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An Investigation of Transition from School to Work for Individuals with Disabilities n

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

An Investigation of Transition from School to Work for Individuals with Disabilities

by

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MA, Walden University, 2007

BS, University of Rio Grande, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

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Abstract

In the school to work transition process, school personnel collaborate with community employment and vocational rehabilitation to establish an employment plan for Individual(s) with Disabilities (IWDs). Development of the Individualized Education Transition Plan (IETP) is often haphazard and not evaluated for effectiveness, resulting in poor implementation. This qualitative case study addresses the lack of a clear school to work transition planning process, unemployment, and explored the perceptions and experiences of county service providers regarding community employment for IWDs. A basic qualitative design consists of semi-structured interviews with 10 county service providers and educators to understand the reason for unemployment, lack of support for IWDs in the community, limited job opportunities, and limited resources for IWDs was used. The resulting qualitative data were coded manually and entered using NVivo software. Data analysis consisted of developing categories, theme, and interpreting the findings. The results demonstrated that in general, participants reported that they regularly collected data in one area of IWDs to keep track of each student's IEP goals and objectives. Another result was participants identified several uses for resources that parents could use to help their IWDs transition smoothly to life after high school. These findings resulted in the development of a policy paper, for educators to assist IWDs with engagement of employment opportunities. The policy recommendations will also provide insight for the local public schools on how to close the gap for IWDs employment opportunities. for positive social change include IWDs being provided additional resources in the local setting, job coaching, and an IETP after high school.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition of the Problem	3
Rationale	5
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level.....	6
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	7
Definitions.....	9
Significance.....	10
Guiding/Research Question	11
Review of the Literature	13
Implications.....	21
Summary	21
Section 2: The Methodology.....	23
Introduction.....	23
Conclusion	43
Section 3: The Project.....	45
Introduction.....	45
Description and Goals.....	46
Rationale	47

Review of the Literature	48
Implementation	60
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	60
Potential Barriers	60
Proposal for Implementation and Timetable.....	61
Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others	61
Project Evaluation.....	61
Implications Including Social Change	64
Local Community	64
Far-Reaching.....	64
Conclusion	65
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	65
Introduction.....	65
Project Strengths	65
Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations	67
Scholarship.....	68
Project Development and Evaluation.....	68
Leadership and Change.....	69
Analysis of Self as Scholar	70
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	71
Analysis of Self as Project Developer	71

The Project’s Potential Impact on Social Change.....	71
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	71
Conclusion	72
References.....	74
Appendix A: Policy Paper	84
Appendix B: Evaluation Survey.....	106
Appendix C: Interveiw Questions.....	107

Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

An Individualized Education Transition Plan (IETP) plays an important role in planning for life, and employment, after high school for individuals with disabilities (IWDs). An IETP is a document prepared for each individual with a diagnosed disability participating in a community-based rehabilitation program. It must include a statement of needed transition services, an assessment, or training needed for the client with a disability (Lee & Carter, 2012). When effectively applied, IETPs can help secure employment in the community for IWDs.

Increased accountability measures instituted by local, state, and national governments, and updated educational policies, have pressured U.S. communities and stakeholders to increase employment in the community for IWDs. Often, if an IWDs does not have a transition plan after high school, he or she will be left out of the workforce, and thus, the community. IWDs, parents, and caregivers may not be aware of what employment support options are offered.

The purpose of this case study is to gain an understanding of the perceptions of three county service providers (ZPS, ZHRP, and ZBDD) working with IWDs, to ensure community employment, prevocational services, supported employment, day habilitation, or adult work centers. These perceptions and experiences will help in gaining an understanding about high school transition and work preparation, community employment, prevocational services, supported employment and success, day habilitation programs, and adult work centers for IWDs (see Appendix A). There is evidence that there is a problem with IWDs being fully employed and participating in competitive employment at the local, state, and national level. An Individual Transitional Plan for Employment is a document prepared for each individual with a diagnosed disability participating in a community-based rehabilitation program.

Alverson (2016) cited Taylor & Seltzer's (2011) research that consistently documented poor employment levels for IWDs. Currently, only 17.5% of IWDs were employed while 65% of Individuals without Disabilities (IWOD) were employed. Furthermore, all age groups for IWDs were much less likely to be employed than those with no disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Since a 2013 decline in community employment for IWDs, new laws and policies have been implemented at local, state, and national levels to ensure competitive equal pay and inclusion opportunities (Employment First, 2016). In Hamilton County, Ohio, there is an 80% unemployment rate for IWDs, which is double the unemployment rate for IWODs (Cincinnati Enquirer, 2016). Due to the low employment rate at the local, state, and national level, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) Section 511 has prohibited subminimum wage for IWDs, created an opportunity for competitive employment at the national level, and initiated integrated employment for youth transitioning from school to work. New provisions in the law require Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to increase their involvement in providing learning opportunities, supported employment services for young adults, and required collaboration with Medicaid and developmental disabilities agencies. These new provisions in the law for VR programs also limited jobs that paid less than minimum wage, and prohibited schools from contracting with sub-minimum wage providers, such as sheltered workshops, when providing transition services (Novak, 2015).

For the first time, after the provision changes of WIOA 2014, competitive integrated employment was identified as the optimal employment outcome of VR services (Hoff, 2014). Novak (2015) noted that the overall drive of the new policy was three-fold: to increase employment opportunities in the community for IWDs, to offer competitive integrated employment, and to address the weakness of the IETP process.

Definition of the Problem

Several studies have concluded that when IETPs are in place, IWDs are able to function and work in a community. “Unfortunately, in Hillsborough, Ohio, there is evidence that this is not occurring. This appears to be a larger, more national problem that has led to increased policies and research in the U.S. directed toward the transitions of IWDs from school to adult roles in their communities” (Ebersold, 2012; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006; Wehman, 2012). According to a comprehensive 2010 report released by the U.S. Census Bureau, it is estimated that 56.7 million Americans, or 19% of the population, live with disabilities. Lee (2012) reported nearly 70% of IWDs have been left out of the American workforce. In June 2012, only 19.3% of IWDs in the U.S. were participating in the labor force, working, or seeking work because of limited educational and local agency support collaborations (Lee, 2012). Of those, 12.9% were unemployed, meaning only 16.8% of IWDs were employed. In contrast, 69.3% IWOD were in the labor force, and 65% of IWOD were employed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

IWDs face a much greater problem with unemployment because of the unique social, emotional, and behavioral challenges that may present when they are preparing for life in the workforce, searching for a position, and competently completing job tasks to stated criteria (Wilczynski, 2013). IWDs who have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face more difficulty finding employment than people with any other disability. Holwerda, van der Klink, Groothoff, & Brouwer (2012) indicate that only about 25% of individuals with ASD are employed, while 69% of adults without disabilities in the U.S. are employed in either full-time or part-time positions.

Furthermore, Burgess & Cimera (2014) concluded that “over time, the number of IWDs seeking Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services has increased; however, employment outcomes, including the percent of IWDs achieving employment, the number of hours worked, and wages earned, have not improved for this group.” Transition-aged IWDs were more likely to become successfully employed as a result of receiving VR services than the larger population of transition-aged adults. However, the employed transition-aged IWDs consistently worked fewer hours and earned lower wages than those in the larger population (Burgess & Cimera, 2014).

Some of the service options for IWDs upon high school graduation might include the following: community employment, prevocational services, supported employment, day habilitation programs, or adult work centers. When IETPs are not in place and practiced during an individual’s high school years, both the IWDs and society will be affected. Increased collaboration among local agencies, county service providers, educators, parents, and the IWDs during the IETP process will ensure a meaningful person-centered plan (Employment First, 2016). When IWDs are provided with resources in a local setting, with job coaches and an IETP, this creates positive social change in the community benefiting IWDs (Wilczynski, Trammell, Clarke, 2013). For example, being able to work in the community with a job coach and then without assistance, would be a positive social change. It was also found that employment positively impacted the quality of life, cognitive functioning, and well-being of participants with ASD and IWDs (Walsh, Lydon, & Healy, 2014).

In order for the IWDs to be successful in securing employment in the local community, there is a need for training, increased support, a raised awareness of how to employ IWDs, and help to ensure success for the IWDs. This study contributes to bridging the gap by creating a shared vision for ensuring IWDs can transition smoothly after high school into integrated,

competitive employment in the community. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the perceptions of county service providers working with IWDs to ensure community employment, prevocational services, supported employment, day habilitation, or adult work centers.

Rationale

The WIOA has now mandated that schools will have to ensure opportunities for IWDs to choose where, with whom, and how they want to live. Therefore, Individuals with Disabilities will need to be able to pursue higher education and become gainfully employed to be included in their community. Graduation from high school alone does not ensure the IWDs will be included in the workforce and provided with support through local agencies. IETPs are not always planned out during high school (Employment First, 2016). According to Employment First (2016), the transition process for an IWDs has not been person centered, job skills or community work have not been introduced and practiced, and as a result, there is no plan for a person with disabilities.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey, at the local level in Hillsborough County, Ohio, there are estimated to be 632,468 total civilians in the noninstitutionalized population. Of that 632,468, there is an estimated 90,541 IWDs, and 541,927 IWOD. Of the 90,541 IWDs, there is an estimated 22.6% employment rate and 72.2% unemployment rate. Of the 541,927 IWOD, 68.6% are employed, and 27.0% are unemployed. 10.0% of IWDs make \$75,000 or more compared to a 16.3% of IWOD. This local county data suggests that there is a significant problem with integrated competitive community employment. According to the Local Disability Data Planners (2016), at the county level, only 37% of IWDs are employed, compared to 77% of IWOD are employed.

Furthermore, in 2013, the American Community Survey (ACS) reported that in Ohio, 13.7% of persons of all ages were reported as being an IWDs. In 2013, the employment rate of IWD working-age people, ages 21 to 64, in Ohio was 33.9%. The percentage of IWDs actively looking for full time work was 10.5%. In 2013, in this same state, the percentage of working-age IWDs who were working full-time for the full year was 21.0%. The median annual earnings of working-age IWDs working full-time/full-year in Ohio was \$39,100. The median annual income for households of IWDs was \$34,800, well below those of IWOD. The poverty rate for working age IWDs was 30.8%. Thirty-three point nine percent of IWDs were employed compared to 78% of IWODs in Ohio in 2013. The gap between the employment rates of working-age people with and without disabilities was 44.1% (Disability Status Report, 2013).

Additionally, IWDs are not entering the local workforce because the appropriate support plan for them to become employment ready does not exist. One scholar who emphasizes that IWDs encounter difficulty with employment is Lee (2012); he argued that when transition plans, supports, and accommodations were not individualized and put into place, IWDs encountered limited employment opportunities, difficulty in job retention, limited opportunities for career advancement, and negative work experiences. Connecting parents, caregivers, and IWDs with local agencies, such as the Department of Developmental Disabilities, county boards, and/or mental health services, will ensure that a person with a disability has options, and is connected to society after graduation (Employment First, 2016).

The Readiness Model, as it relates to the continuum of rehabilitation services, meant that an individual first participates in prevocational education, then a work-activity center, then sheltered employment, before finally being placed in a community job (Novak, 2015). However,

according to Novak (2015), as a result, few people were ever determined ready for community employment, and the vast majority remained confined to segregated settings in perpetuity.

According to the National Autism Indicators Report (2015), two-thirds of young people with autism had neither a job nor an educational plan during the first two years after high school. For over a third of young adults with autism, this continued into their early 20s. With an employment rate of 58%, 20-somethings with autism were less likely to be employed than their peers with other disabilities. In comparison, 74% of young people with intellectual disabilities, 95% with learning disabilities, and 91% with a speech impairment or emotional disturbance were employed in their early 20s.

The report also discussed adult outcomes and disconnection measures for how life, work, and play are related. That report disclosed that the picture is poor for a large proportion of young adults on the spectrum: over 37% of young adults with autism were disconnected during their early 20s, meaning they never got a job or continued education after high school. In comparison, less than eight percent of young adults with other types of disabilities were disconnected. Approximately 26% of young adults on the autism spectrum, and 28% of those unemployed and not in school, received no services - services which could help them become employed, continue their education, or live more independently.

According to the National Autism Indicator Report, employment is often the primary transition goal of students with disabilities as they prepare to exit high school. According to Roux (2015), 58% of young adults on the autism spectrum worked for pay outside the home between high school and their early 20s—a rate far lower than young adults with other types of disabilities. Those who got jobs generally worked part-time for low wages. Postsecondary education, measured as participation in college or vocational/technical schools, is a critical

pathway to employment. Only 36% of young adults on the autism spectrum attended postsecondary education, including 2-year and 4-year colleges, and after high school. These opportunities may be absent in disconnected youth. Furthermore, one in four young adults with autism were socially isolated, meaning they never saw or talked with friends, and were never invited to social activities within the previous year. Transition Planning, a key process for helping youth build skills and access services as they enter adulthood, was frequently delayed. Just 58% of youth had a transition plan by the federally required age (Roux, Shattuck, Rast, Rava, Julianna, Anderson, & Kristy, 2015).

Historically, employment opportunities for IWDs have been limited (Walsh, Lydon & Healy, 2014). In an effort to increase employment for IWDs, the ASD population were given the opportunity to train and start work earlier (Employment First, 2016). If IWDs do not have a transition plan or experience with the job work force, they will be less likely to work. Cimera, Burgess, & Wiley (2015) indicated that individuals from early transition states were significantly more likely to be employed than individuals from the later transition group.

Early transition individuals who became employed appeared to earn higher wages and cost less to serve. According to Wilczynski, Trammell, & Clarke (2013), school professionals must be prepared to ease the transition to adulthood by developing and/or collaborating with programs designed to meet the employment needs of IWDs. The intent of this study is to gain an understanding of the perceptions of county service providers working with IWDs to ensure community employment, prevocational services, supported employment, day habilitation, or adult work centers.

Definitions

Individual with a disability (IWD): Federal law defines a person with a disability as "Any person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment" (The Americans with Disability Act, 2008).

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD): Autism is a spectrum of disorders including Autistic Disorder, Asperger Syndrome, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Development Disorder (PPDNOS) (Cullum & Cole, 2014).

Workforce innovation and opportunity act (WIOA): Landmark legislation that is designed to strengthen and improve our nation's public workforce system and help get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, into high-quality jobs or careers, and help employers hire and retain skilled workers.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Places special emphasis on services to individuals with the most severe disabilities, to expand special Federal responsibilities and research and training programs with respect to individuals with disabilities, to create linkage between State vocational rehabilitation programs and workforce investment activities carried out under title I of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, to establish special responsibilities for the Secretary of Education for coordination of all activities with respect to individuals with disabilities within and across programs administered by the Federal Government, and for other purposes. Amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (P.L. 113–128), signed into law on July 22, 2014, the Act seeks to empower individuals with disabilities to maximize employment, economic self- sufficiency, independence, and inclusion in and integration into society (WIOA, 2016).

Job coach: A job coach is a person specifically assigned to assist or train a person with disabilities in the workforce (Cook & Carter, 2012).

Individualized educational transition plans: A document prepared for each individual with a diagnosed disability participating in a community-based rehabilitation program. It must include a statement of needed transition services established for vocational exploration, assessment, or training for the client (Lee & Carter, 2012).

Sheltered workshop or work center: An organization designed to employ individuals with disabilities working below minimum wage (Wilczynski, Trammell & Clarke 2013).

Supported employment: When a person with a disability works in a community-based setting with a range of supports including, but not restricted to, job development, job coaching, job retention, transportation, and assistive technology (Wilczynski, Trammell, & Clarke 2013).

Employment first policy: Creates opportunities and pathways for integration, independence, and full community participation for people with disabilities. This is a policy that creates opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities (Employment first, 2016).

Competitive employment: When a person with a disability is paid at least minimum wage, and at a rate equivalent to that paid for employees without a disability, for the work they perform in a community-based setting (Wilczynski, Trammell, & Clarke, 2013).

Vocational rehabilitation: Services focusing on job placement and job coaching. Once an individual is hired, Vocational Rehabilitation Services can include job coaching to help ensure long term employment success (Martinez, 2013).

