intellectual disabilities but are not able to obtain employment and live independently.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for my study aligned with the two research questions. To understand Research Question 1, What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and

high school students?, I used the experiential learning instructional model and the sociocultural learning theory. To understand Research Question 2, What are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?, I used the differentiated instruction model and self-efficacy theory.

The foundational concepts for the conceptual framework were (a) Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural learning theory, used to understand how the educators understood the constructivist learning processes of this new program; (b) Bandura's (1995) self-efficacy theory, a positive psychological model of self-belief that plays a part in successful outcomes that was used to understand how teachers' self-efficacy influenced their responses to the learners; (c) differentiated instructional theory, which provided understanding of the teachers' perceptions of individualized instructional processes (Hall, 2002; Tomlinson, 2000) and; (d) experiential learning theory (Kolb et al., 2001), which provided a framework to understand how the teachers experience the implementation of this new program.

Vygotsky's Developmental Learning Theory

Vygotsky's (1986) social learning theory concepts shapes human learning by a dynamic interdependence of social activities and individual processes. Vygotsky studied language development, social context, learning, and development, including educating students with special needs. He transformed two psychological views of how children develop learning (a) genetic origin and; (b) social behavior and said that they are not separate theories but work together to form what has progressively become the social-cultural theory of learning. First, a

child learns from his or her social environment and then psychologically internalizes these experiences into categories.

According to Vygotsky(1986), the social structures of personality are influenced by the relationships of psychological functions through social interactions. Vygotsky's social-cultural theory includes linguistics as a way a child develops language through semiotic mediation. Semiotic mediation includes spoken and written words, signs, and mnemonic aids. According to Vygotsky, child development generates through a gradual process of internalizing the relationships of their surroundings, starting with their own families and other children's interactions. Symbol Stix (n2y.LLC, 2018), a product of N2Y, uses pictures representing words, feelings, and social interactions to help construct meaning for students with autism and intellectual disabilities based on the theoretical perspectives of Vygotsky. N2Y is a product implemented in traditional schools with self-contained classes for students with ASD and IDD (n2y.LLC, 2018).

Vygotsky's concepts of internalization and transformative interpersonal processes are fundamental to the social-cultural theory and representational activities (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky (1978) worked with special needs students and recognized that functional systems, which include neural and cognitive processes in their brains, can reorganize to develop new concepts when faced with new learning activities. The visual representation and verbal approaches are not separate but work together to create meaning.

Vygotsky's (1986) dialectical method approach also serves the conceptual framework as a guide to understanding the contradictions about verbal thought. Vygotsky's philosophy is that there is no separation between mind and matter, language and thought, and nature and culture.

These processes interconnect through complex dialectics that morph in uneven patterns while the child overcomes his or her disabilities and challenges (Vygotsky, 1986). Vygotsky said that learning is internalized by the child while interacting with other people in the environment. Vygotsky believed that learning was an ongoing psychological process that is social and participatory. Vygotsky called this the zone of proximal development.

The zone of proximal development is a measure from a student's actual development to his/her potential level of development through social interactions. Vygotsky (1978) made a point that a child's development is not separate from his or her social situation. Vygotsky also emphasized that the iterative processes of development are not separate biological, psychological, or social entities but are all these together, interwoven, uneven, and complex. Vygotsky's social-cultural theory and zone of proximal development served my study as a conceptual foundation to understand how children learn best.

The TP gives students with ASD and IDD all the Vygotskian foundations observed in this study (see Vygotsky, 1986). Students are surrounded by the college culture of learning, with many opportunities to interact with mentors in a nontraditional school. In the regular school setting, the students are either in a separate class or put in the inclusive model where the standardized curriculum is the norm (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017). The inclusive setting rarely offers individualized social constructs. In comparison, in the innovative learning environment, the students are in a social-cultural learning environment where students from the college of athletics, the college of music and art, the college of visual technologies, and the college of education interact and create a social-cultural

environment of learning. Understanding the educator's perceptions of this type of learning was a response to Research Question 1.

Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1995) is an important theme in special education and particularly for this study. It has implications for the educator as well as the students who have disabilities. Educators face challenges providing explicit instruction of cognitive strategies to promote depth of understanding for learners (Russell, 2012). Self-efficacy determines how educators perceive their instructional abilities (Bandura, 1995). Students with ASD and cognitive problems face a more difficult challenge because they must perceive their capabilities in the world they live in (Clarke, 2016). They must think about how their education and transitional resources will provide a future career (Clarke, 2016).

According to Bandura (1986), how a person confronts a task is influenced by how well they perceive if they can do it. Self-efficacy is situational but also refers to a person's overall coping mechanisms or self-efficacy. Pavlov used contingency as a principle in learning theory (Bandura, 1986). Mackintosh (1986) provided the cognitive explanation for behavior that explains that animals will behave based on occurred expectations. Bandura furthered this research. He said that people learn through direct experiences and through observing what others are doing. Bandura's social cognitive theory includes self-efficacy because people will choose what they learn and how well they learn it and if they stay with it or give up (Bandura, 1995).

In the development of transitioning students with disabilities, the strongest of influences, self-efficacy, includes the development of self-knowledge as in mastery experiences. Mastery of

experiences or accomplishment lead to “Eureka” and “I got it” moments (Bandura, 1995). A combination of instruction that includes cognitive, behavioral, and self-regulating strategies lead to mastery of skills. Bandura (1995) included positive affirmations as a source of bolstering self-efficacy. In response to Research Question 2, I questioned these educators about their perceptions of their abilities to effectively support their students in this innovative learning environment.

Differentiated Instructional Theory

The Transition Program is designed as a differentiated model of instruction for students with cognitive and social challenges. Differentiated instructional learning theory states children have preferences in the way they learn (Tomlinson, 2000). There are different ways to accommodate these preferences, such as in individual structured assignments, learning by doing projects, or listening to lectures.

Sternberg and Zhang (2005) used the theory of thinking styles to articulate how style preferences support the theory of differentiating as an instructional application in the classroom. Differentiating instruction includes understanding the way students learn the material (learning styles) as in listening, hands-on approach, or visually (Sternberg & Zhang, 2005). Using students’ understanding of how they think about their learning is not an ability that can be measured (2005). Most assessments measure the student’s ability in the learned material, not how the student thought about the learning. The style in which a student thinks about his learning is a preference that can change over time (2005).

Working with students who have ASD and other challenges requires differentiating instruction to suit the students learning style and their thinking style so that the instruction and

the assessment are appropriate (Sternberg & Zhang, 2005). This approach of differentiating requires various types of instruction that match the students thinking preferences. Differentiating instruction also requires assessments that are compatible with the students' preferred thinking style. Differentiating instructional theory considers students' thinking preferences and learning styles and individualizes the assessment tools rather than giving multiple-choice tests (Sternberg & Zhang, 2005).

Meyer, Rose, and Gordon (2014) described curriculum design as being universal when it addresses the needs of each student and helps improve the design of the instruction. Traditional education created barriers for the autistic and cognitively challenged students who came ready to learn (2014). The general education class provides textbooks for learning and instruction.

However, academic books do not meet the needs of all students, especially when secondary IDD students are reading on a second-grade level. The TP uses an alternative curriculum designed to meet the needs of students who are not thriving with regular grade-level textbooks. The students who did not understand the printed material in the general education setting undergo a series of diagnoses. Special education services refer the students to placement in special education, as a result of the evaluation processes (Meyer et al, 2014).

Sternberg and Zhang (2005) used the theory of thinking styles to articulate how style preferences support the theory of differentiating as an instructional application in the classroom. Meyer et al. (2014) described the curriculum as being universal when it addresses the needs of each student and helps improve the students learning. Understanding the experiences of the

educators implementing a differentiated instructional model for IDD learners is a response to research question 2.

Experiential Learning Theory

David Kolb, an American educational theorist, focused his research on experiential learning, social change, career development, and professional development in education (Kolb et al., 2001). In Kolb's early days of experiential analysis, the models of experiential learning focused on study groups and individual learning (Kolb et al., 2001). In the 1970s, Kolb created the Experiential Learning Model that featured a continuum of real-life experiences, thinking about that experience, making more knowledge-based connections, and then acting out the experiences (2001). Kolb focused his research on experiential learning, social change, career development, and professional development in education.

Kolb believed psychological processes occur through active social learning. Experiential learning theory is related to the active experiences that perpetuate the learning of a person. Experiential learning is viewed as student-centered and cycles between the actions/experiences and mental knowledge making of learning. The research on social learning became a theory when the demands of popular educational reforms looked to understand psychological constructs that naturally occur during active learning (Kolb et al., 2001). Wozencroft, Pate, and Griffiths (2015) examined experiential learning through a service-learning approach where college students worked with students who had varying disabilities at a summer camp. Experiential learning in education created paths for relationship building. Practical experiences and communication were transformational.

The rationale for the choice of this theory was the Transition Program (TP) offers a special standardized educational curriculum, with an emphasis on social skills and employability skills. Experiential learning takes place through a variety of on-campus field trips and campus jobs where students simulate specific job skills and general work behaviors to transition into future employment. Understanding the experiences of these educators implementing an experiential learning model is a response to research question 2.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

This review of research literature explored the following topics: Attributes of IDD Learners, K12 Educational Programs, Transitional Educational Programs, Post- Secondary Educational Program, and Experiential Transitional Educational Programs.

Attributes of IDD Learners

The increasing numbers of students with autism and intellectual disabilities in the United States, the rate is estimated at 1 in 59 births, is alarming (Baio, et al., 2014). The prevalence of autism in U.S. children increased by 119.4% from 2000 (1 in 150) to 2018 (1 in 59) (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Educational assessment of autistic children has changed in how educators understand the needs of autistic children. The identification of IDD learners has changed over the years, with more learners identified and changing concepts of what IDD and autism mean in the classroom (Kenny et al., 2016).

Kenny et al. (2016) sought to understand the preferred ways people describe autism and the rationale for their choices. The mixed study used a sample of 3470 UK participants who took an online survey (Kenny et al., 2016). The researchers asked participants (autistic adults, parents,

professionals, researchers, students, and volunteers) to select the terms they preferred to use when communicating about autism and what terms they used to describe themselves or the person they worked or lived with who has autism. There was not a preferred word used to describe autism. However, the term “autism” and “on the autism spectrum” were highly endorsed, unlike “autism spectrum disorder” (Kenny et al., 2016, p. 442).

The complex factors contributing to these preferences were the beliefs about autism and the context in which they are found (Kenny et al., 2016). The open-ended questions for the qualitative analysis equally showed there was not a global reason underlying the participants’ choices, including disagreement between person-first terminology. The participants (233 autistic adults, 758 family members, and 340 professionals) took a 10-minute survey on SurveyMonkey.

The thematic inductive analysis provided the essentialist framework, which resulted in five major themes: Autism is not separate from the person, disorder vs. differences, Asperger’s vs. autism, the notion of the autism spectrum, and emphasis on other qualities of autism. One professional stated, “I feel it is important to generate useful language that does not limit our expectations, does not narrow our view but respects the very real difficulties that differences can create” (Kenny et al., 2016, p. 450). The researcher stated the complexity associated with describing the autism spectrum. Researchers also describe the problems these students face academically.

In a study of educators on an assessment of children with autism, Kenny et al. (2016), the terms high functioning and low functioning autism were said to be a misleading descriptive shortcut (p. 458). The terms “high functioning” or “low functioning” are often used to describe the intellectual or verbal ability of autistic people and were not popular with respondents. Kenny

et al. stated the scores on verbal and non-verbal psychological tests do not represent an individual's ability. The words and reasoning to define autism from Kenny et al. (2016) are aligned with my study because children with autism and intellectual challenges face difficulties in how they are labeled. The study shows how autism and intellectual disorders are not clearly defined by professionals, therefore, making it difficult to provide a transitional educational program through conventional means. There are many reasons researchers seek to understand the relationship between the phenomena of autism and the perceptions of the real-world.

McIntyre et al. (2017) used quantitative statistical analysis to study the relationship between reading and autistic spectrum disorder severity. The study by McIntyre et al. asked the question, "Do individuals with HFASD have related but distinct reading abilities?" McIntyre et al. hypothesized that autistic readers are heterogeneous with strengths and weaknesses depending on the type and severity of their diagnosis. The participants (81 children, ages 8-16 years) were evaluated using the Wechsler Abbreviated Scales of Intelligence- II. McIntyre et al. (2017) used a comprehensive reading and language assessment for school-aged children with high functioning autism spectrum disorder (HFASD) with a full-scale IQ of equal to or greater than 75.

They reported that reading problems were proportionally greater with autistic individuals than with general education students and that language impairment was a factor with autism relating to social-communicative and cognitive intelligence. One of the more significant findings of this study was that while reading, ASD children focus on small details rather than the overall picture, which impedes comprehension of the text. McIntyre et al. (2017) reported that one in sixty-six children in 2nd grade is capable of word recall yet cannot

make meaning in 33-65% of the written text samples, yet they received their education in the general inclusive classroom setting. Autistic learners also tend to learn what is personally interesting, and this hinders an over-all understanding of vocabulary, which may be inferentially different rather than concrete as understood by an individual with autism.

They also described the problems in reading as heterogeneous and multi-faceted involving cognitive, communicative, and emotional development within social engagement, social attention, and executive functioning. McIntyre et al.'s (2017) study provided evidence that very little is known about the development of subskills necessary to teach comprehension in reading for the autistic population. Additionally, the study defined the importance of developing language as communication and meaning-making for autistic learners. However, McIntyre et al. (2017) did not address the important educational models that would inform and advance innovative education for these types of learners

Although there are increasing numbers of students with IDD, employment rates from high school to career or college has remained stagnant (McIntyre et al., 2017). In the review of the attributes of students with ASD and IDD, these students face difficulty in communication, social life, and academia. My study may provide new holistic understandings of the innovative transitional educational program designed to provide work and academic skills for intellectually disabled children. Understanding the complexities of ASD is important for education and the outcomes for these young people. McIntyre et al. (2017) reinforced the idea of specialized and innovative educational schools for these students. Furthermore, McIntyre et al. stated that educational innovations are not available for these types of learners to advance and inform their learning.

Transitional Educational Programs

Established guidelines for transition programs exist. Kohler, Gothberg, Fowler, and Coyle's (2016) Framework for Transition is a program to improve the outcomes of students with disabilities preparing for exiting high school. Kohler et al. used a five-tier framework to organize the development of transition. The processes are (a) focused planning with student; (b) student development; (c) collaboration with agencies and academic resources; (d) involvement with parents; (e) overview of program goals and outcomes. Special education uses this framework to prepare students for post-secondary outcomes (Kohler et al., 2016).

Arakelian (2017) conducted a mixed-method study on transition planning and postsecondary outcomes across national, state, and school levels. The quantitative research provided data from the National Longitudinal Transition Survey 2. It identified in-depth the relationship between employment and the level of disability. This study found that people with disabilities get lower-paying work, are not provided the opportunities for careers, promotions, or receive the same workplace benefits as their cognitive-typical peers.

Mainstream Schools

Schools are increasingly mainstreaming special needs schools, placing them in regular classrooms throughout the day. Kelly, Devitt, O'Keffee, and Donovan (2014) investigated the reasons why disabled students are leaving mainstream school programs to attend alternative transition schools in Ireland. The study used a quasi-experimental descriptive data analysis. The 54 special needs school participating were designated in the following categories: 17 schools that had students with mild general learning disabilities, 18 schools with students who had a moderate learning disability, one multiple disabled school, four schools that educated the

physically disabled, two autism schools, seven emotionally disturbed schools, two hearing-impaired schools, two specific learning disability schools, and one traveling family's school. Principals used the School Statistical Return for the School year, attendance books, and student registration records to analyze information to answer the research questions (Kelly et al., 2014).

The principals identified that the traditional schools did not provide support for the special needs children who had a low level of motivation, low self-esteem, and lacked social skills that interrupted their learning. The findings included that there was a lack of transition planning from the mainstream schools to the special needs school, the students' lacked self-confidence and became over-dependent on supports, and there was a mismatch between students' special needs and their placement in the mainstream educational environment (Kelly et al., 2014).

The study found reasons why disabled students left their mainstream schools;

1. mainstream schools failed to meet students' academic and social needs,
2. there was a lack of transition planning from the mainstream schools,
3. the students' lacked self-confidence,
4. students became over dependent on supports
5. there was a mismatch between students' special needs and their placement in the mainstream educational environment (Kelly et al., 2014).

This study supported the importance of specially designed schools or specific individualized support for the success of these students (Kelly et al., 2014).

Career and Technical School

Schools will place special needs high school students in a career and technical school as a transitional program. In a qualitative case study, Gogan (2017) explored how a career and

technical education (CTE) program could support students with autism disorder for college and career opportunities. Gogan's conceptual framework consisted of Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective on human development, Zhao and Frank's ecological perspective of technology, and Song's research about distributed cognition. The participants from this study included teachers from the CTE program, special education teachers, and an administrator.

A thorough analysis of program documents and interviews found that students with autism were prepared with life, job, and technical skills for college and career through the CTE program, which included differentiated instruction, and technology-assisted computers. The CTE program studied was similarly designed as the TP program for this study; however, the success of CTE programs requires the collaboration with Special Education teachers, and knowledge of the student's abilities for proper placement in a CTE program (Powell, 2017).

Transitional Program Curriculum Design

In transitional programs, there is a link between functional curriculum and positive outcomes among IDD learners. Bouck and Joshi (2015) sought to understand the relationship between curriculum and post-school outcomes for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS) included data on functional curriculum and post-school outcomes. Two opposing practices define the functional curriculum. One, the functional curriculum is focused on the skills a person needs to live, work, and be involved in the community. Two, the development of functional academics (reading, writing, and math skills) independent living skills, vocational education, daily life skills, transportation skills, and social skills. These are most appropriate for mild to severe intellectual disabilities.

The research found that a standards-based academic curriculum has replaced the practice of a functional curriculum for post-school college and career readiness (Bouck & Joshi, 2015). The study identified three post-school outcomes, including employment, independent living, and post-secondary education. Students with disabilities and autism struggle with these three post-school functions. Bouck and Joshi's (2015) findings reported only one-quarter of the students with autism and IDD were receiving functional curriculum while the other three quarters received their education through the academic-based curriculum. In terms of post-school outcomes for students with an autism spectrum disorder, the majority were not living independently, attending postsecondary education, or employed within two years of exiting high school.

Bouck and Joshi (2015) reported the relationship between functional curriculum vs. nonfunctional curricula for students with IDD and Autism. The standards-based curriculum was not supporting these learners to be successful after school. The functional curriculum focuses on functional academics, vocational education, community access, daily living skills, independent functioning skills, transportation, and financial skills, social and relationship skills, and self-determination. Recently, the standards-based curriculum and academics have replaced functional skills taught to special needs students.

Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI)

The functional curriculum, focused on teaching specific work skills, was studied by Bridges (2107) to understand the relationship between curriculum and IDD learners' outcomes after graduation. The secondary quantitative study focused on if a functional curriculum rather than transition services would factor in on post-school outcomes (Bridges, 2017). In a secondary

analysis, there were 4995 student participants with autism spectrum disorder who were male (94%), and educated in suburb schools (51.1%), urban schools (41%) and rural schools (2.9%). Most of the students were twelfth graders (56%), then eleventh graders (27.2%), and included students who were between the ages of 17-18 years of age.

The research questions were analyzed using frequency distributions, F-test, and logistic regression (Bridges, 2017). The study found that programs for students with ASD were not utilizing a functional curriculum and had poor post-school outcomes. This study identified that the standardized curriculum did not support positive post-school outcomes (Bridges, 2017). Out of the 4995 students, less than 749 lived independently, were employed, and attended post-secondary education. About 1,248 students were employed (25%), but few worked full time. This study revealed that educating students with the standards-based curriculum is not promoting successful outcomes for students with autism and intellectual disabilities (Bridges, 2017).

The researcher also mentioned there is disagreement among educators on what curriculum needs to be taught and how these IDD students learn. Although this sample was a small portion of the number of children with autism that will be eligible to work in the future, this study defined the needs of these learners related to the outcomes for transition program. My study was designed to understand the experiences of educators implementing an alternative instructional program designed to support students with intellectual disabilities, be productive members of society, having job skills, finding work, and living independently.

Transitional Programs

Transitional educational programs are designed specifically to prepare IDD learners in high school with the skills and knowledge to transition from high school into the workplace or

higher education. In a study by Kelly et al. (2014) of transitional programs, there were major issues identified in the current methods for educating IDD learners. The objective of the Kelly et al.'s study was to understand the experiences of education professionals related to students with intellectual disabilities and their transitional needs to help them gain employment and live productive, independent lives. This study found that inadequate transitional education may cause problems with students' social-emotional needs, learning behaviors, and individual educational needs in secondary education (2014).

Kelly et al.'s (2014) evidence showed the "negative learned behavior" (p. 79) on the students' self-worth, and their ability to adapt to a different school culture caused a decrease in achievement levels. Their social-emotional skills lessened from the effects of the unmet social-emotional needs at the mainstream inclusion school. The results of Kelly et al.'s study showed the challenges of educating students with disabilities and the diversity of their challenges moving from a mainstream school to a special school.

