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## Exploring Career Development Curricula and Experience of Secondary Transition Students with Intellectual Disabilities: Interviews with Students and Teachers

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EXPLORING CAREER DEVELOPMENT CURRICULA AND EXPERIENCES OF  
SECONDARY TRANSITION STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES:  
INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

By

Anthony O. Dosen

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

June 2016

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To my father, James. Thank you for your kindness and for believing in my writing

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

Sword-smith, living mannequin makeup artist, university-level cheerleading coach, computer programmer, blogger, hot dog stand owner, herb farmer. My excitement grew as Bob, a Senior Consultant from a national firm whose mission is to help people with disabilities find or create jobs, described some of the jobs that his clients had recently been hired for. All of his clients were jobseekers with intellectual disabilities. I had been working for the past six years as a job coach and a supervisor at a company whose primary goal was to help individuals living with disabilities find and maintain meaningful, competitive work in the community after they graduated from high school or a post-secondary transition program. Listening to Bob describe the diverse and surprising successes he helped his clients find showed me that so much more was possible than I could have imagined.

It has always been a passion of mine to help people facing challenges find work. My experience working in the social services field, as well as the research done for this capstone, shows that there is a longstanding and massive employment gap for people with intellectual disabilities. This is a major problem, especially for young people newly graduated from their secondary schooling, who are up to 50% less likely to find work than their peers without disabilities (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013) If Bob's firm is able to help people with disabilities find highly unique jobs using non-traditional

methods, and emerging research shows such methods work well for many people, then what is going on? Why is there such a big gap?

### **The Burning Question**

The purpose of this capstone is to interview current transition students with intellectual disabilities, and transition teachers, within secondary transition programs in and around a major U.S. metropolitan area. In this way, I attempted to build a qualitative study that will look into the vocational programming being taught to a subset of students. The compiled results of the interviews and my research focus on my main research question: What job-seeking skills are being taught to pre-graduate students with intellectual disabilities in large, secondary transition programs? Hearing the players themselves describe their world as they experience it will allow me to build an up-to-date and in-depth picture of vocational programming at some transition schools. I was then easily able to connect that information to the current research in the field coming from organizations such as Bob's.

From there, I combed through the interviews and research to find consistent themes and ideas. The data gave answers to a variety of questions, such as: How can transition programs possibly improve vocational programming for their students with intellectual disabilities? What factors have the biggest impact on post-secondary employment for said youth? What career development skills or strategies are transition schools teaching these students that could possibly be done away with, and *who* can make the biggest impact (i.e. who specifically has the power to initiate change related to career development in the school systems)?

The final outcome of this capstone is to take the main themes that emerge from the interviews, and then to cross-reference those themes with modern research. I hope that transition educators and researchers may then use that information to determine potential vocational curriculum recommendations and best practices specifically related to job-seeking skills for their own programs. That may help to both improve curricula, and to close the employment gap that students with intellectual disabilities are facing one student at a time.

### **Moving Beyond Traditional Job Searching**

Bob, and others involved with his firm, have publically published research claiming that many people living with even profound physical or developmental disabilities have unique passions, and can tap into a latent “personal genius.” The firm has published white papers and made presentations across the country teaching that virtually anyone can discover and be successful in careers even as nontraditional as those mentioned in the opening paragraph. As a part of training for my own work, I sat in on many of their firm’s workshops and presentations as they touted an updated vision for career development based on the idea of Customized Employment. Their organization provided consulting, training, and research to job coaching companies like the one I worked for.

The vision of their firm was in line with that of my company’s. When helping job-seekers with disabilities learn and apply job-seeking skills in the community, we both rooted our approach in the “Employment First” philosophy. This meant that paid, competitive work in mainstream settings should be a basic right for all people who want it, regardless of whether or not they are living with a disability (Griffin, 2009, p. 3). However, something must have been missing on my end. Our clients regularly achieved

typical job placements with titles such as food service worker, grocery clerk, customer service person, cleaning crew member, greeter, and store stocker, but nothing the likes of which Bob was describing.

Like many others in my field, I worked hard with my clients to empower them with the full complement of traditional job-seeking skills. However, despite minor successes, we often hit dead-ends as we chased the same job leads seemingly everyone else was chasing. The game of the so-called traditional job-seeker is well known and our typical experiences encompassed the following: playing phone tag with human resources departments, slogging through questionable personality tests on computer-based applications, trying to get through whichever gatekeeper is at the front desk or manning the phones, competing for jobs with hundreds, or even thousands, of other applicants, taking whatever job one can get at a generic, big box store for some huge corporation, and so on.

After years of instructing clients to follow some variations of this mainstream routine—writing resumes, playing dress-up, impressing the interviewer, basically hoping to find a needle in a haystack—I realized that I may have only been adding more barriers to the already difficult lives of many of my clients. Coupled with trying to navigate the desolate aftermath of the global financial crises in 2008, the job search simply felt impossible. I often asked myself how could I break down or bypass those walls altogether and help my clients to build interesting, long-term *careers* based on their innermost passions and interests, like Bob seemed to be helping people to do? Is it possible for a much larger number of people with intellectual disabilities to find happiness in a meaningful career?

## **Customized Employment**

One of the main themes I pulled from many of Bob's presentations and workshops was that there was indeed a secret to the unique success stories of his clients, and that secret was to stop chasing after "job titles" and to simply let go of the endless job search as we know it. As I dug deeper into research about contemporary job development strategies for people with disabilities, it dawned on me that for years I had been hopelessly seeking needles in haystacks when there were mountains of gold all around me the whole time. It just simply meant letting go of everything I thought I knew about people with disabilities finding work, the job search, and even the concept of work itself.

Customized Employment, and its various offshoots, is the area where Bob and likeminded thought leaders are uncovering gold. In general, Customized Employment can be defined as a strategy of

individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in ways that meet the needs of both. It is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the person [...] and is also designed to meet the specific needs of the employers. (Customized Employment, 2002, p. 1).

Job seekers using these techniques attempt to entirely circumvent traditional job-seeking methods, often focusing on smaller or independently owned businesses. It all starts with uncovering the unique interests and skills of the individual job seeker. It is a technique focused on putting humans with shared passions together, and negotiating a position where a formal position opening may not even exist in the first place (Griffin, 2009, p. 2).

The implications of the research Bob and his likeminded colleagues involved with Customized Employment have recently put forth will extend far beyond the realm of the

social services and will increasingly impact all secondary educators, in and out of transition programs, who work with students with intellectual disabilities. I imagine virtually all teachers hope for their students to grow up and apply what they have learned in a way that can increase their independence, help them to find happiness, and make at least enough money to maintain a quality standard of living. The icing on the cake would be for the students to be doing something they truly love. As someone with their feet in both the worlds of education and social services, I want to do what I can to help make this happen for more people.

As of this writing, I no longer work in the vocational social services arena, though I am still in the social services field. I am currently working as a supervisor overseeing the daily programming in three area group homes that cater to adults with varying levels of intellectual disabilities. This mission to help people find rewarding careers is all the more pressing to me as I now spend my workdays with many people who have completed their secondary transition programs and are now either sitting at home or attending day programs where they get paid sub-minimum wages for what amounts to mindless work.