Significance of Study

The WIOA led to increasing federal employment of individuals with disabilities, and committed the country to increasing the number of individuals with disabilities in the Federal

workforce (United States Department of Labor, 2015). The WIOA is landmark legislation that is designed to impact, strengthen, and improve our local, state, and national public workforce system, which will affect all IWDs and those with significant barriers to employment. This will change will affect all public education schools, employees, and businesses in local communities. All businesses must have a population of IWDs working for them, provide a job coach if necessary, and provide equal opportunities and competitive wages. IWDs should have the same opportunities as IWODs in the workforce.

Furthermore, public schools and employees must align IEP's with work and career goals, and ensure that the IEP and career is followed through after high school. Public school employees need to make sure that each IEP is person centered, aligned with their interests, needs, and wants, ensuring equal opportunities. Services focus on enhancing student achievement and post-secondary outcomes through implementation of regional and statewide activities for students, families, educators, administrators, and other stakeholders. Person centered opportunities can target areas for services and supports including accessible instructional materials, assistive technology, curriculum access and alignment, dropout prevention, family engagement, least restrictive environment, positive behavior supports, and transitional services.

Parents, community services, and public school employees need to communicate and create opportunities for IWDs, allowing them to compete in high-quality jobs and careers, and help employers hire and retain skilled workers (United States Department of Labor, 2016). Parents, IWDs, educators, local agencies, and county service providers need to communicate to ensure a smooth transition after high school in preparation for the workforce. However, there appears to be no effective process locally in place and the current IETPs are not serving the needs of IWDs to help them successfully join the workforce. What this study will do is help

identify the process of an IETP to serve individuals with disabilities for a smooth transition to employment. This study will affect 90,541 of people at local level in Ohio, who live with disabilities. This study could affect the field by raising awareness to parents, job coaches, administrators, psychologists, educators, and IWDs.

The current study contributes to the body of academic literature and fills a gap in the evaluation of transition planning and community employment, which is a key process for helping youth build skills and access services as they enter adulthood. A qualitative case study can ensure that the transition plan gives stakeholders an opportunity to explore local agencies working with IWDs and can provide collaborative opportunities and partnerships for finding employment. Administrators, psychologists, parents, educators, and the IWDs can use this information to make immediate adjustments.

Guiding Research Question

Understanding county service providers' perceptions, experiences, and challenges when working with an IWDs will help educators, parents, and the IWD population collaborate. Gaining insight from local agencies and county service providers who work with IWDs can help with a smooth transition during and after high school. Learning what accommodations and modifications are needed to ensure success and accountability for IWDs will give community and business owners a better understanding of what is expected and needed.

The research questions for this study focused on the perceptions and experiences of county service providers working with IWDs who need employment support services, and the perceived needs that county service providers describe regarding appropriate employment support services for IWDs. County service providers reflected on their experience when working with IWDs in the school, work, and community setting.

RQ1: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on high school preparation and readiness for IWDs in need of employment support services?

RQ2: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on development and leadership opportunities for IWDs in relationship to community experience?

RQ3: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on opportunities in the community for IWDs and employment services?

RQ4: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on day habilitation programs and community employment for IWDs?

RQ5: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on family awareness's of local services for life after high school for IWDs?

Review of the Literature

A comprehensive search of Walden University's databases (ERIC, Academic Research Complete, Education Research Complete, and Education from SAGE, Google Scholar, and ProQuest Central) identified a gap in the existing literature. Search terms for the named databases included vocational rehabilitation programs, disabilities in the workforce, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, sheltered workshops, day habilitation programs, autism and community work participation, disability, social model theory, employment and unemployment rates, and accommodations and services for people with disabilities. In addition to scholarly journals, many types of resources were referenced, such as websites of organizations devoted to workforce and community employment for people with disabilities, the Autism Foundation, services and accommodations for people with disabilities, sheltered workshops, and vocational rehabilitation.

Conceptual Framework

Myhill & Blanck's Social Model of Disability is the framework used for this study. Oliver's (1990) *The Politics of Disablement: A sociological approach*, which focused on the disability rights movement, agrees with Myhill & Blanck's Social Model of Disability. Oliver examined how U.S. grassroots organizations were organizing for accessibility in transportation, support for independent living, and equal rights. After an extensive review of the literature, Oliver (1990) conducted further research and argued that "the problem is not located in the individual, but an instructional problem, shaped by economics, political, and ideological forces" (p. 4). Oliver's analysis of the social structuring of disability developed two concepts: the mode of production and the central core values, or ideology, that are present within any given society. The Social Model of Disability shifts away from consideration of the deficits of the functional, physiological, and cognitive abilities of the impaired individual, to the ability of society to systematically oppress and discriminate against disabled people, and the negative social attitudes encountered by disabled people throughout their everyday lives.

In the new edition, *The New Politics of Disablement (2012)*, Oliver and Barnes not only updated the previous edition, but they surveyed the theories and origins of disablement and the ways in which disability is represented in society at large. Oliver and Barnes argue that a clear vision of how to move disability struggles forward is lacking, adding that this fact was not surprising, given the current state of disability rights activism and the global crisis of capitalism. Oliver and Barnes (2012) concluded, "We still believe that the only long-term political strategy for disabled people is to be part of a far wider struggle to create a better society for all." Barnes (2012) advanced the Social Theory of Disability, and established the following framework for the model in three ways:

1. Exploring conventional sociological functionalist and deficit theories of disability and work,
2. Re-defining disability from the standpoint of disabled people and their organizations, and
3. Disability, work, and welfare.

Other researchers have used Oliver and Barnes's (2012) model as their conceptual or theoretical framework while analyzing other theories regarding disability. This study uses the framework and model to help guide the research questions to understand the perceptions of the county service providers working with IWDs through the IETP process. The research is aligned with questions to the Social Model of Disability, and focused on resources, accommodations, and services being provided to the IWDs. The study focuses on what services, support, work, and pay opportunities for IWDs, and how the IWDs sees opportunities during high school and after graduation.

In agreement with the Social Model of Disability, Myhill and Blanck (2009) considered disability a consequence of environmental, social, and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with disabilities from maximum participation in society (Blanck et al. 2009). Lang (2001) used Oliver and Barnes's Social Model of Disability in his article, "The Development and Critique of the Social Model of Disability." Lang provides a description and analysis of the Social Model of Disability and how it is has developed during the past 30 years. Lang concludes that both academics working in the field of disability studies, as well as practitioners providing disability services, have been increasingly influenced by its underpinning philosophy. The disability movement also utilizes the social model as a political platform and tool to secure the rights of

people with disabilities, with the objective of ensuring that they enjoy the status of full citizenship within contemporary society (Lang, 2001).

Kohler (2016) developed a taxonomy for a Transition Programing Model (TPM) with five primary practice categories for IWDs: Student-Focused Planning, Student Development, Interagency Collaboration, Family Engagement, and Program Structure. It includes additional practices in the areas of student supports and the instructional context within Student Development, as well as school climate in Program Structure. Within Family Engagement, a focus on cultural relevancy, empowerment, and family preparation are emphasized. Across categories, collaboration with service agencies, especially vocational rehabilitation, emphasize the importance of such connections prior to and during school and post-school transitions.

Review of the Literature on the Problem Statement

The review of literature begins with a historical review of transition services, as well as the reform movement. Then, the concept of and characteristics of an Individualized Educational Transitional Plan are defined and explained. The literature review is organized to address the following themes: transitional services and IETPs, key characteristics for unemployed people with a disability, community based work and WIOA, job development and support resources, service and support services for families, and individuals with a disability.

A review of current research on VR agencies reveals their critical role in helping transition-aged youth with disabilities attain vocational goals (Honeycutt, Thompkins, Bardos, & Stern, 2014). In addition, according to the literature, policymakers could improve VR services for transition-aged youth by developing specific standards and guidelines for VR agencies serving IWDs. Achieving competitive employment is an important outcome for young adults graduating from high school or college. Adolescents go to high school and sometimes college in

order to obtain meaningful employment in the workplace. Youth with disabilities, especially those with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities (Carter et al. 2011), have struggled to make this transition. Shattuck et al. (2012) and Taylor and Selzer (2011) further note that for youth with autism, unemployment after school can range from 50% to as high as 86%. This is an unacceptable outcome after many years of specialized education and schooling.

In order to increase community education and integrate IWDs, individuals will learn about employment options and planning during their school years. The initiative also insists that adults with developmental disabilities should have support teams that assist in learning more about how abilities and interests can match opportunities within the workplace. Every person should expect that community employment is the preferred outcome for working-age IWDs. Every agency, school, organization, and individual within Ohio's developmental disabilities system plays a role by focusing on what everyone can do, and providing the best supports and services to enable people to choose and succeed in community employment.

Employment First creates opportunities and pathways for integration, independence, and full community participation. Community employment allows for greater independence, wealth building potential, improved self-esteem, and personal satisfaction. Employers and co-workers experience diversity and a broader range of capable employees. Society at large benefits when all citizens are able to participate in an included setting and contribute to their communities in all the ways they can (Employment First, 2016).

According to the 2010 National FINDS survey, 58% of family caregivers reported it was very important that the person with IWDs continue their education after finishing high school, or, for adults, to go back to school for postsecondary education. Twenty-six percent felt post-secondary education was somewhat important, and 16% felt post-secondary education was not

important. Only half of family caregivers of people with IWDs felt post-secondary education was very important for that family member. Differences were also apparent across disability severity. Overall, 68% of family caregivers of people with mild disabilities thought further education was very important, compared with 60% of family caregivers of people with a moderate disability, and 47% of family caregivers of people with a severe disability.

Therefore, as the disability becomes more severe, the expectations in society decline for IWDs, making fewer opportunities for competitive integrated employment. This data supports the conceptual framework of Myhill & Blanck's Social Model of Disability that societal perception is often the main barrier to their participating in viable employment. Furthermore, 73% expressed the need for IWDs to learn a job-related skill, 72% expressed the need for IWDs to learn about things they were interested in, and 66% of caretakers expressed IWDs need to have experiences that will help the person get a job. Caretakers and IWDs expressed the need to have an employment plan during high school, and after high school.

Individualized Educational Transitional Plans (IETP). According to Carter, Harvey, Taylor, & Gotham (2013), equipping IWDs to flourish during and after high school is central to the purpose and practice of special education during the transition process. However, many IWDs are leaving high school without the preparation and connections needed to engage meaningfully in their communities. Recognizing that relationships are at the core of community life, emphasis is placed on fostering social connections as an essential aspect of helping IWDs thrive in these settings (Carter, Harvey, Taylor, & Gotham, 2013).

Project SEARCH is a nationally recognized program that is designed for IWDs in their final year of high school. The program builds the employability skills needed to gain and maintain meaningful employment in the community through career exploration and internships

at local host businesses. Individualized job development and placement occurs based on the student's experiences, strengths, and skills. IWDs also receive on-the-job training and supports from a trained job coach and classroom instructor. At the state and local level, Employment First (2016) was initiated and states: Every person has abilities, skills, and talents to enrich the community and people around us and we envision a time when every working-age adult with developmental disabilities has opportunity to explore their career options and seek jobs that fit their skills and interests.

Key characteristics of unemployment for people with a disability. The poor employment outcomes for IWDs are well-documented and have resulted in calls to examine more effective ways of providing supports (Strickland, Coles, & Southern, 2013). Poor employment outcomes imply that if attitudinal, physical, and instructional barriers are removed, many people would be viewed as having different abilities and a greater opportunity to participate in society, rather than having disabilities and the inability to participate. "The social model highlights a considerable shift from acknowledging only innate disability factors to looking at a disabled individual's highly complex relationship to society as a whole" (Schlesinger, 2014, p. 7). The Social Model of Disability focuses on the unique abilities and needs of each individual which result in positive consequences for employment outcomes in the United States, Canada, and Australia, with many individuals with disabilities obtaining customized and competitive employment in the community, which helps improve negative attitudes among employers (Shapiro, 1994).

Community based work and WIOA explained. Work assessments are paid work experiences that take place in a community employment setting (Ebersold, 2012). These assessments are based on the vocational interests and preferences of the individual. They are

designed to expose the individual to real work tasks, employer expectations and demands, as well as the social demands of community employment. Work assessments allow the individual's needs to be identified and their job readiness skills to be evaluated prior to job placement (Ebersold, 2012). Job developers work one-on-one with individuals to identify employment preferences and interests. They assist with developing a placement plan that identifies the strengths and needs of the individual in order to achieve successful community placement. The job developer works with the individual to create a structured job search and to identify employment opportunities. Developers assist with creating a resume, submitting applications, and sharpening interviewing skills (Ebersold, 2012).

Job development and support services. Job coaching can take place once employment is secured in the community. A trained job coach provides individualized on-the-job training in conjunction with the employer. The job coach assists the individual in mastering job tasks and meeting employer expectations. A job coach acts as a liaison with the employer and provides on-going follow up and retention services. The job coach helps identify natural supports in the workplace and provides advocacy support on behalf of the individual (Wehman, 2012).

Support services for families and individuals with a disability. There are service coordinators for IWDs in the community that can help with developing and continuing services on an Individual Service Plan (ISP) (Wehman, 2012). ISPs are developed after high school and developed to meet the IWDs needs in the community.

One type of living arrangement for an IWD is Supported Living, which can allow IWDs to live as independently in the community or with others. An ISP will be developed for each person participating in the Supported Living program (Cullum, 2014). Another support is the Family Support Services Program (FSSP), which provides supports, services, and help to enable

families to provide home care for their family members with disabilities or to enhance the quality of life for that family member in their homes (Cullum, 2014).

Implications

The literature review established the need to evaluate IETPs before individuals graduate, and then, that they must be an ongoing process to ensure proper IWDs placement in the community. A qualitative case study exploring the perceptions of county service providers and agencies working with IWDs can provide collaborative opportunities and partnerships for finding employment. Administrators, psychologists, parents, educators, and IWDs can use this information to make immediate adjustments. This case study explored accommodations, modifications, and support services that local agencies, county service providers, employers, local communities, and educators are providing to ensure that IWDs secure employment.

As prior research indicates, the development of IETPs, and opportunities for employment or VR programs before graduation will ensure employability (Wehman, 2012). This study led to the development of a policy recommendation that specifically speaks to the employment support that IWDs need to become employability. Targeting transition plans during high school would ensure that IWDs are successful after high school and have a plan of action. Ensuring that parents, caregivers, and IWDs understand the services and supports offered in their community can provide stability and a pathway to employment for the IWDs.

Summary

An IETP is a plan focusing on the IWDs and ensuring success during and after high school (Hoffman, 2013). This IETP must include a statement of needed transition services established for vocational exploration, assessment, or training for the client with a disability. Section 1 provided a review of the literature regarding IETPs and how they are important during

transitions for IWDs during and after high school. Section 1 also included definitions and characteristics of unemployment for IWDs and the opportunities that exist. It is evident today that there is a need for support and opportunity for IWDs in the national, state, and local communities.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey, at the local level in Hamilton County, Ohio, there are an estimated 632,468 total civilians in the noninstitutionalized population. Of that 632,468 there is an estimated 90,541 IWDs, and 541,927 IWODs. Of the 90,541 IWDs, there is an estimated 22.6% employed and 72.2% unemployed. Of the 541,927 IWODs, 68.6% are employed, and 27.0% are unemployed. 10.0% of IWDs make \$75,000 or more compared to a 16.3% IWOD. This local data suggests that there is a significant problem with integrated competitive community employment.

Furthermore, in 2013, the American Community Survey (ACS) reported that in Ohio, 13.7% of persons of all ages were reported as being an IWD. In 2013, the employment rate of IWD working-age people, ages 21 to 64, in Ohio was 33.9%. Employment First (2016) filed data that confirmed there is a significant problem with integrated competitive community employment, and a new policy would need to be put into place to ensure employment. Furthermore, the ARC Survey of 2010 provided data that confirmed there is a significant problem with IWDs being fully employed and participating in competitive employment at the local, state, and national level. Myhill & Blanck's Social Model of Disability serves as the conceptual framework for this study. To ensure proper transition for an IWD, a statement of needed transition services established for vocational exploration, assessment, or training for the client with a disability is necessary (Hoffman, 2013).