Kelly et al. (2014) posited the importance of good educational models that include academic and psychosocial outcomes for each student. Also, educators need training in behavioral, social, and emotional management strategies. Kelly et al. suggested ongoing social-emotional instruction would have a positive impact on all aspects of the ASD student. Kelly et al. found a lack of research on effective models of education that include transition services for special needs students in secondary education (6^{th} – 12^{th} grade).

Individual Transitional Education Process (ITEP)

There are programs implemented in high schools that are differentiated to support the learning of IDD students. Margie (2016) using a case study approach, analyzed the factors that

influence the failure of individuals with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities (IDD) to obtain employment and the connections to their curriculum and transitional planning during high school. A qualitative study used data from interviews from fifteen participants made up of four groups (case managers, teachers of students with IDD, employers who manage individuals with InD, and employees 21 years + with disabilities). Margie provided data from a traditional high school where students with IDD were placed in a separate class for instructional time.

Margie (2016) identified themes based on the information derived from questions asked in the interviews in his study on factors that influence the failure of individuals with IDD to find work and the correlation between what they learn and their transitional planning during high school. The themes identified include connections between curriculum, transition out of school, and employment, curriculum and its effect on employment, skills needed for employment, transitional services, and employment identified issues related to my study. Margie found that a focus on the behaviors and social skills of individuals with intellectual disabilities supported their ability to get a job. Margie (2016) found this factor as a barrier to transition programs because behaviors impact whether people with disabilities get a job. According to Margie's study, employees look for functional and social skills rather than academic skills. The conclusion identified the need to align curriculum with employment needs to develop productive workforce behaviors.

The special education teachers in Margie's study (2016) maintained that functional education is the key to successful employment. The caseworker group and vocational workers agreed that functional skills are key to maintaining a job and securing a place to live. The special educators felt the push for standardized testing and common core mandated by state and federal

government might be good for some students but not for students who are in 11th and 12th grade and have a literacy rate of a first or second grader. Margie's (2016) research found that curriculum and transitional services need to align to guarantee post-school outcomes. The implications of this study included a need for the curriculum designed to teach real-life applications to help students learn about being employed. Transitional planning should include collaboration between schools, families, agencies, and employers. Improved educational policies, practices, and systems in high school are essential to prepare students with IDD for postsecondary outcomes.

My study sought to understand the teachers' experiences and perceptions of an innovative non-traditional school grades 6-12th for students with Autism and IDD at a university in the college of education. The Transition Program includes a social skills curriculum and has behaviorists on-site, including sensory walls and a sensory room designed to modify behavior and teach self-regulation. There is a transitional academic curriculum that includes work-related activities on the university's campus.

Project Step

The Project Step transition curriculum was designed to prepare students for post-secondary education. Sortino (2014) sought to investigate teacher and student perceptions on the effectiveness of the Project Step transition curriculum. Using a mixed-method approach, Sortino analyzed interviews and questionnaires from two teachers and twenty-six students with Other Health Impairments, Autism, and Specific Learning Disabilities. Pretest and posttest were given for each of the eight modules in Project Step, and a survey was given after each module to collect data for the quantitative study. The findings included the importance of a positive

perspective of the teachers on learning outcomes for these special needs learners and the importance of the relationship and the communication between the teachers and the students. My study was designed to understand these perspectives among the educators implementing this new transitional educational program.

Vocational Programs

Vocational programs are used in schools to teach work skills to special needs students. Dosen (2016) conducted a qualitative study to understand the teaching of job-seeking skills to high school students with intellectual disabilities. Dosen interviewed vocational teachers and special needs students with intellectual disabilities in high schools in a U.S. city. The qualitative study's purpose discovered what was being taught in vocational programs geared to help these students gain employment.

The three themes found were that customizing employment strategies instead of traditional school-to-work skills provide students with intellectual disabilities stable employment, tapping into the passions, gifts, and talents of people with IDD lead to fulfilling careers, and successful job acquisition was linked to the students' autonomy when defining personal goals in transitions. One of the most important findings resulting from Dosen's (2016) interviews was the students lacked the subset skill of confidence. Dosen acknowledged there is an ongoing struggle with confidence and dead-end job seeking.

Think College

There are post-secondary transitional programs available at colleges and universities. Ryan (2014) explored a post-secondary education program called Think College for people with intellectual disabilities. This program was funded by U.S. Congress for the Transition

Program for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) and made available from the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act. A college in rural Vermont staff collaborated with local, state, and federal entities, developed individual planning for these students with specific supports and services, utilized multiple differentiated approaches to instruction, and provided training and technical assistance to the staff (Ryan, 2014). The enrollment criteria for students with intellectual disabilities included documentation of the disability, a letter of recommendation, application letters, and an interview (Ryan). The college uses a process call MAPS (Making Action Plans), which addresses academic, social, living, and career plans of the students with disabilities. MAPS served the TPSID program for integrating courses to address the specific areas of academic, social, living, and employment needs. Students obtained credits of certification (Ryan).

A study was implemented by an outside partner who conducted the interviews with staff and students and surveyed mentors and parents. Questions like “What has been your greatest challenge?” and “What suggestions do you have for improvement?” were included in the interviews. Surveys for mentors and parents used a Likert-type 5-point scale recording only the responses of a strong agreement. The participants of this study included staff, students, and parents. The study’s evaluation design found strengths, weaknesses, and needs to improve the program (Ryan, 2014).

The results indicated that 92% of respondents strongly agreed that the mentor program was highly effective and supportive for the students with intellectual disabilities. Sixty-eight percent of the parents surveyed strongly agreed the program met their overall expectations. Students described the program as supported them to feel a connection between themselves

and the real world. One student expressed herself in an essay, “Getting into Think College was the best gift I have had in my lifetime now…It’s like opening a gift repeatedly. And it is a magical gift that no one can ever take away from me for a long time” (Ryan, 2014, p. 26).

The study also found that collaboration with local, state, and federal entities, individual planning with specific supports and services including multiple differentiated approaches to instruction and providing training and technical assistance to university staff was effective in supporting the ThinkCollege program. This study relates to my study designed to understand how the Transition Program encourages post-secondary education that is linked by its physical location on a University College of Education campus.

PASS Program

There are transitional programs that are focused on experiential learning theory. Clarke (2016) examined the transition services and programs offered to students with disabilities who were 18 to 22 years old. These students enrolled in the Post-graduate Alternative for Secondary Students or PASS program. The interviews of the educators and document reviews conducted to understand the experiential learning program. Teachers prepared work-zones in the class to provide community-based instruction. These classroom work-zones translated to job skills in the community, which helped the students obtain and sustain employment. The skill sets needed to be successful after high school was a relationship with the community, soft skills, real-world activities, and age-appropriate activities starting at the age of 14 (Clarke, 2016). This study found that students successfully transferred work skills taught in the classroom to real-world employment.

Experiential learning theory is related to active experiences. Experiential learning is viewed as student-centered. It cycles between actions/experiences and mental knowledge making of learning (Kolb et al., 2001). This study identified the specific work skills developed by experiential learning, learning by doing, and how this type of learning supports the development of work skills for these special needs learners. The Transition Program has a post-secondary transition program to ready students for participation in education, employment, and independent living as appropriate for the individual student.

Summary and Conclusions

In reviewing a summary of the literature, it was vital to understand the research from a theoretical, historical, and current information. The focus of this literature review for my study found relevancies on the topics: the characteristics of the IDD and autistic learner, traditional K12 educational programs, transitional educational programs, post-secondary educational programs, and experiential transitional programs. Furthermore, the predictors of transitional outcomes related directly to theories, relationship with curriculum models, and their design.

Research has identified the changes in the diagnosis of IDD and autistic learners. Kenny et al. (2016) found the identification of IDD learners has changed over the years, with more learners being identified and changing concepts of what IDD and autism mean in the classroom. Similarly, McIntyre et al. (2017) provided evidence that little is known about the development of subskills necessary to teach the autistic population. McIntyre et al. stated that developing language as communication and meaning-making is significant for acquiring relationships and building on soft skills needed for the workforce. More research is needed on designing

individualized education that will support these students in the classroom and support future transitions for job security.

Although Federal laws have passed to give all students a free and equal education putting many students with autism and intellectual disabilities in the general education classroom with support from special education teachers, some differences exist between states, schools, teaching methods, and class settings. Kelly et al. (2014) findings included that mainstream schools failed to meet students' academic and social needs and suggest specialized education with supports increases positive outcomes for these students. Gogan (2017) study also found that a career and technical education (CTE) program could influence students with autism disorder for college and career opportunities in a qualitative case study. In each study, the success relied on cooperative relationships with all people involved in the students' education (Gogan).

As mentioned by Kenny et al. (2016), these students often have two or more diagnoses; Autism is very complexed and individual. McIntyre et al. (2017), stated the difficulties in reading comprehension are a result of fixation on detail rather than the overall story or informational text. Kelly et al. stated that communication and social issues, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are reasons why mainstream education fails to meet transitional criteria. McIntyre et al. reinforced the complexity of the autistic learners in school and accordingly stated there is a mismatch between students' special needs and their placement in the mainstream educational environment.

Some differences exist between schools, teaching methods, and class settings (Kelly et al., 2014). There is a gap in the research on how special education teachers perceive mainstreaming and inclusive practices. Furthermore, the gap in the research exists on the type of

curriculum design models beneficial to students with autism that promote successful transitions to career or college. These studies showed the differences that exist between schools, teaching methods, and classroom settings in the traditional general education setting.

To fully understand ITEP (Individual Transitional Education Process) and predictors of post-secondary outcomes, Margie's (2016) research maintained that functional education is the key to successful employment in obtaining employment for individuals with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities (IDD). According to Margie, there is a gap in employment for individuals with IDD for the following reasons: the curriculum and transitional services are not aligned, and standardized testing and common core may be good for some students, but not all.

Sortino (2014) illustrated the benefits of the Project Step transition curriculum that includes vital relationships and communication between the teacher and the students, whereas Dosen (2016) found that educators needed professional development to customize employment strategies instead of using teaching methods on traditional school-to-work skills. Moreover, Dosen provided an understanding of tapping into the passions, gifts, and talents of people with InD lead to fulfilling careers in his model called, Customized Employment.

Graduation from high school with a diploma requires completing and passing coursework measured by the Carnegie Unit System, passing final assessments, and passing a standardized state test. In Jamgochian and Ketterlin–Gellar's (2015) study, the factors contributing to successful test-taking depended on teachers' expertise and their understanding of the individual student with challenging disabilities. While some strategies worked and others did not depend on the learning style of the student. Besides, tests and testing situations vary in states and districts (ECS, 2018).

Post-secondary transitions in young people's lives require decisions regarding their future. The pathway for career or college readiness is a standard goal for most students. For the student with ASD and InD, transitional planning includes independent and daily life skills. Ryan's (2014) study on Think College program for people with intellectual disabilities integrated courses to address the specific areas of academic, social, living, and employment needs for credits of certification. In like manner, Morgan's (2014) research found a positive correlation with individualized program design, social relationships in a college setting, and support systems benefit post-secondary outcomes.

Bridges (2017) analyzed coded interviews on the perceptions of educators for the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) for at-risk students. The purpose of her study was to understand the potential impact the *ECHSI* might provide in academic and vocational transitions. The interviews provided information that the ECHSI could be used for special needs students like at-risk students. The research found that an in-house model could be created for students with disabilities to earn an associate degree while attending high school, which would improve the post-secondary transition.

Biggs and Carter (2016) stated that experiences between self and community are a predictor of successful transition into adulthood. Similarly, Clarke's (2016) study on transition services and programs found the skill sets needed to benefit college and career were relationship with the community, soft skills, and real-world activities.

After completing a thorough literature research review and synthesis, there was a gap in the research on what types of career development or transitional programs move these students forward, resulting in higher rates of employment among this growing number of special needs

learners in U.S. schools. I designed the study to understand how teachers experience an innovative transitional program designed to support these learners in developing the work skills and knowledge needed to be gainfully employed after high school graduation. By focusing on understanding the real-world experiences of these educators, this study identified new methods of educating special needs learners to support their success in the workforce and college after graduation. In Chapter3, I reviewed the methodology and the rationale for this generic qualitative study. I addressed the methods for recruitment, sampling, data collection, and data analysis, as well as the ethical issues in the design of this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional secondary education program designed to prepare students who have intellectual disabilities and autism to be successful in college or the workplace. The problem this study addressed was that students with autism and intellectual disabilities are not graduating with career or college-ready skills necessary to obtain employment and live independently. In the following sections, I describe the research design, the role of the researcher, and the methodology and methods, and I define the issues of the trustworthiness of my study.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions for this generic qualitative study were as follows:

1. What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?
2. What are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

The central concept for this study was to understand the process of educating learning disabled students to transition from high school to either work or higher education. I addressed this goal through a generic qualitative study designed to understand the experiences of the educators who have implemented a new transitional educational program for special needs learners based on experiential learning and a mentoring process. A generic qualitative study

provided new holistic understandings of the innovative transitional educational program designed to provide work and academic skills for intellectually disabled children.

According to Percy et al. (2015), when traditional qualitative designs such as grounded theory or case study cannot be adapted to the research topic and inquiry, a generic qualitative design is most appropriate. Case study methodology uses data to tell a story of a case (Yin, 1994). The case focuses on a bounded phenomenon. The collection of three types of data (observations, interviews, and documents) are analyzed, consolidated, and reduced to make meaning through the process. It has limits as to the type of information that is bounded by the case. In a case study, the researcher analyzes how and why people behave in a certain way, and the data are reduced to reflect these findings (Yin, 1994).

The grounded theory approach uses the data to explain a theory. Liu (2016) proposed that the methodology of the generic qualitative case is similar to grounded theory. However, the difference is that the data collection is not based on theory saturation as it is for grounded theory but the saturation of the most important themes for a generic qualitative study. As a result, the presentation of the findings in generic qualitative methodology uses the important themes, instead of building on a theory (Liu, 2016).

The generic qualitative approach can advance qualitative scholarship because of its methodological adaptability (Liu, 2016). The generic qualitative study addresses and describes how an educational experience has meaning. The generic qualitative methodology has all the components in the design and links the findings to research questions, the problem statement, and the purpose. In a generic qualitative study, the researcher investigates the participants'

subjective beliefs, attitudes, or opinions on their experiences to understand their real-world perceptions and knowledge of their experiences.

Role of the Researcher

I have been teaching students with specific learning disabilities for 17 years, with 12 years spent in the inclusion model. I recently worked with autistic and intellectual students (Grades 6-8) in a self-contained classroom. I trained in educational mental handicap and trainable mental handicap and felt confident in my understanding of these children.

To reduce my bias from these experiences, I used member-checking to ensure that my transcripts were correct based on feedback from the participants. Additionally, I journaled my findings and memoed my thoughts. I sent a copy of the transcript of the interview to each participant to review and respond to the accuracy of the transcript. I asked if there were errors, any further discussions of a topic, or any new response. Data were analyzed, consolidated, and reduced until the data met saturation or any additional codes or topics discovered during analysis (see Liu, 2016). Reflexive journaling continued during the study to identify and address any covert biases. Finally, I memoed throughout the study, which provided a thorough audit trail to support my analysis.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional secondary education program designed to prepare students who have intellectual disabilities and autism to be successful in college or the workplace. I posted recruitment flyers on-site at the school in a wing of the

College of Education. I made an on-site presentation to discuss the study during an administrator meeting. After posting the flyers and making the presentation, potential participants contacted me through email or by calling my telephone number.

Purposeful sampling in qualitative research is used to provide a sampling of participants to give the greatest understanding of the social setting (Liu, 2016). I identified the participants through purposeful sampling. I selected the volunteers for the study by asking about their role in the educational program. I recruited three teachers, three student mentors (teacher aides), and three administrators, including the College of Education faculty who began the program, for a total of nine participants. To integrate diversity, I chose to identify participants based on their roles in the educational programs.

The teachers work with the students on implementing the program. Some of the student mentors (teacher aides) are from other colleges at the university and support the students through specific projects related to work skills. The administrators, who are also faculty at the College of Education, developed the new educational program and oversee its progress. This sample resulted in data saturation as a result of the interviews and review of curriculum artifacts. Saturation is central to qualitative sampling and is realized through the quality of the analysis rather than quantity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Instrumentation

I collected three types of data, through interviewing and collecting curriculum documents and artifacts. I did the interviews at the school in a private room. Each interview took 45 minutes to 1 hour. Semi-structured interviews are a common qualitative data collection method in qualitative research (Chaiklin, 2003). Percy et al. (2015) stated that generic qualitative studies

rely on semi structured interviews. I chose the interview process over other qualitative data collection techniques because it attained the personal perceptions of events and experiences of the participants.

During the interview process, the researcher has the freedom to ask questions in sequence and use a friendly voice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There will also be times when the researcher has the freedom to utilize "tell me more" questions (Percy et al., 2015, p. 79). Ruben and Rubin (2012) described the features that will produce a quality interview, including be authentic, be thorough, and make observations that are written with every detail. The interview is a personal action, relying on a personal viewpoint.

I designed the interview questions during my Advanced Research course (see Appendix A). I created matrices to illustrate the relationship between my study, the research questions, and the interview questions. My interview questions were developed further with the guidance of the professor of the course and three doctoral colleagues. I also made changes based on the advice of my dissertation chair and the methodologist reviewing my study.

I used my conceptual framework to understand the perceptions and experiences of educators. The conceptual framework groups the interview questions for this study into defining personal experiences by focusing on understanding the participants' concept of self-efficacy, understanding social interactions in the classroom based on defining sociocultural interactions, including the perceptions of zone of proximal development (Chaiklin, 2003), and organizational topics based on the innovative program's goals for implementing this experiential transitional program.

Below are the interview questions aligned with the research questions for this study:

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

1. Why do you choose to work in this program?
2. What do you believe are the best ways to support these learners?
3. What are some of the learning responses you see in these learners?
4. What kind of interactions are most effective with the learners? Why?
5. How do you encourage productive interactions among your learners?
6. Is it important for these learners to be more social?
7. How does the program support the learners' development of work/study skills?
8. What are some of the main work skills or study skills that these learners need? Why?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

1. What do you perceive to be the greatest influence of your work in this program?
2. What do you believe are the students' greatest needs to achieve as learners?
3. What are some of the challenges these learners face academically?
4. What kind of social interactions are most effective with these learners? Why?
5. What is the type of encouragement produces interactions among your learners? How do you know this?
6. How are these students social?

7. How do these learners develop work/study skills?
8. What are some of the main work skills or study skills that these learners need to develop? Why?
9. Is there anything else you think I should know?

Review of Artifacts

For the second source of data, I collected documents and artifacts provided by the participants. Documents add rigor and depth to understanding the research setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The instructional documents requested included teacher lesson plans, rubrics, awards made by the participants for the students, work or created artifacts as a part of the lesson, and anecdotal notes from the classroom. Additional documents included the review of school improvement plans and faculty meeting notes to understand the administration's goals for the new program. I analyzed these documents using inductive content analysis to relate to the coding structures in the artifacts with the themes identified in the interviews.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The procedures for the data collection begin with gaining IRB approval at Walden University and at the university where my study took place. The university required conditional approval from Walden IRB before my application for their approval. To recruit, sample the participants, and collect data, I followed the following steps:

1. I made an on-site presentation to educators. I made this presentation in the faculty conference room before a scheduled faculty meeting. The presentation took between 10-15 minutes.
2. After I presented, I passed out recruitment flyers.

3. I also posted this flyer in the main conference area.
4. Potential participants contacted me through an email address, or the phone number printed on the recruitment flyer to discuss the research.
5. Sampling: I emailed or talked with the potential participants to understand if they met the inclusion criteria. I included diversity in my sampling process to interview administrators, educators, and mentors.
6. After I chose the potential participants, I emailed the participants the Informed Consent Form.
7. After they replied to participate, I emailed each participant to schedule an interview.
8. Before the face-to-face interview, I reviewed the Informed Consent Form and obtained their signature agreeing to participate.

Data Collection Plan

I collected two types of data. I conducted one face-to-face interview with each of the 9 participants. I requested program artifacts from participants. The documents I requested included curriculum documents, lesson plans submitted by the teachers, faculty meeting notes requested from an administrator, and the school improvement plan requested from an administrator participant. Below was the planned Interview Protocol for this process. I completed all of the following steps as presented.

1. The interviews were 45-60 minutes that will be face-to-face and take place at the Transition Program in a private conference room.

2. I will hire a transcriber for the interviews. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement. I will email the digital audio tapes to the transcriber. She will email me the transcribed audiotapes in Word documents.
3. I will email the transcribed interview for participant response.
4. Participants will email me their response to the transcript for member-checking.
5. I will request lesson plans and curriculum documents from the classroom teachers.
6. I will request documents that describe the program's educational goals from the administrators.
7. After all the data is collected, I will email the participants to thank them for participating in this study.

