The Profession of Transition Specialization: In Search of an Identity

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Submitted to Plymouth State University College of Graduate Studies

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF
Dawn E. Breault
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Abstract approved:

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Gail F. Mears, Psy.D., Dissertation Committee Chair

Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological dissertation examined the overall profession of transition specialization; in particular the perceptions of transition specialists regarding the sufficiency of their professional preparation and development. Fifteen transition specialists from the six states participated via semi-structured interviews. Major themes identified were: lack of exposure to transition competencies and skills needed during college preparation, reliance on knowledge and skills acquired in previous positions, lack of professional identity and fellowship, and variability in defining post-school success of the students served. Additionally, a transdisciplinary approach between special education, rehabilitation and counseling is highlighted, forming what this researcher refers to as the transition triad. This research also points to the idea that transition specialization is a phantom profession; the work exists, but the profession itself lacks identity, and the role is elusive. Implications for practice, training and policy makers are offered in addition to ideas for future research.

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of

Plymouth State University, Lamson Learning Commons. My signature below authorizes

release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Dawn E. Breault, Author

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My mother was my first and most enthusiastic source of encouragement. She knew that I had what it takes to tackle college even when I didn't. My father instilled in me a drive to better myself academically, and my brother set the bar high and served as a great role model when he completed his juris doctorate.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Legislative mandates regarding students with disabilities transitioning out of

secondary school and the services they are entitled to have been in place since 1990.

Those mandates make it clear that school systems need to prepare students for post

school activities including, but not limited to, employment and post-secondary education

(United States Department of Education, 2007). Although these mandates have been in

place for 25 years, recent data shows that youth with disabilities are in fact under-

employed when compared to their non-disabled peers.

In the 20-24 age bracket in August of 2014 the employment rate of those without a

disability was 65% and those with a disability was 31.6% (Office of Disability

Employment Policy, 2014). In addition, people with disabilities that are employed are

often overrepresented in service, transportation and production jobs (United States

Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2014). Given how long the

mandates have been in place and how specific they are, it is troublesome that the student

outcomes are so poor when compared to their non-disabled peers.

The transition services mentioned above are often performed by school staff

known as transition specialists. The Division on Career Development and Transition

(2000) defined the term transition specialist as "an individual, who plans, coordinates,

delivers, and evaluates transition education and services at the school or system level, in

conjunction with other educators, families, students, and representatives of community

organizations" (para. 2). Different parts of the country may use different terms to

describe the position, however for the sake of clarity transition specialist will be the term

used for this study.

Statement of the Problem

Some argue that transition specialists lack the skills and competencies needed to prepare students with disabilities for life beyond high school. Additionally, when exiting their pre-service educational programs they are not equipped with the skills needed and most obtain their training on the job (Anderson et al., 2003; Morningstar & Liss 2008; Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009; Kohler & Greene, 2004).

Not only does research support that pre-service education for transition specialists is poor, but once employed, in-service opportunities for professional development are disjointed and haphazard. In particular; Morningstar & Benitz (as cited in Morningstar & Liss 2008) state that the "present state of professional development specific to transition is illustrated by a lack of clear policies, as well as limited systems planning for delivering and evaluating professional development" (p. 52). The research shows that qualified transition specialists are a significant factor in improving the outcomes of students with disabilities (Blalock et al., 2003, Kohler & Greene, 2004). Given these findings, the lack of consistent identified pathways to educate transition specialists and the disjointed access to professional development is troubling.

Despite the information above regarding the lack of training for the field, many advances have been made in the relatively young field of secondary transition to enhance our understanding of post-secondary success predictors for students with disabilities. For example, Test et al. (2009) conducted a comprehensive literature review and found 16 evidence-based-in-school predictors of improved post school outcomes. Rowe et al. (2015) complemented the aforementioned study by conducting a Delphi study that operationalized the 16 predictors through expert consensus and defined the predictors to help make them universally understood by the field. The empirical evidence mentioned above is an excellent resource for practitioners and those teaching the practitioners.

Although research identifies practices such as those previously mentioned to support post high school success for students with disabilities, there continues to be concern regarding the quality and rigor of the pre-service and professional development training that transition specialists receive. Currently there is little or no incentive for pre-service special educators to specialize in transition services. Mazzotti, Test & Mustain (2014) assert that states need to develop credentialing avenues such as licensing, certification and or endorsements for transition specialists. Until states make some changes, conditions in the field will remain fragile with sites "dependent on one or two experts who, when they leave, take their expertise with them, often requiring state or local programs to start over" (p. 16).

In addition, the profession of transition specialization, itself, is struggling with an identity. Asselin, Todd-Allen & deFur (1998) found 21 different titles for transition specialists; their findings highlight a lack of professional identity in the field of transition services.

The concern regarding the quality and rigor of transition specialist's pre-service education and in-service professional development was the impetus for this research project as well as a concern regarding the profession itself. The concern for the profession itself surrounds the lack of professional identity of the transition specialist. These concerns fuel this researcher's desire to further understand the perceptions of transition specialists who serve students with disabilities specific to the adequacy of their professional preparation and development and their sense of professional identity.

Significance of the Study

Several quantitative research studies exist that indicate most transition professionals are not properly trained upon starting a career in the field (Wolfe et al 1998; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). In particular, Morningstar & Benitez (2013) surveyed 557 middle and high school teachers regarding their experiences with professional

development and found that pre-service and professional development training matter. Significant correlations were made between those who were exposed to courses and training and their implementation of transition practices. For example, those with formal pre-service and in-service training in transition were more likely to implement transition practices.

In a more recent quantitative study by Mazotti and Plotner (2016) found that when 592 transition service providers were surveyed regarding their training, access, preparation and knowledge of evidence based best practices in secondary transition their access was limited. The survey used was a Likert type rating scale; 61% of the respondents reported they seldom or never received professional development related to evidence-based practices. Specifically mentioned was training around making decisions by utilizing data to determine the effectiveness of evidence based best practices for improved student outcomes.

One qualitative study was found that aligns itself with this research project. Four transition specialists from the northeast region of the US considered to be pioneers or first ever in their positions were interviewed using a narrative approach for a doctoral dissertation. The research suggested that meaningful professional development and pre-service training is needed in the field of secondary transition, specifically provided by seasoned transition professionals (Holeman, 2014).

This research project extended the findings above by using a larger sample of participants from a broader geographic region and they were not pioneers. Using a larger sample and increasing the geographic region expands the ability to generalize the results. This study will also include deeper exploration regarding the perceptions of the participant's pre-service and professional development; as well as an overall exploration of the profession of transition specialization.

Despite extensive searches and consultation with a highly citied national expert in the field (D. W. Test, personal communication, December 10, 2014) no studies were found that were qualitative in nature and explored the perceptions of transition specialists specific to professional preparation and development; leading to a gap in knowledge. The data collected in this qualitative study will allow the voices of those in the field to be formally documented.

The following statement was received from Dr. David Test a highly cited national expert in secondary transition. Based on a conversation describing the research project, he expressed that this study has merit and the *potential* to benefit the field (D. W. Test, personal communication, December 10, 2014). In addition, researchers have suggested that data obtained through transition research has direct implications concerning the content and process at the pre-service and in-service level (Blalock et al., 2003).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was twofold. The overarching phenomenon explored was the profession of transition specialization. The second purpose was to explore the perceptions of transition specialists who serve high school students with disabilities in order to understand their insights regarding the sufficiency of their professional preparation and development. Data collection occurred via in-depth semi-structured interviews. The participants were from six states in the northeast section of the United States and the sample size will be between 10 and 15. The inclusion criterion for this study consists of those working full time at the high school or district level in a transition role, serving students with disabilities in planning for life after high school.

Primary Research Questions

The questions below served as the guideposts for this study. Through in-depth interviews with transition specialists the answers to the following questions will be sought:

- What are the perceptions of transition specialists regarding their pre-service professional preparation as related to sufficient preparation to provide effective services to students with disabilities?

- What are the perceptions of in-service transition specialists regarding their access to professional development that supports effective services to students with disabilities?

- How do transition specialists evaluate the effectiveness of the transition services they provide?

Research Design

A phenomenological research approach was selected for the study. Groenewald (2004) regarding phenomenology stated that "the aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts" (p. 5).

When a researcher engages in a phenomenological study, the intent is to try to make meaning out of the lived experiences of several participants by uncovering the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). For example, by observing an occurrence or circumstance such as perceptions of transition specialists, meaning can potentially be made from the data collected. Similarly, Leedy and Ormrod (2005) state that the purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand people's perceptions, points of view, and the meanings they give to specific experiences.

Descriptive information was sought for this study; as a result, data collection took place using semi-structured interviews. The participants were from six states and data was collected through formal face to face interviews, SKYPE and the telephone.

This study explored the perceptions of transition specialists who serve students with disabilities at the high school level specifically in regards to professional preparation and development.

Limitations

Takacs (2003) discusses the connections between personal position and epistemology. He states that "knowledge gets constructed by interactions between the questioner and the world" (p. 31) and that "only by listening to others can one become aware of the conceptual shackles imposed by one's own identity and experiences" (p. 29). Additionally, as Creswell (2013) explains the researcher should comment on past experiences, biases, prejudices and orientations that have the potential to shape the interpretation and approach of the study.

This researcher has worked in the field of transition for over 20 years and holds certifications as a New Hampshire School Counselor and a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. These 20 years include time as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor specifically working with young adults with disabilities as well as several years working for nonprofits that serve students with disabilities. As a result of this work experience some assumptions and prejudices have developed regarding the lack of quality pre-service training, on the job training and limited access to pertinent in-service training. As a result, this researcher has been particularly interested in the pre-service education of those serving in transition roles.

Another limitation is that only six states are represented in this study. It is possible the perception of those from other states would have yielded better/more information.

The final data that was collected depended on what the participants offered during the interview process. Therefore, it was important that the selection of the participants was completed in a scholarly way that is transparent and makes the most sense for the study. The participants for this study were located through chain or snowball sampling. Snowball or chain sampling assists the researcher in finding those participants that are difficult to locate and who fit the criteria the researcher is after (Creswell, 2013). With

this process it is possible that not all potential candidates that match the criteria will be solicited, therefore it could be considered a limitation.

Summary

Mandates making school systems responsible for preparing students with disabilities for post school activities, including but not limited to employment and post-secondary education have been in place for 25 years (United States Department of Education, 2007). This study documented the perceptions of transition specialists serving students with disabilities. Specifically, their perceptions related to the sufficiency of their professional preparation and development. Exploring how those who are employed to carry out the mandates above may shed light on possible themes, patterns and trends that in turn could be used to make a positive impact on the field.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter reviews federal law relevant to secondary transition; and transition competencies; a pattern of increasing transition requirements with each new authorization will emerge. Several research studies regarding how well prepared or how ill prepared transition specialists feel on the job are also reviewed.

A review of the literature specific to transition requirements under IDEA, identifies the competencies as well as professional preparation and development; a rationale will occur for the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of transition specialists regarding the process of their professional preparation?

2. What are the perceptions of transition specialists regarding their professional development?

3. How do transition specialists evaluate the effectiveness of the transition assistance they provide?

Keywords used in this literature review are transition, pre-service, competency, training, transition specialist and professional development.

History of Transition Legislation

Prior to the federal government mandating education for all, children with disabilities were denied access to education (United States Department of Education, 2007). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, PL 94-142 was groundbreaking legislation that afforded all children the right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. In addition, PL 94-142 afforded children the right to an individualized education program (IEP) that addressed their own unique needs given their disability (Neubert, 2006).

Progression of Transition Legislation

According to Morningstar, Bassett, Kochhar-Bryant, Cashman and Wehmeyer (2005), federally funded transition grants fall under the umbrella of special education. Therefore, this review of transition legislation is specific to special education law.

The first directive regarding secondary transition appeared in the 1983 Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments. The amendments included language asking for the development, operation, dissemination and adaption of programs that served students with disabilities upon exiting the public school system. Through competitive grants, state education agencies institutions of higher education, colleges, vocational centers and nonprofit educational agencies were invited to apply. The amendments did not require any specific action from school systems regarding secondary transition (Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments, 1983). As illustrated in the next section, specific mandates were not included until 1990.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1990. In 1990 the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 P.L. 94-142 was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 PL 101-476. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) included specific language surrounding transition requirements. For the first time in history, legislation required special educators to include a statement of needed transition services in students Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) by the age of 16 (Prince, Katsiyannis, and Farmer, 2013 & Neubert, 2006).

The reauthorization also provided guidance on what transition services entailed. Neubert explained (as cited in Department of Education, 1992, 44804-44815) that the concept of postsecondary options broadened to include several options. She further clarified that transition services included the following:

A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome

orientated process that promotes movement from school to post school activities,

including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment

(including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services,

independent living or community preparation. (Department of Education, 1992, p.

44804)

Neubert also explained (as cited in Department of Education, 1992, 44804-44815) that

the reauthorization included language that students needed to be involved in the transition

planning process and that in order to create transition goals, assessment data needed to be

utilized:

The coordinated set of activities must be based on the individual student's needs,

taking into account the students preferences and interests; and include instruction,

community experiences, the development of employment and other post –school

adult living objectives; and acquisition of daily living skills and functional

vocational evaluation if appropriate (Department of Education, 1992, p. 44804).

Lastly, Neubert explained (as cited in Department of Education, 1992, 44804-

44815) that the reauthorization included language that transition planning and services

should happen with a team of individuals. In addition, interagency planning was to be

initiated by the special educators. This was the first time special educators were required

by law to tap into resources such as Vocational Rehabilitation or State Developmental

Services for students outside of the school building.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1997. IDEA was reauthorized again in 1997 and continued to include transition language. In particular, mandating that transition planning should begin at the age of 14; a noteworthy change from the previous requirement of age 16. The Individuals with Disabilities Act Amendments of 1997, PL 105-17 also mandated the need to incorporate a statement regarding the student's course of study and transition services needed including outside agencies. PL 105-17 stated:

> Beginning at age 14, and updated annually, a statement of the transition service needs of the child under applicable components of the child's IEP that focuses on the child's course of study (such as participation in advance placement courses or a vocational education program). (IDEA 1997, p.84).

This language required special educators, students and the teams that support them to be more vigilant when planning the course of study. If a student wants to attend college or is on a non-standard diploma track, the course of study needs to be carefully thought out and documented. Prior to this directive, student's post-secondary goals did not have to match their course of study. (Neubert, 2006).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004. With this reauthorization came an opportunity to improve the way transition services are provided to students. The reauthorization continued to emphasize the importance of transition services and access to general education. In addition, the language was written to align with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 by adding the definition of highly qualified special education teachers (Neubert, 2006).

The law requires teams to take into account a student's strengths as well as preferences and interests when constructing the IEP. Strengths in particular had not been addressed previously. Building a plan around a student's strengths forces the team to look at what the student can do (O'Leary, 2006). Other additions included changes to the content of the IEP. There must be measurable post-secondary goals based on age

appropriate transition assessment. This addition was significant in that it directly targeted the quality of the plan being written (O'Leary, 2006).

Kochhar-Bryant (2009) pointed out a subtle change in the wording of the reauthorization. Educators were to be held accountable for producing results for students under the 2004 reauthorization. She explains that the definition of transition changed from an "outcome orientated process, which promotes movement from school to post school activities to a results-orientated process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child to facilitate the child's movement from school to post school activities" (p. 125).

With the 2004 reauthorization the age at which transition services need to be considered changed. The language from the reauthorization states:

> Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16, and updated annually thereafter –
>
> > (a) Appropriate measurable post-secondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessment related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills;
> >
> > (b) The transition services (including course of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals; and
> >
> > (c) Beginning not later than one year before the child reaches the age of majority under State law, a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under the title, if any, that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority under sections 615(m). (IDEA, Part B, Sec. 614, H.R. 1350).

Since the age for starting transition planning increased to 16, it was left up to states to keep it at 14 if they desired (Prince, Katsiyannis, & Farmer, 2013 Neubert, 2006).

Once IDEA 2004 was passed, it included a mandate that states report annually on several special education indicators, including transition. Indicators 13 and 14 have specific language around secondary transition. This mandate put accountability front and center. In order to assist states, The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) developed the Indicator 13 checklist. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) reviewed the checklist and suggested states use it as a tool to assist with reporting out on progress related to the indicator (Erickson, Noonan, Brussow & Giplin 2014). The two indicators are listed below:

Indicator 13. Indicator 13 requires states to report the following set of information.

Department of Education (2014) defined Indicator 13 as the percent of youth with IEPs aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annually updated and based upon an age appropriate transition assessment, transition services, including courses of study, that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals related to the student's transition service needs. There also must be evidence that the student was invited to the IEP team meeting where transition services are to be discussed and evidence that a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority. (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B)) (p. 1).

Indicator 14. Indicator 14 requires states to report on the following information specific to the post school outcomes of students. Department of Education (2014) defined Indicator 14 as the percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school and were:

- Enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school.

- Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school.

- Enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school. (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B)) (p. 1).

Over the last 30 years, transition mandates under IDEA have been written in a way that shows an increased level of accountability as well as the specific actions required of educators providing transition services. IDEA 2004 in particular has specific language around accountability and results. Such a directive leads to questions regarding what the next reauthorization may look like specific to accountability surrounding post school outcomes for the students.

Transition Competencies Overview

Early work in the area of identification of transition competencies started in the late 70's. In the 1980's research emerged regarding the critical competencies needed for those who are providing transition services (Bull, Montgomery & Beard 1994).

In 1987 the Division of Personnel Preparation of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) funded thirteen programs to help train those in transition roles (Baker & Geiger 1988). Those thirteen programs helped to identify over seven hundred transition competencies. Categorization of the competencies was completed using content analysis. From the content analysis, Baker & Griger (1988) came up with fourteen domains and thirty-nine cluster areas. This study served as a springboard for future studies related to transition competencies. See table 1 for the domains developed through content analysis by Baker & Griger (1988).

Table 1

Competency Domains for the 13 OSERS Funded Projects.

Domain	Domain Title
1	Philosophical and Historical Considerations
2	General Transitional Concerns
3	Professionalism
4	Advocacy
5	Knowledge of Agencies
6	Knowledge of Systems Change
7	Legal Aspects
8	Working with Others
9	Development and Management if Individual Plans
10	Planning and Organizing Instruction
11	Assessment, Delivery and Evaluation of Instruction for Community Living
12	Assessment, Delivery and Evaluation of Job Training
13	Administrative Functions
14	Research

Note. Source: deFur & Taymmans (1995)

Baker & Griger's content analysis has helped to inform the field regarding the skill set individuals providing transition services should have as well as what institutions of higher education should be teaching those entering the field. Subsequent analyses that have been completed since Baker & Grieger's content analysis include national surveys, regional surveys, curriculum development, content analysis, multiple state surveys, dissertations and most recently a comprehensive synthesis of the literature specific to transition competencies (Plotner, 2009).

Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, Hoffman and Kupferman (2014) completed the synthesis of the literature in order to identify competencies for the surveys. They developed two surveys: one for practitioners from five states and the other for national transition experts. There were 52 experts that responded and 231 for practitioners. The respondents surveyed were asked to rate the importance of transition teacher competences. Similarities were substantial between both groups. The synthesis of literature generated a list of 67 competencies. The synthesis and surveys were completed in an attempt to reduce multiple reiterations and provide more simplicity regarding

transition competencies (Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, Hoffman & Kupferman 2014).