The current study contributes to the body of academic literature and fills a gap in the evaluation of transition planning and community employment, which is a key process for helping youth build skills and access services as they enter adulthood. A qualitative case study can ensure that the transition plan gives stakeholders an opportunity to explore local agencies working with IWDs which can provide collaborative opportunities and partnerships for finding employment. Administrators, psychologists, parents, educators, and the IWD population can use this information to make immediate adjustments.

In Section 2, the study focuses on the methodology, including the research design and approach, type of evaluation, participants, data collection and analysis, limitations, and rights of participants. The details and findings of this study are included in Section 3. Finally, Section 4 includes reflections and conclusions.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of county service providers working with IWDs to ensure community employment, prevocational services, supported employment, day habilitation, or adult work centers are available. Stake (1995) noted that researchers who have a genuine interest in a single unit should use a case study approach when the intent is to gain a better understanding. A qualitative design best met the needs of this case study in order to understand the process of how IWDs transition after high school, the opportunities that are provided, and to understand and address the research problem and questions. Merriam (1998) implied that case studies can be differentiated from other forms of qualitative research by the fact that these studies focus on a single unit.

Data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with a total of ten participants. Therefore, the case study and key informants consisted of four participant interviewees at Zephyrhills Rehabilitation Program (ZHRP), a day program with workshops and community job opportunities; two participant interviewees at the Zephyrhills Board of Developmental Delays (ZBDD); and four participant interviewees with the Zephyrhills Public School (ZPS). Pseudo names were used to protect the case study key informants. Immediately after data collection, interviews were transcribed, and the interview data notes analyzed. After analysis, the interview questions were refined based on the strengths and weaknesses identified through the ACS and the CPS. Typologies were created from the conceptual framework of Myhill & Blanck's Social Model of Disability.

Once IRB approval had been obtained and prior to collecting the qualitative data for this case study at ZPS, ZHRP, and ZBDD, a review of local, state, and national data regarding IWDs that were employed and unemployed after high school transition was reviewed. An employee from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) provided a guide and report on unemployment and employment rates by disability status for the nation on an annual basis. The source of these estimates came from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Also reviewed were the ACS data and the FINDS, which contains the employment and unemployment rates for IWD and people with no disability by various demographic characteristics. A comprehensive review of the BLS and the ACS summary reports informed the development of the interview questions for this case study.

Justification for Qualitative Design

The researcher considered a phenomenological study where people report their lived experiences about a specific phenomenon. However, this approach was not appropriate because

individuals are not reporting their lived experiences. Creswell (2012) suggested that phenomenological studies could describe the meaning of several individuals and their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Furthermore, phenomenological studies consist of the “what” and “how”. However, this study seeks to provide an understanding of a single unit rather than reporting lived experiences. Therefore, a case study was most appropriate for this study because the researcher wanted to listen to and better understand the transition needs of the IWD community. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were used because the intention was to investigate key informant’s perceptions of the IETP and how IWDs transition from school to working in the community. Creswell (2012) suggested that researchers often use qualitative approaches when they want to understand how participants experience a phenomenon.

Furthermore, Stake (1995) suggested that potential data sources might include, but are not limited to: documentation, archival records, interviews, physical artifacts, direct observations, and participant-observation. For this qualitative case study, in-person interviews were completed because predesigned and semi-structured interview questions are suitable for answering the descriptive research questions. The research questions were descriptive in nature because they require participants to share their perceptions about how the transition process works for IWDs and about opportunities for employment in the community after high school. This qualitative case study used the Social Model of Disability for the theoretical framework. This specifically involved unveiling the potential problems that exists for the IWD community and how a person handles them. The researcher explored multiple people’s experiences and perceptions related to working with IWDs, and therefore allowed a theory to emerge from the analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

Population and Participants

The participants of this case study consisted of four participants at a day program with workshops and community job opportunities called Zephyrhills Rehabilitation Program (ZHRP). Specifically, the case study participants from ZHRP consisted of a director, an administrator, a teacher in one of the day workshops, and a job coach. The four participants employed at ZHRP were purposefully selected participants because they had experience with IWDs in a school and community setting. Also, the case study consisted of four teachers with the Zephyrhills Public School (ZPS) and were purposefully selected since they are specialists working with IWDs. Furthermore, the case study interviews were conducted with two participants at the Zephyrhills Board of Developmental Delays (ZBDD); those participants have experience serving on the board and help connect local community businesses with IWD. These two participants were selected for the case study since they have knowledge of the community and opportunities that arise.

The following subsection offers a description and justifications for (a) criterion for selection of participants, (b) the number of participants, (c) procedures for accessing participants, (d) methods of establishing working relationship between researcher and participant, and (e) the method for ethical protection of participants.

Criteria for Selection of Participants

This research study focused on better understanding the perceptions of county service providers working with IWDs to ensure community employment, prevocational services, supported employment, day habilitation, or adult work centers. The criteria for selection to participate in this study included working with individuals with disabilities and having experience working with the school to work transition process. The main study site, ZHRP, is a component of the Zephyrhills County Board of Developmental Disabilities Adult Services.

Within ZHRP, there are two services offered there known as The Atrium Center, which provides Adult Day Services to persons with developmental disabilities, and Greene Incorporated, which is a not-for-profit, 501(c)3 organization that provides laundry and document shredding services for businesses and organizations in the Hillsborough Region.

The ZBDD is a county agency committed to serving individuals with disabilities in Hillsborough County, while providing support services for their families. ZBDD's mission is helping people lead dignified, successful lives. The Board strives to ensure the availability of programs, supports, and services that assist eligible individuals with disabilities in making good choices and achieving a life of increasing capability so that they may live, work, and play in the community. Major service areas include Early Childhood, Community Services, and Adult Services, as well as Finance and Administration. Each of these areas is committed to excellence in providing services to IWDs.

Finally, educators working at ZPS were interviewed. The case study at ZPS is a small public school district serving Kindergarten through 12th grade students and has a transitional living program (TLP) for IWDs. The average graduating class size is 200 students. ZPS bases their framework of education for IWDs and typical peers on four pillars: (1) Providing a meaningful, rigorous, and adaptive curriculum for each student, including intellectual skills in written and spoken communication, mathematics, science, technology, social studies, problem-solving, and the tools for application of knowledge; (2) Providing skills and appreciation for the fine arts, physical activities, languages, and leisure time activities for each student; (3) Providing the example, leadership, information, and training to help each student function in an honest, moral, and ethical manner in their family, community, and society; (4) Providing a highly trained, knowledgeable, caring teacher in every classroom whose mission is to teach each student

and to maintain an environment that will enable each student to learn, grow, feel worthy, and become successful.

Justification for the Number of Participants

Charmaz (2006) suggested that the aims of a study are the ultimate driver of the project design, and therefore, the sample size. Charmaz (2006) further suggested that a small study with “modest claims” (p. 114) might achieve saturation quicker than a study that aims to describe a process without disciplines. Creswell (1998) noted that 10 participants are enough for providing an in-depth experience of a phenomenon. Invitations were sent out, along with consent forms, to all 10 participants (Form A). The 10 participants at 3 different research site locations were interviewed. The interview data collected for this case study reached saturation and meta themes.

Access to Participants

The researcher had previous relationships with all the participants at the site locations. The researcher sent out emails to former coworkers at 3 participating locations: a public school (ZPS), one work center (ZHRP), and one county board of developmental disabilities (ZBDD). The researcher worked in an elementary setting at ZPS with the four intervention specialists that agreed to the interview. The researcher also knew the four employees that work at ZHRP through volunteering work for IWDs. The group of participants and the researcher spent two years working together in a self-contained classroom for students with disabilities. The researcher built a relationship with the two county board members that work for ZBDD through the research studies for this project. The previous relationships allowed the researcher easy access to the participants needed for the interviews.

The researcher emailed the consent forms to each participant to see if there was an interest in the case study (Form A). Another emailed letter (as suggested by Creswell (2012))

was sent to supervisors at ZHRP, ZBDD, and ZPS explaining the research, extent of time needed for interviews, potential impact, and the outcomes. The principal at ZPS and the supervisors at ZHRP, and ZBDD approved access. Those willing to participate received invitations and consent forms. The participants were given a 3-week notice, as suggested by Creswell (2012), to allow participants to plan for the interviews. On-going communication in various methods met the needs of all participants. The consent form included the participant's right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time, the central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in data collection, comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents, a statement about known risks associated with participation in the study, the expected benefits to accrue to the participants in the study, and a place for them to sign, date, and where to return the form (Creswell, 2012). The ten participants from the three different locations acknowledged an understanding of the nature of the doctoral study and the connected obligations, signed the electronic emails, and agreed to the interviews.

Methods of Establishing Researcher Relationships

The researcher has known the participants being interviewed for this case study for several years. These educators and professionals have worked with IWDs and the IETP process for most of their professional careers. The relationships between the participants and the IWDs were noteworthy to ensuring full access to the participant's perceptions and experiences while working with IWDs. Ongoing communication will establish trust and allow for any questions or concerns at any time. Once the participants were selected, the researcher established mutual trust, respect, and honesty through the entire process, so that premier relationships continued. Coercion was not used, and any participant could elect not to participate in the study at any time. The informed consent process set the tone for honesty in the process and revealed the purpose of the

case study. Participants were able to choose the date and time for the interview, to better meet their needs.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Stake (2005) stated that qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. “Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict” (p. 459). The researcher submitted the proposal to Walden University’s IRB for approval before collecting any data. The IRB ensures that researchers follow all ethical guidelines in protecting human subjects from harm (Walden University, 2013). Once approved, the researcher submitted the formal request form to Zephyrhills High School and met with the principal and the participants. The researcher reviewed the informed consent form and explained the interview process to the participants and the principal. Informed consent allowed the participant to understand the benefits and risk involved in the study.

Merriam (2009) suggested that coding is assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of data so that a researcher can easily retrieve specific pieces of data. In agreement with Merriam, the researcher ensured the confidentiality of each educator, by coding their names E1, E2, E3, E4, and so on. The first interview was coded 1, the second 2, and so on until the 10th interview was conducted, making the data collection confidential, easy, and organized. The coding of individuals was used so that they could not be identified.

All files were collected and stored on a personal, password protected laptop. The data will be destroyed within five years after the completion of the project study to ensure the confidentiality of all participants and agencies. The audiotaping, hand-written notes, journal entries, and emails will be shredded and discarded after five years. The interview transcripts, coding, and other typed data in Word and Excel, will be deleted from the personal computer after

five years. The researcher will empty the trash can on the personal laptop after five years so that no data collected remains. Patton (2002) provided an Ethical Issues Checklist identifying the following ten items to be considered when engaging in qualitative research. (1) Explaining the purpose of the inquiry and methods to be used, (2) Promises and reciprocity, (3) Risk assessment, (4) Confidentiality, (5) Informed consent, (6) Data access and ownership, (7) Interviewer mental health, (8) Advice, (9) Data collection boundaries, and (10) Ethical verses legal conduct (Patton, 2002).

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

Walden University's Instructional Review Board (IRB) granted permission for data collection. The Walden University IRB board approved the proposal and granted permission for the research to proceed. The program administrators granted the researcher permission and access to conduct the case study at their respective sites: ZHRP, ZBDD, and ZPS. Participants signed the consent forms and times were set up for interviews. The researcher developed a data collection instrument protocol, which consisted of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A).

At the end of the 2018-2019 school year, participant interviews took place at ZHRP, ZBDD, and ZPS. As Creswell (2012) suggested, benefits from data collection via interview can provide information in a designated place rather than a field setting. Therefore, each interview took place at each respective research site in a private area where a sign was placed on the outside of the door to ensure confidentiality. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and each participant chose an appointment time. The semi-structured interviews

consisted of several open-ended key questions that helped to define the areas to be explored, but also allowed the participant to give a response in more detail (see Appendix A).

The interview questions were semi-structured which yielded thick, rich data to better understand the phenomena from each participant. A thick description refers to the detailed account of field experiences in which the researcher makes explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context (Holloway, 1997). Thick description is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a way of achieving a type of external validity. Audiotaping was used to enhance the interviews, ensuring the researcher could observe eye movement, other non-verbal cues, and hear every detail of the interview correctly. The researcher created journal entries throughout and hand-written notes during observations to ensure creditability of the data collected.

Interviews were focused on answering the following research questions:

RQ1: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on school preparation and readiness for IWDs in need of employment support services?

RQ2: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on development and leadership opportunities for IWDs in relationship to community experience?

RQ3: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on opportunities in the community for IWDs and employment services?

RQ4: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on day habilitation programs and community employment for IWDs?

RQ5: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on family awareness's of local services for life after high school for IWDs?

Data collection instrument used was a researcher developed interview protocol (see appendix A). The data was generated, gathered, and recorded by keeping an organized system on the computer using coding and Excel spread sheets. Data was uploaded to a password protected personal laptop, and data was transcribed within one week after the interviews. The systems for keeping track of data and emerging systems were reflective journals throughout the process, audiotaping, and hand-written notes. It was necessary to review and transcribe audiotapes simultaneously to determine analytical categories, subsequent data collection and any follow up questions.

The researcher's past role at ZHRP was volunteering with IWD adults in The Atrium in 2014 for one year. The Atrium is where IWDs go to complete activities of daily living (ADL). These activities consist of puzzles, sorting, categorizing, organizing different items in the classroom, and completing work boxes which involve solving simple problems at their level so they can feel successful. The researcher is very familiar with The Atrium and staff members that currently work there. the researcher may know some of the staff and IWDs that work there now, but not all the same people may be there at this time. The researcher's current role with ZBDD consisted of visiting the county office for information in regard to IWDs. Advocating for current elementary students with disabilities led the researcher to the ZBDD. The researcher has also attended various professional development courses and received help in the current classroom from ZBDD. The researcher's past and current role with ZPS consists of working there since 2014 and currently teaching a moderate to severe elementary classroom for grades kindergarten through fifth grade. There exists a great familiarity with all the current staff and students. These roles and relationships may affect data collection by some staff knowing the perceptions of the researcher regarding IWDs and employment in the community. Staff and students at all three

locations know that the researcher is a special education teacher and advocate for IWDs in the community. Some participants may bias their reported information solely on the fact of what that they perceive as what the researcher might want to hear.

Data Analysis

A typological analysis was used to analyze data correlated with the conceptual framework Myhill & Blanck's Social Model of Disability. The data went through a typological analysis after the interviews to categorize and organize the reported data. Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition Programing was used for supporting subthemes. Kohler (2016) suggests using a conceptual framework as a guide for transition planning with educators and families while focusing on student-focused planning. After the interviews data was reviewed thoroughly and marked within each typology on a separate document for each category. After developing typologies, subthemes such as patterns occurred and then were developed.

The research questions which are based on the conceptual framework, informed and developed the typologies in this case study. Each subtheme was read and reread to ensure accurateness. Categories were grouped and organized into a separate Excel document to maintain data collection and records. Next, a generalization for each subtheme was developed to support the findings as suggested by Creswell (2012). The data collected and typological analysis ensured that the entries provided rich, thick data to support the subthemes as suggested by Merriam (2009).

Coding procedures were applied based on emergent topics, that were surprising and unusual, and appeared to address a larger theoretical perspective in the research (Creswell, 2012). Interview notes were transcribed into a separate Word document for each participant. Each participating location had its own folder on the laptop, and within that folder there were

separate documents for each participant interview. Each participant interview was coded to ensure privacy and E1-E10 was used for each interview participant. All of this has been password protected to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

In addition, the researcher used a computer software program called NVIVO 12 to support coding, retrieving, build theories, and conducting analyses of the collected data. This qualitative case study addressed the lack of a clear school to work transition planning process, and the perceptions of county service providers regarding what is needed to ensure meaningful community employment for IWD clients.