I followed and completed the steps in the interview protocol as planned. I did not need to make any changes.

Data Analysis Plan

I used an inductive thematic analysis for my interviews. The analysis aligned with the methodology of a constructivist and contributed to how the process was iterated, collected, and analyzed together at the same time. The thematic analysis involved identifying repeated patterns with thematic inductive analysis to structure the interview data to answer my research questions. The steps I planned and implemented included:

1. I will listen to the audiotapes of the interviews and take notes.
2. I will note any overall topics or ideas that I have about the interviews.
3. I will have all the interviews transcribed by a transcriptionist.

4. I will upload the interviews into Dedoose, a qualitative analysis online program that is login protected and on secure servers.
5. I will review all the transcribed interviews and highlight any paragraphs that I find meaningful in Dedoose.
6. I will use a paragraph as a unit of meaning. A unit of meaning will be a paragraph that I can code with a linking word or sequence of words to structure the paragraph for analysis.
7. For each interview, I will do initial coding by highlighting a paragraph and then identifying a code that will be a category or phrase that relates to the question.
8. After I have done initial coding for the interview, I will go back and review my codes and identify categories that connect.
9. For each interview, I will identify a pattern that is relevant to all the categories.
10. After I have coded and then identified categories for each interview, I will define themes among all the patterns in the interviews.
11. I will identify all themes and synthesize them into a coherent response to the research question.
12. For the curriculum documents, I will use thematic inductive analysis to identify patterns and themes in the documents that relate to the research questions and themes from my interview analysis.
13. If there are discrepant codes in the data set, I will identify these in the report in my presentation of findings.

I followed and completed all the steps in this data analysis plan as presented. I did not need to make any changes.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The issues of trustworthiness for this study were addressed by the design of the study and my methodology. Credibility is related to the capability of the researcher to ensure that the study results are trustworthy (Merriam, 2002). I developed credibility by member checking with my participants to ensure that my transcription was accurate. Reflexive journaling reduced any bias in my analysis.

Transferability is related to the ability to reproduce the study and find different outcomes. To support transferability in this qualitative study, I aligned my research questions with my conceptual framework. I sampled my participants by their role in the educational program to understand their experiences and perceptions from multiple perspectives (Merriam, 2002).

Merriam (2002) describes dependability as a research plan with a clear pathway that has consistency in the data interpretations. To develop dependability, I developed an audit trail that included extensive memoing and documentation of my data collection and analysis in my report. Additionally, member-checking ensured the accuracy of the data.

The researcher took steps to ensure that the findings were the results of the participants' responses rather than the researcher's preferences (Trochim, 2006). As an aspect of confirmability, I engaged in reflexive journaling throughout the study to reduce my bias. I memoed throughout the study and included member-checking to ensure an accurate representation of the participants' responses.

Ethical Procedures

The National Institute of Health certified me to conduct research. I received Walden University IRB permission approval, 02-13-19-0458775, before implementing this study. I engaged in multiple research courses as part of my doctoral program of study. I worked closely with my mentor to ensure that I implemented the study ethically. I gained informed consent from all participants prior to any interview. I received their signature on the informed consent form and ensured they understood that this was a voluntary process. I informed participants that they could choose to withdraw at any time. If there were any issues related to the implementation of this study, I would contact my mentor and IRB immediately for advice. No issues were found in the implementation of my study.

My plans to secure the data included and were implemented as follows:

1. Interviews will be recorded on my login protected laptop.
2. I will create a Master List that will include the participant's name and a pseudonym used in the study, such as P1, P2.
3. This master list will be stored on a USB drive and locked in a file cabinet in my home. All the participants will be referred to by the pseudonym throughout the remainder of the study.
4. The tapes will be transcribed by another person who will sign a confidentiality agreement.
5. After the interviews are transcribed, these documents will be analyzed using Dedoose in my login protected laptop in my home office.
6. In Dedoose, I will define paragraphs as a unit of meaning selecting text and creating code structures.

7. After identifying the codes for each interview, I will re-categorize the initial codes through a secondary analysis to look for similar codes.
8. Next, I will create a matrix of all codes for all interviews and documents.
9. After analysis, all documents related to this study will be stored on a USB drive and locked in a file cabinet in my home. All data related to the study will be deleted from my laptop.
10. After five years, the USB drives will be destroyed by hitting them with a hammer.

I completed all the steps to secure the data as presented in the above list, except for number 10. The USB drives will be destroyed in 2025.

Summary

This proposed study was a generic qualitative study. In this chapter, I reviewed the rationale for designing a generic qualitative study to respond to the research questions. The two research questions were: What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students? What are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

This study was designed to understand educators' work perceptions and experiences. Ethical procedures were followed in accordance with the Institutional Review Board application. I used Braun and Clarke's model (2006) for thematic data analysis. Chapter 3 provided the study's methodology and included the researcher's role, participants, and data collection and analysis methods. In the next chapter, I reviewed the study's implementation and my main findings.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional secondary education program designed to prepare students who have intellectual disabilities and autism to be successful in college or the workplace. A face-to-face session per participant using a semi structured interview method provided the qualitative data to understand the participants' feelings and experiences working in this innovative school for autistic and cognitively challenged students. In Chapter 4, I describe the findings and the results with a relationship to the literature review and conceptual framework. The research questions for this generic qualitative study were as follows:

1. What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?
2. What are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

Chapter 4 includes the following sections. In the setting, I describe how and where the interviews took place. The demographics report the characteristics of my population that are relevant to the study. The data collection and data analysis chronicle the study design and methodology. The evidence of trustworthiness informs the ethical dialogue regarding this generic qualitative study. Chapter 4 relates to the material used in Chapter 2 (literature review) and

Chapter 3 (Conceptual Framework). The final result and summary of findings conclude this chapter and are preparation for Chapter 5.

Setting

The development of this innovative educational setting started with how the TP school was created through a conversation with a friend. I asked, "Why did you choose to start this program?" P3 answered,

> It was actually a thought to start because I had a friend who has a child with autism, nonverbal, noncommunicative except through behavior. Her son is getting ready to age out of elementary school and she was not happy with the public-school options that she had for middle school for her son. Came to me and asked for help. After a few minutes of conversation with her, I said, Well, instead of trying to find another school, why don't we just create our own?

The creator of this TP program presented the idea to the board using the mission of the university and the added benefits of helping students, families, and the university community. The program design was meant to create a pathway for the TP student in academic, personal, and spiritual life by individualizing learning in a safe environment. Staff and faculty planned for 10 months before the TP opening, and this included 6 months of pretraining because of the atypical behaviors that students with autism and IDD would bring to the campus. These manifestations of behavior may include vulgar language, violent outbursts, screaming, and running. The staff and faculty were informed and educated on what to expect and how to react safely. A school uniform was designed for safety so that the TP students could be easily identified on campus.

The enrollment at the TP has increased over the past 3 years. For the 2016-2017 school

year, there were 19 students enrolled. In 2017-2018, 24 students were attending the TP school, and in 2018-2019, 44 students attended. The TP program has been extended until the age of 22 when state funding ends.

The school is housed in the bottom back wing of the College of Education and is classified as a lab school. The school has a parent/student handbook and a 5-year strategic plan. The university added a comprehensive postsecondary transition program for those students who have completed their high school experience. They have options to live in a dorm or commute. The students take specific courses in life skills, job skills, and academics related to their job or career choice. The university is working with the community, setting up partnerships so students can do internships or externships.

Demographics

Nine educators with varied years of experience from the southeastern region of the United States were interviewed for the study. I used a generic qualitative design to understand how these educators experience and perceive working with autistic students in a unique transitional middle and high school. The nine participants had three differing roles at the TP school: administrator, teacher, and paraprofessional. To protect their identity, I assigned each participant a code number, which is used throughout Chapters 4 and 5. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic data at the time they were interviewed.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Participants	Gender	Experience	Position	Tier	Education	Years at TP
P1	F	2 yrs. at the TP	Paraprofessional	2	Bachelor of Education	2
P2	F	10 yrs. At charter school 1 yr. at TP	Paraprofessional	3		1
P3	F	7.5 yrs. as a sheriff 7 yrs. home-school 2 yrs. at TP	Paraprofessional	3	BS Earning a Master in Social Work	2
P4	M	4 yrs. ESE 10 yrs. physical Ed. 1 yr. at `TP	Teacher	1	Bachelor Certification ESE & PE	1
P5	F	1.5 yrs. at TP	Teacher	2	Bachelor's in SPED	1.5
P6	M	7 yrs. BA 2 yrs. as a behavioral analyst 2.5 yrs. at TP	Teacher	3	BS Psychology Master in SPED	2.5
P7	F	27 yrs. in ESE 3 yrs. at TP	Administrator		Master Ed, ESE	3
P8	M	21 yrs. in Ed 3 yrs. at TP	Administrator		BS, Masters Doctorate	3
P9	F	7 yrs. Instr 8 yrs. Higher.Ed 4 yrs. at TP	Administrator		BS, Masters Doctorate	4

Note. TP = transitional program; BS = bachelor of science; ESE = exceptional student education; PE = physical education; SPED = special education; BA = behavioral assistant; Ed = education; Instr = instructor;

Data Collection

In January of 2019, I met with administrators at the TP school to inform them I was going through the proposal approval process with my university. The location of the TP school is on the back wing of a university's College of Education. The university where my study took place required the same IRB process and additional ethics certification. My university granted final approval after meeting the conditional requirements in March. In April, I presented my study to the administrators and posted the recruitment flyer at the site of my study. Nine educators contacted me through email and volunteered to participate in the study. I contacted the principal to discuss the best time to begin the interviews and to make sure my scheduled interviews would not interfere with class time or student needs. I sent out an email to each participant with their specific scheduled time.

All participants who responded by email received an informed consent form to look over, and if they agreed to participate, they could sign the form. The flyer was sent to use as a reference for the study. Before scheduling the participants, I inquired about their job descriptions, and the group included three teachers, three paraprofessionals, and three administrators who volunteered to participate for a total of nine. At the TP school, the mentors are called paraprofessionals and have graduated or are working on a graduate degree. The semi structured face-to-face interviews took place after the informed consent form was reread and signed. I used the interview protocol, which consisted of Research Question 1 with eight sub questions and Research Question 2 with eight sub questions.

Before I emailed the participants their scheduled time, I asked the principal of the school if there was a specific date or any other factors I should consider before making my interview

schedule. I scheduled one interview every hour to include transition times of participants and personal journaling time. Seven participants agreed on their scheduled time. The interviews of Participants 5 and 9 were conducted towards the end of May 2019 on the campus of the university. The school year was ending for the TP school, and university was on summer break. Most college activities on campus had ended. The participants were relaxed and passionate about participating in the study. There no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experiences at the time of the study that may influence the interpretation of the study results.

Seven of the interviews took place on May 14, 2019 and were conducted on the second floor of the College of Education above the innovative transitional school. A large private conference room at the end of a quiet hall on the second floor of the college of education provided a relaxing and secure site to conduct the participant interviews. The TP school is located on the first floor of the building. The administration of the TP school provided coverage for participants during the interview times.

The interviews were scheduled for 40 to 60 minutes; this included a brief introduction, signing the informed consent, and preparing the digital recording devices. The interview process and time were defined by the participants' elaborations or their clarity and precision. After each interview, I thanked the participant for volunteering and told them the transcribed interview would be emailed to them for their review, questions, or concerns. Some of the participants brought artifacts with them, and others emailed documents after the interview.

The interviews were recorded using a mini iPad and an Olympus WS852 digital voice recorder. I emailed the voice recorded interviews to the transcriptionist who signed a

confidentiality agreement. The transcriptionist emailed to me the audio recordings and the transcribed interviews. There were no variations in the data collection process, as described in Chapter 3 or unusual circumstances encountered in data collection. The digital recordings were clear and matched the transcribed interviews word for word.

Data Analysis

I chose inductive thematic analysis, which aligns with the methodology of a constructivist and contributes to how the process is iterated, collected, and analyzed together at the same time. I used the Braun and Clarke (2006) model of thematic analysis to identify repeated patterns of meaning and structure the data set. I listened to the audio recordings of each participant and reflected on their voices, nuances, and words. I wrote down thoughts and noted overall topics and ideas that I had when I heard their voices. Next, I compared each transcribed interview with the voice recordings. I also created a matrix of the conceptual framework to further understand the relationship between the conceptual framework, interviews, and the data analysis process.

I uploaded the interviews into Dedoose, a qualitative analysis online program that is login protected and on secure servers. I began to structure the data starting with the first interview using a paragraph and identifying phrases of words. Dedoose is a new tool, and I used their resources to serve in the structuring of codes that were relevant to me. I outlined each transcript under Research Questions 1 and 2. Furthermore, I also noted each interview question and the type of participant interviewed during my initial coding. The participant type is relevant because of the way the participants serve the students and work at the school. The interview questions directly related to the conceptual framework and each research question.

I was interested in the teachers' experiences and perceptions of working with students who were autistic and had learning challenges. The alignment with the conceptual framework determined the interview questions and analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns and themes within the data making it flexible within the diversity of educational research. I followed the example of the 6-step framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). After structuring the data sets using the interview questions, I realized this approach was a summary of the data. I began to read the transcripts and listen to the voices of the interviewees, jotting down my impressions and memoing what I was thinking and what was I was experiencing. These background notes provided further ideas about my initial codes. I also wanted to take down notes concerning my initial topics in my proposal, which guided the literature review on the subject of educating students with intellectual disabilities and autism.

I had initial ideas about codes after becoming familiar with the data. I used inductive thematic analysis, going paragraph by paragraph, developing and modifying the codes during the coding process. After the initial process, I began to bring the multi-dimensional facets together: the participants' voice, beliefs, values, attitudes, and judgments creating the codes and categories and reconsidering the research questions and the inter-relationships with the conceptual framework.

The participants' profiles and significant codes from the transcribed interviews are summarized below. The participants were given a pseudonym, the letter P, and a numerical identifier (1-9) for confidentiality purposes. At the time of the interviews, I informed the participants that their identity would remain confidential.

P1

P1 is an adult female who serves as a paraprofessional or a teaching aid for Tier 2 students. During the interview, P1 stated she worked for two years at this school and is a recent graduate with a bachelor's degree in education. P1 often spoke on her beliefs of how the school provides the personal, academic, and spiritual foundation for the students. She emphasized the need for differentiation and positive verbal praise. P1 broke down her students' ages, academic levels, and social-emotional learning and how the groups are formed to accommodate the students' individual needs. When I asked her, what are some of the main work or study skills you want your students to have, she stated, "To become independent, that is my biggest one."

The significant codes created from this interview included: Beliefs about work, motivation to teach, differentiation and support, verbal praise, academic level, social skills, communication, application of real-life skills, social interactions, routines, structure, and become independent. P1 affirmed her experiences working with autistic and intellectually challenged students at this innovative program. P1 perceives the greatest need for these students is to use what they learn at school and apply it at home and in the community.

P2

P2 is an adult female who works with non-verbal students who also have difficulty with small motor skills. P2 has ten years of prior experience working with special needs students as a teacher. She has worked at this program for one year as a paraprofessional with Tier 3 students. P2 identified her beliefs of working at this program, "I will need to state that I did not choose, I was chosen. It was a privilege to come to this side of the world."

P2 had a key chain with pictures or symbols on cards. She explained the cards are used to show the students what she wants them to do, especially when diffusing emotional behaviors. P2 stated communication is difficult, so many students have tablets:

They can't communicate verbally, or they can't read, but they can use their device. We have one who loves popcorn, and so when it is snack time, he knows how to open up his device and ring the popcorn bell.

P2 conveyed she is observant and compassionate, which has resulted in being an effective team player with the non-verbal students. P2 stated that the students she works with may not have a career but will learn how to communicate with their assistive devices. The significant codes created from this interview are effective social skills, focus on the positive, verbal praise, effective communication, social skills, non-verbal, compassion, observant, becoming independent, using technology to communicate, and direct instruction.

P3

P3 is an adult female with seven years of experience with the sheriff's department, seven years of home-schooling her son, and two years at the TP school as a paraprofessional. She chose to work at this school to have a better understanding of the growing population of children with autism. She believes the best way to support these learners is by identifying their strengths and building on them. She emphasized the best processes Tier 3 students respond to are: repetition, one-on-one interactions, and using visual aids.

P3 shared as a police officer, she saw the fear in families, not being able to communicate with their child and the disturbances this caused. P3 affirms, "Hey, we have options. There are options out there. So, that's why I am here." P3 expressed the challenges she experiences

working with these children who are non-verbal and have poor fine motor skills. However, placing demands or high expectations and praising them for their accomplishments work with social skills and daily life skills. The significant codes created from this interview are they are teachable, repetition, visual aids, Tier 3, living skills, social interactions, nonverbal, independent, homelife, parent communication, positive praise, and hands-on-activities. P3 said her experience working with these children is to develop work skills related to life skills.

P4

P4 is an adult male teacher at the TP school who works with higher functioning (Tier 1 and Tier 2) students who want to learn, are good at math, but have a hard time with social-emotional communication. He worked in public education as a special education teacher for four years, as a physical education teacher for ten years, and has been at the TP school going into his second year. P4 affirmed that his passion for working with special needs children started in childhood when he had a heart for these children. He involved himself in Special Olympics as he was an athlete.

When I asked why he chose to work in this program, he responded, “Actually there’s a number of reasons. I have a 13-year-old son with autism. God gave me the gift of a son, knowing I had a heart and the experience of working with children with special needs.” He also stated that the school is faith-based, and his son attends the school. P4 expressed his experiences with passion working in this innovative program on ways that support these learners, their strengths and weaknesses, and the kind of social interactions that support their learning.

P4 believes that parents, teachers, and the community are too quick to assume that special needs people cannot do for themselves. He stated that we do not allow them to do for themselves

because we helped so much when they were little. The significant codes created from this interview are have a heart, all-hands-on-deck, Tier 1 and Tier 2, consistency and structure, campus jobs, career jobs, want to be normal, transitions, real-world situations, higher functioning, non-stop praise, communication with parents, communication skills, job skills, money management, and don't enable them, challenge them.

P5

P5 is an adult female teacher who has worked at the program for a year and a half. She has a bachelor's degree in special education. P5's educational foundation is in elementary education: building reading skills and number sense. She utilizes the foundational skills working with middle and high schoolers who lack the basic skills. The students in her class are mostly high schoolers. P5 expressed her experiences of being an advocate for the students and their families. She stated, "I love being an advocate of finding strengths in the students and finding jobs they can do on campus or in the community and helping build not only the students up but their families, I really love that."

P5 asserted the importance of a laboratory school, which helps to develop work and study skills:

> The students have the resources of the school, and they get to utilize the resources of the college. The college is a safe place for the students where they get to practice within the university community. They deliver newspapers, they recycle for the professors, and they clean the café.

P5 conveyed her beliefs and experiences working with autistic and intellectually challenged students with an understanding of pedagogy and the interactions that take place

during learning. The significant codes created from this interview were: knowing your students, role-playing, verbalize my thinking, assessments, inventories, stamina, student-led instruction, independent functioning skills, foundational skills, verbal prompts, visual prompts, specific verbal praise, and genuine interactions.

P6

P6 is an adult male who has a BS in psychology, and a Master's in special education. He has experience working as a behavioral assistant at a school, a behavioral analyst, and a teacher for special needs children. He has worked at the TP school for two and a half years with the Tier 3 students. P6 stated he likes working with "kids that need a little bit more help than other kids." P6 added,

> This population is not necessarily wanted at times by some teachers. It is very difficult, physically exhausting, mentally exhausting, but I feel fulfilled being able to reach these kids and trying to figure out what they can learn.

P6 works with eight students who have different learning styles. P6 emphasized direct instruction and repetitive drills to support these learners. The students in his class have a deficit in communication, and one-on-one interactions are the most effective ways to support these learners who often are like toddlers mentally. P6 shared his perceptions transparently and authentically. He spoke honestly about the difficulties working with students who are in their teens but have severe deficits in their cognitive and social-emotional learning.

When asked what educational activities develop socialization, he said that he could not take his students out into the university campus because of the problematic behaviors. He created

social stories to use in his instruction. I asked if P6 could explain what a social story is, and he stated,

> A social story is primarily used with kids who have autism to describe a situation they may be in, like the one they were going to be in, they were going to the campus school store. I introduce the story… When I go to the store, I see these different things, kids like candy, toys, drinks, things like that. So, then I present the rules of going out into the social setting. We cannot grab things; we cannot take things.

P6 sends his social stories to the parents so they can practice. The significant codes created from this interview are assessments, direct instruction, repetitive drills, social stories, one-on-one, verbal praise, token reinforcement system, aggression, inappropriate, hormonal, academic goals, communication goals, lack of communication skills, abstract concepts, concrete concepts, faith-based university, and consistency.