In order to assist the field in framing transition competencies, Kohler (1996) developed the *Taxonomy for Transition Programming*. The taxonomy gave the field the ability to plan, organize and evaluate over-arching transition competencies. Kohler and Field (2003) asserted that "the practices represented and described in the taxonomy represent concrete strategies that operationalize the transition perspective and represent a consumer-oriented paradigm built on student and family involvement and students' self-determination" (p. 176). The taxonomy assisted the field by providing a concrete framework for transition.

In 2016 Kohler's taxonomy was updated, and is now referred to as Taxonomy 2.0. The updated version includes information regarding predictors of post-school success and specific strategies are offered to help those supporting students in their transition to post-secondary settings Kohler, Gothberg, Fowler and Coyle (2016).

Kohler's taxonomy has five domains; student focused planning, student development, collaborative service delivery, program structure and family involvement. The student-focused planning domain includes the development of goals for a student using appropriate assessment tools, the engagement of that student in their goal development and evaluation of said goals. This domain also speaks to a student's ability to self-advocate and his/her level of self-awareness and self-determination.

The student development domain includes activities such as work-based learning, occupation skill exploration and development, and employment. In essence, activities that help a student develop the skills needed to grow into independent adults. This domain also speaks to a student's ability take the pre-vocational skills they have learned and help them apply those skills to life after high school.

At the heart of the collaborative service delivery domain is interagency collaboration and cooperation. Helping to connect students and their families with adult service providers, community agencies and adult education providers is a critical link to help ensure a smooth transition. The connection itself is important but equally important is helping the student and family to engage in a way that is meaningful with those entities.

The essential elements of the program structure domain include: philosophy of the program, how planning is executed, policies of the program, program evaluation and development of resources. The program framework and structure should be transition focused and outcome orientated.

The family involvement domain is based on three aspects: family participation as well as roles, family empowerment, and training. Participation practices include areas such as decision-making, policy development and service delivery. Empowerment refers to meaningful family engagement and identification of methods to discover needs of the family. The training component involves offering families training opportunities that are specifically family focused.

Kohler's taxonomy has helped to provide a concrete framework regarding competencies for the field. It also serves as a mechanism for scholars to categorize, conduct and ground research by using the domains, Test et al., (2009) and Blalock et al., (2003).

More recently, in an effort to provide the field access to basic information about transition competencies, The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) developed three documents explaining competencies at different levels: transition specialists, special education teachers and state agency secondary special education administrators. The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (2011) reports that the documents are "based on the Division for Career

Development and Transition's competency lists for secondary special educators

(Blanchett, 2001) and transition specialists (DCDT, 2000), and the Council for

Exceptional Children competencies for school leaders (CEC, 2008)" (p. 1 para 1). The

documents help ensure that given staff turnover, individuals at all levels of transition

service provision from state administrators to those in the field have access to

information and resources related to implementation of quality transition services

(NSTTAC, 2011).

The competencies are organized by timeframes. For example, within the first

month of employment a transition specialist needs to know how to write IEP's that

include the required transition components. Within a year, transition specialists need to

know how to facilitate access into community services (NSTTAC, 2011).

In a recent effort to help transition specialists, their employers and institutions of

higher education understand and define the role and responsibilities of the transition

specialist, the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) Division on Career

Development and Transition (DCDT) revised their original competencies and standards

in 2013. The Division on Career Development and Transition (2013) reports that their

transition standards were initially developed by CEC's DCDT in 2001. In 2013, the

CEC's Board of Directors approved the new, updated Transition Standards developed by

the DCDT Validation Team led by Dr. Jane Razeghi, Dr. Mary Morningstar, Dr. Robert

Morgan and Dr. Kendra Williams-Diehm. Before the CEC Board approved the

competencies, all DCDT members were sent a draft for validation. A variety of other

stakeholders and external partners also received the draft competencies for validation.

Subsequent to these reviews, the CEC Professional Standards and Practices Committee

approved the validated competences and presented them to the CEC Board of Directors.

See appendix A for DCDT's revised list of transition standards.

The Council for Exceptional Children is the largest international professional organization committed to helping students with disabilities increase opportunities for educational success, and their Division on Career Development and Transition is the division serves those in transition roles (Council for Exceptional Children, 2015). One could postulate that transition specialists looking to advance their knowledge could turn to their resources for professional development. The 2013 revisions to the transition standards may assist the field with updated information regarding expectations of those serving in transition roles.

Professional Preparation and Transition

Morningstar and Benitz (2013) reported that special education teachers often feel unprepared to plan for and deliver transition services. In addition, an information brief prepared for The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition in 2005, Morningstar & Kleinhammer-Tramill explain that most states' teacher licensure or certification policies do not make provisions for transition personnel. In addition, they report that state policies may not include any transition-specific standards within general special education. The authors also explain that 30% of states show no evidence of transition-relevant standards or courses for special educators.

Further, findings from a national survey Anderson et al., completed in 2003 involving special education personnel preparation programs in the United States revealed that less than 50% of the training that special education teachers receive in higher education currently addresses transition standards. Specific knowledge and competencies beyond what is typically included in most special education teacher preparation programs is required in order to fully prepare personnel for the field (Anderson et al., 2003).

The research above demonstrates how ill prepared transition specialists are when entering the field and attempting to deliver services (Anderson et al., 2003, Morningstar & Benitz, 2013, Morningstar & Kleinhammer-Tramill, 2005). This research raises

questions regarding the relationship between the level of training of the practitioner and

the impact it may have on student's post-school outcomes. Additionally, the complexity

of this issue has the potential to be confusing and frustrating for those serving in the field.

It leads to questions regarding the level of preparation of transition specialists and their

sense of how well prepared they are: do they feel their preparation was adequate and, if

not, how did they learn to do their job.

Institutions of Higher Education with Transition Preparation Programs

There are several college and university programs that specialize in training those

who will serve in a transition role. The personnel preparation of NSTTAC's website

suggests that many that of those programs are the result of grant-funded opportunities for

workforce development offered by the Department of Education Office of Special

Education Programs (NSTTAC 2015).

Table 2 lists a sampling of college and university programs that offer

specialization in secondary transition. The chart was developed by using information

provided by NSTTAC (2015) and from websites of the institutions listed.

Table 2

Partial Sample of Colleges and Universities that offer specialization in transition.

Institution	Academic Level	Title of degree	Discipline	Type of delivery
Auburn University	Graduate	M.Ed. Secondary Transition	Special Education	Campus based
George Washington University	Graduate	Graduate Certificate	Special Education	Online
San Diego State University	Graduate	Transition Specialist Certificate	Special Education	Campus based
University of Kansas	Graduate	M.S. in Education Doctorate in Secondary Special Education & Transition	Special Education	Masters – online Doctorate – campus based
Utah State University	Graduate	M.S. or M.Ed. in Special Education with a concentration in Transition	Special Education and some shared content with Rehabilitation Counseling	Campus based
University of Oklahoma	Graduate	M.Ed. in Special Education with an emphasis in Secondary Transition Education	Special Education	Campus based
University of Illinois	Graduate	State Certification in Secondary Transition	Special Education	Campus based
Kent State University	Graduate	Transition to Work Endorsement	Special Education	Campus based
Armstrong State University	Graduate	Transition Specialist Endorsement	Special Education	Online
Lesley University	Graduate	Transition Specialist Endorsement	Special Education	Mixed Delivery Model
University of Massachusetts Boston	Graduate	Transition Specialist Endorsement	Special Education	Online

Source: National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (2015)

After reviewing curriculum from the institutions listed above, there appear

to be some common elements. For example, it appears that all of the programs require

some sort of practicum as well as coursework in assessment. Coursework outside of the

special education discipline is required by two of the institutions: one in rehabilitation

counseling and the other in social work. The mix of rehabilitation, social work and

special education coursework could lead one to draw conclusions that skill sets from

several fields are helpful when providing transition services given the complex nature of

the requirements in IDEA.

The Six States with Transition Endorsements

In an effort to prepare transition specialists, only six states verified through an

internet search (see Table 3) have instituted endorsement programs. Endorsement

programs typically include coursework that states suggests transition specialist take.

Those six states are Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Nebraska, and Ohio.

Massachusetts in particular took a very inclusive approach to the transition endorsement

they developed. It includes special educators, rehabilitation counselors, school

counselors and occupational therapists as individuals that should consider the transition

endorsement program. The other five states have it solely under the umbrella of special

educators. (M. Morningstar, personal communication, March 25, 2014; Massachusetts

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013).

Table 3

States with Transition Endorsements

State	Title	Regulation or Statute	Link
Delaware	School-to-work Transition Teacher	14 - 1556	http://regulations.delaware.gov/AdminCode/title14/1500/1556.shtml
Georgia	Special Education Transition Specialist	505-2-.178	http://www.gapsc.com/Rules/Current/Certification/505-2-.178.pdf
Illinois	Learning Behavior Specialist II, Transition Specialist	28.310	http://www.isbe.state.il.us/rules/archive/pdfs/28ark.pdf
Massachusetts	Transition Specialist	603 CMR 7.14(4)	http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/advisories/TSEguidelines.pdf
Nebraska	School Transition Specialist	006.67	http://www.education.ne.gov/EducatorPrep/NCTE/R24NCTE-Finals/PassedNCTE/SPED-SecTransSpec.pdf
Ohio	Transition to Work Endorsement	OAC 3301-24-05(E)	http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Special-Education/Federal-and-State-Requirements/Students-with-Disabilities-Participating-in-Career/Transition-To-Work-Certification-Endorsement-Process.pdf.aspx

Transition Specialists and Professional Identity

In order for a profession to be considered a profession, several elements must

exist: a defined purpose, a code of ethics, a developed body of specialized knowledge, a

certification that requires maintenance and is recognized by the public as such (Martinez,

Desiderio, & Papakonstantinou, 2010; Professional Standards Councils, n.d.; Williams,

1998).

Given there is no federal endorsement for transition, making it an actual profession, it

leads to speculation as to what code of ethics transition specialists are following. If they

do have an endorsement such as teaching or school counseling they may be following the

code of ethics for those professions. This researcher did find that a set of ethics that

aligns itself with the profession. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the

parent organization for the Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT). The

CEC has a code of professional standards (Council for Exceptional Children, 2016).

Although the existence of these standards is helpful, they are not appropriate for all

transition specialists. The standards are part of the CEC which is geared toward special

educators. If the transition specialist is a special educator and is also a member of the

CEC their standards would be appropriate. If not, these standards would not suffice.

      The United States Department of Labor offers an online database of occupational

information called O*Net. The database lists over 900 occupations and their descriptions.

Of the titles listed, none included the word transition. Similarly, the same keyword search

on two career guidance websites www.careercruisng.com and www.naviance.com

yielded no results. This could lead one to surmise a lack of professional identity in the

field of transition services.

      Further, in 1998 Asselin, Todd-Allen and deFur collected information from 14

transition specialists in the state of Virginia using the Developing a Curriculum

(DACUM) model. This model serves as a way to collect information from experts in the

field. Through this process, the researchers found 21 different titles for transition

specialists; see Table 4. Their findings highlight a lack of professional identity in the field

of transition services.

Brott and Myers (1999) asserted that "professional identity, serves as a frame of reference from which one carries out a professional role, makes significant professional decisions, and develops as a professional" (p. 339). The lack of ethical standards and professional identity could suggest that transition practitioners are confused regarding who they are and what is required of them. Additionally it forces one to ask whether or not transition specialization is an officially recognized profession.

Table 4

Varying titles for transition specialists

Titles					
Transition Supervisor	SPED Transition Specialist	Coordinator Transition Services	Transition Council Coordinator	Transition Team Leader	Transition Resource Coordinator
Transition Service Coordinator	Instructional Specialist	Community Based Vocational Trainer	Work Study Coordinator	Coordinator Pupil Services	Case Manager
Transition Specialist	Transition Coordinator	Transition Planner	Vocational Resource Coordinator	Employment Placement Coordinator	Vocational Planner
School to Work Coordinator	Vocational Special Needs Coordinator	Employment Specialist			

Source: Asselin, Todd-Allen & deFur, 1998.

Conclusion

Providing students with disabilities transition services has been acknowledged as an important provision since the 1980's. In efforts to highlight its importance, the federal government has incorporated transition language into IDEA for close to 25 years. There has also been a variety of federally funded programs to assist institutions of higher education to better prepare those entering the field.

Given the law requires substantial efforts from school systems to provide transition services, it is concerning that there appears to be no consistent set of standards regarding secondary transition nor any entity that credentials transition specialists.

Without consistent standards and credentialing, questions arise as to transition specialists'

sense of job preparedness and professional identity. Questions also arise as to whether or

not their level of preparedness is a factor in the post school outcomes of students.

Furthermore, Mazzotti, Rowe, Cameto, Test, and Morningstar (2013) reccommed

conducting research that examines the quality of training that transition professionals

receive, in particular, programs that they may or may not have taken part in. Trainer and

Leko (2014) assert that qualitative research has the ability to address some of the fields

most challenging and enduring issues; given the complexity of the issue being studied

this researcher decided to do a qualitative study. Additionally, Mazzotti, Rowe, Cameto,

Test, and Morningstar (2013) suggested that the field consider research addressing

transition specialists' perceptions of preparedness and professional development.

To date, a comprehensive literature search finds no qualitative studies that explore

the perceptions of transition specialists from multiple states who serve students with

disabilities at the high school level, in particular their perceptions surrounding

professional preparation and development. This study will be an in-depth inquiry with

transition specialists of perceptions specific to professional preparation and development;

it will provide new knowledge to the field.

The aforementioned reasons in conjunction with passion for the field has

compelled this researcher to explore the perceptions of transition specialists who serve

students with disabilities at the high school level, in particular their perception of their

professional preparation and development.

The proposed study has the potential to benefit the field by allowing the voices of

those doing the work to be documented and analyzed to discover possible themes

regarding their level of preparedness. Those themes may provide insights regarding how

transition specialists can be supported at the pre-service level in order to obtain the

knowledge and tools they need to assist students with disabilities meet their post-

secondary goals.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this research was twofold. The overarching phenomenon explored was the profession of transition specialization. The second purpose was to explore and obtain an in-depth understanding of the participant's perceptions regarding the sufficiency of their professional preparation and the sufficiency and accessibility of in-service professional development. A qualitative approach was used.

When a researcher looks to understand a phenomenon in detail, qualitative research is most appropriate. When looking to understand a phenomenon, using a systemic approach (such as semi-structured interviews) within a specific context (such as specific participants) helps uncover the nature and qualities of it; it's the very core of qualitative inquiry (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach, & Richardson, 2004; Patton, 2002).

Grounded theory was considered and then rejected as the purpose of grounded theory is to develop or discover a theory rather than explore and make meaning out of perceptions. Consideration was also given to a case study approach. It was ruled out given that one of the hallmarks of case study is that it happens over a sustained period of time. An ethnographic approach was also considered and ruled out due to its focus on developing a complex description of the culture of a group rather than exploring perceptions and make meaning out of them. The last qualitative approach considered was narrative. This approach is best when studying an individual, not when looking to uncover themes and patterns from multiple participants (Creswell, 2013 & Creswell 2014). After considering the various approaches mentioned above, it became clear that

phenomenology was the best fit for this study as this study explores perceptions and reports on the experiences the participants share.

Background of Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl (as cited in Groenewald, 2004) developed a philosophical method called phenomenology, the science of pure phenomena. Thomé, Esbensen, Dykes, and Hallberg (2004) state that phenomenology attempts to discover what is unique and what is at the core of a phenomenon to better understand what a specific experience involves. When a researcher engages in a phenomenological study, the intent is to try and make meaning out of the lived experiences of several individuals by uncovering the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Further, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2005) the purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand people's perceptions, points of view, and the meanings they give to specific experiences.

Study Population and Sample

This study included participants from the six states in the northeast section of the United States; the sample size was 15. Creswell (2013) states that when conducting phenomenological research groups can range in size from 3 to 15. Participants were selected who met the inclusion criteria developed for the study. Since the population desired for this study was very specific and difficult to find, a snowball or chain method of sampling was used. Snowball or chain sampling assists the researcher in finding those participants that are difficult to locate and who fit the criteria the researcher is after (Creswell, 2013). As noted earlier, according to Atkinson and Flint (2001) snowball sampling is particularly useful when the researcher is conducting qualitative research that is exploratory in nature.

The Department of Education from each of the six states has a point person for secondary transition. A simple internet search yielded their contact information. Each of those six contacts was e-mailed and asked to assist finding individuals that fit the

inclusion criteria for this study in their state; hence assisting this researcher obtain a

snowball sample for this study. Some states offered more names than others, some of the

replies did not fit the criteria and one state had only one name to offer.

The inclusion criterion for this study consists of those working full time at the

high school or district level in a transition role. They needed to be serving students with

disabilities in planning for life after high school and helping support the activities

surrounding such plans. This researcher operationally defined transition specialists as

those that engage in activities such as development of work experiences, administration

of transition assessment, pre-employment skills training and consultation on the

development of the transition plan in the students individualized education plan (IEP).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection occurred via in-depth semi-structured interviews. Prior to

interviewing the participants, ten questions demographic in nature were sent out. The

platform used was Survey Monkey. See Appendix B for a list of the ten questions. Upon

starting the interview, having the ten questions answered gave this researcher some

background knowledge about the participant such as title, years of service, degrees and/or

certifications held.

Field notes were taken, artifacts were gathered and the interviews were recorded

with the participant's permission. For this research study, artifacts consisted of the job

descriptions of the participants. Field notes were hand-written then typed into a document

for on the researcher's laptop. The notes were kept in a locked filing cabinet and the

computer documents will be stored on a password protected laptop. Following the

interviews the data was transcribed. Once the interviews had been transcribed, the

recordings were destroyed to help ensure the confidentiality. Participants were also asked

to share any artifacts they are willing to in order to help this researcher understand the

phenomenon under study. Artifacts might include IEP's, student's transition folders/binders, transition assessments, copies of training materials, and copies of transcripts.

All information that was collected was kept confidential. Participant names were not used. The community of transition specialists is small even across six states. Given the need to protect the identity of the participants, no identifiable coding system was used. Even with using pseudonyms the risk is too great. They are simply referred to as participants or transition specialists. The software program Dedoose was used to help this researcher with structuring and organizing the raw data.

Interview Techniques

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using audiotape, field notes were taken and a transcription service was used to convert the data into type-written words. The interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes. There was a list of questions, however being able to deviate from the list if the participant offered salient information was critical. Most interviews happened face to face, but given the geographical distance of some of the participants, SKYPE was used. Collection of the data over the internet has advantages and disadvantages (Creswell, 2013). Advantages include time efficiency and reduced travel costs. Conversely, one disadvantage is a complete guarantee regarding protection of privacy. In order to address issues surrounding privacy for those interviews that were completed via SKYPE, every effort was made to ensure privacy was maintained.

Conducting qualitative interviews via SKYPE is a fairly new and innovative way to gain access to participants to a study that may otherwise be untapped. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) explain that online interviewing techniques such as SKPYE can change the sense of the interview. They share experiences they had with conducting interviews via SKYPE and found that participants may be put off by the technology and feel less

committed to the interview. Technical difficulties can make establishing a rapport

difficult. Taking these drawbacks into consideration, this researcher ensured that the

participants who chose SKYPE were comfortable with the use of it.