Creswell (2012) suggested that member checking is viewed as a technique for establishing the validity of collected, analyzed data. Member checking was used to assure accuracy and credibility of the findings. Furthermore, member checking provided the opportunity to volunteer any additional information and edit collected data. Member checking took place after the transcription of the data. It was completed by sharing all the findings from the schools and the work center with the interview participants. Member checking allowed the interview participants to critically analyze the findings and cleared up any misconceptions.

The participants confirmed the accuracy and completeness of the analyzed data, then it was assumed that the analysis of the data was credible. The overall goal of this process was to provide findings that are authentic, original, and reliable (Creswell, 2012). Researcher journal entries, interviews, and audiotaping was used to ensure data triangulation. By describing a phenomenon about IWDs and transitions after high school in detail, conclusions were drawn and transferred to other times, settings, situations, and people in the local community.

To ensure validity, one must anticipate the emergence of data that may contradict explanations in data analysis. Discrepant cases were anticipated with the same integrity and

ethical bounds as other data collected in this study. Therefore, data was reviewed with the same integrity and ethical detail as data which supports this study. In terms of handling discrepant cases, one would call for assuming a proactive stance.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are the following: it's impossible to know how well these employment services are going to employ IWDs and make a difference since the study is limited by time. It is important to follow individuals throughout their lifespan to see if they maintain employment over time, increased wages, and hours. It is important to gather multiple perspectives from county service providers on IWDs and their IETP process and experience. The ten interviews were conducted with county service providers in Hillsborough County. However, this sample size may not be representative of all county service providers. Therefore, this study will not be generalizable to a larger population.

Data Analysis Results

Three themes emerged from the data:

1. Participants' perceptions of and experiences with school readiness and employment (supports research question number 1). RQ1: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on school preparation and readiness for IWDs in need of employment support services?
2. Participants' perceptions of and experiences for resources provided to parents of IWDs (supports research question 5). RQ5: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on family awareness's of local services for life after high school for IWDs?

3. Participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve IWD school to work transition (supports research question 3). RQ3: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on opportunities in the community for IWDs and employment services?

Theme 1: Participants' perceptions of and experiences with school readiness and employment

When asked about IWD IEP goals, participants described two types of data collected: some talked about people or positions responsible for collecting the data, and some talked about the frequency of timing by which the data were collected. In general, participants reported that they regularly collected data in one area for IWDs to keep track of each student's IEP goals and objectives.

E1 stated, "Once the objectives and goals are mastered, they create new individualized goals for work DLS (daily living skills)". E2 reported that they collect data every 4 weeks, which is two times for each quarter. The participants monitor student IEP data 4 times a school year, which is 4 quarters. The determination for data collection for IEPs is mandated by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE).

E2 further explained that each IEP progress report is sent home to parents or caregivers. He said, "IWDs' data is recorded as NP (no progress), LP (limited progress), MP (making progress), and M (mastered goal)." In other words, E2, and other participants felt that they do a great job at collecting the data, changing goals and objectives as needed, but felt that IEP goals and objectives should be examined together with community employers for decision making. E2, E3, and E4, discussed how it is a mystery to some caretakers when it comes to helping IWDs find employment within the local community. E3 shared, "caretakers or parents of IWDs oftentimes need help themselves with paperwork, keeping work in the community and gaining an

income, transportation, money for items needed for new place of employment, and just where to start for life after high school.” E4 concluded, “I am deeply concerned that when a parent has an IWD and they do not have an action plan, goals, or expectations in place, the IWD will sit at home and do nothing.” “It is important as a school, and as a staff member, we reach out to the community and the parents to provide them with the correct tools needed to help their IWD so that a smooth transition can happen.”

E4, E5, and E9 feel that there needs to be more community involvement and opportunities outside of school to gain real world experience so that transitions after high school can run smoothly. E5 stated, “it is hard to find work opportunities for IWDs in the community; we often try to take the IWD to the place of employment, but they end up getting in trouble and kicked out, or their behavior is seen as unacceptable by the place of business.” E4 further concluded, “it is hard to find a job that an IWD is good at, can excel at, and be accepted by the place of employment.” “We need more opportunities for practice for IWDs when it comes to real world experience and employment for life after high school.”

Nicholas et. Al (2017) found through an online survey that 58.67% of people indicated that vocational services in their organization support employers in the aim of building employer capacity related to hiring individuals with ASD. Furthermore, 66.67% of participants agreed that vocational services in their organization include communication guidelines for sharing relevant information with key partners, such as employers and family members. However, only 36.62% of respondents indicated that their organization has sufficient staffing levels for employment.

E9 explained that “Transition is hard for IWDs and can have a major effect on student behavior and opportunities inside the school and outside high school.” E9 emphasized, “I can’t find jobs IWDs like to do and provide them within the school setting but taking them out in the

community changes everything.” “Their behavior changes; they need routine, consistent schedules that places of business can’t offer.” “The community has to be open and also have the proper staff to help support IWDs or the transition process fails.” E6, E7, E8, and E10 reported that IEP goals relating to the workforce do not seem to be individualized for each student and that they see a trend of IEPs all having familiar language and working on the same goals.

E6, E7, E8, and E10 not only described the perceptions of school readiness and employment (Theme 1), but also foreshadow the conditions needed which is a more individualized plan for IWDs. E6 concluded, “we need help with how to get IWDs into the community and have them be successful; it is hard enough to find their interest and takes a while to build a relationship with IWDs.” “I wished we had a professional job coach or some recommendations for how to coach an IWD in the community work setting, and also helping them maintain a job, feel welcomed, and feel wanted.” E7 states, “there is so much more we can be doing with our IWDs in the work community, I just don’t know how to take my classroom strategies and make them work in the working community.” Other participants (E4, E5, E9) also described the school to work transition plan as needing more involvement from the community for employing IWDs (Theme 3). E2, E3, and E4 advocated for more community resources for caretakers of IWDs (Theme 2).

The statements made by E4 are relevant to all three themes that emerged from this study. E4 discussed school readiness and employment transition opportunities (Theme 1), indicated that there are minimal leadership roles and opportunities for IWDs in the community (Theme 2) and perceived that more resources for caretakers are needed in the community for a successful transition (Theme 3).

The word *transition* was repeatedly used throughout the interviews. Transition was described as behavior causing and the unknown, not a normal routine, or an expectation for the IWD. For the purpose of this study, the word *transition* refers to graduating from high school and starting vocational school or working in the community.

Theme 2: Participants' perceptions of and experiences with resources provided to parents of IWDs

In their responses to interview questions, participants identified several uses for resources that parents could use to help their IWDs transition smoothly to life after high school. E1, E2, E3, E4, and E5 all referenced "Task Force Priorities and Recommendations" (Preston and Jakobsyn, 1997). The resources suggested by participants and the "First National Survey of Parents" fit under six main priorities:

For each priority, specific strategies were recommended to address the most critical areas of concern. 1) Promote recognition and inclusion of parents with disabilities and their families. Establish a national and international Task Force on parents with disabilities and their families. E1 suggested that parents of IWDs be contacted through e-mail, written correspondence, phone correspondence, and staff posting information on school and community websites. E2 suggested that resources are provided at least four times throughout the school year. E3 stated that providing parents with phone numbers, making sure they have the proper contacts, making sure they can check their own emails, and having access to the internet as critical to the success of IWDs.

E4 discussed developing linkages to mainstream and disability oriented organizations directed at parents, families, and/or adults with disabilities. E4 wanted to create a disability awareness day in the community to promote awareness of families of parents with disabilities.

E1 stated, “We need an increase in personal assistance services to help families with IWD.” “We need to help families find people in the community to that can help them at home if they are struggling or need a sitter for a few hours.” “Maybe the parents themselves need training at home and support with the type of work their IWD wants to participate in.” “Sometimes parents don’t know how to teach their IWD rules, routines, job expectations, practice opportunities, and having another set of hands and eyes can be very helpful for the parent”. Pro

E3 wanted to provide resources on the waiver system or tax deductions to enable parents of individuals with disabilities to purchase the services and equipment necessary for them to raise their children. E3 concluded, “if caregivers had the proper steps for waivers, the right staff to help connect them to the resources, IWDs could have supplies bought for them specifically in regard to the job of their interest.” E2 wanted to increase access to and provide job training to the IWD along with the caregiver in the local community. E2 stated, “for example, we could have a caregiver go to work with the IWD to help them with their behavior, get comfortable, meet their needs in a way the employer might not be able to right away, and in general provide the caregiver and the IWD with the resources they need to keep a job.” “These are real life resources caregivers can understand by “doing and seeing” the expectations, the requirements, and helping with a smooth transition for IWDs in the workforce. E2 implied, “a lot of the students I work with in high school that have a disability, their parent does too.” “Often times it makes it hard to provide the parent with resources because the resources given are too hard for them.” “The resources are just explained and handed to the caregivers with a disability and no one is actually helping them work through the process, answer questions, showing them one on one.” “How can we expect the IWD to be successful when the caregiver doesn’t know where to start either?”

A report called “Keeping Our Families Together” (1997) implied that trainings must acknowledge the rights of disabled parents, be based within the appropriate disability cultural contexts, promote better understanding of the needs of parents with disabilities, and provide appropriate resources for parents with a disability and also parents of IWDs. E3 emphasized that trainings be provided to other members working in the school district or community to ensure a successful transition for life after high school and to ensure proper resources are being given to caretakers (Theme 2). The National Survey of Parents with Disabilities (1997) indicates that “providing parenting education specific to parents with disabilities through establishing a centralized library of resources and information, such as parent concerns in multiple formats, will reach our local community.”

E5, E6, E7, E8, E9, and E10 discussed the need of increased accessible childcare sites and improved accessibility of all sites, increasing accessible recreation programs and sites, and increasing the availability and the development of adaptive parenting equipment. All the interviews of participants each indicated the need for collaboration among parents with IWDs. For example, starting a parent support group with a weekly meeting. Furthermore, teaching parents about wheelchairs, daily living skills, communication devices to help with non-verbal IWDs, medical equipment needed, and behavior and communication strategies for parents of IWDs. E10 further implied, “we also need to teach parents to advocate for them and their loved one, standing up and making sure their needs are being met and that they fully understand the IEP process.” E10 also stated, “Sometimes I feel like a parent of an IWD leaves an IEP with unanswered questions, limited support or community resources, and feels like their child isn’t making progress.” Each interview participant felt that their school, facility, and/or board was

doing a great job; however, the board did not provide enough support to the parent and just focused on the IWD.

Theme 3: Participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve IWD school to work transition

After the interviews, participants mentioned a variety of ways to have transitions run smoother and be more effective. These words were said the most: getting IWD experience starting in the elementary setting with rule following; being flexible with their schedule and routine; encouraging interest in a hobby or career they would like to pursue; and build upon all this over the years until they reach high school. E8, E9, and E10 discussed the importance of providing opportunities for IWDs to talk, socialize, and have real world experiences, since this is why most IWDs lose their jobs. Having local businesses employ IWDs and give them opportunities in multiple areas to practice, learn the trade, and be accepted by the community will increase the chance for IWDs to stay employed, as well as allowing customers and employers to give the IWDs experience so that they can be successful too.

E3 discussed the struggle of finding opportunities for IWDs in the community to work since there are few businesses in the area. E3 concluded that "small businesses don't have the experience, accommodations, staff, support, or same opportunities as larger companies, making it hard to provide an array of experience for our students with disabilities." E8 implied, "there is never enough time in the day to arrange a long visit to a place of employment; the employer is always busy, it's not the right time, or gives us little jobs that I feel are more discriminating than worth the IWDs time." "We can do large jobs, advanced jobs; we just need practice opportunities, the right training, for our IWDs"(Theme 3) .

E5, E6, and E7 discussed the importance of collaboration with school and vocational rehabilitation. E5 said that “we are two separate entities, we don’t work together, and we don’t have time to collaborate; therefore, sending our kids to them without having any communication sets our IWDs up for failure and we need a solution.”

Project Deliverable

This section described and justified the methodology that was used for this study. This case study investigated perceptions of service providers working in an adult day center regarding the accommodations and support services they provided to ensure IWDs secure employment. Furthermore, data collected will support a policy recommendation based on Individualized Education Transition Plans and the school to work transition process. The policy recommendation findings, data collection, and perceptions of the Individualized Education Transition Plan will be given to three case study service providers at ZHRP, ZBDD, and ZPS. Interview data was coded and developed into themes for the purpose of the study and the research guiding questions.

Stake (2003) uses the term intrinsic and suggests that researchers who have a genuine interest in the case should use this approach when the intent is to better understand the case. This case study explored perceptions of service providers that could change delivery in services for IWDs through the Individualized Education Transition Plan process.

Summary

Section 2 outlined the framework, methodology, and methods for this study, and the ways in which these decisions anchored the research design and process of data collection and analysis. A rationale for the qualitative design approach was described along with the

methodological decisions of the study. Justification of participants and establishing relationships and trust is also included.

Findings were discussed in three themes that emerged from the data collected that aligned with the research questions. These themes offer recommendations for the interview participants. Theme one included participants' perceptions of and experiences with vocational rehabilitation services. A support model is discussed for integrating resources for vocational opportunities for IWDs. This model outlines and identifies three categories for successful vocational transition (Nicholas et al. 2017). Theme two included participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve IWD school to work transitions. Recommendations are provided in regard to job coaching. The article "What constitutes effective support in obtaining and maintaining employment for individuals with intellectual disability" offers specific strategies at both individual and organization levels (Cheng et al. 2017). Theme three included participants' perceptions of and experiences with resources provided to parents of IWDs.

This section concluded with the project deliverable describing that a policy recommendation will be produced from findings of this study. The following section, Section 3, will address the goals of the study and the rationale for the policy recommendation paper, examine the literature review, provide a project description, evaluation plan, and project implications.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The project derived from this study is a policy recommendation paper (Appendix A) and will be presented to stakeholders serving in the educational field working with IWDs. The policy recommendation paper describes recommendations for improving IWDs' community

employment and vocational rehabilitation, transition services, and community resources. The goal of the policy paper is to educate stakeholders on a support model for integrating state resources for vocational opportunities for IWDs. The policy paper will be given to the interviewees of ZHRP, ZBDD, and ZPS for guidance on ways to increase smooth transitions from school to work for IWDs and to create positive social change.

The policy paper outlines a support model for integrating resources for vocational opportunities for IWDs. This model outlines and defines three categories for successful vocational transition (Nicholas et al. 2017). The policy paper recommends adopting a model (Nicholas et al. 2017) for vocational opportunities for IWDs and focuses on three categories: (1) Access, (2) Engagement, and (3) Retention. Within the three categories, structural/programmatic issues are discussed, tailored individual support for entering the workforce is examined, family navigation and support evaluated, and community/workplace capacity analyzed. Adopting a model that stakeholders follow will provide IWDs knowledge and access to their community, allowing work-routine practice and structure for IWDs.

The policy paper provides recommendations regarding job coaching. The article “What constitutes effective support in obtaining and maintaining employment for individuals with intellectual disability” offers specific strategies at both individual and organization levels (Cheng et al. 2017). The policy paper provides resources for stakeholders for providing support to parents through resources. In this section is the policy recommendation paper that emerged from the findings of this study. Appendix A contains the policy recommendation paper.

Rationale

The purpose of this project study was to understand the perceptions of stakeholders working with IWDs in high school and after high school. The WIOA has now mandated that

schools will have to ensure opportunities for IWDs to choose where they want to live, who they want to live with, and how they want to live. Therefore, IWDs will need to be able to pursue higher education and become gainfully employed while being included in one's community. Graduation from high school alone does not ensure the IWD will be included in the workforce and provided with support through local agencies. Furthermore, IETP's are not always planned out during high school (Employment First, 2016)). According to Employment First (2016), the transition process for an IWD has not been person centered, and job skills or community work have not been introduced and practiced. Consequently, there are minimal opportunities or no jobs in the community for IWDs.

This project was chosen to help support IWDs during school, in the community, and life after school. There are many opportunities for IWDs, but we must first gain an understanding of the perceptions of county service providers working with IWDs to ensure community employment, prevocational services, supported employment, day habilitation, or adult work centers. By working together as a community, IWDs will be provided the support they need to be successful during life after high school.