P7

P7 is an adult female who is an administrator at the TP school. She has her master degree in special education and taught for twenty-seven years in the special education classroom. She was the assistant principal for one year, and this is her second year as an administrator at this school. P7 grew up with a sibling who had a learning disability, which gave her the heart for people with disabilities. She reiterated the best practices supporting these learners are visuals cues and step-by-step instructions. P7 stated the school focuses on the positives of students and instructors use a lot of verbal praise. She expressed the programs offer campus jobs that support work skills. The socialization extends into better communication skills that autistic students lack.

When I asked what her perceptions were on what is her greatest influence or how does she help students, P7 said, “I am in the classroom daily. I help coach the teachers and help them refine what they are doing based on my experiences. And then I am also building relationships and helping them out as well.” P7 stated the work skills the students need are communication skills and working independently. The students also have to be able to be independent enough to navigate the campus by themselves. The significant codes created from this interview are step-by-step instructions, work by doing it, instead of seeing it, building relationships, social skills, independent functioning skills, peer to peer interactions, post-secondary transition program, and motivation.

P8

P8 is an adult male who is an administrator at the TP school. He worked as an educator for twenty-one years and began his career as a special education teacher for six years. He feels very fulfilled meeting the needs of children and their families, and building a school, faculty, and staff. P8 thrives on supporting the mission of the TP school through a holistic approach-academic and spiritual life of the student. P8 has a BS, a Master's degree, and a doctorate in education. He sees each child as having gifts and talents. He shared the structure of the school, which has five different classrooms with a range of students who are nonverbal to students who are working on their HS diploma. As the principal, he leads the whole school, building relationships and trust that extends to the entire school community, parents, and families.

When I asked what the main work skills or study skills that you want your students to have, P8 stated,

> Every child is different. I think about the children that are less able… and others who will earn their high school diploma and so the range is enormous. In the end, what is it that the parents are looking for, what is it? What is it that every parent is looking for?

The significant codes created from this interview are vocational needs, encouragement, knowing right from wrong, getting along in society, role play, socialization, daily living skills, faith-based integrated program, achievement levels, building trust, positive reinforcement, integrating college students, the range is enormous, and what the parents are looking for.

P9

P9 is an adult female with a total of 21 years in education. She has been in higher education for nine years. She shared her experiences on how the concept of the TP school began. A friend asked for help from her autistic son, who was getting ready to enter the middle school and did not know where she would send him to school. P9 said that instead of finding a school for the boy, they would create one. “If it benefits one family, there would be more families in the same situation.” When I asked about her experiences on what kinds of interactions are most effective for these learners, she articulated,

> Kinesthetic. To me, most of the time, students with intellectual disabilities or more extreme autism have a hard time grasping or accessing language, but they can physically represent what they need to show you. That’s why behaviors are such a manifestation of what their needs are.

P9 expressed similar experiences as the teachers and paraprofessionals on strategic lessons, differentiation, individualization, social-emotional skills, and daily life skills that are incorporated throughout the daily routines. P9 delved into students' self-care and how the school

provides training and toiletries for their independent life skills. P9 noted that the TP is bridging a gap between home and school because academics are important, but life skills are an integral part of the learning for autistic students. Furthermore, she described the process of creating the IEP (individual education plan) as lengthy and schedules the meeting for a whole day. The parents do not feel rushed and can completely understand the goals for their child.

P9 conveyed that as a result of this program, the benefits and blessings have multiplied. Now, many companies and small businesses are hiring people with cognitive disabilities because of the partnerships they have established because of the TP school. She also provided an in-depth dialogue on the interaction between the campus community, colleges, and the positive culture that was created as a result of the TP school. The significant codes created from this interview are understanding the intractability between multiple diagnosis, repetition in teaching, kinesthetic, strategic lesson plans, cooperative learning, feeling physically safe, thriving, positive interactions, embedded job skills, school curriculum, living skills, self-care skills, bridging the gap, performance levels, college excitement, and positive culture.

Data Structuring

Exploring Dedoose, a web-based program for data analysis, gave me the supports I needed to begin my analysis. After signing up, I watched every tutorial in the resources toolkit and took a webinar. There is an example of a project that I also checked out, but the researchers used surveys, and I could not relate their example to my research interviews. I created my project, labeled Ruiz Dissertation, and then downloaded all nine of the transcribed interviews.

I opened the first interview P1 and looked at the research question and the interview question, hoping to gain insight into what I would do next. I went line by line, thinking about

what I was seeing and what to use as a contextual phrase of meaning. I did this for a month until I had coded through the interview P6. I listened to the audio recordings, while I coded for meaningful phrases and highlighted excerpts. Also, I memoed my thoughts that came to mind, rethinking about the individual participant.

I did not like the disarray of words, not knowing where this was leading me. I felt extremely overwhelmed and thought if I go back and restructure using a numerical value to each paragraph, I would not be drowning in an ocean full of words. I started this new structuring and realized that the words, the codes, the phrases of meaning, the paragraphs, the interviews were not going to change. Going back and putting a numerical code on the paragraphs was useless for my research. However, I dove deeper into each interview as I reread and numbered the paragraphs. During my initial coding, I created over 501 codes of 706 excerpts. The initial codes were the primary source for the next stage of data analysis.

At that time, I began to fill out the data summary tables, as I was coding and journaling on each transcript, and how the categories aligned with the conceptual framework. There were many things to consider. For example, the segment of words and their meaning, the research questions, my thoughts, the conceptual framework, and the reduction of grouping and regrouping the data went into the analysis process. The next step entailed going back through the interviews, my memos, and the data - while interpreting and reflecting on their meaning. First, thinking about the purpose of my study. Secondly, thinking about the conceptual framework, “how are the participants experiencing and understanding themselves, the work, and their students?” The patterns and regularity of words became categories and are representative of the design and methodology of this research. The review of the transcripts produced three significant

categories: Beliefs (Table 2), Classroom Topics (Table 3), and Program Characteristics (Table 4).

Beliefs

I coded 169 excerpts in Dedoose on the educators' beliefs about their perceptions and experiences working at this innovative transitional education school for the autistic and cognitively challenged student. I grouped the 169 initial codes into six belief categories: learning and teaching, students' greatest needs, teachers' perceptions about their teaching, the motive for working with these students, challenges' students' face, and beliefs about learning. The initial categories were compacted into three patterns: teacher motive, beliefs about learning, and beliefs about student development. Table 2 presents the initial categories, patterns, topics, themes, and conclusions on beliefs.

The participants had individual perceptions and experiences working with autistic and intellectually disabled students at this innovative school. The participants' beliefs included teacher influences, teacher motivation, effective social interactions, genuine interactions, learning processes, the best ways to support learners, and the beliefs and understanding of the students' learning development, both social and academic.

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Table 2

Beliefs

Initial categories 169	Patterns	Topics	Themes	Conclusion
Faith-based university Connection with program Knowing their students' capabilities Understanding students' abilities School enthusiasm	Teacher motive/self-efficacy	Highly motivated Bandura	Participants believed in their ability to support the students to their highest potential.	Ability to support students at their highest level of designation.
To be independent In society Social skills Communication Job skills Realization - the true meaning of things They don't grasp the current time and real life	Beliefs about learning	Effective communication Independence Social Cultural Learning	Participants understand what it takes to support the students to their highest potential.	When faced with new learning activities, special needs students can develop new skills.
Knowing their students' capabilities Understanding students' abilities Effective interactions- Finding students niches and successes Making them aware of their talents Time, love and affection Self-help skills	Beliefs about student development	Self-efficacy Bandura Social-cultural learning	Low self-efficacy examples	

Classroom Topics

The second category, Classroom Topics identified in Table 3, initially produced 319 codes and similarly overlapped in the other categories. I sorted the 319 codes and produced the

following categories: classroom development of work/study skills, classroom-effective interactions, classroom-effective social interaction, classroom interactions, types of encouragement: verbal praise, classroom-learning processes, and responses, classroom-main work/study skills, classroom-teach productive encouragement, classroom: academic skill requirement, classroom technology, students greatest need to achieve: put technology away, go for a walk, classroom social interactions, and program and laboratory school at university. Several of the categories sorted for Classroom Topics collapsed into one, and if the descriptors were too broad, they were subdivided into two. These categories represent the genuine responses to the interview questions from the nine participants and offered their beliefs and experiences working at the TP school.

I coded 319 excerpts in Dedoose on the educators' perceptions and experiences working in the classroom with their students who have many challenges. The 319 codes were originally grouped in 18 classroom categories: technology tools, effective interactions, learning processes and interactions, main work or study skills, academic challenges, best ways to support these students, types of encouragement, students greatest needs, effective social interactions, productive encouragement, academic skill requirement, authentic activities reading, concrete schedule/routine, social interactions, social skills activities, and activities for Tier 3. The initial categories were compacted into eight patterns: learning processes, classroom development of work/study skills, academic skill level, academic skills vs. social-emotional skills, tools for communication, effective interactions, classroom interactions, and social skills activities. Table 3 presents the initial categories, patterns, topics, themes, and conclusions on the classroom topic.

Table 3

Classroom Topic

Initial categories 319	Patterns (5-6)	Topic	Theme	Conclusion statement
One-on-one: Learning process is slow Repetition, repetition Authentic learning Direct instruction Differentiated instruction model	Learning processes	Individualize the learning experiences	Interact individually as much as possible	For these students to be successful in their tier, they need as much individual interaction as possible.
Gifts and talents Love learning but struggle with abstract			Differentiation	
Communication: Ability to express or communicate without emotions, use devices to communicate, struggle with social skills, Hits himself to communicate Positive reinforcement		Vygotsky developmental theory		
Career skills: apply for a job, Understand the concept of being dependable, Activities associated with transition, money management, success, making goals, thinking about thinking, stamina Communicate Physical skills: labor type, restaurant, construction	Classroom Development of work/study skills	Linking classroom activities to real-life experiences	Making learning as concrete as possible.	The concepts that support individual needs for autonomy.
Florida does not have a large workforce for these people Life skills: laundry, tie shoes, open the envelope, cleaning, communicate Self-care: grooming being able to use the bathroom College students help in PE: course requirement		Experiential	Differentiation	

1st-2nd grade level, 3rd-4th grade level, Tier 1 explanation Tier 1 & Tier 2, tier 3	Academic skill levels	Differentiated instruction	Make learning goals match the student's skill level.	Specialization in the development of a new curricular design.
Higher functioning social Cannot read but understand when they are read to.		Zone of proximal development	Differentiation	

Fine motor skills: writing greeting cards				
Like K-1st grade				
Tier 3- emotionally like toddlers				
Academic vs. social Are different	Academic skills vs Social emotional skills	Individualization	Holistic approach in teaching students with autism.	
Academic vs. social Both important				
Academic vs. social interacting w/them		Vygotsky sociocultural learning	Differentiation	
Academic vs. social Social skills are higher				
SmartBoard	Tools for communication	Differentiated	Infused technology	
iPad				
Games				
Puzzles			Differentiation	
Picture cards				
Story boards (PPT)				

Praise and recognition: see it in their body language, student hug, High 5,	Effective	Social learning	Social development is an integral part of learning.	
Focus on positives, Reinforce positive behaviors', grading	Interactions	Social Interactions		
Genuine interaction: one-on-one Groups of 2-3, play social games		Zone of Proximity	Differentiation	
Practice taking turns and making choices, Talk about this during prayer time				
Kinesthetic		Vygotsky's Dialectal Model		
The human brain thrives on discipline over chaos				
Rigorous schedule				
Initial Categories	Patterns	Topics	Themes	Conclusion
Verbal praise	Classroom interactions	Types of encouragement	The types of inseparable interactions mind and activities, visual representations, and verbal praise create pathways of new meaning.	For these students to be successful in their tier, they need as much positive interaction as possible.
Extrinsic reward systems				
Rewards-sensory room		Tools used for interactions		
Classroom routine: setting boundaries				
Picture cards Story framework		Socio-cultural learning theory	Differentiation	

Interactions: with college students, with peers Safe and positive class			
Job Skill: library cooking and cleaning, laundry, recycling, shredding Social Skill: morning greetings, self-care skills, campus field trips, eating at the Café with college students, going to chapel weekly, campus college store Activities for Tier 3: picture cards	Social skills activities	Experiential Relating to real world Human learning is shaped through these dynamics	Giving the child a sense of self-worth and accomplishment Differentiation

Program Characteristics

The third category, Program Characteristics included in Table 4, produced 159 units of information that overlapped with the interviewees' perceptions and experiences about classroom development. The 159 codes were reread and reconsidered in newly revised categories: program: laboratory school at university, program: reason why they work in program, program: important transitional skills, program: parent outreach, program: safe classroom, program: skill development, program: support of career skills, program study/work skill, program: outcomes, and program tiers explained.

I coded 159 excerpts in Dedoose on the educators' perceptions and experiences about this program, an innovative transitional school for children ages 12 through 21 who have autism and other cognitive challenges. Appendix B lists the initial codes for Table 4. The original group of 159 codes produced 16 program categories: laboratory school at a university, reasons why they work at the school, parent outreach, transition skills, important transition skills, skills development, TP support of career skills, Tier 3, development of work/study skills, greatest need, outcomes, special education, and self-contained classrooms. The initial categories scaled down to into eight patterns: laboratory school, support of work and study skills, support of social-

emotional skills and holistic approach, support of career skills, support of educational and developmental levels (Tier 1, 2, 3), development of work/study skills, students greatest need, and social and academic goals. Table 4 presents the initial categories, patterns, topics, themes, and conclusions on the program.

Table 4

Program Characteristics

Initial categories 159	Patterns	Topic	Theme	Conclusion
Get to practice in a small community Laboratory school Level of the class depends on vocational skills Living skills Supported in the classroom: Tier relative TP has campus jobs TP has career class TP has a social skills class	Laboratory school	Program design: Link transition program to the community Experiential	The program designed to include the partnership of the University, the community, business outreach and parents	The design of the program pushed a collaboration among the greater community, including the university, outreach to parents, and the business community.
Getting around the community Effective social interactions for transitioning Transition to post-school life Learning empathy Have conversation Being without problematic behaviors Collaborate with parents Asking for help	Support for work skills study skills	Support students to become independent Independence gives the student a sense of freedom Parents have less stress	Community awareness on the abilities of students with autism	Research and partnership with all disciplines
Hard work earns an HS diploma High expectations, many demands, show them, then let them do it Setting boundaries and building a process Developing work skills	Support for social-emotional skills and holistic approach	Fill a need to support these students	Foundation of universal design of learning	The institution of education can implement specialized schools.

Direct instruction and social stories Hands-on activities Individualized classrooms Specific praise PT does not except children in Diapers		Self-efficacy		
Program supports independence Programs support for developing work/study skills, recycling program at School and on campus Programs support for transition: many resources, Get to utilize college resources TP community jobs and careers College is a safe place to be Campus job at Chic Filet Custodial	Support for career skills	Tier 1, 2, 3	The need for specialized schools exists.	New design school models

TP transitions to LINK program Technology, Shark Tank, Undercover Boss	Support for educational and developmental levels	Tier 1	Links to post education and credit certifications towards career	
Daily living skills are supported Tier 2 and 3 - academic challenges Tier 2 and 3 life skill Independence	Independence and supervised employment	Tier 2 and 3		
Tier 3 participate in assisted living	Talents and	Tier 3		

Tier 3 adaptive PE, college students help	gifts	
Tier 3 socially invisible to each other		
Tier 3 Will is not able to hold a job		
Tier 3 main work skill: Communicate nonverbal-picture cards, iPad		
Tier 3 developing work skills: holding a crayon in their hands to trace-model, guide, practice		
Concrete schedule	Development of work/study skills:	Outcomes
Routine for groups		
Structure		
Apply information to the real world	Greatest needs-	Outcome
Generalize learning in all areas of life		
Independent at home, school, work		
Use information		
Doing inventory assessments	Social and academic goals	Outcomes
Getting them to behave better		
Knowing our kids and their needs		
Meeting education goals		

Review of Documents

I was provided with documents and analyzed the 2018-2019 Parent and Student Handbook, and the 5-year strategic plan to understand the program design. P4 provided lesson plans, P5 provided social stories, and P2 provided Peck cards. I conducted a content analysis of the documents listed above.

The purpose of this systematic method was to apply the same action on the documents as I performed on the transcripts. I reflected on the roles, relationships, and routines to look for similarities and differences that would separate the codes into categories that supported my conceptual framework. The identifiable codes that represented each merged into the following notable categories: mission, vision, statement of beliefs, roles, individualization, life skills, communication, beliefs, technology, and assessment. The categories were evaluated and aligned with the study's intent. Co-occurrences analysis and comparison analysis demonstrated the findings were relevant to the three major themes beliefs, classroom, and program.

The result of this study included themes relevant to how the educators perceived and experienced working in an innovative transitional program for autistic and intellectually disabled students and answered the research questions. The theme, Beliefs, offered insight into the teachers' self-efficacy and beliefs on how to implement a holistic instructional approach when thinking about the individual child. The theme, Classroom Topics, offered an outline of the activities associated with social-cultural learning theory based on the concept; Learning is shaped by dynamic interdependence of social activities and individual processes. Likewise, the theme Program Characteristics provided evidence that supports experiential learning theory. The themes describe the participants' perceptions and experiences and answered the research questions.

The data collection and data analysis process were lengthy but thorough. Overall, there were no discrepant issues related to the data. The interview process provided me with insight into the educators' compassion and professional expertise working with autistic and IDD students. There were no problems with the timing of interviews or technology. The audio recordings were

clear and easily transcribed. After reviewing my notes, reflective journal, the transcripts, and the audio recordings, I was able to describe their perceptions in an honest, ethical way. In the same way, the recruitment process was easier than I had anticipated. I appreciated meeting with the enthusiastic participants. They showed a great interest in my study and demonstrated sincerity and a great love for their work at the TP.

Summary

As a result of the thematic inductive analysis, I identified four major themes. The first theme is that the participants felt able to support these learners to their highest developmental potential. The second theme is that the teachers expressed the importance of differentiation of the instructional process to support the learner at their highest developmental potential. The third theme identified is the importance of teaching communication and social skills to these learners. The fourth theme was the specific aspects of this transitional program that supported the development of work skills for these learners.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The data collected from the participants' interviews confirmed their credibility regarding their perspectives and lived experiences. The face-to-face interviews were recorded and transcribed; then, the participants confirmed the transcriptions for accuracy. I used the data collected from the interviews, memoing, and journaling to create the codes, patterns, and themes for the credibility of this study. I used reflexive journaling throughout the study to reduce any bias in my analysis. The collected codes, patterns, categories merged to make up the themes that substantiate the credibility of this study.

The recruitment process initially started by setting up a meeting with administrators to share my study. A recruitment flyer was posted at the school, inviting educators to volunteer. As a result, nine educators emailed me, and the consent form was emailed to each one. A schedule for the interviews was made, and seven of the participants were interviewed in one day; the other two were scheduled for the interview a few days later.

There were no adjustments made to establish credibility from the original design. The methodology was consistent and appropriate. The research questions were well defined, and the interview questions aligned to produce an objective analysis of the data collected. Also, the systematic and comprehensive literature review gave evidence on the discussion and conclusion.

To support transferability in this qualitative study, I aligned my research questions with my conceptual framework. I used nine participants with three distinct roles in the educational program to understand their experiences and perceptions from multiple perspectives (Merriam, 2002). I used Dedoose, the audio recorded interviews, and transcripts to ensure the precision of the data. I followed the processes outlined in Chapter 3 of this study so that the results of this study can be used for further research.

To develop dependability, I used member-checking to ensure the data was accurate. I developed an audit trail that included extensive memoing and documentation of my data collection and analysis. Additionally, I used journaling to make sure the coding, categories, and patterns were chronicled as a part of my thinking and rationale for the decisions made during this study. As an aspect of confirmability, I engaged in reflexive journaling throughout the study to reduce my bias. I memoed throughout the study and included member-checking to ensure that the participants' responses were accurately represented.

Results

The research questions were What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students? And What are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students? The purpose of this study generic qualitative study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional secondary education program designed to prepare students who have intellectual disabilities and autism to be successful in college or the workplace. In this study, I focused on understanding the perceptions and experiences of educators working with autistic and intellectually challenged students who attend an innovative transitional educational program designed around experiential and social learning concepts.

As a result of the thematic inductive analysis, I identified four major themes. The first theme is that the participants felt able to support these learners to their highest developmental potential. This theme is responsive to the research question What are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

The second, third and fourth themes are responses to the research question What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students? The second theme is that the teachers expressed the importance of differentiation of the instructional process to support the learner at their highest developmental potential. The third theme identified is the importance of

teaching social skills to these learners. The fourth theme identified was the integration of the transitional educational program with the community.