Validity and Reliability Issues

Given this researcher's background and experience, bias needs to be addressed.

As Creswell (2013) explains the researcher should comment on past experiences, biases,

prejudices and orientations that have the potential to shape the interpretation and

approach of the study. By discussing personal experiences with the phenomenon,

researchers make an attempt to bracket themselves out of the study Creswell (2013).

Giorgi (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 79) sees bracketing as a matter not of forgetting

what has been experienced, but not letting past knowledge become involved while

determining experiences.

Further, Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) explain that it is very difficult if not

impossible for a researcher to suspend beliefs they may have about the phenomenon

being studied. Creswell (2013) points out that researchers should decide how and in what

ways his or her own personal understanding can be introduced into the study and usefully

incorporated in the analysis. This researcher's understanding of transition was

incorporated in the results of the study simply as a means of clarification not a means of

altering the perceptions of the participants.

In addition to having worked in the field of transition for over 20 years, this

researcher has been particularly interested in the pre-service education of those serving in

transition roles. Positions that have been held in the past include; job coach, job

developer, school-to-work program coordinator and rehabilitation counselor. As a result

some assumptions and prejudices have developed over the years, for example lack of

quality per-service training, lack of on the job training opportunities in the field and poor

access to in-service training.

Creswell (2013) explains that when researchers are concerned about the validity of a project, they consider making use of multiple and different sources of information in order to corroborate evidence; this is referred to as triangulation of data. The three points of triangulation for this research study were the participants perception captured in the interviews, the artifacts gathered (in particular job descriptions or lack thereof) and prior research as presented in the literature review and as tied to the findings of this study.

This researcher utilized the following methods as a means of ensuring validity: member checking, peer review and rich thick description. Member checking involved asking the participants to review their transcript for accuracy and provide comments if needed. Participants were also provided information on the emerging themes and asked to provide feedback. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that member checking is perhaps "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 134).

Peer review was be accomplished by selecting a colleague in the field to review the findings, ask questions about the process and provide feedback as necessary. The peer reviewer was given copies of the transcripts and field notes; themes were also given for review.

The narrative regarding the findings includes thick and rich descriptions; meaning that details and specific quotes are provided when writing about the theme. Writing in this way allows the reader to see the full details of the data and possibly transfer the information to other settings and determine if said finding could be transferred (Creswell, 2013).

Research and Interview Questions

The overarching phenomenon that was explored was the profession of transition specialization. The following three questions drove this study.

1. What are the perceptions of transition specialists regarding their pre-service

   professional preparation as related to sufficient preparation to provide effective

   services to students with disabilities?

2. What are the perceptions of in-service transition specialists regarding their access

   to professional development that supports effective services to students with

   disabilities?

3. How do transition specialists evaluate the effectiveness of the transition services

   they provide?

In addition to the research questions; interview questions were developed, they are as

follows:

- How many years have you been in the field of transition?

- What is your professional title?

- What is your academic background?

- What is your professional work background?

- What specific certifications do you hold?

- Could you describe how you were prepared for your transition role?

- What preparation (specific to transition) if any was part of your pre-service degree

  program?

- What if any on-the-job training (specific to transition) did you receive?

- What types of in-service trainings have you had?

- What type of professional development do you have access to?

- What are you responsible for in your transition role? Types of student served?

- How did you learn to do the "transition tasks" for your position?

- How does your professional preparation help or hinder your ability to do your

  job?

- How do you measure or evaluate success with the students you work with?

- What is your perception regarding the impact of your pre-service training on the post school outcomes of the students you serve?

- What is your perception regarding the impact of your professional development on the post school outcomes of the students you serve?

- What is your perception regarding the accessibility of professional development that can have a positive impact on the post school outcomes of the students you serve?

- Participants were asked to share their job descriptions if they had one.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

Methodology

A phenomenological approach was selected for this study. When a researcher engages in a phenomenological study, the intent is to try and make meaning out of the lived experiences of several participants by uncovering the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).When looking to understand a phenomenon, using a systemic approach (such as semi-structured interviews) within a specific context (such as specific participants) helps uncover the nature and qualities of it; it's the very core of qualitative inquiry (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach, & Richardson, 2004; Patton, 2002).

Background

The participants in this study included transition specialists from six states in the northeast section of the United States. The inclusion criterion for this study consisted of those working full time at the high school or district level in a transition role. This researcher operationally defined transition specialists as those who engage in activities such as development of work experiences, administration of transition assessment, pre-employment skills training and consultation on the development of the transition plan in the students individualized education plan (IEP). Participants were found by connecting with each state's Department of Education and asking them to assist with the discovery of the participants; ultimately fifteen were found and agreed to participate.

Data Collection

Survey Monkey

For the sake of efficiency and having more knowledge about the participant prior to the actual interview, a simple demographic survey was conducted. The survey consisted of 10 questions (see Appendix B). Table 5 reviews participant's degree

programs and years of experience as indicated on their surveys. Two of the fifteen

participants did not have a graduate degree. One participant had two, a Masters and a

Doctorate.

Table 5

Graduate Degrees	Number of Participants
Masters in Special Education	7
Masters in Counseling	1
Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling	2
Masters in Community Mental Health	1
Masters in Educational Studies	1
Master's in Education Administration	1
Masters in Therapeutic Recreation	1
Doctorate in Administration	1

Four of the fifteen did not report their undergraduate degree reporting only their graduate

degree. Table six breaks down the number of undergraduate degrees and the type held by

the reporting participants.

Table 6

Bachelor's Degrees	Number of Participants
Bachelors in Special Education	2
Bachelors in Elementary Ed	2
Bachelors in Communication	2
Bachelors in Psychology	2
Bachelors in Marketing	1
Bachelors in Business	1
Bachelors in Recreation and Leisure	1

Table seven reviews the number of years providing services in the field of transition.

Table 7

Years of service in Transition	Number of participants
Less than 1 year	1
1-3	4
4-5	1
11-20	5
21-30	3
30+	1

Interviews

Once approval was obtained by the Plymouth State University's Institutional

Review Board (see Appendix C), fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Eleven of the interviews were in person, one was via SKYPE and three were over the

phone; each participant was interviewed once. The participants represented the six states

that make up New England: New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode

Island and Connecticut.

The Department of Education from each of the six states has a point person for

secondary transition. A simple internet search yielded their contact information. Each of

those six contacts was e-mailed and asked to assist in finding individuals that fit the

inclusion criteria for this study in their state.

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The real names of the

participants were not included in the submission to the transcription service. Once the

transcripts were received, they were checked for accuracy by listening to the recording

while reading along with the transcript. Field notes were also taken and added to the

participant's document.

Member Checking and Peer Review

The peer reviewer assists by externally checking the research process and by

member checking the researcher asks the participants to review their statements for

accuracy (Creswell, 2013). Member checking for this study involved asking every

participant to review their transcript for accuracy and provide any corrections and or

additions they deem appropriate. The peer review process occurred. A colleague in the

field, who is familiar with secondary transition reviewed the findings, asked questions

about the process, challenged findings and provided feedback as necessary. The reviewer

was sent the transcripts and themes that arose from examination of the data.

Emergence of Themes

Data Analysis

The essential themes of this study emerged when this researcher completed

multiple readings of the transcripts and field notes. The web-based application Dedoose

was used as a tool to assist in organizing the data and finding themes. By using the

coding system offered by Dedoose, this researcher was able to take statements made by

the participants and put them under specific codes. From there, deep analysis occurred

using the following steps:

Deep analysis of the data occurred by:

- Listening to each interview while reading the transcription.

- Making notes while reading the transcripts.

- Utilizing the keyword search and word count tools offered by Dedooose.

- Similar statements were grouped together.

- Excerpts were highlighted and color coded using tools offered by Dedoose.

- Statements were grouped into similar categories.

- Themes were created based on the categories.

Once data had been read numerous times, and reflected upon extensively this

researcher started to see patterns with big picture ideas and key words. By looking for

what the participants actually experienced or the essence of their experience vs. the actual

words that were offered, this researcher noticed patterns in the data. Once the process of

reviewing the data and reflecting on it was completed, the themes and subthemes

emerged. The themes were the primary essence of the data and the subthemes secondary.

Four themes emerged. Table 8 lists the major themes and their subthemes.

Table 8

Themes and sub-themes.

Theme	Subtheme
Lack of exposure to transition competencies and skills needed during college preparation.	• Learning as you go and creating the position
Reliance on knowledge and skills acquired in previous positions.	• Usefulness of rehabilitation counseling skills • Usefulness of counseling skills • Knowledge of community resources
Lack of professional identity and fellowship.	• Informal learning networks as a source of professional development and identity. • Eagerness to engage in practitioner orientated professional development specific to transition.
Variability in defining post-school success of the students served.	• Obtaining employment and meeting goals

Inclusion of Nonconforming Data and Numbers

Creswell (2013) does not support reporting counts in his research, explaining that

"counting conveys a qualitative orientation of magnitude and frequency contrary to

qualitative research" (p. 185). Maxwell (2010) has an opposing view, he asserted that by

incorporating numbers into qualitative data there is a presentation of evidence to support

the themes developed. He further explains that if researchers are going to use numbers in

qualitative reporting, they should also address nonconforming instances in the data

Nonconforming qualitative data challenges the themes that are developed. They are

points of data that challenge the researcher's interpretations of themes and highlight

potential assumptions the researcher may have made. By addressing the outliers, a level

transparency occurs and the researcher can then reflect upon the discrepancies (Maxwell.

2010; McPherson & Thorne, 2006). Creswell (2014) also supports the idea of reporting

discrepant or nonconforming data, asserting that by reporting data that run contrary to the

major themes developed it adds credibility to the account.

Given there can be a proclivity to wonder how many participants perceived

something one way or another, this researcher chose to include numbers and

nonconforming / discrepant data as part of the findings. Although this decision strays

from traditional qualitative reporting, it was made as a means of honoring the idea of

transparency and credibility.

The Themes

The overarching question that drove this research study was about the profession

of transition specialization. The participants all described their jobs differently. Not one

had the same daily tasks as another. As mentioned in the literature review chapter, the

first directive regarding secondary transition appeared in the 1983 Education of the

Handicapped Act Amendments. The field has been in existence for over 30 years; in

those 30+ years, it appears that there has been a lack of consistency as to how the role is

defined and what the transition specialist does for the students they serve (Asselin, Todd-

Allen & deFur, 1998). The 15 participants in this study shared their perceptions about the

profession and their voices are captured in the themes and sub-themes below.

Lack of exposure to transition competencies and skills needed during college

preparation.

Eleven out of fifteen participants had no pre-service exposure to anything related

to transition. Of those eleven, three were trained prior to the 1990. This is noteworthy

given that in 1990 the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 P.L. 94-142

was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 PL 101-476.

That act included specific language surrounding transition requirements. For the first time

in history, legislation required special educators to include a statement of needed

transition services in students individualized education plans (IEP's) by the age of 16 (Prince, Katsiyannis, and Farmer, 2013 & Neubert, 2006).

Of the eleven participants trained after 1990, eight had no pre-service exposure to anything related to transition in spite of the federal regulations mandating it. The remaining four reported some exposure. The statements below fall under this theme.

- "It's so focused on the academics. We really didn't get a lot of training."

- "We need to have it as a big part of pre-training, transition is treated as an afterthought."

- "There was no preparation. There was no discussion."

- "I felt like a lot of it was geared towards grade school, elementary school, middle school, which doesn't have a lot of transition in it. There was one class that I took, IEP in transition."

- "There was not a lot of training around transition."

- "It is appalling, to be honest with you, that these young folks are coming into the field with little or no understanding or knowledge of how to write transition goals, how to work with parents on these last steps."

- "What I'm finding is, the overwhelming majority of the teachers who are coming into the high school have no clue about transition. Nothing."

- "I don't feel like college helped me at all."

- "None. Nothing at all about how to "do" transition. I think we learned about goal writing and that's the extent of it."

- "I don't learn from just reading, I learn from doing."

The sentiments shared by the eleven participants conveyed feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction regarding the lack of preparation. One participant used the word "appalling" and expressed a sense of exasperation when describing the feeling he had

regarding the lack of exposure to transition competencies during college preparation. He also questioned how the system can continue to teach those entering the field without the proper training.

The statements above align themselves with research finding that participants leave their pre-service training programs not feeling equipped with the skills needed and most obtain their training on the job (Anderson et al., 2003; Morningstar & Liss 2008; Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009; Kohler & Greene, 2004).

Four participants reported some exposure to transition competencies and skills during their college preparation; however, that exposure varied greatly. Variations included a 1 hour lecture regarding the transition section of the Individualized Education Plan to a full course specifically focused on transition.

Learning as you go and creating the position. Learning as you go and creating the position emerged as a sub-theme; participants explained that they literally had to create the position without the background knowledge to do so. Seven of the fifteen participants indicated that they had to create their position upon accepting the job. Though six participants reported feeling somewhat prepared to handle the requirements of the job through their previous positions (discussed further under the theme: reliance on the knowledge and skills acquired in previous positions in order to understand current position), none of the participants indicated that training that was made available by their current employer. The statements below are specific to this sub-theme.

- "As far as learning what I need to do, it's really self-taught, self-directed."
- "Everything that I learned, I learned on the job or from going to professional development, listening to colleagues, being on the commission."
- "To be honest with you, I think that the administrators, they didn't know what to do with this program - My first day when I got there, it was an empty room with all kinds of crates and I didn't even know where to begin."

- "When I started, I was just making it up as I went along."

- "Serving as a consultant for the district, one of the recommendations I made was for a transition coordinator. I developed a job description for them."

- "Luckily, when I started, I knew the paraprofessional who had worked in the program and I called her and I said, "Is there any way you can come over and just give me a heads up on what to do and give me some kind of curriculum guidelines?" Because I didn't have a curriculum, I had nothing."

- "Everything that I learned, I learned on the job or from going to professional development, or listening to colleagues."

- "I learned on the job."

The statements above align with the research findings of Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2009). They found that transition training happens more frequently at the in-service level vs. the pre-service level; that they learn the majority of their transition skills on the job.

Reliance on knowledge and skills acquired in previous positions

Seven of the participants mentioned the lack or pre-service training they received and how significant their pre-service work history ended up being as it related to their ability to carry out the requirements of the position they held as a transition specialist. Below are statements shared by the participants specific to the theme of reliance on knowledge and skills acquired in previous positions.

- "I was already doing what I'm doing now, which is contacting businesses, setting up ... I used to set up on-the-job trainings, but now I set up volunteer experiences."

- "I worked for a non-profit and taught vocational skills. I was a case manager. That non-profit experience really had a huge impact on my ability to do this job."

- "Whatever I've done in the 35 years that I've been working has only broadened my perspective, whether it was my job as a teenager or in college, it gave me that connection to the working business community and understanding of that culture and those demands.

- "Having a really good grounding in that culture that I'm working with every day, I'm in a kitchen, a restaurant, a grocery store, a ski rack factory manufacturer, I have to really understand that, the demands of that culture and how people get along in that. That was super helpful."

- "I had a really strong background in understanding funding, understanding Medicaid, understanding relationships with private agencies, relationships with the bureau of rehabilitation services, all of that."

- "When I look back, that was probably the biggest piece is that I had that behavioral analysis training."

- "My initial training, again, was with life skills kids. I think that prepared me in a lot of ways for students needing services, and what those services could be."

- "I think being a Case Manager ... I think that is so important because you have to know how to write and understand the IEP."

- "Working with the community appealed to people that hired me."

- "I was responsible for 75 salesmen, 9 managers and managed a half a million dollar budget and 135 million dollar sales for the area, so I had to learn how to deal with people and problems. Believe it or not, that has been a big asset with the students."

- "Working with vendors and understanding all that, but as far as like transition and federal regulations and IEP, I didn't really know much about that. That was all kind of learned on the job and as you go."

- "I guess disability related stuff from VR, mostly, and just working with people in general. Obviously working in human services."

The importance of the transition specialist's pre-service work history in order to carry out the tasks expected of them support findings from Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2009). They surveyed special educators looking to see if there was a correlation between their background experiences and how well prepared these educators felt to deliver transition services. They found that special educators with more experience rated their level of preparedness higher. Three sub-themes emerged from the data: usefulness of counseling skills, usefulness of rehabilitation counseling skills and knowledge of community resources.

Usefulness of counseling skills. When sharing perceptions regarding helpful skills to have as a transition specialist, counseling emerged as a sub-theme; it was mentioned by four of the participants. What stood out to this researcher was the emphasis placed on the sentiments by the participants. It became clear that this sub-theme needed to be addressed.

- "The counseling piece is huge."

- "I throw on the counseling hat a lot with everyone; with staff, families and students. It's definitely helpful in my role as a transition specialist."

- "I do a lot of counseling tasks that school counselors typically do; like classroom guidance on career development and how to use Naviance."

- "I'd just say it's more about counseling and working with students and connecting with students."

- "Having a background in adolescent counseling has helped."

- "I think my counseling background has helped me when processing with families."

- "This job is more about counseling and connecting with students."

Usefulness of rehabilitation counseling skills. Three of the participants expressed that having a rehabilitation counseling skills was a helpful as a transition specialist. Given the overall number of statements made to this sub theme by the participants, this researcher felt compelled to address their sentiments. According to the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (2016) rehabilitation counseling is defined as a:

> systematic process which assists persons with physical, mental, developmental, cognitive, and emotional disabilities to achieve their personal, career, and independent living goals in the most integrated setting possible through the application of the counseling process. The counseling process involves communication, goal setting, and beneficial growth or change through self-advocacy, psychological, vocational, social, and behavioral interventions. (para 3).

- "I think rehabilitation counseling is a great path in for the transition specialist, it's ideal preparation"

- "Rehabilitation counseling does seem to be a good fit."

- "I think Vocational Rehabilitation did definitely and being exposed to a multitude of different disabilities, that kind of information feel like I came in with that was pretty solid."

- "The disability related stuff from Vocational Rehabilitation was helpful."

- "I think because my masters was in rehabilitation counseling, we talked a lot about vocational rehabilitation and state agencies and case management and what does life look like in the community and thoughtful integration into the

community. For the people that I've talked to that have gone through special

education programs, they never had that."

- "A lot of my work has been thinking about it from a transition lens. Think about it

  long term. Holistic planning, whole person planning. Those were things that were

  just naturally part of rehabilitation counseling."

- "Case management, skills teaching, the counseling piece is huge. Vocational, I

  don't know how I would have known about vocational evaluation piece if I didn't

  have the rehabilitation background."

- "I think working for vocational rehabilitation helped by being exposed to a

  multitude of different disabilities. Also, working with adult service vendors and

  understanding how that process works."

- "I think it's the rehabilitation counseling that that's my mindset, my vision and I

  think my priorities are always like, "how can we back off and have the family

  access more community-based supports?"

- "Those that I know that only have a background only in special education have

  the vision for the future, but it does not come naturally. When we start talking

  about things, they're thinking about IEP objectives and, 'well this needs to be

  measurable for this.' They're thinking in the special education and school based

  realm. A lot of my work has been getting them to think about it from a transition

  lens. Think about it long term. Holistic planning, whole person planning. Those

  are things that are just naturally part of rehabilitation counseling."