The reason this project was considered for qualitative data analysis is because it provides a real opportunity to have participants' voices being heard and this was more important than having numbers. Helping provide that bridge for local community members, parents, and IWDs will help close the gap and increase awareness in IWDs' need to live successful lives.

The project addresses the problem by introducing categories based on stakeholder's perceptions. The categories are themes that emerged from data collected after interviews. Recommendations will be provided for improving IWDs community employment and vocational rehabilitation, transition services, and community resources.

Participants E1, E2, and E5 in this study agreed that collaboration between staff in special education and vocational rehabilitation is crucial for IWD and their success in the workforce. A participant stated it this way: “There isn’t always time to meet, hard to have the same schedule, and often times don’t offer what the IWD wants to participate in for the workforce; staff at the vocational school also have a hard time connecting with IWDs when they can’t build a daily relationship with them and only see them every once in a while.” One in four young adults with disabilities were socially isolated, meaning they never saw or talked with friends, and were never invited to social activities during their school years. Transition Planning, a key process for helping youth build skills and access services as they enter adulthood, was frequently delayed. Just 58% of youth had a transition plan by the federally required age (Roux, Shattuck, Rast, Rava, Julianna, Anderson, & Kristy, 2015).

Review of the Literature

The review of literature for this case study begins with the Social Model of Disability theoretical framework. This case study is based upon and then discusses teaching IWDs to become workforce ready, explore development and leadership opportunities in the local community, and develop a relationship with local businesses. Multiple resources guide and support the research along the way. Searches of ProQuest, Google, Google Scholar, online publications, and other colleagues’ papers based on education and IWDs provided insight and guidance during research. Finally, the concept of community resources and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) is defined and explained.

Theory and research support the content of this policy paper by using the framework of Myhill & Blanck’s Social Model of Disability. Oliver’s (1990) *The Politics of Disablement: A sociological approach*, which focused on the disability rights movement, agrees with Myhill &

Blanck's Social Model of Disability. Oliver examined how U.S. grassroots organizations were organizing for accessibility in transportation, support for independent living, and equal rights. After an extensive review of the literature, Oliver (1990) conducted further research and argued that "the problem is not located in the individual, but an instructional problem, shaped by economics, political, and ideological forces" (p. 4). Oliver's analysis of the social structuring of disability developed two concepts: the mode of production and the central core values, or ideology, that are present within any given society. The Social Model of Disability shifts away from consideration of the deficits of the functional, physiological, and cognitive abilities of the impaired individual, to the ability of society to systematically oppress and discriminate against disabled people, and the negative social attitudes encountered by disabled people throughout their everyday lives.

In the new edition, *The New Politics of Disablement* (2012), Oliver and Barnes not only updated the previous edition, but they surveyed the theories and origins of disablement and the ways in which disability is represented in society at large. Oliver and Barnes argue that a clear vision of how to move disability struggles forward is lacking, adding that this fact was not surprising, given the current state of disability rights activism and the global crisis of capitalism. Oliver and Barnes (2012) concluded, "We still believe that the only long-term political strategy for disabled people is to be part of a far wider struggle to create a better society for all." Barnes (2012) advanced the Social Theory of Disability and established the following framework through exploring conventional sociological functionalist and deficit theories of disability and work, re-defining disability from the standpoint of disabled people and their organizations, and focusing on disability, work, and welfare.

Other researchers have used Oliver and Barnes's (2012) model as their conceptual or theoretical framework while analyzing other theories regarding disability. The researcher will use the framework and model to help guide the research questions to understand the perceptions of the county service providers working with IWDs through the IETP process. The research questions regarding the Social Model of Disability are realigned, and focus on resources, accommodations, and services being provided to the IWDs.

In agreement with the Social Model of Disability, Myhill and Blanck (2009) considered disability a consequence of environmental, social, and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with disabilities from maximum participation in society (Blanck et al. 2009). Lang (2001) used Oliver and Barnes's Social Model of Disability in his article, "The Development and Critique of the Social Model of Disability." Lang provides a description and analysis of the Social Model of Disability, and how it has developed during the past 30 years. Lang concludes that both academics working in the field of disability studies, as well as practitioners providing disability services, have been increasingly influenced by its underpinning philosophy. The disability movement also utilizes the social model as a political platform and tool to secure the rights of people with disabilities, with the objective of ensuring that they enjoy the status of full citizenship within contemporary society (Lang, 2001).

Kohler (2016) developed a taxonomy for a Transition Programming Model (TPM) with five primary practice categories for IWDs: Student-Focused Planning, Student Development, Interagency Collaboration, Family Engagement, and Program Structure. It includes additional practices in the areas of student supports and the instructional context within Student Development, as well as school climate in Program Structure. Within Family Engagement, a focus on cultural relevancy, empowerment, and family preparation are emphasized. Across

categories, collaboration with service agencies, especially vocational rehabilitation, emphasize the importance of such connections prior to school, during school, and post-school transitions.

The project genre was chosen based on the themes that emerged after the interviews and data collection. The problem will be addressed through the review of literature based on participants' perceptions. The literature searches were conducted based on topics that were presented in themes. Search terms on Google Scholar included "transitional services for IWD, vocational rehabilitation programs for IWD, employment support strategies for IWD, working in the community as an IWD, local community resources for IWD."

The literature review addresses the following three sections: Preparing for transitional services such as vocational rehabilitation programs, employment support services for IWDs, and community resources and OOD.

Vocational Rehabilitation Programs for IWDs

The Center for Parent Information and Resources (2017) explain that vocational rehabilitation is a nationwide federal-state program for assisting eligible people with disabilities to define a suitable employment goal and become employed. Each state capital has a central VR agency, and there are local offices in most cities. VR provides medical, therapeutic, counseling, education, training, and other services needed to prepare people with disabilities for work. VR is an excellent place for a youth or an adult with a disability to begin exploring available training and support service options.

E4 discussed hopes of adopting a school model to support his students with IWDs and lead the way for a smooth transition for students with IWDs going into vocational school. E4 stated, "Often times I know what I want to do with my students, I just don't know where to start

and how to follow through.” E4 went on to say, “We all need to get on the same page and have a set process that can align with our data collection as well.”

Adopt a Model for Vocational Rehabilitation Transition

The findings in the article support a model from Nicholas et al. (2017) discussing integrated resources for vocational opportunities for IWDs and pinpoints three categories: (1) Access, (2) Engagement, and (3) Retention. Within the three categories, structural/programmatic issues are discussed, tailored individual support for workforce, family navigation and support are analyzed, and community/workplace capacity is evaluated.

Adopting a model that everyone can follow will ensure proper routines, which allows access to all knowledge about community and school connections to ensure that students are engaged, allowing for retention to ensure success, practice, and structure for IWDs.

Collaboration Between Special Educators and Vocational Rehabilitation

According to the article “Combining Intake and IEP Meetings: Evaluation of the Effects of Interagency Collaboration Between Vocational Rehabilitation and Special Educators “ (2017), Collaboration between agencies has been shown to be an indicator of post-school success for individuals with disabilities. While it is shown to be important, collaboration between Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Special Educators (SPED) does not always occur. This project examined the effects of combining Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and intake interviews on the rate and satisfaction of collaboration and the understanding of the other agencies roles and responsibilities (Cummings, 2017). E1, E2, and E5 agreed that collaboration between staff in special education and vocational rehabilitation is crucial for IWD and their success in the workforce.

Furthermore, E1 stated, “There isn’t always time to meet, hard to have the same schedule, and often times don’t offer what the IWD wants to participate in for the workforce, staff at the vocational school also have a hard time connecting with IWDs when they can’t build a daily relationship with them and only see them every once in a while.” This article offers suggestions about collaboration between special education and vocational staff, making the transition smoother, and having everyone involved in the process. Findings of the article suggested the process of combined IEP/intake meetings was a viable process that could be used to enroll more students for VR services while increasing the rate of and satisfaction with collaboration between the agencies.

This article discusses the importance of collaboration and knowing the other participants’ role at an agency or public school “may lead to less role confusion of the other agency” (Cummings, 2017). Role confusion may be related to why teachers are not inviting rehabilitation counselors to meetings for students according to Agran et al. (2002). Therefore, knowing the other agencies’ roles and responsibilities may increase the invitation to meetings that will create opportunities to collaborate to better support students. In addition, understanding the other agencies’ roles and responsibilities may also assist in working more effectively together to assist students in reaching their goals (Plotner et al., 2012).

Employment support services for IWD

In the article “Evaluation of employment-support services for adults with autism spectrum disorder,” findings indicate that the quality and beneficial impact of employment-support services for adults with autism spectrum disorder may be more favorably perceived by employment-support personnel than by individuals with autism spectrum disorder and their families (Nicholas et al. 2018). Individuals with autism spectrum disorder and their families seek

services that support both accessing and retaining employment. Capacity-building in employment support for youth and adults with autism spectrum disorder is recommended during the school years (Nicholas et al. 2018). Historically, employment opportunities for IWDs have been limited (Walsh, Lydon & Healy, 2014).

Employment Support Services for IWD

Online Support

“Worksupport” is a web portal that highlights the funded projects and topics related to the employment of individuals with disabilities. This includes the RRTC on Employment of People with Physical Disabilities, Autism Center for Excellence, School 2 Work, and the Center on Transition to Employment for Youth with Disabilities (Nicholas et al. 2018).

To increase employment for IWD, the ASD population were given the opportunity to train and start work earlier (Employment First, 2016). If IWDs do not have a transition plan or experience with the job work force, they will be less likely to work. Cimera, Burgess, & Wiley (2015) indicated that individuals from early transition states were significantly more likely to be employed than individuals from the later transition group. Early transition individuals who became employed appeared to earn higher wages and cost less to serve.

Working with Outside Agencies to Close the Gap

The National Center on Workforce and Disability/Adult (2017) provides training, technical assistance, policy analysis, and information to improve access for all in the workforce development system. The focus of the outside agency is providing accommodations, assistive technology, relationships with employers, helping clients with disabilities find jobs, and advising employers as to how to provide job-related supports.

The article “Evaluation of Employment-support Services for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder” provides evidence-informed resources and curricula for employment-support personnel such as job coaches (Nicholas et al. 2017). The article suggests a proper “fit” of the job and extended job supports that are suited to the individual seem pivotal for optimizing job retention and satisfaction.

E6 and E7 both would like to adopt strategies or work with a job coach to learn how to help IWDs like their job, maintain their job, and be accepted into the community. Furthermore, evaluating employment supports for IWDs will help increase long-term employment, increase quality of life, and improve community integration. In moving forward, the extent and quality of employment support and corresponding workplace capacity likely will be reflected in terms of employment opportunities for individuals with ASD (Nicholas et al. 2017).

The author of “What constitutes effective support in obtaining and maintaining employment for individuals with intellectual disability” implies that existing evidence regarding open employment for people with intellectual disabilities could be enhanced through the conduct of rigorous outcomes-focused studies that attend to specific strategies at both individual and organization levels (Cheng et al. 2017). The article discusses needs for ongoing support in the workplace. IWDs learn skills that they need to carry over to the workforce, however they often don’t know where to start looking for a job after high school. They lose their skills after taking a break from high school and then need those same lost skills to apply, hold, and maintain a job. Making sure that IWDs have jobs before leaving school can connect and bridge the gap for IWDs and high school transition. Other key factors the article listed were the need of family support, need for collaborative service, and limited support funding and access to services (Cheng et al. 2017).

Collaboration Among Professionals

According to the article “Collaborative Assessment for Employment Planning: Transition Assessment and the Discovery Process” the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) is implemented across the nation, and special education and vocational rehabilitation professionals will need to increase their level of collaboration. One area of potential collaboration is assessment—transition assessment for the field of special education and the discovery process for adult service providers (Stevenson, 2015). According to Wilczynski, Trammell, & Clarke (2013), school professionals must be prepared to ease the transition to adulthood by developing and/or collaborating with programs designed to meet the employment needs of IWDs.

The overarching recommendation is for school professionals to increase their knowledge of the two categories of assessment to increase and improve collaboration with VR. One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is for school personnel engaged in conducting transition assessment to communicate with the school’s assigned VR counselor, or local VR office, to learn about the discovery process. E5, E6, and E7 discuss the importance of collaboration with school and vocational rehabilitation. E5 said that “we are two separate entities, we don’t work together, and we don’t have time to collaborate; therefore, sending our kids to them without having any communication sets our IWDs up for failure and we need a solution.”

Stevenson recommends two factors for fostering a relationship among professionals: (1) A final consideration is to emphasize the qualitative methods of the discovery process in all areas of transition assessment as they are applicable to employment, independent living, and postsecondary education. For example, for independent living, observations could be conducted in the student’s place of residence and community settings to inform plan development.

Similarly, for postsecondary education, a student could be observed sitting in on a lesson at a college or interview the office of disability services to gather information on skills needed for success in that setting.

(2) Plan ways to coordinate the discovery process in transition assessment, two of the most critical professionals in the lives of high school students and young adults with IWDs could streamline the assessment process for IWDs. Furthermore, reaching out to each agency, school, or staff member working with IWDs in the process of employment will provide a smoother transition and also a long lasting work-ethic model for IWDs.

Community Resources and OODworks Accessibility

Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation

The Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) provides individuals with disabilities services and supports necessary to help them attain and maintain employment. Disabilities may include physical, intellectual, mental health, or sensory disabilities. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services are customized for everyone through assessments and one-on-one meetings with professional VR Counselors (OOD, 2019).

The next step in the process will be to identify the IWDs vocational goal and the vocational rehabilitation (VR) services needed to reach the goal. Once the IWDs have been assigned to a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor or Vocational Rehabilitation Coordinator, agreement on an employment goal that fits the IWDs needs. The IWDs may participate in assessments or experiences to help decide if the employment goal is right. The VR Counselor or Coordinator may supply information about different employment opportunities and careers.

Develop an IPE (Individualized Plan for Employment)

Individuals with Disabilities can work with Vocational Rehabilitation programs and

determine if the employment goal is a match for personal strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, interests, and informed choices. The IWDs can also determine if the vocational rehabilitation services necessary to achieve the employment outcome desired. The counselor and the VR will help the IWDs locate a job, keep the job, and help with any other assistance needed. IWDs can find out more information about an IPE at ODD Works.

Work with local community business and build partnerships

The transition to adulthood can be a challenging period for all adolescents as they move from the education system to the workforce. Adolescents with disabilities face additional challenges (Chambers, Rabren, & Dunn, 2009; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003), including the transition from special education to multiple eligibility-driven systems (e.g., adult services, postsecondary education disability services, housing supports) (Hanley-Maxwell, Whitney-Thomas, & Pogoloff, 1995).

Working with local businesses in the community will ensure employment opportunities for IWDs. The supports and services that youth experience for most of their education are no longer guaranteed and can be complex to reestablish in the adult world (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010; Wehman, 2006). Researchers have suggested that adolescents with autism or intellectual disabilities and their families particularly struggle with the transition to adulthood (Blacher, Kraemer, & Howell, 2010; Neece, Kraemer, & Blacher, 2009). Students with intellectual disability or autism lag behind their peers with other struggles in achieving employment, independent living, and community participation (Billstedt, Gillberg, & Gillberg, 2005; Luftig & Muthert, 2005; National Organization on Disability, 2004).

In the article “Community Conversations to Increase Employment Opportunities for Young Adults with Developmental Disabilities in California,” the authors suggested a total of

400 strategies that were organized into 20 categories (groupings of strategies with similar ideas, practices, or recommendations) and five themes (groupings of categories that reflected a similar goal). Although the five themes were common to all seven communities, two themes encompassed 60.3% of all strategies: “Building Partnerships with Employers” and “Building Awareness and Shared Resources” (Raynor, O., Hayward, K., Semenza, G., & Stoffmacher, B. (2018).

Project Description

The research conducted to understand the county service providers’ perceptions of their experience working with IWDs, led to the development of a policy recommendation paper that issues a call to action (Appendix A). The policy recommendation paper advocates for a change in the school to work transitional services for IWDs.