### **Transition Programs**

My ultimate goal for this capstone project is to first gather information on what vocational skills are actually being taught to students in large transition programs. Focusing on key programs within large and diverse school districts will help me to understand what many students could expect to learn in such programs. Transition programs are district-level, individualized programs catering to students with disabilities, aged 18-21, who may need more learning support before receiving their diploma and moving into the world outside of the school system. I will take a much closer look at

transition programs, and other pertinent social services structures, in the next chapter. I am focusing specifically on transition programs in this paper because of the overall flexibility they typically offer to the learner (each student's curriculum is driven by a unique Individualized Education Plan), and thus there is often more ability to focus heavily on vocational skills. Also, the time of transition is a critical juncture in the lives of these students and I want to see if potent change can be elicited there.

### **Capstone Overview**

Many important themes emerged from the interviews within this study. Researchers and educators may use them to pull out best practices for teaching effective job-seeking and retention skills to students with intellectual disabilities in the transition setting. Other main research areas I will discuss in my review of the literature include the history of disability services and transition programming, research on the employment gap for people with disabilities, prevalence of post-school failure, notions of effective career development curricula for secondary transition students, and some deficiencies I have identified in the existing research.

The third chapter of this capstone provides an overview of the research methods I used and how I built and executed this qualitative case study. It includes a description of the interview-based research process, a rationale for my qualitative research design, an explanation of how the data will be collected and analyzed, an outline of all procedures, a look at ethical considerations, and an examination of possible limitations of the chosen methods.

It should also be stated here, at the outset of this study, that I approached all of my research and writing through a particular philosophical lens known as the

advocacy/participatory worldview (Griffin, 2009). This worldview is more fully explicated in chapter three, but the reader should know from the outset that such a “bias” is one of helping disenfranchised people gain empowerment. I believe this kind of research should always include a clear action agenda meant to uplift the subjects of the study. With this study, my action agenda is to give educators and researchers tools they can immediately use to make positive change in the educational system for students with intellectual disabilities.

The fourth chapter documents the final results of my research, how the project proceeded, and summarizes the interview data and themes that emerged. Here, I describe and explain the results of the interviews. I then connected the information and thematic concepts I gathered back to my key research questions and the literature review. This is the chapter where I answer the capstone’s central question and address what was learned from the study

The fifth and final chapter revisits the Review of Literature, drawing some final connections. I also discuss more about what I learned throughout the process of building this case study. Possible limitations of the study and its findings are examined. A plan for presenting and communicating the results is presented. The chapter closes with final thoughts, reflections on personal growth, lingering questions, and ideas for future research that may extend from this study.

### **Navigating a Challenging Environment**

I understand that all individuals living with disabilities face challenges when seeking work. However, since I have primarily worked with individuals living with mild to severe intellectual disabilities throughout my entire social services career, and seeing the

ongoing, unique struggles they can face, I intentionally focused on them. I learned so much about the world, what I take for granted, and my own personal struggles as I tried to help them find work and learn skills. This study would be one small way I could give something back to the next generation of similar job seekers. As a brief definition, an *intellectual disability* originates before the age of 18 and is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many common social and practical skills (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013).

One of my operating hypotheses going into this project is that nontraditional forms of job-seeking can lead to a higher level of positive outcomes for job-seekers with intellectual disabilities. Based on what I have observed over the years from working with my former and current clients, spending time observing classrooms, talking to transition educators and other disability services professionals, I wondered if there is not enough of a focus on emerging non-traditional forms of job-seeking and Customized Employment for students with disabilities, let alone any students, in American schools today. I hoped the interviews I conducted for this study will help to shed more light on this issue. When I worked in the vocational services field, the younger clients with disabilities assigned to me by their social workers would often graduate high school or wrap up their transition programs and then join my program with what seemed like little to no job- seeking skills beyond the traditional methods noted above.

Specific skills aside, I noticed the former transition students I have worked with often did not even have the basic confidence to go out and find a job they really wanted. Frequently they did not seem to believe that they even had a choice in the matter. Worse yet, they might not have known what they really wanted or what was even possible for

them in the working world. What little confidence they may have had coming out of school was often quickly shattered as constant dead ends were hit. The low-probability, but deeply culturally ingrained, traditional methods of searching for jobs often causes those young job-seekers to start getting used to a lifetime of failure. Meanwhile, their underlying dreams, talents, and passions may lay dormant.

For many years I worked directly in the “trenches” as a Job Coach directly helping people with intellectual disabilities find and maintain community-based work. I eventually spent about five years supervising more than twenty job coaches all doing the same thing. A big part of that job was to make sure that we brought clients into our company via county or state funding and those clients then found a sustainable job, with or without our continued support, as quickly as possible. I know from those years of real-world practice that traditional methods of job seeking often do not work for people with intellectual disabilities. It is my sincere hope that this study can in some ways help transition educators understand more about why that is so and to take real action to make much needed changes.

I want to help students with intellectual disabilities learn that there really are ways to make a living while still following their dreams. People do not have to resign themselves to a depressing fate of a boring job, nor do they have to accept any old job they can find simply because it is there. My hope is this project can help these students find deeper happiness, self-sufficiency, and self-worth as they transition into adulthood and the working world on their own terms.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this capstone is to use interviewing to help answer my primary research question: What job-seeking skills are being taught to secondary transition students with intellectual disabilities in large transition programs? As a research problem, I have identified a lingering employment gap for individuals with intellectual disabilities following their secondary school graduation. I believe that identifying many of the specific job-seeking skills being taught to these students at the transition level in and around a diverse, highly populated area may help to show reasons why this employment gap persists for so many of these individuals.

This chapter's research may also help to identify and bring to further light strong but possibly underused (or misused) strategies that could help close the employment gap. Beyond answering my research question, it is my hope that the data uncovered from the interviews I conducted, and the relevant scholarly research presented in this chapter, could be used to inspire best practices for transition teachers teaching job skills to students with intellectual disabilities.

This chapter reviews and synthesizes relevant literature about these topics. The first section provides definitions of important terms and concepts. This will help guide the reader who may be less familiar with these concepts and to ensure precise language is

used. I found it important to set this off in a separate section at the start of this literature review because there are many terms, agencies, laws, and other potentially complicated concepts involved that can easily become confusing for a reader unfamiliar with the ever-changing world of disability services or transition education.

The second section reviews research and statistics about the pervasive employment gap for people with disabilities. The third section provides a concise history and overview of key American disability services and legislation. These sections give necessary context for the remaining sections.

The fourth section reviews literature specifically related to past, present, and future transition programming for American secondary students with intellectual disabilities. Information about transition program structures, challenges, current best practices, and burgeoning research is the focus.

The fifth section reviews research about post-school employment outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities. It focuses on research about what seems to work for these students, and other things that may not be working, once students are done with secondary school. In particular, potential factors for post-transition employment success are examined in detail in order to maintain a best practice and strengths-based frame for this study.

