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Employers' Perceptions and Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

Barbara Ann Rosemond
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Barbara Ann Rosemond

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Dr. Cathryn Walker White, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Candace Adams, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Elsa Gonzalez, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

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Abstract

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

In a Midwest school district, individuals with disabilities (IWD) graduating from high school are not successful in obtaining employment in the local community. District leaders were unable to make evidence-based decisions regarding the transition program due to a lack of data regarding employers' perceptions related to employment of IWD. The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore employers' perceptions regarding the employment of IWD. Using Tinto and Pusser's model of institutional action for student success, 12 employers were purposefully sampled in the target community, and data were collected through face-to-face interviews. Data were analyzed using comparative, inductive analyses and analytical coding. Four themes emerged from the findings: (a) employers are willing to hire IWD and make accommodations, (b) employers need the support of job coaches and professional development, (c) the positive attitudes and social skills of IWD contribute to hiring more IWD, and (d) some employers will hire IWD under certain conditions. A white paper was developed to improve stakeholders' understanding of the needs of these individuals and employers in the community. Implications for positive social change are that adoption of the recommended actions by the stakeholders will improve transition, employment, and understanding of these individuals' needs as they transition to the target community, allowing individuals with disabilities to be independent contributing members of society.

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Dedication

This research study is dedicated to God, my beloved parents, sisters, family, and friends. Thank you for your love, encouragement, and support. I am blessed to have you in my life. Thank you, God.

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Thank you, Dr. Ramo Lord for your dedication and support you provide to your students. Thank you, Dr. Cathryn White for your steadfast support, motivation, and encouragement you have given me to finish my doctoral degree. It has been a pleasure and a blessing to have you as my chairpersons. Because, of you two individuals, I have regained my confidence, dedication, and determination to complete my doctoral journey. A heartfelt thank you to my granddaughter Brittni Braswell, for her steadfast encouragement, support, and proficiency editing my work. Thank you, my sister Cecilia Heron, who at a very young age instilled me with the drive and motivation to succeed at any endeavor in my life. Thank you, my sister Gwendolyn Young, who has been my rock and support system as I've continued through this process. Thank you, my friend, Dr. Louise Campbell for your continued support throughout this turbulent journey to witness this accomplishment of me completing my doctoral degree.

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Section 1: The Problem

Despite legislation and national programs to improve employers' understanding of the hiring process for adults with disabilities, adults with disabilities continue to be overlooked by individuals with hiring responsibilities for employment in their respective businesses. In a recent poll, the Kessler Foundation and National Organization on Disability (KF/NOD, 2015) found that employers hiring people with disabilities recognized the significance of hiring them, although very few employed individuals with disabilities (IWDs). Furthermore, KF/NOD found that while 70% of those polled had diversity policies, only 66% of those included disability as a recognized group (KF/NOD, 2015). The KF/NOD poll also showed that only 21% of adults with disabilities report being employed. Maier, Ulferts, and Howard (2012) likewise reported the employment rate for people with disabilities remains far lower than for people without disabilities. According to the National Organization on Disability president (C. Glazer, personal communication, July 26, 2016), everyone has an opportunity to a full and equal chance to secure employment.

This problem was evident in the Middle Stone Public School District (pseudonym), a district located in southeastern Michigan. According to the district's administrative program director, IWDs transitioning from high school are not being hired at an equitable rate as compared to non- disabled students. Additionally, no data is available about employers' perceptions regarding the employability of IWDs. This evidence warrants research on employers' perceptions of IWDs in the local community.

The Local Problem

The Middle Stone Public School District (MSPSD) partnered with the non-profit Upscale Foundation (UF; pseudonym) to determine employers' perspectives regarding employability of IWDs. According to a MSPSD Executive Director, "This partnership is the only one of its kind in the MSPSD." UF employs two teachers from MSPSD to training IWDs to be productive employees in the workplace. Unfortunately, the MSPSD Executive Director noted that "[UF] leadership does not understand employers' perceptions for effective future employment opportunities for these individuals."

The MSPSD director stated that there are numerous and significant problems related to employment of IWDs in the MSPSD. The MSPSD director of special education reported not understanding employers' perceptions of IWDs, which prompted me to undertake this study. According to the director, "What was not known about the problem was what the employers believed educators could do to help businesses and community members understand employers' perceptions vis-à-vis for hiring IWDs in their community." MSPSD has no school-to-work transitional employment program currently in place, and thus no mechanism for understanding perceptions that promote employers to hire IWDs. Chang, Coster, and Helfrich (2013) discussed a need to involve IWDs in community activities, educational transition programs, and processes leading to employment opportunities. Researchers have found that bridges to facilitate transition include alterations to better suit needs within the community, intellectual skills, individual skills/strong points, and teacher's qualities (Giarelli, Ruthenburg & Segal, 2013). However, they have not determined what specific services, businesses, or

educational systems need to do to assist IWDs in reaching their independence goals. Overall, job coaches and parents have embraced positive attitudes and beliefs about inclusion, with parents expressing the most positive opinions about inclusion in both the classroom and workplace (Bennet & Gallagher, 2013). These findings give credence to additional research of employers' perceptions of successful employment of IWDs.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

According to the MSPSD Executive Director, employers in the MSPSD are not hiring IWDs transitioning from high school to independence "at an equitable rate as compared to non-disabled individuals" (personal communication, June 9, 2016).

MSPSD has an enrollment of 1,130 students with disabilities. MSPSD has a partnered with UF in the local community to increase employment prospects for IWDs. This program was launched to assess IWDs' employability in the community. The director of special education for this school district reported that "290 students ages 16-26 are enrolled in the high school setting and [are] in critical need of employment." In addition, there are 80 local businesses in the community, 12 of which have employed 40 IWDs. However, the MSPSD Executive Director noted that "there is no current understanding of employers' perceptions of employability for IWDs transitioning from high school at the local level" (personal communication, June 10, 2016). The local school administration, businesses, educators, and parents of IWDs agree that the problems employers encounter providing employment is worthy of study.

The MSPSD director of special education expressed her concerns "about the small numbers of employers who were willing to offer employment for the disabled" (personal communication, June 9, 2016). As an active community member, I have learned about the depth of this problem from teachers, parents, and employers who were willing to express their concerns. I discovered that the professional literature and national organizations advocating for IWDs agree that businesses have significant problems with hiring IWDs. By exploring employers' perceptions of IWDs' and employability in the local community, school administrators and educators developed a deeper and more lucid understand of employers' providing employment to IWDs, which was the phenomenon focused on in this study. Additionally, this information will allow school administrators and educators to understand why employers are reluctant or hesitant to hire IWDs. To further explain the problem that prompted this study, I have provided an overview of the problem in the local community as understood by business leaders, school administrators, and educators. Furthermore, I gained an informed understanding of employers' perceptions of IWDs' employability at the local level and evidence of the problem based on data from the professional literature.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

IWDs have not been hired by employers at a notable rate as compared to individuals without disabilities (Livermore et al., 2000; Pagan, 2013). When it comes to transitioning youth with disabilities to life in the community, the MSPSD special education director said, "The diverse and numerous assets of most communities are inadequate to the task of hiring them," (personal communication June 10, 2014). Kaye,

Jans, and Jones (2011) and Wehman et al. (2015) suggested that employers' perceptions regarding employment of IWDs were informed by social desirability biases. The employer reports what they think the interviewer wants to hear instead of expressing their true attitudes, which might be socially unacceptable and inconsistent with legal requirements. This becomes problematic as it reflects a veneer of business acceptance of employees with disabilities but does not address subtending issues. Kaye, Jans, and Jones, in their review of employer responsiveness and adherence to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990), also reported that many companies still do not understand the disability laws and continue to show resistance to complying with them. The apparent lack of knowledge regarding employers' perceptions, whether positive or negative, as it relates to employability of young adults with disabilities warranted this study. My aim in this study was to explore and understand the problems associated with employers' perceptions regarding hiring IWDs transitioning from MSPSD to independence.

Definition of Terms

Community participation: In its grassroots definition, community participation is a planned process in which a group or people come together to discuss their ideas and concerns in order to collectively meet their objectives. An alternate definition of community participation is "involvement in activities that are intrinsically social and either occur outside the home or are part of a nondomestic role" (Chang et al., 2013, p. 771).

Independent living: A philosophy and movement that empowers [IWDs] with self-determination and equal opportunities while also enabling them to exert influence,

make decisions, choices, and have control in every aspect of their lives. (Ratzka,1992, para 1.).

Significance of the Study

The MSPSD Executive Director examining and understanding the problems with employers' perceptions employing individuals with disabilities from the Upscale Foundation, was a primary concern throughout the community," (personal communication, June 10, 2016). This problem is significant because, as the MSPSD Executive Director noted, "teachers, employers, and communities must become aware of the critical need for expanded employment opportunities for IWDs." Hall and Wilton (2011) and Lovgren, Markstrom, and Sauer (2017) established that studying this issue promotes and builds positive relationships between the local education setting, employers, and community participants. In Lovgren et al.'s study, stakeholders' concerns included a lack of understanding of employers' perspectives of a school-to-work transitional employment program for IWDs. Bruyere (2009) and Erikson, von Schrader, Bruyere, VanLooy and Matteson (2014) found that reasons for this concern included an inadequate understanding of ADA requirements, work experiences, and skills training, as well as a lack of knowledge about accommodations, supervision, and coworker attitudes. In this research study, I gathered perceptions from employers through interviews to understand any problem associated with hiring IWDs as related to employers' perspectives, employment concerns, community participation. This study is significant as the analysis of the findings provided future recommendations to the local school district stakeholders and specifically how the how the school to work transitional program was

implemented for IWDs. In addition, the community, businesses, and local educational institutions will benefit from this study as the data collected provided a better understanding of employers' perceptions of the employability and new strategies to support the employment of e IWDs and the employers as well.

In many communities, it is difficult for non-disabled individuals to find jobs, and this problem is especially notable for IWDs. Bantjes, Swartz, Conchar, and Derman (2015) and Schultz (2010) found that IWDs are not only lacking in employment opportunities, they are often disproportionately represented in the poorest segments of society. Brucker, Mitra, Chaitoo, and Mauro (2015), and Fremstad (2009) argued that living with a disability costs more money than living without a disability regardless of employment status; on the other hand, employment rates remain significantly lower for IWDs than for non-disabled people. Ultimately, this can interfere with the successful integration of IWDs. Although IWDs have diminished capacity to perform certain tasks, they possess the same desires as non-disabled individuals. Gathering site-based data on employers' perspectives to teachers, employers, program administrators, and stakeholders led to collection of valuable information that will lead to the adoption of best practices for hiring qualified IWDs in the workplace.

Research Questions

I designed this study to discover employers' perceptions of employability for IWDs transitioning from the MSPSD to the local community while considering that IWDs are not currently being hired at a rate equitable with non-disabled individuals. To better understand this problem, I generated the following research question: What are

employers' perceptions of IWDs' employability as they transition from MSPSD to the community?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore employers' perceptions regarding the employment of IWDs transitioning from the MSPSD. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Tinto and Pusser's (2006) institutional action for student success model. This framework describes employers' perceptions needed for understanding the problems associated with IWDs for successful employment. Consistent with this model, is a research design that elicits descriptions of participants' views, which include information on perceptions, categorizations, and interpretations (Creswell, 2007; Yazan, 2015). Human thinking creates constructs, which are best addressed using the qualitative approach. Additionally, these constructs are driven by interaction with the environments in which individuals operate. The implications of qualitative studies are extensive considering that every person has a different reality that can shift perception and meaning according to changing environments (Creswell, 2007; Yazan, 2015). Perceptions are therefore based on human relationships and interactions in the context of their respective environments. In this study, I worked to understand employers' perceptions of hiring IWDs at the local site.

Tinto and Pusser's institutional action for student success model. In this study, I sought to understand employers' perceptions using Tinto and Pusser (2006) institutional model of action. This model is effective for understanding what shapes

student success while measuring the capacity of employers to change. Astin (1984) found that students' personal backgrounds and characteristics they bring with them can influence their employment outcomes. Additionally, Astin (1993) argued that student successes were associated with the degree that students feel that they belonging to one or more affinity groups at their place of employment. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999), Strauss and Volk (2002), and Tinto (1993) likewise found that social integration of students relies on their comfort level and interactions with other employees. Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) suggested increased social integration leads to more outcomes resulting in successful employment. Berger (2000) contended that Tinto's educational integration model of student success was not equally appropriate for all students, while Kuhl and Love (2000) identified empirical based evidence as a major component for education integration. Kuhl and Love (2000) emphasized the separation between actual student experiences and theoretical social integration concepts. These researchers further suggested more measures were needed to understand social integration for student success of IWDs.

I used Tinto and Pusser's (2006) model to identify specific barriers and accommodations to students' successful employment. They examined employment environmental factors that influence intuitional actions for students' success and identified five conditions needed to promote institutional action: commitment, expectations, support, feedback, and involvement. These five conditions identified by Tinto and Pusser, which I describe in detail in the following subsections, are precursors for IWDs' successful attainment of employment.

Commitment. The first and most important condition for student success is employers' commitment to developing goals and providing incentives and rewards to increase student success for IWDs (Wehman, 2011). Furthermore, Wehman (2011) and Burgess et al. (2014) recommended that schools engage with employers to collaboratively promote successful employment outcomes. The Tinto (1975) model focuses on interactions between the student and employer for success. Habley (2004) and Swecker, Fifolt, and Searby (2013) found that specific persons interacting on the job with IWDs will result in a positive influence regarding their commitment towards employment. Berger and Lyon (2005), and Garza and Randall (2013) added the influence of peers helps to determine student commitment to the job. Without employer commitments to these programs' success, the programs may begin but rarely succeed. Employers want to know if IWDs are committed to being to work on time, completing assigned job tasks, and interacting in a positive manner with employer and coworkers. Swail (2004) specified that student goals, commitment, and expectations needed to match employers' missions. Tinto (2007) concluded that for students to achieve successful employment, they should socially integrate in the community, as this increases student commitment to the job and leads to employment in the community. Commitment is the first condition informing employers' perceptions of successfully hiring IWDs (Tinto & Pusser, 2007).

Expectations. An employer's expectation for IWDs is a key condition for student success (Elfer, 2014). Additionally, Elfer (2014) and Lyth (2012) asserted that positive expectations, experiences, and greater knowledge about IWDs would possibly encourage

more employers to hire them. However, von Schrader, Malzer, and Bruyere (2014) found that employers' major concerns for IWDs were "lowered expectations, lack of respect, isolation from co-workers, [and] decrease in job responsibility" (p. 240). Tinto (1975) found that educational expectations, motivation, and goal commitment are factors that influence employment success for IWDs. Schunk and Zimmerman (2006), and Wang, Shannon, and Ross (2013) argued that success and failure on the job are attributable to four casual factors: capability, effort, task difficulty, expectation, and luck. Students feel in control to succeed in their efforts by factors attributed to outcomes seen as internal, stable, and controllable. Employers hold different expectations for IWDs because ability level vary among each disabled individual. Researchers have shown that positive expectations from employers are a form of support for IWDs in the workplace (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006).

Support. Employer support of employment services for IWDs is most effective and a condition for student success in the workplace. Tinto and Pusser (2006) identified three types of provisions for student success: academic, financial, and social. Employers' perceptions regarding hiring IWDs is partially the responsibility of the educational system. Employment and academic support is needed in the form of "developing courses, tutoring, and study groups" (Attinasi, 1989, p. 7). Attinasi (1989) further found that counseling, mentoring, and support centers played key roles in student success. Bean and Eaton (2000) and Simpson (2013) described a psychological model of student retention, noting that when students believe they are competent, supported, and useful, they will develop higher goals. Additionally, Bean and Eaton (2001) and Simpson (2013)

identified several successful support models (e.g., teaching communities, tutoring, and orientation) and the underlying psychological processes, which included more self-confidence beliefs that encourage student persistence. Zelly (2013) identified an example of employer social support and satisfaction at a Walgreens distribution center located in South Carolina with 600 employees, 40% of whom are disabled. Employers like Walgreens collaborating with educational systems could help to eliminate the barrier of lack of support and provide reinforcements to increase awareness for hiring IWDs.

Funding supported employment remains challenging, with political and policy-related complexities that continue to plague employers, governments, and IWDs. Community-integrated employment is one option that employers have found to be effective. Burgess et al. (2014) and Wehman (2011) identified several optional features, which included offering supported employment, funding local programs, encouraging substantive meaningful work, and including severely IWDs. The complexities of employment for persons with disabilities are reflected in an employment success gap of "38% with 21% among the disabled adults vs. 59% among non-disabled adults" (Wehman, 2011, p. 146). This is an indication that IWDs are more likely than not to live in poverty. Amado, Stancliffe, McCarron, and McCallion (2013) and Novak and Rogan (2010) identified several systems, including education, business, and government, as being beneficial towards "supported employment and clarity of mission for persons with disabilities have proven repeatedly to be one critical element of success for adults with disabilities" (p. 34). Burgess et al. (2014) and Wehman (2011) postulated that the evolution of supported employment, with all its improvements, continues to retain the

same goal, which is to integrate disabled workers into the community with mainstream jobs. A more focused, comprehensive approach will ensure employers, locally and nationally, will continue to advance in their ability and capacity to hire IWDs. Frequent positive feedback from employers encourages students and motivates them to enrich their performance in the workplace.

Feedback. Student success and performance is more likely when they receive feedback from other students, teachers, and administrators. Angelo and Cross (1993) argued that students should be given pre-testing to determine areas of strength and weakness to address specific needs and learning styles. Students should be assessed periodically to determine if learning is taking place. Employers' engagement in positive feedback provides employees with encouragement for their success. Frequent positive feedback written in a portfolio form enables IWDs access to employers with information that will allow them to adjust, change, and promote learning for their success in the workplace (Tinto & Pusser, 2006).

Involvement or engagement. Researchers have found that involvement plays an integral role in IWDs' academic success and social integration. The more IWDs are academically and socially involved in the community, the more employable they become (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). This is critical during the first year of learning on the job because it involves subsequent learning and persistence (Tinto, 2001). Learning and persistence are important during the first year because it is necessary to build engagement and affiliation among disabled individuals.

Involvement and engagement are essential tools to facilitate student success for two reasons. First, the employment setting may be the only place that students and employers engage in social interactions. Second, effective engagement in socialization with other students leads to enhanced learning and heightened student success. Endo and Harpel (1982), Lundbery and Schreiner (2004), and Tovar (2015) have concurred with Tinto's model, finding that when students were engaged in social interactions with other students, they showed an increased success. Tinto's initial writings focused only on academic and social inclusion as key factors in determining IWDs' engagement and persistence in the workplace.

Tinto's model is useful because it recognizes factors beyond the control of educational institutions. If students are to persist, they must be engaged. In summary, the key to student success consists of: (a) commitment and a positive setting; (b) high expectations for success; (c) needed support for academic achievement; (d) positive feedback from other students, faculty, and community; and (e) commitment to all students as equal members of their communities. The Tinto and Pusser model (2006) aligned with my goal, which was to explore employers' perceptions of IWDs' successful employment.

Review of Broader Problem

I completed an online database search by using Walden's University Library. The databases included Educational Research Information Center (ERIC), *EBSCO*, Pro Quest Central, Education Research Complete, Google Scholar, Sage, and Academic Search Complete. Search Topics: employer's perceptions, job training, transition from school to

work, employment opportunities for IWDs, employer perspectives hiring IWDs, professional development to improve efficacy when teaching students with disabilities. Key phrases: people with disabilities, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), (1990), employer attitudes, discrimination, employers' perceptions, Key words: transition, job training, disabled, special education, teachers, parents, perspectives, employment families, communication, commitment, expectations, support, feedback and engagement.

I combined and reworded key terms, using a "snowball" strategy, to leverage results. I also identified more articles by researching and locating references of pertinent peer-reviewed articles. I limited the search to articles within the last five years. To reach saturation, I searched until the reference section of new articles featured almost the same articles.

I reviewed the empirical research that scholars conducted to understand what a school to work transitional employment program was trying to accomplish. Special education teachers must provide an organizing framework for data collection, analysis, and understanding employers' perceptions set forth for hiring IWDs. This review of literature explored an examination of employer's perceptions as it related to employers hiring IWDs.

Negative and positive employer perceptions for hiring IWDs. Employers have presented positive and negative attitudes regarding the employment of IWDs. As with any job applicant, employers have good reason to be skeptical of an applicant's ability claims. The employer's perceptions of IWDs added a dimension of uncertainty for hiring decisions (Bruyere, Malzer, & Von Schraeder 2014). Specifically, researchers identified

that reasons for not hiring IWDs included "lowered expectations, lack of respect, isolation from co-workers, decrease in job responsibility, and being passed over for promotions" (p. 240). Unfortunately, this negative attitude may discourage some employers from hiring IWDs. Researchers from Fortune 500 corporations reflected more positive inclinations to hire IWDs. This was apparently justified, as these employers experienced affirming behavior of IWDs who were employed related to job performance (Kaye et al., 2011; Wehman et al., 2015). Some other factors influencing employer decisions towards hiring IWDs involve provisions for reasonable costs related work accommodations, performance appraisals, and safety factors (Burke et al., 2013). These dimensions must be addressed in the context of employers' perceptions of IWDs in the workplace. There has to be the willingness and positive inclination of employers to address employability issues of for IWDs.

IWDs' and stigma in the workplace. Historically, IWDs have been discriminated against and stigmatized in the workplace. Bruyere, Malzer, and Von Schrader (2014) identified "One of the greatest barriers to student success is the unfavorable attitudes of employers toward people with disabilities" (p. 236). Workers with disabilities were reluctant to disclose their disability for fear of rejection of employment and/or differential "treatment once employed" (p. 239). Cruden, McDonnall, and Zhou (2013) acknowledged 160 randomly selected businesses in four states; they recognized the challenges of 37 employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs. Capella, O'Malley, and Cruden (2014) found negative employer attitudes of IWDs were identified as one of the most "significant barriers to employment" (p. 214). Other factors

cited by employers included discomfort or unfamiliarity (32.2%) and lack of knowledge was (39.7%). Houtenville and Kalorgyou (2012) and Madera (2013) identified diverse racial and ethnic groups as one of the most complicated issues of employer challenges surrounding hiring IWDs, even though these racial and ethnic groups help to create an environment conducive to new ideas and enhanced market responsiveness.

Employers' reasons for not hiring IWDs. There are many reasons cited by employers regarding their refusal to hire IWDs. Kaye et al. (2011) and Wehman et al. (2015) suggested that more than 80% of respondents cited three primary factors: uncertain costs, lack of awareness, and uncertainty about the proper care and treatment of "workers with disabilities" (p. 526). U.S. Department of Labor (2012) established, from a national sample, that for the 2.5 million businesses commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor approximately 62% of companies, according to the size and sector, cited accommodation costs as the principal reason employers gave for not hiring IWDs. Kay et al. (2011) stated adjustment needs for fear of being stuck with a worker you cannot discipline or fire, and the possibility of a lawsuit. Employers provided numerous reasons why they refrain from hiring people with disabilities, as indicated by the chart included below:

Table 1

Employer Perceptions of Why They do not Hire IWDs

Employer perceptions	Percent of employer agreement
Cost considerations	81.4
Concerns about accommodating special needs of disabled workers	80.9
Difficult to assess IWDs' abilities to perform job	73.3
Rarely see IWDs applying	66.3
IWDs not perceived as competent	31.5

Table source: Kaye et al., 2011, p. 527; Wehman et. al., 2015.