The statements above offered by three of the participants speak to their belief

surrounding the importance of having a rehabilitation mindset when working as a

transition specialist. They expressed that having the rehabilitation mindset gives them an

advantage when practicing transition. These sentiments support what Szymanski and

King (1989) reported well over 25 years ago. They asserted that rehabilitation counselors

receive specialized training that uniquely prepares them to work in school systems supporting students with disabilities as they transition to work or post-secondary education.

Knowledge of community resources. Three of the participants expressed the importance of being able to navigate the community in order to help students and families find the appropriate resources once they have graduated. They felt that their prior knowledge and skills in this area helped them upon taking on their role as a transition specialist. Two of those three felt that skill came from their counseling background.

- "I think what transition specialists really need to have is more of that outside stuff, knowledge about where to go for services outside the school."

- I had some knowledge of the adult service agency process which is kind of huge, you know? You really need to know that piece. That's a big part of the job."

- "How can you make and develop a meaningful life in your community and who do you need to access and how do you access them and how do you maintain those relationships. That's always in my mind."

Helping families and students navigate the community and find resources for support were shared by the participants above. Two of the three participants felt this skill was something they picked up from their training as a counselor. These findings are consistent with assertions from The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (2011) that transition specialists need to have knowledge of adult service agencies.

Three of the participants mentioned prior skills and knowledge that didn't fit into the theme or subthemes developed. One shared that her prior experience as a paraprofessional assisted her in her role as a transition specialist as it afforded her the opportunity to develop relationships. Another mentioned his previous position as a sales manager; he had to build relationships with community members. He also had to learn how to resolve problems and deal with people. He felt those prior experiences have

served him well in his current position as a transition specialist. A participant also shared that she had worked as a life skills case manager prior to taking on the role of a transition specialist. She explained that it helped her to understand what services her students may need.

These participants offered perceptions regarding their prior skills and knowledge that didn't fit into the theme or sub-themes developed. Their perceptions offer ideas around knowledge and skills other than those highlighted in the themes and sub themes of this document that they considered helpful when working as a transition specialist.

Lack of Professional Identity and Fellowship

A common theme that arose from the participants involved feeling isolated and not having a colleague in the building and or district that truly understood and could identify with what the transition specialist was required to do. In addition, they expressed a desire for meaningful, practitioner oriented professional development specifically about transition. One participant mentioned feeling like a lone wolf and that due to participation in informal learning networks she was made aware of resources for her students that she had not learned about in any other venue. A sense of not feeling validated arose; in particular that the tasks of a transition specialist are very real, but the profession itself in some ways does not exist.

Informal Learning Networks as a source of professional development and identity. Every participant in this study mentioned that informal learning centered on secondary transition is a significant part of how they learn the tasks of their jobs. Three types of groups were mentioned: the Community of Practice (CoP) model, transition specialist groups and groups that are facilitated by the Department of Education for that specific state. All three of these group models are collaborative and social by nature.

Vygotsky (1978) addressed the collaborative nature of learning and proposed the idea of the more knowledgeable other (MKO) referring to somebody who has a higher

skill set or ability level in a specific area as compared to the learner. It's an opportunity to work with and learn from those that have a better understanding of the element task or process being questioned.

The three groups mirror the MKO model as they all offer the opportunity to learn from others that have more knowledge specific to transition. One participant stated when referring to the informal learning network she has access to "it was beneficial especially when I first started and I felt like I didn't have as much in my tool box. I would get a lot of information from that and connecting with other people, especially in the community and looking at the resources".

Community of practice . Six out of the fifteen participants specifically mentioned the community of practice model as a strategy. They use it as a means to gather information about the position and tap into a variety of resources. They also appreciate getting ideas from others in the field.

Communities of practice (CoP) are defined as people who connect around a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to improve their work as they interact on a regular basis. There are three elements of a CoP: a shared *domain* of interest, the *community* where members are engaging with and helping each other and the *practice* meaning the repertoire of resources, tools, stories and ways of addressing concerns (Wegner & Wegner-Trayner, 2015).

Urquhart et al., 2013 and Kester 2013 found that the CoP way of working is very helpful for those that are early in their careers. In particular, having the ability to share knowledge, develop networks, learn and cultivate relationships with those that are doing similar work and have more experience in the field. Their findings support the perceptions of the participants of this study had specific to CoP's. Some of the comments from the participants regarding CoP's include:

- "As far as being on the community of practice for a while, that was beneficial. I think that gave me information about resources for students that I wouldn't have known."

- "The CoP is the most helpful with respect to learning about transition."

- "What's been great about the community of practice is we actually are working. We actually are sitting down and they're pretty much all transition specialists or our state agency folks charged with transition; we're actually working on things."

- "I get a lot of information from the CoP by connecting with other people, especially in the community and looking at the resources."

Six out of the fifteen participants mentioned CoP's as a vehicle for professional development and finding an identity. The statements that they shared spoke to the importance of the CoP model as a strategy for obtaining professional development and creating fellowship with others in the field of transition.

Transition specialists groups. Three of the participants mentioned transition specialist groups as a means of informal learning. They explained that what made this type of group stand out is that it is comprised of only transition specialists. As a result they felt more freedom to share frustrations without any filters or judgment. One group in particular was comprised of transition specialists that are responsible for job development and working with employers. Below are some of the statements shared that align with what is explained above.

- "You can talk about real challenges because we are very exclusive and specific about who can be a member of our group, so that we do have the freedom to talk honestly about what some of our questions and challenges are and how others are implementing things. That's a very helpful resource."

- "Our transition coordinator group has been an awesome professional development experience."

- "We formed a coalition specifically for those of us doing job development so we could respect each other's turf."

The three participants that spoke to the importance of their transition specialist group felt it was helpful in a couple of ways; first, as a means of professional development and second as a place to discuss issues without filters.

State department of education driven groups. The last type of informal learning mentioned were groups that were facilitated and managed by their respective state department of education. Below are comments specific to this type of group.

- "I learned on the job, and most of the information that I received was, clearly, through the transition advisory council run by the state department of education. It has been the one and only opportunity for me to get some kind of professional development, and it is a very active and focused group, we get tons and tons of professional development."

- "We have a really well established transition community in my county. We all meet every eight weeks as a core team. There's probably 25 of us who get together from all the different agencies and other people in my role at different high schools."

- "Participation in transition advisory council run by the state department of education has helped – regarding training."

- "I sit on a task force that's headed up by the department of education for our state. It is made up of 40 some odd people. Every state agency is represented. School districts have folks, we have administrators, we have parents, we have students, and we have one employer on that big group. That's really a clearing house for information."

The four participants above explained that the training offered by their respective state departments of education were helpful as a means of professional development. They also expressed appreciation that the training was offered and found it helpful.

Identity and fellowship. In addition to sharing how the informal groups helped many of them learn about their profession, it was shared that the groups helped them feel like they were not alone. As previously mentioned, a common theme that arose from the participants involved feeling isolated and not having a colleague in the building and or district that truly understood and could identify with what their day to day tasks required of them.

- "I get a lot of information from the CoP meetings in particular and connecting with other people responsible for the same type of things."

- "I wish there was support for us. Sometimes you feel like a lone wolf and there's no teeth to what you do because there's no certification for our profession or there's no official requirement to have one in every school."

- "I have to say you feel very isolated in a school but I'm not a case manager which many folks in my role might be. I rarely teach classes. To my own faculty, I'm kind of an anomaly. They're not really sure what I do."

- "That's the one thing I struggle with is that there's really no one, other than my own staff, to talk through these things with."

- "I guess I feel like transition in general is still not widely received by districts."

- "I wish there was some kind of certification. I wish there was some kind of recognition for it on a state-wide level more than what it is now. I feel like it would bring some more meaning to it. It wouldn't be so subjective. I feel like we're kind of all over the board and transition means different things in different

districts. I wish it was more mainstreamed – it makes me feel less respected and

legit."

- "In this role I don't really fit in a department or building so I don't have the

    collegiality, I'm kind of off on my own. I was missing that connection with

    colleagues."

The sentiments of feeling isolated and not being understood were offered by the

participants above. Having a colleague at one's own workplace that understands what the

transition specialist does was something each of the participants yearned for. These

findings align with assertions offered by Brott and Myers (1999) that professional

identity is important; it serves as a frame of reference and helps the professional to not

only make decisions but grow and develop.

The second part of this subtheme gets at the variability in job descriptions further

highlighting the lack of identity. Of the fifteen participants none explained the

requirements of their job in the same way. There was a tremendous lack of consistency

when the participants explained what they do. Not only were the tasks different, but the

actual structure of their positions varied; some were administrators, others special

educators and others counselors. Asselin, Todd-Allen & deFur, (1998) found that that

there were 21 different titles for transition specialists. Their findings align with the lack

of consistency that this researcher found almost 20 years later.

Table 9 breaks down the varied titles of the participants.

Table 9

Job titles

Title	Number of Participants
Transition Coordinator	7
Transition Facilitator	2
Transition Specialist	2
District Transition Coordinator	1
Employment Coordinator	1
Transition Strategist	1
Special Ed Teacher/Occupation Preparation	1

Many of the participants explained that given their role and how their district

defined transition their services fell under special education. As a result most of them

held certifications as a teacher, the majority in special education. The other area of

certification that three of the participants held involved some sort of counseling. Table 10

breaks down the different types of certifications held by the participants.

Table 10

Certifications held by the participants

Professional Certifications/Endorsements	Number of Participants
Some aspect of Teaching	10
School Counseling	1
Certified Rehabilitation Counselor	2
School Adjustment Counseling	2
Special Ed Administration	1
Transition Endorsement	2
No formal certification held	2

Review of artifacts collected/document analysis.

As a means of triangulation, the fifteen participants were asked if they would be

willing to share their job descriptions. The information reviewed below speaks to the

theme titled lack of professional identity and fellowship. Five of the fifteen were able to

produce one. The five that were produced were all different; see appendix D. Although

they had varied essential job functions, they were two job functions that were shared

across all five; job placement and vocational assessment. Additionally the education and

licensing requirements were also varied. See table 11 for a breakdown.

Table 11

Document analysis

Documents	Education Required	License required	Common Essential Functions
Job Description 1	BA or MA in related field	Special Education or Certified Rehabilitation Counselor	Job placement Vocational Assessment
Job Description 2	MA in teaching or other appropriate field as deemed acceptable	Teaching license	Job placement Vocational Assessment
Job Description 3	Specific degree not listed	Special Education	Job placement Vocational Assessment
Job Description 4	Education requirement not listed	Specific license not listed	Job placement Vocational Assessment
Job Description 5	BA in Special Education, Vocational Education, Vocational Rehabilitation or Social Services.	General Special Education, School Counselor or School Social Worker.	Job Placement (implementing transition services) Vocational Assessment

Although five job descriptions were shared, ten participants were not able to

produce one. This leads one to speculate regarding the level of confusion transition

specialists may experience when they do not have formally defined expectations.

Eagerness to engage in practitioner orientated professional development

specific to transition. The participants were questioned about their perceptions regarding

professional development. Each of the 15 participants stressed the importance of the

informal learning networks given the lack of pre-service exposure to transition. Four

mentioned they were eager for professional development that is meaningful, practitioner orientated and specific to transition.

- "The most recent workshops have been about how to make sure all the boxes are checked."

- "In supported employment and transition, there really isn't that much out there."

- "I feel like the DOE doesn't do a whole bunch with transition, or I should say switching it up. I feel like finding meaningful training can be difficult - it's the same, you know, the same training and I'm like well okay we understand compliance, what's after compliance?"

- "My professional development has been much better than my college experience around learning transition. The one conference that I went to last year, the transition summit that was huge. I got a lot of information out of it that I could use in the classroom."

- "I feel like there's still not a lot out there as far as training that are specifically transition related unless you go to the transition summit, and then you get like a smorgasbord, but like daily throughout the year, I never see, I don't see much."

Having professional development that is meaningful, practitioner-orientated and content specific to transition is important to the participants above. They all expressed an eagerness to learn more about the field and were hungry for resources.

The perceptions offered by these participants mirror findings from Holeman (2014) that meaningful professional development and pre-service training is needed in the field of secondary transition; specifically provided by seasoned transition professionals. Results from this study are also in alignment with assertions from Baer, Simmons & Flexer (1996) that there is too much of a focus on compliance, for example, filling out paperwork and checking the right box. They suggest there needs to be more training on how to provide transition services.

Eleven of the fifteen didn't offer input regarding this issue. It begs the question as to why. It is possible the four that expressed the need are more seasoned and are looking for more comprehensive training. For those transition specialists that are relatively new, they may not be aware of what they need to know. Also worthy of consideration is whether this emerging field of transition has the infrastructure to support transition specialists and their professional development needs in a way that is relevant and meaningful.

Variability in defining post-school success of the students served.

Each participant was asked about how they define success. Through data analysis, one sub theme emerged. Obtaining employment and meeting goals was offered by six of the participants as a way they defined success. One participant mentioned that it is very difficult to find students once they have graduated or exited their program, as a result it's hard to know what they are doing once they have left the public school system and if they are successful.

Obtaining Employment and meeting goals. Below are the comments shared by the participants specific to employment as a means of measuring of success.

- "By how many of them leave with paid employment for those students for whom paid employment was part of their plan."

- "I think success lies in whether they complete high school, or if they leave college, whether they're able to find employment; not just employment to have a paycheck but employment that has a future to it, that they enjoy doing."

- "Jobs is a big piece of it, it's not the only piece, but jobs is a big piece of it."

- "The best possible measure is that we're successful with their transition goals."

- "By their outcomes - their graduation outcomes and what their transition plan said."

- "I would say success would be measured by what they are doing the year after they leave us."

- "I would say we measure success by how many of them leave with paid employment for those students for whom paid employment was part of their plan."

- "Being employed."

- "Did they get their driver's license? Are they using public transportation if not? If they find employment did they build a relationship with Vocational Rehabilitation and was that successful?"

- Watching the student grow, we work with them from 4 to 6 years - just helping them gain the experience, and feel comfortable. Knowing what resources to access by the time they graduate and a competitive paid employment position, or some plans for post-secondary education."

The six participants above identified obtained employment as a measure of post-school student success. All six specifically expressed the importance of paid employment for the student. The results of this study complement the findings of Test et al., (2009) that paid employment and work experiences offered as transition service are evidence based predictor of post school success.

Three participants shared that family satisfaction is a means of defining success. One explained that she defines the student's success by whether or not the student has completed specific curriculum regarding transition. Five mentioned that their states complete a survey, Indicator 14 which requires states to track employment and educational outcomes of students with disabilities once they have exited the public school system (Gaumer-Erickson, Nonan, Brussow & Gilpin, 2014). Three of the five participants that discussed Indicator 14 offered their perception that it is a means of defining success for their students. Given the assorted answers the participants offered

about evaluating the effectiveness of their services, it speaks to a professional issue in the field that is in need of more formalized guidance. It is also interesting that some of the participants didn't identify actual outcomes but rather the tool that is used to gather them (indicator 14 survey) as a means of defining success.

Summary

The major themes developed were; lack of exposure to transition competencies and skills needed during college preparation, reliance on knowledge and skills acquired in previous positions, lack of professional identity and fellowship and variability in defining post-school success of the students served.

The voices of the participants make up the data and their perceptions helped to shape the themes and sub themes. In the next chapter this researcher will cover a summary of the findings, the implications of data, recommendations for change, limitations and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion of results

The Phantom Profession: This study suggests that transition specialization is a phantom profession. The transition specialists that participated in this research study conveyed a sense of not feeling validated and that the tasks they are required to do are very real, but the profession itself in some ways does not exist. Every participant in this study explained the tasks that they do differently. Most of the transition specialists did not have a job description, for those that did, the descriptions varied significantly. The disparities that arose highlight a disjointed, emerging profession that is sorely in need of more guidance regarding roles and responsibilities. The absence of formalized certifications or endorsement on the federal level only adds to the confusion, lack of identity and lack of validation. Federal law has mandated transition services for those students who are being served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. School systems are responsible for the implementation of those mandates. Some school systems choose to employ a transition specialist whose job involves the implementation of those services. Others choose to have special education teachers implement the services. One could speculate that there are a variety of reasons for either path, such as funding, size of the district, number of identified students, or level of knowledge specific to transition of those already employed.

There are elements of the profession of transition specialization that are missing. The field has a taxonomy, as well as predictors and practices to follow that can lead to post school success for the students being served (Kohler, Gothberg, Fowler, & Coyle, 2016; Mazzotti, Rowe, Cameto, Test, & Morningstar 2013). The elements that are missing include: educational guidelines around who should be doing the actual work in the school systems and whether or not they have been prepared to do it, formal educational pathways, agreed upon credentialing guidelines that requires maintenance, a

set ethics specific to the profession and recognition by the public as a profession

(Martinez, Desiderio, & Papakonstantinou, 2010; Professional Standards Councils, n.d.;

Williams, 1998). Further, if they have not been prepared, are they aware of the available

resources such as Kohler's taxonomy, and the practices and predictors of post school

success.

Overarching inquiry: The overarching questions that drove this research study were

about the profession of transition specialization. The participants all described their jobs

differently. Not one had the same day to day tasks as another.

The first directive regarding secondary transition appeared in the 1983 Education of the

Handicapped Act Amendments. The field has been in existence for over 30 years; in

those 30+ years, it appears that there has been a lack of consistency to how the role is

defined and what the transition specialist does for the students they serve. Additionally

there is an absence of formalized certifications or endorsement on the federal level.

Furthermore, a code of ethics is missing that would specifically guide those employed as

a transition specialist with their decisions and practice.

The 15 participants in this study shared their perceptions about the profession and

their voices are captured in the themes and sub themes below.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of transition specialists regarding

their pre-service professional preparation as related to sufficient preparation to provide

effective services to students with disabilities?

Lack of knowledge. Based on the information shared by the participants of this

study, the findings suggest that there is a lack of exposure to transition competencies and

skills needed during college preparation. Eleven out of fifteen participants had no pre-

service exposure to transition. The eleven participants expressed that they were not

trained well enough at the pre-service level to handle the requirements of their positions

as transition specialists.

The Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) publishes the journal Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals. The journal is the official publication of DCDT/CEC; they specialize in the fields of special education, transition, and career development of individuals with disabilities (Sage Publishing, 2016). The research committee for the journal identified in 1997 that one of the most pressing issues in the field of transition was personnel preparation. The concern was so great, that there was a special issue published in 2003 dedicated to issues surrounding personnel preparation (Blalock, Kleinhammer-Tramill, Morningstar, & Wehmeyer, 2003).

The perceptions shared by the eleven participants conveyed feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction regarding the lack of preparation. One used the word "appalling" and expressed a sense of exasperation when describing the feeling he had regarding the lack of exposure to transition competencies during college preparation. He also questioned how the system can continue to teach those entering the field without the proper training.

Learning on the job. The findings also revealed that transition specialists are creating their positions from the ground up and are acquiring the knowledge needed on the job. As a result of having to be self-taught and self-directed as one participant put it, a transition specialist has to reply on the knowledge and skills they acquired in previous positions.

Morningstar and Clark (2003) stated that many novices in the field of transition enter without any training or awareness of the competencies needed to do the job. They point to discrepancies in allowing this to happen in the field of transition but not general or special education. Well over a decade later, the findings of this study highlight that this continues to be an issue.