The sixth section analyzes the topics of supported employment, customized employment, and a related offshoot strategy known as Discovering Personal Genius. I know from my work experience that these strategies are being employed by many transition educators, vocational social service providers, and others to help students with

intellectual disabilities find community-based jobs. These areas represent a growing field that is worthy of detailed examination in the context of this study.

Section seven summarizes qualitative research about the perceptions of transition students with disabilities, their parents, and teachers as the transition students learn employment-related skills and seek work following school. The section further synthesizes and brings their opinions and experiences into this discussion.

Section eight addresses possible deficiencies I have identified in the existing research on these topics. Section nine provides an overall summary and synthesis of all the concepts addressed within this literature review.

### **Definition of Important Terms and Concepts**

The definitions of terms and concepts are necessary for the reader to best understand the research and ideas presented throughout this capstone. These terms and concepts may not be easily understood by a layperson. I feel it is important to be precise with language because the world of disability services and its many agencies are often multi-layered and differ greatly across the country and world. Further, definitions and terms come into and out of favor in the disabilities-services world, and are often used in different ways by different people. It is an ever-shifting environment filled with fuzzy terminology, and some of these terms listed will change again in the future. However, at the time of this writing, I believe the definitions presented here to be most accurate and useful to the reader without getting too technical. Unless otherwise stated, all of these definitions are my own language.

- Intellectual Disability (ID). A disability originating before the age of 18 that is

characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning (i.e. intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, problem solving, and so on) and in adaptive behavior (i.e. the collection of conceptual, social, and practical skills that are learned and performed by people in their everyday lives). This term refers to the same population of individuals who were previously diagnosed as having mental retardation. This term will be used interchangeably with ID for the remainder of this study (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013).

- **Developmental Disability (DD).** An umbrella term that includes intellectual disability, but also includes other disabilities that are apparent during childhood (mostly before the age of 22) and that are severe, chronic, and can be cognitive, physical, or both. This term will be used interchangeably with DD for the remainder of this study.

- **Intellectual Functioning Level.** A person's mental capacity for learning, reasoning, problem solving, and so on. As of this writing, this is usually measured by an IQ (intelligence quotient) test, where a test score below 70, or as high as 75, indicates a limitation in intellectual functioning (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). Individuals are often formally and informally classified as higher or lower functioning within educational and social services arenas.

- **Transition Age Youth (TAY).** For the purposes of this study, this refers to American youth, aged 16-21 (sometimes beginning younger than 14), who qualified for special education services during their secondary educational programming, and are deemed to need additional formal programming before fully graduating their secondary programs.

- **Employment Gap.** My own general definition referring to the statistically proven, pervasive underemployment and unemployment of otherwise employable individuals with intellectual disabilities in America. The fundamental research problem underlying this study.
- **Transition Program(s).** Accommodated, special-education programming and services for eligible students with disabilities in American public secondary education. Typically, they are based on formal IEP-based services and curricular programming (see below) meant to help the student more easily transition into post-secondary education, employment, or independent living.
- **Individual education program/plan (IEP).** A written document required for each child who is eligible to receive special education services. It is provided to a student who has been determined first to have a disability and, second, to need special education services because of that disability. Related services are usually overseen by an interdisciplinary IEP team typically consisting of the student, their parents/guardians, teachers, counselors, a social worker, and so forth. This term will be used interchangeably with IEP for the remainder of this study (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013).
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).** American Legislation passed in 1990 that prohibits, and makes illegal, discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications, and government activities. Notably, it requires employers to make reasonable accommodations in order

for their disabled person to perform their job function(s) (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013).

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). American federal legislation passed in 2004 requiring that schools serve the needs of eligible students with disabilities. It states that schools must evaluate students suspected of having disabilities, including learning disabilities, and provide the student with IEP-driven special education services as needed. Individuals are eligible for individualized special education services if they are first found to have one of 13 designated disabilities (Note: ID is currently included) (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013).

- Vocational services. Broadly, used within this study to mean any services provided by an individual or agency to a person with disabilities outside of a school setting, whether privately or via public funding, meant to help that individual find employment, maintain employment, or learn employment-related skills. Services may include *job development* (one or more individuals helping the individual to directly seek and secure employment, volunteering opportunities, internships, or to otherwise carve out paid job opportunities) and *job coaching* (one or more “coaches” helping the individual directly at their job site to learn skills, communicate with supervisors, meet specific vocational goals, and so forth).

- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). A set of vocational services offered by many American state agencies to individuals with mental or physical disabilities. These services are designed to help participants attain job-related skills and connect with needed resources to find work. For example, training related to practicing interviewing skills,

resume writing, and job searching techniques may be offered. Services offered may also help an individual retrain for employment after an injury or mental disorder has disrupted previous employment.

- **Day Programs.** Broadly, daily services provided at a particular site, or sites, to many individuals with disabilities which may include quasi-vocational experiences such as contract work, enclave work, sub-minimum wage work, vocational training experiences, and more. Such services vary greatly for each individual and location and may include drastically different experiences depending on the individual. They may be privately funded by the individual, or paid for via government funding.

- **Employment First Initiative.** A critical priority for the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), to invest in systems change efforts that result in increased community-based, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. This initiative grew from a national, grassroots movement centered on the major premise that all citizens, including those with profound disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life. Under this approach, publicly-financed systems are urged to align policies, service delivery practices, and reimbursement structures to commit to integrated employment as the priority option with respect to the use of publicly-financed day and employment services for youth and adults with significant disabilities (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013).

- **Customized employment.** Customized employment is a flexible process designed

to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both. It is based on an individualized match between the strengths, conditions, and interests of a job candidate and the identified business needs of an employer. Customized Employment utilizes an individualized approach to employment planning and job development, and typically focuses on one person and one employer at a time. Specific forms, such as Discovering Personal Genius, will be discussed below (Griffin, 2009).

- Supported employment. A widely-used approach to helping people with disabilities participate in the competitive labor market, helping them find meaningful jobs and providing ongoing support from a team of professionals. First introduced in the psychiatric rehabilitation field in the 1980s, supported employment programs are now found in a variety of service contexts, including community mental health centers (CMHCs) and psychosocial rehabilitation agencies. Customized Employment (see above) is a form of supportive employment (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013).

- Nontraditional employment. Broadly used within this study to refer to non-typical forms of, or means of obtaining, employment for people with disabilities such as by creating a business-within-a-business, self-employment, “micro-employment” (jobs with five or fewer employees in total), working in other small and independent places of employment, job carving/creation, bypassing the typical aspects of the job search (applications, resumes, interviews), and so forth.

### **The Employment Gap**

As mentioned above, I define the employment gap broadly as the statistically significant, pervasive underemployment and unemployment of American people with ID versus their nondisabled peers. Despite many efforts to reduce the discrepancy, only eight % of individuals with severe ID were employed versus 81% of those without disabilities in 2004, with even more recent data showing those figures to essentially remain unchanged (Certo, Luecking, Murphy, Brown, Courey,& Belanger, 2008). The research of Certo et al. (2008) further states that the low employment rate for individuals with ID leads to broader social and economic marginalization, including the fact that, as of 2000, adults with severe ID were at least three times more likely than their non-disabled peers to live in poverty.