Employers' concerns related to healthcare for IWDs. Furstenberg, Fleury, and Connolly (2011); Bond, Drake and Campbell (2016) examined IWDs, absence in the workplace and healthcare reform. They reviewed several challenges that employers face in managing health care costs for IWDs. The additional cost of national health care reform for IWDs makes the interrelationship between employer profitability and health care more "crucial than ever for employers" (p. 9). Potential liability was cited as another key concern. These factors were combined to represent, in many cases, a high barrier to employment for persons with disabilities.

Mason (2013) argued employers and managers lacked knowledge and confidence when health issues were raised for IWDs, as they fear being accused of discrimination or insensitivity by either their workers or employers. Section 20 of The Equality Act of 2010 stated, "There was a duty by the employer to make reasonable adjustments if the organization was able to make reasonable adjustments" (p. 3). The Equality Act gave employers the flexibility to hire and provide workplace accommodations for IWDs if they can, and if they cannot they will not be penalized for violations of the American with

Disabilities Act (p. 3). The Equality Act provided employers with a better understanding of the cost factors and accommodations needed for hiring IWDs.

Employer attitudes in the leisure hospitality industry. Houtenville and Kalorgyou (2012) and Madera (2013) studied employers in the Leisure and Hospitality Service Industry (LHSI) found that employers and employees as it related to hiring IWDs expressed similar "concerns about their attitude of customers, knowledge, productivity, cost, and reluctance to employ them" (p. 168). The findings from the (LHSI) study aligned with the study of Kaye et al. (2011). Furthermore, Houtenville and Kalorgyou's (2012); Madera's (2013) studies of employees at 320 hospitality companies in the United States suggested similar challenges, primarily due to the lack of employer education. Many employers were willing to hire IWDs but communicated their problems and concerns were for continuous education programs from their local Education Transition Program along with the concerns about the attitude of customers (Houtenville & Kalorgyou, 2012; Madera. 2013). Therefore, hospitality companies as compared to other industries have more concerns about attitudes of customers than production concerns.

Employer misconceptions regarding IWDs. It is a common myth that many disabled persons are not reliable workers but, to dispel this myth, the US Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment (2003) study revealed that IWDs had an 80% lower turnover rate than non-disabled. King (2011) and Ju, Roberts, and Zhang (2013) agreed that persons with disabilities constitute an untapped pool of skilled, dedicated employees, and can address employers challenged by a shrinking and increasingly older workforce. Per the Aspen Institute, in the next few decades, the United States will face

three major gaps: workers, skills, and wages. Thus, employers need to and want to do everything possible to recruit skilled workers. This offers employment opportunities for "persons with disabilities" (p. 1). School to work transition programs for IWDs have the potential to fill a gap in our system. Thereby, allowing employers to be better prepared to hire them.

Educational and communal strategies for transitioning IWDs into the workforce. Certo and Luecking (2011) and Luecking and Luecking (2015) proclaimed that community strategies for boosting post-school employment outcomes for IWDs have not proven effective since becoming a federal initiative in the early 1980's. No educational institution, employment agency, or community organization has undertaken the task of being responsible for a school to work transition programs for IWDs to gain employment. Daunting problems continue for IWDs regarding the school to work transition, employment, legislation, and public funding remedies Burke, Bezyak, Fraser, Pete, Ditchman and Chan (2013), and Strauser, Gervey, and Lee (2010) established factors that influence and employers hiring IWDs reflected limited knowledge of ADA requirements for job accommodations, employment of diversity, and inclusion strategies. Employers' lack of knowledge about ADA accommodations, laws, and diversity continues to be a problem that influences employer decisions to hire or not hire IWDs. Communities' strategy for boosting employment outcomes for hiring IWDs continues to be a problem for employers.

Americans with Disabilities Act laws and regulations. The perception of employers is that the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) has given IWDs a

boost; yet a wide range of disabled persons in the private and public sectors still experience barriers in employer's attitudes, financial concerns, technology-based accommodations, and education. It is important that employers and managers become aware of ADA compliances and additional information from Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) when considering hiring disabled individuals The ADA definition of a disability cited by the U.S. Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR, 2003) features "more than thirty-five different definitions of disability in the U.S. federal code" (p. 1). The Office of Disability Employment Policy (2009) described the first definition of a disability as: (a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, (b) a record of such hindrance or, (c) is regarded as having such deficiency. The second definition is extremely important to disability legislation after several years of litigation. The ADA Amendment Act (ADAAA, 2008) broadened the ADA's definition to include people with disabilities who can engage in major physical or mental activity. Designated medication and remission of activities would not impede qualifying an individual as "disabled" (p. 42). The definition of ADA legislation continues to remain a problem for employers' understandings as it relates to hiring IWDs. Additionally, the ADA (2008) continues to strive to open doors for employment opportunities for IWDs. For many employers, the ADAAA's definitions of a disability will likely "increase the number of current employees covered by the ADA" (ICDR, 2003, p. 1). Furthermore, U.S. Interagency Committee on Disability Research (ICDR) (2003) definition seems to impact the supposition that, larger companies (more than 200 hundred employees) were more likely to hire people with

disabilities than small firms of one to ten employees. Houtenville and Kalorgyou (2012) and Madera (2013) found that small and medium-sized firms had numerous issues in common, including biased perceptions about performance. These perceptions often prevent IWDs from getting jobs that match their training, education, and "work experiences" (p. 43). Amir, Strauser, Chan, Strauser, Maher, Lee, Jones, and Johnson (2010) and Burke et al. (2013) specified employer attitudes and traditional employment approaches partially drive "low employment rates" (p. 435). Some employers and employees have a mindset that they refuse to change about these individuals, fearing they cannot perform the jobs they can do. Von Schrader et al. (2014) identified that IWDs are often not given a "chance to succeed in the workplace or move up the ladder as managers or executives" (p. 251). Employers were also found to perceive that IWDs' skill deficits would interfere with job performance and this created challenges for supervisors and managers due to the perception itself and the potential training burden which would be placed on the administrative staff on the job sites.

Problems in the workplace. Furthermore, Houtenville and Kalorgyou (2012) and Madera (2013) cited additional problems in the workplace were created due to unfamiliarity with strategies to manage, assess, and discipline workers with disabilities. Kaye et al. (2011) and Wehman et al. (2015) discussed, employers' rationales for not hiring workers with disabilities was conducted using an Agree…Disagree continuum where 8% or more employers agreed with the three top reasons for employment gaps among disabled workers were: unfamiliarity with ADA accommodating needs, "legal cost, and specific concerns" (p. 530). Other reasons included concerns regarding job

performance, assessment challenges, and perceptions about “worker deficits” (p. 530). Table 2 contains the survey responses obtained by 468 employer respondents in the study by Wehman et al. (2015)

Table 2

Employers' Negative Rationale for not Hiring IWDs

Employer Rationale	Percentage of Employer Agreement
Workers who develop disabilities will become a liability	80.3
Disabled workers will come with prohibitive costs for accommodating their disability	79.8
Poor performers who become disabled will only get worse	72.1
Workers who become disabled can no longer perform basic functions	65.1
Workers who become disabled become less dependable	60.1
Workers who become disabled become less dedicated to their job	32.3
Workers who become disabled prefer not to return to work	31.6

Table source: Kaye et al., 2011, p. 529; Wehman et al., 2015.

Kaye et al. (2011) provided a multitude of factors that come into play when determining the employment outcome of people with disabilities. It also suggested many anticipated barriers or deterrence to work could be generated for IWDs. Livermore and Goodman (2009) and Wittenburg, Mann and Thompkins (2013) found employer attitudes were a major factor in preventing IWDs from securing employment. Employer attitudes were found to be discriminatory both because of and despite ADA's numerous provisions to accommodate IWDs. Kaye et al. (2010) specified that the work force population regarding job losses among IWDs is higher. Kaye also stated that:

> New data available from the Current Population Survey (CPS) indicated that between October 2008 and June 2010, job losses among workers with disabilities

> far exceeded those without disabilities; this labor market instability of employed U.S. workers was identified as 9% higher for non-disabled. (p. 19)

In addition, Kaye (2010) asserted that IWDs were "the last hired and first fired… the first to get laid off in a recession and the last to be hired when conditions "improve" (p. 19). Employers continue to lag when it comes to hiring IWDs in the workplace, despite the integration of federally mandated laws.

Employers' role in maintaining the wage gap. Per the latest progress report from the National Council on Disability (NCD, 2012), further supplements with mandates to train, transition, and support IWDs, a great need continues to exist as the employment gap between disabled workers and others continues to exist. Employer expectations of the disabled person's ability to perform the job, combined with their understanding and expectations, determine how employers' make employment decisions. This information is important for determining if a specific position is best suited for an individual's capability or ability level. Kaye et al. (2011) indicated that their findings distinctively and accurately portray information about employers' perceptions and their general attitude of employers toward workers with disabilities. Jakobsen and Svenden (2013) established employer perceptions, regarding hiring IWDs, continue to have challenges and their return to work numbers "remains low" (p. 145). Three categories of employer challenges have emerged from this study were:

1. The inclusion process: Employers, managers, as well as IWDs might influence colleagues' attitudes and opinions in the workplace.

2. The adjustment process: Employer's responsibility involves taking the initiative with the disabled for creating communication dialogue regarding the necessary adjustments.
3. Cost and bureaucracy: Employers have a general dissatisfaction with the bureaucracy surrounding public support systems. It also indicates how employers have limited knowledge regarding the challenges IWDs might encounter in the workplace. Furthermore, employers indicated that public economic compensation could possibly be upheld for the firm's production, but this information was difficult to obtain in time.

Another topic of concern for employers not hiring IWDs is the lack of established *best practices*. King (2011) and Ju et al. (2013) stated the lack of employer perceptions' regarding employment motivations, assistive technologies, and other supports plays a key role in their practices towards hiring the disabled. Roberts and Zhang (2013) argued that in the 21st century, global integration and rapid technological evolution brings both challenges and opportunities for IWDs in the workplace. The detailed examination of my research and surveys will provide more insights into the factors behind the historical lack of employment progress vis-à-vis hiring IWDs.

Employers' willingness to hire IWDs. Relative to employers' perceptions, it could be theorized that employers are willing to hire IWDs if they appeared able to perform successfully in the job for which they were being considered. Although, the researchers have not confirmed this theory Ajzen, Chan, Herbert, Fraser, and Johnson (2011) and Jasper and Waldhart (2013) described their understanding of employers' real

concerns and intentions for hiring IWDs but ultimately found that "research was limited" (p. 2). Employment for disabled adults tend to cluster into three areas of employer concerns: (a) safety productivity, (b) hiring and retention, and (c) need for support staff to handle issues related to vocational "bridging and retention" (Fraser et al. p.2, 2011; Jasper & Waldhart, 2013). Employers expressed their real concerns for hiring IWDs and this explains why more research is needed for employment of IWDs.

Burgess et al. (2013) and Wehman (2011) specified the answer lies in changing local and state systems of practices and service delivery. Therefore, some businesses incorporate new opportunities and challenges into their ongoing system development while others "struggle with systems that maintain non-integrated day work programs as the predominant service option for persons with significant disabilities" (p. 148). Success for these individuals will require certain employment workers, as opposed to program centric supports, for which neither "public nor private funds are available" (p. 148). Funding for these agencies would allow them to document participant profiles and individual outcomes. Delvin (2011) validated how consumer-responsive systems build satisfaction measures for the following outcomes: enhancing job performance by the descriptions of jobs found available for IWDs, "utilizing a particular provider, wages, benefits earned, employment longevity, matching the states goals, and evolving interest of the individuals in supported employment" (Wehmeyer and Shogren, 2016, p. 221). This system of measurable and mission-driven change is often present in states that have proven successful in changing systems related to disability employment issues. In other states, resistance to change is characterized by adding new initiatives to existing,

traditional programs, and funding alliances. Additionally, Delvin (2011) and Wehmeyer and Shogren (2016) specified the states of Washington and Vermont have redirected funding for sheltered employment to community-integrated services instead. Furthermore, Hall, Freeze, Butterworth, and Hoff (2011) and Nord, Luecking, Mank, Kiernan and Wray (2013) noted,

> Funding is a central tool for improving the quality and range of employment service options. While outcome-based funding models are more common in the Vocational Rehabilitation system, there is a need for funding structures in intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Different approaches to funding can work along with goals for employment outcomes for disabled adults. (p. 6)

Employment service options signals a clear preference for high quality and profitable inclusive employment outcomes. According to Hall, Freeze, Butterworth, and Hoff (2011) stated, "state IDD systems must engage in rate setting, funding discussions rooted in their priorities, and long-term goals" (p. 1). Numerous approaches and strategies have been implemented at the local and national level to generate employment opportunities for IWDs. Kaye et al. (2011) and Wehman et al. (2015) reported employers describe some other practices and strategies proposed by them to help improve hiring and retention of workers with disabilities, ranked by percent of respondents. The results were as follows:

Table 3

Employer Identified Needs to Successfully Integrate IWDs

Employer Needs	Percent of Employer Agreement
More / better training	74.4
Central source of expertise on accommodation	66.8
Written guidelines on disability issues	65.2
Organization-wide system for handling disability requests	65.2
External disability guidance resources	60.6
On-site diversity specialist	58.4
Centralized fund to pay for job accommodations	55.4
Written company non-discrimination policy that addresses disabilities	50.7

Table source: Kaye et al., 2011, p. 530-531; Wehman et. al., 2015.

Negative effects of not hiring IWDs. If employers fail to address the employability of IWDs, their lives will continue to be challenged, and tax dollars will continue to be allocated to ensure that these individuals are properly cared for. Louis (2010) and Owen and Wilkins (2014) specified that multicultural challenges in employment of IWDs increased ethnically between 2000 and 2010 per the United States Census Bureau. The United States faces a fundamental mandate "to do more" (p. 1) within a context of limited resources, increasing demand for services, increased pressures toward accountability, and problems communicating disability disparities exist "due to cultural orientation" (p. 2). Employers' awareness of multicultural IWDs adds to the problem employers' face when hiring them.

Kaye et al. (2011) and Wehman et al. (2015) reported government intention was a major problem and concern as it relates to accommodations and services entirely paid for

by the government. It was ranked as number one among employers' willingness to and retain IWDs in the workplace.

Table 4

Employer Perceptions of Why They do not Hire and Retain IWDs

Employer Hiring and Retention	Percent of Desired Employers
Government program to fund/subsidize reasonable disability accommodations	65
Free government assistance in solving disability issues	62.6
Tax breaks for hiring/retaining workers with disabilities	53.4
Salary subsidies for workers with disabilities	46.4
Trial initial employment period for workers with disabilities	45.4
External mediation to help resolve disability and accommodation issues in lieu of lawsuits	44.6
Facilitated recruitment for IWDs	39.0
Externally facilitated problem-solving to address issues of accommodation and retention	32.7

Table source: Kaye et al., 2011, p. 536; Wehman et al., 2015.

Employer knowledge regarding ADA. Kaye et al. (2011) and Wehman et al. (2015) identified the next area of concern for employers are inadequate knowledge of practical hiring, retention strategies considering ADA mandates, and guidelines. Employers still do not understand ADA laws or reasonable accommodations when it comes to hiring and retaining IWDs. Despite more than two decades of government efforts to educate them on the ADA legislation, more work in this area is "critically important" (p. 533). The lack of employer knowledge for understanding ADA laws and

mandates for hiring IWDs continues to plague them today. Guild, Orza, Wardrope, and Karimipour (2007) affirmed this remains a potential area of social and legal conflict.

Employers' barriers when hiring IWDs. Employers face many challenging practices and barriers of inclusion for developing and promoting employment for people with disabilities. Cruden, McDonnall, and Zhou, (2013) indicated concerns by rehabilitation professionals from hiring IWDs, which reaffirmed the belief that most employers exhibit negative attitudes toward hiring them in the workplace. Von Schrader et al. (2014) indicated, as previously discussed, that disabled workers are uncertain about their hiring potential and the real possibility that they may be treated differently in the workplace. More concerns included employer expectations, lack of respect, isolation [from co-workers], decreases in job responsibility, and promotion potential. The barriers may link attitudes to job applicants as well as potential employers. The Ontario Health and Safety Association (HSA) along with the Ontario Ministry of Labor, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) recruited ten worksites to participate in a study of IWDs return to work and the challenges employers encounter (Maiwald, Meershoek, de Rijk & Nijhuis, 2014; Soklaridis, Cassidy, Van Der Velde, Tompa, & Hogg-Johnson, 2012). Results from the review of literature and expert advice identified the following categories of cost: medical equipment, training, education, productivity, and if the cost is relevant or retrievable as it pertains to an insurance claim or not. Employers are also concerned with the potential expense of accommodating workers with disabilities because costs increase as more IWDs transition from school to workplace.

IWDs transitioning process. Transition is another factor of the many dynamics

that come into play when transitioning IWDs from school to employment. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2012) identified competencies from a comprehensive review of literature, including practices related to transition planning, service delivery, and national standards for inclusion. Data collected from two surveys depicted differences between experts and practitioners. Discrepancies between the two were most pronounced in the following areas:

1. Curriculum and instruction: Integrating evidence-based transition practices (essential: experts 88%, practitioners 51%).
2. Curriculum and instruction: Teaching daily living skills (essential: experts 46%, practitioners 73%).
3. Assessment and evaluation: Selecting assessments with consideration for cultural and linguistic diversity and family values (essential: experts 67%, practitioners 43%).
4. Family involvement: Ensuring transition processes and outcomes are consistent with families' cultures, beliefs, practices, and values (essential: expert 80% practitioners 51%) (CEC, 2012)

The researchers in this study did not determine reasons for the differences, between the experts' focus on evidence-based transition strategies in curriculum and instruction and the practitioners' reduced focus on evidence-based practices. Perhaps practitioners are not as knowledgeable about the prevailing educational theories. This suggests that evidence-based practices in transitional education for IWDs may be a more effective practice for transition teachers.

Houtenville and Kalorgyou (2012) and Madera (2013) studied the problems facing the leisure and hospitality service industries regarding hiring IWDs. Few companies engaged in this pool of labor. The corporations, who exhibit social responsibility by employing people with disabilities, suggest that such practices could benefit companies financially, and combine profit as well as social thoughtfulness. This line of research has enriched my understanding of employers' perceptions, on recruitment, hiring practices, strategies, and challenges when studying disability-related employability.

Implications

This study provided insight into the development of employers' perceptions and community awareness for hiring IWDs. Following the conceptual framework, this study has provided descriptions of successes, challenges, concerns of educators, employers' perceptions, and successful retention related to hiring IWDs. The study has featured employers' perceptions in various areas. Employers assess their own level of understanding and perceptions regarding disability issues in their respective workplaces. An Executive Report in the form of a white paper, will be submitted to leaders in the program. In this case, the outcome has recommendations to faculty regarding how employers might learn a framework for hiring IWDs. My research was to identify employers' perceptions of issues that influence hiring, retaining IWDs, and facilitating a successful school to work transitional program into the community. Finally, I offered practical suggestions for improving education, employers' perceptions, needs, concerns,

and abilities for hiring persons with disabilities, through implementing components of Tinto and Pusser's theory (2007) institutional action for student success model.

Summary

Section 1 explained the problems and challenges employers had for hiring IWDs. There was a consensus among government, employers, educators, and facilities that employers should prepare IWDs for work and independent life in their communities. For this study, examples were provided by Kaye et al. (2011) regarding data collection and interpretation. This study incorporated the following concept necessary for hiring IWDs and employers' perceptions. The present study evaluated employers' perceptions of IWDs for employment as they transition from the Middle Stone Public School District. Section 2 includes the methodology for data collection and analysis.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

I used Tinto and Pusser's (2006) institutional action for student success (IASS) interpretive model as the framework for this study. The five components of the IASS model include commitment, expectations, support, feedback, and involvement or engagement. (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore employers' perceptions regarding the employment of IWDs transitioning from the MSPSD. The research question that guided this study was as follows: What are employers' perceptions of IWDs' employability as they transition from MSPSD to the community?

Qualitative research is both systematic and subjective, and lent itself to my focus on real-life social practices and perceptions of employers as they go through their normal work activities (see Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Further, it is well suited for an in-depth understanding of the world through the perspectives of others and is useful for explaining a social or human problem as it naturally occurs in its setting (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research was most appropriate for this study because there was little to no understanding regarding employers' preconceptions regarding the employment of IWDs transitioning from the MSPSD to independence.

Qualitative research helped me identify concepts not yet known, and build patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up in order to make generalizations through analyzing participants' concrete descriptions (Creswell, 2013; Lee, 2014; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Qualitative research requires appropriate design and a

careful, detailed description of procedures to demonstrate rigor and a systematic disciplined approach (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007; Yazan, 2015). This approach allows for more robust, substantive insights that are difficult to obtain via quantitative methods. A qualitative case study has allowed me to assess employers' perceptions vis-à-vis hiring IWDs.

Creswell and Poth (2017) further stated that the qualitative researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument in the natural setting. For this study, I interacted with the participants as they offered their descriptions of experiences and knowledge regarding the case study. Creswell and Poth noted that this type of interaction is a "major characteristic of qualitative research" (p. 175). Inductively, specific data pieces are broken down and re-built into a broader understanding of employers' perceptions and beliefs regarding IWDs in the workplace. Creswell and Poth also stated that qualitative researchers who collected information had the opportunity to inductively shape the themes that "emerge from the process,"(p. 175). My emergent design was open to change or modification as the setting dictate (Creswel & Poth, 2017). Creswell (2007) claimed that the key to qualitative research is to learn about the problem from the participants and address the research questions to obtain the necessary information.

Case Study

A case study provided me the opportunity to explore or describe a phenomenon in its natural setting through using a variety of data sources (see Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2013, 2014; Merriam, 2009). A case study design provides tools to study a phenomenon within a specific context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Sovacool, 2014). The

phenomenon studied in this case study was employers' understanding of the workplace integration of IWDs transitioning from the MSPSD to independence. Baxter and Jack (2008) and Sovacool (2014) argued that qualitative case study design provides evidence informing stakeholders working to implement policy making changes or decisions. Yin (2014) and Stake (1995) discussed establishing boundaries for case studies so the research does not get too broad and the researcher maintains focus on data collection while limiting the scope to generalize the findings. Creswell and Poth (2017) suggested binding a case by time and place. The time and place of this case study research was at the business site, which I considered a strength because it bound the study to employers' perceptions of young IWDs employability as they transition to the workplace.

Stake (1995) defined one type of case study as an intrinsic research design. Baxter and Jack (2008) and Stake (1995) described that researchers use intrinsic case studies to explore the case, in and of itself, to gain a deeper understanding of it. For this project study, an intrinsic case study helped provide the structure to explore employers' ideas regarding the employment of IWDs in their local community.

Justification of Design

I did not select an ethnography design since researchers use it to study an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period by collecting observational and interview data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). LeCompte and Schensul (1999) argued that the ethnographic research process is flexible and most commonly developed in response to the environmental factors found in the field setting. I was not examining culture; hence, ethnography was not an appropriate choice.