Theme 1: Beliefs About Teaching and Learning

The first theme is that the participants felt able to support these learners to their highest developmental potential. The first theme is that the participants felt able to support these learners to their highest developmental potential. This theme is responsive to the research question What are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

The three major aspects of their beliefs are: understanding their influence on their learners' development, understanding their ability to develop the learner's highest potential in their Tier, and understanding their motivation for working with these students. Participants believed in their ability to support the students to their highest potential. I coded 71 statements of positive beliefs about these learners' potential from all participants. I asked P1 what do you perceive to be the greatest influence of your work in this program P1 answered,

> I feel a sense of responsibility when I walk into that classroom. I feel thankful and blessed, and sometimes I think to myself, "I can't believe these lives are in my hands! And I can't believe I'm making a difference in their lives." I can't believe I get the opportunity to teach them. I go home and think about how in the world do I get to do this. Why me? I don't take that lightly. I take that responsibility really seriously because I've always wanted to teach. When I was in high school is when I knew I wanted to do special education, but I never knew it would look like this. I didn't know that self-contained classrooms existed. I didn't know that this was a thing. So definitely blessed, I would say.

> I am so blessed and thankful that I get to teach these students and help these students and that I get to walk into that room and teach them something. It's a huge responsibility to think that when they graduate from high school, they are going to walk into the real world and whatever I taught them and whatever we learned in our classroom they are going to bring into the real world. So, it's a huge responsibility, definitely.

In response to his feelings about teaching in the school, P3 shared, "That's a tough one because they're all so individual, as a whole I think the one thing we need to do is identify their strengths and be able to build on them because their weaknesses are usually very obvious." P5 also believed,

> I love it here, number one. I really enjoy the students. My educational background is primarily elementary, so I had a lot of foundational skills. Foundational number sense, building reading, and writing, things like that. I loved coming to middle and high school because I was able to find the foundational skills that they were missing and build that foundation because all knowledge is built on background knowledge. So, I really enjoy using what I know to help these students. So that's one of the things that I love. And I also love the real-world application that we have. They have so many living skills and job skills and things like that. That's what I love about it.

P4 noted, "They want to learn. They love learning." Then he explained,

> I really went into that classroom and really didn't want to treat them or treat them as having special needs. So, I gave them consistency; I gave them a structure. I gave them, it was not going to be easy, so I gave them some rigorous schedule involved. So, they like structure. They like consistency. So, you definitely need to have a schedule, and you need

> to follow that schedule. Definitely gonna have success in structure, schedule, discipline, consistency, definitely in that area… It just has to do with the human brain or emotions. We like discipline. We like structure. We may vent and verbally say we don't like being told what to do, but we really do. We may vent at the stoplight when we approach it, but we really do enjoy that stoplight; otherwise, you would have chaos at an intersection. So, I just think that God naturally made us to, our brains, to thrive on structure, discipline, and consistency. That's my statement on that.

All the participants except P6 felt that they were able to support these special needs learners. Participant 6 described the students' ability in the classroom. He said,

> Most of the kids in my classroom are nonverbal. The ones that are verbal are a little more difficult to understand. They're also a lower functioning classroom, and so a lot of the kids in the classroom are focusing on life skills rather than high academics. Although we do academics in the classroom as well.

P6 described his emotional difficulties working with these students:

> I like to work with kids that need a little bit more help than other kids. I think this is a population that is not necessarily wanted at times by some teachers. It is very difficult, physically exhausting, mentally exhausting, but I feel very fulfilled being able to reach these kids and trying to figure out what they can learn.

P6 described the difficulty of individualization in his classroom:

> Each kid is different. You need to be able to teach them the way that they learn in order to do that; you need to conduct proper assessments. Data, constantly evaluating, constantly just, you've gotta stay on your toes and change things, I've only got eight kids

> in my room, but every kid learns completely differently. So, like my lesson plan that I gave you, I don't get in-depth about how we teach every single kid, but like, every kid is so different, and each level is so different. So, you have to be able to adapt. That's just basically a skeleton of what we do.

The teachers believe they can support these learners to their highest potential except participant 6. Working within the Tier 3 class of nonverbal students is challenging physically and mentally.

Tiers

There is a range in the abilities and characteristics of children with autism spectrum disorders. The Organization for Autism Research discusses RTI or response to intervention, which organizes instructional needs by Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 (Organization for Autism Research, 2015). RTI was developed in response to the over-identification of students for special education. RTI is a three-tiered framework and lists the tiers as Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 (2015). Tier 1 learners are taught using a traditional curriculum, including some direct instruction and differentiation. Tier 2 learners are taught using small group interventions to develop the skills or knowledge they lack on the standardized test. Tier 3 learners receive intensive individual interventions.

These participants considered the developmental needs of the Tiers classification to guide them in their expectations for the learners and themselves. All the Tiers work on communication skills, social-emotional skills, and academic skills. Tier 1 students will most likely graduate and become employed and may transition into the Links program for post-secondary training and certification.

They will also focus on career skills. Tier 2 students will work on communication skills, academic skills, and social-emotional skills while developing the transitional skills necessary to become autonomous and working towards the Links transitions or work-related skills. The focus of Tier 3 students is to help them develop life skills, communication, and self-help skills. The future for these students as adults must not be forgotten because they will need to learn how to live without their parents. The participants described tier 1-3 throughout the interviews. Included in the table of demographics are Tier levels of classroom group for each participant. Interview excerpts are included in the following grouping of Tiers.

Tier 1

Participant 4, a teacher whose students are ages 12- 22, stated that treating each student as normally as possible is meaningful for his population of students. He described what works best for them:

> Realization for them to realize the true meaning of things. They, again, they have a difficulty of grasping and understanding the true basis of things. So, their need is just again understanding and understanding things. They also have great needs in, again, all the kids are at such different levels and different classrooms, unfortunately when I speak, I'm speaking of my 12 students in my classroom and not… then again, that's where I'm at, my students' needs are them really understanding what it would take to get a high school diploma. What will it take to get a job? What will it take to get your own place to live? What will it take to get your own car? What will it take to go to college? What will it take to walk into Publics and buy a gallon of milk and a loaf of bread? I don't think they truly grasp and understand that at their current time of real-world situations.

> Unfortunately, children today, not just children with special needs, are all in that category, I would say. Because they're just understanding the true grasp of reality. I do struggle in the classroom of them understanding that.

P4 works with the students who can transition into the next phase of their lives. The teacher believes that treating them as normally as possible helps them to understand the realization of life goals.

Tier 2

P5 acknowledged the importance of thinking out loud and recognizing the importance of teaching students that making mistakes is a part of the learning cycle:

> These students are learning how to think themselves. When you're a child, and you get mad, you have a temper tantrum, right? Well, when you get older, you learn, momma told me not to have a temper tantrum like that. I have to use my nice words and not get a punishment or whatever. A lot of these students, because of their delay, they are still formulating their thinking. So, when I make a mistake, I'll stop the whole class, and we'll talk about it. I made a mistake, friends. I accidentally spelled a word this way, or I accidentally said this, and this is not what's on the schedule. Is that okay? What should I do? Should I freak out? Should I lay on the floor and scream? And they are like, "No, you should move on because everyone makes mistakes. And everyone learns." And I'm like, "YES! You're right."

Teaching these students is challenging because it requires educators who provide explicit instruction using cognitive strategies to promote depth of understanding. This excerpt provides an interesting concept of how thinking about learning is taught at every level. The teacher

believes that they can learn by self-beliefs.

Tier 3

The most challenging to teach are Tier 3. Participant 6 explained how his teaching influenced the students. In contrast with the other teachers, he mentioned needing the expertise of a board-certified behavior analyst. He has eight students and two paraprofessionals; the three of them must stay alert to the children's emotional developments:

> We try to… when these kids come in, they are given plans as to academic communication, speech goals, and we try to meet those goals throughout the year. We try to manage the problematic behaviors using our board-certified behavior analyst on board, and I also have years of experience doing that as well. So, we're trying to, one of my jobs, a lot of my kids, they are not going to take large steps, and they are not going to grow a ton academically unless we could push them one-on-one all the time, which unfortunately we cannot do. So, my goal, I would like these kids to get better behaviorally so that their teacher next year or the year after or year after can push them to meet those other goals.

After reviewing the transcripts, and listening to P6, the reality of meeting these students at their developmental stages is complexed because of their intellectual shortcomings. This educator also indicated the students would have a different teacher in the upcoming year. In this way, his belief about teaching these kids was different than the other teachers.

Motivation

These educators described varied forms of motivation to work in this program that related to their roles in the educational program. I coded 102 excerpts where these participants described

their motivation to teach ID learners. Administrators saw the opportunity to impact the larger educational community by making a difference in the lives of students with disabilities and their families. P9, the creator of this school, said she wanted to help a friend who was not happy with the public-school options for her autistic son. P7's brother had a learning disability, and she majored in education at college with an emphasis in special education.

P7 said, "so growing up, I was always, as the older child, I had to help him with his homework, and that kind of gave me a heart for people with disabilities." P7 also stated, "I do want to make a difference and help these students become employed one day and help them become as independent as I can." P8 retired with 21 years in education and began his career as an ESE teacher. P8 said the opportunity presented itself. The motivation to work with special needs students with disabilities is connected with personal and professional goals. P8 stated, "For the last two years, I've been a principal at pathways, and it's been very fulfilling meeting the needs of children with special needs and meeting the needs of families of those children and building a school and faculty and staff that's been wonderful to work with."

Equally important, the administrators all shared their passion for teaching and leading in an environment that supports the well-being of students, the staff, and the community. The paraprofessionals were motivated to improve the lives of the students. P1 said, "They focus on success academically, personally, and spiritual life. I've always wanted to work at a school where they focus on the spiritual life of a student as well as academic and personal life." She also said that she feels welcomed, and the environment is welcoming. P2 said she was chosen to improve the lives of the students through the social skills.

In contrast, P3 said, “My goal was to get a better understanding of the growing population of children with autism.” P3 had worked as a sheriff and said she saw the problems arising with the out-of-control autistic. P3 shared her experiences as,

> These students were often in their homes left in rooms. Not necessarily forget about engaging them in social activities; they were terrorizing their homes; families were afraid of them. And so, when law enforcement came in, we kind of had this mixed thing where how do you treat them because they don’t have the capacity. So, for me, it was a double kind of a thing. I wanted to know the opposite side, and I wanted to be able to go back to families and say, “Hey, we have options. There are options out there.” So, that’s why I am at pathways. This will be my third year now.

The classroom teachers were passionate about their understanding and motivation for working with these students. P5 said, “I love it here, number one. I really enjoy the students.” P4 agreed with P5 as she stated, “Actually, there’s a number of reasons. Personal reasons would be I love working with children with special needs, all needs, not just necessarily autism but any type of needs.” P6 shared his feelings in a different context, “I like to work with kids that need a little bit more help than other kids. I think this is a population that is not necessarily wanted at times by some teachers. It is very difficult, physically exhausting, mentally exhausting, but I feel very fulfilled being able to reach these kids and trying to figure out what they can learn.” P6, in contrast with the other participants, provided a different view of the difficulties working with autistic and IDD students (it is very difficult, physically exhausting, mentally exhausting).

The teachers also shared the same understanding of their motivation to teach these children related to their role as professional educators and their experiences related to their expertise. P4 formulated her perception by saying,

> My educational background is primarily elementary, so I had a lot of foundational skills. Foundational number sense, building reading, and writing, things like that. I loved coming to middle and high school because I was able to find the foundational skills that they were missing and build that foundation because all knowledge is built on background knowledge. So, I really enjoy using what I know to help these students.

P4 stated his commitment to work with special needs students even when he took on the role of PE instructor at a public school before working at the TP. P4 said,

> I had started off in education back in 2002 as an ESE teacher in school. I didn't know what I was getting myself into, but I gave it a whirl, and I actually enjoyed it. During those four years as an ESE teacher, things changed as far as how ESE was going, whether inside the classroom or outside the classroom. So, I did switch over to PE after four years. That was my experience, four years in the ESE classroom. As I worked with PE throughout the year, obviously, I did work with students with special needs in PE as well. Just always had a heart early on in my childhood, it seems. I was surrounded by children with special needs; it seemed. Whether I had a friend who had a cousin with special needs, I always involved myself in special Olympics. I was involved in sports myself. I just always had a big heart for children with special needs.

P4 shared, "Who would have known years later I would have actually had my own son with autism? I have a 13-year-old son with autism. So, God gave me the gift of a son, knowing

that I had a heart and experience working with children with special needs." P4's third reason for working at the TP is that his son attends the school as well. P6 explained his expertise in the field of education saying,

> I've been in the field of working with kids with disabilities for about 12 years. I used to work in similar classrooms in a different role. I graduated with a psychology degree, and you can't really do a whole lot with a psychology degree, so I worked in a similar school back in Pennsylvania as an assistant where I dealt with kid's behaviors. I decided at one point that I wanted to go back to school and got my master's degree in special education and got my certification of teaching. So, officially I've been a teacher for about five years, but I've been doing different things for the past 12 years. Behavior analyst in classrooms when I wasn't teaching, I would kind of teach for a couple of years and then take a break. Well, I didn't take a break but would do something different. Then I am teaching again. But I've always worked around kids with special needs though.

Participant 6 was the only teacher who expressed a need to 'take a break' from teaching special needs learners. P6 works with Tier 3 students, and he stated some differences in these students. "A lot of times, the learning process is very slow. My classroom is different than the other rooms because we do the same thing a lot. Just kind of that repeat drill." Participant 6 told me that they are kind of ready to learn after they get past the hard parts, they are high need, they need one-on-one, they function like 2 to 3 years old, and if they don't want to do something, they will attack you, throw something, or bite you. This teacher said he works for a few years with these students and then takes a break. His interview provided us with a snapshot of some of the difficulties working with these children on Tier 3.

The participants felt able to support these learners to their highest developmental potential and were based on three major aspects of their beliefs: understanding their influence on their learners' development, understanding their ability to develop the learner's highest potential in their Tier, and understanding their motivation for working with these students. The critical aspects of this theme are teachers' beliefs about how they can impact their students' development, their expectations of how to engage the learners based on the tiers, and their motivations for working with special needs students.

Theme 2: Classroom Interactions

The second theme is that a dominant topic for the teachers' interactions in their classroom is based on the individualization of their interactions with the tiered students. This theme is responsive to the research questionWhat are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students? I coded 319 excerpts as their descriptions of their classroom interactions. This is by far the largest theme. The most prevalent topics for these participants was individualization.

Individualization. The program designer formulated her thoughts succinctly on what it takes to work with these students. P9 acknowledged,

> Individualization is first and foremost. Very keen and deep understanding of the diagnoses that come across with these students. Understanding the intractability between multiple diagnoses for some of these students. Understanding how disabilities may manifest. Understanding that anything that we may find socially unacceptable or behaviorally unacceptable may be the only way that some of these students can

> communicate. In the ESE world, we know that behavior is communication because they don't always have access to language. So, understanding that behaviors are communication, behaviors are not a personal attack against you as the educator or you as the authority. They are just a kid to help you understand that they need something. A way for understanding all of that is one of the biggest pieces so that you're not judging. You're not disciplining a kid for trying to express their needs to you. You have to kind of be; you have to be a puzzle maker, someone putting the pieces together and grabbing all the data from what are the diagnoses of this child, and what are the behaviors of this child? What are the typical manifestations of this diagnosis for any child and pulling that all together to see a holistic view of the whole child, not just one or two demonstrations?

P5 explained her understanding of supporting the individualized student needs through the programs student-teacher ratio:

> And as far as academics, we have a very small student to teacher ratio. The largest class we have, I believe, is 12. And that's one teacher and two paras. So, as you can see, that's only 3 to 4 students for every para. And for the higher needs students, we have 6 to 8 students per teacher and 2 to 3 paras. So, we find the need for students, and we give them the support that they need. So, whether it is academics or living skills, we're able to instruct them in a small group setting in an individualized way rather than in a whole group setting. We'll never have 20 to 30 students for a teacher, so we are able to hone in and break students up into small groups, not only in the class but in small groups within the class. They have needs-based groups, and that helps all their skills.

The program also supports individual transitional needs through campus jobs, a career

class, and or social skills. P 4 described the individualization of classes.

> A campus job, for example, would be recycling, so one of the classrooms they have a recycling program. So, whether it be just the school or around campus, they will get to gather plastic bottles or any type of plastic. Also, along that same campus job, they will go over to the Chix Filet dining area where you were at for lunch, they will go over there and clean those tables. There is a classroom that does that. You have other classrooms that are more going to do classroom responsibilities, whether it's cleaning tables, trash cans, depending on the level of the classroom will depend on the vocational skills. My class, which is higher functioning, the problem is at our school campus the things that my students could do are already being done by college students on campus, so there's…

Even the PE program meets the needs of the individual. P4 conveyed that

> If I am out with ten students who can stretch and can listen and who can understand what I'm saying, and I've got four kids who have no clue what I'm saying the coaches, the SEU students can go work with them. We don't have any students that are wheelchair alone or any students who can't walk. So, in my PE class, my goal always is nobody sits. You do something. That doesn't always happen depending on the amount of staff that I have. But that's the goal. You're going to do something that you don't want to do. You're going to be physical today. You're going to go for a walk. Trying to get their mind off of… and this goes back to me being a PE coach if I pull out a football or I pull out a soccer ball. Right off its, I don't want to play football. I don't want to play soccer. We are not going to play football. We are not going to play soccer. We're going to use these tools in our activity today. We don't play actual soccer games.

A critical aspect of individualization of interactions and differentiation of instruction was the Tiered process of identification. These students' curriculum was based on their Tiered classification.

Tier 1. Tier 1 ID learners require the least amount of support and interventions. These participants described the interactions needed to support Tier 1 students. P4, who works with high school students, described the students' strengths in Tier 1 and Tier 2 as wanting to learn and be normal. He also said, "a student can be non-verbal and high-functioning. They are good at math. But their weakness is expressing emotions." Furthermore, on individualization and performance skills P4 attested,

> Again, my students, there's no reason why my students can't learn to do anything physically. My students can physically work. So, they can learn physical skills, whether it be shovel and dirt. They say, "Oh Mr. Gills, this hurts my arms." Or "This hurts my hands." "I'm getting blisters." So, working them through that. But physical skills, labor type skills, cleaning up messes, basic common skills my students would be able to do. They could work in a restaurant; they could work for a construction company. Again, that's not all the kids here at Pathways. They are all different levels at the moment. Skills of understanding how to get a job. Skills of understanding how to maintain a job and not get fired. Skills of money management and learning that you just got paid that you need to start saving some money and not spend it. Well, they have some basic academic skills. My students can pronounce and read words. They have reading skills, read words, not necessarily reading comprehension skills. But they have decoding and pronunciation skills. They have some basic math skills. They have skills as far as physical skills. My

> students are able to do anything I ask them to do, whether it be P.E. or just a certain job or task.
>
> P4 spoke about what type of interactions support the learning.
>
> Modeling is probably going to be the first step here on campus is modeling that type of work skill, whether it's a broom and dustpan or again, just modeling work for them. And then teaching them as you go. I think what happens a lot of the times we skill to the children that make a mess and they are used to someone cleaning it up for them, whether with a wipe or a dishcloth or a broom a mop, they are used to somebody doing it for them. Okay, now I have to model and show them how it's done, and then the next time you can do it. So again, you model it, and then you work with them. Even if you have to hold on to all of their arms and hands with the mop bucket even though you're actually doing it, they are holding it, and they are standing right there. As you mentioned earlier, we would be surprised at the amount of skills that they have, and we're not allowing them to do it.

P4 reported that repetition and consistency when teaching challenging students is a part of the process because of the way they learn. Tier 1 teachers also communicated that when supporting autistic children, it is important to take an "all hands on deck" approach. The parents, teachers, behavioralists, speech pathologists, and the community need to be involved. P4 also stated that individualizing is a part of developing communication. P4 discussed communication,

> Definitely, from grading to having conversations with them working one on one with them really teaches them how to interact with one another and really how to properly have a conversation with another person. If they're not able to create or form those words

> or have that practice, at home, or making meaning. So, what I can do in the classroom is communicate with them.

Tier 2. Tier 2 learners require more supports and interventions. P5 embraced her elementary foundational skills for being an important factor in teaching her Tier 2 group.

> Most of our students are autistic, and we have two Down Syndrome with similar characteristics; they are not your typical down syndrome. A few of them have speech impairments, especially those with autism. So, that's the predominant property. Sure, we are predominantly high school, but we have two or three middle schoolers who just missed that high school mark, but we let them in because of their functioning level. We have to really work on writing down directions and writing down our schedules for the day. Of course, every student is very different, but a common struggle that they have is anything that's not concrete. So, for example, reading comprehension might be a struggle for a student because they have to formulate their own thinking, whereas concrete addition, subtraction, multiplication might be easy for a student because that's something that never changes. Any time that you can make learning concrete for them, they are able to retain it better. So, we do a lot of visual schedules, a lot of modeling, role-playing, and things like that. For example, a lot of these students struggle with social skills and independent functioning skills. Because every time you talk to an individual, you may have it memorized how to introduce yourself to them, but they could say something to throw you off, and then it's no longer your routine. So, anytime you can find a routine or a way to make learning concrete, it helps them. And they all have a different strength. I've seen the best artists. I've seen the best musicians. I've seen the best, whether boys or girls. They all

> have something they are interested in, and if you can hone in on that and let them enjoy that, it makes learning so relevant for them.