Reliance on previous skills and knowledge. Seven of the participants expressed the importance of their prior work history and how it assisted them in carrying out the

tasks required of them in their role as a transition specialist. One participant shared that she worked for a non-profit and taught vocational skills and that her non-profit experience had a huge impact on her ability to do her job. She attributed her ability to work with employers, set up work experiences, and understand the pertinent laws and regulations surrounding youth employment to her transferable skill set.

When taking on the role as a transition specialist, the participants offered their perceptions about transferrable skills and knowledge they found most helpful. Three skills in particular were mentioned: counseling skills, rehabilitation counseling skills, and knowing how to navigate community resources. Participants shared that without these skills they would have been initially lost in their role as transition specialists.

Participants shared their perceptions regarding how acquiring counseling skills prior to taking a position as a transition specialist was helpful. They explained that they rely upon those skills in their current role as a transition specialist. The findings from this study align with prior research. Hamilton and Shumate (2005) found that those providing vocational evaluations, some of whom were transition specialists, use counseling skills to develop relationships with their clients. They also use them when having sensitive discussions with their client regarding their disability in particular how it can be a barrier to employment.

The usefulness of rehabilitation counseling skills was another perceived advantage among participants that had backgrounds and training in the field of rehabilitation counseling. Those participants with background in rehabilitation counseling considered this "ideal preparation" for working in a transition specialist role. The perceptions shared by these participants regarding the usefulness of rehabilitation counseling skills echo Szymanski and King (1989) findings that those trained in rehabilitation counseling receive specialized training that uniquely prepares them to

coordinate the array of school and community services necessary to ensure students with disabilities have smooth transitions from school to work or post-secondary education.

Knowledge regarding how to navigate community resources and the ability to access them was also mentioned by participants. These findings support research from McMahan and Baer (2001) when they recommended that in-service and pre-service training for those in the field of transition need to expand beyond compliance and should include practical cross-agency training to increase knowledge of surrounding services available.

Examining the perceptions of transition specialists regarding their pre-service professional preparation as related to sufficient preparation to provide effective services to students with disabilities was the focus of question one. Results indicated that given their lack of exposure to transition during their college training there was a heavy reliance on the skills acquired prior to taking on the role as a transition specialist.

The findings above align with research from Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2009). They surveyed special educators looking to see if there was a correlation between their background experiences and how well prepared they (the special educators) felt to deliver transition services. They found that special educators with more experience rated their level of preparedness higher.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of in-service transition specialists regarding their access to professional development that supports effective services to students with disabilities?

Informal Learning Networks as a source of professional development and identity.

All participants mentioned that informal learning centered on secondary transition is a significant part of how they learn the tasks of their jobs and find a professional identity. The ability to be part of an informal learning network (ILN) specific to transition is

something all of the participants found not only valuable, but necessary. The participants shared their perceptions regarding ILNs with excitement, and they expressed gratefulness.

The participants' perceptions regarding the importance of ILNs could expand understanding on what is helpful in professional development for those serving as transition specialists. Their perceptions regarding the importance of being involved with ILN's also highlight a potential way to remedy their perceived lack of identity. It is alarming that the participants described feelings of frustration, isolation and loneliness and that they were not understood by their colleagues.

Three types of ILN's were mentioned: the Community of Practice (CoP) model, transition specialist groups and groups that are facilitated by the Department of Education for that specific state.

Communities of practice. Communities of practice (CoP) are defined as people who connect around a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to improve their work as they interact on a regular basis (Wegner, 2006). Six of the fifteen participants mentioned CoP's as a means of professional development and finding an identity. The statements that they shared spoke to the importance of the CoP model as a strategy for obtaining professional development and creating fellowship with others in the field of transition.

When interviewing the participants, a sense of yearning around the need to find professional identity and fellowship was conveyed as well as a strong desire to learn from other practitioners in the field. It was shared by one participant that she gets much of her information about resources by attending CoP meetings; however, the highlight for her is connecting with others that are responsible for the same tasks that she is. She expressed feeling like a lone wolf and that the CoP helps her to alleviate some of those feelings. Similar thoughts were shared by another participant when she expressed feelings of

isolation in the school she works in and that to her own faculty she is misunderstood and an anomaly. The CoP meetings offer her a way to talk things through with like-minded individuals. The perceptions offered by these participants align with findings from Kester (2013) that knowledge and learning play an important role in the work of a CoP.

Transition specialist groups. Three of the participants mentioned transition specialist groups as a means of informal learning and finding an identity. They explained that what made this type of group stand out is that it is comprised of only transition specialists. As a result they felt there was more freedom to share frustrations without any filters or judgment. Having the ability to talk about real challenges, because the group is selective about who can participate, was something one participant valued. She explained that there is a sense of freedom to share freely as there are no other stakeholders in the room. One participant shared that she does not feel any collegiality; stating she does not fit into one specific department or building. Attending the transition specialist group has helped her develop a sense of collegiality with the other transition specialists that attend.

State Department of Education driven groups. The third type of informal learning network mentioned involved groups that were facilitated and managed by their respective state departments of education. Perceptions shared included that this group serves as a clearinghouse of information, that this group has been helpful to as a means of learning how to do the job and it provides substantial professional development. The findings from this study support research from Wolfe et al. (1998) that the most frequent source of transition instruction took place at the in-service level.

Eagerness to engage in practitioner orientated professional development specific to transition. Four of the participants mentioned they were eager for professional development that is meaningful, practitioner orientated and specific to transition. A sense of frustration was expressed by the participants that spoke to this

issue. They stated a desire for training that was not just based on compliance; they are looking for training on mechanics of how to do their jobs.

The perceptions offered by these four participants mirror findings from Holeman (2014) that meaningful professional development and pre-service training is needed in the field of secondary transition, specifically training provided by seasoned transition professionals. Results from this study are also in alignment with suggestions from Baer, Simmons & Flexer (1996) that there is too much of a focus on compliance (such as the paperwork) when it comes to transition and there needs to be more training on how to provide transition services.

Every participant stressed the importance of informal learning networks given the lack of pre-service exposure to transition. Four out of fifteen participants expressed a desire for more professional development that is practitioner-orientated and specific to transition. Eleven of the fifteen didn't offer input regarding this issue. It leads to speculation as to why. It is possible the four that expressed the need are more seasoned and are looking for more comprehensive training. For those transition specialists that are relatively new, they may not be aware of what they need to know. Also worthy of consideration is whether this emerging field of transition has the infrastructure to support transition specialists and their professional development needs in a way that is relevant and meaningful.

Research Question 3: How do transition specialists evaluate the effectiveness of the transition assistance they provide?

The participants shared their perceptions regarding how they evaluate the effectiveness of the services they provide. The theme that emerged involved the student's employment and goal attainment once they have left the school system. It was shared that it is very difficult to find students once they have graduated or exited the school system, and as a result it is hard to know what they are doing and if they are successful.

Obtaining employment and meeting goals.

Six of the participants in this study specifically mentioned paid employment as a means of measuring success. Their perceptions support the findings of Test et al., (2009) that paid employment and work experiences offered as a transition service are an evidence-based in school predictor of post school success.

Five of the fifteen mentioned that their states complete a survey, Indicator 14 which requires states to track employment and educational outcomes of students with disabilities once they have exited the public school system (Gaumer-Erickson, Nonan, Brussow & Gilpin, 2014). Three of the five participants that discussed Indicator 14 indicated that it is a means of defining success for their students. It is also interesting that some of the participants didn't identify actual outcomes but rather the tool that is used to gather them (indicator 14 survey) as a means of defining success. Given the assorted answers the participants offered about evaluating the effectiveness of their services, it speaks to a professional issue in the field that is in need of more formalized guidance.

Implications

Implications for Practice

Transition specialists are frustrated by feelings of isolation, lack of understanding and lack of a professional identity. They expressed not feeling connected to anyone in their places of work. They were able to find fellowship and a sense of validation externally through informal learning networks.

Professional organizations such as The Division for Career Development and Transition (DCDT) exist, however transition specialists and their employers are not always aware of them. Many states also have a variety of ILN's specific to transition. Administrators and supervisors that support transition specialists need to be mindful of this phenomenon. Specifically they may want to consider sponsoring their DCDT memberships, and making sure they have paid time during their work day to participate

in informal learning networks. As the results of this study point out, allowing the transition specialist to reach out to others in the field who are doing the same work is essential.

This study highlighted the positive impact informal learning networks have on remediating the feelings of isolation for the transition specialist. It should be noted there are other potential avenues to remediate those feelings, for example professional organizations similar to DCDT have local chapters and national committees.

The Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) may want to consider a specific designation for those practicing rehabilitation with transition aged youth. This study revealed that having rehabilitation counseling skills can be useful and an interdisciplinary approach to training is helpful for transition specialists. This type of designation may be attractive to those trained as rehabilitation counselors and potentially those looking to enhance their knowledge and skills specific to transition and rehabilitation.

According to the United States Department of Labor (2015) the following are typical tasks of a rehabilitation counselor: understanding disability and how it impacts employment, understanding employment law in particular for those with disabilities, labor market information, evaluation of work skills and capacities, and providing individual and group counseling around adjustment to disability.

Jenkins, Patterson and Szymanski state that rehabilitation counseling is grounded in a strengths based model and that the "assets of individuals with disabilities need to be emphasized, supported and developed" (p. 3). This differs from the special education model from which the tasks of a transition specialist emerged from. The special education model requires proof of an intrinsic deficit in order to receive services (Harry & Klingner, 2007).

The melding of these two philosophies should be at the heart of any type of transition designation that the CRCC consider developing. Including background on special education and how the system works would be an important tenet to any such designation. Additionally, training on how to best work with and engage young adults would be critical.

Implications for Pre-service Education

The findings from this research study have implications regarding how transition specialists are educated, what they should be learning and ways in which to support them once employed. Based upon the perception offed by the participants of this study, transition specialists need a better understanding of *how* to do the job. While receiving their college education, more consideration should be given to internships in the field. For example, those that are majoring in special education would benefit from having a specific amount of hours dedicated to transition tasks; practicing skills such as how to locate adult service providers and how to set up work experiences and how to administer vocational assessments would be valuable.

This study highlighted the need for transition specialists to feel equipped with the proper knowledge and skills in order to assist the students they are serving. Although these findings are not new, they highlight that pre-service training for transition specialists continues to be inadequate (Anderson et al., 2003; Morningstar & Liss 2008; Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009; Kohler & Greene, 2004). Research shows that qualified transition specialists are a significant factor in improving the outcomes of students with disabilities (Blalock et al., 2003, Kohler & Greene, 2004). Further, Institutions of higher education (IHEs) report they are addressing the educational needs of pre-service transition specialists (Anderson et al., 2003)**.** If qualified transition specialists lead to better student outcomes, yet they continue to report feeling unprepared

to do the work, and IHEs state they are addressing transition, there is a disconnect in the process.

The findings of this study raise the question whether or not the content some IHEs are delivering is relevant, practical and useful and whether or not those that are teaching the pre-service transition specialists are equipped with the right information. Transition specialists are serving students with a variety of needs, some very intense. There has been and continues to be a cry to remedy this phenomenon for years and yet the field is still grappling with the issue.

Additional implications specific to training that arose from this research study suggest that transition specialists benefit from access to informal learning networks as a means of professional development. The fifteen participants represented six different states, and 100% of them stressed the importance of informal learning networks, such as CoPs, given the lack of pre-service exposure to transition. These findings support those of Urquhart et al., 2013 and Kester 2013 that CoPs can be a helpful means of training for transition specialists.

Another finding of this study aligns with previous research that the transition specialist's pre-service work history plays an important part in their ability to carry out the tasks of their job
(Blalock et al., 2003; Benitez, Morningstar & Frey, 2009; wolf et al., 1998). The findings from this study highlight specific training from previous disciplines that the participants perceived as helpful when working in the field of transition: counseling and rehabilitation.

The implication is that transition knowledge (pre-service and in-service) needs to transcend special education and include aspects of counseling and rehabilitation. Examples of knowledge and skills participants perceived as helpful from rehabilitation included an exceptional understanding regarding a variety of disabilities, whole life

planning, and engaging with adult service providers. Examples of counseling knowledge and skills that the participants perceived as helpful included working with families and students in crisis, knowing about community resources and being able to think outside of the box, in particular around how to assist students in working toward the acquisition of their post-secondary goals.

The idea of coordinating the expertise of various disciplines by the sharing of information and skills has been offered as a means of training those in transition roles (Flexer, Simmons & Tankersley 1997; Orelove, & Sobsey 1987; Szymanski, Hanley-Maxwell, & Parker, 1990). Tilson & Simonsen (2012) suggested that the fields of career counseling, vocational rehabilitation and special education have the skills sets needed to assist students in obtaining their post school outcomes. Additionally, Flexer, Simmons and Tankersley (1997) asserted that transition specialists need an interdisciplinary and coordinated approach to training in order for it to be effective.

A transdisciplinary approach between special education, rehabilitation and counseling emerged from the data. These three disciplines emerged when participants shared how significant their pre-service work history was as it related to their ability to complete tasks as a transition specialist. This researcher would suggest that the field consider the three knowledge domains as forming a triad; the transition triad see Figure 5-1.

The logic behind this model is that when components of the three disciplines are combined, there is potential to develop for a more well-rounded and competent transition specialist. By rethinking how we train transition specialists there is an opportunity to develop a comprehensive and standardized framework to help ensure that all students are provided quality transition services. Further, by synthesizing rehabilitation, counseling and special education competencies transition specialists may be better prepared and feel more confident in their ability to handle the demands of their jobs.

Figure 5-1 is offered as a means of visualizing the three disciplines coming together to form a triad. It also makes an attempt at establishing a link between practice and the findings of this study. IHE's, state agencies and school systems may want to consider this model when designing programs that are built to train transition specialists; whether pre-service or in-service.

Figure 5-1

Transition Triad
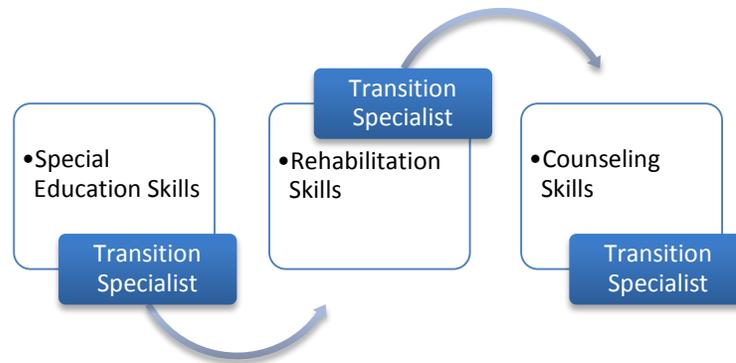
This researcher recommends that states consider having cross stakeholder discussions regarding how those providing transition services in their states are prepared. The transition triad could serve as a starting point for discussions. Getting input from students, families, policy makers, researchers and practitioners would be a vital first step to ensure that transition specialists are prepared to serve the students they are supporting.

Implications for Policy Makers

The United States Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) ought to consider examining the required pre-service elements for those who are serving as transition specialists. A starting point would be reviewing competencies from the fields of special education, rehabilitation and counseling in order to find the areas within each that would be a benefit to the transition specialist. Grants, initiatives and or programming via a transdisciplinary approach to

training transition specialists would be wise investments to help ensure they are provided

the proper education before entering the field.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 included

language that schools should provide high-quality intensive pre-service preparation and

professional development for those working with disabled students. The results of this

study suggest that mandate is not being met. Additional consideration should be given to

national policy that articulates the specific training transition specialists need.

It is also recommend that a national dialogue occur with researchers, policy

makers and perhaps most importantly practitioners from the fields of special education,

rehabilitation and counseling to evaluate the current research regarding transition giving

particular consideration to how transition specialist are prepared for their roles. By

reviewing the current federal research agenda and considering how transition specialists

are trained, perhaps more monies can be directed toward understanding why

discrepancies exist and how to remediate them. One example might be offering grants

that would require researchers to comprehensively investigate how transition specialists

end up in their roles and what set of skills they arrive with. Such research may offer

insights as to why discrepancies exist.

A lack of consistency pertaining to who is providing transition services, how they

are trained and what tasks they are providing was exposed through the perceptions of the

participants in this study. Having federal guidance specific to these issues would provide

much needed consistency to a disjointed field.

State credentialing.

States may want to consider following Massachusetts when considering the

creation of transition endorsements. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education (2016) defines an endorsement as supplementary credential issued

to an educator indicating satisfactory knowledge and skills to perform services in a particular area.

Massachusetts took a very inclusive approach to the transition endorsement they developed (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013). They include special educators, rehabilitation counselors, school counselors, school social workers and school adjustment counselors as professionals that should consider and would be eligible for their transition endorsement program. In order to earn the endorsement from Massachusetts, specific criteria must be met. Endorsement candidates must have a minimum of two years of experience under specific licenses. Those licenses include teacher of students with moderate disabilities, severe disabilities, visually impaired or deaf and hard of hearing. Also included are those with a license in school guidance counseling, school social work, school adjustment counseling or rehabilitation counseling (as determined by the commission on rehabilitation counselor certification). Additionally candidates must complete a 150 hour field experience that includes the provision of transition services. There are also specific expectations regarding competencies the candidate must know: the foundation and implementation of transition education and services, individual transition assessment and systems evaluation, transition systems and support and effective collaboration (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013). These competences can be met through graduate programs offered by institutions such as the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB). UMB has developed a transition leadership program; candidates are required to take five graduate courses focused on transition and complete a practicum (University of Massachusetts Boston, 2016).The findings of this study would support the model developed by Massachusetts given the transdisciplinary approach that was emphasized.

The three disciplines included in the transition triad special education, rehabilitation and counseling tend to work in silos, meaning each discipline is narrowly

defined and the pre-service training has a very specific focus. Having a transition endorsement that allows various disciplines in is a potential way to remediate the issue around working in silos.

A particularly troubling finding in this study was the perception regarding lack of identity and isolation experienced by the transition specialists. State endorsements would provide legitimacy, identity and more importantly structure to a very complex and misunderstood field. Endorsements would also have the potential to create a sense of community for those that hold it, perhaps assisting to alleviate their perceived sense of isolation. This call for state endorsements is not the first; Mazzotti, Test & Mustain (2014) suggested that states develop credentialing avenues such as licensing, certification and/or endorsements. They go on to assert that until states make some changes, conditions in the field will remain fragile with sites "dependent on one or two experts who, when they leave, take their expertise with them, often requiring state or local programs to start over" (p. 16). The results of this study further document the need for endorsements, certifications and or licensing in the field. The transitions specialists in this study are hungry for an identity and relief from isolation.

Future Research

There are several areas worthy of consideration for future research. The first area concerns the perceived lack of identity experienced by transition professionals. There is a paucity of research regarding transition specialists and professional identity. More studies capturing the voice of those embedded in the provision of transition services is warranted. Examination of their perceptions specific to their professional identity may provide a deeper understanding to this complex phenomenon. In particular, how ILN's helped these participants to remediate their perceived lack of training and professional identity.

Additionally, future research examining if there is a correlation between the transition specialist's training and the post-school outcomes of the students they serve is

warranted. This recommendation mirrors that of Morningstar & Mazzotti (2014) that post-school outcomes in relationship to teacher training need to be examined.