Moustakas (1994) described phenomenological inquiry as an inquiry where the researcher identifies the substance of actual human experiences. The process involves learning about a small number of subjects through exclusive and lengthy engagements to develop patterns and relationships of meaning. Nieswiadomy (2017) argued that in this experimental process, the researcher sets aside his or her own ideas in effort to understand the participants' views and opinions. I did not seek a detailed description of a central phenomenon, so phenomenological inquiry was not an appropriate choice.

Narrative inquiry is a strategy of exploring peoples lived stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Stories from people or groups are sought to understand their life history. The narrative researcher often retells this information chronologically. In the end, the narrative combines views from the participant's life with those of the researcher's experiences in a collaborative narrative. I did not research individual stories narrated chronologically or collaborate with participant's in this way. Therefore, a narrative design was not an appropriate choice.

Participants

Population and Sampling

MSPSD, an urban public-school district in southeastern Michigan, was the setting for this study. This community comprises families of middle- to upper-class socioeconomic statuses. The MSPSD partnered with a non-profit organization in the local community to increase employment prospects for IWDs. This program was launched to understand employers' outlooks regarding the employability of IWDs in the MSPSD community. There are 80 local businesses in the MSPSD community, 12 of which have

employed 40 IWDs. The school district administrators reported 290 students with disabilities ages 16–26 were enrolled in the high school setting and in critical need of employment during the 2014-15 school year (personal communication, June 9, 2014). This approximate number of students with disabilities continued to need employment during the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years. This population was approximately 10% of the total student population in MSPSD. MSPSD administrators reported concerns about the small number of employers who are willing to offer employment for IWDs. However, district administrators understanding of employers' preconceptions surrounding the hiring and retentions of IWDs transitioning from high school at the local level. Thus, school administrators and educators wanted a deeper and better understanding of the employers, and why they are reluctant or hesitant to hire IWDs. I randomly selected 50 employers in the MSPSD using a 2016 business member directory and then sent each an email invitation to participate (Appendix B). Although 50 employers were invited to participate in this study, only one employer voluntarily agreed. I began cold calling 15 employers listed in the directory, and eventually 12 employers voluntarily agreed to participate, which was an 80% success rate. Creswell (2012) indicated that a few cases will be sufficient in a qualitative research study; having 12 volunteers allowed me to collect in-depth and detailed data that I coded for each participant in their respective setting (see Creswell, 2012).

Criteria for Selecting Participants

Each case in the study was an employer in the MSPSD community. The primary criteria for selecting participants involved being a business listed in the 2016-member

directory, which lists all the local business in the MSPSD with an available email address. The public business directory lists all the business in alphabetical order by names, addresses, city, state, zip codes, phone numbers, and email addresses. The business member directory also lists the advertisers by page number, schools, and education sites in the community. This business member directory was from the local Chamber of Commerce office in the local community and is updated annually. These criteria were akin to those suggested by Yin (2014). Table 5 provides a summary of the demographics of the participants included in the semi-structured interviews.

Table 5

Basic Demographics of Participants

Participants	Business types	Gender
1	Short order restaurant	Male
2	City government agency	Male
3	Fitness gym	Male
4	Pastry factory	Male
5	Supermarket chain	Female
6	High end restaurant	Female
7	501c3 Production business	Female
8	Neighborhood market	Female
9	Neighborhood market	Female
10	Gift shop	Female
11	Pet shop	Male
12	World War II memorial	Female

Data collected by Rosemond (2017)

Participant Justification

The 12 participants from this study included business that were the first to respond to a telephone inquiry based on saturation of data (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Meriam & Tisdell, 2015). The selective criteria were selected from a 2016-member directory listing all the local businesses in the MSPSD as the primary data collection source. Twelve business owners agreed to participate. Total participation included: one short order restaurant, one high end restaurant, two government establishments, one fitness gym, one pastry factory, one supermarket chain, one non-profit business, two

neighborhood markets, one gift shop, and one pet shop. The varied participants provided rich data for the project study. The number of participants and the types of businesses represented supplied a depth of inquiry and allowed me to obtain rich thick descriptions of the participants' perceptions on the phenomena which was being studied. (Creswell, 2012).

Access to Participants

To secure approval for research data collection within MSPD, I submitted an IRB application to the Walden IRB and received approval May 2, 2017. It was not necessary to submit a request to the MSPSD administration because I used available public records information to access the potential participants. After the approval of my proposal and associated documents by Walden University, I used the 2016 business member directory in the MSPSD listing all the businesses located in the local community to identify businesses that were listed in the business directory and could be communicated with via email. I emailed 50 participants by sending them my invitation letter to participate. After one week, I had received only one response from a participant indicating they would be interested in participating. Therefore, after waiting one week for responses from the initial email I then began cold calling the businesses from the directory that had received the initial invitation to participate via email the prior week. I called businesses randomly from the directory that had received the initial email to participate until I obtained verbal agreement from 12 participants were willing to participate in the study.

I secured the agreement to participate from 12 randomly selected businesses from the local directory and requested their permission by telephone to participate in a 30-

minute personal interview for research purposes. Yin (2014) articulated this would avoid selecting business whose situation does not provide the rich data needed for an effective investigation. Additionally, Bernard, Ryan, and Wutich (2016) and Leech and Onweugbuzi (2007) argued this process is recommended in qualitative studies to keep the sample size small, and to ensure robust data saturation. In addition, I obtained signed letter of consent from each of the participants in the MSPSD. However, prior to soliciting business participants to volunteer to participate, I received Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (#05-02-17-0168759).

Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

The development of a researcher-participant relationship was established to safeguard all participants so that each felt comfortable sharing their perceptions with me prior to and during the interview process. As the researcher, I played an integral part of the researcher-participant relationship to be able to collect useful data for administrators, employers, parents, and teachers within MSPSD (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). A researcher-participant relationship was achieved by obtaining approval to conduct research from employers in the MSPSD and Walden University IRB. Furthermore, I completed an exam and was provided a certificate from the National Institute Health (NIH) (April 6, 2017) research ethics course as required by Walden University. The course emphasized protection of participants' rights, respect, confidentially, beneficence, and justice in conducting research on human subjects. It asserts that it is very important to measure a given study's research potential with the health and welfare of the participants being studied.

It was very important to respect and adhere to procedures that protect the rights of participants and institutions alike (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I began data collection only after I was approved from the IRB. The invitation to participate letter was given to participants prior to the informed consent form. Both the invitation to participate and informed consent form explained the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, the voluntary nature of the study, the risks and benefits of being in the study, confidentiality of his or her participation, and contact information. A total of 1 business participant responded to the invitation to participate email. All other 11-business participants responded to cold calls indicating their interest in participating.

Basic contact information was available through the Business Member Directory for 2016 therefore it was not necessary for me to obtain additional contact information. I arranged a mutually agreed interview time and location for the interview. I obtained a completed consent form at the scheduled interview prior to beginning the interview process.

Protection of Participants

I obtained a certificate from NIH Office of Extramural Research to document that I understood the ethical protection of all participants. This research study had a low risk level to participants, and none of the business participants had ever worked with me. Furthermore, I have never been employed by any of the business participants. Participation was entirely voluntary.

I compiled a list of the 12 consenting businesses used for this study. Numeric pseudonyms (from 1 to 12) were randomly assigned as each participant voluntarily

agreed to participate in this study, as denoted via an informed consent form. Randomly assigning each participant prior to conducting any interviews was done to protect participants' identities prior to, during, and post data collection when reporting the findings of this study. Only I have knowledge of the true identities of each participant within this study.

Overall, the safety, well-being, and confidentiality of each participant were a priority throughout the duration of the study. In addition, all electronic data collected from each participant is stored in password-protected, encrypted files on my home computer. Encrypting the files ensured confidentiality, that in the unlikely event that my computer was lost or stolen, data were coded in a manner that any third party will not be able to read the data. All data will be destroyed after five years. Data, however may be used for publications, but will remain confidential, and free of revealing details.

Data Collection

Within this intrinsic case study design, I thoroughly considered the data collection methods. Data collection methods were central in exploring the perceptions of business participants in the MSPSD community. The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore employers' perceptions regarding the employment of IWDs transitioning from the Middle Stone Public School District. The data for the study consisted of 12 semi structured one-on-one interviews.

Interviews

According to Yin (2014), data collection from interviews provides an important source of information. Additionally, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) reported individual interviews are the most common form of interviewing. Interviews can provide the researcher with more in-depth understandings, information, and participants' experiences (Lodico et al., 2010). In qualitative research interviews are a process whereby researcher and participant engage in a discussion focused on questions relating to the research study (Demarrias and Lapan, 2004). One-on-one semi structured individual interviews were used in this research study to collect the vivid, rich descriptions from the participants (Creswell, 2013).

For this research study, I conducted 12 interviews at the participants' place of business to protect the privacy of participant and data. Prior to the interview I telephoned each participant and asked if the interview could be conducted in a private, quiet location (Adamson, Bray & Mason, 2014; Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Lodico et al., 2010). Also, I confirmed date, time, and exact location of the business via telephone. Participants were first asked to sign an agreed consent form by replying, "I consent" before the interviews process began. According to Lodico et al. (2010), personal information was not asked of the participants during the interview process as to further protect participants' confidentiality. I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix C), which contained 10 open-ended questions that directed the semi structured interview session (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Yin, 2014). The interview protocol included constructed interview

questions and prompts based on recommendations of interview protocol responses (Crabtree & DiCicco-Bloom, 2006; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Turner, 2010).

Prior to asking the first interview question, I introduced myself and established rapport through general conversations not related to topic of study. Next, I reiterated the purpose of the study, research procedure, and methods used to protect participants' confidentiality. I wanted participants to clearly understand that identified information is kept confidential, is safeguarded, and promotes candid responses. Furthermore, in addition to participant protection of confidentiality, I reminded participants their contribution was voluntary, and they can withdraw from the study at random, with no consequences. The nature of semi structured interview questions allowed participants the flexibility to respond to open-ended questions that were not leading to or would allow a yes/no response (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam, 2009). In addition, this afforded me the ability to ask semi structured questions in any order, based on the observation of participant (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

The guided interview questions allowed employers the opportunity to express their perceptions vis-à-vis for hiring IWDs in the MSPSD. In addition to the 10 interview questions, probes (see Appendix E) were used in an unbiased nature to elicit additional information that may be relevant to my study and to allow the participants to enhance or clarify their own responses (Creswell, 2012). Each participant interview was audio recorded and only labeled with the assigned numeric pseudonym.

Sufficiency of Data Collection

The appropriate instrumentation is vital to a study (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative studies normally employ open-ended questions, non-participatory interviews, observations, text and image analysis (Creswell, 2010). In this study, I utilized semi-structured interviews. To record the data from the interviews, a tape recorder and hand-written field notes gave a written and voice description of what the researcher observes in the field (Lodico et al., 2010). Interview protocols provided a brief script for an explanation of the purpose of the study to the interviewee and the preliminary questions used in the interview (Lodico et al., 2010). The instruments used in qualitative studies are usually gathered in the form of words, pictures, or both being used in a systematic process that allows for thick descriptions of the phenomena being studied (Lodico et al., 2010). Choosing an instrument that is dependable, valid, and applicable for the population being studied is a critical part of the realization of the entire study (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and each interview yielded unbiased, rich in detail, pertinent data correlating to this study in relation to what perceptions employers had regarding the hiring and retention of IWDs. Interviews consisted of the researcher asking semi-structured interview questions. Creswell (2009) noted that researchers must consider a variety of methods and sources to gather and record in-depth, comprehensive information for a case study. To record the data, I utilized field notes for and interviews. During the data collection process, I kept reflective journals to track data and emerging themes.

Systems for Keeping Track of Data

All interview data were transcribed, verbatim, so that the data was coded, analyzed, and stored or retrieved post research (Yin, 2014). Using an audio recording and interview protocol helped minimize any anticipated ethical issues that might bring harm to the participants, such as risks, confidentiality, deception, and informed consent (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014).

Role of the Researcher

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) identified the researcher as someone who collects data through interviews with individual participants, while interacting in a positive, professional, nonjudgmental, non-threatening, and respectful way. Additionally, the role of the interviewer is vital to remain unbiased by refraining from debating, arguing, or injecting my personal views into the discussion (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Trust is essential for participants to be honest, open to share opinions, and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To develop trust with interviewees it is crucial for them to feel comfortable to give truthful, open, and honest communications with researcher (Duan, Green, Hoagwood, Horwitz, Palinkas & Wisdom, 2015; Patton, 2002).

I was transparent about my potential biases. My volunteer work in the MSPSD exposed me to IWDs, who train and work at the Upscale Resale Facility to prepare them for permanent employment opportunities. I also worked in several special education programs in the local tri-county area. This work gave me certain insights into challenges, difficulties, rewards involved with the disabled, and employer involvement. This could possibly distort the lens through which I looked during my interviews and research,

affecting my objectivity. To prevent this, I avoided using leading or presumptive questions and withheld comments during participant interviews so that subjects could share their perspectives views, and experiences unhindered by my interjection. Bray et al. (2013) and Howe (2003) indicated this would adopt an unbiased sampling technique that includes all data-rich participants who meet a set of transparent conditions by mitigating potential researcher prejudices.

Stake (1995) identified experiences that he had with the disabled have an upside as well as a counterpoint to the potential bias. I could relate to the participants and my familiarity with the issue to facilitate an enhanced ability to accurately collect data as well as conduct research. This was useful as I uncovered contextual subtleties such as facial expressions, tone, or body language in the interviews. Additionally, I recognized details as I coded data thereby discovering patterns, developing categories, plausible themes, and conclusions.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Methods

The data analysis included labeling concepts and assigning codes with different colors to define, as well as develop categories based on their properties and thematic analysis. I used manual coding along with a qualitative excel spreadsheet to help code, organize, and sort information that was useful in writing the qualitative study. I also emphasized pinpointing, examined, and recorded patterns within data collected.

Qualitative research puts the researcher at the center of data collection. Practices include inductive reasoning and data analysis (Creswell & Poth. 2017; Lodico, Spalding

& Voegtle, 2010). These qualitative data were analyzed using an inductive approach. I grouped the data into themes, teasing out patterns, ranges of views, and perceptions. Inductive reasoning was a heavily relied upon strategy in data analysis. Guba (1985) found this strategy identifies data units that seem to answer the research questions either related to other data, interpreted in context, or stand by themselves as independent observations. Merriam (2009) identified the inductive process as rigorous as it requires reduction of the data into descriptive themes, and patterns. Patton (2002) stated that the work is in developing rival themes that explain the research phenomena.

Uncovering emerging patterns. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) and Bray et al. (2014) concluded that data is broken down and coded to uncover emerging patterns. Coding involved relevant data notations that allowed the researcher to discover similarities and common themes. The similarities were formed into larger patterns of analysis that helped to paint a cohesive picture. Coding allowed for consistent participant comparisons. The researcher proved their analysis was derived systematically and examined from all angles.

Constant comparative method. The constant comparative method is an iterative process in which data is analyzed, coded, and compared at the same time to uncover patterns and develop a conceptual framework to develop relevant conclusions and interpretations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process allowed me to uncover data, examined it comparatively, and asked questions that were compared to data collected in earlier studies. Additionally, it systematically specifies, states, and implied possible

relationships with previously collected data to show how it helped to evolve the conclusions from the data.

Analyze and synthesize data. Barnett-Page and Thomas (2009) stated there are numerous ways to analyze and synthesize data. I adapted the 'framework analysis' approach, building on Byrman's (2012) "model for qualitative data analysis and the work of Ritchie and Spencer's (1994) five-stage qualitative data analysis strategy" (p. 173). This was a highly structured approach, and necessary for voluminous qualitative data and most effective when building on a body of previous research. I compared the themes which emerged from these data deductively and related them to the conceptual framework, and then drew conclusions from these deductions.

This process travels through several loosely marked stages. The first was familiarity, in which the data was reviewed on a case-by-case basis. This involved detailed reviews of transcriptions, field notes, and memos that allowed me to identify potential data points, coding, and general categories. The second process was initial coding that involved preliminary labels of selected texts for coding as well as notation and highlighting. The third and final stage was systematic coding, which looked for repetitive responses and builds on and refines initial thoughts and notations, leading to more precision, linkages, and theme identification.

Axial coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) described the method of axial coding, which I used to look for links between codes. Creswell and Poth (2017) argued that data saturation occurs when all possible code categories have been exhausted. The intent was

to generate analysis instead of simply validating it. The fourth and final stage was interpretation. Interpretation goes beyond coding, which was merely descriptive.

Identifying significant codes and categories. This stage involves identifying significance and relating codes to each other, the research questions, and the literature. Completion of the data analysis yields case study- explaining categories. These categories must meet four criteria: (a) responsiveness—that is, answering the research questions, (b) exhaustiveness—that is, accounting for all study data, (c) mutually exclusive—that is, a one-to-one correspondence between a unit of data and its category, (d) sensitizing—that is, specific and exact. Categories should also have the same level of abstraction. In reporting the study findings, I described how I applied these criteria to the results and themes. In my data analysis, I adhered to the above definition of proper categories and to exhaust the analysis until data saturation was reached.

Interviews. In each interview in this qualitative case study, I used semi-structured, open-ended questions, which were intended to gather information to understand employers' outlooks regarding the employability of IWDs as they transitioned from the local high school to the workplace. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) specified data collected during semi-structured, opened ended interviews will allow you to gain a deeper understanding of individual views in a case study I conducted 12 interviews with local business to understand their criteria for hiring or not hiring IWDs. Although, 100% of the businesses agreed satisfaction of all job requirements for IWDs is key to obtaining employment.

I scheduled the interviews at various times that were convenient to the participants at their location over a period of three weeks. Prior to each interview, I briefly introduced myself, I started with the introductions, explained the purpose of the study, assured each participant of their rights, and confidentiality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Additionally, I ensured that each interviewee remained on task all the while also providing the opportunity each interviewee not be restricted in their responses. The in-depth, semi-structured interview questions used for employers are included in Appendix B. Protocols for face-to-face interviews are used to systematize the interview procedure, and to clarify the purpose of the study (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Following each interview, I made reflective notes regarding the interview.

Accuracy and credibility. Validity is very important in qualitative research. Merriam (2009) stated, "The researcher needs to establish validity of their research findings; this will enable users of research to trust, and act on their findings," (p. 209). Researchers must be objective when considering sources, especially those sources that may compromise or refute their hypotheses or their subsequent research. If such is the case, they must adopt procedures to account for such data. Creswell and Poth (2017) specified that qualitative research included several procedures that researchers can employ to "establish rigor and consistency" (p. 209). Guba (1981) developed a conceptual model of these research assessment strategies. I used strategies which facilitated the four concepts of credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability as four key concepts related to data quality. Denzin and Lincoln, (2005); Patton (2002) and Palinkas et al. (2015) indicated that this is useful in discovering the

breadth of experiences that IWDs have encountered in their respective settings and some may encounter discrepant cases.

Member checking. Understanding the importance of validity allowed me to better control whether the research measures what it was projected to measure if the results are truthful (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam (2009) stated, "The researcher needs to establish validity of their research findings; this will enable users of the research to trust and act on their findings" (p. 209). Throughout the data collection process, data analysis and outcomes results were kept constant to guarantee credibility, validity, and reliability of the data (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Yin, 2014).

According to Merriam (2009), member checking is a common strategy in ensuring internal validity and credibility. I was the primary instrument for collecting data. Therefore, I encouraged participants to read transcripts and make corrections where necessary. The participants were given a copy of the transcriptions and the researcher's interpretations of the interviews and observations to make comments and/or necessary corrections. Member checking, and debriefing are valid methods to assure participants that there were no judgments or negative thoughts based on any experiences or perceptions revealed during the questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Member checking served as a safeguard against biases, and ensured internal validity and credibility (Merriam, 2009).

Member checking was used so participants could assess the accuracy of the findings and minimize any ethical issues (Creswell, 2012). After the completion of each

interview, I did member checking which allowed me to ask each participant to review their transcribed interview answers for accuracy and to make changes if they needed to revise, change, or omit any responses (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Member checking reinforced trustworthiness by ensuring the interviewee had the ability to refute or confirm accuracy of the data they provided (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Also, member checking provided credibility by confirming that researcher bias did not affect the data (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). None of the participants chose to correct, elaborate, or make changes from my findings. My goal was to make sure the interpretations of the participants' views, personal experiences, and reflections were accurately interpreted in my study (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Field notes. Within this study, I also used reflective fieldnotes to safeguard internal validity, measures, credibility, and reliability of the data (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The reflective field notes I recorded identified my thoughts and ideas that arose as the participants responded to the interview questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Throughout the research process my reflective field notes were written in a journal to constantly monitor for researcher bias (Lodico et al., 2010). Furthermore, Creswell and Poth (2017) specified that qualitative research included several procedures that researchers can employ to "establish rigor and consistency" (p. 209). Guba (1981) developed a conceptual model of these research assessment strategies, which embrace the four concepts: credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as well as Patton (2002) indicated that this is

useful in discovering the breadth of experiences that IWDs have encountered in their respective settings while accounting for the fact that some may possess discrepant cases.

Discrepant Cases

The discrepancies in cases often occur when new coding, or meaning, rise from the data that is different from the current themes or patterns (Erickson, 1986; Meriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described negative case analysis as being a "process of revising hypothesis with hindsight" (p.309). Furthermore, Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, and St. Pierre (2007) acknowledged that incomplete data does not exist. This means that each research participant possesses different experiences, beliefs, behaviors, values, and implications, which forces the researcher to make correct accommodations when recording data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described data collected from interviews and interactions etc. are subject to the researcher's standards as well as the participants. Lodico et al. (2010) and Lee et al. (2014) described qualitative researchers, as taking on an emancipatory or social constructivist liberators framework, and all participants may not share the same perceptions. In view of this understanding in my procedures I maintained openness and used methods to manage discrepant cases for themes that were different and those already found.

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore employers' perceptions regarding the employment of IWDs transitioning from the Middle Stone Public School District. Participants of this research study were businesses located in the Middle Stone Public School District. I collected data from 12 businesses in their natural

environments. I took measures throughout the research process, to protect participant rights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to organize, categorize, themes, and subthemes that emerged from the coding. The data collected were transcribed and analyzed to answer the research question throughout the finding. Peer debriefing and member checking ensured reliability and validity of data while preventing bias (Creswell, 2012: Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). Using Tinto and Pusser's framework (2006), the goal of this study was to inform employers and other stakeholders of the business community that shapes individual student success. Each interview conducted gave me insight into understanding and identifying what programs are available to support and gain knowledge of employers' understanding of the employability of IWDs transitioning from high school to the workplace. The findings from the study are discussed below.

Findings

This section contains a summary of findings for the research question, presentation of findings, themes which emerged from the findings, and a summary of the outcomes in relationship to the problem, research question, literature and conceptual framework. Overall, I found 4 major themes, and 3 minor themes. Results and summary of findings from the research question, themes, and sub themes emerging from the findings are noted in Table 5.

The following research question was used to guide this study: What are employers' perceptions of employability for individuals with disabilities as they transition from Middle Stone Public School District after age 26 from high school to the community?

According to the analyzed data, all participants displayed no reluctance towards hiring IWDs in their respective businesses.