In the big picture, I have found major research showing that the struggle with employment is not just an issue for people with ID, and this gap affects the majority of Americans with disabilities. According to the article “Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics Summary”, released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), in 2014, only 17.1% of individuals with disabilities were even employed at all, and eight out of ten employable people with disabilities were entirely out of the workforce, meaning they were neither employed, nor unemployed; basically, they were not working, were not available for work, or were not seeking work. Further, when they did seek and find work, it was much more likely to be part-time work or to involve forms of self-employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

Simonsen and Neubert (2012) identified that, according to a separately published, major longitudinal study conducted in 2011, only 46.1% of transition-aged youth with

intellectual disabilities held paid employment following graduation from their secondary programs. Simonsen and Neubert (2012) further analyzed data from the same longitudinal study and found that approximately 43% of the transition-aged youth that did find paid employment were working at jobs where most of their coworkers also had disabilities, whether in the community or in private settings. In my opinion, this is doubly troubling as it shows that individuals with intellectual disabilities may be less likely to find work, and when they do, they are often relegated to segregated work sites or teams.

Decade after decade, the numbers speak for themselves. A significant portion of young American people with disabilities that are perfectly capable of working community-based, competitively-paid, non-segregated jobs simply do not. According to national census data current at the time of this writing, the employment rate for American youths with any disabilities aged 16-24 is, on average, 40-50% less than their non-disabled peers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). These numbers are in line with those cited above. The Bureau of Labor further substantiated those figures for 2012 and 2013 by presenting data showing that the average unemployment rate for people with disabilities aged 16 and up is twice that of their non-disabled peers (Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics, 2014).

Surveys conducted even further back show shockingly similar statistics. For example, Berry (2000) presents one study showing that, in 1998, working-aged people without disabilities were employed at least 50% more of the time than their peers with disabilities. Worse yet, those same surveys point to the 1998 data being roughly the same as the troubling statistics from the mid 1980s (Berry, 2000). It seems that over the

course of decades, virtually nothing is changing for youth job seekers with intellectual disabilities

The research of Fabian (2007) shows that seminal government initiatives such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) may have helped to spur some small percentage increases in post-secondary school employment outcomes for jobseekers with ID. The increases include increased job satisfaction, improved skills, and better wages. However, much of my research shows there is still a long way to go to close the overall unemployment gap between students with ID following secondary graduation and their nondisabled peers. Many students with disabilities complete their secondary and transitional programs and find themselves in need of work.

Lee and Von Wagner (2013) found that students with disabilities are still not being hired as much as their nondisabled peers, nor are they even trying to search for jobs as much as their peers. According to recent census and survey data gathered by Lee and Von Wagner (2013), in 2011 there were over 12.5 million adults with disabilities aged 21-64 living in the United States. Of those, only 11.7 percent (about 1.5 million) that were not working were at least actively trying to search for work (Lee & Von Wagner, 2013). For those individuals with ID who struggle to find work, or who stop looking, segregated and facility-based non-work services comprised 77% of all DD services for people with severe ID in 1999 (Certo et al., 2008).

Survey data published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Persons with a Disability, 2015) very clearly shows the employment gap as it exists at the time of this writing. As recently as 2014, the unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities in the U.S. was 12.5% versus only 5.9% for those without disabilities. That study specifically defined

unemployed people as those who did not have a job, but were available to work, and whom were actively looking for work in the four weeks leading up to the study (Persons with a Disability, 2015). Overall, the research shows that people with disabilities not only have ongoing difficulties finding community-based, non-segregated work, but many of them simply stop trying to find it altogether (or never even start the search).

According to a 2009 report by Griffin, the struggle to integrate into the mainstream community remains massive and the unemployment gap remains basically unchanged over many years for the job seeker with disabilities, regardless of their disability type; “be it developmental, psychiatric, brain injury, sensory, or physical, no particular group of people with disabilities is flourishing in the employment arena [...] The overall unemployment rate remains at unacceptable levels,” (p.3). However, data presented by Rogers et.al (2008) shows that individuals living with DD, including the subcategory of ID, seem to face even more pronounced barriers than other individuals with disabilities with regard to their level of employment, wage amount, and amount of hours worked. Their research presented a five-year longitudinal study conducted in the Twin Cities metropolitan area which proved this to be true for local ID jobseekers there, even after their enrollment in a Customized Employment-based interagency project known as The Anoka County Transition & Customized Employment Project (TCE) that somewhat increased placement and wage outcomes for a subset participants (Rogers et.al, 2008). It seems to me that much of the current schooling, programs, and initiatives do not seem to be affecting these numbers to the positive. The Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015 survey again showed that 2014 unemployment rates were still significantly higher for people

with disabilities across all educational groups including students with disabilities enrolled in all levels of post-secondary schooling (Persons with a Disability, 2015).

Cary Griffin is a researcher, a known key player in the Customized Employment (CE) movement, and a modern leader in the field of employment initiatives and vocational curriculum building for people with disabilities. He is a Senior Partner of the Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Support Center (MNTAT), and a professional colleague and business partner of Bob's, the consultant whom was mentioned in chapter one. Griffin's research (2009) shows that although the past two decades have seen an increasing amount of money funneling into vocational support programs, plus legislation that, by now, should have catalyzed a marked improvement in employment outcomes for people with disabilities, the current levels of underemployed and unemployed people with disabilities remain virtually unchanged since at least the 1980s. This view definitely matches with the statistics cited throughout this chapter thus far.

The previously mentioned 1998 survey results that Berry (2000) presented also revealed that, apart from simply experiencing much higher than average unemployment rates, many people with disabilities in their adult years report that they experience an overall lower income, less community participation, poorer health care, and a clear decrease in general life satisfaction. In my opinion, these continuing disparities and struggles are simply unacceptable in a modern society which, more and more, seems to embrace, or at least champion the idea of, freedom and inclusion for all people with disabilities in all areas of life. The next section overviews of some of the legislation and

services that have been created to help individuals with disabilities find support, independence, inclusion, and success in mainstream American society.

### **A Brief History of Services for People with Intellectual Disabilities**

It is well beyond the scope of this capstone to attempt to outline the complete history of American social services and legislative efforts meant to assist individuals with intellectual disabilities in finding social support and work success. However, the following brief overview is necessary to provide important context for the remaining research and the capstone as a whole. The previous section went into statistical detail about the pervasive employment gap for all people with disabilities. This section touches on what I consider to be some of the most critical pieces of legislation and social service concepts that shape the experiences of many American individuals with disabilities as they move through school to graduation, ultimately planning for their transition into independent living and the working world.