The purpose of this study and main goal was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of county service providers working with IWDs to ensure community employment, prevocational services, supported employment, day habilitation, or adult work centers. The policy recommendations will be presented to key stakeholders within Ohio’s school system and transitional services for IWDs. This policy recommendation represents a call to action for systems servicing IWDs.

The following research questions informed this study: RQ1: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on school preparation and readiness for IWDs in need of employment support services? RQ2: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on development and leadership opportunities for IWDs in relationship to community experience? RQ3: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on opportunities in the community for IWDs and employment

services? RQ4: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on day habilitation programs and community employment for IWDs? RQ5: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on family awareness's of local services for life after high school for IWDs?

Existing Supports and Necessary Resources

Service providers that serve IWDs thrive on consistency of a process, collaboration, and goals for IWDs. Multi-service providers need a system that could adopt the recommendations in this policy paper. A key resource is having contact information for the appropriate key stakeholders so that they can access the policy recommendation paper through technology. The policy recommendation paper will be sent via email so stakeholders will need an email address set up. The electronic policy recommendation paper will showcase the findings from the study and have a suggested implementation plan. Not all stakeholders will have the access to technology and email, therefore, several barriers will likely arise.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

The researcher's role and responsibility is to ensure the policy recommendation paper is disseminated to the appropriate stakeholders within the IWD community, and several issues are under consideration. One is to ensure stakeholders receive the policy paper via email and obtain an electronic copy. Gathering the right contact information for stakeholders and even stakeholders that may not be motivated, would be counter-productive. The solution is to capitalize on the existing relationships with the ten people interviewed and build more relationships with more community members so that consistency and collaboration can happen across all settings.

A primary potential barrier is the use of technology and ensuring email delivery to key stakeholders. To encourage participation in reading the policy recommendation paper, a prior email will be sent out based on interview concerns. Concerns addressed in the paper are school readiness and employment, improving success in school to work transitional programs, and resources for parents and how to implement them. Furthermore, there could be some hesitancy in how to move forward and implement the recommendations. Ensuring that stakeholders received the electronic version, a requested returned confirmation email sent back would ensure receipt of the policy recommendation paper.

Timetable

The implementation for the project policy recommendation paper will occur in the fall of 2020. The participating stakeholders(s) will begin to share their impressions and feedback. The service provider can introduce the policy recommendations through a collaborative meeting at their desired time and location.

Project Evaluation Plan

Justification for Outcome Base

The project deliverable is a policy recommendation paper and is outcome based. The outcome is that stakeholders are better educated and prepared for school readiness and employment for IWDs in their local community. Furthermore, improving success in school to work transition programs, and providing resource for parents and how to implement them.

Overall Goal and Evaluation Goal

The overall goal of the policy recommendation paper is to educate the stakeholders regarding IWDs and the barriers IWDs face for employment. Furthermore, the evaluation of the impact of the policy recommendation paper is based on a summative evaluation tool which will

be used to access the overall policy recommendation paper outcomes (Appendix A).

Administrators from the interview locations (ZHRP), (ZPS), and (ZBDD) will have the chance, via email, to provide evaluative feedback before the recommendations are publicly released. The administrators will have the opportunity to evaluate the policy recommendations through the evaluation survey sent via email (See Appendix B) and ensure that the recommendations are well developed and include models and strategies that benefit IWDs during the school to work transition phase.

The feedback received from the three administrators will be invaluable in ensuring policy recommendations. The three administrators will review the policy recommendation paper and complete the evaluation survey (Appendix B), which will include yes/no questions and open ended questions. The data from the evaluation survey will be analyzed to identify areas that may need revision before dissemination of the policy recommendation paper to a larger audience.

Key Stakeholders' Roles and Responsibility

As the person responsible for this project, the researcher will require assistance from other stakeholders who can provide support, collaboration, and advocate for IWDs during their time in school and afterschool. These stakeholders described below frequently develop and advocate for policy changes.

Zephyrhills Rehabilitation Program (ZHRP). This is a day program with workshops and community job opportunities. There were four participants interviewed here. ZHRP is a component of the Zephyrhills County Board of Developmental Disabilities Adult Services. Within ZHRP, there are two services offered there known as The Atrium Center, which provides Adult Day Services to persons with developmental disabilities, and Greene Incorporated, which

is a not-for-profit, 501(c)3 organization that provides laundry and document shredding services, for businesses and organizations in the Hillsborough Region.

Zephyrhills Board of Developmental Delays (ZBDD). There were two participants interviewed here. The ZBDD is a county agency committed to serving individuals with disabilities in Hillsborough County, while providing support services for their families. ZBDD's mission is helping people lead dignified, successful lives. The Board strives to ensure the availability of programs, supports, and services that assist eligible individuals with disabilities in making choices and achieving a life of increasing capability so that they may live, work, and play in the community. Major service areas include Early Childhood, Community Services, and Adult Services, as well as Finance and Administration. Each of these areas is committed to excellence in providing services to IWDs.

Zephyrhills Public School (ZPS). There were four educator participants interviewed here. ZPS is a small public school district serving Kindergarten through 12th grade students and has a transitional living program (TLP) for IWDs. The average graduating class size is 200 students. ZPS bases their framework of education for IWDs and typical peers on four pillars: (1) Providing a meaningful, rigorous, and adaptive curriculum for each student, including: intellectual skills in written and spoken communication, mathematics, science, technology, social studies, problem-solving, and the tools for application of knowledge; (2) Providing skills and appreciation for the fine arts, physical activities, languages, and leisure time activities for each student; (3) Providing the example, leadership, information, and training to help each student function in an honest, moral, and ethical manner in their family, community, and society; (4) Providing a highly trained, knowledgeable, caring teacher in every classroom whose mission is

to teach each student and to maintain an environment that will enable each student to learn, grow, feel worthy, and become successful.

Project Implications

This case study has the potential of improving the current special education practice by increasing the responsiveness of the county service providers, and connecting staff members at public schools with staff at vocational schools. The importance of this project for local stakeholders will help establish communication, procedures, and expectations with the ZBDD, ZPS, and ZHRP for IWDs through this policy recommendation paper. The literature review indicates that there is a concern for bridging the gap and helping IWDs in the community.

When IWDs are provided with resources in local settings, with job coaches and an IETP, this creates positive social change in the community benefiting IWDs (Wilczynski, Trammell, Clarke, 2013). For example, being able to work in the community with a job coach and then without assistance, would be a positive social change. It was also found that employment positively impacted the quality of life, cognitive functioning, and well-being of participants with ASD and IWDs (Walsh, Lydon, & Healy, 2014). In order for IWDs to be successful in securing employment in the local community, there is a need for training, increased support, a raised awareness of how to employ IWDs, and help to ensure success for IWDs.

The research conducted for this project study led to the development of a policy recommendation paper that has the potential to affect positive social change in the school to work transition for IWDs. Furthermore, while the results and recommendations suggested cannot be generalized to the entire IWD field, this information may be useful to public schools, county boards, workplaces, community centers, and local businesses. The developed policy recommendation provides implications that would encourage board members and community

members to take the lead and close the gap by providing multiple opportunities and choices for IWDs in their local community. The policy recommendation will also provide insight for the local public schools on how to close the gap for IWDs during school and after school. The policy recommendation will support the growth and transition of IWDs from school to work.

The publication of the policy recommendation would be given to three different locations via email. Giving the policy recommendation to the county board, local public school, and a day school would help connect and guide the next steps of the special education program and life after high school for IWDs in this region. The policy recommendation will also provide recommendations for school readiness and employment, improving success in school to work transitional programs, and resources for parents.

Conclusion

This section outlines the project evaluation plan and project implications for the three county service providers for this case study. It illustrates the potential impact for IWDs who struggle with finding a place in their community to work and maintain employment. The policy recommendation paper provides suggestions for finding community resources and connecting families to the school and community. Implications from this case study will help bridge the gap from school to work transitions for IWDs. Providing opportunities and resources during high school will improve the school to work transition program for IWDs.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths

A strength of this project is its focus on a support model that maintains consistency for IWDs working in high school and then transitioning to full time employment. Additionally, establishing a job coach and supporting IWDs during their job would be necessary for a

successful transition. After an extensive review of literature, Nicholas et al. (2018) conducted further research and concluded employment success is impeded by lack of coordination and inter-agency communication and often fails if support is not provided. As suggested by Nicholas et al. (2018) “addressing the gap, implementing a support model, and considering strategies to integrate and evaluate promising practices is indeed invited” (p. 40). Nicholas et. al concluded “there is a concerning lack of accessible employment support and opportunity for IWDs, as well as inequitable service, limited engagement with families, and an overall lack of community and employer capacity” (p. 41).

Additionally, stakeholders working with IWDs need a support model, training for IEP writing, and a way to provide resources to parents. Through analysis of the data, it is recognized that communication among staff members, community businesses, and parents is deemed necessary. As supported by Nicholas et. al, the current vocational services for IWDs are insufficient to meet the needs and desired level of employment engagement and success. Parents are involved in seeking and navigating employment for their adult child yet are typically excluded from associated support and employment service engagement.

According to my findings, there are three recommendations for connecting the employment path for IWDs: (1) develop an IEP that works for the IWD, making their learning meaningful and connecting to their interests; (2) schedule meetings to connect community employers to mold their expectations of what a working community looks like and; (3) provide trainings for staff members on how to effectively write IEPs and how to make them meaningful. Based on policy recommendations, it is suggested that an IETP can lead to positive outcomes for IWDs and their life after high school for the transition to employment.

Project Limitations

The limitations to this study were as follows:

- The data was collected fall 2019, therefore this study is limited by time.
- The project was not longitudinal in nature, therefore was not able to follow individuals over a span of time.
- The project was completed in one specific county, therefore this study is limited by area.
- It is important to follow individuals throughout their lifespan to see if they maintain employment over time, and if they have increased wages and hours.
- The sample size may not be representative of all county service providers, therefore this study is not generalizable to a larger population.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

For this study, face-to-face interviews conducted at a day program, the local board of disabilities, and a local public school were used. However, holding a focus group with IWDs would allow them to share their perceptions on how they perceive working in the community. A focus group with IWDs could have offered a deeper insight into how they understood IEPs, their roles in the community, and their experiences in the workforce. A focus group could have offered insight regarding their feelings and recommendations. An additional option would have been to include input from multiple families that have an IWD. Interpreting data from IWDs and parent focus groups might have led to the development of a professional development training for educators instead of a policy recommendation paper.

This is a basic qualitative study focused on the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders who serve IWDs. Alternatively, this study could have been a mixed methods study focusing on both qualitative and quantitative data to understand IWDs and their transition to life

post high school graduation. As suggested by Creswell (2013), a mixed methods design consist of the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Furthermore, a mixed methods design is an approach that utilizes both research designs to best describe a phenomenon under investigation.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

The research design of this project has been a heart filled journey resulting in personal growth and understanding of IWDs in the workforce. I have always had an interest in teaching and special education for over 20 years, and learning about IWDs in an educational setting has been a life-long process. Newly formed knowledge and understanding of research from the most recent publications and articles regarding IWDs and what the future holds for them informed the policy paper. According to Foot (2014), a doctoral journey is as much about identity transitions as it is about becoming an expert in the field of one's study. Foot's assertion is valid as earning this doctoral degree has been a learning process requiring discipline, critical thinking, and the ability to persist under conditions of adversity, while increasing one's understanding of how the scientific method can be applied to investigate basic human problems. Through this process, I have emerged as a scholar practitioner.

During the investigation of IWDs and employment, the researcher formulated the problem, identified the research problem, and established the research questions. At the beginning of this project, there were faulty assumptions about how research problems are identified. I have assumed research problems were common problems that were easily identifiable; the researcher holds a new understanding that it is necessary to conduct research to develop the research problem. During the development of this policy paper, I have gained an understanding of employment services and opportunities for IWDs and learned, through

countless hours spent with stakeholders, that the public needs to hear their perceptions and thoughts.

A newer, more mature researcher such as myself has emerged from this project, one who can go into various settings that serve IWDs and provide positive change recommendations. With these research findings, I have a voice and can provide leadership around this method of employment support services for IWDs. The policy recommendation provides ideas - the next steps for how we can help students with IWDs make connections and understand their options through school and after school.

Leadership and change are needed as the current vocational services offered to IWDs are insufficient to meet the needs and desired level of employment engagement and success. Parents involved are seeking and navigating employment for their adult child yet are typically excluded from associated support and employment service engagement. I have to seek out the perceptions of key stakeholders involved with special education. Furthermore, to ensure on-going communication and learning that would transfer to IWDs community, I have developed a policy recommendation paper to provide resources and recommendations to bridge the gap for IWDs. Communities need to ensure IWDs' choices and involvement during the employment transition and also follow an organized system for job employment. Change happens when employees feel like they can contribute and are valued.

While working toward completing this degree, I have realized that to view oneself as a scholar, one must be dedicated and determined to complete the work. This has been a long process with multiple challenges. The process of data collection and analysis has created a scholar who has made a difference, and the findings of this study will support the growth of IWDs in communities. The support of colleagues, friends, and family have boosted the scholar's

knowledge and love for learning and teaching. After completing this research study, this scholar has decided to leave the elementary special education setting and go to work in the community as a job coach to support IWDs. After 20 years with elementary kids, it is time to become their voice and provide these recommendations within the community.

This project has also required an in-depth investigation of the Social Model of Disability (see Myhill and Blanck, 2010), which was the framework for the study. The Social Model of Disability shifts away from consideration of the deficits of the functional, physiological, and cognitive abilities of the impaired individual. The Social Model of Disability shifts societies to focus away from oppressing and discriminating against disabled people, and the negative social attitudes encountered by disabled people throughout their everyday lives. The conceptual framework focuses on the abilities of IWDs rather than disabilities. I have learned to involve everyone, have an open mind, and listen to the perceptions of others and their feelings on a topic. Credit must be given to Walden's students, professors, and the organizations' staff members for their contributions to the study.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

After discussing questions and obtaining information from stakeholders in the educational community, there is clearly a need for training, increased support, and a raised awareness of how to employ and help ensure success for IWDs. There are so many IWDs in our local community that have no plan for life after school. The importance of this work is to learn how to bridge the gap and create employment and raise awareness for IWDs. The face to face interviews helped present perceptions and how creating a shared vision would ensure that IWDs can transition smoothly after high school into integrated, competitive employment in the

community. Sharing resources early with parents, exploring options for IWDs early, and communicating with the community earlier will increase IWDs' opportunities.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This policy recommendation paper attempted to increase understanding for IWDs working in the community after high school, and to improve employment outcomes for IWDs. Although this study represents a start for developing a larger body of research for bridging the gap for employment for IWDs, further research is necessary. Future research studies could be conducted from local agencies, county service providers, employers, local communities, and educators who worked with IWDs during high school. Further study is essential to understand the many facets of special education. Ongoing research could investigate how to provide collaborative employment opportunities and partnerships for IWDs, as well as additional benefits in investigating how administrators, psychologists, parents, educators, and IWDs work together to ensure a plan for life after high school. Future research studies could investigate which accommodations, modifications, and support services that local agencies, county service providers, employers, local communities, and educators are providing to ensure that IWDs secure employment after school.

As prior research indicates, the development of IETPs, and opportunities for employment or VR programs before graduation will ensure employability (Wehman, 2012). This study led to the development of a policy recommendation paper that specifically speaks to the employment support that IWDs need to become employable. Implications for positive social change include IWDs being provided additional resources in the local setting, job coaches, and an IETP after high school.

Conclusion

An ongoing process of collaboration with the school, community, and organizations is intended for IWDs to be successful with life during and after high school. It is intended that all participants learn and understand the importance of collaboration, implementation, and following through. Section 4 presented the results of the study. Furthermore, this section discussed the findings and draws conclusions based on examination of study results and review of the literature in the field. Furthermore, this study discussed the implications of the study for practice and makes recommendations for further research.

The intent was to investigate key informants' perceptions of the IETP and how IWDs transition from school to working in the community. Participants in interviews received an email version of Appendix A, which is the invitation and the consent form combined. Participants were given a three week window to respond to the email and decide on a location of their choice for the in-person interview. No post data collection steps are planned at this time. All hard data, such as signed consent forms, journal entries, and handwritten notes, are stored in a file cabinet that is locked and secured. These documents will be destroyed, using a paper shredder, within five years of completion of the study.