The various businesses I encountered related to understanding employability of IWDs. These variations of employability-included businesses that were willing to alter their work environment, expectations, and teamwork to hire IWDs with a high level of commitment to ensure IWDs are integrated successfully with others in the workplace. For example, Participants 2 and 12, a city government agency and a veteran memorial building were both government establishments. Participant 2 was willing to hire IWDs with minor limitations, whereas Participant 12's priority was prepared to hire disabled veterans with no physical disabilities before hiring IWDs transitioning from the local high school.

These variations show a difference in the standards used by employers for hiring IWDs. Participants reported a lack of unfamiliarity of outside programs to support hiring and retaining IWDs on the job. All participants expressed the need for systems that train, supervise, support, and monitor IWDs, teachers, and JCs at the workplace.

Themes from the Findings

Results from the analyzed data, in Table 6 lists the major themes and minor themes in relation to the research question.

Table 6

Major and Minor Themes

Major themes (M)	Minor themes (m)
1. Employers are willing to hire IWDs and make accommodations (12/12 = 100%)	1. Employers are willing to hire IWDs with contingencies (5/12 = 42%)
2. Employers are willing to hire IWDs with JC training (10/12 = 83%)	2. Employers provide their own training for IWDs (2/12 = 17%)
3. Positive attitudes and social skills attributes to hiring more IWDs (9/12 = 75%)	3. IWDs should be afforded social justice and opportunities for inclusive community experiences. (3/12 = 25%)
4. Employers are willing to hire IWDs under certain conditions (3/12 = 25%)	

Based on interview data collection and analysis process, four major themes emerged. The first major theme was employers are willing to hire IWDs and make accommodations while the sub-theme was that employers were willing to hire with contingencies. The second major theme revealed that employers were willing to hire with JC training, and the minor theme was that employers provide their own training for IWDs. The third major theme was that employers believed positive attitudes and social skills could be attributed to hiring more IWDs, the minor theme that emerged from this topic was that employers felt that IWDs should be afforded social justice and opportunities for inclusive community experience. The fourth and final major theme was that some employers were willing to hire IWDs under certain conditions.

Major Theme 1: Employers are willing to hire IWDs and make accommodations. All 12 participants (100%) revealed that they were willing to make accommodations for IWDs to be successfully integrated into their workplace. Participant 1, a fast order restaurant owner said, "There are positions behind the scenes that keeps my establishment operating efficiently and more professionally. In my opinion: a neat and clean establishment can often attract more customers and enhance business significantly. These are some of the tasks I feel IWDs can effectively complete with some success". Participant 1 likewise revealed that they "would consider hiring at least one IWD to assist in the following areas: a janitorial person to clean the bathrooms and make sure that enough toilet tissue, hand soap and paper towels are kept in the ladies and men's bathroom at all time. I like to keep my establishment looking clean, impressive, and presentable at all times. The floors require constant sweeping and cleaning always because customers often spill liquids on the floor and it can generate a lawsuit. It would be helpful to have someone there to make sure there is no water on the floor or any debris that would interfere with effective customer service." Participant 1 additionally stated that they would be willing to make accommodations as needed for IWDs.

One of the two government agencies I interviewed was Participant 2, a Detroit Public Works (DPW) department. Participant 2 employed IWDs to care for grounds and drive large equipment. IWDs hired could not drive, so other duties were created for them to do other jobs such as; janitorial, and upkeep of grounds, picking up paper, and running errand jobs "other employees would not do." Participant 2 stated, "One of the major conditions for us to make a commitment to hire IWDs depends on funding availability we

receive from the Federal and State governments, they provide the funding to open a job description to fill by IWDs. [For an employee], we had to create a special category for him with (union) American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). He was not a union member and worked part time for a total of 30 hours per week; he was on a different pay scale, slightly higher pay scale than minimum wage, and was well liked by everyone. The previous IWDs we employed were paid more, with benefits the same as other employees. We had to make modifications with timing, pay scale, adjustments, and benefits were provided for the current IWDs. In fact, they are paid more than minimum wage, and are provided with certain benefits such as coverage by workers compensation, and vacation/ sick time is treated as special benefit for them. They also, get the same uniforms as the other employees so they would fit in with all the other employees and feel as a part of the team." The director personally took an IWDs to receive their uniform to show them how the process is carried out. Participant 2 continued, "We have had no issues adjusting supporting or accommodating IWDs at the worksite. I negotiated with the union and developed an agreement for more funding to hire IWDs. Once the funds were made available, we hired another IWDs. We must have a job opening and have the funds available to fill the position. Everything is based on finances these days."

Participant 3, a fitness gym owner, was willing to hire IWDs with the aid of a JC. Participant 4, a pastry factory, stated that a disabled worker must be trained and qualified by a school teacher to work independently on various job assigned in this small pastry assembly factory. Participant 4 stated, "I was approached by a special education teacher

from the local school. At that time, they were seeking employment for IWDs at my facility." I consented to this request and this began an excellent relationship with the special education department. That is how I became familiar with the school special education training and employment program for IWDs. We could create realistic expectations for those IWDs who are assigned to bake pastries and mix the pastry batter with the appropriate amount of ingredients as indicated by the baker. We also expect for them to mix the ingredients for the length of time indicated and to pour the batter into a baking pan and place into the oven. Other IWDs were trained and assigned janitorial duties at my facilities such as: sweeping and mopping the kitchen as well as the entire facility, keeping the counters clean, wiping off stools and tables in the carry out and customer serving areas. They were also required to take out trash daily, clean windows and keep the display counters clean and appealing to customers. However, it was necessary for me to inform the baker to emphasize the importance of safety rules in the kitchen area, regarding the heat from oven and caution involving fire and grease and being careful when they place and remove the hot pastries from the oven," (personal communication, June 15, 2017).

Participant 5, a large supermarket chain, was willing to hire an IWDs at the entry level position of a courtesy clerk, someone who bags grocery, cleans grounds, interact with customers, and collects carts. The Motor City awarded this company an award in 2016 for hiring and promoting IWDs in their business. Participant 5 was always committed to hiring IWDs. Participant 5 was also patient and helpful to IWDs to become proficient on the job. The courtesy clerk positions were based on skill level for

promotion, and most IWDs seemed to enjoy their assignment. IWDs were hired part-time 30 hours per week or for 40 hours per week as a full-time employee. Participant 6, a high-end exclusive restaurant, was willing to make accommodations and create a new system to hire IWDs assisted by a JC. IWDs were instructed to wash, iron, and fold linen napkins for restaurant at a scheduled time at the job location Additionally, Participant 6 required that all IWDs adhere to a strict time schedule, which the JC was not inclined to agree to. Participant 6 stated, "We must change the way we do things, a home setting with no socialization skills needed could be developed for some IWDs, job descriptions could be tweaked, and we can make clarifications changes as needed by way of evaluations and assessments every 6 months." Participant 7, a 501c3 production business that provides production services for other businesses such as mailings, sheading paper, photo scanning, tri fold etc., stated all jobs were dependent on IWDs' capabilities for production. Participant 7's response implies that the expectations will be more lenient for IWDs. Participant 7 revealed that they have a transition program to make IWDs more productive as they transitioned out of high school. Participant 7 stated, "We provide support and training for IWDs to complete a job task. We monitor them with positive reinforcement, we speak positively to them when not completing the task, and they [IWDs] make corrections without making a big issue out of it. Assessments completed monthly allow supervisors to request a slowed down pace as well as visual aids, and sequential visuals that help IWDs understand the progression of things, and written prompts to be used to support IWDs' understanding of how to complete a task.

Sometimes it is necessary to modify the job in some way to improve and IWDs' chances for task completion.

Participants 8 and 9 were both neighborhood markets with similar job requirements for IWDs. They assigned various cleaning jobs, inside, and outside the store, stocking shelves and assisting where needed by others. Both businesses made sure "not to overload IWDs." IWDs were assigned from the local school with JC assistance along with limited working hours to help IWDs better acclimate to the job. Both neighborhood markets installed a wheel chair ramp because some of their employees and customers are wheel chair bound. Participant 8 revealed that, "We are open to hiring IWDs in our business and we are happy they are available to us. We are always open for change to improve the lifestyle of IWDs and help them to become contributing members of their community. We take ability into consideration when assigning tasks, and we adjust the type of work based on what a person can do or can't do." Participant 9 was fairly committed to allowing IWDs individuals in their workplace. Participant 9 stated, "We have a couple of them [IWDs] working now; they come from the school across the street. It's important they get accustomed to their position and that they perform his or her job duties as well as the non-disabled. Once they know what their job duties are, they are not asked to perform any jobs that are above their ability level. They can bag groceries, help the customers take their bags to their car, and do janitorial work."

For Participant 10, a gift shop, the first job requirement was that IWDs look presentable, act professional, and act socially appropriate to customers. Duties included; sweeping the floors, dusting, and cleaning store shelves, working behind the meat

counter, bagging groceries, and keeping inside and outside of store free of debris. Participant 11, a pet shop owner, revealed that their job requirement was not clearly recognized or written out. A simple procedure for IWDs was to handle animals, and guide customers to make a sale or provide a service to them. Participant 11 noted, "This is a unique business and IWDs will leave with a greater love of life, foster lots healing, and release emotions for animals, all the while enjoying their experience here." Some IWDs were assigned with feeding the animals, while others were assigned with bathing the animals and keeping their cages clean. Other expectations of IWDs were to keep the store clean and smelling fresh, to pick up debris from in and outside of the store, and according to the Participant, "depending on the level of performance you can get out of each person expectations are very minimal. Simple procedures such as handling animals, talking with customer and employees, and being able to communicate appropriately with other employees, staff, and customers about their feelings and emotions on the job [were sufficient tasks for most]. We used a technique with a person with a physical disability who would often seem depressed or down. We would use trigger words that would bring them back and draw them back into a positive and pleasant work environment. Additionally, we must make sure they [IWDs] are not afraid of the animals before they are hired at my pet shop."

Participant 12 revealed that they have a commitment to hiring IWDs, but disabled veterans are their priority. Participant 12 stated in their interview, "[An] individual with a physical disability is not expected to perform certain job task adequately therefore, we

would avoid placing them if we recognize or see the disability ahead of time. The mentally challenged individual is expected to be able to work in the dining room. Some of the employees know or have members in their families who had a disability or know IWDs have been successful in assisting with customer service."

My analysis of the data collected revealed that employers possess no apprehension towards hiring IWDS and are willing to make accommodations for IWDs so long as it does not interfere with the success of the business. The positive experiences that the employers have had with IWDs have improved their overall opinion on hiring IWDs' in the future.

Minor Theme 1: Employers are willing to hire IWDs with contingencies. Participants 2, 3, 10, 11, and 12 all agreed that they were willing to hire IWDs with certain contingencies. Participant 2 expressed a willingness to hire IWDs, if there were sufficient funding from the government. This is like Participant 12, who was also reliant upon government funding. Additionally, Participant 12 had a commitment to hiring disabled veterans, which is often prioritized before hiring IWDs. Participant 3 stated in their interview, "Depends on what's available, what they are capable of and how much they match the job description, they [IWDs] would have to fit into what we have here. This is a small general gym. I don't see us doing any adjustments, it must be the right fit for them [IWDs] and they must fit in with us. Yes, I will hire IWDs if they have a JC with them always."

Participant 10 made it clear that an understanding of an IWDs' capabilities was essential before any hiring decisions could be made. Participant 11 indicated that all

IWDs within their workplace must not be afraid of animals to be successful at their establishment.

The participants' responses reflected the idea that hiring of IWDs within their facilities will only be possible under certain conditions. One of the most notable contingencies expressed was a necessity for JC training to better integrate IWDs by improving the understanding of an IWDs' needs. Other contingencies relayed were the need for specialized support geared towards IWDs to better complete job tasks as well as better teaching, training, and understanding phenomenon of the disability from the school system to provide better jobs matches for IWDs.

Major Theme 2: Employers are willing to hire IWDs with JC training.

Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 11 were willing to hire IWDs with the assistance of JC training. Participant 1 stated that, "I would expect more support from the school personnel to provide training by teachers or JC of IWDs. This would be a positive contributing component to assure the jobs assigned to IWDs were carried out as expected. It should be required to have consistent support and scheduled weekly visitations on site from JCs to aid and support the IWDs."

Participant 2 revealed that most training for IWDs was done by either teachers or JCs, which proves JCs and teachers to be essential in the process of helping IWDs to maintain employment and demonstrate success in performing the job and tasks assigned to them. Participant 3 declared in their interview, "A JC or teacher would have to be with them on the job always. They [IWDs] would have to be appropriately matched in every way for the task assigned to them. To be honest, I would only hire IWDs under certain

conditions."

Participant 4 stated that, "IWDs must come to us with a teacher or JC to provide the trainings needed. Due to the extensive training they get from teachers and JCs from the school, it has been proven they can perform their duties as well as non-disabled individuals. They would be able to perform the task they were hired to do without limitations. I am looking for someone to do the job and I don't care if they are disabled. We depend on school personnel to inform us of their ability and rely on teachers to monitor and to make sure they [IWDs] do the task they were hired to do. The school staff does all our interviewing to make sure they're sending someone that is trained and able to do the job. Some of the feedback I get regarding the IWD's performance is forwarded to the teacher and JC in an effort to improve or enhance job training skills at the facility."

Participant 5 revealed that a JC would be given to IWDs as needed, as JCs are not readily available at their facility. Participant 6 will commit to hire IWDs with a JC aid. Participant 6 additionally revealed that they had previous experiences with JCs that were less than positive. According to the participant, "The JC wanted to take the work to her house to watch television and work at their leisure. The IWD was happy to work, but the JC insisted to work at home. JCs must be held accountable."

Participant 7 was willing to hire IWDs only with the presence of a JC. Additionally, the participant provides supplementary training for IWDs onsite. Participant 8 also provided onsite training and reinforced positive behavior with monthly employee meetings. But, as the participant stated, they "would not turn away a JC."

Participant 9, a similar business to Participant 8, had different requirements for

hiring IWDs. Participant 9 stated, "Along with a supervised teacher, we would need a teacher or JC to provide the training. We set minimal goals for them [IWDs] and give them extra time to complete tasks, as well lowering the level of difficulty. Additional training may be required in the beginning but once they [IWDs] understand their duties they become proficient."

Participant 11 revealed in their interview, "A JC is required to provide training and support to the IWDs on the job as needed or at least 3 times per week.
The JC provides training and assures the IWDs along with the manager, employees and staff that the assigned job and/or task can be successfully completed. JCs must work alongside IWDs until the IWDs are comfortable and confident with the job assignment and performance. This training is needed because there are animals that require maintenance. Specific instructions must be given on how to interact with animals, move the animals, and how to use tools with the animals.

Based on the gathered responses, I deduced that many participants felt that IWDs' retention on the job was only possible with the assistance of a JC. The participants believed that JCs were imperative to better understand the needs of IWDs as well as to communicate the necessary job tasks to IWDs. Also, the participants reported that they were willing to integrate JCs into IWDs' training for as long as necessary.

Minor Theme 2: Employers provide their own training for IWDs. Participants 10 and 12 revealed that no additional training was needed for IWDs to be successful at their respective workplaces. Participant 10 was willing to hire and make job accommodations as well as provide on the job training to improve IWDs success.

Participant 12 does not have the space for training, but they are willing to try to better integrate IWDs.

From this evidence, it can be concluded that these participants were both willing to adjust the necessary training requirements within their own workplace by modifying various training tactics to better suit the needs of IWDs without outside assistance. For instance, visual prompts, verbal assistance, hands on aid, and setting strong modeling examples were all strategies the employers indicated they made possible to strengthen the understanding of job requirements, performance and abilities of IWDs.

Major Theme 3: Positive attitudes and social skills attributes to hiring more IWDs. Nine participants reported that positive attitudes directly correlate to hiring more IWDs (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9). Participant 1 felt that positive experiences result in positive feelings toward hiring more IWDs. This participant has a high regard IWDs, viewing them as respectful and diligent workers. Participant 2 also reported high levels of respect and work ethics among IWDs, additionally adding that some IWDs go above and beyond their assigned tasks. Participant 3 felt that IWDs were prideful and never complained about their duties. Participant 4 stated that, "[IWDs} are very committed to job with good work ethics, pride in job duties, and the desire to please. IWDs are also confident in job assignments, kind, respectful, and polite."

Participant 5 attempts to completely integrate IWDs by doing things such as granting them the same uniforms as other employees to help IWDs feel accepted. This participant gives IWDs positive feedback to reward and motivat as well ensuring that they are always available to help IWDs grow on the job. Participant 5 stated, "IWDs take

pride in doing a good job and coming to work on time. “They [IWDs] are always polite and well-mannered towards customers and coworkers as well as being very eager to please.”

Participant 6 found that at their workplace, IWDs were happy to have some place to go daily. The participant also found that IWDs were especially committed when they interact and socialize with other employees and staff. Participant 7 reported that IWDs interact appropriately with other employees and management staff. Participant 7 also makes it a point that employed IWDs were invited to the yearly company social events to help them blend in with the team. The participant also cited IWDs’ commitment, pride, and respect as admirable qualities that aid their chances of retention. Participant 8 revealed, “IWDs were always kind and polite to customers, they were very helpful assisting the other employees or customers when asked. They are told that the “customer is always right.”

Participant 9 declared in their interview, “We found them [IWDs] to be hard working, kind and respectable to customers. They seem happy to be employed at my facility. They do a nice job, arrive on time, have good attitudes, are upbeat, and everyone loves to see them coming. They [other employees] treat them [IWDs] with respect and pride in the work they are performing important to make them feel they are equal. They [IWDs] are respectful and considerate of each other’s abilities and disabilities to complete their job assignment. IWDs and employees are invited to each other’s homes once a month to play games and it’s known as “game night”. This positive interaction between IWDs and non-disabled individuals helps to make the working climate more

positive."

Several employers made it clear that IWD's positive outlook displayed improved employee attitudes toward IWDs in the workplace. The IWDs' attitudes about being respectful, using good work ethics, being committed to the job, demonstrating diligence in their work and were inclined to go beyond the assigned duties, improved the quality of the work environment as well as the social climate of the business.

Minor Theme 3: IWD's should be afforded social justice, and opportunities for inclusive community experiences. Participants 10, 11, and 12 all cited social justice as a key factor in their hiring of IWDs. Participant 10 stated, "Anyone that takes in a disabled person they should talk to them, see what they like, and sometimes you may discover a skill that will blossom. We, as a society, should support IWDs. Every disabled person should be in the mainstream. My only concern is that they [IWDs] not be taken advantage of."

Participant 11 revealed in their interview, "IWDs seem to be very sensitive and wanting to be accepted by the group. We make, sure they are welcome, open, and positive. All employees are sensitive to the limitation of IWDs, making sure the person with a disability is made to feel assimilated and a part of the team. We want IWDs to be a part of our culture."

In addition to the remarks made by the other participants, Participant 12 made it clear that IWDs would be completely included into their workplace just as any non-disabled individual would. This participant also takes into consideration an IWD's ability level when assigning tasks to promote success and task accomplishment.

The topic that was uncovered by the participants was the need for social involvement to strengthen community and reinforce IWD's sense of belonging, which in turn makes a stronger and more dedicated worker. Some participants felt as a society they should support IWDs and include them in the mainstream. Also, IWDs should be made to feel integrated, as part of the team, and culture. This type of social involvement directly correlates to the community understanding and respecting the social justice that IWDs deserve as independent people.

Major Theme 4: Employers are willing to hire IWDs under certain conditions. Some participants reported that they are not willing to make modifications for IWDs to obtain employment (participant 1, 3, and 12). Participant 1 noted, "The IWDs is expected to do the rapid, repetitive, automotive work, unfortunately they cannot do the job." Participant 1 noted, "It's not a good fit to hire IWDs because of the rapid work that is required at the restaurant." Participant 3 noted, "The gym is not an appropriate setting to hire IWDs because no assistance, training, or teamwork would be available to assist them. Participant 3 additionally stated that, "IWDs were expected to present themselves appropriately, if they can do work independently, no adjustments will be made to accommodate, train or hire them."

Twenty-five percent of interview participants noted "Depends on the disability if they can do the job, and no physical disabilities for employment" (participants 1,3, and 12). Participant 1 declared that "I will not hire IWDs who has a physical disability." Participant 1 stated that the only conditions under which they would hire IWDs would be if there was a round the clock presence of a JC to assist them. Participant 3 noted, "No

physical disability for employment." Participant 12 noted that "No physical disability for employment, disabled veterans are priority." Participant 12 reported, "No staff or space is available to aid, training, or teamwork no modifications will be made for IWDs." Participant 12 additionally revealed that due to a lack of elevators, their building is not ADA compliant and therefore is not sufficient for hiring IWDs. Also, according to Participant 12, "I would say change policy on budget. A lot can be done with more money". Participant 12's work environment is also a hazardous place for physically disabled individuals, especially considering that the kitchen is not up to code.

The data collected from the above responses revealed that employers are only willing to include IWDs in the workplace if specific conditions related to the job assigned are being met. The participants described a need for better community and school system involvement as well as prior specialized training to avoid being responsible for additional teaching of IWDs.

Interpretation of Findings

The problem this qualitative, intrinsic case study focused on is that there is no current understanding of employers' perceptions of employability for IWDs transitioning from high school at the local level to the community setting. After a brief interview, the director of special education for this school district indicated, "290 students' ages 16-26 are enrolled in the high school setting and are in critical need of employment" (personal citation, March 2018). In addition, there are 80 local businesses in the Middle Stone community, only 12 of which have employed 40 IWDs. The local administration, businesses, educators, and parents of IWDs agreed that the problems employers

encounter providing employment for IWDs was worthy of further study to more deeply understand the needs of employers in the community to hire IWDs. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore employers' perceptions regarding the employment of IWDs transitioning from the Middle Stone Public School District. In this study, I sought to understand employers' perceptions of young adults with disabilities employability as they transition from the MSPSD to independence. The major (M) and minor (m) themes that emerged from these data included the following:

- (MT1) Employers are willing to hire and make accommodations for IWDs.
- (mT1) Employers are willing to hire IWDs with contingences.
- (MT2) Employers are willing to hire IWDs with JC training.
- (mT2) Employers provide their own training for IWDs.
- (MT3) Positive attitudes and social skills attributes to hiring more IWDs.
- (mT3) IWD's should be afforded social justice, and opportunities for inclusive community experiences.
- (MT4) Employers are willing to hire IWDs under certain conditions.

An analysis of all themes supported that employers willing to hire and work with IWD's provided they have more training regarding the nature of the disability, more training for the IWDs on the job in the form of JCs or vocational teachers supporting the IWDs. Employers believe in social justice for IWDs. They appreciate and respect the IWDs and indicated that they think all employers should provide respect, and inclusion for IWDs in the community and work environment. Once the employer understands the nature and needs of IWD's they are willing to hire more IWDs and the positive

experiences create more job opportunities for other IWDs. The social skills, positive attitude and behavioral skills IWD's display on the job are appropriate, positive and contribute to the workplace environment and positively affect other employees as well.

Reindal (2008) and Nestler's (2016) social relations model of a disability will guide this study and provide a different way to understand IWDs as they are learning an assignment. This theory involves various approaches to special needs education and it's understanding the phenomena of the disability. For example, cognitively challenged, mentally impaired, autistic, and developmentally delayed individuals all have unique needs that requires a personal method to better complete job tasks. This is done by an examination of behavior and interpersonal interactions within groups of IWDs (Ludtke, Robitzsche, Kenny, and Traulivein, 2013).