According to Citron et al. (2007), the common segregation, negative labeling, and eventual disenfranchisement of most American individuals with disabilities begins early in grade school, where they are frequently placed in special education programs, receive special bussing, and are segregated from their mainstream classmates much of the time. In their adult life, following graduation from secondary school, they are often given low expectations for community-based employment success, and are placed in segregated settings, such as sheltered workshops, with little emphasis placed on helping them to build a long-term career (Citron et al., 2007). Adult job seekers with disabilities may also end up working in segregated groups with other disabled individuals, and rarely have

they had much of a choice in the matter of employment as their support networks are typically inadequate and fragmented (Citron et al., 2007).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a landmark piece of civil rights legislation instituted by Congress in 1990 (and later amended in 2008) in order to diminish discrimination against people with disabilities. With this legislation, the American federal government acknowledges that people with disabilities have been subjected to continued discrimination, segregation, isolation, and other unfair treatment in society, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 2008 plainly states that,

discrimination against individuals with disabilities persists in such critical areas as employment [; individuals with disabilities] are severely disadvantaged socially, vocationally, economically, and educationally [; and, this continued discrimination and prejudice] denies people with disabilities the opportunity to compete on an equal basis and to pursue those opportunities for which our free society is justifiably famous, and costs the United States billions of dollars in unnecessary expenses resulting from dependency and nonproductivity. (Introduction to the ADA, p.1)

Among other things, the ADA describes a number of specific vocational barriers individuals with disabilities often face and provides legal recourse to those individuals to help them overcome those barriers. Most relevant to this study, the ADA states that people with disabilities must have equal access to employment opportunities, equal ability to purchase goods or services, and equal ability to participate in government programs and services (Introduction to the ADA, 2008).

A 2013 online government report outlining a general history of social services in the United States shows that, prior to the ADA in the 1970s, hundreds of thousands of American individuals with various disabilities were housed in government run institutions until large-scale deinstitutionalization ramped up, initially due to advocacy groups filing lawsuits against what they viewed as poorly run institutions (History of Services, 2013). Following this deinstitutionalization, many thousands of individuals who were used to completely segregated facility living suddenly needed to learn how to navigate society and to advocate for themselves (History of Services, 2013).

Through the 1980s and 1990s, as US society began to shift its view of people with disabilities towards a more inclusive one, hundreds of new social service programs were created to allow for more personal choice and freedom of the individuals served (History of Services, 2013). Discrimination and segregation of people with disabilities still persisted, but services provided to people with disabilities were becoming less and less restrictive and more person-centered overall (History of Services, 2013). For example, increasingly progressive community-based vocational service providers began to emerge across the country that would allow individuals to learn and apply skills as well as to find and maintain jobs within the community, and to do so fully outside of enclave or other segregated settings (History of Services, 2013).

It is my experience from working in this field for many years that many modern vocational service providers and government agencies seek to provide person-centered support for the jobseeker by incorporating the jobseeker's own choices into the program creation. This is usually supported by members of the jobseekers' personal network such as a parent, guardian, or Social Worker (Citron et al., 2007). According to Griffin and

Keeton (2009), recent decades have seen the powerful emergence of the Supported Employment (SE) movement, shifting government funding of services away from segregated sheltered workshop and enclave service models and helping jobseekers with disabilities locate community-based jobs they were once thought too disabled to be able to do. The SE movement and related research are discussed in much more detail in an upcoming section.

More specifically related to students with disabilities is the law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This piece of legislation was first passed by Congress under a different name in 1975 and has been amended many times since. The 2008 research of Lee, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, and Little provides a good overview of this legislation. The main purpose of this legislation is to ensure that students with disabilities receive needed special education services and to provide rights and protections to those students and their parents or guardians (Lee et al., 2008). Many, but not all, students with disabilities or learning issues are eligible for special education services under IDEA. However, if a student is eligible for those services, they will receive an Individual Education Plan (IEP-see definition above) which is a legal document- basically a formal contract- that spells out the child's educational goals, disabilities, and the support services that the school will provide until graduation, as well as a transition plan (Lee et al., 2008).

Pertinent to this capstone, IDEA covers the student from infancy through the age of 21. Most students receive related transition services and programming to help them prepare for post-graduation life between the ages of 16-21, although they may start preparing them earlier (Lee et al., 2008). IDEA was reauthorized in 2004 as the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), which continued to reemphasize the importance of quality transition services (Black, 2010). As Black (2010) states, the IDEIA specifically defines transition services as, “a coordinated set of activities in a results-oriented process to improve educational and functional outcomes” (p.118).

Transition programming is the primary focus of this capstone, and specific transition curricula, outcomes, and other concepts are examined in further detail in the next section. Transition services are provided to American students with disabilities who are receiving special education services under IDEA. Such services often include vocational training meant to prepare the student to find and maintain community-based employment following completion of their secondary schooling.

Once eligible students have completed their transition program and graduated from secondary school, there are numerous social service and support options related to employment that many of them may pursue. The sheer amount of different service types is too broad to elaborate here. However, some key service types include: various types of community based services meant to help individuals find and maintain employment; training programs meant to teach individuals job skills; other types of non-community based programs such as sheltered workshops, work centers, or schools; or some combination of any and all of the above. Information about these services is readily available in the public domain. The next section examines specific research related to transition school curricula, planning, and practices.

### **Current Research and Practices in Transition Programming**

American secondary school transition programs and their job-seeking curricula as provided to students with ID in particular are the main focus of this capstone. This section details current research about secondary transition programs across America. The literature starts with more general and historical information about transition programs and then focuses on a review of current practices, possible challenges, burgeoning practices, best practices, and example service models in the field today. It hones in on individuals with ID and job-seeking practices.

A basic definition and overview of American transition programming has already been given above. Research by Lee et al. (2008) expands this definition: Transition services are a required component of the IDEA mandated Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that must be provided to all eligible students with disabilities. All American secondary students with ID are currently eligible for special education transition services under IDEA, and, following assessments, their IEPs are required to include services with measurable postsecondary outcomes related to transition, education, employment, and, when appropriate, independent living skills (Carter, Brock, & Trainor, 2012).

The research of deFur (2003) shows that the wording of the original versions of IDEA legislation stated IEPs were intended to be reviewed annually and revised as needed, with family and student participation on a multidisciplinary team that could plan and document an education plan meant to meet the unique needs of the student. Following 1990 revisions, IDEA mandated full documentation and provision of needed transition services in the IEPs of all students with disabilities 16 and older, and that transition

services must be outcome based, include employment objectives, instruction, community experiences, and be based on the students own interests and preferences (deFur, 2003).

However, deFur's research (2003) also identified various studies showing that very few IEPs created for about ten years following the 1990 IDEA actually reflected solid compliance with IDEA regulations and best practices. Most IEPs identified in deFur's research included issues such as mismatched service provision, vague outcomes, unclear timelines, unclear transition roles, limited long-range planning, and few references to the community or workplace as an opportunity for integrated work (2003). Finally, deFur cites research from Prater showing that most IEPs of secondary special education students were almost exclusively focused on academics as opposed to transition-related goals and outcomes (deFur, 2003).