Given the assorted answers the participants offered about evaluating the effectiveness of their services, it speaks to an emerging professional infrastructure that is in need of more formalized guidance. There was a lack of consistency and not much attention paid to what successful outcome criteria is. Future research around how transition specialists measure the effectiveness of their services should be studied.

Investigating the effectiveness of a transdisciplinary training approach including counseling, rehabilitation and special education, as referenced in this study as the transition triad, may offer insights as to which specific competencies from each discipline would benefit transition specialists.

The results of this study highlighted a lack of consistency regarding how the role of transition specialists is defined at the local level and what tasks in particular they are responsible for. It leads to speculation about how and why this is the case. Future research should aim to investigate why this discrepancy exists in the field and further, what the impact of that inconsistency is. In particular, the documents reviewed in this dissertation were job descriptions from five of the participants. Given the small number that were reviewed, and how diverse they were, obtaining a larger sample of job descriptions to review in order to further identify discrepancies or reveal more commonalities may lend itself useful.

Having the ability to measure student outcomes once they have left the public school system is challenging. Locating students and getting the information needed can be difficult. Future research regarding how this dilemma could be remedied would be extremely useful to the field. The idea of using social media as a tool to find students may be worthy of consideration.

The sample size of this study was small, although geographically six states were represented, the number of participants was small. As such, the voices of the 15 participants do not speak for all transition specialists. A more comprehensive sampling may provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of transition specialization.

Limitations

In order to find participants that fit the criteria for this study, a snowball sample was used. This method relies on the network of the individual conducting the sampling, and that individual's ability to find appropriate participants. This is a limitation since not all potential candidates were solicited. Additionally, the sample size was small only 15 individuals from six different states were interviewed. It would be inappropriate to assert that these 15 individuals represent the voices of all transition specialists.

This researcher has worked as a transition specialist and is interested in the pre-service education of those serving in transition roles; there is potential for bias regarding the interpretation of the results. Bias was addressed in Chapter 3 and measures (triangulation, thick description, member checking, peer review) were taken in an effort to avoid it.

In this study, only those working full time at the high school or district level in a transition role were included in the population sample. Perhaps by including those that work part time or those that work for charter, private or alternative schools different perceptions may have been offered.

Job descriptions were requested from the participants as a means of evidence. Although the participants were asked for a copy, this researcher chose not to ask the school district for a copy. It is possible that the district had a copy and the transition specialist was unaware of it. In an effort to protect the identity of the participants, this researcher chose not to contact the districts.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was twofold. The overarching phenomenon explored was the profession of transition specialization. The second purpose was to explore and obtain an in-depth understanding of the participant's perceptions regarding the sufficiency of their professional preparation and the sufficiency and accessibility of in-service professional development.

This research pointed to the idea that transition specialization is a "phantom profession", the work exists, but the profession itself lacks identity and the role is elusive. Standardized training and credentialing is sorely needed; common ethics and principles are also warranted. The profession has not formalized; until it does, role and identity issues will continue to be a concern.

The findings of this study provide some insights as to how transition specialists can be supported at the pre-service and in-service level in order to obtain the knowledge and tools they need to assist students with disabilities meet their post-secondary goals.

Research has demonstrated that qualified transition specialists are a significant factor in improving the outcomes of students with disabilities (Blalock et al., 2003, Kohler & Greene, 2004). If the training transition specialists receive does not provide an understanding of effective transition services, pre-service field training opportunities on how to deliver these services, and ways to evaluate effectiveness of those services, it is unrealistic to expect staff to execute the tasks associated with positive student outcomes necessary without significant professional development once hired.

Well over a decade ago, Morningstar and Clark (2003) called for a more unified approach to personnel preparation for those delivering transition services; specifically around competencies and experiences needed to do the actual work. There have been concerted attempts by the field, in particular DCDT, to offer standards. Although these resources exist, many of those that need to know about them do not. As a result they are

often left scrambling to figure things out while on the job. Allowing this trend to continue

puts arguably the most fragile students at risk of not getting the proper support in making

the transition out of the secondary school setting.

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Appendix A

Specialty Set: CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist

CEC Advanced Preparation Standard 1　　　**Assessment**

CEC Advanced Preparation Standards
1.0 Special education specialists use valid and reliable assessment practices to minimize bias.
Key Elements
1.1 Special education specialists minimize bias in assessment.
1.2　Special education specialists design and implement assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of practices and programs
Specialty Set: CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist
Knowledge
K1.1　Variety of formal and informal transition assessments and procedures to identify student strengths, preferences & interests critical to transition to outcomes (postsecondary education, employment, independent living)*.*
Skills
S1.1　Utilize a variety of transition assessments on an on-going basis to develop appropriate transition plans.
S1.2　Modify transition assessments to meet individual student needs.
S1.3　Interpret results of transition assessments for students, **families** and professionals.
S1.4　Develop measurable postsecondary goals based on transition assessment results.
S1.5　Match student preferences and interests with assessment results with skills and　demands of post school environments.

S1.6 Apply transition assessment results to develop natural support systems in post school settings.

S1.7 Assess student progress in work based experiences.

CEC Advanced Preparation Standards
2.0 Special education specialists use their knowledge of general1 and specialized2 curricula to improve programs, supports, and services at classroom, school, community, and system levels.
Key Elements
2.1 Special education specialists align educational standards to provide access to challenging curriculum to meet the needs individuals with exceptionalities.
2.2 Special educators continuously broaden and deepen professional knowledge, and expand expertise with instructional technologies, curriculum standards, effective teaching strategies, and assistive technologies to support access to and learning of challenging content.
2.3 Special education specialists use understanding of diversity and individual learning differences to inform the selection, development, and implementation of comprehensive curricula for individuals with exceptionalities.
Specialty Set: CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist
Knowledge

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¹ As used, "general curricula", means the academic content of the general curriculum including math, reading, English/language arts, science, social studies, and the arts.
² As used, "specialized curricula" means the content of specialized interventions or sets of interventions including, but not limited to academic, strategic, communicative, social, emotional, and independence curricula.

K2.1 Evidence-based instruction, curricular resources, and practices regarding transition to post school settings

Skills

S2.1 Provide teachers with instructional practices and related activities to embed transition content within general academic courses.

S2.2 Offer instructional, related activities, and curricular resources related to transition planning.

S2.3 Deliver self-advocacy and self-determination information and resources.

S2.4 Provide instructional resources and related activities addressing career awareness leading to employment preparation and postsecondary education.

S2.5 Develop school-based employment experiences and curricula in preparation for postsecondary education and community integration.

S2.6 Ensure that student instructional and related activities facilitate the movement toward identified post-secondary goals.

S2.7 Evaluate evidence-based transition practices and curricula to ensure post school outcomes.

S2.8 Facilitate student-centered transition planning approaches.

CEC Advanced Preparation Standard 3   Programs, Services, and Outcomes

CEC Advanced Preparation Standards

3.0 Special education specialists facilitate the continuous improvement of general and special education programs, supports, and services at the classroom, school, and system levels for individuals with exceptionalities.

Key Elements

3.1 Special education specialists design and implement evaluation activities to improve

   programs, supports, and services for individuals with exceptionalities.

3.2 Special education specialists use understanding of cultural, social, and economic diversity and individual learner differences to inform the development and improvement of programs, supports, and services for individuals with exceptionalities.

3.3 Special education specialists apply knowledge of theories, evidence-based practices, and relevant laws to advocate for programs, supports, and services for individuals with exceptionalities.

3.4 Special education specialists use instructional and assistive technologies to improve programs, supports, and services for individuals with exceptionalities.

3.5 Special education specialists evaluate progress toward achieving the vision, mission, and goals of programs, services, and supports for individuals with exceptionalities.

Specialty Set: CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist
Knowledge
K3.1 In-school and community evidence-based employment preparation and postsecondary programs and services
K3.2 Strategies for providing community-based training
K3.3 Strategies for linking transition goals to academic content
K3.4 Job seeking and retention skills identified by employers as essential for successful employment
K3.5 Career/professional technical education (formerly vocational education) strategies, models, and curricula
K3.6 Range of post-school outcome options for supporting adult life outcomes (i.e., employment, postsecondary education, and independent living)

K3.7 Effects of the cultural and environmental milieu of the individual and the family on behavior and learning.

Skills
S3.1 Develop annual goals and objectives related to measurable postsecondary goals.
S3.2 Select relevant transition services and course of study to achieve postsecondary goals and objectives.
S3.3 Align instructional activities and related activities with postsecondary goals and objectives.
S3.4 Identify and facilitate modifications within work and community environments.
S3.5 Evaluate instructional and related activities in relation to postsecondary goals.
S3.6 Develop educational experiences that correspond with IEP postsecondary goals.

CEC Advanced Preparation Standard 4   Research & Inquiry

CEC Advanced Preparation Standards
4.0 Special education specialists conduct, evaluate, and use inquiry to guide professional practice.
Key Elements
4.1 Special education specialists evaluate research and inquiry to identify effective practices.
4.2 Special education specialists use knowledge of the professional literature to improve practices with individuals with exceptionalities and their families
4.3 Special education specialists foster an environment that is supportive of continuous instructional improvement and engage in the design and implementation of research and inquiry.

Specialty Set: CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist
Knowledge
K4.1 Transition practices, programs and services that produce successful post-school outcomes
K4.2 Theoretical and applied models of transition programs and services
K4.3 Research on relationships between transition programs, services, and individual outcomes
Skills
S4.1 Collect post-school outcomes data for youth exiting school to identify relevant variables to improve transition services and programs.
S4.2 Analyze data of individual transition plans to address federal and state compliance requirements.
S4.3 Use evidence-based practices and research to develop transition programs and services.

CEC Advanced Preparation Standard 5   Leadership and Policy

CEC Advanced Preparation Standards
5.0 Special education specialists provide leadership to formulate goals, set and meet high professional expectations, advocate for effective policies and evidence-based practices, and create positive and productive work environments.
Key Elements
5.1 Special education specialists model respect for and ethical practice for all individuals and encourage challenging expectations for individuals with exceptionalities.
5.2 Special education specialists support and use linguistically and culturally responsive

practices.

5.3 Special education specialists create and maintain collegial and productive work environments that respect and safeguard the rights of individuals with exceptionalities and their families.

5.4 Special education specialists advocate for policies and practices that improve programs, services, and outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities.

5.5 Special education specialists advocate for the allocation of appropriate resources for the preparation and professional development of all personnel who serve individuals with exceptionalities.

Specialty Set: CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist

Knowledge

K5.1 Transition laws and policies (e.g., IDEA, Vocational Rehabilitation Act, Fair Labor Standards Act)

Skills

S5.1 Advocate for transition program and policy changes to improve transition services.

S5.2 Engage in individual student advocacy to obtain transition planning and services.

S5.3 Train district professionals, community agency personnel, and other transition stakeholders about transition for individuals with exceptionalities.

S5.4 Provide leadership to insure that individual with exceptionalities experience the same opportunities and resources as those without exceptionalities.

S5.5 Include and prepare the student, family, team and other related-agency members for the transition planning process.

S5.6 Coordinate and facilitate on-going transition planning during and after IEP meetings.

S5.7 Ensure same career and vocational opportunities as peers without disabilities.

CEC Advanced Preparation Standard 6   Professional and Ethical Practice

CEC Advanced Preparation Standards

6.0 Special education specialists use foundational knowledge of the field and professional Ethical Principles and Practice Standards to inform special education practice, engage in lifelong learning, advance the profession, and perform leadership responsibilities to promote the success of professional colleagues and individuals with exceptionalities.

Key Elements

6.1 A comprehensive understanding of the history of special education, legal policies, ethical standards, and emerging issues informs special education specialist leadership.

6.2 Special education specialists model high professional expectations and ethical practice, and create supportive environments that safeguard the legal rights and improve outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities and their families

6.3 Special education specialists model and promote respect for all individuals and facilitate ethical professional practice.

6.4 Special education specialists actively participate in professional development and learning communities to increase professional knowledge and expertise.

6.5 Special education specialists plan, present, and evaluate professional development focusing on effective and ethical practice at all organizational levels.

6.6 Special education specialists actively facilitate and participate in the preparation and induction of prospective special educators.

6.7 Special education specialists actively promote the advancement of the profession.

Specialty Set: CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist
Knowledge
K6.1 Scope, role, and responsibilities of a transition specialist
K6.2 Scope, role, and responsibilities of community agency personnel related to transition services
K6.3 Organizations and publications relevant to the field of transition
Skills
S6.1 Develop and maintain professional transition-related ethics in working with community and related agency personnel.
S6.2 Participate in activities of professional organizations in the field of transition.

CEC Advanced Preparation Standard 7   Collaboration

CEC Advanced Preparation Standards
7.0 Special education specialists collaborate with stakeholders to improve programs, services, and outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities and their families.
Key Elements
7.1 Special education specialists use culturally responsive practices to enhance collaboration.
7.2 Special education specialists use collaborative skills to improve programs, services, and outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities
7.3 Special education specialists collaborate to promote understanding, resolve conflicts, and build consensus for improving program, services, and outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities.

Specialty Set: CEC Advanced Special Education Transition Specialist
Knowledge
K7.1 Strategies for collaborating with stakeholders to insure and increase effective transition services, supports, and outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities and their families
K7.2 Roles and responsibilities of educators, employers, and other stakeholders in the variety of settings related to postsecondary outcomes
K7.3 Employment trends and needs in the community
Skills
S7.1 Promote active involvement of families, especially those who are culturally and linguistically diverse, throughout the transition decision-making and implementation process.
S7.2 Coordinate interagency agreements and partnerships to use and share data to achieve postsecondary outcomes.
S7.3 Communicate with employers and other professionals to develop and monitor natural support networks.
S7.4 Disseminate transition information and resources to stakeholders.
S7.5 Participate in community level transition teams.
S7.6 Ensure compliance with federal and state policies impacting transition (Fair Labor Standards Act, Vocational Rehabilitation Act, etc.).
S7.7 Implement student/family referrals to postsecondary and community services.
S7.8 Coordinate work-based programs (e.g., work-study, paid work experiences, internships).
S7.9 Coordinate regularly with employers, businesses, and work site personnel.
S7.10 Plan accommodations and modifications in postsecondary, educational, and training

settings.
S7.11 Develop job placements within the community and coordinate placement activities with relevant agencies.

Appendix B

Pre-interview survey questions

1. What is your name and professional title?

2. How many years have you worked in the field of transition?

3. What is your academic background (i.e. specific college degrees)?

4. What is your professional work background?

5. What specific certifications do you hold?

6. What preparation (specific to transition) if any was part of your college program?

7. What if any on-the-job training (specific to transition) did you receive?

8. What types of in-service training (specific to transition) have you had?

9. What type of professional development (specific to transition) do you have access to?

10. How did you learn to do the "transition tasks" for your position?

Appendix C

Application for IRB

PLYMOUTH STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH APPLICATION

Part A

1. Title of Study: Perceptions of transition specialists who serve high school students with disabilities in order to understand their insights regarding the sufficiency of their professional preparation and development.

2. Investigator's Name: Dawn E. Breault

3. Department: College of Graduate Studies, Plymouth State University.

4. Phone: 603-566-9672

5. Plymouth State University E-mail address: dbreault1@plymouth.edu

6. If applicant is a student, name of faculty research supervisor: Dr. Gail Mears

   Phone: (603) 535-3119
   Email address: gmears@plymouth.edu

7. Is this research being funded? No

8. Beginning date 10/1/15 and ending date 1/30/16 of the study.

9. Level of review requested, if known: x exempt <u>expedited</u>   full

10. Does the study require human participants? Yes Estimated Number: 15

11. Where will participant recruitment occur? Participants will be contacted by phone and/or e-mail inviting them to participate, using participation letter (see Appendix A).

12. Will participants receive compensation for participating in the study? No

13. Does research involve special populations specifically children, prisoners, pregnant women, mentally/ physically disadvantaged? No

14. What kind of risks if any, will participants be exposed to? Provide a detailed

statement about risk in the brief summary.   Regarding anticipated physical,

psychological, social, economic or legal risks to the participants; the level of risk is

minimal. Some questions may cause discomfort and interviews may cause fatigue.

15. What efforts will be made to minimize the risks? The interviews involve answering questions surrounding the participant's perceptions regarding their professional training and development. Some questions may cause discomfort about being identified and interviews may cause fatigue. Participants can take breaks as needed if they become fatigued. Regarding answering questions related to pre-service and professional development that may cause discomfort; in order to mitigate any risk associated with the potential of the participants administrators/supervisors discovering what was said, no real names will be used in the study. A coding system will be developed in order to ensure confidentiality. That coding system will be stored on a password protected laptop in a locked office. Any hard copy data and or artifacts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. After three years, the data will be destroyed.

16. Will participants be exposed to deception? No

17. Is this an anonymous survey (i.e.; responses cannot be linked to the identity of the participants in any manner)? Yes, all interview transcripts will be coded so that the true identity of the participant is kept confidential.

18. For those applications that involve research being conducted by one or more students, has the protocol described in the application been approved by a supervising faculty member, a proposal defense or a dissertation/thesis defense process? Yes
Approval Date: TBD

19. Investigator's Assurances:

> I certify that the information contained herein is complete and accurate. I agree to conform to the procedures as described and to conduct the research with the highest respect and regard for the participants' right to be protected from undue risk or invasion of privacy. If changes to the procedure become necessary, I agree to seek prior approval from the IRB.

> Dawn Breault as principal investigator, if changes to the procedure become necessary, I agree to seek prior approval from the IRB as well as to inform my

research supervisor and the Director of my program. Finally, I agree to keep my research supervisor informed of my progress and of any complications that may arise.

Name: Dawn Breault_____.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

20. Assurances of Faculty Research Supervisor:

I certify that the information contained herein accurately represents the student's complete and final research study and that it has been reviewed and approved by all responsible for the supervision of the work. I agree to periodically review the student's progress and make sure that the procedures are being carried out as approved.

Name:_ Gail Mears_____.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

CHECKLIST FOR THE IRB REVIEW OF THE APPLICATION

Note: This checklist serves as a face sheet for review of the IRB application. If any item below is not applicable, please mark the item N/A and provide a brief rationale describing why the item does not apply or should not be required in the consent form.

Purpose

1. _x___A brief statement of the purpose of the study.

2._x___ A brief statement of background and significance.

Participants

3.__x___A statement describing the participants which includes anticipated age and other demographic information, and inclusion/exclusion criteria.

4.__x__ A description of the specific methods to be used for participant recruitment.

5._n/a____A statement whether minors (under age 18) will be involved as participants.

6._n/a____A statement that indicates investigator will obtain assent to participate from minor.

MATERIALS

7.___x _A description of the measurement procedures to be used.

8.__x__All instruments used to collect data from the participants are appended to the application including demographic forms.

PROCEDURES

9.__x__A description of the data collection methodology/procedure.

10.__x__A statement of the risks to the participants and/or society.

11._x__A statement describing how risk will be managed or minimized.

12._x__A statement identifying liability and how the injury compensation process will be managed.

13.__x__A statement describing any potential benefits to the participants and/or society.

14._x__A statement describing the specific methods to assure confidentiality.

14._x__A statement whether compensation will be provided to participants for participation.

16.__x_A discussion of alternative therapies or procedure, if applicable.

17._n/a___If drugs are used in research an addendum for "research involving drug administration" must be included.