Data accumulated from the findings would suggest that a policy recommendation with detail (position paper) is an appropriate project based on employers' perceptions, themes, and sub-themes that emerged from the data. The purpose of the position paper is to recommend a Vocational Support System (VSS) for IWDs. The focus of the white paper will be to communicate employers, teachers, JC, and educational institutions what school system general education administrators and special education administrators can do to strengthen the vocational training system both while the IWDs are still enrolled in school and while they are transitioning to working in the community. A systemic of process of planning, designing, and creating appropriate vocational curriculum would strengthen the vocational training and transition process so that, stakeholders develop a deeper understanding of what is required to support IWDs in getting prepared

vocationally and how to sustain meaningful employment once they are working in the community. This white paper will also address specific needs identified by employers to strengthen the vocational training and transition program thereby strengthening the ties to the community for IWDs and promoting greater opportunities for job placement and an improved sense of a community that truly embraces all individuals.

Conclusion

In Section 2, I discussed detailed information that justified the methodology and design of my qualitative case study approach. I used this approach to interview participants and obtain rich descriptions regarding understand employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs. The qualitative case study research design approach was to further the exploration of phenomenon. After I analyzed the data, a project study may result in a policy recommendation with detail (position paper) that helps to eliminate the perceived gap in employers' perception and school communication in the transition of IWD from MSPSD to the workplace. In Section 3 of this project study, I will discuss the project study and the project that will develop after gaining some understanding and insight on some possible answers to the research question I discussed in Section 1. Next, I discussed the rationale, review of literature, implementation, and project evaluation of the prospective project study based on the data collected and analyzed in Section 2. Finally, I discussed the implication for social change. To finish, this section will conclude with a discussion on various implication from the project study to warrant a social change locally as well as a social change nationally.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The aim of this qualitative case study was to gain a deeper understanding of employers' perceptions as to why IWDs are not getting much opportunity to get hired as they transition from the local educational setting to the workforce. This study was guided by the following research question: What are employers' preconceived ideas regarding the employability for IWDs as they transition from the MSPSD after age 26 from high school to the community?

Several problems were identified by employers. Overall, employers were willing to hire IWDs, and reported that once they have a positive experience, all or most were willing to make accommodations to hire and support IWDs. This employer perspective would be ideal to systematize in the form of a professional development program designed to develop a support system that the school district personnel drive rather than being happenstance and relying on the good hearts of the employers to figure out the dynamics for employing IWDs in the target city. I chose a white paper (Appendix A) as most appropriate to make recommendations to the school district and other stakeholders based on my findings derived from the study at the local site.

Description of Goals

My overall goal for this white paper project was to positively influence stakeholders to incorporate the recommendations from the white paper to support the transition and employment of IWDs as they graduate from high school and enter the workforce. The specific goals are as follows:

- Goal 1. The district leaders will implement strategies to improve opportunities for employment and retention of IWDs after reviewing the white paper.
- Goal 2. The district leaders will develop an improved plan for enhanced communication between the school district staff (including the JC or any educators supporting IWDs) and the employers.
- Goal 3. Improved transition support systems, and resources available provided for educators implementing a transition curriculum.
- Goal 4. Targeted PD for job coaches specific to supporting IWDs' work performance and integration.

I developed the white paper to provide a format through which I could share the problem, my project study findings, and recommendations for best practices for employers and school system staff to improve the job experiences for IWDs and increase employment options for IWDs in the target community.

Rationale

In the target district, no qualitative data had been collected that reflected employers' perspectives regarding the employability of IWDs transitioning from high school to independence. The local problem involves a lack of understanding of transition needs for IWDs, and employers' perceptions of hiring IWDs. In Section 2, I discussed the employers' perceptions regarding employability of IWDs from the local school system. Most participants interviewed discussed the need for more support from the school district staff for newly hired employees who were also IWDs. As a result, I recommended that the JC become an integral part of ongoing training and support for employers.

During the participant interviews, I also discovered that it is of the upmost importance to match the employees' abilities with the job skills/tasks assigned. In the white paper I provide the findings and recommendations from the data collected in the study and will present it directly to the school administrators and stakeholders. This will result in improvement of the district administrators' understanding of IWDs who are transitioning into the workplace. In the scholarly review of literature from the last 5 years, I review literature in relation to the research study project.

Review of the Literature

In this literature review, I focus on the white paper, which is the project deliverable of this study. In the white paper, I will discuss the data related to understanding employers' perceptions of hiring IWDs transitioning from the local school district to the community. The white paper will be a vehicle for me to share the problems that exist for IWDs related to obtaining and maintaining employment, resulting in fewer opportunities for employment in the community. In addition, I will present the research findings from the study, recommendations, and final results to school district staff and employers regarding needed transition support systems. These systems will work to improve targeted PD for employers, transition staff working for the school district stakeholders, and delineate school district staff responsibilities related for IWDs. All of these improvements will support the improvement of vocational training for IWDs and implementation of transition support systems, including enhanced staff assistance and improved communication with employers.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used while developing the white paper is based on the social relational model of disability (SRMD; Ludtke, Robitzsch, Kenny, & Traulwein, 2013; Nestler, 2016; Reindal, 2008). Initially, disability researchers launched the social model of disability (SMD) using the medical model to define disability. This SMD was criticized in the field of special education for not providing and understanding the different ability levels, and classifications for IWDs; this model continued to reflect the disempowerment of IWDs (Sim et al., 1998). Other critics of the initial SMD thought that this framework put current lives under threat (Oliver, 2013; Shanna, Kattari, Lavery & Hasche, 2017). Academicians and those advocating for IWDs questioned the relevance of the SMD as it pertained to the actions and behaviors of IWDs (Levitt, 2017). In addition, the social model did not enhance the employability of IWDs in comparison to non-disabled individuals (Cunnah, 2015). Acceptance of the medical model has been in a state of crisis as it is still not accepted as a model to apply in the education of IWDs (Nestler, 2016; Reindal, 2008). The challenge is that teachers', JCs', and employers' lack of understanding the characteristics, needs, and abilities of IWDs (Ludtke, Robitzsch, Kenny & Traulwein, 2013). Understanding the phenomenon of a disability is critical to identifying needs, making accommodations, and successfully transitioning IWDs to employment and integration in the community.

Limitations and abilities with the negative effects associated with classification, categorization, and labeling in the medical and social model of a disability have been highly criticized in the field of special education (Ludtke et al., 2013; Reindal, 2008).

Researchers have promoted the SRMD as a mechanism for understanding the characteristics and phenomenon of a specific disability (Ludtke et al., 2013; Reindal, 2008). Furthermore, the SRMD is a design to provide an understanding of the characteristics, capabilities, limitations, and personal experiences of IWDs. With a deeper understanding of IWDs' needs, special education services have been more effectively designed because understanding the model helps service providers internalize the needs and capabilities of IWDs, which has been the main issue for the SRMD (Ludtke et al., 2013; Nestler, 2016; Reindal, 2008). The information provided by special education personnel to employers regarding the nature and needs of a disability will aid employers with a personal profile assessment for employment and placement of IWDs.

SRMD implies an understanding of the interaction between the reduced function and phenomenon of a disability in relation to special needs. SRMD addresses the pupils' needs without contributing to the negative effects resulting from classification, categorization, and labeling of IWDs (Florian et al., 2006). Therefore, supporting the SRMD as a mechanism for special education is appropriate for this study of IWDs as it employs a model in which the entire student is viewed and in particular their relational needs and support needs to improve functionality and promote independence. In this model, the elements of oppression and discrimination are significantly associated with disadvantages and restriction of activities for IWDs. Reindal (1998) indicated a distinction between necessary and sufficient reasoning. He further described the interaction and the reduced function and characteristics of a specific disability. According to Reindal, a thorough description of IWDs in this model, when achieved, will guarantee

that whatever is uncertain will be more clearly viewed and understood from a programming point of view. Thomas (2004) specified that having a disability indicates some effect of the condition of a disability under certain circumstances. Reindal (1998) specified having a disability in some instances is not a sufficient condition for improving hiring and retention for all, considering that the criteria for disabilities are not the same for all, but will vary according to time, circumstances, and environmental factors. The main problem of understanding IWDs is reserved in the SMD, whereas personal experience of an impairment in the SRMD incorporates an interplay between reduced function and individual disability as a platform (Ludtke et al., 2013; Nestler, 2016; Reindal, 2007). Another issue emphasized in the SMRD are the relational aspects of having a disability and how to address the relational gaps to promote functionality in the environment.

This perspective implies that reduced function creates both personal and social implications for IWDs. The reduced function, which varies on an individual basis, is not necessarily a restriction in itself, but becomes a restriction in various macro levels in society. In addition, these conditions are imposed on the social effect that the reduced function implies for IWDs (Nestler, 2016). In the SRMD, weight is given to the personal experience of living with reduced social functionality without embracing the individual approach (Nestler, 2016.) Figure 1 visually portrays the SRMD model and the relationship between disability and function.

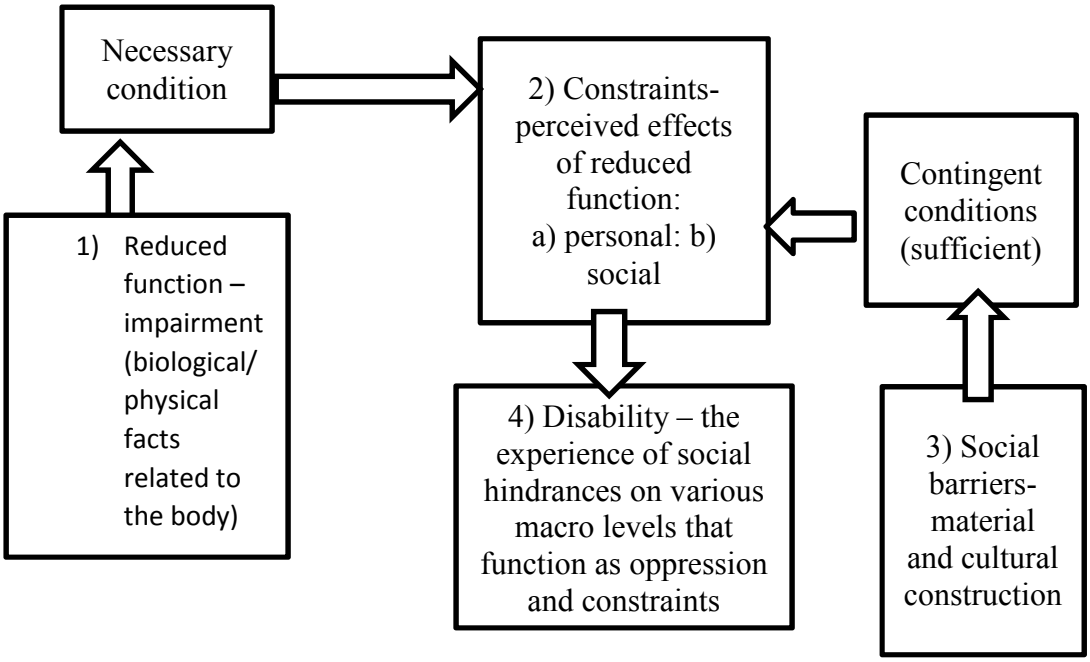

Figure 1. *The interplay between reduced function and disability: A social relational model.* Figure source: Nestler, 2016; Reindal, 2007, p. 49.

In the SRMD, IWDs are the focus of discussion. The reduced function or impairment (biological/physical) is a necessary condition for constraints, perceived as reduced functioning that is either personal or social as it related to the body. By understanding both personal and social effects of reduced functionality, it becomes possible to talk about what is needed to adjust for the needs of IWDs on an individual basis (Ludtke, et al.,2013). Contingent sufficient conditions exist within social barriers of both material and cultural contexts if they are accessed to support IWDs. Changes could be addressed on the macro level to promote individuality and lessen the significance of issues which IWDs experience from presenting on the job, or in the community and resulting in better support for IWDs. In conclusion, researchers proffered that IWDs'

experiences of social hindrances on various macro levels function as oppression and cultural constraints (Nestler, 2016; Reindal 2007).

Analysis of conceptual framework, research findings. I have selected the SRMD as the conceptual framework for the white paper project to help further support an understanding of IWDs. The SRMD is appropriate to use in this study. This model relates to the problems of understanding reduced IWDs' functionality, unique impairments, personal, social or cultural constructions, which may influence work productivity, and the individual interplay, for successful employment. The SRMD framework provides rationale for more deeply understanding employers' perceptions, in implementing the individualized SRMD, and making recommendations for targeted PD. In addition, the tenets of the model could guide the educational stakeholders to strengthen the transition, and employment support systems for IWDs. The findings from this study provided me with a clear direction for the project for this study, which is the white paper.

The social relations model is used to underline the problems faced by IWDs on an individual basis, which is why this model is significant to this study. From the social relations model, I collected responses from my researchers that showed a patterns and relationships which could be developed into themes. The major (M) and minor (m) themes that emerged from these data included the following:

- (MT1) Employers are willing to hire and make accommodations for IWDs.
- (mT1) Employers are willing to hire IWDs with contingences.
- (MT2) Employers are willing to hire IWDs with JC training.

- (mT2) Employers provide their own training for IWDs.
- (MT3) Positive attitudes and social skills attributes contribute to hiring more IWDs.
- (mT3) IWD's should be afforded social justice, and opportunities for inclusive community experiences.
- (MT4) Employers are willing to hire IWDs under certain conditions.

The findings in Section 2 indicated that employers are willing to hire IWDs once they have a positive working experience with them. Employers demonstrated and conveyed that they are open minded, and are willing to hire IWDs again. Many employers are willing to make accommodations, and adjustments to meet the needs of IWDs. An employer's positive experience of hiring IWDs can lead to increased employment opportunities, thus opening doors for other IWDs (Ludtke, et al.,2013). Business owners want a basic understanding of the IWDs, including their capabilities, and limitations. Employers requested more support from the school system, improvement in job training, vocational consulting, more communications, collaboration with school administration, and consistent JC support. SRMD framework is appropriate for this study because it reflects the attitudes of some employers, the effect of such attitudes on hiring IWDs, and understanding the basic concepts of a disability to complete the job assignment. When considering the availability of gainful employment for people with disabilities, it is important to examine the attitudes, and relationships of the special education staff, JCs, employers, and IWDs living in the community (De Neve, Devos, & Tuytens, 2015). In response to the findings, I recommend that stakeholders/administrators

incorporate specific on-going, and targeted PD recommendations for JCs, vocational adjustment teachers, and support materials that could be provided to employers in the community along with a PD component when IWDs are placed on the job. The described PD would strengthen the transition, and vocational curriculum for IWDs that will promote transitioning from school to community. Further, I would like to encourage the school district personnel to influence future employment for IWDs by considering the recommendations in the white paper rather than relying on the good hearts of employers within the community (Schultz, Arora, & Mautone, 2015).

Database Search Words and Phrases. I completed an online database search by using Walden's University Library. The databases included Educational Research Information Center (ERIC), *EBSCO*, Pro Quest Central, Education Research Complete, Google Scholar, Sage, and Academic Search Complete. Search topics used when searching these databases were *best practices for IWDs employment, curriculum design for work study, vocational job training, transition from school to work, vocational assessment planning, JC training, employment opportunities for IWDs, best practices support systems, IWDs, professional development to improve efficacy when teaching students with disabilities* and *white paper.* The strategy I used to organize information from the database search was a reference web. Google Scholar was used to locate peer-reviewed scholarly articles published within the last 5 years on the given topics related to the white paper.

White Paper Genre

A white paper is a detailed authoritative written report of a specific problem that is designed for a specific audience to provide detailed solutions for the problem. It is also intended to influence stakeholders in the decision-making process of the problem (Graham, 2010; Kemp, 2005; & Mattern, 2013). The local problem of my research study is the lack of data on employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs as they transition from the local school system, which may contribute to some employers' hesitation to hire IWDs. The white paper is often used when the audience consists of academic stakeholders, and professionals due to scholarly format. In this context, the audience consists of school district personnel and special education teachers thereby making a white paper an appropriate choice to convey the findings and convey recommendations to the key stakeholders to inform them and support social change within the school system to better serve IWDs in the community (Bly, 2015).

I followed a specific outline identified by Kemp (2005) to design an operational and cohesive white paper.

- Establish goals and audience was the first step identified by Kemp (2005). The goal of the white is to inform the audience (employers, school system administrators, and teachers) of the local problem (the lack of data on employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs transitioning from the local school system, which prompted the research study. Results of the study, stated conclusions, and recommendations will be made and presented to stakeholders (the need for more communication about disability, systems of support,

curriculum to support IWDs, and training issues as it relates to employers hiring IWDs.

- Form a plan to develop and share the white paper was the second step identified by Kemp (2005). I developed a Microsoft Word document to format my white paper to share with stakeholders via email. I am the expert in this subject matter of my research study and researcher of the selected peer-reviewed journal articles.
- Review information and data was the third step identified by Kemp (2005). In this phase, I reviewed and analyzed the research data as well as the information from Section 1 and 2 to determine patterns and relationships of this population.
- Organization of data was the fourth step identified by Kemp (2005). In this phase, of the research study I organized the research data into a Microsoft Word document. The white paper will consist of recommendations to employers and school systems in response to research study findings that may ultimately lead to employers hiring more IWDs as they transition from local high school (Ju, Pacha, Moore & Zhang, 2014).
- Designing a layout is the fifth step identified by Kemp (2005). In this phase, I designed the layout and style of the white paper so the audience, employers, school system administrators, and teachers could easily comprehend the information.
- Determining major concepts was the sixth step identified by Kemp (2005). In this phase I wrote the white paper, identified major concepts of the research

study findings, and provided supportive peer-reviewed journal articles that included visual artifacts as needed for clarity (Mattern, 2013).

- The next step was to review the completed product as identified by Kemp (2005). In this phase, I reviewed the white paper to make sure it was clear, concise, and visual graphics to display important information.
- Finally, in the last step, I will publish my word document for distribution (Kemp, 2005).

By following these steps, I will include all pertinent data relevant to this study.

Research-Based Instructional Strategies

The purpose of writing a white paper is to inform the audience of a specific problem, pertinent data, and likely solutions. Further, the local school system staff lack data on employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs as they attempt to transition from MSPSD to independence, which may later attribute to low employment rates. The unemployment rate for IWDs was 10.5% in 2016. In contrast, to the unemployment rate for individuals without disabilities was 4.6% in 2016, a decline of 0.5 percentage point from 2015 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). This information indicated that effective instructional strategies will result in a positive impact on job performance for IWDs.

JC and research-based strategies. Researchers have indicated supported employment has enabled IWDs to be successful in competitive employment (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013; Wehman et al., 2014) The data findings revealed that 100% of the employers were devoted to hiring IWDs, but some needed additional systems of support. This support should be provided through school administration, vocational consulting,

and consistent JC support. According to the literature, evidence-based practices were effective for IWDs (Graham et al., 2015). Additionally, Wehman et al. (2014) identified initial job site training as paramount in which a JC implements behavioral strategies, analyzes, and assesses job performance, teaches new current job skills while giving consistent support to eventually build independence for IWDs. According to the literature, JCs cultivate natural support by using natural cues, to accomplish a job task and creating positive relationships and partnerships with coworkers (Wehman et al., 2016). Initial job site training is considered essential for JCs to provide the optimal support needed for skill achievement and independence (Wehman et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, many JCs are not trained sufficiently or prepared to use research-based approaches to training IWDs for specific job tasks (Hall, Bose, Winsor, & Migliore, 2014; Migliore, Hall, Butterworth, & Winsor, 2010). Wong et al. (2015) indicated that six JCs were selected to participate in a study from a large Midwest university. Their assignment involved testing the efficacy of a training package that could potentially train JCs on strategies to teach vocational skills to IWDs. This training package was designed to focus on the following training methods: task analysis, simultaneous prompting, and least to most encouragement. Task analysis is dividing the behavior into individual steps to evaluate and teach the skill (Wong et al., 2015). Simultaneous prompting as described by Gibson and Schuster (1992) is sending a controlled prompt (i.e., the least intrusive prompt to ensure correct responding) directly after the target stimulus. For chained tasks, the cue is the first target to begin the task and the target stimulus for each following step is completion of pervious step. This is

stated as least to-most prompting as it contains a hierarchy of prompts, and levels sequenced from least intrusive to most intrusive (Alberto & Schofield, 1979). These instructional strategies were selected because each strategy had a strong indication for teaching, a variety of skills (Test et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2015) including vocational skills for IWDs (Collins, Cooper, Maciag & Schuster 2001; Parsons et al., 2001). The strategies were versatile and could be useful to any vocational task. The isolated steps, allows JCs to evaluate vocational skills, identify target behaviors, lessen errors during introductory teaching, and decrease prompts effectively to build independence for IWDs (Wong et al., 2015). Based on numerous interviews with JCs and employers their presence on the job provided more confidence and support for both the employee and employers of IWDs.

Vocational teachers implement research-based training practices. One of the factors identified in the data findings in Section 2 was that employers need more job training skills and support provided to them by local school district when hiring IWDs. A study involving vocational teachers reflected their interest in additional training that includes specific instructional training strategies for IWDs (Breton, 2010; Carter et al., 2009). Vocational teachers have become more integral to the special education curriculum and job placement; however, most vocational teachers lack training in research-based instructional strategies (Brock & Carter, 2013.) Without the support and assistance of vocational teachers in public schools, job placement for IWDs will probably be at a minimal to very low because there are few if any agencies that train students with disabilities for gainful employment within their community.

Professional development. Professional development of special education teachers reflects, that without comprehensive training, community support, and implementation of effective research-based practices, will often result with inconsistent trustworthiness of job training and placement of IWDs (Odom, Cox, Brock, & National Professional Development Center on ASD, 2013). Implementation of research-based practices for school-based personnel remains a pressing concern for the field of special education (Cook & Odom, 2013; Klingner, Boardman, &McMaster, 2013). The most notable finding from the data collected in Section 2 was that employers in the MSPSD expressed that they would benefit from development of PD recommendations of best practices for JC, school-based employment training, and enhanced transition practices for IWDs. According to Cone (2012), PD is the key factor of effective teaching and training. PD and implementation may lead to improved achievement of IWDs completing a job task. As with teachers, training practices for JCs, minimal research links PD help with IWDs' success (Shaha & Ellsworth, 2013). JCs become more effective when PD provides needed training skills, personalized coaching, and modeling through observation of job task for IWDs (Creemers, Kyriakides, & Antoniou, 2012; Pianta, 2011). Although, Pancsofar and Petroff (2013) and Kretlow, Cooke, and Wood's (2012) findings were that PD may likely positively influence a JC's ability to learn new skills, training strategies, and give the feedback that is needed according to the researchers' findings. Quality PD has been known to positively influence JC training and student achievement (Yost & Vogel, 2014). PD is most effective for JC' learning if administered on a weekly basis (Mundy et al., 2014). Although PD was characterized by McCarthey et al. (2014) and

Hughes et al. (2012) as something that should be ongoing and sustained as opposed to one-day workshops for effective learning. Mundy et al. (2014), Schrum and Levin (2013) revealed that PD should be available on a weekly basis.