In order to assuage some of these issues, the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 made significant changes to final regulatory requirements regarding secondary transition programming (Topic: Secondary Transition, n.d.). Notably, the definition of transition services was refined to encompass a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be a results-oriented process focused on facilitating a child's movement from school to post-school activities with focus on vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), and community participation, among other focus areas (Topic: Secondary Transition, n.d.). Further, the secondary transition requirements of the IEP were also changed so that beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16 (or younger if the IEP team deems it necessary), and updated annually from then on, an IEP must include appropriate measurable postsecondary goals related to employment (Topic: Secondary Transition,,

n.d.). The transition services and their related courses of study need to clearly assist the child in meeting those goals and that the child is required to be invited to any and all IEP meeting when the purpose includes a consideration of those goals (Topic: Secondary Transition,, n.d.).

Research from Carter, Brock, and Trainor (2012) identifies that age-appropriate transition assessment, as mandated in the 2004 IDEA reauthorization, is meant to individually tailor the best possible services and supports to individuals receiving transition services. A crucial element of transition assessment and planning involves the integration of perspectives from multiple individuals who know the student or are familiar with the expectations of current or future endeavors that student may undertake (Carter et al., 2012). This is the concept of the interdisciplinary team, as mentioned above. Advocates of the interdisciplinary team approach find it to be appropriate since transition planning can be much broader than other educational planning as it involves multiple domains, contexts, time points, and support systems (Carter et al., 2012). This requires a team of individuals offering multiple vantage points and different sets of domain-dependent expectations, and the approach may be especially helpful in assisting individuals with ID who many have communication challenges when it comes to articulating their own goals, interests, support needs, and strengths (Carter et al., 2012).

Carter et al. define a second critical aspect of high-quality interdisciplinary team-based transition assessment as being that the assessment should inform planning teams about the support needs and strengths of the individual student to best inform individualized programming (2012). As cited by Carter et al. (2012), Roberts and

Wehman argued in their research that, to identify these needs, transition assessment and planning should be comprehensive and address multiple aspects of the students' lives.

Involving multiple people in the planning team does indeed seem to help teams present multiple viewpoints about the strengths of the student. Carter et al. undertook a data analysis study examining the parent and teacher assessments of 134 youth with severe ID and found that the perspectives of teachers and parents regarding the transition-related strengths and needs of the student often diverged in important ways for a variety of reasons (2012). However, under the surface, this divergence is not necessarily a bad thing as both parents and teachers in the study were able to identify a great number of unique transition-related strengths held by students with severe ID, especially in the realms of interpersonal relationships and communication (Carter et al., 2012).

Meaningful assessments completed by a team with multiple members can really help to uncover a more complete perspective of the student and prompt deeper discussion of the unique amalgamations of strengths and needs held by students with ID (Carter et al., 2012). Soliciting additional perspectives from an expanded planning team is likely to provide rich, detailed information to inform the transition planning, and even further research may be needed to explore the way in which increasing the number or assessment informants may both deepen and challenge such planning decisions (Carter et al., 2012). Indeed, a 2013 study published by Small, Raghavan, and Pawson shows that individuals with severe ID often have very limited social networks beyond their own families and other immediate educators or caregivers, thus even expanding the interdisciplinary team to incorporate the broader social ecosystem the student exists in—a type of “whole system planning”—may lead to better outcomes.

Conversely, students with ID in transition programs and their planning teams often face challenges due to the sheer amount of different people involved with the transition planning. In a team model, support needs and configurations are often complex. Quantitative research of Carter et al. (2012) identified broadly divergent perspectives between parents and teachers during transition planning for a large sampling of ID students.

In one sense this poses a challenge as it may seem to be difficult to come to consensus when stakeholders hold such varied perspectives, but Carter et al. suggest that the ability of parents and teachers to work together to identify a broad amount of strengths can help to tailor higher quality individualized assessments for the student, may lead to deeper team discussions, and also higher expectations for the student (2012). However, that is the best-case scenario, and Carter et al. believe that their research shows the team-based transition assessment process is in need of more focused research attention and much more work to address ways to more effectively include all stakeholders in the planning and assessment process (2012).

The extensive interview-based research of Noonan, Morningstar, and Erickson (2008) has identified that high levels of interagency collaboration remain elusive during transition planning. Noonan et al. (2008) identify ongoing barriers to include: misperceptions of outside agencies by educators and parents; nonexistence of effective procedures for collaboration of school and agency staff throughout the transition referral and planning process; and systemic issues inherent to the collaboration between public school systems and the adult service sector such as in eligibility, primary locus of service issues, and funding.

Noonan et al. (2008) cited various studies which found that effective interagency collaboration is a highly critical indicator of future success as transition students moved into adulthood, directly correlating with an increase in post-secondary employment. Indeed, “the stronger the linkages with outside services and supports, the greater the chances of the student’s attending postsecondary education [...and interagency collaboration] is a critical element leading to higher employment and postsecondary outcomes” (Noonan et al., 2008, p. 133).

The resulting research presented by Noonan et al. shows that better interagency collaboration would (and does) occur with improvements in the following areas: more flexible scheduling and staffing, continued follow-up with the student after transition is complete, increased administrative support at the local level, access to and usage of a variety of funding sources, state-level technical support, districts having access to and using a variety of adult service agencies, including students and families in agency meetings, training students and families about the process, jointly training district staff members, frequent meetings with agency staff and transition councils, and frequent dissemination of information to parents and students regarding available services (2008).

Research presented by deFur (2003) finds similar solutions as Noonan et al. (2008) regarding minimizing the challenges of interagency collaboration, especially the rift that can grow when juggling the transition-specific planning and the more traditional educational elements of a student’s IEP plan. deFur (2003) outlines the following key best practices for IEP transition planning and creation of a quality, student-centered transition plan as culled from numerous follow-up and other research studies: student involvement in transition planning; direct instruction of students in social skills and self-

determination; active family involvement in transition planning; opportunities for students to participate in inclusive environments; ensuring students have opportunities to have work experiences while still in high school; providing occupational-specific vocational courses of study based on assessments and exposure to career guidance instruction; supporting students in academic skill areas; providing direct instruction in independent living skills; students accessing assistive technology services as needs; and students being provided consistent administrative support that includes the presence of a state transition specialist within the district. Many of these same themes came up time and again during the course of this literature review.

The extensive quantitative and survey-based research of Simonsen and Neubert (2012) draws similar conclusions, and they identify family engagement in transition planning, and programs offering direct work experience, to be key factors in increasing community-based employment outcomes for youth with ID. Notably, their research found that transition-aged youth (TAY) with families actively involved in the transition planning, and whose families actively expressed a preference for paid community work, were statistically much more likely to be engaged in community-based work following graduation (Simonsen & Neubert, 2012).

Further, TAY with ID who learned self-management skills during the transition process were also more likely to be engaged in community-based work, thus self-management skill instruction must be addressed during transition assessment activities and goal development by the IEP team (Simonsen & Neubert, 2012). Again, a great variety of factors are shown to be critical during the planning and execution of transition

services for youth with ID to help students to be more likely to experience integrated, community-based work experiences once they exit their secondary programs.