P5 not only described how concrete learning, routine, and structure contribute to the learning process but also how teaching, directly and indirectly, is central in helping these students progress. P5 added,

> So, for example, we have a morning meeting and a smartboard. The students are in charge of leading morning meeting. They have a little routine that they do, whether that's cleaning your fingernails for the day, putting on deodorant, they all have little hygiene, and when it's time for school to start, everyone takes turns. They have a little magic wand, and they use it to touch the smartboard. They go through like the calendar, the student news for the day, look at the weather. I have modeled the first quarter of the year how to do that. And then I said one day, "I can't teach this anymore. I need someone to teach it for me." And then I modeled, and then I gave them the opportunity to do it. So, then at the end, they have a little rubric, and they grade each other. And they took control of their learning. And it was really cute in the beginning because they couldn't really do it. They would get nervous and wouldn't know what to say. Or when a slide messed up, they didn't know how to ask for help. But when they actually had to do it, they took control of their learning. So, as a teacher, I verbalize my learning, so when I make a mistake, I talk through what I do to fix it, things like that. And then releasing them to take control of the classroom. So, a lot of student-led rather than teacher-led activity has really helped the students grow in our classroom.

This educator can model and mentor learning in her students as a systematic process, ongoing self-efficacy, and self-regulation through trial and error and persistent.

Tier 3. Tier 3 learners require the highest levels of individualization. P6 works with Tier 3 students who are nonverbal or hard to understand. The students are lower functioning, so his classroom focus for Tier 3 is life skills rather than high academics. P6 stated the most effective way to interact with Tier 3 students is one-on-one. P3 also said, "I would say the most effective is one-on-one." P3 added, "Also, visual aids, it doesn't matter what we are doing if I have visual aids… they are easily distracted. So, one-on-one is the best, but that's hard to do even though we have a small classroom."

P6 said he works with "they call it Tier 1," but he works with the Tier 3 students. "I am an ESE teacher here, and I teach in the, they call it the tier one classroom." He said most of the kids in his classroom are nonverbal. The verbal students are a little more difficult to understand. Most of P6's students are lower functioning and are working on life skills rather than standardized academics.

P2, a paraprofessional, talked about what she does in the classroom. "We use these cards to show them like…Oh, symbols." P3 also talked about the symbol cards and how she uses them with the students. She described the process:

> The process is slow, repetition, repetition, repetition. But usually after multiple repetitions, the process and the progress that we notice is that they are capable of doing it on their own. For instance, with Pecks, we show them the model goes by steps, and so you show them the picture to identify an object and then the picture gets placed in front of them and then they would have to take the picture and put it your hand to say that they

> want that object. You then add more pictures to show that they can identify the picture with the object. So, it is a slow process. However, they all can learn.

P3 clarified how technology is a productive means of interacting with the students in Tier 3 class:

> They are easily distracted. So, one on one is the best, but that's hard to do even though we have a small classroom. I think being productive with them is identifying… for instance, we use the smart board, iPads, a lot of technology is used in our in particular room. Some students have limited fine motor skills, which makes it very difficult for them to use an iPad, but they are great on the smartboard because it's not tiny, and it doesn't require those fine motor definition skills, so that's how we use it.

The second theme is that the teachers expressed the importance of differentiation of the instructional process to support the learner at their highest developmental potential. The teachers make learning goals match the student's skill level. The teachers understand student learning and recognize the developmental level of the individual student. The types of inseparable interactions (mind-cognitive and activities), visual representations, and verbal praise create pathways of new meaning and learning. Individualization, working one-on-one, and specialized technology tools support students with autism and intellectual disabilities.

Theme 3. Communication and Social Learning Skills

These teachers described the focus of their classroom interactions was to teach social and communication skills. The third theme is a response to the research question What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students? Communicating with their

students in positive ways produced the most effective learning experiences. The main purpose of classroom interactions is to teach these children how to interact in the real world. The educators provided options for communication by using multiple tools and media for learning.

Communication. P4 shared the types of communication skills Tier 1 students have, "They have skills of communication with others. They can communicate with one another. They may not do it in an appropriate manner at times, but they can communicate." P3 shared,

> I'm going to say positive praise and small incentives or rewards. For instance, they all love positive praise: Good job, I am so happy to see you, I can't believe that you did that, High five, that was awesome. The other thing is if I know a student, for instance, likes to sit and bounce on a ball, or likes to go to sensory room, or… so you know what, you did such a great job, let's go spend some time over there, or here's the ball. And then that just reinforces them to do it again, so, we find that to work well.

P4 also discussed the type of encouragement that produces interactions with the students. P4 thinks that people naturally love to be praised, recognized, and honored. P4 said, "Definitely nobody likes to be put down, cut down, discouraged; we like to be encouraged." He described what interactions support these students. He stated, "Praise, nonstop praise. Good job with that! Wow! I am really impressed with what you've done there! Thank you, thank you for your patience and waiting."

P4 reiterated more about the type of communication that is effective:

> Teaching them mannerisms, teaching them politeness wears on them, and they learn to say thank you and please. Praise is definitely a key. Acknowledging them is a key. They love being acknowledged; they love being praised. We have a communication system

between the parents and the teachers. So, there are times when I will communicate with the parents, so they hear a parent at home say, “Mr. Gills texted me today and said how good you did on this math problem today.” That’s going to be an encouragement.

The interview question, “What type of encouragement produces interactions among your learners” was answered in the following way by P5,

Specific praise. Any time you can give encouragement. You can walk by anybody and give them encouragement, hey good job, man. Good job, what? Good job, walking, good job reading? You know, they have no idea. For our students, they need concrete learning. So, if you say, good job little Johnny, or whoever, I like the way you wrote nicely, and you held the pencil in your left hand and not your right hand, and your hands are down, and your feet are down. You are being a great learner, thank you. I love that. Or if you walk by and say, I love the way that you made eye contact with that teacher, thank you for that. So, you’re specifically praising the action, you say action praise, you praise the student specifically, so they know exactly what it looks like to be a good student and a good community member. You can see it all over their face. For one, it’s like a typical peer. If you make them happy, they’ll smile. Sometimes you’ll see a student smile, and you’ll say, that student has smiled all day! You know, school is hard for these students a lot of times. So, any time their body language. When a student is successful, that’s good. They don’t realize it, but they like structure, and they like to learn, and you can see it on their faces when they are being successful, and they are learning, and they are making you happy, one, you are avoiding behaviors because they are just so happy that they are doing the right thing. And it can be as simple as, “I threw my trash away, and it didn’t hit

the floor." To, "I did my job the right way, and I got all independent scores today." So, you can see it in their body language and their faces.

Tier 3 discussed the type of communication that his students have because of their deficits in communication and what works best:

> They have different devices that they can use to communicate with us, but it's still not the same as being able to actually, like express verbally how you feel. So, we're always kind of… we're not guessing, but some of the kids, one of the students, he hits himself, and that's his form of communication. Yep, and it means several different things, so through experience with the kids and use of the behavior analysis in the classroom, we've kind of determined and come up with replacement ways for him to communicate.

A paraprofessional, P2, who works with Tier 2 and Tier 3 stated:

> I work with nonverbals, and most of my students use a program called Pecks, whether it's on their iPad or their iPhone, or we have a book that has Velcro pictures. So, they communicate through picture recognition, and I would say a strength is that they are teachable. They can learn. Picture recognition is probably the simplest form to communicate, and it works even with my verbal students who are limited in vocabulary. They can choose a picture to express themselves.

P3 described the way she uses communication with positive praise and small incentives or rewards. "The other thing is if I know a student, for instance, likes to sit and bounce on a ball, or likes to go to the sensory room, or… so you know what, you did such a great job, let's go spend some time over there." P2 addressed how technology is used to communicate with the non-verbal students in the Tier 3 class. P2 stated,

> I have one of them who brings his own device, and when it is snack time, he will open it up and tell me I want grapes. I want orange juice. I want cookies. He has like snacks; he has a feature that says food. He has from drinks to snacks to an actual dinner. So, they can't communicate verbally, or they can't read, but they can use this device. Yes, ma'am. Thanks to all the technology. They can do all of that by themselves. Yes, we have one who loves popcorn, and so when it is snack time, he knows how to open his device and ring the popcorn bell. He's on a first or second-grade level or below that? Yes, ma'am. Wonderful. I love my job.

The teachers use the structure of the classrooms, differentiating, and technology to communicate with the autistic child. They understand the relationship between valuing praise and rewards to give the child a sense of self-worth and accomplishment. Communicating with their students in positive ways produced the most effective learning experiences. The main purpose of classroom interactions is to teach these children how to communicate in the real world.

Social Skills. The Transition Program offers a special standardized educational curriculum, with an emphasis on social skills and employability skills. Interactions with people on campus promote social skills. The students interact through job skills such as working at the campus library, cooking and cleaning, laundry, campus recycling, and shredding. The opportunity to learn social skills start with the morning greetings and continues with eating at the Café with college students, going to chapel weekly, or visiting the campus college store.

P7, an administrator conveyed her understanding of the importance of social skills:

> They need to be able to hold a conversation, answer questions when asked. They need to be able to have eye contact. Then smile and answer questions that are asked of them. And then they also need to be able to ask for help if they need it or for clarification if they're not sure what's being asked of them.

P8, an administrator, shared that establishing social relationships and life skills are key in social development. P8 stated:

> Teaching them social skills embedded into the classroom is part of cooperative learning. As a trainer, we know that social skills are specifically filtered into those, so if you teach those strategies to the students, you're embedding social skills as well as academic skills. So, utilizing all of those together, I think, is effective.

P5 said that modeling social skills encourages productive interaction. "By doing it with them, so we don't send them to do something. I model it for them. And then they will then do it with me. And then at some point, I transition for them to do it on their own."

Some of the teachers spoke about the negative side of social skills in the classroom. P4, who works with the higher functioning students, said the students did not know how to express their emotions, especially when they are frustrated or angry. He informed me that the student might kick a wall or throw a chair. They may curse at other students and the teacher, but classroom structure, consistency, and teaching self-discipline in a calm manner produce positive social interactions.

P6 explained that the students are at the stage where hormones affect their social interaction. He said the student's hormones cause aggression and putting their hands in their pants. Participant 6, also referred to the students attacking and biting him. P6 shared that the

students are taught replacement skills for their problematic behaviors using small group games for 5 to 10 minutes at a time. He stated that many of the Tier 3 students would rather be by themselves or working with the teacher. He models positive social interactions and verbal praise in the classroom and takes them on field trips so they will learn how to interact in public. P6 designs social stories in a PowerPoint that previews where he will take the students, what they will do on their outing and how the students are expected to behave. Direct instruction of the concepts and the visual social story promotes positive social interactions with the non-verbal Tier 3 students.

Social skills learning takes place through a variety of classroom structures and interactions on campus. These social skills are the foundation of creating general work behaviors to transition into future employment. The school was founded on the basic principle of teaching to the whole child's development. The teachers described the focus of their classroom interactions was to teach social and communication skills. Due to the large gap with the Tier 3 students to communicate, it is important to realize; the teachers use social stories, picture cards, and the student tablets to teach social skills and to communicate effectively.

Theme 4. Program Design

The teachers identified the community focus for this transitional work skills program as an integral part of the development of the holistic learner in this program. This fourth theme is a response to the research question What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students? All teachers described how these interactions within the university, the business community, and parent outreach supported their learners' development.

The design of the program was shared by the administrator who created the program to be a laboratory school. Participant 9 said, “Individualization is first and foremost.” The initial categories coded for this theme were laboratory school, TP has campus jobs, career classes, and social-skills class. The program design includes a partnership with the university, community, business partner outreach, and collaboration with parents. P9 expressed the function of the school:

> Pathways actually has work skills built into the curriculum. There are daily tasks that students do in the classroom. They have classroom helper type chores as well. There is a Peck system for some of the students who are nonverbal. Also, some of those life skills and social skills are embedded and job skills embedded. Our students actually have done some community-based learning as well, gone off-campus as sort of a quote-unquote field trip. They’ve gone to the grocery store. They’ve gone to other stores. Pathways has its own booth at Lakewood or at Wildwood antique mall. And our students have gone to the antique store booth and done things like put price tags on items and help check out customers with their items and things like that. They also have a program on campus where they have to recycle bins around campus, I believe it’s the middle school kids, but it could be the high school students. One of the classes goes around and collects the recycling, which embeds social skills too because they have to work with people on campus to greet them and say hello and introduce themselves when they pick up the recycling. But then they are also getting the recycling, a job skill.

P4 said the athletic department is involved:

> We have a professor on campus. She has one of her spring classes, one of her fall classes, and her spring class is involved in our adaptive PE program. So, each student has a coach, which is an SEU student who helps them with what we do every day. So, they are helping them with the stretches, helping them with the exercises. That happens, fall and spring. The school also channels the students according to their Tier level but can keep them at the school until they are 22 years old.

P4, who works with Tier 3 said:

> I have them as low as 12 years old and believe it or not I have one as old as 21 years old. So, in that range. They can be here until they are 22 years old." The school not only provides work skills which are life skills but integrates its faculty and university students in the TP's curriculum.

The University supports the program with the entire learning community. This learning community values, nurtures, and develops educators and students, alike. The university provides interactions with campus facilities and activities. There is the ongoing flow of campus students transitioning throughout the livelihood and excitement of the post-secondary academic life. All the educators shared how these interactions within the university, the business community, and the parent outreach supported their learners' development.

> During the interview, P5 shared the many ways the university uses its community: Sure, so to start with the work skills, I think being a laboratory school on the campus is a great opportunity. It's fantastic. The students have the resources of our school, but we all get to utilize the resources of the college. So, the college is a safe place for students. It's like a small community within the city of the community. They are able to practice within the

community. They deliver newspapers; they recycle for college professors. We work with the green team Earth Day every year and do a presentation of what Earth Day is all about. We teach them what a community looks like and how they can give back in a safe setting before they go out into the public subway or their community and give back. They clean the café; we have a little chic-file on campus. We have a safe place for them to practice those skills before they go out into the community.

P4 described some of the job skills they are taught on campus,

We have either campus jobs or a career class. We have social skills. We have a bunch of classes in the afternoon here at our school that end up depending on the classroom will depend on what type of class you are going to do. A campus job example would be recycling, so one of the classrooms they have a recycling program. So, whether it be just the school or around campus, they will get to gather plastic bottles or any type of plastic. Also, along that same campus job, they will go over to the chick file dining area where you were at for lunch, they will go over there and clean those tables. There is a classroom that does that. You have other classrooms that are more going to do classroom responsibilities, whether it's cleaning tables, trash cans, depending on the level of the classroom will depend on the vocational skills. My class, which is higher functioning, the problem is at our school campus the things that my students could do are already being done by college students on campus, so there's…

P7 shared how the program supports the development of work skills:

So, we take them out onto the campus and we have them performing jobs on the campus. For example, we have a class that goes to the library, and they stack books in the library.

> Or we have a recycling team that goes from office to office to do those kinds of jobs. They're actually out and about communicating with people on the campus and within the community of Southeastern, practicing those skills on a daily basis.

P2 shared how the university helps students learn social skills. She stated, "For example, if they go to a restaurant, we work with the cards a lot. We show them that it's time to be quiet, and if we are going to sit, we just go ahead and point to the chair." P3 shared how a university is a learning tool for social-emotional learning,

> When we go to chapel, they know that they are going there to sing, and it's okay to clap, and it's okay to dance. But it is not okay to throw like a big tantrum." Given these points, the interactions with the university support students to become socially adept. Moreover, it teaches independence and gives the Tier1 and Tier 2 students a sense of freedom. P9 included how the students interact with the campus and sporting events. P9 said:
>
> They do come to the sporting events. You'll see carpools of families with a couple of Pathways kids who will drop the kids off at a football game, and then mom and dad will go off on a date night or whatever. Or pathways kids will come in with their buddy, and then mom and dad will come to the football game too, and you'll see mom and dad in one section and the pathways kids walking up and down the football stadium with all the Southeastern students.

Another way the program is helping students with autism and IDD socialize is through their campus dining facilities. P9 explained:

> One of the biggest pieces of inclusion that we have in our program is that Pathways students eat in our restaurant for lunch… So, you'll see southeastern students eating

> amongst pathways classes. And you'll see pathways kids, some of them will actually work towards their privilege of eating at a table with southeastern students. Some of them will work toward going to the buffet line without having to have a para with them. Because they have proven that they can make wise choices with their food. Things like that.

Linked to University Community

TP is a part of the college of education. College students at the university volunteer and complete coursework at the TP. The students at TP are a part of the university community. The University added a post-secondary transition program in the areas of hospitality, healthcare, and technology. It gives students the tools to obtain employment and to live independently. P9, an administrator, described the post-transitional secondary program,

> It's called the link comprehensive post-secondary transition program. It is a college experience for those who have completed their high school experience. For students with intellectual disabilities here on our campus, they have options to be residential, so they can live in the dorms. They can be a commuter student, but they take link specific courses that are life skills, job skills, academics. They pick a job choice or a career choice. We put them into a Southeastern university course that aligns with that job choice. And then with their social skills or learning skills, they have actual courses for that… It's sort of the next level from students with intellectual disabilities completing high school. Where do they go from there? Well, a lot of them don't join the workforce, but a lot of them want to. They want to be contributing members of society, so we've created a post-secondary transition program.

The TP provides opportunities beyond the walls of the school and the campus. P9 shared the university's ties to the community and the community's willingness to provide jobs for students with intellectual disabilities. P9 said,

> No, there are actually a lot of jobs out there.
>
> There are a lot of companies out there who hire students or people with intellectual disabilities. You have to find the right one. In the area we are in, there are a lot of small businesses that want individuals with intellectual disabilities who want disabilities because they tend to actually… the research is showing they tend to have a better attendance record. They have better productivity record and a higher level of motivation to succeed at their job. Getting the word out there, we've gone to commerce meetings and talked to them and set up partnerships to do internships and externships for our students, and the businesses are starting to realize I want that student. Or I want that person to work with me, look how great they are. How reliable they are. Given the caveat that the student with a disability may have the same social effect that everybody else does. But they can be brilliant and creative just like everybody else.

Parent Outreach

Equally important is the dynamic relationships between the school and the parents. ESE students have an annual review of students with disabilities. P9 explained the parents' perceptions about this process and why TP is different. P9 stated:

> It's probably bridging the gap between home and school and working so closely with families. Making sure families are aware of the fact that we're not here just to teach them academics. That we're here to teach life skills as well. So, I think that having that open

> communication. Also, I feel like when parents come here, they have a different expectation of the level of our relational approach and that we're not the same. The feedback I've gotten, is you guys don't run the same way as a public school because the IEP meeting is so intimidating because of all the ESE professionals there are using jargon, and we don't understand it. And they're trying to go so fast; we don't understand what's happening. They are not slowing down for us. They just want to get through the meeting. So, if they just want to get through the meeting and the parents are in survival mode and are just trying to get through the meeting and understand what these professionals are saying, nobody's getting anything out of it, except the professionals are getting through their meeting. Check off the checklist right, here we don't do that. Here, we will schedule one family a day, if that's what it takes. But we are going to do whatever it takes to serve the family and serve the kid. And I know that we have different parameters to follow than public schools or other schools that these kids have come from, but that's part of what sets us apart.

Teachers shared how they approach families with sensitivity and respect for differences, valuing multiple perspectives, and collaborating to improve prevailing assumptions. P3 explained:

> I think it as just being an encouragement to not only the development of the student but of the family members. It's almost like we are part of a bigger team at Pathways. These parents, they are on a longer journey. We have them for a period of their life. But we almost play tag team. Mom and dad come in and say, "Hey, these are the problems we're having at home." And so, we kind of piggyback on that along with their… well, some of

them had an IEP until we transitioned to their service plan. But we work on developing a skill in our environment that the parents can continue with at home. So, we do a lot of continuity here with their home life. So, that's a big strong element here.

In contrast, teachers also understood that multiple familial conditions fundamentally affect events, conditions, and issues. The difficulties of living with autistic and intellectually disabled students cause parents to do everything for their child, thus enabling over-dependent children.

P9 informed,

So, I know some autistic students will give their families power struggles, especially with teenagers, right? Brush your hair, brush your teeth, so you've worked with the family to accept how he's going to… what does that mean to him? The school came up with a solution and made grooming baskets so they could groom themselves once they got to school. Another teacher shared that sometimes parents do not follow through at home with the skills they are learning at school.

P4 expressed,

Unfortunately, I do see where it is an all hands on deck, but not everyone is doing their part. Whether it be the parent at home not following through with what we're incorporating into the student's life, whether it's a routine. As far as how to communicate with your child, they're not following through and doing it at home. So, it isn't always all hands on deck as I keep saying. Unfortunately, there are times when that part isn't being done by everyone.

The teachers also perceived that parents are accustomed to doing so much for a little child with a disability and have difficulty letting the child do things. P4 said,

> We have to teach them to do it, or they'll never be able to do it. They're going to lose that ability to learn it if we don't teach it at a young age. Letting go, letting children grow up is difficult for many parents, especially for parents who have children who have disabilities.