Professional development for JCs. According these data findings, the local school system and employers need targeted PD strategies to communicate and share instructional strategies as well as individual experiences. Ideally, employers will share their experiences with other community business owners. JCs, who lack training in research based-instructional strategies, have been found to shift their focus from training to task completion (Parsons, Reid, Green & Browning, 2001; Towery, Parsons, & Reid, 2014). This method does not contribute to teaching or promoting independence for IWDs, but instead perpetuates the idea that IWDs cannot adequately perform or complete specific job task (Guess, Benson, & Siegel-Causey, 2008; Wehman & Kegel, 1988). Although, Parson et al. indicated that JCs' training can result in presentations of evidence-based practices to improve outcomes for IWDs. The importance of the Parson et al. (2014) study was on relationships between JC and job training behavior. However, it did not include a description of how JCs should be trained. Although, it is apparent that JCs should be trained to implement research-based instructional strategies, there were no studies in which researchers had tested the efficacy of training JCs to implement research-based instructional strategies about how best they could be trained (Brock et al., 2016). The literature presented may be helpful for JCs and vocational paraprofessionals who are responsible for providing instruction to IWDs (Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, & Pelsue, 2009; Rogan & Held, 1999; Towery et al., 2014) Special education staff who are

teachers of IWDs are more effective when trained in research-based instructional strategies and are more successful with training and placement for employment.

Collaboration. Collaboration and teamwork among, educators, employers, JCs, and vocational consultants enhances learning opportunities as reflected in the theory of the SRMD (Van Diggelen, den Brok, & Beijaard, 2013). SRMD represents a platform for understanding impairments relevant to a specific disability. The uniqueness of IWDs are linked with social interactions between IWDs, employers, and special education teachers who collaborate and solve problems related to employability for IWDs (Popp & Goldman, 2016). PD is essential to solving problems and is known to enhance thoughtful teaching methods beyond curriculum, state standards which are imperative to effectively support teaching methods, analysis, and solving training issues (Bean, Lucas, & Hyers, 2014). Due to this understanding achieved by researchers' findings, it can be viewed as essential that PD recommendations are implemented into the school district's processes as evidence based strategies, transitioning programs, vocational programs, JC training, collaboration with employers regarding employment, and retention of IWDs transitioning from the MSPSD to the community.

Transition and Vocational Programs. Other recommendations are essential for the school administration personnel) to understand the long-term effect of graduation outcomes for IWDs. For example, proposing how critical it is to prepare IWDs when first entering high school for gainful employment working part/full time is a must. It is recommended that school administrators invest in specific vocational exploration. For example, proactive curriculum, vocation skills, and PD workshops of work study and job

placement opportunities for IWDs. This can be accomplished by developing curriculums to support and train IWDs to stay on task, teaching IWDs to complete job assignments, and providing a personal profile assessment of IWDs of what they can and cannot do to employers (Roberts, Ju, & Zhang, 2016). Finally, I recommend the school administrators invest in transportation for IWDs to and from employment locations, provide professional development workshops to train teachers, JCs and vocational consultants on effective strategies for employment of IWDs. The findings from the study of Wehman et al. (2015) indicated the transition process is critical for the success of employment of IWDs. Vocational training while attending high school and employment experiences in the vocational school setting are components for ultimate success in job placement for IWDs. Parents with high expectations for their child provides them with more opportunities, support, and encouragement, this will likely cause them to function more independently in the community (Wehman, et al., 2015). Therefore, their child is more likely to engage in various activities, which may increase normalizations, autonomy, expression, and creativity on the job and within their community (Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012). It is imperative for professionals working with IWDs to implement the knowledge of parents and teachers regarding their strengths and needs, relative to gainful employment (Wehman et al., 2015). A study conducted by Gragoudas, (2014) identified self-determination skills training as necessary components of the curriculum for transition-aged IWDs. Training in self-determination skills enable IWDs to be more successful as contributing members of society. Self-determination is critical for IWDs to know themselves and what accommodations they may need by communicating their needs to

the employer. The employee can insure a successful transition from school to work, which may otherwise be a costly mistake for employers to assume if they do not know the accommodations needed for IWDs (Gragoudas, 2014). To promote success on the job employers must understand the abilities and unique needs of IWDs.

Vocational exploration. The goal of vocational exploration is to assist learners with finding work that they enjoy and perform successfully. During vocational exploration, IWDs are provided an opportunity to gain insight and become familiar with various occupations and their requirements. Students will also become exposed to various skills, responsibilities, and work place settings (Lindsay, McDougall, Sanford, Menna-Dack, Kingsnorth, & Adams, 2015). More importantly, students will be administered assessments that measure their interest, abilities, and work habits in a contrived (mock) work environment. Examples of vocational exploration and valuations are: The Self-Directed Search (SDS) and the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) (Neukrug, Peterson, Bonner, & Lomas, 2013). Therefore, vocational exploration activities are needed to assist in matching their abilities with the appropriate job description for IWDs.

Vocational assessment and planning. A successful school to work program, should include a teacher, JCs, vocational consultant, school administrators, psychologists, and parents during the assessment process for each IWDs. An effective vocational valuation includes members of the staff and parents, working together in efforts identify relevant transitional needs and strengths of each student (Albin, Horner, O'Neill, Sprague, & Storey, 2015). The goal of vocational assessments is to facilitate instructional and vocational planning that allows students with disabilities to make successful job

placement and adjustment to work independently in the community. The following skills should be assessed during the comprehensive vocational evaluation process for IWDs: reading and math skills, daily living activities, self-care, personal skills, social skills, and vocational readiness (Nicholas, Zwaigenbaum, & Clarke, 2015). The results of the vocational assessment will reflect the extent to which the student will have a successful transition from school to the work environment. The outcome of the assessment can also be used to help establish realistic employment and personal goals to assist with independent living in their community. Without a comprehensive assessment, reflecting the student's strengths and needs, it will be difficult for teachers, counselors, and JC to effectively identify vocational deficits that should be recognized and addressed in the student's transitional design. Examples of vocational assessments implemented with IWDs students are: The Career Key, Vocational Aptitude Assessment Tools and the Occupational Aptitude Survey (Arulmani, 2014). This provides an accurate understanding of IWDs' capabilities.

Supported employment. The model of supported employment for IWDs is designed to secure and maintain employment. This information is explained in the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE 2017) publications. The supportive employment model implements a partnership strategy in efforts to enable IWDs to achieve long-term employment. This model will also enable employers to hire desirable/valued workers. The low rates of employment among IWDs may indicate that adequate support of the appropriate type has not been provided to make a difference in the national figures according to the research study findings of Beyer and Beyer (2017).

BASE, has demonstrated considerable insight regarding the appropriate model of support for IWDs on the job. Researchers reflected that the supported employment model has been most effective for IWDs. The European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE, 2010) provided a five-stage model for supported employment of IWDs in the workplace: engagement, vocational profiling, job finding, employer engagement, and on/off job support (EUSE, 2010). Supported employment was developed in the United States and legislated in 1984. Beyer and Robinson (2009) reported evidence of positive outcome for supported employment that was researched throughout the 1990s and 2000s. This document was designed for IWDs and has been very successful in helping them and many other groups obtain employment (Reindal et al., 2007). This is an implication that supported employment has been successful and is needed throughout the country.

Best practices for preparing IWDs for employment. Most public high schools throughout the country have designed curriculums to prepare students for college, specific trades or careers based on individual students' interest and academic preparation. Students, enrolled with disabilities, and have been identified as cognitively challenged, learning disabled, autistic or other severe disabilities, are not expected to attend college. Instead, it has been determined, that 'best practice' for IWDs has involved designing a curriculum focusing on the specific educational needs of each individual and directing the educational plan toward preparing IWDs to attain employment within the community (World Health Organization, 2015). Preparing IWDs for the work force is an important role for today's public schools. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Act, and the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), has mandated work force preparation for IWDs.

Work study curriculum is becoming more common in today's public school (Connor & Gabel, 2013). The work study concept was founded on the concept that there should be close coordination between academic instruction, and vocational experiences for IWDs. In addition, the academic work or instruction should be designed to include work experiences (Connor & Gabel, 2013). More importantly, teachers, parents, JCs, and school administrators should be mindful that their hope for IWDs is to attain employment for those whom employment is the expected graduation outcome (Neubert & Simonsen, 2013). Core elements of the work preparatory study curriculum for IWDs include more extensive and individualized support from teachers and JCs.

Best practices for providing a support system to employers and employees with disabilities. Essential elements of work force training skills for IWDs are the same for those of their nondisabled peers. However, workers with disabilities may require more accommodations, adaptations, and individualized support from JCs, parents and other school personnel. Employers of IWDs will also require a level of support from the transitioning school (Novak, 2015). JCs are important personnel who provided support systems for employed IWDs. They provide the necessary support to employers because they have been actively involved with the newly hired worker in the classroom setting, they were present at the individualized educational plan meeting, involved in all assessments and interest inventories. The role of the JC is to guide and direct students with disabilities against unrealistic career expectations, but toward more realistic employment goals (Krieger, Best, & Edelman, 2015). They should also be aware of each student's abilities and disabilities. To summarize, the role of the JC is recognized as an

integral support system for both employers and employed IWDs (Brock & Carter, 2013). It is evident that JCs are valuable support personnel on the job for IWDs.

Role of JC as a support system to employers. The role of a JC is important because they can respond to the employee's wide range of needs based on individualized strengths and deficits of IWDs (Department of Health and Valuing People Now, 2011) there is currently a National Occupational Standard for JCs throughout the United Kingdom. As consumers of supported employment services, it is important that equal emphasis is placed on employer's success of IWDs as consumers. JC duties that emerged from this study were:

1. Provide a leadership role and liaison role between the transitioning school, the employer and the newly hired IWDs.
2. Present to the employer the worker's "Personal Profile" page, which provides vital, personal information to employers relative to the worker's background, strengths, limitations, and special accommodations on the job.
3. Provide aid to employers with the initial orientation for employers with disabilities. During orientation, the JC will discuss best methods of training and teaching IWDs will provide direct assistance by explaining, demonstrating, and modeling the job task.
4. Provide support by being available to employers for addressing all complaints, disagreements, and concerns regarding job performance issues of the employee with disabilities.

The JC will assist employers with problems involving daily attendance and arriving on time for work. Also, there will be assistance available to employees with completing the assigned job assignment to the employer's satisfaction. The JC will build a reliable, trusting, supporting relationship with employers by being available to employers for support and assistance daily or whenever necessary (Ellenkamp, Brouwers, Embregts, Joosen, & van Weeghel, 2016). Additionally, JC will assist employers with setting an approximate pay scale, pay schedules, and raises for IWDs. This work will allow JCs to work closely to bridge the gap between employers and employees with disabilities, in efforts to attain continued success and survival in the work place. Lastly, JCs will meet with employers to rate, assess, evaluate, and make recommendations to improve the job performance of IWDs.

The role of the JC as support system to IWDs on the job. The role of JC was to become an advocate and vital support for IWDs on the job. JCs should have been available to the employee as a mentor, exhibiting a trusting, reliable supporting relationship (Gustafsson, Peralta, & Danermark, 2013). JCs have been integral in reinforcing work skills, behaviors necessary for obtaining, and maintaining successful job performance. JCs should have been available to assist with job orientation and the initial adjustment process on the job for the IWDs. Additionally, JCs work to assure that the IWD has no problems with daily attendance, being on time, being able to use the time clock to check in, and out of the work place (Ellenkamp et al., 2016). JCs reinforce appropriate conduct and behavior on the job. Furthermore, JCs remind the worker of the importance of proper work attire and neatness on the job. The JCs have worked closely

with the employees to assure that assigned job task is completed with confidence, efficiency and success (Gentry, Kriner, Sima, McDonough, & Wehman, 2015). If there are complaints regarding performance in the work place, the JC has acted as counselor for the employee to address complaints and resolve issues in a positive manner to prevent damage to the IWDs' self-esteem or sense of worth. The JC has provided support and assisted employees with getting along with supervisors and coworkers. The role of the JC has been to reinforce and emphasize to the worker, the importance of obtaining and maintaining employment. The JC must heighten enthusiasm and embrace the concept of having pride and commitment to his/her job assignment (Gustafsson, Peralta, & Danermark, 2013). The JCs emphasized that work is a necessary source of our livelihood, accomplishments, and overall satisfaction of being an employed, contributing member of the community (Fossey & McDowell, 2015). It is of vital importance that JCs provide the employers with an introduction to the new employee (Ayres, Mechling, & Sansosti, 2013). In addition, to providing vital personal information this document will also provide information regarding the applications capabilities and limitation.

Personal Profile Assessment for Job Placement of Individuals with Disabilities. Ellenkamp et al. (2016) recommended and supported this assessment profile and found this information to be effective when determining the employability of certain individuals. Ellenkamp et al. (2016) identified key information to include in the profile may include: cognitive abilities, social capabilities, and personality traits. An example of a personal profile may include the following:

Assessment Summary

Name: Jack Jackson Age: 25 Diagnosis: Cognitively challenged

Social Skills

- Jack interacts and gets along well with others
- He is friendly and approachable
- Has good verbal skills
- Is eager to please during the work assignment
- Has a pleasant disposition (smiles frequently)?

Social Weakness: Organizational skills; Jack often appears untidy

Shirt unevenly buttoned, shoes untied, pants sagging too low, etc.

Cognitive Abilities

Will perform well on the job, if during job orientation, Jack is provided with concrete demonstrations and modeling of the job task. Repetition of the assigned task is also an important component of the learning process, for Jack, during orientation.

- Follows directions
- Has no physical disabilities
- Can successfully complete physical tasks if modeled during orientation.
- Has good work ethics: Always on time and is proud to be employed.
- Will assist others (if necessary)

Cognitive deficits

Jack is unable to read or count to 100. However, he can write his name and address.

Project Description

The research study findings resulted in in the project deliverable of a white paper. In the white paper, I present the needed resources, existing support, potential barriers, and potential solutions to the barriers. In this white paper, I describe the research study findings, recommendations and solutions to the problems of finding employment for IWDs (Graham, 2010; Mattern, 2013). I also discuss best practices for preparing IWDs for employment and best practices for providing a support system to employers of IWDs (Graham, 2010; Kemp, 2005, 2013).

Barriers and Resources

The significant resource of the project is the white paper, it's a clear, concise document describing in detail the research study findings, and recommendations. I designed the white paper in a Microsoft Word document and will present it in person to the intended audience, special education stakeholders, who will determine whether to implement the recommendations based on the research study findings. The primary support for the resulting project white paper is for the special education stakeholders and employers in the local community and prospective employers hiring IWDs. Special education administrators and directors are primarily responsible for the success and effectiveness of the project for positive substantial change regarding the supports, PD, processes, and communication needed for employing IWDs. Failure to do so will possibly be a barrier to the success and effectiveness of the project. The results of research study findings and recommendations could be distributed or publicized to other

stakeholders, special education administrators, and teachers throughout the school district if deemed acceptable to the stakeholders to whom I will present the white paper.

Implementation and Timeline

The white paper will be presented in person to stakeholders and special education administration, upon approval of the Chief Academic Officer, according to Walden University requirements. My vision is that the special education administrators will find the content of the white paper useful and thought-provoking. It is my goal that Special education administrators distribute the white paper to educational audiences, for discussion of the research study findings, and recommendations. The collaborative PD design will be created with input from special education teachers, JCs, vocational consultants, and school administrators to meet the specific needs of the employers. JCs, teachers, school administrators, and vocational consultants could be responsible for distributing the research findings, and applying the recommendations, if deemed appropriate by the leadership staff. I created a timeline to implement, distribute, and provide future support of the project. After the final project is approved by Walden University, I will call the special education administrators, teachers, JCs, vocational consultants, and other education stakeholders to schedule a meeting for the purpose of distributing, reviewing, and discussing the white paper. I inform the leadership staff that I will be available for consulting and to discuss the contents and implementation of the white paper throughout the 2018-2019 school year. Table 6 provides a list of the projected implementation and timeline for the white paper. The table also includes

recommendations for the timeline of activities related to distribution, implementation, and future support of the project.

Table 6

Project implementation timeline

Date	Action
5/7/18	Schedule meeting
5/8/18	Distribute white paper
5/9/18 – 5/18/18	Meet with audience
5/9/18 - 9/10/18	Available for consulting

Roles and Responsibilities

My role as the researcher will be an attempt to bridge the gap between school system and employers of IWDs. In addition, I will distribute and present valuable components of information relevant to my research study. I was responsible for developing a clear, concise white paper to outline the findings of the study, resulting recommendations after data collection, and analysis. Once obtaining approval from Walden University, I will present an executive summary of the findings from this study to provide more insight into the problems, employers' perceptions, recommendations, and specific outcomes for hiring IWDs. I will also distribute and convey my findings to special education administrators, teachers, JCs, vocational consultants, and employers who have hired IWDs transitioning from the local high school. In addition, stakeholders from other communities will be provided information from my research project to better understand the evidence that supports the recommendations. I will also convey the above

information to the stakeholders who are in the local communities, as well as other stakeholders located in other communities to implement the strategies on a larger scale.

Project Evaluation Plan

The goals of the project include the following:

- Goal 1. The district leaders will implement strategies to improve opportunities for employment, and retention of employment for IWDs after reviewing the white paper.
- Goal 2. Improved plan for enhanced communication between the school district staff, including the job coach or any educators supporting IWDs,' and the employers.
- Goal 3. Improved transition support systems, and resources available provided for educators implementing a transition curriculum.
- Goal 4. Targeted PD for job coaches specific to supporting IWDs' work performance and integration.

The evaluations will include the following: (a) JCs will implement and demonstrate the effectiveness of the SRMD when training IWDs, (b) employers will provide and informal evaluation of employees' performance (negative and positive) on the job site, (c) employers will provide formal feedback to school staff regarding the effectiveness of JC support system to employers, and (d) educators will be evaluated on their performances.

Justification for Evaluation

Because of the information gathered from the study, I have chosen to use a summative evaluation to assess the white paper, because it provides an overall description of program success (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Summative evaluations are a goal-based evaluation. Provided the directors chose to implement the recommendations of the white paper, the summative evaluation process would be the most effective measure for hiring IWDs.

The main philosophical approach of evaluation chosen for this project includes summative methods (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). The formative evaluation is a technique of continuous and instantaneous feedback applied during a program cycle (Yu, 2014). Formative evaluation examines, adjusts, and provides timely feedback on reoccurring procedures (Dixon & Worrell, 2016). This type of formative evaluation is used in the early stages of program development to refine or improve program implementation (Yu, 2014). Additionally, this type of summative evaluation includes final assessments, recommendations, evaluations on the job, and weekly observations to assure job task completion (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). The other type of evaluation to be used will be a summative evaluation, which is designed to assess final learning conclusions (Dixson & Worrell, 2016; Nolen, 2011). Summative evaluation determines the effectiveness and overall description of the program (Caffarella & Daffron 2013; Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Key stakeholders include school that would be presented with information regarding the summative evaluations include school personnel, administrators, teachers, potential employers, JCs, and vocational consultants.

Project Implications

Local Community

When IWDs are hired they are perceived as being limited in their abilities and skills. However, when presented to the employer without being labeled as disabled, they are perceived as any other individual seeking employment (Vornholt, Uitdewilligen, & Nijhuis, 2013). When IWDs are matched appropriately with the skills they can perform they typically experience success on the job. When IWDs are matched with a job skill that they can perform, they will also experience success. Therefore, it does not matter if the person is an IWDs or is not, when an individual is matched appropriately with the job to be performed (Ameri, et al., 2015). For example, if individual is stocking items on the shelf and is having success with this job task, it does not matter if he is disabled; the key priority is whether the job can be performed at the level expected by the supervising staff. Labeling and categorizing plays an important role in the perception of employers hiring IWDs. Special education categorizing and labeling involves the stigma of being disabled because as a group they experience social restriction (Oliver, 1990). Educators could implement the project study findings to promote social change at their site. Findings from the study could begin communications among special education administrators, teachers, JCs, and vocational consultants to promote success toward employing IWDs. Employment of IWDs may be positively influenced if stakeholders chose to integrate the project recommendations outlined in the white paper**.**

Far-Reaching

The case study findings were bound by the local school, community, and a specific culture of individuals, which may limit the generalizability of the project results. I am hopeful, that other school district administrators are able to use the study findings and endorsements as a model to determine the needs and goals of IWDs for their community. Other school districts with transitional IWDs may also use my research study findings to successfully affect employment opportunities and improve the outcomes for hiring IWDs.

Conclusion

This section summarizes the results of the project study. The white paper focused on exploring employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs as they transition from the local high school to independence by working in the community. From this study, special education administrators, teachers, JCs, and vocational consultants will obtain a deeper understanding of effective methods of obtaining employment for IWDs. Stakeholders, employers, and educators may observe increased training, and employment opportunities of IWDs in the local community. I conducted interviews with individual employers within the community and gained an understanding of employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs. I explored the range of employment opportunities available to meet the needs of IWDs within the community. Following the above process, I collected data analyzed the data, formulated themes and synthesized all of these data to specific findings and recommendations in the form of a white paper. After providing copies of the white paper to stakeholders, I will determine the effectiveness of the project based on their positive

responses and ability to proceed with the recommendations outlined in the white paper. Summative evaluation will be used to support the white paper's effectiveness as perceived by the education stakeholders to whom I present. Recommendations such as increased communication, better professional development support, providing of individualized learning material, and the construction of a positive culture that promotes outreach and possible work incentives. If the school district administrators, and stakeholders decide to implement the recommendations from the white paper, it will result in positive outcomes for, training, hiring, and maintaining employment for IWDs. In Section 4, I have outlined the reflections and conclusions of the project study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this section, I provide an overview of the strengths and limitations of the study. Specifically, I will discuss my need for self-reflection as the project developed along my doctoral journey as a scholar-practitioner. I will also provide recommendations for further investigations, add-ons, and the potential social change impact my study may have. The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore employers' perceptions regarding the employment of IWDs transitioning from MSPSD. This study may benefit other special education teachers, JCs, vocational consultants, and employers because it might provide some useful insights into the needs of employers in the local community. The white paper contains a detailed report of the employers' needs and PD recommendations. The white paper recommendations, if adopted by stakeholders, will ultimately meet the needs expressed by employers. IWDs' employability has become the responsibility of educators because it is the school staff's responsibility provide a clear program and individualized services to support the development of employability skills leading to employment and successful performance on the job as this is one of the education outcome options for IWDs according to federal law regulations indicated in IDEA. School staff are required also to educate local employers on the needs of IWDs and improve the transition to work processes as implemented by the local school district.

Project Strengths

I used a qualitative case study design for this research project, which understandably was derived from the problem. In addition, I chose this research design

because it useful for identifying potentially unknown concepts, and for exploring people, places, and events in their natural setting (Creswell, 2014). Employer interviews were the primary data source I used to determine employers' perceptions regarding the hiring of IWDs transitioning from the local high school.

I identified several strengths of the qualitative method I used for this study. A qualitative research design is a process by which the researcher observes a phenomenon, searches for patterns and themes, and develops an overall analysis of the themes (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010). Qualitative research uses several resources for collecting data, ranging from descriptive interviews texts, fieldnotes, photographs, observations, video, and documents (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative methodology permitted me to explore employers' perceptions through individual interviews about hiring IWDs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In sum, qualitative methodology allowed me to explore the phenomenon, examine the problem, and provide answers to my research question.