Therefore, after this investigation was conducted, findings in the school to work transition process were minimal, and IEPs were written for high school students with no plan to follow graduation. This qualitative case study addressed the lack of a clear school to work transition planning process, unemployment, and explored the perceptions and experiences of county service providers regarding community employment for IWDs. The research questions focused on gaining an understanding of the IETP process and county service providers' perceptions and experiences working with IWDs.

The qualitative design consists of semi-structured interviews with ten county service providers and educators to understand the reason for unemployment, lack of support for IWDs in the community, limited job opportunities, and limited resources for IWDs. The conceptual framework & Blanck's Social Model of Disability was used for this study. The Social Model of Disability shifts away from consideration of the deficits of the functional, physiological, and cognitive abilities of the impaired individual, to the ability of society to systematically oppress and discriminate against disabled people, and the negative social attitudes encountered by disabled people throughout their everyday lives. The conceptual framework used in this study focused on ability of IWDs rather than disability. Implications for positive social change include IWDs being provided additional resources in the local setting, job coaches, and an IETP after high school.

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Appendix A: Policy Recommendation

Background of existing problem

An Individualized Education Transition Plan (IETP) plays an important role in planning for life, and employment, after high school for individuals with disabilities (IWDs). An IETP is a

document prepared for individuals with a diagnosed disability participating in a community-based rehabilitation program. It must include a statement of needed transition services, an assessment, or training needed for the client with a disability (Lee & Carter, 2012). When effectively applied, IETPs can help secure employment in the community for IWDs.

Increased accountability measures instituted by local, state, and national governments, and updated educational policies, have pressured U.S. communities and stakeholders to increase employment in the community for IWDs. Often, if an IWD does not have a transition plan after high school, he or she will be left out of the workforce, and thus, the community. IWDs, parents, and caregivers may not be aware of what employment support options are offered.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of county service providers working with IWDs to ensure community employment, prevocational services, supported employment, day habilitation, or adult work centers. These perceptions and experiences will help the public gain an understanding of high school transition and work preparation, community employment, prevocational services, supported employment and success, day habilitation programs, and adult work centers for IWDs (see Appendix A). There is evidence that there is a problem with IWDs being fully employed and participating in competitive employment at the local, state, and national level. A Transitional Plan for Employment (IPTE) is a document prepared for each individual with a diagnosed disability participating in a community-based rehabilitation program.

Alverson (2016) cited Taylor & Seltzer's (2011) research that consistently documented poor employment levels for IWDs. Currently, only 17.5% of IWDs were employed while 65% of Individuals without Disabilities (IWOD) were employed. Furthermore, all age groups for IWDs were much less likely to be employed than those with no disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics,

2016). Since a 2013 decline in community employment for IWDs, new laws and policies have been implemented at local, state, and national levels to ensure competitive equal pay and inclusion opportunities (Employment First, 2016).

In Hamilton County, Ohio, there is an 80% unemployment rate for IWDs, which is double the unemployment rate for IWOD (Cincinnati Enquirer, 2016). Due to the low employment rate at the local, state, and national level, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) Section 511 has prohibited subminimum wage for IWDs, created an opportunity for competitive employment at the national level, and initiated integrated employment for youth transitioning from school to work. New provisions in the law require Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to increase their involvement in providing support based learning, supported employment services for young adults, and required collaboration with Medicaid and developmental disabilities agencies. These new provisions in the law for VR programs also limited jobs that paid less than minimum wage, and prohibited schools from contracting with sub-minimum wage providers, such as sheltered workshops, when providing transition services (Novak, 2015).

For the first time, after the provision changes of WIOA 2014, competitive integrated employment was identified as the optimal employment outcome of VR services (Hoff, 2014). Novak (2015) noted that the overall drive of the new policy was three-fold: to increase employment opportunities in the community for IWDs, to offer competitive integrated employment, and to address the weakness of the IETP process.

Several studies have concluded that when IETPs are in place, IWDs are able to function and work in a community. “Unfortunately, in Hillsborough, Ohio, there is evidence that this is not occurring. This appears to be a larger, more national problem that has led to increased policies

and research in the U.S. directed toward the transitions of IWDs from school to adult roles in their communities” (Ebersold, 2012; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006; Wehman, 2012). According to a comprehensive 2010 report released by the U.S. Census Bureau, it is estimated that 56.7 million Americans, or 19% of the population, live with disabilities. Lee (2012) reported nearly 70% of IWDs have been left out of the American workforce. In June 2012, only 19.3% of IWDs in the United States were participating in the labor force, working, or seeking work because of limited educational and local agency support collaborations (Lee, 2012). Of those, 12.9% were unemployed, meaning only 16.8% of IWDs were employed. In contrast, 69.3% of IWOD were in the labor force, and 65% of IWOD were employed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

IWDs face a much greater problem with unemployment because of the unique social, emotional, and behavioral challenges that may present when they are preparing for life in the workforce, searching for a position, and competently completing a job to criterion (Wilczynski, 2013). IWDs who have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face more difficulty finding employment than people with any other disability. Holwerda, van der Klink, Groothoff, & Brouwer (2012) indicate that only about 25% of individuals with ASD are employed, while 69% of adults without disabilities in the United States are employed in either full-time or part-time positions.

Furthermore, Burgess & Cimera (2014) concluded that “over time, the number of IWDs seeking Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services has increased; however, employment outcomes including the percent of IWDs achieving employment, the number of hours worked, and wages earned, have not improved for this group.” Transition-aged IWDs were more likely to become successfully employed as a result of receiving VR services than the larger population of

transition-aged adults. However, the employed transition-aged IWDs consistently worked fewer hours and earned lower wages than those in the larger population (Burgess & Cimera, 2014).

Some of the service options for IWDs upon high school graduation might include the following: community employment, prevocational services, supported employment, day habilitation programs, or adult work centers. When IETP are not in place and practiced during an individual's high school years, both the IWDs and society will be affected. Increased collaboration among local agencies, county service providers, educators, parents, and the IWDs during the IETP process will ensure a meaningful person-centered plan (Employment First, 2016). When IWDs are provided with resources in the local setting, with job coaches and an IETP, this creates positive social change in the community benefiting IWDs (Wilczynski, Trammell, Clarke, 2013). For example, being able to work in the community with a job coach and then without assistance, would be a positive social change. It was also found that employment positively impacted the quality of life, cognitive functioning, and well-being of participants with ASD and IWDs (Walsh, Lydon, & Healy, 2014).

In order for the IWDs to be successful in securing employment in the local community, there is a need for training, increased support, a raised awareness of how to employ IWDs, and help to ensure success for the IWDs. This study contributes to bridging the gap by creating a shared vision for helping to ensure any IWDs can transition smoothly after high school into integrated, competitive employment in the community. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the perceptions of county service providers working with IWDs to ensure community employment, prevocational services, supported employment, day habilitation, or adult work centers.

Summary of analysis findings

A typological analysis was used to analyze data correlated with the conceptual framework of Myhill & Blanck's Social Model of Disability. The typological analysis after the interviews categorized and organized the reported data. Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition Programing was used for supporting subthemes. Kohler (2016) suggests using a conceptual framework as a guide for transition planning with educators and families while focusing on student-focused planning.

After the interviews the researcher read, reread, and then marked data within each typology on a separate document for each category. After developing typologies, subthemes such as patterns occurred and then were developed. The research questions, which are based on the conceptual framework, informed and developed the typologies in this case study. Each subtheme was read and reread to ensure accuracy. Categories were grouped and organized into a separate Excel document to maintain data collection and records. Next, a generalization for each subtheme was developed to support the findings as suggested by Creswell (2012). The data collected and typological analysis ensured that the entries provided rich, thick data to support the subthemes as suggested by Merriam (2009).

Coding procedures were applied based on emergent topics, that were surprising, unusual, and appeared to address a larger theoretical perspective in the research (Creswell, 2012). Interview notes were transcribed into a separate Word document for each participant. Each participating location had its own folder on the laptop, and within that folder there were separate documents for each participant interview. Each participant interview was coded to ensure privacy and E1-E10 was used for each interview participant. All of this has been password protected to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, a computer software program called NVIVO 12 was used to support coding, retrieving, build theories, and conduct analyses of

the collected data. This qualitative case study addressed the lack of a clear school to work transition planning process, and the perceptions of county service providers regarding what is needed to ensure meaningful community employment for IWDs clients.

Creswell (2012) suggested that member checking is viewed as a technique for establishing the validity of collected analyzed data. Member checking was used to assure accuracy and credibility of the findings. Furthermore, member checking provided the opportunity to volunteer any additional information and edit collected data. Member checking took place after the transcription of the data. It was completed by sharing all the findings from the schools, and the work center, with the interview participants. Member checking allowed the interview participants to critically analyze the findings and clear up any misconceptions. The participants confirmed the accuracy and completeness of the analysis of the data, then it was assumed that the analysis of the data was credible. The overall goal of this process was to provide findings that are authentic, original, and reliable (Creswell, 2012). Researcher journal entries, interviews, and audiotaping was used to ensure data triangulation. By describing a phenomenon about IWDs and transitions after high school in detail, conclusions were drawn and transferred to other times, settings, situations, and people in the local community.

Discrepant cases, which are inevitable, may contradict explanations in data analysis. Discrepant cases were anticipated with the same integrity and ethical bounds as other collected data in this study. Therefore, data was reviewed with the same integrity and ethical detail as data which supports this study. In terms of handling discrepant cases, one would call for assuming a proactive stance.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are the following: we don't know how well these employment services are going to employ IWDs and make a difference since the study is limited by time. It is important to follow individuals throughout their lifespan to see if they maintain employment over time, get increased wages, and improved hours. It is important to gather multiple perspectives from county service providers on IWDs and their IETP process and experience. The ten interviews took place with county service providers in Hillsborough County. However, this sample size may not be representative of all county service providers. Therefore, this study will not be generalizable to a larger population. As such, this case study has a limitation related to the sample size interviews of ten key interview participants and time.

Data Analysis Results

Three themes emerged from the data:

- 1) Participants' perceptions of and experiences with school readiness and employment (supports research question number 1). RQ1: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on school preparation and readiness for IWDs in need of employment support services?
- 2) Participants' perceptions of and experiences for resources provided to parents of IWDs (supports research question 5). RQ5: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on family awareness's of local services for life after high school for IWDs?
- 3) Participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve IWDs school to work transition (supports research question 3). RQ3: How do county service providers describe their perception and experiences on opportunities in the community for IWDs and employment services?

Theme 1: Participants' perceptions of and experiences with school readiness and employment

When asked about IWDs' IEP goals, participants described two types of data collected: some talked about people or positions responsible for collecting the data, and some talked about the frequency of timing by which the data were collected. In general, participants reported that they regularly collected data in one area for IWDs to keep track of each student's IEP goals and objectives.

E1 stated, "Once the objectives and goals are mastered, they create new individualized goals for work DLS (daily living skills)." E2 reported that they collect data every 4 weeks, which is two times for each quarter. The participants monitor student IEP data 4 times a school year, which is 4 quarters. The determination for data collection for IEPs is mandated by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE).

E2 further explained that each IEP progress report is sent home to parents or caregivers. He said, "IWDs' data is recorded as NP (no progress), LP (limited progress), MP (making progress), and M (mastered goal)." In other words, E2, and other participants felt that they do a great job at collecting the data, changing goals and objectives as needed, but felt that IEP goals and objectives should be examined together with community employers for decision making.

E2, E3, and E4, discussed how it is a mystery to some caretakers when it comes to helping IWDs find employment within the local community. E3 shared "caretakers or parents of IWDs oftentimes need help themselves with paperwork, keeping work in the community and gaining an income, transportation, money for items needed for new place of employment, and just where to start for life after high school." E4, concluded, "I am deeply concerned that when a parent has an IWD and they do not have an action plan, goals, or expectations in place, the IWDs will sit at home and do nothing. It is important as a school, and as a staff member, that we reach

out to the community and the parents to provide them with the correct tools needed to help their IWDs so that a smooth transition can happen.”

E4, E5, and E9 feel that there needs to be more community involvement and opportunities outside of school to gain real world experience so that transitions after high school can run smoothly. E5 stated, “It is hard to find work opportunities for IWDs in the community; we often try to take the IWDs to the place of employment but they end up getting in trouble and kicked out, or their behavior is seen as unacceptable by the place of business.” E4 further concluded that “it is hard to find a job that an IWD is good at, can excel at, and be accepted by the place of employment. We need more opportunities for practice for IWDs when it comes to real world experience and employment for life after high school.”

Nicholas et. Al (2017) found through an online survey that 58.67% of people indicated that vocational services in their organization support employers at in the aim of building employer capacity related to hiring individuals with ASD. Furthermore, 66.67% of participants agreed that vocational services in their organization include communication guidelines for sharing relevant information with key partners, such as employers and family members. However, only 36.62% of respondents indicated that their organization has sufficient staffing levels for employment.

E9 explained that “Transition is hard for IWDs and can have a major effect on student behavior and opportunities inside the school and outside high school.” E9 emphasized, “I can’t find jobs IWDs like to do and provide them within the school setting but taking them out in the community changes everything. Their behavior changes; they need routine and consistent schedules that places of business can’t offer. The community has to be open and also have the proper staff to help support IWDs or the transition process fails.” E6, E7, E8, and E10, reported

that IEP goals relating to the workforce do not seem to be individualized for each student and that they see a trend of IEPs all having familiar language and working on the same goals.

E6, E7, E8, and E10 not only described the perceptions of school readiness and employment (Theme 1), but also foreshadow the conditions needed, which is a more individualized plan for IWDs. E6 concluded “we need help with how to get IWDs into the community and have them be successful. It is hard enough to find their interest and it takes a while to build a relationship with IWDs. I wished we had a professional job coach or some recommendations for how to coach and IWDs in the community work setting, and also helping them maintain a job, feel welcomed and wanted.” E7 said that “there is so much more we can be doing with our IWDs in the work community, I just don’t know how to take my classroom strategies and make them work in the working community.” Other participants (E4, E5, E9) also described the school to work transition plan as needing more involvement from the community for employing IWDs (Theme 3). E2, E3, and E4 advocated for more community resources for caretakers of IWDs (Theme 2).

The statements made by E4 are relevant to all three themes that emerged from this study. E4 discussed school readiness and employment transition opportunities (Theme 1), indicated that there are minimal leadership roles and opportunities for IWDs in the community (Theme 2), and perceived that more resources for caretakers are needed in the community for a successful transition (Theme 3).

The word *transition* was a repeated word used throughout the interviews. Transition was described as behavior causing for IWD due to the unknown, creating a normal routine or expectation for the IWDs. For the purpose of this study, the word *transition* refers too graduating from high school and starting vocational school or working in the community.

Theme 2: Participants' perceptions of and experiences for resources provided to parents of IWDs

In their responses to interview questions, participants identified several uses for resources that parents could use to help their IWDs transition smoothly for life after high school. E1, E2, E3, E4, and E5 all referenced "Task Force Priorities and Recommendations" (Preston and Jakobsyn, 1997). The resources suggested by participants and the "First National Survey of Parents" fit under six main priorities, and for each priority, specific strategies were recommended to address the most critical areas of concern. 1) Promote recognition and inclusion of parents with disabilities and their families. Establish a national and international Task Force on parents with disabilities and their families. E1 suggested that parents of IWDs be contacted through e-mail, written correspondence, phone correspondence, and staff posting information on school and community websites. E2 suggested that resources are provided at least four times throughout the school year. E3 stated that providing parents with phone numbers, making sure they have the proper contacts, making sure they can check their own emails, and having access to the internet.

E4 discussed developing linkages to mainstream and disability oriented organizations directed at parents, families, and/or adults with disabilities. E4 wanted to create a disability awareness day in the community to promote awareness of families of parents with disabilities. E1 stated, "We need an increase in personal assistance services to help families with IWDs. We need to help families find people in the community to that can help them at home if they are struggling or need a sitter for a few hours. Maybe the parents themselves need training at home, support with the type of work their IWD wants to participate in. Sometimes parents don't know

how to teach their IWDs rules, routines, and job expectations; practice opportunities and having another set of hands and eyes can be very helpful to a parent with a disability.