Summary

In summary, the educators shared their experiences implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students. They believed in their abilities to support these students at their highest individual potential. The educators shared their perceptions of implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students. The participants were able to express their perceptions about students' success in their tier; they need as much individual interaction as possible, concepts that support individual needs for autonomy, and specialization in the development of a new curricular design. Chapter 5 will provide the interpretations of the finding for this study, the limitations, and the recommendations. A conclusion will follow the implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional secondary education program designed to prepare students who have intellectual disabilities and autism to be successful in college or the workplace. My research on the perceptions and experiences of educators implementing a transitional program titled the TP produced data that fills a gap in understanding educating students with these learning challenges. The TP is an innovative transitional educational program designed around experiential and social learning concepts. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the experiences of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?
2. What are the perceptions of educators implementing an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

In the key findings of this study, I describe how educators perceive and experience educating students with autism and cognitive impairments implementing a nontraditional educational school, unique in the setting and the curricular design. The four major themes that developed from the data analysis are (a) teachers' beliefs about how they can impact their students' development, their expectations of how to engage the learners based on the tiers, and their motivations for working with special needs students; (b) each student should be interacted

with individually to meet their needs academically; (c) social interactions and; (d) program characteristics. In this chapter, I discuss the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

I developed the research questions for this study based upon foundational theoretical concepts within the body of education. Research Question 1 addressed participants' experiences working with autistic and IDD students in an innovative transitional setting, which relates to the experiential learning theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory. Research Question 2 addressed the teachers' perceptions working in the TP school with autistic students, which aligned with differentiated instructional model and Bandura's self-efficacy theory. This section addresses and expands upon the correlation between the themes and theoretical concepts addressed in my conceptual framework.

Theme 1. Teacher Beliefs

The first theme identified in Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1995) was a positive psychological model of self-belief that plays a part in the successful outcome of the educators in this school and their students. The participants had strong beliefs about their abilities to teach the students correlated with their personal stories. In this research, I identified the teacher beliefs as having a strong influence on how teachers can respond in their classrooms (see Kelly et al., 2014). In this study, eight of the nine participants described strong personal beliefs about their ability to teach IDD learners and their beliefs about the ability of IDD learners to learn in their classroom. Many participants had experienced a family member with learning challenges that gave them the "heart" to teach children with disabilities.

However, the critical issue relevant to understanding these teachers' self-efficacy in this study was the tiered educational process. The only participant who felt less efficacy was working with Tier 3, where learners are nonverbal and their social-emotional levels are like 3-year-old's, yet they are physiologically at the developmental stage of an adolescent. The participant was motivated to engage with the learners. Sortino (2014) investigated teacher and student perceptions. He also found that positive teacher perceptions were related to student learning. This confirms my study findings that these teachers' positive perceptions were aligned to their interactions in their classrooms.

Furthermore, the program design focus is on academic, and work skills, and this participant did not find a cohesive alignment with the program goals and the one-on-one developmental needs of the Tier 3 learners. This participant also said he felt he needed a break from the program because he was physically and mentally exhausted. Bandura's (1995) work on social cognitive theory and self-efficacy included whether people stay with it or give it up.

In this study, the tiered educational structure was not supportive of this teacher's feelings of self-efficacy. His major issue was the emphasis on academics with Tier 3 learners who were noncommunicative and unable to progress on academic skills. He did not see the progress in his students because of their disability, and this influenced his self-efficacy. Powell (2017) also found that the success of the teachers in the CTE program was linked to their knowledge of their classifications. This aligns with my study's results that the single teacher who did not feel strong efficacy felt that the students' classification was not supported in his curriculum.

Gogan's (2017) explored a CTE program through teacher interviews and found that students with autism disorder in his study were prepared with life, job, and technical skills for

college and career opportunities. Gogan also found that the teachers and educators in his study cared about the students learning needs and felt supported, and they could provide students with the instruction they needed to learn. In his study, the teachers' beliefs in their learners and their self-efficacy contributed to the success of this program (Gogan, 2017). The results of my study confirmed this as the teachers that felt supported were able to work more effectively with their ID learners. The single teacher who worked with the Tier 3 students did not feel capable of supporting these learners within the current curriculum structure.

Theme 2. Classroom Interactions

The second theme of this study identified individualization needed for these IDD learners to be successful. Differentiated instructional theory identified the understanding of the process of individualized instructional processes (Hall, 2002; Tomlinson, 2000) used in the TP. The participants in this study described both an understanding of how their learners differ in their learning and how they individualized their responses to increasing learner success.

In this study, the process of assessing the learning described a highly differentiated process except in the case of Tier 1 learners. For Tier 1 students, the assessment was more systemic and holistic, encouraging higher-order thinking in contrast to Tier 2 and 3 teachers, who described a finite, measured process of assessment. Working with students who have ASD and other challenges requires differentiating instruction to suit the students' learning style and their thinking style so that the instruction and the assessment are appropriate (Sternberg & Zhang, 2005). McIntyre et al. (2017) results included that individualization was successful for Tier 1 learners. My study supports this as these participants focused their differentiation procedures on their students' Tiers.

This approach of differentiating requires various types of instruction that match the students' thinking preferences. Differentiating instruction also requires assessments that are compatible with the students' preferred thinking style. Differentiating instructional theory considers students' thinking preferences and learning styles and individualizes the assessment tools rather than giving multiple-choice tests (Sternberg & Zhang, 2005). Clarke (2016) found that as teachers' differentiation of their classroom resulted in successful transition work skills for the special needs learners. My study extends these results by identifying the differentiation procedures and how these teachers experienced implementing them in their classroom.

Differentiated instructional models are effective for preparing IDD learners for work. Gogan (2017) included a thorough analysis of program documents and interviews and found that students with higher-level autism were prepared with life, job, and technical skills for college and career through the CTE program, which included differentiated instruction and technology-assisted computers. Powell (2017) also identified that the success of CTE programs requires the collaboration with special education teachers and knowledge of the student's abilities for proper placement in a CTE program. This study reinforced this premise that the differentiation of instruction supports the success of the learners in CTE programs.

Theme 3. Teaching Communication and Social Skills

The third theme was related to the development of social skills in the classroom. Vygotsky's (1986) sociocultural learning theory was important in this study because it contributed to the understanding of collaborative learning and mentoring in the program. Vygotsky's social learning theory is based on the concepts that human learning is shaped by a dynamic interdependence of social activities and individual processes. In this study, all of these

teachers focused on social skills and communication skills, as these are critical work skills for these learners.

The overarching interactions among these teachers and their students were both positive interactions and the development of real-world communication skills required to be successful. In this study, however, Tier 3 learners were less successful at these social interactions and required nonverbal visual aids and the least verbal interactions to be successful. Repetitions of self-help skills, for example, grooming, and social skills like working with the teacher one-on-one or with one other student helped students on Tier 3 become more social. Social stories, a tool to develop social awareness, shaped the reality of social activity. The use of the students' iPad and apps provided a means for effective communication. I was unable to find literature that supported this aspect of my results. The results of my study show a gap in the literature.

In this study, social skills were identified by the teachers as critical to finding a job. Margie (2016) found that a focus on the behaviors and social skills of individuals with intellectual disabilities supported their ability to get a job. Margie found this factor as a barrier to transition programs because behaviors impact whether people with disabilities are getting a job. According to Margie's study, employees look for functional and social skills rather than academic skills. Margie identified the need to align curriculum with employment needs to develop productive workforce behaviors.

In this study, teachers described the importance of socio-emotional skills. Kelly et al. (2014) showed the "negative learned behavior" (p.79) on the students' self-worth and their ability to adapt to a different school culture caused a decrease in achievement levels. Their social-emotional skills deficit lessened from the effects of the unmet social-emotional needs at

the mainstream inclusion school. The results of Kelly et al.'s study revealed the challenges of educating students with disabilities and the diversity of their challenges moving from a mainstream school to a special school.

Kelly et al. (2014) posited that the importance of good educational models includes academic and psychosocial outcomes for each student. Educators also need training in behavioral, social, and emotional management strategies. Kelly et al. suggested that ongoing social-emotional instruction would have a positive impact on all aspects of the ASD student. Kelly et al. found a lack of research on effective models of education that include transition services for special needs students in secondary education (6^{th} – 12^{th} grade).

Examples of educational programs that are designed to teach social skills to IDD learners were found in the literature. Sortino (2014) illustrated the benefits of the Project Step transition curriculum that included vital relationships and communication between the teacher and the students and the importance of this relationship and the interaction between the teachers and the students. Dosen (2016) found that virtual simulations supported the development of these communication skills in Tier 3, autistic learners. Additionally, Clarke (2016) claimed that the skills needed to be successful after high school were a relationship with the community, soft skills, real-world activities, and age-appropriate activities starting at the age of 14. My study participants also supported the premise that social skills are critical for success in a transitional educational program for IDD learners.

Theme 4. Program Design

The fourth theme was concerned with the program design and goals. The educational program studied in this research engaged the students in experiential learning activities to

develop the real-world knowledge and life skills needed by the students to acquire a job or transition to college. Experiential learning theory (Kolb et al., 2001) provided an understanding of the benefits for the learners in this program model.

The focus of this program was on the real-world interactions in the classroom and their local community to develop the work skills needed to be successful after graduation. The development of functional academics (reading, writing, and math skills),independent living skills, vocational education, daily life skills, transportation skills, and social skills are successful for students with mild to severe intellectual disabilities to increase a likelihood of attaining work after graduation (Bouck & Joshi, 2015). A study by Lindstrom et al. (2014) also found that engaging IDD learners in real-world learning activities support the development of functional work skills for these students. My study extended the results of these studies by defining the experiences of teachers implementing a transitional program designed based on experiential learning theories. These teachers were explicit in the need to teach real-world skills in authentic learning environments.

There are transitional programs that are focused on experiential learning theory. Clark (2016) examined the transition services and programs offered to students with disabilities who were 18 to 22 years old. These students were enrolled in the Post-graduate Alternative for Secondary Students or PASS program. Interviews of the educators and document reviews were conducted to understand the experiential learning program. The study found that students successfully transferred work skills taught in the classroom to real-world employment. Gogan's (2017) case study also found that a CTE program that focused on experiential learning for students with autism disorder prepared them for both college and career opportunities. My study

findings are critical in understanding these teachers' experiences by defining their real-world experiences teaching in their classrooms.

Summary

This study identified four themes, including teachers' beliefs and motivation. The teachers' efficacy influenced their success in their classroom and how they can impact their students' development based on the students' tiers. The second theme, differentiation – found how working individually with students promotes holistic growth. The third theme, social interactions, recognized that genuine social exchanges are experiential. These students learn by relating to meaningful real-life experiences shaped by the dynamics of the campus laboratory school and that these types of inseparable interactions, including positive verbal praise and acceptance, create pathways of meaning. The fourth theme characterized the unique setting of the TP and how the program supports these autistic and IDD students with work and study skills. The program characteristics also provide a safe environment for individual growth. The students have an opportunity to find work through business partnerships or continue to post-secondary college experiences.

In conclusion, the study adds new understanding to (a) the types of interactions that support the social and academic development of autistic and intellectually challenged learners; (b) the educational culture that supports and produces teachers beliefs, self-efficacy, and motivation to support the social and academic development of special needs students to their highest potential; (c) developing/designing nontraditional innovative programs for ASD and IDD students starting in 6th grade that focus on the individual students gifts and talents, life skills, employability skills, and links to post-secondary outcomes, and; (d) utilizing the academic

setting at a university and its resources (college community, partnership outreach, college extracurricular activities) to create a safe environment for secondary students to earn the skills necessary to find work and live independently at their level. The findings offered clarity on how autistic and intellectually challenged middle and high schoolers can thrive on meeting their personal best.

Limitations of the Study

As a limitation, I recruited from only one program, but I identified three roles to add diversity to the sample. I only recruited nine participants, but I was able to reach data saturation. As a delimitation, I chose not to interview university mentors as this would have complicated the study and made it unwieldy. I did not interview students as a form of protection for them as vulnerable participants.

Recommendations

In the future, research is needed on similar programs to define guidelines and evaluations of programs designed specifically to understand the most effective manner to teach IDD learners. A qualitative study that includes understanding the parents' experiences and conceptions would be beneficial to understanding programs designed to support IDD learners. A longitudinal study of IDD learners from ages 12 through graduation from high school is needed to understand the transitional developmental processes for these students. Additionally, a mixed-method study to track changes in educational programs for IDD learners to understand the impact of a standardized curriculum and assessments on the socio-emotional development, and social skills of the learners and the job satisfaction and attrition rates of the teachers.

Implications

My research is important for social change because it develops new understandings about how these IDD learners can be supported to graduate and move into a successful job or go to college. The school experiences of children with disabilities are influenced by the attitudes of other students, staff, and education policy. Discovering the gifts and talents of children with disabilities can provide them the opportunity to live a fuller independent life as contributing citizens. Having supported school environments will also ease the pressure of parents as their children grow into independent adults.

Additionally, my study found characteristics of a successful transition life skills for IDD learners program that can be used as a guide for other programs. Community-based learning allowed students to interact and communicate in a safe environment while learning important work skills. Another characteristic found was individualization through differentiated instruction. In my study, the teacher to student ratio optimized differentiated instruction. The educators were also able to learn more about the individual student's gifts and academic abilities and design instruction that catered to the student's learning needs. My study found that for these students, specialized instruction appealed to the promotion of the individual needs of the students. My research found that experiential learning provided the students with a way to increase their learning, develop skills, and create a pathway to contribute to the school community at the university.

My study found that a program that is differentiated, experiential, and community-based that teaches social skills is beneficial to these students, their potential for success at finding a job, and becoming independent. Educational policy should focus on supporting these types of innovative programs to support IDD learners and remove the focus on standardized assessments

so these students can be autonomous and independent citizens. My study identified that specialized instruction that focuses on developing real-world work and life skills is critical for supporting these learners. Education systems should develop programs for children in middle schools that work on identifying the students' real-world strengths at their levels to optimize their potential to have careers. With the use of augmented, virtual, and mixed reality, the use of simulated jobs could benefit students as well as increase their opportunities for work and careers.

Conclusion

This study identified specific themes relevant to these educators' experiences and perceptions implementing an innovative transitional educational program. However, an underlying issue identified in this study was the focus on the Tiers classification program and how the interactions with learners, instructional processes, and the program model were aligned with the Tiers learning goals. The Tiers status of these learners was relevant to the teachers' beliefs about their own efficacy and their students' ability to respond to the curriculum. The program was designed to develop work skills based on the students' Tiered category to support independent living after school.

However, education in the U.S. has moved away from the process of Tier identification and specialized educational training and instruction. Bouck and Joshi's (2015) findings reported that only one-quarter of the students with autism and IDD were receiving functional curriculum while the other three quarters received their education through the academic-based curriculum. In terms of post-school outcomes for students with an autism spectrum disorder, the majority were not living independently, attending postsecondary education, or employed within two years of exiting high school. A study by Bridges (2017) identified that the standardized curriculum did

not support positive post-school outcomes. Out of the 4995 students, less than 749 lived independently, were employed, and attended post-secondary education. About 1,248 students were employed (25%), but few worked full time.

There is an increasing number of special needs learners in U.S. schools. These students are not leaving school with the skills they need to be successful. In a report published by the Journal of Rehabilitation, an alarming number of people with IDD are not employed. Eighty-five percent of all students with autism and intellectual disabilities are underemployed or unemployed. The gap between the employment rate of working-age people with disabilities and without disabilities is 43.1%. Twenty-seven percent of individuals with disabilities are reported to live in poverty compared with 11.6% of people without disabilities living in poverty (Briel & Getzel, 2014).

As more students in U.S. schools are diagnosed with IDD and autism, there is a critical need to support these students so they can be successful after graduation. The current emphasis on standardized teaching and assessment based on NCLB means that the unemployment rate and drop-out rate for these children will rise. We should redesign our education for students with autism and cognitive disorders. It is our ethical and moral responsibility to provide these children with individual and specialized instruction, which includes experiential learning, immersive environments including simulation, virtual and mixed environments, and a place where they can benefit in positive learning environments, so they develop social-emotional behaviors and work skills to become independent and successful in the work force.

At the age of 2, Dr. Temple was diagnosed with autism, thought to be a form of brain damage at that time (Biography.com Editors, 2014). She was nonverbal until she turned 4. She

learned how to read in third grade. She completed high school in one year. Dr. Grandin Temple earned a degree in psychology, a master's degree in animal science, and a doctoral degree in animal science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In an interview with Karen Simmons (2012), Dr. Temple Grandin says she wants to see kids with autism succeed. Dr. Temple said,

> Too many kids on the higher end are being put with kids on the lower end in schools. Too many kids are not learning job skills.…Certain things they can do really well, but they need job and work skills. Taking the hands-on out of the classroom was the worst thing education did for autistic kids (Simmons, K., 2012).

In a report with Lorena Mills, (Kenw, 2019), Grandin Temple is an inductee of the National Women Hall of Fame and recognized by Time in the hero category as one of the 100 influential people. Dr. Temple reiterated, “Schools are not exposing students with autism to jobs that will become a career. Kids need to be involved in doing stuff…Kids need hands on, experiential learning. They also need social skills.”

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview Guide

RQ 1 What are the experiences of educators in an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

1. Why do you choose to work in this program?
2. What do you believe are the best ways to support these learners?
3. What are some of the learning processes or responses you notice in these learners?
4. What kind of interactions are most effective with the learners? Why?
5. How do you encourage productive interactions among your learners?
6. What social skills are important for these learners to transition?
7. How does the program support the learners' development of work/study skills?
8. What are some of the main work skills or study skills that these learners have? Why?

RQ 2 What are the perceptions of educators in an innovative transitional educational program for intellectually disabled and autistic middle and high school students?

1. What do you perceive to be the greatest influence of your work in this program?
2. What do you believe are the students greatest needs to achieve as learners?
3. What are some of the challenges these learners face academically?
4. What kind of social interactions are most effective with these learners? Why?
5. What is type of encouragement produces interactions among your learners? How do you know this?
6. How are these students social?
7. How do these learners develop work/study skills?

8. What are some of the main work skills or study skills that these learners need to develop? Why?
9. Is there anything else you think I should know?