Qualitative research enables the researcher to understand relationships, communities, individuals, and programs (Creswell, 2013; Yin 2014). The research case to be studied must be a specific person, organization, and geographic location, or phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case for this study was employers' perceptions of IWDs' employability when hiring IWDs from the local school.

The final task of this study was the development of a white paper focusing on PD recommendations to support transition and vocational training for educational stakeholders who support IWDs in obtaining jobs. In the white paper I stated specific problems in the local community, described results from this study, and provided

recommendations that will be presented to school administrators and all stakeholders. The recommendations collected in the white paper will provide the school administrators and stakeholders with information to share the positive relevant findings with other school administrators and stakeholders. The recommendations will also outline support systems for best practices and further encourage PD for employers who hire IWDs transitioning from the local high school to the job setting. The white paper could also be relevant to other districts and employers who hire IWDs in their community.

Project Limitations

This doctoral case study research was limited by the qualitative methodology. One limitation when using this methodology included the large amount of data collected, making data analysis extensive and time-consuming (see Creswell, 2013). Qualitative data findings may be transferred to a different setting, but it is not generalizable to the overall population (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015). In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collector and analyst (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdale, 2015). The researcher's reflection and awareness of bias is imperative to ensure research quality (Taylor et al., 2015).

There are other limitations to using a case study design. The possibility of a case study analysis lacking methodological techniques, epistemological grounding, and generalizability are all additional areas that could weaken a case study (Yin, 2014). Another limitation with single case study research is the reliability and replicability of a single case study analysis (Berg & Lune, 2012). In conclusion, personal bias of the researcher may affect the validity and reliability of single case study (Merriam & Tisdale,

2015; Taylor et al., 2015; Yin, 2014). Other obstacles in this study included the small sample size of participants.

There were 15 employers who qualified to participate in this study after 60 employers were initially contacted. All 15 employers had businesses in the local community and were invited to participate in this research study via an introductory email. Inviting all employers to participate in the study allowed me to collect data from employers of different types of businesses, which enhanced the diversity of participant responses. However, only 12 employers agreed to participated in the study. If all 15 employers from the local community agreed to participate, the research data may have been more representative of all employers' views by providing deeper and richer data. The participants in this research study included employers in the local school district; however, if other school districts were invited to participate, the data may have been more in-depth and enriched as cross case comparisons could have been made, allowing for identification of relationships and themes to address the gap in practice and phenomenon being studied.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Building relationships between employers and special education personnel can sometimes be challenging. Due to this predicament, the following are potential alternatives that may be utilized by educators and job coaches in order to reap successful results:

- Recommendation 1: Work proactively with employers regarding their perceptions about hiring IWDs. The purpose of collecting data from

employers would be to allow questions to reveal employers' concerns before and after hiring IWDs.

- Recommendation 2: Observe how teachers provide instructional training to JCs to support IWDs to stay on task on the job, and to maintain rapport with clients and colleagues. This would be a critical observation because there is a problem with JCs having formal PD regarding evidence-based instructional practices (Brock, et al., 2016). A small number of participants were included in this study and may not be representative of all employers. Random sampling methods may be used to closely mirror generalization to the larger populating in future studies by researchers.
- Recommendation 3: Provide a support system to monitor and assist with maintaining job placement and retention after hiring for IWDs. In future studies, researchers might include maintenance probes after all training is complete.
- Recommendation 4: Provide direct aid to IWDs and their families to assist, enhance experience, and educate on the workforce transition.

Recommended strategies might have contributed to promoting implementation of evidence-based instructional practices, improving the efficacy and accomplishment of JC and resulting in encouraging improved outcomes for IWDs.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

There are several aspects of my doctoral journey that informed my analysis of myself as a scholar. My abilities as a scholar were enhanced on my doctoral journey. The

coursework was the beginning of my doctoral journey at Walden University. I have learned about quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, design, data collection, and research analysis. I am confident and well versed in using academic databases to search for peer-reviewed journal articles on specific topics.

I reflected on several aspects of myself as a scholarly practitioner during my research study. In this qualitative case study, I implemented a course of study to explore employers' notions surrounding the hiring IWDs transitioning from the local high school. From this study, I learned that employers at the local level who hire and do not hire IWDs are uncertain about IWDs' ability levels. Employers want more support systems, which consist of training IWDs at the local level. Employers also expressed the need for consistent and reliable assistance from JCs. In addition, employers desired frequent communications between school staff and JCs.

I also reflected on myself as a project developer. Throughout the doctoral process I learned about many projects and approaches to use in addressing gaps in practice. I chose a white paper as the most appropriate project to discuss the research study findings and to make PD recommendations to the stakeholders, including recommendations to strengthen the vocational training and transition support services for IWDs.

Project Developments Which Influence Social Change

A white paper was developed from the supported findings of this study. The results of this research study have implications to enhance and support positive social change in the community. The findings from the research study could initiate collaboration between the local school district and employers hiring IWDs. Additionally,

the research study identifies employers' needs from the school district, indicate steps needed to close the gap between the school district services, and perspective employers. The primary goals of special education teachers, JCs, vocational consultants, and school administrators is to effect positive social change for IWDs.

Professional development recommendations are designed to implement the research findings relative to job placement for IWDs. The contents of the white paper are a reduction of thoughts, recommendations, opinions, interviews, and comments. When information in my white paper is broken into smaller units, educators can engage, deliberate, and scrutinize the information likely leading to stronger collaborations, and improved opportunity for employment for IWDs. This will likely result in positive social change within the community. Additionally, in the white paper I identify the main points, specify supporting details, describe the relevancy of the white paper, and purpose of using a white paper to generate discussion among stakeholders. The school district stakeholders may use the research findings, and recommendations as a model to better support the needs, goals of school district, and employers' apprehensions for hiring IWDs.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The importance of this project was to understand employers' perceptions for hiring or not hiring IWDs as they transition from their local school district to independence. Before I initiated the PD process, I knew it would require a significant time, effort, and planning. Upon this premise, I was reluctant to implement PD because it was time consuming and required a lot of resilience to construct. I developed the white

paper to disseminate the research findings, and recommendations to appropriate stakeholders. I will personally deliver the white paper to the appropriate special education personnel, who will become vital in distributing the findings of my research study. The special education personnel will have an opportunity to determine the effectiveness and success of the project design. Implementation of this project provided in the white paper can ultimately effect positive social change for IWDs seeking employment.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The limitations of this research study provide implications and opportunities for future research. Researchers could measure employment opportunities using an authenticated instrument through a quantitative study. Researchers could also use other qualitative designs to explore employment opportunities for IWDs.

The ethnography design is a qualitative approach that investigates inside a cultural group, influence on the group, and the larger society (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al., 2010). Researchers may use this qualitative research design to focus on the social order or culture of employment for IWDs from the local school district (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Yin, 2014). Ethnography design requires long periods of time in the field for data collection, and long-term access to the participants. It is important that the researcher becomes embedded inside the group being studied to scrutinize a specific culture (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014).

Action research is another qualitative approach to report a specific problem within an educational setting (Creswell, 2012; Lodico, et al., 2010). Action researchers also examine their own practices, as opposed to examining the practices of somebody else

(Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). Consequently, a special education teacher of student with disabilities may use this action research to distinguish between evidence-based instructional training practices for a specific IWDs.

Another qualitative approach is a phenomenological design. Researchers may use this research to explore lived understandings of people and ways we recognize those understandings from human conditions through longitudinal data (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenological inquiry consists of three in-depth discussions concentrating on past, present, and overall practices with the specific phenomenon (Seidman, 1998). Therefore, scholars may use a phenomenological research in longitudinal studies to explore employers' perceptions on employment for IWDs over a prolonged period.

Finally, a case study is also a qualitative approach used to relate several cases to explore a specific topic (Lodico et al., 2010). Researchers may use a shared case study to associate employment assessment of IWDs from multiple school districts. These possible future studies may address other gaps in practice regarding employment of IWDs transitioning from their local high school to the community as well allow various school districts to learn best practices from each other.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore employers' perceptions regarding the employment of IWDs transitioning from the Middle Stone Public School District. The participant interviews provided me with information from employers expressing needs regarding hiring IWDs. The white paper involves a detailed explanation of these employers' needs and recommendations to meet these needs as

expressed by employers. The study was guided by (Ludtke et al., 2013; Nestler, 2016; Reindal, 2008) social relational model of a disability, to more deeply understand to what employers' perceptions of IWDs' employability as they transition from the local school system to independent living.

In summary, several difficulties and requirements associated with employment of IWDs at the local job site were identified in the case study research findings. Employers are willing to hire IWDs if they can complete a job assignment. Employers requested the need for consistent support systems, increased communications from the local school district stakeholders, and more job training at the local school level for JCs and other vocational staff in addition to PD to improve their understanding of IWDs as they seek to hire IWDs in the workplace. Employers' lack of understanding of ADA laws and mandates for hiring IWDs continue to be an issue for IWDs in getting hired and retaining employment. More concerns are employer expectations, lack of respect, isolation [from co-workers], decreases in job responsibilities, and promotional potential for IWDs.

After data collection and analysis, I created a white paper designed to address the themes, which emerged from the data collections, and included specific recommendations to the school system stakeholders. I recommend PD, specific to transition and understanding IWDs, be delivered within a unified and clear framework to encourage partnership, discussion, job training, and to build a deeper understanding of the unique characteristics of this population. In the white paper, I will present the research study findings, describe the data collected, and themes that emerged from the findings and link these data to recommendations made in the white paper, which will serve to close the gap

in practice, and serve the needs of IWDs in the target district and community if adopted by stakeholders as designed (Graham, 2010; Kemp, 2005; Mattern, 2013). The local job site participants may be able to use the research study findings to promote positive social change in their local community. The outcome of this study may result in additional research regarding the social and community impact of employers hiring IWDs. Finally, other school districts may distribute the research finding and recommendations as a model to determine more effective methods, and strategies for preparing IWD's for employment, hiring IWDs and supporting IWDs on the job as well as supporting employers who hire IWDs.

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Appendix A: The Project

White Paper

Case Study of Employers' Perceptions and Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

Barbara Rosemond

Walden University

Table of Contents

Case Study of Employers' Perception and Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

Introduction

School administrators of the Middle Stone Public School District (MSPSD) lacked an understanding of employers' perceptions for hiring individuals with disabilities (IWDs) in their community. The absence of knowledge reflecting the employers' perspective relates to the less than satisfactory prospects for hiring and retaining IWDs in the local community for the years 2015-2018 (personal communications, March 2, 2018). Maier, Ulferts, and Howard (2012) and Von Schrader, Malzer, and Bruyère, (2014) described the employment for IWDs remains far lower than people without disabilities. The National Organization on Disability (2015) indicated 70% of IWDs polled have diversity policies with only 66% of those including disability as a recognized group. This evidence warranted the need for a study in which employers' perceptions in the local community regarding the hiring of IWDs leading to possible recommendations to support the resolution of the problem identified.

Limited understanding exists of employers' perceptions regarding the employability of IWDs in our community.

Problem

Despite legislation and national movement programs to improve employers' perceptions of IWDs, as well improve employers' understanding of the hiring process for IWDs, the problem of hiring IWDs continues to be a problem that has not been addressed by educational or community stakeholders. In 2016, the unemployment rate for IWD was 10.5% and for non-disabled individuals the unemployment rate was 4.6% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). Specific criteria to facilitate

successful transition from school to work are: personal accommodations, community support, mental abilities, school personal, and mentor's support (Giarelli, Ruthenburg & Segal, 2013). According to the 2015-2016 Michigan State Performance Plan Data Special Education Reporting Indicator 14B (2018), the MSPSD did not meet the state target for IWDs graduating or competitively employed. In a national poll conducted by Kessler Foundation and National Organization on Disability [KF/NOD] (2015) found that employers hiring IWDs recognized the significance of hiring them although very few employed IWDs. The president of the National Organization on Disability president stated, "everyone has an opportunity to a full and equal chance to play a part in our normal process of seeking and finding employment" (personal communications, July 26, 2016). Furthermore, NOD reported that 21% of IWDs were being employable. Overall, job coaches and parents embrace the most positive attitudes and beliefs about integration with parents particularly affirmative about inclusion experiences in both the classroom and workplace (Bennet & Gallagher, 2013). This problem was evident in the MSPSD per the administrative program director disclosing that IWDs transitioning from high school are not being hired at an equitable rate as compared to non- disabled students (personal communication, June 9, 2016). Additionally, no local data is available about employers' perceptions to facilitate the understanding of to support both employers and students with a strong school system including PD in order to obtain and retain jobs in the community. This gap in practice warranted the need a research study in which the goal was to more deeply understand the needs of employers' perceptions in the local community related to hiring IWDs. A non-profit foundation (Upscale Foundation [UF]), and an educational

institution (MSPSD) partnered together to determine the effectiveness of employers ’perspectives of employability for IWDs. “This partnership is the only one of its kind in the MSPSD,” (personal communication, June 9, 2016). UF employs two teachers from MSPSD to facilitate training IWDs to be productive employees in the workplace. Unfortunately, the “UF leadership does not understand employers’ perceptions for effective future employment opportunities for these individuals,” (personal communication, June 9, 2016). This program was launched to understand employers’ perceptions of employability for IWDs in the Middle Stone community. The problem of hiring IWDs continues to be a problem that has not been addressed by educational or community stakeholders. The director of special education for this school district indicated, “290 students’ ages 16-26 are enrolled in the high school setting and are in critical need of employment” (personal communications, June 9, 2016). In addition, there are 80 local businesses in the Middle Stone community, 12 of which, have employed 40 individuals with disabilities, thereby supporting the need for research to obtain a deeper understanding of how to address this problem in our local community. Students who graduate from high school and are employable and should be transitioning to a part or full-time employment before they graduate (personal communication, June 9, 2016).

MSPSD currently has no school to work transitional employment program in place to understand and support employers’ perceptions that promote employers’ commitment to hire IWDs. This key component may need to become a priority for the stakeholders. First, let’s consider why IWDs are not hired as often as they could be hired in our community.

Why are IWDs not Hired in the Community?

To understand the problem that prompted this study, I will provide an overview of evidence of the problem in the local community, from businesses, school administrators, and educators as to why IWDs are perhaps not being hired based on data from community stakeholders and the literature. The implications are that IWDs need social skills training as part of their high school transition and vocational training programs extended from the school out to the community targeting employers where disability awareness training is recommended.

The apparent lack of employers' perceptions as it relates to employability of young IWDs warrants this study.

Kaye, Jans, Jones (2011) and Wehman, Sima, Ketchum, West, Chan, and Luecking (2015) suggested that employment among the disabled and employers' perceptions was due to social desirability biases. As the researcher, it appeared to me that employers wanted to have a positive response to the interview questions, therefore most indicated they would like to hire IWDs, but some had excuses or justifications for why they had been unable to hire IWDs in their work environment. The employer reported what they thought the interviewer wanted to hear instead of expressing their true attitudes, which might be socially unacceptable, and inconsistent with legal requirements. This became problematic as it reflected a veneer of business acceptance of employees with disabilities but seemingly still did not address the issue found This occurred due to a desire to maintain political correctness regardless of an employer's true intentions (Rosemond, 2018). However, Kaye, Jans, and Jones additionally reported a review of employer responsiveness, and adherence to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) and

these data suggested that many companies still do not understand the disability laws and continue to show resistance regarding the employability of IWDs transitioning from high school to the community. The apparent lack understanding of IWDs reported by employers related to employability of high school IWDs warranted the need for this study. The aim of this study was to explore and understand the problems associated with employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs transitioning from MSPSD to independence.

Research Question

I conducted this study to discover employers' perceptions of employability for IWDs transitioning from the MSPSD to the local community. The research question, which guided the study was:

> What are employers' perceptions of employability for individuals with disabilities as they transition from Middle Stone Public School District after age 26 from high school to the community?

Literature which Informs the Stakeholders about the Problem

Over the literature review, I associated employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs in the local community to evidence-based practices (EBP) from peer reviewed journal articles published within the last 5 years. Based on the research findings, the participants, who were employers in the community, discussed the need for more supported employment for IWDs in the form of additional job coach training, improved communication with school district personnel, and a deeper understanding of IWDs' capabilities to complete a job task varied among participants. This premise, showed a lack of: (a) best practices procedures, (b) IWDs based procedures, and (c) evidenced-

based procedures, which may contribute to the low employment opportunities for IWDs. Chang, Coster, and Helfrich (2013) discussed a need to involve IWDs in community activities, educational transition programs, and processes to increase employment opportunities. However, they have not determined what specific services, businesses, or educational systems need to do to provide and assist IWDs in reaching their employment and independence goals.

Components of Employment for IWDs

Employers' perceptions of IWDs need to be influenced in a positive manner to support greater opportunities for IWDs to be employed in the community. In addition to understanding the nature and needs of IWDs, support and PD is needed at the school system level during the vocational and transition process to provide vocational curriculum training and on-the-job training and supervision. In this study, participants were employers in the local community. I will explain in detail the criteria, selection process and how I accessed each participant in the following section.

Participants

Fifty employers in the MSPSD were identified through a 2016 business member directory; the randomly selected employers were sent an email invitation letter to participate (Appendix B). Although fifty employers were invited to participate in this study, only one employer voluntarily agreed. I cold called employers listed in the directory and 12 employers voluntarily agreed to participate out of the 15 invited. Creswell (2012) indicated that a few cases will be sufficient in a qualitative research

study; by receiving 12 volunteers this allowed me to collect in-depth and detailed data that was coded by each participant in their respective setting (Creswell, 2012).

The participants in this research study included employers in the local school district, however if other school districts were invited to participate, the research data may have been more in-depth and enriched as cross case comparisons could have been made allowing for the identification of relationships and themes to support the gap in practice and phenomenon being studied.

Criteria for Selecting participants.

Each case in the study was an employer in the MSPSD community in order to better understand employers' perceptions of employability of adults with disabilities in the MSPSD. The primary criteria for selecting participants involved being a business listed in the 2016-member directory, which listed all the local businesses in the MSPSD and an email address for businesses, and other pertinent information regarding address, and phone number. This business member directory was from the local Chamber of Commerce office in the local community and is updated annually. If all 15 employers from the local community agreed to participate, the research data may have been more representative of the employers' views by providing for deeper and richer data.

Access to Participants

To secure approval for research data collection within MSPD, I submitted an IRB application to the Walden IRB and received approval May 2, 2017. It was not necessary to submit a request to the MSPD administration because I used available public records information to access the potential participants. After the approval of my proposal and

associated documents by Walden University, I used the 2016 business member directory in the MSPSD listing all the businesses located in the local community to identify businesses that were listed in the business directory and could be communicated with via email. Both the invitation to participate and informed consent form explained the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, the voluntary nature of the study, the risks and benefits of being in the study, confidentiality of his or her participation, and contact information. Yin (2014) articulated this would avoid selecting business whose situation would not provide the rich data needed for an effective investigation. Additionally, Bernard, Wutich and Ryan (2016) and Onweugbuzi and Leech (2007) argued this process is recommended in qualitative studies to keep the sample size small, and to ensure robust data saturation. I emailed 50 participants by sending them my invitation letter to participate. After one week, I had received only one response from a participant indicating they would be interested in participating. Therefore, after waiting one week for responses from the initial email I then began cold calling the businesses from the directory that had received the initial invitation to participate via email the prior week. I called businesses randomly from the directory that had received the initial email to participate until I obtained verbal agreement from 12 participants who indicated their agreement to participate in the study.

I secured the notice of consent to participate from the 12 randomly selected businesses from the local directory via email. After obtaining their consent to participate in the study, I requested their permission by telephone to participate in a 30-minute personal interview for research purposes as indicated in the notice of consent. I arranged

a mutually agreed interview time and location for the interview. It was very important to respect and adhere to procedures that protect the rights of participants and institutions alike (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I meticulously followed the procedures indicated in my IRB application and reminded employers during the interview that they could withdraw at any point with no consequences or repercussions.

Research Design

To discuss the local problem, I directed a qualitative, instrumental case study to understand employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs transitioning from the MSPSD. The lack of data on employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs was the research problem that I explored in this study explored. A qualitative case study methodology was used for this research study, which is a naturalistic fieldwork that involves collecting data where the event of interest naturally occurs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore employers' perceptions regarding the employment of IWDs transitioning from the Middle Stone Public School District. By directing this study, I became aware of employers' perceptions for hiring IWDs, and how to identify potential considerations for PD that support the needs of employers' employability for IWDs in the local community.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Results

I collected data through semi structured individual interviews of 12 employers from the local community, which were conducted at the employer's businesses. The interview questions were related to employers' hiring IWDs, and how employers felt about IWDs as employees. The interview transcripts and literature review provided

thorough information from employers in the local community as well as employers' personal work settings. Upon completing my data analysis seven themes emerged throughout the interviews of employers which will be used to provide recommendations aimed at improving employment outcomes for IWDs. Employers' perceptions and understanding the phenomenon of the disability which examines behaviors, and interpersonal perceptions for each perspective IWDs employee (Ludtke, Robitzsche, Kenny & Traulwein, 2013).

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore employers' perceptions regarding the employment of IWDs transitioning from the Middle Stone Public School District. A total of four major themes were found throughout the data analysis process. Themes include: (a) Employers are willing to hire IWDs and make accommodations, (b) Employers are willing to hire IWDs with job coaches on the job site to support the IWDs, (c) Positive attitudes and social skills attributes encourage and support the hiring of more IWDs, and (d) Employers are willing hire IWDs under certain conditions.

Themes from the Findings

From the data collected during employer interviews, consistent themes emerged from gathered responses.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Employers are willing to hire IWDs and make accommodations	Employers are willing to hire IWDs with contingencies
Employers are willing to hire IWDs with job coach training	Employers will provide their own training for IWDs
Positive attitudes and social skills attributes to hiring more IWDs	IWDs should be afforded social justice, and opportunities for inclusive community experiences
Employers are willing to hire IWDs under certain conditions	

Findings indicated that employers need systems of support from the school district administrators including vocational staff and/or job coaches, curriculum to support IWDs development of job related skills, professional development (PD) about disabilities, job coach need PD, and regular reviews of work expectations for IWDs. Employers are willing to hire IWDs once they have a positive experience and all or most will make accommodations to support IWDs. Employers indicated that pre-workforce training would be ideal if it were systematized that it becomes a system that the school district personnel drive rather than being happenstance and relying on the good nature of the employers that are in the target city.

Employers at the local level who hire and do not hire IWDs reported they were uncertain about their personal ability levels. Employers want more support systems involving previously acquired of training IWDs on the specific job tasks. Employers also expressed the need for consistent and reliable assistance from JCs. In addition, employers

desired frequent communications between school staff, and JCs to increase employment opportunities and positive job experiences for IWDs. I will discuss the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data which provide support or recommendations to address the problem identified.

Theme 1: Employers are willing to hire IWDs and make accommodations. All 12 participants (100%) revealed that they were willing to make accommodations for IWDs to be successfully integrated into their workplace

The collected data revealed that employers possess no apprehension towards hiring IWDS and are willing to make accommodations for IWDs so long as it does not interfere with the success of the business. The positive experiences that the employers have had with IWDs has improved their overall opinion on hiring IWDs' in the future.