Other

15._x__References (include only those references that are cited within the body of the IRB application).

16a._n/a__A consent form with addenda as necessary.

16b._n/a__An assent form with addenda as necessary

17.__n/a__Appendices related to support for the project (approval for use of Institute equipment, approval by

        appropriate person at site for collaboration with letter of support).

18. __x_Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement has been completed and included with the application.

19.__x_ Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor signatures on the application.

20. _x_ Attached certificate of completion for NIH or CITI Human Subjects Training

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PROTOCOL TEMPLATE

PART B

Please use the following template to summarize your study as part of the application process. Please complete all of the sections.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to complete an in-depth inquiry with transition specialists; examining their perceptions specific to the sufficiency of their professional preparation and access and sufficiency to professional development.

BRIEF BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Division on Career Development and Transition (2000) defined the term transition specialist as "an individual, who plans, coordinates, delivers, and evaluates transition education and services at the school or system level, in conjunction with other educators, families, students, and representatives of community organizations" (para. 2).

Some argue that transition specialists lack the skills to prepare students with disabilities for the transition from the secondary school setting to life after high school (Anderson et al., 2003; Moringstar & Liss 2008). In addition, others report that pre-service educators do not have the transition skill set needed upon exiting institutions of higher education (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009). Further, research has also shown that qualified transition professionals are a significant factor in improving the outcomes of students with disabilities (Blalock et al., 2003, Kohler & Greene, 2004). Greene and Kochhar-Bryant (as cited in Kohler & Greene, 2004, p. 147) reported that most special educators involved in transition planning received most of their training "on the job" and often felt unprepared to implement services and support that would assist students with disabilities in a successful transition. Given that well trained transition professionals are a factor in the successful transition of students with disabilities and many transition professionals reported feeling unprepared; it leads one to surmise there is a disconnect in the field.

Not only does research support that pre-service training for transition professionals is poor, but once employed, opportunities for professional development are disjointed and haphazard. In particular; Morningstar & Benitz (as cited in Moringstar & Liss 2008) state that the "present state of professional development specific to transition is illustrated by a lack of clear policies, as well as limited systems planning for delivering and evaluating professional development" (p. 52).

PARTICIPANTS

- *Since the population desired for this study is very specific and difficult to find, a snowball or chain method of sampling will be used. Snowball or chain sampling assists the researcher in finding those participants that are difficult to locate and who fit the criteria the researcher is after (Creswell, 2013).*

- The Department of Education from each of the six states has a point person for secondary transition. A simple internet search yielded their contact information. Each of those six contacts were e-mailed and asked if they could assist finding individuals that fit the inclusion criteria for this study in their state (hence snowball sampling). Participants will be asked to contact the researcher if they are interested in participating in the study. Depending on the number of replies, the goal is to have at least 2 participants from each state. From the responses, candidates will be selected via a random name draw.

- Participants will be from the six states in the northeast section of the United States; they are all over the age of 18.

- Once participants have been secured, they will be contacted in order to set up an interview time.

Participant Inclusion Criteria.

The inclusion criterion for this study consists of those working full time at the high school or district level in a transition role. They need to be serving students with disabilities in planning for life after high school and helping support the activities surrounding such plans. Activities that support transition could include things such as development of work experiences, administering transition assessment, pre-employment skills training and consulting on the development of the transition plan in the student's individualized education plan (IEP).

Participant Exclusion Criteria. Individuals that work part time in the field of transition, and those that do not work for public school systems.

MATERIALS

The materials for this study will include:
- Consent form
- Survey questions
- Laptop with "Skype"
- Interviews conducted via SKYPE will be recorded using Evaer
- Telephone
- Interviews conducted via telephone will be recorded using a digital recorder.
- Face to face interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder.
- Researcher's notebook.

PROCEDURE

Names of possible participants will be double checked against the inclusion criteria. Depending on the number of potential participants that reply, (the goal is to have at least 2 participants from each state) candidates will be selected via a random name draw.

Interviews. The interviews will be set up with the participants at a time that is convenient for them. The interviews will last between 30-60 minutes.

Interview Questions. Participant interviews will take place in one session. See appendix B for the list of questions.

Member checking. Once the data has been transcribed, the researcher will e-mail the session to the participant in order to review the tentative findings and interpretations of the data for accuracy. Participants will be afforded an opportunity to add additional information if they feel it is needed.

Peer Review. Peer review will be accomplished by this researcher selecting a colleague in the field to review the findings, ask questions about the process and provide feedback as necessary.

Thick and rich descriptions. The narrative regarding the findings will include thick and rich descriptions; meaning that details will be provided when writing about a theme. Writing in this way allows the reader to see the full details of the data and possibly transfer the information to other settings and determine if said finding could be transferred (Creswell, 2013).

Artifact review. Participants may have documents, files and or a variety of other items to share that would be considered artifacts. These artifacts may help to inform the researcher regarding the questions asked.

Data Analyses.

This research study is qualitative in nature; specifically the approach falls under the umbrella of hermeneutic phenomenology. van Madden (as cited in Gill, 2014) proposed four analytical activities when conducting hermeneutic phenomenology. The researcher conducts a thematic analysis to tease out essential themes; describes the

phenomena through writing that requires many revisions in order to obtain deep meaning;

practices thoughtfulness when working with participants, reflexivity that involves

examining oneself as the researcher as well as the actual research relationship; balances

the research context by considering the parts and whole by taking a step back from

explicit details of what something is in order to develop the findings. Once the data has

been collected, the text will be thoroughly reviewed using the above four step process in

order to discover the intention and meaning behind it. The interviews will be transcribed

by hand by this researcher.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Risks. The potential risk to which the participants may be exposed is minimal. In order to

mitigate any risks associated with this study, procedures have been put in place. See #15.

Benefits. This study will document the perceptions of transition specialists serving

students with disabilities. Specific to their perceptions related to the sufficiency of their

professional preparation and development. Exploring how those who are employed to

carry out the mandates above may shed light on possible themes, patters and trends that

in turn could be used to make a positive impact on the field; potentially helping to create

more positive outcomes for students.

Confidentiality. All information that is collected will be kept confidential. Participant

names will not be used. A coding system will be developed in order to ensure

confidentiality. That coding system will also be stored on a password protected laptop.

Data will be stored on a password protected laptop and the laptop will be stored in a

locked office. After three years, the data will be destroyed. Any hard copy data and or

artifacts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Alternative Therapies or Procedures. Participants can elect to not take part in the study.

Compensation. No compensation will be provided.

POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Despite extensive searches and consultation with a highly citied national expert in the field (D. W. Test, personal communication, December 10, 2014) no studies were found that were qualitative in nature and explored the perceptions of transition specialists specific to professional preparation and development; leading to a gap in knowledge. The data collected in this qualitative study will allow the voices of those in the field to be formally documented.

Regarding the significance of this study, the following statement was received from Dr. David Test a highly cited national expert in secondary transition. Based on a conversation describing the research project, he expressed that this study has merit and the *potential* to benefit the field (D. W. Test, personal communication, December 10, 2014). In addition, researchers have suggested that data obtained through transition research has direct implications concerning the content and process at the pre-service and in-service level (Blalock, G., Kochhar-Bryant, C. A., Test, D. W., Kohler, P., White, W., Lehmann, J., Bassett, D. & Patton, J. 2003).

References

Anderson, D., Kleinhammer-Tramill, P., Morningstar, M. E., Lehmann, J., Bassett, D.,

    Kohler, P., Blalock, G & Wehmeyer, M. (2003). What's happening in personnel

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    fact sheet. Retrieved from

http://www.nsttac.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/DCDTFactSheeCompentencies
.pdf

Kohler, P. D., & Illinois Univ., C. I. (1996). Taxonomy for Transition Programming:
Linking Research and Practice.

Kohler, P. D., & Greene, G. (2004). Strategies for Integrating Transition-Related
Competencies into Teacher Education. Teacher Education and Special Education:
The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional
Children, 27(2), 146-162. doi: 10.1177/088840640402700206

Morningstar, M. E., & Liss, J. M. (2008). A Preliminary Investigation of How States Are
Responding to the Transition Assessment Requirements under IDEIA 2004.
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van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action
sensitive pedagogy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Participation Letter

Dear _____

I am writing you to inquire if you would be interested in participating in a study I am conducting as part of my doctoral candidacy. The research for my dissertation involves perceptions of transition specialists who serve high school students with disabilities; in particular perceptions they may have regarding the sufficiency of their own professional preparation and development.

After the interview you will have the opportunity to review my notes and decide if I was able to capture what you were trying to get across. You will also be able to offer any edits you think may be needed.

The following is a list of what I'm looking for in a potential candidate:

•Individuals that work full time for a public school system as a transition coordinator. I'd like folks to be responsible for transition most of their day verses those that have dual roles (for example: transition and case management or transition and teaching).

•Willing to speak with me for 30-60 minutes over skype or telephone if skype isn't an option.

•Willing to speak with me regarding their perceptions surrounding their pre-service training.

Participants can rest assured all data collected will be kept confidential. Please feel free to respond with your intentions to participate using the following contact information:

Email: dbreault1@plymouth.edu
Cell: 603-566-9672

Thank you for consideration in being a part of this study.

Dawn Breault
Plymouth State University Doctoral Candidate

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement

Name: _____Dawn Breault_____   Department/Unit: ___Education,

COGS_____ Phone:_____603-566-9672_____   E-

mail:____dbreault1@plymouth.edu_____

An investigator has a **Conflict of Interest** in a research study when s/he or any member of his/her immediate family (spouse/spousal equivalent, parents, and children) has interests in the design, conduct, or reporting of the research that might compromise the integrity of the research. Conflicts of interest can be financial, personal, supervisory, academic, or professional. For further guidance, the University's general Conflict of Interest Policy is set forth on the back of this Statement. The investigator has an ethical responsibility to disclose a potential conflict of interest or a possible appearance of a conflict of interest to the IRB and to potential research subjects as part of the informed consent process. If an investigator or his/her immediate family member is directly involved in potential subjects' health care, professional or academic supervision/evaluation, precautions must be undertaken to avoid the appearance of coercion or conflict of interest in the recruitment process. Please check all applicable boxes.

X   1. I and no member of my immediate family have any **financial conflict of interest** (a) that is related to or would reasonably appear to be affected by the proposed research; or (b) in external entities whose financial interests would reasonably appear to be affected by such activities.

☐   2. I am disclosing the following **financial conflict(s) of interest**:

☐ Salary, consulting fees, or other payments for services
☐ Equity or ownership (stock, stock options, partnership interests or other ownership)
☐ Intellectual property rights (patents, trademarks, copyrights, licensing rights, etc.)
☐ Honoraria, royalties for books, publications or lectures, gifts or other payments
☐ Positions in entity related to research (board member, officer, etc.)
☐ Other financial interests that could affect or be perceived to affect the results of research or educational activities proposed for funding

☐   3. I and no member of my immediate family have a **personal/professional dual role conflict of interest** related to this proposed research.

X   4. I am disclosing the following **personal/professional dual role conflict(s) of interest:**

☐ Supervisory role as faculty/teacher, direct supervisor/manager,
☐ Healthcare provider
☐ Family/friend relationships
☐ Other

If you have identified any conflict of interest (numbers 2 and/or 4), please provide additional details below. Describe how the investigator plans to manage, reduce, or eliminate the conflict.

I certify, as an investigator of this research, that I am in compliance with and will continue to comply with Plymouth State University's policy and procedures pertaining to financial and/or personal/professional CONFLICT OF INTEREST. I further certify that I will comply with any conditions or restrictions imposed by the University IRB to manage, reduce, or eliminate actual or potential conflicts of interest.

I attest to the accuracy of these answers and, should circumstances change in the future, I will contact the Plymouth State University IRB to update this disclosure statement.

_____   _____
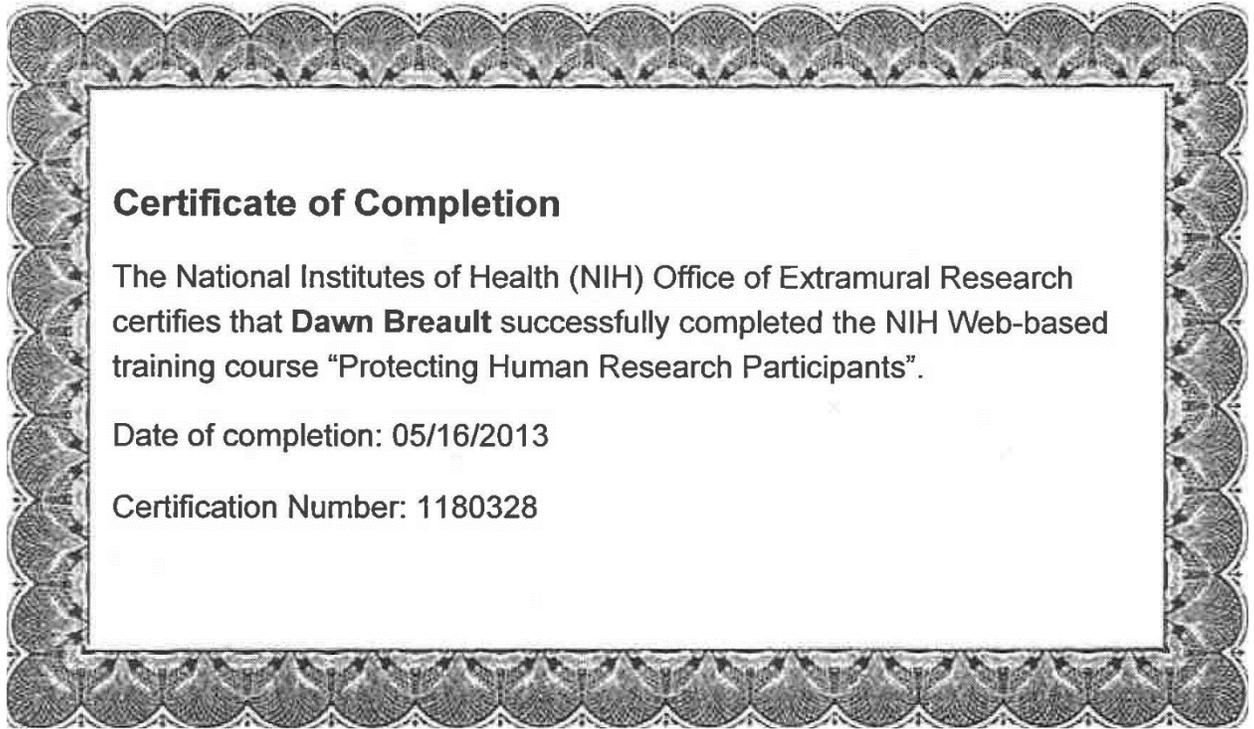Signature   Date

*All investigators listed on IRB application must complete and sign a conflict of interest form.

Appendix C

Interview Questions

- How many years have you been in the field of transition?

- What is your professional title?

- What is your academic background?

- What is your professional work background?

- What specific certifications do you hold?

- Could you describe how you were prepared for your transition role?

- What preparation if any was part of your pre-service degree program?

- What if any on-the-job training did you receive?

- What types of in-service trainings have you had?

- What type of professional development do you have access to?

- What are you responsible for in your transition role? Types of student served?

- How does your professional preparation help or hinder your ability to do your job?

- What is your perception regarding the impact of your pre-service training on the post school outcomes of the students you serve?

- What is your perception regarding the impact of your professional development on the post school outcomes of the students you serve?

- What is your perception regarding the accessibility of professional development that can have a positive impact on the post school outcomes of the students you serve?

Appendix D

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Dawn Breault** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 05/16/2013

Certification Number: 1180328

CONSENT FORM

INVESTIGATOR(S) NAME: Dawn Breault, Doctoral Candidate

STUDY TITLE: Perceptions of transition specialists who serve high school students with disabilities in order to understand their insights regarding the sufficiency of their professional preparation and development.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to better understand how transition specialists are trained at the pre-service level.

I am being asked to be a participant in the study because I am employed as a transition specialist for a public school system.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

This study will be in an interview format. The interview will take no longer than 60 minutes and it may happen in person, via skype or over the phone. The interview will be recorded. All names and responses will be kept confidential. Notes will be taken after the interview in order to summarize the conversation. Those notes will then be sent to the participant in order to make sure comments were represented correctly.

The amount of time required to participate in the study is up to 60 minutes - there may be additional time if the participant sends any follow up information.

There will be no costs associated with the study.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

As a participant in this study, any risks or discomforts associated with it are minimal.

BENEFITS

The benefit to participating in this study is that the experiences and perceptions shared have a potential to inform how transition professionals are trained.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

The alternative would be not participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All documents and information pertaining to this research study will be kept confidential in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations. I understand that data generated by the study may be reviewed by Plymouth State University's Institutional Review Board, which is the committee responsible for ensuring my welfare and rights as a research participant, to assure proper conduct of the study and compliance with university regulations. If any presentations or publication result from this research, I will not be identified by name.

The information collected during my participation in this study will be kept for 3 years.

My confidentiality will be also protected by the researcher storing any collected data in a locked office, under a password protected computer system.

TERMINATION OF PARTICIPATION

I may choose to withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason. If I choose to drop out of the study, I will contact the investigator and my research records will be destroyed. If this is an anonymous survey, research records cannot be destroyed following submission of the survey.

The principal investigator may terminate the participation of the subject if it is discovered that the participant is not employed full time as a transition specialist for a public school system.

COMPENSATION

I will not receive payment for being in this study. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. There will be no cost to me for participating in this research.

INJURY COMPENSATION

Neither Plymouth State University nor any government or other agency funding this research project will provide special services, free care, or compensation for any injuries resulting from this research. I understand that treatment for such injuries will be at my expense and/or paid through my medical plan.

QUESTIONS

All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction and if I have further questions about this study, I may contact Dawn Breault at 603-566-9672 or dbreault1@plymouth.edu. If I have any questions about the rights of research participants, I may call the Chairperson of the Plymouth State University's Institutional Review Board at 603-535-3193.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to me. I am free to withdraw or refuse consent, or to discontinue my participation in this study at any time without penalty or consequence.

I voluntarily give my consent to participate in this research study. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form.

Signatures:

_____
Participant's Name (Print)

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

I, the undersigned, certify that to the best of my knowledge, the subject signing this consent form has had the study fully and carefully explained by me and have been given an opportunity to ask any questions regarding the nature, risks, and benefits of participation in this research study.

Dawn Breault
Investigator's Name (Print)

_____   _____
Investigator's Signature   Date

Plymouth State University's IRB has approved the solicitation of participants for the study until Leave blank, date will be one year from IRB approval.

PART C

CHECKLIST FOR INFORMED CONSENT FORM

All items must be addressed in the consent form. Before submitting the application to the IRB, **COMPLETE AND ATTACH** the following checklist to all copies of the application consent form to indicate that each item listed below has been addressed in the consent form.

If in your opinion, any item below is not applicable, please do all of the following: (1) mark the item N/A and (2) provide a brief rationale describing why the item does not apply or should not be required in the consent form.

LANGUAGE OF DOCUMENT

1. Identify the **Flesh-Kincaid** grade level of the language used in the consent form and rationale for identified reading level: Grade level is 12.1 – all participants will be college graduates.