E3 wanted to provide resources on the waiver system or tax deductions to enable parents with disabilities to purchase the services and equipment necessary for them to raise their children. E3 concluded “if caregivers had the proper steps for waivers, the right staff to help connect them to the resources, IWDs could have supplies bought for them specifically in regard to the job of their interest.” E2 wanted to increase access to and provide job training to the IWDs, along with the caregiver, in the local community. E2 stated, “For example, we could have a caregiver go to work with the IWDs to help them with their behavior, get comfortable, meet their needs in a way the employer might not be able to right away, and in general provide the caregiver and the IWDs with the resources they need to keep a job. These are real life resources caregivers can understand by “doing and seeing” the expectations, requirements, and helping with a smooth transition for IWDs in the workforce.” E2 implied “a lot of the students I work with in high school that have a disability, their parent does too. Often times it makes it hard to provide the parent with resources because the resources given are too hard for them. The resources are just explained and handed to the caregivers with a disability and no one is actually helping them work through the process, answer questions, showing them one on one. How can we expect the IWDs to be successful when the caregiver doesn’t know where to start either?”

A report called “Keeping Our Families Together” (1997), implied that trainings must acknowledge the rights of disabled parents, be based within the appropriate disability cultural contexts, promote better understanding of the needs of parents with disabilities, and provide appropriate resources for parents with a disability and also parents of IWDs. E3 emphasized that trainings be provided to other members working in the school district or community to ensure a

successful transition for life after high school and to ensure proper resources are being given to caretakers (Theme 2). The National Survey of Parents with Disabilities (1997) indicates that “providing parenting education specific to parents with disabilities through establishing a centralized library of resources and information such as parent concerns in multiple formats will reach our local community.”

E5, E6, E7, E8, E9 and E10 discussed the need of increased accessibility to childcare sites and improved accessibility of all sites, increasing accessible recreation programs and sites, and increasing the availability and the development of adaptive parenting equipment. All the interview participants indicated the need for collaboration among parents with IWDs. For example, starting a parent support group and meeting weekly. Furthermore, teaching parents about wheelchairs, daily living skills, communication devices to help with non-verbal IWDs, medical equipment needed, and behavior and communication strategies for parents of IWDs.

Also, E10 implied “we also need to teach parents to advocate for them and their loved one, standing up and making sure their needs are being met and that they fully understand the IEP process.” E10 also stated that “Sometimes I feel like a parent of an IWDs leaves an IEP with unanswered questions, limited support or community resources, and feel like their child isn’t making progress.” Each interview participant felt that their school, facility, and/or board was doing a great job; however, they did not provide enough support to the parent and just focused on the IWDs.

Theme 3: Participants’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve IWDs school to work transition

After the interview, participants offered a variety of ways to make transitions run smoother and be more effective. These words were said the most: getting IWDs experience

starting in the elementary setting with rule following, being flexible with their schedule and routine, encouraging their interest in a hobby or career they would like to pursue, and build upon that over the years until they reach high school. E8, E9, and E10 discussed the importance of providing opportunities for IWDs to talk, socialize, and have real world experience, since this is why IWDs lose their jobs. Having local businesses employ IWDs and give them opportunities in multiple areas to practice, learn the trade, and be accepted by the community. E3 discussed the struggle of finding opportunities for IWDs in the community to work since businesses are small. E3 concluded that “small businesses don’t have the experience, accommodations, staff, support, or same opportunities as larger companies making it hard to provide an array of experience for our students with disabilities.” E8 implied “there is never enough time in the day to arrange a long visit to a place of employment, the employer is always busy, not the right time, or gives us little jobs that I feel are more discriminating than worth the IWDs time. We can do large jobs and advanced jobs, we just need practice opportunities and the right training for our IWDs” (Theme 3).

E5, E6, and E7 discussed the importance of collaboration with school and vocational rehabilitation. E5 said that “we are two separate entities, we don’t work together, and we don’t have time to collaborate; therefore, sending our kids to them without having any communication sets our IWDs up for failure and we need a solution.”

Project Deliverable

This section described and justified the methodology that was used for this study. This case study understood the perceptions of county service providers working in an adult day center regarding the accommodations and support services they provided to ensure IWDs secure employment. Furthermore, data collected will support a policy recommendation based on IETPs

and the school to work transition process. The policy recommendation findings will be given to county service providers at ZHRP, ZBDD, and ZPS. The use of a case study design is proposed along with data collection methods of gathering the perceptions of county service providers regarding the IETP process. Interview data was coded and developed into themes for the purpose of the study and the research guiding questions.

Stake (2003) uses the term intrinsic and suggests that researchers who have a genuine interest in the case should use this approach when the intent is to better understand the case. This case study explored perceptions of county service providers that could change delivery in services for IWDs through the IETP process.

Summary

Section 2 outlined the framework, methodology and methods for this study, and the ways in which these decisions anchored the research design and process of data collection and analysis. A rationale for the qualitative design approach was described and the methodological decisions for the study. Justification of participants and establishing relationships and trust is also included.

Findings were discussed in three themes that emerged from the data collected that aligned with the research questions. These themes offer recommendations for the interview participants. Theme one included participants' perceptions of and experiences with vocational rehabilitation services. A support model is discussed for integrating resources for vocational opportunities for IWDs. This model outlines and defines three categories for successful vocational transition (Nicholas et al. 2017). Theme two included participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their current efforts to improve IWDs school to work. Recommendations are provided regarding job coaching. The article "What constitutes effective support in obtaining and

maintaining employment for individuals with intellectual disability” offers specific strategies at both individual and organization levels (Cheng et al. 2017). Theme three included participants’ perceptions of and experiences for resources provided to parents of IWDs.

This section concluded with the project deliverable describing that a policy recommendation will be produced from findings of this study. The following section, section 3, will address the goals of the study and the rationale for the project, examine the literature review, provide a project description, evaluation plan, and project implications.

The review of literature begins with a historical review of transition services, as well as the reform movement. Then, I define and explain the concept of and characteristics of an Individualized Educational Transitional Plan. I organized the literature review to address the following themes: transitional services and IETPs, key characteristics for unemployed people with a disability, community based work and WIOA, job development and support resources, service and support services for families and individuals with a disability.

A review of current research on VR agencies reveals their critical role in helping transition-aged youth with disabilities attain vocational goals (Honeycutt, Thompkins, Bardos, & Stern, 2014). In addition, according to the literature, policymakers could improve VR services for transition-aged youth by developing specific standards and guidelines for VR agencies serving IWDs. Achieving competitive employment is an important outcome for young adults graduating from high school or college. Adolescents go to high school and sometimes college in order to obtain meaningful employment in the workplace. Youth with disabilities, especially those with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities (Carter et al. 2011), have struggled to make this transition. Shattuck et al. (2012) and Taylor and Selzer (2011) further note

that for youth with autism, unemployment after school can range from 50 % to as high as 86 % rate. This is an unacceptable outcome after many years of specialized education and schooling.

In order to increase community education and integrate IWDs, individuals will learn about employment options and planning during their school years. The initiative also insists that adults with developmental disabilities should have support teams that assist in learning more about how abilities and interests can match opportunities within the workplace. Every person should expect that community employment is the preferred outcome for working-age IWDs. Every agency, school, organization, and individual within Ohio's developmental disabilities system plays a role by focusing on what everyone can do and providing the best supports and services to enable people to choose and succeed in community employment. Employment First creates opportunities and pathways for integration, independence, and full community participation. Community employment allows for greater independence, wealth building potential, improved self-esteem, and personal satisfaction. Employers and co-workers experience diversity and a broader range of capable employees. Society at large benefits when all citizens are able to participate in an included setting and contribute to their communities in all the ways they can (Employment First, 2016).

According to the 2010 National FINDS survey, 58% of family caregivers reported it was very important that the person with IWDs continue their education after finishing high school, or, for adults, to go back to school for postsecondary education. 26% felt post-secondary education was somewhat important, and 16% felt post-secondary education was not important. Only half of family caregivers of people with IWDs felt post-secondary education was very important for that family member. Differences were also apparent across disability severity. Overall 68% of family caregivers of people with mild disabilities thought further education was very important 68%,

compared with 60% of family caregivers of people with a moderate disability, and 47% of family caregivers of people with a severe disability. Therefore, as the disability becomes more severe, the expectations in society decline for IWDs making fewer opportunities for competitive integrated employment. This data supports the conceptual framework Myhill & Blanck's Social Model of Disability that it is societal perception often is the main barrier to their participating in their viable employment. Furthermore, 73% expressed the need for IWDs to learn a job-related skill, 72% expressed the need for IWDs to learn about things they were interested in, and 66% of caretakers expressed IWDs to have experiences that will help the person get a job. Caretakers and IWDs expressed to have an employment plan during high school, and after high school.

Individualized educational transitional plan. According to Carter, Harvey, Taylor, & Gotham (2013), equipping IWDs to flourish during and after high school is central to the purpose and practice of special education during the transition process. However, many IWDs are leaving high school without the preparation and connections needed to engage meaningfully in their communities. Recognizing that relationships are at the core of community life, emphasis is placed on fostering social connections as an essential aspect of helping IWDs thrive in these settings (Carter, Harvey, Taylor, & Gotham, 2013). Project SEARCH is a nationally recognized program that is designed for IWDs in their final year of high school. The program builds the employability skills needed to gain and maintain meaningful employment in the community through career exploration and internships at local host businesses. Individualized job development and placement occurs based on the student's experiences, strengths, and skills. IWDs also receive on-the-job training and supports from a trained job coach and classroom instructor. At the state and local level, Employment First (2016) was initiated, and states: Every person has abilities, skills and talents to enrich the community and people around us and we

envision a time when every working-age adult with developmental disabilities has opportunity to explore their career options and seek jobs that fit their skills and interests.

Key characteristics of unemployment for people with a disability. The poor employment outcomes for IWDs are well documented and have resulted in calls to examine more effective ways of providing supports (Strickland, Coles, & Southern, 2013). Poor employment outcomes imply that if attitudinal, physical, and instructional barriers are removed, many people would be viewed as having different abilities and greater opportunity to participate in society, rather than having disabilities and the inability to participate. “The social model highlights a considerable shift from acknowledging only innate disability factors to looking at a disabled individual’s highly complex relationship to society as a whole” (Schlesinger, 2014, p. 7). The Social Model of Disability focuses on the unique abilities and needs of each individual which result in positive consequences for employment outcomes in the United States, Canada, and Australia; with many individuals with disabilities obtaining customized and competitive employment in the community, which helps improve negative attitudes among employers (Shapiro, 1994).

Community based work and WIOA explained. Work assessments are paid work experiences that take place in a community employment setting (Ebersold, 2012). These assessments are based on the vocational interests and preferences of the individual. They are designed to expose the individual to real work tasks, employer expectations and demands, as well as the social demands of community employment. Work assessments allow the individual’s needs to be identified and their job readiness skills to be evaluated prior to job placement (Ebersold, 2012). Job developers work one-on-one with individuals to identify employment preferences and interests. They assist with developing a placement plan that identifies the

strengths and needs of the individual in order to achieve successful community placement. The job developer works with the individual to create a structured job search and to identify employment opportunities. Developers assist with creating a resume, submitting applications, and sharpening interviewing skills (Ebersold, 2012).

Job development and support services. Job coaching can take place once employment is secured in the community. A trained job coach provides individualized on-the-job training in conjunction with the employer. The job coach assists the individual in mastering job tasks and meeting employer expectations. A job coach acts as a liaison with the employer and provides on-going follow up and retention services. The job coach helps identify natural supports in the workplace and provides advocacy support on behalf of the individual (Wehman, 2012).

Support services for families and individuals with a disability. There are service coordinators for IWDs in the community that can help with developing and continuing services on an Individual Service Plan (ISP) (Wehman, 2012). ISP are developed after high school and developed to meet the IWDs needs in the community.

One type of living arrangement for an IWDs is Supported Living which can allow IWDs to live as independently in the community or with others. An ISP will be developed for each person participating in the Supported Living program (Cullum, 2014). Another support is the Family Support Services Program (FSSP) provides supports, services, and help to enable families to provide home care for their family members with disabilities or to enhance the quality of life for that family member in their homes (Cullum, 2014).

Outlines recommendations connected to the evidence

This policy recommendation will provide recommendations in three main themes concerning IWDs. After face to face interviews with participants from ZHRP, ZBDD, and ZPS,

three themes emerged from data collection. Recommendations will be provided for improving IWDs community employment and vocational rehabilitation, transition services, and community resources. Three outcomes are then discussed in regards to how the recommendation will be supported.

Theme 1: Vocational Rehabilitation programs for IWDs

The first recommendation addressed providing service towards school preparation and readiness for IWDs in need of employment support services. To support the increase in preparing IWDs for employment one option is to adopt a model for vocational rehabilitation transition. Adopting a model can connect school members with the community by providing places IWDs can work, what support is provided by the business and support services to insure IWDs job experience opportunities in high school.

Recommendation 1: Adopt a Model for Vocational Rehabilitation Transition.

Recommendation 2: Collaboration between Special Educators and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Recommendation 3: Employment support services for IWD.

Theme 2: Employment Support Services for IWDs

Another recommendation is providing resources to parents of IWDs and increase awareness of local services for life after high school for IWDs provided in the community. To support the need of having resources available for the local community a recommendation is to have collaboration between special educators and vocational rehabilitation places.

Recommendation 1: Online Support for parents and IWDs

Recommendation 2: Working with Outside Agencies to Close the Gap

Recommendation 3: Collaboration among Professionals such as monthly meetings

Theme 3: Community Resources and OODworks Accessibility.

The final recommendation focuses on how to improve IWDs school to work transition. To support how county service providers can help provide opportunities in the community for IWDs and employment services is providing employment support services for IWDs.

Establishing local monthly meetings for school districts to discuss findings and offer solutions for community and school connections. Discussing check-in's for IWDs (listening to business and IWDs perceptions), solutions if problems arise in the community at the IWD;s workplace between staff and or business, and celebrating IWDs that remain working in the community.

Recommendation 1: Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation

Recommendation 2: Develop an IPE (Individualized Plan for Employment)

Recommendation 3: Work meetings

Appendix B Evaluation Survey

Please send your return evaluation to kernsheather@gmail.com

Participant name: _____ **Workplace/Role** _____

Directions: Please underline one answer, pick yes or no.

1. Was the paper logically constructed? Yes/No
2. Was the policy recommendations clearly identified? Yes/NO
3. Did the research support the policy recommendation? Yes/No
4. Was the policy recommendation paper easy to follow and understand. Yes/No

Please share any thoughts and ideas you have after reviewing the policy recommendation paper.

1. Describe any new information ideas that you gained from reading the policy recommendation paper.
2. Do you believe the recommendations presented in the paper would be valuable to your workplace?
3. Please share any additional feedback or comments about the policy recommendation paper.
4. Please identify stakeholders you feel should be included in the dissemination of this policy recommendation paper for evaluation.

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Stakeholders Working with IWDs

These questions will be used during interviews with stakeholders to understand their experiences and perceptions when working with IWDs. Understanding stakeholders' experiences and perceptions will help identify the problems IWDs encounter regarding unemployment, underprepared for the workforce, and lack of resources for families with IWDs.

1. Describe your experiences when working in the community with IWDs?
2. What accommodation did you provide for the IWDs working in the community?
3. Based on your experience, did the IWDs succeed in the community and sustain employment?
4. Describe opportunities in the community for IWDs and employment services?
5. Describe the job opportunities for an IWDs in the community?
6. Describe the day habilitation programs and opportunities at the day habilitation program for IWDs?
7. Describe your experience with family awareness of local services for life after high school for IWDs?
8. What services are families aware of, and what services does the family participate in?
9. Upon graduation, was the IWDs prepared to enter the workforce after high school?
10. What job skills are required for an IWDs to be considered in the workforce?