Minor Theme 1: Employers are willing to hire IWDs with contingencies. The participants' responses reflected the idea that hiring of IWDs within their facilities will only be possible under certain conditions. One of the most notable contingencies expressed was a necessity for JC training to better integrate IWD's by improving the understanding of an IWD's needs. Other contingencies relayed were the need for specialized support geared towards IWDs. Other individuals noted they needed IWDs to be able to better complete job tasks as well as more teaching from school employees, PD, and a deeper understanding of the disabilities of individuals for whom they hired.

Major Theme 2: Employers are willing to hire IWDs with JC training. Based on the gathered responses, it can be deducted that many participants felt that IWDs' retention on the job was only capable with the assistance of a JC. The participants

believed that JCs were imperative to better understand the needs of IWDs as well as to communicate the necessary job tasks to IWDs. Also, the participants reported that they were willing to integrate a JC into IWDs training for as long as necessary.

Minor Theme 2: Employers provide their own training for IWDs. From this evidence, it was concluded that these participants were both willing to adjust the necessary training requirements within their own workplace by modifying various training tactics to better suit the needs of IWDs without outside assistance. For instance, visual prompts, verbal assistance, hands on aid, and setting strong modeling examples were all strategies the employers indicated they made possible to strengthen the understanding of job requirements, performance and abilities of IWDs.

Major Theme 3: **Positive attitudes and social skills attributes to hiring more IWDs.** Several employers made it clear that IWD's positive outlook displayed improved employee attitudes toward IWDs in the workplace. The IWDs' attitudes about being respectful, using good work ethics, being committed to the job, demonstrating diligence in their work and were inclined to go beyond the assigned duties, improved the quality of the work environment as well as the social climate of the business.

Minor Theme 3: IWD's should be afforded Social Justice, and opportunities for inclusive community experiences. The topic that was uncovered by the participants was the need for social involvement to strengthen community and reinforce IWD's sense of belonging, which in turn makes a stronger and more dedicated worker. Some participants felt as a society they should support IWDs and include them in the mainstream. Also, IWDs should be made to feel integrated, as part of the team, and

culture. This type of social involvement directly correlates to the community understanding and respecting the social justice that IWDs deserves as independent people.

Major Theme 4: Employers are willing to hire IWDs under certain conditions. The data collected revealed that employers are only willing to include IWDs in the workplace if specific conditions related to the job assigned are being met. The participants described a need for better community and school system involvement as well as prior specialized training to avoid being responsible for additional teaching of IWDs.

Recommendations

The results from this study culminated in the creation of a project, which is a white paper or position paper designed in executive summary format, of best practices recommendations. Best practices include open communications between employers and school administrators, improved job training for employees, and consistent support from JCs for students and employers. I also recommend in the white paper that job placement is matched only with the skills that IWDs can successfully achieve, and whether the individual is able to complete the job task. Through the design and presentation of the white paper it is understood that the which paper, when presented to key stakeholders, can bring institutional awareness of the identified problem and recommendations to initiate change (Graham, 2010; Kemp, 2005; Mattern, 2013).

The purpose of this white paper is to inform stakeholders/administrators of the findings from this study, to strengthen existing vocational and transition components for

IWDs, and to make recommendations to district leaders to focus on strengthening learning systems, and bridging the gaps between the school and business community. By reinforcing and improving in the areas of support systems, communication, and PD, schools will be more adequately prepared to provide supported JC training, satisfactory job matching, better communications, and increased employment opportunities for IWDs. The nature of the white paper is to provide a format through, which I could share the results of findings, identify problems, make recommendation of best practices for employers, and school system leaders to increase employment for IWDs.

Other recommendations are essential for the school administration personnel to understand the long-term effect of graduation outcomes for IWDs. For example, proposing how critical it is to prepare IWDs when first entering high school for gainful employment working part/full time is a necessary implementation. It is recommended that school administrators invest in specific vocational exploration. For example, proactive curriculum, vocation skills, and PD workshops of work study and job placement opportunities for IWDs improve IWDs' ability to be hired. This can be accomplished by developing curriculums to support and train IWDs to stay on task, teaching IWDs to complete job assignments, and providing a personal profile assessment of IWDs related to their strengths and challenges in order to inform employers prior to employment (Roberts, Ju, & Zhang, 2016). Finally, I recommend the school administrators invest in transportation for IWDs to and from employment locations, provide professional development workshops to train teachers, JCs and vocational consultants on effective strategies for employment of IWDs. Alternatively, it is possible

that IWDs might be able to be provided training to use the public transportation system or other available systems in our community. The findings from the study of Wehman et al., (2015) identified three aspects of the transition process that are critical for success the first is employment training while attending school and second is implementation of work experiences in high school and the third is higher expectations from school teachers and parents are valuable components in predicting work outcome for IWDs. Parents with high expectations for their child provides them with more opportunities, support, and encouragement, and will likely cause them to function more independently in the community (Wehman, et al., 2015). Furthermore, their child is more likely to engage in various activities, which may increase normalizations, autonomy, expression, and creativity on the job and within their community (Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012). When working with IWDs, it is important that professionals working during the transition process, include the knowledge of teachers, support staff, and parents regarding their abilities and disabilities (Wehman et al., 2015). A study conducted by Gragoudas (2014) identified self-determination skills training as an integral component of the curriculum for transition-aged IWDs. This will enable them to be prepared to enter and succeed in the workplace. Self-determination skills training enables IWDs to be influential in their own lives and make positive choices that will shape their future. Self-determination is critical for IWDs to know themselves and what accommodations they may need by communicating their needs to the employer. The employee can insure a successful transition from school to work, which may otherwise be a costly mistake for employers to assume if they do not know the accommodations needed for IWDs (Gragoudas, 2014).

Employers must have a clear understanding of the abilities and limitations of IWDs to promotes success on the job.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Building relationships between employers and special education personnel can sometimes be challenging. One of the first recommendations as an alternative approach is to specifically work proactively with employers and their perceptions for hiring IWDs. The purpose of collecting data from employers would be to allow questions to reveal employer's concerns before and after hiring IWDs. Additionally, another alternative approach could be a study of how teachers provide instructional training to JCs to support IWDs to stay on task on the job, and to maintain rapport with clients and colleagues. This would be a critical study because there is a problem with JCs' having formal PD regarding evidence-based instructional practices (Brock, et al., 2016). This study included a small number of participants and may not be representative of all employers. Future studies might specify that researchers may use random sampling methods to obtain a sample that more closely mirrors generalization to the larger population.

A second recommendation is presented to help improve employer and special education personnel communications. This will also provide an understanding of how training criteria impacts successful employment for IWDs. A support system will be provided to monitor and assist with maintaining job placement and retention after hiring for IWDs. In future studies, researchers might include maintenance probes after all training is complete. Furthermore, it is unfair to ask JC to deliver services without

equipping them with evidence-based strategies. Recommended strategies might have contributed to promoting implementation of evidence-based instructional practices, improving the efficacy and accomplishment of JC resulting in encouraging improved outcomes for IWDs. The results of this research study have implications to enhance and support positive social change in the community. The findings from the research study could initiate collaboration between the local school district and employers hiring IWDs. Additionally, the research study identifies employers' needs from the school district, indicate steps needed to close the gap between the school district services, and perspective employers. The primary goals of special education teachers, JCs, vocational consultants, and school administrators is to effect positive social change for IWDs.

Professional Development

PD recommendations are designed to implement the research findings relative to job placement for IWDs. The contents of the white paper are a reduction of thoughts, recommendations, opinions, interviews, and comments. By breaking the information into smaller units in the white paper, educators can engage, deliberate, and scrutinize the information likely leading to stronger collaborations, and improved opportunity for employment for IWDs. This will likely result in positive social change within the community. Additionally, in the white paper I identify the main points, specify supporting details, describes its relevancy, and purpose of a discussion among stakeholders. The school district stakeholders may use the research findings, and recommendations as a model to better support the needs, goals of school district, and employers' apprehensions for hiring IWDs.

Project Developmental Impact on Social Change

A white paper was developed from the supported findings of this study. The results of this research study have implications to enhance and support positive social change in the community. The findings from the research study could initiate collaboration between the local school district and employers hiring IWDs. Additionally, the research study identifies employers' needs from the school district, indicate steps needed to close the gap between the school district services, and perspective employers. The primary goals of special education teachers, JCs, vocational consultants, and school administrators is to effect positive social change for IWDs.

Best Practices

The results from this study culminated in the creation of a project, which is a white paper or position paper designed in executive summary format, of best practices recommendations. Best practices include open communications between employers and school administrators, improved job training for employees, and consistent support from JCs for students and employers. I also recommend in the white paper that job placement is matched only with the skills that IWDs can successfully achieve, and whether the individual is able to complete the job task. The white paper was selected to bring institutional awareness of the identified problem and recommendations to initiate change (Graham, 2010; Kemp, 2005; Mattern, 2013). The findings from the study indicate employers had positive experiences working with IWDs; they were willing to make accommodations to support them, and would again hire other IWDs. Employers requested support systems to successfully manage IWDs, preferred vocational /JC

training, wanted more dialogue with school personnel, and greater understanding the strengths/ challenges IWDs' faced as well as professional development on the specific nature, and characteristics of disabilities of individuals who were hired to complete a job task. The purpose of this white paper is to recommend stakeholders/administrators of the findings from this study, to strengthen existing components district leaders have for IWDs, and to make recommendations to district leaders to focus on strengthening learning systems and bridge the existing gap between the school and business community. By reinforcing and improving in the areas of support systems, communications, and training, schools will be more adequately prepared to provide supported JC training, satisfactory job matching, better communications, and increased employment opportunities for IWDs. The nature of the white paper is to provide a format through, which I could share the results of findings, identify problems, make recommendation of best practices for employers, and school systems to increase employment for IWDs**.**

Best Practices for Providing a Support System to Employers and Employees with Disabilities

Essential elements of work force preparation for individuals with disabilities are the same for those of their nondisabled peers. However, IWDs workers may require more extensive and individualized support from school personnel and parents as well. On the other hand, employers of workers with disabilities will also require a level of support from the transitioning school (Novak, 2015). JCs are an integral part of forming and implementing student's vocational goals and success. They provide the necessary support

to employers because they have been actively involved with the newly hired worker in the classroom setting, they were present at the individualized educational plan meeting, involved in all assessments and interest inventories. The role of the JC is to guide and direct students with disabilities against unrealistic career expectations, but toward more realistic employment goals (Krieger, Best, & Edelman, 2015). They should also be aware of each student's abilities and disabilities. To summarize, the role of the JC is recognized as an integral support system for both employers and employed IWDs (Brock & Carter, 2013).

Role of JC as a Support System to Employers

The role of a JC is important because of their ability to respond to the wide range of needs of IWDs. This integral support system helps both employee and employer on a regular basis (Department of Health and Valuing People Now, 2011). Therefore, there is currently a National Occupational Standard for JCs in the United Kingdom. The success to supported employment involves equal emphasis on employers as consumers of services while including IWDs. JC duties that emerged from this study were:

1. Provide a leadership role and liaison role between the transitioning school, the employer and the newly hired IWDs.
2. Present to the employer the worker's "Personal Profile" page which provides vital, personal information to employers relative to the worker's background, strengths, limitations, and special accommodations on the job. (a sample copy of the personal profile page is included in the appendix).

3. Provide aid to employers with the initial orientation for employers with disabilities. During orientation, the JC will discuss best methods of training and teaching IWDs will provide direct assistance by explaining, demonstrating, and modeling the job task.
4. Provide support by being available to employers for addressing all complaints, disagreements, and concerns regarding job performance issues of the employee with disabilities.

The JC will assist employers with problems involving daily attendance and arriving on time for work. Also, there will be assistance available to employees with completing the assigned job assignment to the employer's satisfaction. The JC will build a reliable, trusting, supporting relationship with employers by being available to employers for support and assistance daily or whenever necessary (Ellenkamp, Brouwers, Embregts, Joosen, & van Weeghel, 2016). Additionally, JC will assist employers with setting an approximate pay scale, pay schedules, and raises for IWDs. This work will allow JCs to work closely to bridge the gap between employers and employees with disabilities, in efforts to attain continued success and survival in the work place. Lastly, JCs will meet with employers to rate, assess, evaluate, and make recommendations to improve the job performance of IWDs.

The Role of the JC as Support System to IWDs on the Job

The role of JC is to become an advocate and vital support for employees with disabilities. They are always available to employee as a mentor, exhibiting a trusting, reliable supporting relationship. JC is integral in reinforcing work skills, behaviors

necessary for obtaining, and maintaining successful job performance. JCs will be available to assist with job orientation and the initial adjustment process on the job. Additionally, the JC will work to assure that the worker has no problems with daily attendance, being on time, being able to use the time clock to check in, and out of the work place (Ellenkamp et al., 2016). JC reinforces appropriate conduct and behavior on the job. Furthermore, the JC reminds the worker of the importance of proper work attire and neatness on the job. The JC works closely with the employee to assure that his assigned job task is completed with confidence, efficiency and success (Gentry, Kriner, Sima, McDonough, & Wehman, 2015). If there are complaints regarding performance in the work place, the JC will act as counselor for the employee, to address complaints, resolve the issue in a positive manner to prevent damage to his/her self-esteem or sense of worth. The JC will provide support and assist employees with getting along with supervisors and coworkers. The role of the JC is to reinforce and emphasize to the worker, the importance of obtaining and maintaining employment. The JC must heighten enthusiasm and embrace the concept of having pride and commitment to his/her job assignment. In addition, the JC will emphasize that work is a necessary source of our livelihood, accomplishments, and overall satisfaction of being an employed, contributing member of the community. It is of vital importance that the JC provide the employers with an introduction to the new employee. In addition, to providing vital personal information this document also provides information regarding the applications capabilities and limitation.

JC and Research Based Strategies

Researchers have indicated supported employment has enabled IWDs to be successful in competitive employment (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013; Wehman et al., 2014) The data findings revealed that 100% of the employers were devoted to hiring IWDs, but some needed additional systems of support. This support should be provided through school administration, vocational consulting, and consistent JC support. According to the literature, evidence-based practices were effective for IWDs (Graham et al., 2015). Additionally, Wehman et al. (2014) identified initial job site training as paramount in which a JC implements behavioral strategies, analyzes, and assesses job performance, teaches new current job skills while giving consistent support to eventually build independence for IWDs. According to the literature, JCs cultivate natural support by using natural cues, to accomplish a job task and creating positive relationships and partnerships with coworkers (Wehman et al., 2016). Initial job site training is considered essential for JCs to provide the optimal support needed for skill achievement and independence (Wehman et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, many JCs are not well prepared to use evidence-based approaches for training IWDs for specific job tasks (Hall, Bose, Winsor, & Migliore, 2014; Migliore, Hall, Butterworth, & Winsor, 2010). Wong et al. (2015) indicated that six JCs were selected to participate in a study from a large Midwest university to test the efficacy of a training package that could potentially train JCs on strategies to teach vocational skills to IWDs. The training package developed from this study was designed for JCs to focus on three training methods that implement systematic instructional

practices to train IWDs on employment skills. According to Wong et al. (2015) task analysis, simultaneous prompting, and lease to most prompting are the three systematic instructional practices implemented for IWDs. Task analysis involves dividing the behavior into individual steps to assess and teach the skill. Simultaneous prompting involves sending a controlled prompt. Least to most prompting ensure correct responding directly after the target stimulus (Gibson & Schuster, 1992). In addition, Alberto and Schofield (1979) referred to the system of least prompts as a hierarchy of prompts and levels sequenced from least intrusive to most intrusive. These instructional strategies were selected because each strategy involved a strong research base for teaching a variety of skills including vocational skills (Maciag, Schuster, Collins, & Cooper, 2001; Parsons et al., 2001; Test et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2015. Each component was versatile and could be useful to any vocational task with isolated steps. Together these strategies would allow JCs to evaluate vocational skills and identify target behaviors, lessen errors during preliminary teaching, and systematically decrease prompts for IWDs (Wong et al., 2015). This emphasis the importance of research based strategies for JCs working with IWDs.

Vocational teachers to Implement Research-Based Training Practices

One of the factors identified in the data findings in Section 2 was that employers want more job training skills and support provided to them by local school district when hiring IWDs. Vocational teachers have become an integral component of special education services, many teachers lack training in research-based instructional strategies (Brock & Carter, 2013.) A study involving vocational teachers indicated they desire

additional training this includes specific instructional strategies for IWDs (Breton, 2010; Carter et al., 2009). Therefore, it is imperative that vocational teachers implement research-based instructional strategies within the curriculum for IWDs.

Transition and Vocational Programs

Other recommendations are essential for the school administration personnel) to understand the long-term effect of graduation outcomes for IWDs. For example, proposing how critical it is to prepare IWDs when first entering high school for gainful employment working part/full time is a must. It is recommended that school administrators invest in specific vocational exploration. For example, proactive curriculum, vocation skills, and PD workshops of work study and job placement opportunities for IWDs. This can be accomplished by developing curriculums to support and train IWDs to stay on task, teaching IWDs to complete job assignments, and providing a personal profile assessment of IWDs of what they can and cannot do to employers (Roberts, Ju, & Zhang, 2016). Finally, I recommend the school administrators invest in transportation for IWDs to and from employment locations, provide professional development workshops to train teachers, JCs and vocational consultants on effective strategies for employment of IWDs.

The findings from the study of Wehman et al. (2015) identified the following concepts of successful transition from school to work process: employment while attending high school, the implementation of work experience in high school, and higher expectations from teachers and parents. Parents with high expectations for their child provides them with more opportunities, support, and encouragement, this will likely

cause them to function more independently in the community (Wehmen, et al., 2015). Furthermore, their child is more likely to engage in various activities, which may increase normalizations, autonomy, expression, and creativity on the job and within their community (Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012).. The employee can insure a successful transition from school to work, which may otherwise be a costly mistake for employers to assume if they do not know the accommodations needed for IWDs (Gragoudas, 2014). Therefore, an implementation of a sound comprehensive vocational curriculum is important to preparation of employment for IWDs.

Vocational Exploration

The goal of vocational exploration is to assist learners with finding work that they enjoy and perform successfully. During vocational exploration, IWDs are provided an opportunity to gain insight and become familiar with various occupations and their requirements. Students will also become exposed to various skills, responsibilities, and work place settings (Lindsay, McDougall, Sanford, Menna-Dack, Kingsnorth, & Adams, 2015). More importantly, students will be administered assessments that measure their interest, abilities, and work habits in a contrived (mock) work environment. Examples of vocational exploration assessments are: The Self-Directed Search (SDS) and the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) (Neukrug, Peterson, Bonner, & Lomas, 2013).

Vocational Assessment and Planning

A successful school to work transition program should include a variety of school personnel and parents during the vocation assessment process. An effective vocational assessment includes members of the staff and parents, working together in efforts identify

relevant transitional needs and strengths of each student (O'Neill, Albin, Storey, Horner, & Sprague, 2015). The need for vocational assessments is to facilitate instructional and vocational planning that allows students with disabilities to make successful job placement and adjustment to work independently in the community. The skills assessed in a comprehensive vocational assessment should include the following components: reading and math skills, selfcare/personal, social skills, and vocational readiness (Nicholas, Zwaigenbaum, & Clarke, 2015). The outcomes of the vocational assessment will reflect the student's capability to make a successful transition from school to the work environment. The result of this evaluation can also be used to help determine realistic employment and independent living goals for each student. Without a comprehensive assessment, reflecting the student's strengths and needs, it will be difficult for school personnel to effectively identify vocational strengths and deficits that should be addressed in the student's transitional plan. Examples of vocational assessments implemented with IWDs students are: The Career Key, Vocational Aptitude Assessment Tools and The Occupational Aptitude Survey (Arulmani, 2014).

Supported Employment

The model of supported employment for IWDs is designed to secure and maintain employment. This information is explained in the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE 2017) publications. The supportive employment model implements a partnership strategy in efforts to enable IWDs to achieve long-term employment. This model will also enable employers to hire desirable/valued workers. The low rates of employment among IWDs may indicate that adequate support of the appropriate type has

not been provided to make a difference in the national figures according to the research study findings of Beyer and Beyer (2017). BASE, has demonstrated considerable insight regarding the appropriate model of support for IWDs on the job. Researchers reflected that the supported employment model has been most effective for IWDs. The European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE, 2010) provided a five-stage model for supported employment of IWDs in the workplace: engagement, vocational profiling, job finding, employer engagement, and on/off job support (EUSE, 2010). Supported employment was developed in the United States and legislated in 1984. Beyer and Robinson (2009) reported evidence of positive outcome for supported employment that was researched throughout the 1990s and 2000s. This document was designed for IWDs, and has been very successful in helping them and many other groups obtain employment (Reindal et al., 2007). This is an implication that supported employment has been successful and is needed throughout the country.

Based on employer's responses and the literature review regarding employment of IWDs transitioning from MSPSD, I offered recommendations to school district administrators regarding research study findings of PD needs of employers in the local community for hiring IWDs (Graham, 2010; Kemp, 2005; Mattern, 2013). Additional, I have recommended further vocational curriculum development that should begin when students enter high school to graduation. Finally, I recommend that implementation of PD based on research study finding occur regularly and frequently to maximize employment opportunities for IWDs.

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study is to explore employers' perceptions regarding the employment of IWDs transitioning from the Middle Stone Public School District. I have gained insight into employers' perceptions on employment of IWDs at the local job sites. The participant interviews provided me with information from employers expressing their needs for hiring and maintaining IWDs. This white paper involves a detailed explanation of these employers' recommendations to meet these needs as expressed by them. This social relational model of a disability study was guided by (Ludtke et al., 2013; Nestler, 2016; Reindal, 2008). The basis of this study was to provide an understanding of employers' perceptions of employability for IWDs as they transition from the local school system to independent living.

In summary, the following concerns and requirements associated with employment of IWDs were identified in my case study research findings: employers are willing to hire IWDs if they can complete a job assignment, employers requested the need for consistent support systems, increased communications and support from the local school district stakeholders, and more job training at the local school level for JCs and other vocational staff. In addition, more PD in services to improve their understanding of IWDs as they seek to hire them in the workplace. Employers' lack of understanding ADA laws and mandates for hiring IWDs continue to be an issue. More concerns are employer expectations, lack of respect, isolation [from co-workers], decreases in job responsibilities, and promotional potential for IWDs.

In response to data findings, I am recommending PD delivered within a unified and clear framework. This will ultimately encourage partnership, discussion, job training, and more understanding of the unique characteristics of this population. My recommendations serve close the gap in practice, present the research study findings, and the need for improvement as an outcome of this project (Graham, 2010; Kemp, 2005; Mattern, 2013). After data collection and analysis, I have created a white paper designed to address the problems by including specific recommendations to the school system, community, and stakeholders. This research study findings may be used to promote positive social changes within the community. The outcome of this study may result in additional research regarding the social and community impact of employers hiring IWDs. Finally, other school districts may distribute my research finding and recommendations as a model to determine more effective methods and strategies for employing IWDs. My research information will also be useful for employers' who are seeking to hire IWDs. The effectiveness of this project is to bring about significant changes that relies solely on the school administrators and appropriate stakeholders for employment of IWDs (Graham, 2010; Kemp, 2005; Mattern, 2013). In summary, it takes the support of the local school system, community support, parents, and employers of local businesses to initiate a change for hiring and retaining employment of IWDs.

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