Appendix B: Initial Codes

	Parent Id	Depth	Title
1		0	effective interactions: a student hug
2		0	effective interactions: Student give High 5
3		0	Tier 1 Explanation
4		0	Able to wipe themselves in bathroom
5		0	Academic Skills
6	5	1	1st-2nd grade level
7	5	1	3rd-4th gr
8	5	1	Cannot read but understand when they are read to.
9	5	1	K-1st grade
10		0	Academic vs Social Skills
11	10	1	Academic vs Social Skills are different
12	10	1	Academic vs Social Skills are equal
13	10	1	Academic vs Social Skills interacting w/them
14	10	1	Academic vs Social skills SS are higher
15	10	1	Fine Motor Skills: Writing Greeting Cards
16		0	Authentic Activity Reading
17	16	1	Entry Level Social Skills
18		0	Beliefs- future skills Challenges Students face
19	18	1	R2.3 Abstract Concepts
20	19	2	R2.3 Knowing their strengths and weaknesses
21	18	1	R2.3 Academic Challenges
22	21	2	R2.3 comprehension
23	21	2	R2.3 Visual Learners not Auditory
24	18	1	R2.3 Dealing with a disability -processing
25	24	2	R2.3 repetition will program them with consistency
26	24	2	R2.3 Low - Kindergarten 14-18 yrs old
27	24	2	R2.3 making them independent
28	24	2	R2.3 Not prompt dependent
29	24	2	R2.3 They do not like to work
30		0	Beliefs- motive why do you chose to work
31	30	1	Brother had a disability
32	31	2	Options for children with Autism
33	31	2	My son attends this school
34	30	1	Influence of helping students
35	30	1	motivation
36	35	2	Always has a heart
37	35	2	Gives their parents sense of freedom
48	30	1	Motivation to Learn
49	30	1	Motivation to teach

50	49	2	R1.1 Like to work with kids that need more help
51	30	1	Previous experiences
52	51	2	Better understand the growing Pop. of ASD
53	51	2	Always involved in special Olympics
54	51	2	Build on foundational skills, elementary educator
55	51	2	Personal-Love working with special needs
56	30	1	R1.1 physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting
57	30	1	the school
58	57	2	TP focus on Living Skills and Job Skills
59	57	2	enjoy the students
60	57	2	faith
61	57	2	Feel Welcomed
62	57	2	Focus on success: Academics, personal, spiritual
63	57	2	My Autistic son attends
64	57	2	School Mission Statement
65		0	beliefs- self-efficacy Teachers' Perceptions about their
66	65	1	R2.1 Christian University
67	66	2	R2.1 School enthusiasm
68	65	1	Teachers perception: connectiveness with program
69	68	2	R2.1 Bigger Team
70	69	3	R2.1 Work on skills they can take home
71	68	2	R2.1 Build Relationships
72	65	1	Teachers Perceptions: Knowing their students' capabilities
73	72	2	R1.2 Effective Interactions- Stay Calm
74	72	2	R2.1 cover life, social, academic skills
75	72	2	R2.1 Finding students niches and successes
76	72	2	R2.1 Making them aware of their talents
77	72	2	Students greatest need to ach: Time, Love and affection
78	65	1	Teachers' Perceptions: Understanding students' abilities
79	78	2	R2.1 To serve God's children
80	78	2	R2.1 Coach teachers
81	78	2	R2.1 Collaborate with home life
82	78	2	R2.1 Encouragement
83	78	2	R2.1 Not a job/work but led spiritually
84	78	2	R2.1 One on One
85	78	2	R2.1 Self-Help skills
86	78	2	R2.1 Self-Help skills Self-Care skills
87	78	2	R2.1 work on Fine motor and Gross motor Skills
88		0	Beliefs- Students; Students Greatest Need

89	88	1	Greatest Needs as Learners
90	88	1	R2.2 Realization - the true meaning of things
91	88	1	R2.2 to achieve normality in society
92	88	1	R2.2 What it takes to have a car, your own place
93	88	1	R2.2 Be independent individually and in their communicate
94	88	1	R2.2 Communication
95	88	1	R2.2 Depends on Tier
96	88	1	R2.2 Helping the students become independent
97	88	1	R2.2 I struggle getting them to realize reality
98	88	1	R2.2 I think about the parents
99	88	1	R2.2 parents goal and society
100	88	1	R2.2 social skills and independent functioning skills
101	88	1	R2.2 students are not aware of their surroundings
102	88	1	R2.2 Students greatest needs to achieve
103	88	1	R2.2 They don't grasp current time and real life
104	88	1	R2.2 to eat out, to go to Walmart
105	88	1	R2.2 What it takes to get a job
106	88	1	R2.2 what it takes to get a HS diploma
107		0	Beliefs; Teacher beliefs about Learning
108	107	1	Teacher Influence: Teach Independence
109	108	2	Teacher Influences: Paying attention to Student
110	108	2	Teacher Influences: Teach Life Skills
111	108	2	Teacher Motivation - Improve Skills
112	108	2	Teacher Responsibility to ready them 4 real world
113	107	1	Teacher Intrinsic Influence EX feels honored
114	113	2	Teach Them to greet every student
115	113	2	Teacher Influence- Responsibility
116	113	2	Teacher Influences: Divine Patience
117	116	3	Teacher Influence-Responsible for their life
118	113	2	Teacher Influences: Show Compassion
119	113	2	Teacher Influences: Thankful and Blessed
120	113	2	Understand they have to work to get paid
121	113	2	Weakness not a focus
122		0	Classroom Academic Challenges
123	122	1	Higher Level Gr-Form Sentence
124	122	1	Verbal Expression, Tone
125	124	2	Morphology
126	124	2	Phonemic Awareness
127	124	2	Pragmatics
128	122	1	differentiating
129		0	Classroom best ways to support learners

130	129	1	choosing to work with students
131	130	2	R1.2 Differentiated Instructional Model
132	130	2	R1.2 Teacher Influences
133	130	2	R1.2 TP is a Choice
134	129	1	Experiential learning
135	134	2	R1.2 Individualization
136	134	2	R1.2 Advocate finding their advocates
137	134	2	R1.2 Hands on
138	134	2	Spiritually and academic
139	129	1	Find their interests
140	139	2	R1.2 Connect learning with interests
141	139	2	R1.2 Finding jobs on campus and community
142	129	1	Main Goal-Autonomy not enabling
143	142	2	R1.2 Find out their needs
144	142	2	R1.2 Look at holistically
145	129	1	Advocate finding their strengths
146	145	2	R1.2 All-hands on deck- Collaborate effort
147	145	2	R1.2 Build up children and families
148	145	2	R1.2 Frustrations- no home-school connection
149	129	1	Differentiated Instruction: Schedule, Groups, Teachers
150	149	2	Interactive Skills: Fine Motor Skills Station
151	129	1	differentiation
152	151	2	Differentiated Instruction
153	151	2	Differentiation and support
154	151	2	R1.2 Individualization
155	151	2	R1.2 conduct proper assessments and collect data
156	151	2	R1.2 Make it relevant
157	151	2	R1.2 Step by Step Directions
158	151	2	R1.2 Visual Aids
159		0	Classroom Development of work/study skills
160	159	1	Expectation of Learning work/study skill: Independence
161	159	1	R2.8 Career skills: apply for a job
162	159	1	R2.8 Main Work Skills for Success
163	159	1	R2.8 Tier 3 Life Skills-Cleaning
164	159	1	R2.8 Activities associated with transition
165	159	1	R2.8 Being able to use the bathroom, self-care
166	159	1	R2.8 Communicate with parents on the individual child
167	159	1	R2.8 communicate
168	159	1	R2.8 making your goal
169	159	1	R2.8 Money management
170	159	1	R2.8 Physical Skills: labor type, restaurant,

			construction
171	159	1	R2.8 Stamina
172	159	1	R2.8 thinking about thinking
173	159	1	R2.8 Tier 2 and Tier 3
174	159	1	R2.8 TP College students help in PE: Course requirements
175	159	1	R2.8 TP R2.8 College students help
176	159	1	R2.8 Transitioning Programs and funding
177		0	Classroom -Effective Interactions
178	177	1	Effective Types of Interactions: Using Smart Board
179	178	2	Effective Types of Interactions: Physical Guided Practice
180	177	1	R1.4
181	177	1	R1.4
182	177	1	R1.4 One on One
183	182	2	R1.4 One on One
184	183	3	R1.4 Consistency
185	182	2	R1.4 Groups of 2-3 Kids
186	182	2	R1.4 Interact positive manner - 2-3yr Toddlers
187	182	2	R1.4 Kinesthetic
188	177	1	R1.4 Focus on Positives
189	188	2	R1.4 Reinforce positive behaviors
190	177	1	R1.4 Human brain thrives on discipline over chaos
191	190	2	R1.4 Practice taking turns and making choices
192	177	1	R1.4 Structure
193	192	2	R1.4 Independent Learning is best in the afternoon
194	192	2	R1.4 You need to follow a schedule
195	177	1	R1.4 Visual Aids
196	195	2	R1.4 Rigorous schedule
197		0	Classroom- Effective Social Interaction
198	197	1	Effective Social Interaction: One-on-one
199	198	2	Effective Social Interactions: Conversations
200	199	3	R2.4 Non structured time PE, Lunch
201	199	3	R2.4 not role played, not staged -let them think
202	197	1	Effective Social Interactions: grading
203	202	2	R2.4 PE race, pick up balls, wait their turn
204	202	2	R2.4 Can answer a question
205	202	2	R2.4 self-assess their campus job
206	197	1	R2.4 Effective Social Interactions
207	206	2	R2.4 say inappropriate words and things
208	206	2	R2.4 Genuine Interactions
209	206	2	R2.4 have conversations
210	206	2	R2.4 PE a sense of comradery
211	206	2	R2.4 play social games

212	206	2	R2.4 Positive Interactions
213		0	Classroom -Learning processes and responses
214	213	1	Direct Instruction
215	213	1	Identify the students strength/weaknesses
216	215	2	R1.3 Strength -Math
217	216	3	R1.3 Ability to express or communicate without emotion
218	216	3	R1.3 Communication
219	216	3	R1.3 Differentiated Instruction Model
220	216	3	R1.3 Kids are good natured
221	216	3	R1.3 Learning process is slow
222	215	2	R1.3 Capable of doing it on their own
223	215	2	R1.3 Learning Processes: Direct instruction
224	215	2	R1.3 Struggle with Social skills
225	215	2	R1.3b Use devices to communicate
226	213	1	R1.3 Gifts and Talents
227	226	2	R1.3 Love acknowledgement of accomplishments
228	226	2	R1.3 Love learning
229	226	2	R1.3 Repetition, Repetition
230	229	3	R1.3 repetitive drills
231	226	2	R1.3 Struggle with Abstract Learning
232	226	2	R1.3 want to learn
233	232	3	R1.3b Hits himself to communicate
234	213	1	R1.3 Tier 1 & 2 Want to be normal
235	213	1	R1.3 Weakness emotional stability
236	235	2	R1.3 weakness- communication
237	235	2	R1.3 Weakness- Emotional and Physical violence
238	235	2	R1.3 Weakness emotional stability
239	235	2	R1.3 Weakness math
240	235	2	R1.3b
241	235	2	R1.3b aggression
242	235	2	R1.3b Deficit in communication Weakness
243	235	2	R1.3b Strength to keep it going
244		0	Classroom -main work/study skills
245	244	1	R1.8 Florida does not have a workforce for these ppl
246	244	1	R1.8 good at preferred interactive skills
247	246	2	R1.8 good and remembering songs
248	246	2	R1.8 Good at role play and hands on
249	244	1	R1.8 it depends on their level
250	249	2	R1.8 Tier 1 Tier 2 12 yrs to 21 yrs
251	249	2	R1.8 Tier 3 does not have study skills
252	251	3	Life Skills: laundry, tie shoes, open envelope
253	251	3	R1.8 Short spans
254	251	3	R1.8 brushing teeth and combing hair

255	251	3	R1.8 cannot sit and listen
256	251	3	R1.8 Teach them to clean but you cannot let them alone
257	244	1	R1.8 Understand concept of being dependable
258	257	2	Main work/study skill goal/ Independence
259	257	2	R1.8 their responsibility
260	257	2	R1.8 work to make money
261	244	1	R1.8 University loves it and the students too
262		0	Classroom- Teach productive encouragement
263	262	1	Intrinsic Rewards
264	263	2	R1.5 groups small 3students
265	263	2	R1.5 Repeating the procedure over and over
266	263	2	R1.5 Repeating the procedure over and over
267	266	3	R1.5 I do, we do, you do
268	266	3	R1.5 Intervening with a calm voice
269	266	3	R1.5 I Pads and smart boards
270	263	2	R1.5 A school-wide expectation: encouragement
271	263	2	R1.5 Interventions; patience
272	263	2	R1.5 Morning Meeting and Smart Board
273	263	2	R1.5 Side hugs
274	263	2	R1.5 Tier 3 verbal praise
275	263	2	R1.5 Tier 3 verbal praise
276	263	2	R1.5: Productive Encouragement
277	262	1	R1.5 Extrinsic Rewards
278	277	2	R1.5 Rewards
279	277	2	R1.5 Student led instruction
280	277	2	R1.5 Tier 3 verbal praise
281	277	2	R1.5 Token Reinforcement
282		0	Classroom: Academic Skill Requirement
283	282	1	/Routine took two weeks
284		0	Classroom; social interactions
285	284	1	R2.5 Communication with parents: text, notes
286	284	1	R2.5 Rewards: Sensory room
287	286	2	extrinsic Rewards
288	284	1	R2.5 Interactions with college students, peer to peer
289	284	1	R2.5 Positive interactions
290	284	1	R2.5 Reward: sit on ball and bounce
291	284	1	R2.5 Rewards Reinforces positive interactions
292	284	1	R2.5 see it on their smiley face
293	284	1	R2.5 Small Incentives and rewards
294	284	1	R2.5 Social Stories have helped
295	284	1	R2.5 Teaching manners
296	284	1	R2.5 Types of Encouragement
297	284	1	R2.5 verbal praise

298	297	2	R2.5 Specific Praise
299		0	Classroom; Social Interactions
300	299	1	R2.6 How are they social
301	299	1	R2.6 They are different at home and with facilitators
302	299	1	R2.6 Academic Skills: read, basic math
303	299	1	R2.6 all different in expressions of social
304	299	1	R2.6 All kids enter the school with different skills
305	299	1	R2.6 build on social stamina- listening and responding
306	299	1	R2.6 Communication Skills
307	299	1	R2.6 Holistic
308	299	1	R2.6 Physical Skills: PE, work, certain jobs/tasks
309	299	1	R2.6 Socially at a surface level
310	299	1	R2.6 students levels of social skills
311	299	1	R2.6 They want to do well in life: live independent
312	299	1	R2.6 Tier 3 Not Social
313	299	1	R2.6 verbal directions are hard
314	299	1	R2.6 You can see it in their faces
315		0	Classroom; Social Interactions
316	315	1	Effective Social Interaction
317	316	2	Communications
318	316	2	Greeting High Five
319	316	2	Making them aware of how to behave in specific place
320	316	2	Physical Guided Practice
321	316	2	Setting Boundaries
322	316	2	Verbal Praise
323	316	2	Verbal Praise
324	316	2	Social Interactions: Lunch Time
325	316	2	Social Skills Activities: Show cards, touch card, define ca
326	316	2	Teaching Right/Wrong
327	316	2	We love encouragement, everyone loves recognition
328	315	1	Social Interactions: All Day Compliments
329	315	1	Social Interactions: Morning Meet, Lunch Eats
330	315	1	Social Interactions: Morning Meeting
331	315	1	Taking Turns
332		0	Classroom; Social Skills Activities
333	332	1	Job Skill - Library
334	332	1	Job Skill- Cooking and Cleaning
335	332	1	Job Skill- Laundry
336	332	1	Job Skill- Recycling
337	336	2	Social Skill: Morning Greetings
338	332	1	Job Skill- Shedding

339	332	1	Social Skills Activities for Tier 3: Picture cards
340	332	1	Social Skills: Morning Routine greeting people
341	332	1	Social Skills: Talking to each other
342		0	Communication and Job Skills
343		0	Concrete schedule/ Routine: Lunch Time
344	343	1	Concrete Schedules and Routine promote Independent
345		0	Development of Work/Study Skills: Concrete Schedule
346	345	1	Developing work/study skills: Routine for Groups
347	345	1	Development of Work/Study skills: Routine
348	345	1	Development of Work/Study Skills: Structure
349		0	Expectations of learning Main Skills
350		0	Extrinsic Motivation
351		0	Greatest Needs- apply information
352	351	1	- Apply info to Real World
353	351	1	- generalize learning 2 all areas of life
354	351	1	Independent at home, school, work
355	351	1	Use information
356		0	Instructional Level: Tier 1
357		0	Instructional Level: Tier 2
358		0	Learning & teaching
359	358	1	Growth Mindset
360	358	1	Learning Processes: One-on-one
361	358	1	Learning processes: Positive Reinforcement
362	358	1	Learning Processes: Being Successful
363	358	1	Meaningful (authentic) Learning
364		0	Paraprofessional
365		0	Productive Encouragement: Let them do it
366		0	Program - R1.7 Laboratory School at University
367	366	1	R1.7 Get to practice in a small community
368	366	1	R1.7 Laboratory School
369	366	1	R1.7 Level of class depends on Vocational skills
370	366	1	R1.7 Living Skills
371	366	1	R1.7 Supported in the classroom: Tier relative
372	366	1	R1.7 TP has campus jobs
373	366	1	R1.7 TP has career class
374	366	1	R1.7 TP has Social Skills Class
375		0	program- Important Transitional skills
376	375	1	R1.6 Getting around the Community
377	376	2	R1.6 Asking for help if lost
378	376	2	R1.6 How to use the bus system
379	376	2	R1.6 How to walk to the store and back
380	375	1	R1.6 Collaborate with parents

381	375	1	R1.6 Effective Social Interactions for Transitioning
382	381	2	R1.6 being without problematic behaviors
383	381	2	R1.6 have conversation
384	381	2	R1.6 Learning Empathy
385	381	2	R1.6 Practicing group interactions in 5-10min interval
386	381	2	R1.6 Social Skills Activities for Tier 3
387	375	1	R1.6b
388		0	Program- Skill Development
389	388	1	Development of Work /Study Skills: Concrete Learning
390	388	1	R2.7 Low Expectations, not many demands
391	388	1	R2.7 Parents pick and choose battles, I get it
392	388	1	R2.7 Parents pick and choose battles, I get it
393	388	1	R2.7 setting boundaries and building a process
394	388	1	R2.7 Social Stories are sent to parents
395	388	1	R2.7 Developing Work Skills
396	388	1	R2.7 Direct Instruction and social stories
397	396	2	R2.7 Hands on Activities
398	396	2	R2.7 Individualized classrooms
399	388	1	R2.7 follow up with specific praise
400	388	1	R2.7 Guilty as a Parent, doing for them
401	388	1	R2.7 I do, we do, you do
402	401	2	R2.7 we assume they can't do it
403	388	1	R2.7 Lose the ability to learn young
404	388	1	R2.7 Practice of Concepts
405	404	2	R2.7 Modeling the work
406	404	2	R2.7 practice, practice, practice
407	388	1	R2.7 PT does not except children in Diapers
408	388	1	R2.7 Puzzles
409	388	1	R2.7 Show them, then let them do it
410		0	Program- TP Support of career skills
411	410	1	R1.7
412	411	2	R1.7 recycling program at School and on campus
413	412	3	R1.7 recycling program at School and on campus
414	413	4	R1.7 TP Transitions to College program
415	412	3	R1.7 Program supports independence
416	412	3	R1.7 Programs Support for developing work/study skill
417	412	3	R1.7 Programs support for transition: many Resources
418	412	3	R1.7 Recycling program
419	411	2	R1.7 Technology , Shark Tank, Undercover Boss
420	411	2	R1.7 Daily Living Skills are supported

421	410	1	R1.7 TP community jobs and Florida careers
422	421	2	R1.7 Frustration for Tier1 students Campus jobs
423	421	2	R1.7 Work and study skills are not supported
424	410	1	R1.7 college is a safe place
425	424	2	R1.7 Campus Job at Chic Fil Custodial
426	424	2	R1.7 Campus jobs
427	424	2	R1.7 Get to utilize college resources
428		0	Program: R2.8 Tier 3 soccer/football is used as a tool
429	428	1	R2.8 Tier 3 Will not be able to hold a job
430	428	1	R2.8 Tier 3 Life Skill - Independence
431	428	1	R2.8 Tier 3 Participate in Assisted living
432		0	Program; Special Education and Self Contained class
433	432	1	T2
434	432	1	T3
435	434	2	Tier 3 - academic challenges: trying, repetitiveness
436	434	2	Tier 3 transition: They may not be able to have a job
437	434	2	Tier 3 Adaptive PE, College students help
438	434	2	Tier 3 communicates through picture cards
439	434	2	Tier 3 developing work skills: holding a crayon in their
440	434	2	Tier 3 developing work skills: Model, guide, practice
441	434	2	Tier 3 Goal is to be independent
442	434	2	Tier 3 Level of Communication
443	434	2	Tier 3 lowest level, non verbal
444	434	2	Tier 3 Main Work Skill: Communicate
445	434	2	Tier 3 Main Work Skill: social behavior
446	434	2	Tier 3 Socially Invisible to each other
447	434	2	Tier 3 They could careless about others
448	434	2	Tier 3: developing work skills: keep them working
449	434	2	Tier 3: preparing them for noises
450	434	2	Tier 3: Will not hold a regular job
451	434	2	Tier3 : Basic daily functions
452		0	R1.6 Transition to post school life
453		0	R1.8 Work/study skills
454		0	R2
455		0	R2.1
456	455	1	Teacher Influences
457		0	R2.1b
458	457	1	R2.1b Doing inventory assessments
459	457	1	R2.1b Getting them to behave better
460	457	1	R2.1b Knowing our kids and their needs
461	457	1	R2.1b Meeting Education Goals
462		0	R2.2b Parents teaching the same thing

463	462	1	R2.2b students need love and care
464	462	1	R2.2b Trust teachers
465	462	1	R2.2b Hard work earns a HS Diploma
466	462	1	R2.2b Push them to communicate
467		0	R2.5b Outcome of effective interactions
468	467	1	R2.5b Praise and recognition
469	467	1	R2.5b see it in their body language
470	467	1	R2.5b Talk about this during prayer time
471		0	R2.7B Activities for Tier 3
472	471	1	R2.7B Activities for Tier 3
473	471	1	R2.7b Tier 1 and Tier 2
474		0	Reason why they work in program: Improve lives
475		0	Relieve their parents from the burden
476		0	Routine: Automatically get the tools (glue, scissors)
477		0	RQ 2
478		0	Safe Classroom Family
479		0	Students greatest need to ach: Put technology away, g
480		0	Study / Work Skill- Open to Learn
481		0	Study/Work Skill - Work with different People
482		0	Technology Tool: Smart Board
483		0	Tier 1 & Tier 2 Higher functioning social
484		0	Tier 1 Explanation
485		0	transition
486	485	1	Development of work/study skills
487	486	2	Transition Program to college requirements
488	485	1	Programs Support for Transition skills: Tablets
489	488	2	Transition Activities: Take their device to communicate
490	488	2	Waiting in Line
491	485	1	Programs Support for Transition Skills: Technology-sm
492	485	1	Transition Activities: Behave in different environments
493	492	2	Transition Activities: use manners
494		0	Types of Encouragement: Verbal Praise
495	494	1	Types of Encouragement: Good Job
496	494	1	Types of Encouragement -Coins Extrinsic
497	494	1	Verbal Praise
498	497	2	Verbal Praise encourages interactions
499	497	2	Verbal Praise encourages interactions]
500	497	2	Verbal Praise: safe and positive class