2._n/a_A foreign language translation must be included if the study will include participant whose first language of

       choice is not English. ***Note: All Participants will speak English.***

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

3.__X__A statement that the study involves research, an explanation of the purpose and a description of the

       procedures to be followed.

4.__X__A statement of expected duration of the participant's participation (e.g., one hour).

BENEFITS AND RISKS

5.__X__A description of all reasonably discomforts or foreseeable risks to the participant, as identified in the

       study and any additional, known and unknown.

6.__X__A description of any benefits (indirect or direct) to the participant or others that may reasonably be
       expected from the research; if there is no benefits to the participant this should be stated.

7.__X__A statement of risk to human participants including availability of treatment if physical or
       psychological injury occurs and a statement regarding liability for any injury arising out of study
       participation.

ALTERNATIVES

8.__X__Disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures or treatment, if any, available to the participant
       whether or not the participant elects to participate in the study. If the study is a treatment study,
       what alternatives to participation are available to participants and at what costs (i.e., free or not).

CONFIDENTIALITY

9.__X_ A statement related to confidentiality of records related to identification of the participant.

TERMINATION OF PARTICIPATION

10.__X_A statement to the effect that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will result in no penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled; the participant may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

COMPENSATION

11.__n/a__If compensation (e.g., monetary, course credit, treatment) is involved, describe.
       Note: There will be no compensation

QUESTIONS

12.__X_The name of the contact person for information related to questions about the research (the Principal

       Investigator), the rights of human participants (the IRB Chairperson), and whom to contact in the
       event of a research-related injury (the PI).

13.__X_ A statement that the investigator has answered and will answer all questions posed by the participant now and in the future to the best of his/her ability.

<u>OTHER</u>

14._ n/a __A statement regarding injury compensation and institutional or PI liability for any injuries that might occur. *Note: There is no foreseeable risk of injury*

15._X__A statement indicating voluntary consent has been obtained, including signature lines for participant and
      investigator, and date.

16.___n/a_ A statement indicating child assent, if applicable.
       Note: There will be no children participating in this study

17.__ n/a __A statement that the participant will receive a copy of the consent form (when an oral summary is read, and short consent form is used, the statement should read that a complete copy of the consent form will be provided to the participant).

18. __ n/a __Addenda if participants include: women who are pregnant, Children under the age of 18, or drug administration. *Note: The researcher has no reason to believe addenda is required to protect women who are pregnant or children under the age of 18.*

19.____ A statement that the IRB has approved the solicitation of participants for the study; this appears after
      the signatures.

Appendix D

Job Descriptions

Position Description

Position Title: Transition Coordinator– Grade 7-12
Location: XXXXXXXXXXXX
Reports To: Director of Special Education/Principals
Prepared By: XXXXXXXXXX   Date: February 2008
Approved By: School Committee   Date: March 17, 2008

<u>**SUMMARY**</u>**:** To develop and provide post secondary options for students with disabilities as they prepare to leave high school.

<u>**ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**</u>**:** *Other duties as may be assigned.*

<u>**Individual Student Support:**</u>

- Attend/participate in IEP meetings
- Meet with students to discuss transition planning and options
- Be familiar with various types of student-centered planning methods
- Work with students to choose most appropriate planning method based on individual style/preference
- Coordinate person-centered-planning with staff
- Assist students to participate in transition planning activities by:
    - Facilitating access to vocational/educational opportunities within general education

    - Identifying and referring students for more targeted vocational assessments as needed (like situational assessments)

    - Coordinating the development of career awareness exploration opportunities(job shadows, internships, information interviews)

    - Developing community-based training and community work-based learning opportunities based on identified student interests

    - Assisting student to examine/identify postsecondary training and education options connected to career interests

    - Assisting students to complete job readiness activities- resume, securing references, interview preparation

    - Assisting students to evaluate their postsecondary experiences

- Identifying, establishing, and maintaining linkages with community agencies and businesses

- Facilitating referrals to other agencies

- Assist students to present their transition needs to transition team

- Facilitate transition to accepting adult services agencies

Family Support:

- Assist families, parents, and students to access transition services
- Promote student, family, and school personnel understanding of laws, eligibility requirements, and availability of services

District-Wide Transition Services:

- Identify transition services provided by community agencies
- Monitor adherence to federal laws
- Train faculty, special education teachers and employers to understand and promote self-determination and self-advocacy
- Supervise, train, manage and coordinate job and educational coaches
- Lead interagency transition meetings
- Develop system guidelines, programs, and procedures
- Develop and refine self-determination, job coach and educational coach curriculum as needed
- Identify gaps in transition services
- Analyze and use evaluation information for quality improvement efforts
- Create school-wide team to focus on transition issues for special education and regular education students
- Identify district-level issues as well as individual student issues and utilize school-wide team for problem-solving and brainstorming support to address them

SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES:
None

QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:
To perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The requirements listed below are representative of the knowledge, skill, and/or ability required. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

EDUCATION and/or EXPERIENCE:
Masters degree in area of major study; minimum of three to five years of middle and/or secondary school teaching or such alternatives to the above as the principal may find appropriate and acceptable.

CERTIFICATES. LICENSES, REGISTRATIONS:
Valid Massachusetts teaching certificate and certified or certifiable as a supervisor/director in the content area.

LANGUAGE SKILLS:
Ability to read, analyze, and interpret general business periodicals, professional journals, technical procedures, or governmental regulations. Ability to write reports, business correspondence, and procedure manuals. Ability to effectively present information and respond to questions from groups of students, parents, teachers, and the general public.

MATHEMATICAL SKILLS:
Ability to work with mathematical concepts such as probability and statistical inference, and fundamentals of plane and solid geometry and trigonometry. Ability to apply concepts such as fractions, percentages, ratios and proportions to practical situations.

REASONING ABILITY:
Ability to solve practical problems and deal with a variety of concrete variables in situations where only limited standardization exists. Ability to interpret a variety of instructions furnished in written, oral, diagram, or schedule form.

OTHER SKILLS AND ABILITIES:
Ability to apply knowledge of current research and theory to instructional program; ability to plan and implement lessons based on curriculum content and school objectives and the needs and abilities of students to whom assigned. Ability to establish and maintain effective relationships with students, peers and parents; skill in oral and written communication. Have a thorough knowledge of the use of technology as a means to understand and analyze data that is associated with content area.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:
The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by an employee to successfully perform the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

While performing the duties of this job, the employee is frequently required to stand and talk or hear. The employee frequently is required to walk. The employee must occasionally lift and/or move up to 10 pounds, for example, school supplies and books.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS cont):
Specific vision abilities required by this job include close vision such as to read handwritten or typed material and the ability to adjust focus. The position requires the individual to meet multiple demands from several people and interact with the public and other staff.

WORK ENVIRONMENT:
The work environment characteristics described here are representative of those an employee encounters while performing the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

The noise level in the work environment is moderate to loud.

The information contained in this job description is for compliance with the American with Disabilities Act (A.D.A.) and is not an exhaustive list of the duties performed for this position.

Additional duties are performed by the individuals currently holding this position and additional duties may be assigned.

POSITION TITLE: Transition Coordinator

SUPERVISOR: Special Education Administrator

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Bachelor or Master's Degree in education or related field.
- Experience working with middle school and preferably High School students.
- At least one to three years teaching at the secondary level.
- Must be certified or certifiable in Special Education, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, or other related field

SUMMARY: Responsible for the coordination and placement of students with disabilities in appropriate environments which promote necessary skills for transition to the world of work. Will develop and implement a system for ensuring vocational evaluations are conducted on secondary level students prior to vocational experiences. Will facilitate transition planning for secondary level students.

SKILLS/ ABILITIES:

LANGUAGE:

- Ability to read, analyze, and interpret professional periodicals, professional journals, technical procedures, or governmental regulations.
- Ability to write reports, business correspondence, and procedure manuals.
- Ability to effectively present information and respond to questions from staff, students, parents and other personnel as appropriate.

REASONING:

- Ability to solve practical problems and deal with a variety of concrete variables in situations where only limited standardization exists.
- Ability to interpret a variety of instructions furnished in written, oral, diagram or schedule form.

OTHER:

- Ability to apply knowledge of current research and theory to instructional program; demonstrate knowledge of transition foundations to develop transition education, activities, and services for students, families and service providers.

- Must demonstrate effective facilitation, coaching, and leadership skills at a group and individual level.
- Must demonstrate the ability to engage in collaborative transition service delivery, and utilize interagency agreements;
- Must be able to facilitate/teach pertinent transition practices to support special education and agency staff, (including Federal/state law, Curriculum/Best Practices)
- Must demonstrate delivery of transition services, and Interagency Collaboration.
- Must understand outcome measurement and evaluation of transition services.
- Must have essential technology skills, i.e. skilled at using computer, laptop, assistive communication devices/technology and other educational technology and software.
- Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with students, peers, parents/guardians and community.
- Ability to speak clearly and concisely in written or oral communication.
- Must be able to meet multiple demands from several people.
- Must be organized and meet with required timelines.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Assist constituent districts with transition planning for secondary level students with disabilities.
- Support LEAs in development, implementation and evaluation of school to work programs (CWE).
- Consult with other personnel including teachers, principals, other ancillary staff and parents/guardians to evaluate program effectiveness.
- Provide consultation services to general education and special education teachers, parents/guardians.
- Work with local district teachers and school-to-work coordinators in addressing appropriate career options and classes for students with disabilities.
- Participate as part of the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team as appropriate in the administration of vocational evaluations.
- Consult with staff on necessary accommodations and modifications needed for students with disabilities to progress through their vocational education program.
- Participate in IEP meetings.
- Provide written reports for the IEP Team.
- Provide professional development for transitional services for staff, students, parents/guardians, and other community service agency staff.
- Participate in interagency community planning and development of services/options for individuals with disabilities.
- Work with paraprofessionals who are monitoring students assigned to Vocational Training Sites/Programs.
- Establish and maintain appropriate records, reports and procedures.
- Travel to meet job requirements.
- Adhere to Board Policies and support LEA policies and procedures.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Utilize technology appropriately.
- Clear understanding of IDEA Transition requirements

● Assist in preparation of Summary of Performance form for the student before they
graduate, age out or leave the program at the end of their high school term.

● Promote student self-advocacy and ensure that each student and their
parent(s)/guardian understand the transfer of rights from parents to students.

● Work directly with students toward the development of self-advocacy such as
participation and decision making in the IEP process, determining school classes

and/or activities, preparation for adult living skills, understanding transfer of rights
at 18 and the ability to make life choices within the transition process. This may be
an individual student activity, working with groups of students or structured
within a classroom situation.

● Maintain data on exits, ie suspensions, expulsions, dropout rates, secondary
education, graduation rates and postsecondary activities for special education

students 16 or older.

● Coordinate transition into high school from middle school, working with high
school staff.

● Make sure the required high school studies plan is in place.
● Provide technical assistance and consultation for special education teachers,
parents, counselors and others, focused on integrating developmental transition

activities classroom curriculum and school wide functions.

ADA MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS OR STANDARDS REQUIRED:

● Occasionally stooping, bending body downward and forward by bending spine at the waist. This factor is important if it occurs to a considerable degree and requires full motion of the lower extremities and back muscles.
● Occasionally kneeling, bending legs at knee to come to a rest on knee or knees.
● Occasionally crouching, bending the body downward and forward by bending leg and spin
● Frequently reaching, extending hand(s) and arm(s) in any direction.
● Frequently standing, particularly for sustained periods of time.
● Frequently walking, moving about on foot to accomplish tasks, particularly for long distances or moving from one worksite to another.
● Occasionally lifting, raising objects from a lower to a higher position or moving objects horizontally from position-to-position. This factor is important if it occurs to a considerable degree and requires substantial use of upper extremities and back muscles.
● Frequently fingering, picking, pinching, typing or otherwise working, primarily with fingers rather than with the whole hand as in handling.
● Frequently grasping, applying pressure to an object with the fingers and palm.
● Frequently talking, expressing or exchanging ideas by means of the spoken word. Those activities in which they must convey detailed or important spoken instructions to other workers accurately, loudly, or quickly.
● Frequently hearing, perceiving the nature of sounds at normal speaking levels with or without correction. Ability to receive detailed information through oral communication, and to make the discriminations in sound.

- Light work. Exerting up to 20 pounds of force occasionally, and/or up to 10 pounds of force frequently, and/or a negligible amount of force constantly to move objects. If the use of arm and/or leg controls requires exertion of forces greater than that for sedentary work and the worker sits most of the time, the job is rated for light work.
- The worker is required to have close visual acuity to perform an activity such as: preparing and analyzing data and figures; transcribing; viewing a computer terminal; extensive reading; visual inspection involving small defects, small parts, and/or operation of machines (including inspection); using measurement devices; and/or assembly or fabrication parts at distances close to the eyes.
- None. The worker is not substantially exposed to adverse environmental conditions (such as in typical office or administrative work.)

Job Summary – Transition Specialist

Will be responsible for developing quality employment and other appropriate placement opportunities for the School District students. Establishes personal contact with prospective area employers to expand job development efforts for employment/internship opportunities. Conducts employment skills training classes on interviewing. Assists participants in focusing on their occupational preferences through interest/ability assessments.

Skills to:

- Identify a variety of outcomes and Instructional options specific to the community for each post- school outcome area.
- Assist teachers to identify, in conjunction with the student, appropriate educational program planning team members.
- Evaluate students' educational program with respect to measurable post-school goals and alignment of those goals with instructional activities.
- Monitor student, family, and agency participation in transition planning and implementation.
- Demonstrate procedures to ensure the inclusion of specific transition-related goals in the educational program plan.
- Evaluate and modify transition goals on an ongoing basis.
- Use interests and preferences of the individual with exceptional learning needs to develop post- school goals and educational objectives.
- Match skills and interests of the student to skills and demands required by vocational or employment settings, community residential situation, and other community participation options.
- Interpret results of career and vocational assessment for individuals, families, and professionals.
- In collaboration with individuals with exceptional learning needs, families, and agencies, design, implement, and use program evaluation procedures to assess and improve the effectiveness of transition education and services, including evaluation of students' post-school outcomes.
- Use a variety of formal and Informal career, transition, and vocational assessment

- Knowledge of:

- Formal and informal career and vocational assessment approaches.
- Formal and informal approaches for identifying students' interests and preferences related to post-school goals and educational experiences.
- Job seeking and job retention skills Identified by employers as essential for successful employment.
- Vocational education methods, models, and curricula.
- Range of post-school options within specific outcome areas.

Position Description

Transition Coordinator (High School)
9/2010

(formerly titled School to Work Coordinator)

QUALIFICATIONS:

A. Education
   • Bachelor's degree in Special Education, Vocational Education,
     Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Services or comparable area.
     Master's preferred.
   • Certifiable by the State in General Special Education or School Social Worker or
     Counselor.

B. Experience
Ideal candidate will have 3 or more years' experience working with young adults (ages 14-21) with Individual Education Plans and transition services.

   • Knowledge of special education laws and procedures
   • Knowledge of community resources
   • Ability to collaborate with state and local agencies
   • Ability to identify and assess explorations of work/career options specific to the
     community
   • Ability to assess and match skills and interests to the level of students' needs

C. Other Considerations and Requirements
   • Ability to work as an effective member of a high performing team.
   • Maintains professional certification/s and industry knowledge.
   • Excellent written and verbal communication skills. Ability to work with staff,
     students, parents, administration and community members in a collaborative and
     effective manner.
   • Maintains valid driver's license and reliable transportation.

REPORTS TO:
       Building Principal

SUPERVISES:
       Students in job assignments.

       Job Coaches (paraprofessionals)

JOB GOAL:
To plan, coordinate and implement the transition programs and services of special
education students. The School to Work Coordinator will monitor the development and
implementation of individual transition plans to ensure that each identified student
successfully transitions into post- secondary opportunities.

PERFORMANCE RESPONSIBILITIES:
A. Essential Functions
1. To plan and implement programs and services for students transitioning from school to adult life. To assist Director of Special Services (as directed by the Director of Special Services or school administrator) in the planning, developing and implementation of long and short-term programs, projects and activities designed to enhance transition and post- school services.
2. Participates in inter-agency meetings with Vocational Rehabilitation, Area Agencies and similar groups for the purpose of coordinating transition activities for students.
4. Assists special education students and their families in completing Area Agency applications.
5. To collaborate with regular education teachers, special education teachers, guidance counselors, and other related school personnel regarding a student's transition needs.
6. To maintain comprehensive reports and data on student transition activity both on and off of the school campus.
7. To administer vocational and/or career assessments to students and interpret the results to families, students, and staff.
8. To provide information to families about transition related education and services, support networks, and post-school options.
9. To identify and facilitate appropriate modifications within the work, vocational training, or community environments.
10. Co-facilitates with case managers the transition process
11. Speaks to selected students in special education classes on process of completing interest inventories, conducting job searches, completing job applications, and the writing of resumes, as well as interviewing skills and follow-up activities; assists students in these activities.
12. Contacts and corresponds with the Department of Labor regarding approved worksites.
13. Trains and oversees district job coaches to do task analysis, analyze data, chart student progress and document work hours of the student.
14. Attends special education student meetings and staff meetings as appropriate.

B. Other Functions
Attends department, committee and staff meetings.

2. Attends professional development related to job responsibilities as approved.
3. Coordinates bus schedules with central office transportation coordinator for identified SPED students placed in worksite or job shadow positions.
4. Coordinates paperwork for the job development program including permission slips for students to participate in off-site activities.
5. Other duties as assigned by building principal/administrators/Director of Special Services.

TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT:

Days contracted as per the Master Agreement
EVALUATION:

In accordance with district procedures.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSITION SPECIALIST

Job Description:

> The Transition Specialist is a member of the Special Education Department who establishes the interschool and interagency linkages for transition, participates in Transition Planning/IEP writing, develops and monitors the community-and school-based job sites and works in concert with regular education, special education support staff, and counselor in a 9-12 school.

Accountability R e l a t i o n s h i p :

> Reports to the Building Administration, Pupil Services Director and/or Coordinator of Secondary Special Education, with joint supervisory and evaluative responsibilities.

Qualifications:

> Certified Special Education teacher **OR** Equivalent Education and Experience
> 3-S years training/experience in career counseling or the delivery of transition services to secondary students with disabilities.
> Strong interpersonal skills to work with diverse constituents.
> Understanding of disabling conditions and their e ffect on community based employment.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- Interschool Linkage - Disseminate transition information to families, students, teachers, counselors and administrators.
- Interagency/Business Linkages Identify, establish and maintain linkages with community agencies and businesses . Facilitate referrals and link students with post-secondary special support coordinators.
- Assessment and Career Counseling – In conjunction with counselors, classroom teachers and special education support staff develop career awareness and exploration activities as part of the career counseling process.
- Transition Planning In conjunction with the PPT Team, identify and plan the Individualized Transition Plans for students.
- Community Training – Under the direction and guidance of the Secondary Coordinator: Develop community-based training and school-based training sites.
  Work closely with regular education counterpart in the Guidance Department in developing student workshops on community-based work sites, job skills and post-secondary jobs and job training options. In conjunction with appropriate staff complete community based assessments.

b

- Public Relations: Work in conjunction with Special Education Counselor and in planning transition activities and job fairs.

- Provide individual and small group instruction in Job seeking/preparation skills.
- Other – Complete other duties as may be assigned *by* the Building and Central Office Administration.   Revised 3/01