Beyond the challenges that sometimes stem from convoluted teamwork and the resultant poor planning, other issues persist in transition programming for students with ID. One major theme that emerged from my research is that transition students with ID often do not have enough contact and participation with the business community or employment-related activities prior to graduating, which ultimately results in fewer community-based job placements for the student (Andrade 2014; Joshi, Bouck, & Maeda, 2012; Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007; Simonsen & Neubert, 2012). Joshi et al. (2012) specifically researched post-school employment outcomes for transition students with mild ID and found that post-school employment status was directly related to participation in employment-related transition activities while in school. Their qualitative research found that most TAY with mild ID had at least some opportunities to participate in paid, unpaid, or school-sponsored work experiences while in school, and student engagement in paid or school-sponsored work is positively associated with obtainment of post-school employment (Joshi et al., 2012).

However, this same study found that vocational education itself was not found to be significantly related to post-school employment attainment for transition students with mild ID, and the authors hypothesize that this may have something to do with the generic nature of some vocational education programs which are often not tailored specifically to the needs of the student (Joshi et al., 2012). This suggests that more research may need to be done, and educators will need to think creatively when writing vocational curricula for students with ID so that it includes real, customized work experiences that may be

most beneficial in helping these students secure employment (Joshi et al., 2012).

However, Joshi et al. note that, realistically, the resources of particular schools vary so greatly, and it is often much easier for urban educators to locate paid employment experiences for students with ID, versus schools in rural settings which may have access to a very limited amount of potential employers (2012).

The work of Andrade (2014) corroborates this, and finds that models of transition service provided to student with cognitive disabilities that do not provide contact with the greater work community (such as sheltered workshops) simply do not prove effective for those students to find meaningful, paid, integrated employment in the long run.

Andrade's 2014 research studied the employment outcomes of transition students with significant cognitive disabilities as they completed a program (Project SEARCH) that primarily includes collaboration with private businesses and real work experiences.

Andrade (2014) found that participation in such a program helped students with cognitive disabilities to become more successful within integrated employment opportunities following graduation, and posits that much more research is needed when it comes to public-private collaboration between community businesses and transition programs. Andrade's qualitative research identified seven main benefits that stemmed from the public-private collaboration involved with Project SEARCH, potentially effecting students, business owners, and the community. The seven benefits are changed attitudes and higher expectations of students with disabilities from people in the community; reduced employment barriers as employers become more familiar with the unique strengths of students with ID; increased integrated employment, supporting more meaningful adult lives as TAY come of age; more job opportunities for people with

disabilities in general; a reduced gap from school-to-work; increasing strong public-private partnerships; and the expansion of real workplaces and experiences, which enhances professional employability skills for students with disabilities (Andrade, 2014).

Similarly, Sabbatino and Macrine (2007) present research showing that although federal legislation requires transition plans to include individualized post-graduation employment planning, people with disabilities continue to be employed at a much lower rate. Their research finds that students with disabilities need community-based education to really learn needed vocational skills that translate to success in today's society, and they analyze a model program (Start on Success,) which is rooted in community-based transition activities in a supportive environment including district leaders, skilled teachers, mentors, parents, and even universities (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007). Start on Success is an urban transition model that includes paid work experiences leading to possible permanent job placements at a local university and a hospital, and employment opportunities have grown as the program itself progresses (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007).

As a result of this sort of programming, students demonstrated improved attendance, increased self-esteem, increased work ethic, increased knowledge, and progress towards permanent community-based employment (Sabbatino & Macrine). Similar to the work of Andrade, Sabbatino and Macrine's research also shows that this kind of program benefits the community as a whole as employers and community members had an increased appreciation for, awareness, and understanding of the unique skills, talent, habits, and needs of the students with disabilities (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007). Again, the themes of community-based experiences and collaborative interdisciplinary team planning and

ongoing support as key factors in employment success for the transition student are made clear.

My research into vocational-related transition programming uncovered many more potential best practices and areas for growth in the field. Simonsen and Neubert's extensive quantitative and survey based 2012 study revealed that TAY with ID have not completely benefitted from the recent paradigm shift among educators and policy makers toward community employment-related outcomes in transition programs, and many students are simply not learning and being supported in the most effective ways. Findings from their study reaffirm related research from Moon et al. (2011) showing that to improve post-school outcomes for students with ID, those students need to learn self-management skills, community mobility skills, have paid work experiences during their secondary schooling, and be supported by informed family members who truly believe in integrated employment as a long-term goal for their child (Simonsen & Neubert, 2012).

A 2011 study conducted by Grigal, Hart, and Migliore found that transitions students with ID had less contact with external professionals in their IEP meetings, were less likely to have competitive employment goals and outcomes as a part of their IEP/transition plans, and were more likely to have sheltered or supported goals and outcomes as opposed to students with other disabilities. Grigal et al. (2011) examined results from a longitudinal study of transition student outcomes known as NTLS-2 and found only one post-high school transition goal to be a significant predictor of post-school employment for students with ID. It was having the goal of attending a 2- or 4-year college. Thus, transition planning and services for students with ID should include

focus on access to employment, contact with professionals, and higher expectations regarding post-secondary education (Grigal et al., 2011).

Finally, although further research may be needed in this area, findings from the research of Grigal et al. (2011) seem to support the assertion of McGrew and Evans (2004) that people tend to rise to the expectations that they and others have for themselves. Thus, when possible, it may benefit students with ID to shoot for loftier goals with the help of their support team. This may mean eliminating altogether post-school referrals to sheltered workshops (unless absolutely necessary), improving the professional development of educators and interdisciplinary team members, providing TAY students with ID higher levels of academic support and resources, and increasing interagency collaboration so that students with ID are adequately prepared for competitive employment outcomes (Grigal et al., 2011).

Tying things together, the research of Papay (2011) collects and corroborates most of the potential best practices and predictors that have been identified above, and shows that usage of identified best practices are indeed highly predictive of post-school outcomes. However, no single study has been found that shows if any particular combination of best practices is better for students with ID versus students with other disabilities (Papay, 2011). Nevertheless, high parental expectations seem to be one majorly critical factor predictive of success for TAY with ID (Papay, 2011).

All in all, the literature on transition programming, specifically that of vocational programming for American TAY with ID, points to several best practices and predictors of post-school competitive employment. There are many model programs in operation across America that help TAY find increasing success. Yet, many challenges are still

being worked out, especially regarding interagency collaboration, planning, and implementation of employment-related outcomes in alignment with federally mandated practices meant to close the employment gap for students with ID. The reviewed literature reviewed does not seem to point to one clear set of best practices for these students, and it is still a rapidly evolving field with room for improvement in most cases. Next, I will examine research more specifically related to potential reasons why students with ID are not finding competitive work once they complete their secondary transition programs.

### **Other Possible Factors Contributing to Post-School Employment**

The primary focus of this capstone is to examine what vocational-related skills are being taught to secondary students with ID while they are in their transition programs. The previous section outlined some challenges currently facing these students while attending their transition programs. It also identified numerous potential best practices, model programs, and other concepts for transition programs that have been found to contribute to TAY with ID finding competitive employment success after graduation. Though it is well beyond the scope of this capstone to research all of the educational and support factors that add to, or are somewhat predictive of, the success of these students for the one or two years immediately following completion of their transition programs, I felt it beneficial to outline below a few of the key recurring themes I found in my research as these concepts certainly can inform transition curriculum development.

Much of the research I reviewed pointed to a significant number of students with ID leaving their transition programs without skills that can lead to meaningful employment, with many students ending up in segregated or sheltered work settings (Carter, Brock, &

Trainor, 2012; Simonsen, 2010; Sabbatino & Macrine, 2010; Papay, 2011; Simonsen & Neubert, 2012). Beyond the specific programming offered by many transition programs, there seems to be many other factors aiding to the student finding and maintaining competitive, community-based work in the crucial one or two years following graduation.

First, having an actual paid community job experience during the high school years seems to be highly correlated with post-school success (Carter, Brock, & Trainor, 2012; Simonsen, 2010). Indeed, TAY having paid, fully community-based work experience during high school—as opposed to school-sponsored unpaid work, volunteering activities, or simply not working—was shown by the quantitative research of Carter et al. (2012) to be a statistically significant predictor for TAY with even severe disabilities to find meaningful employment in the two years following high school. Extensive, survey-based research done by Simonsen (2010) comes to the same conclusion. Simonsen (2010) pointed towards paid work experience during the secondary school years as one of only five factors found to be salient predictors of post-school supported employment for TAY with DD. According to Simonsen (2010), supported employment strictly means paid, community-based work as opposed to the sheltered types of employment experiences had by over two-thirds of her large survey sample in the few years immediately following graduation (including enclaves, mobile work crews getting paid sub-minimum wage, unpaid sheltered work, or non-work activities).

As described in a previous section, Sabbatino and Macrine's 2010 research and Joshi, Bouck and Maeda's 2012 research further substantiated these findings, and posited that transition students with disabilities specifically need community-based vocational and

educational experiences while in their transition programs in order to find success in the modern working world after the programs are over.

Another recurring theme related to post-school success was that family support and expectations seem to be a major element in TAY finding employment success after graduation. Carter et al. (2012) found that students whose families gave them more household responsibilities (both pre- and post-graduation) and who had higher expectations related to the student's future work opportunities were directly correlated with increased odds of post-school employment success. Simonsen's 2010 research findings matched this and pointed to the idea that families that expressed a preference for their family member with DD to hold community-based work is a specific predictor of that child finding and maintaining supported employment. A variety of research presented in previous sections shows how important family support and collaboration are to the transition process, and further family and parental perspectives are discussed in a section below.

Another key predictor for employment success in the years following graduation is that the post-transition graduate with ID has established skills and supports in independent self-care and self-management. Particularly, Carter et al. (2012) identified the graduate having the capacity to complete some self-cares more independently contributed to greater odds of employment, and such skills can be easily addressed through systematic instructional efforts while the student is still in their transition program. Again, Simonsen (2010) comes to the same conclusion, borrowing a definition of self-management from Agran (1997) as the ability of the graduate to function mostly independently (e.g. organization and self-care) without the need for constant support,

prompts, or directions. These functional skills can include things like washing hands at appropriate times, dressing appropriately for different situations, other hygiene skills, time-management skills, taking care of a living space, and so forth (Simonsen, 2010).

Though I was unable to find much research on the application of assistive technology in workplace settings, I feel it is worth briefly mentioning here. The research of Bouck, Maeda, and Flanagan (2012) finds that access to and usage of assistive technology during transition programming has been shown to improve life outcomes for youth with ID, including finding paid work, having better wages, and even having increased participation in postsecondary education. Bouck et al. (2012) used IDEA's 2004 definition of assistive technology as being any item, equipment, or system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability. However, Bouck et al. analyzed database and survey data, and determined that very few transition students with disabilities report being given access to assistive technology (2012). More research is needed to determine if post-school support agencies, or even employers, are providing individuals with ID with modern, assistive technology to help improve employment outcomes.

There exists a potentially endless variety of other factors that may contribute to the employment success or failure of an individual with ID in the first few years following completion of their transition program. Nonetheless, despite what skills or strengths the graduate may have, the survey-based research of Gromley (2014) identified that a legacy of workplace stigma currently remains for individuals with ID. Gromley's 2014 research shows that a large amount of coworkers of new workplace entrants with ID voiced concerns about anticipated performance and behavioral issues. However, in many cases,

initial negative perceptions were overcome in time, often with the help of transition programs, or other transition support systems, helping to guide the graduate into the working world (Gromley, 2014). Gromley's 2014 research also found that individuals with ID are typically stable, dependable, and competent employees once they enter the community-based workforce.

In the next section, I will present and examine research related to Supported Employment Customized Employment, and related offshoots, which are fields that may offer transition students and fresh graduates with ID the opportunity to find other means of support and success in community-based, competitive employment.

### **Current Research on Supported and Customized Employment Strategies**

Though these fields are not specifically related to transition programming for TAY with ID, they represent important concepts and support systems that may help these individuals find unique ways to access employment. It is possible that strategies presented below could be applied to programming for TAY both during and after their transition programming, thus it is beneficial to review some of the related literature within the context of this capstone. Many of the ideas I found in this research cleanly relate to some of the transition best practices outlined above. However, though programs may exist, I was not able to locate any research showing specific examples of transition programs in America systematically using customized employment strategies to help youth with ID find and maintain community-based employment.

Customized Employment, and its offshoot known as the Discovery Process, encompass the strategies touted by Cary Griffin (see above), Bob from chapter one, and many other disability services providers across America today. According to Inge

(2008), the term Customized Employment (CE) was first coined in the context of vocational services for people with disabilities in a 2001 US Senate Speech given by then Secretary of Labor, Elaine Chao. Chao saw the concept of vocational customization, or tailoring/creating a work experience to mutually meet the needs of both employer and jobseeker through various means—mostly via totally customized job creation—as the next trend in the labor market. Shortly thereafter, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), at that time a new office within the US Department of Labor, put forth the concept of CE as a major upcoming initiative, funding and giving trainings and demonstration efforts to one-stop vocational service centers and other human service providers around the country. From there, it did not take long for the usage of CE to spread in the human services field.

There are many features that make CE stand apart from SE (both of which stand apart from the classic “traditional methods” of job searching such as interviewing, resume writing, navigating Human Resources departments/gatekeepers, filling out applications, and searching for jobs based on job titles). Overall, Customized Employment is about deeply getting to know the jobseeker with a disability and understanding the unique skills, talents, and resources that he or she can bring to a community employment experience, ideally at a smaller or family-owned business (Inge, 2008). It is an approach that could be seen as being based in a sort of “abundance mindset”; one of identifying and capitalizing on strengths, resources, and skills. Inge identifies other critical features of the CE experience, paraphrased here:

1. the jobseeker has choice;

2. the job search process is grounded in an “abilities” perspective as opposed to focusing on disabilities;
3. job descriptions are often individualized and negotiated by the job seeker (with help from the support provider) and thus the job search is not inextricably tied to the local labor market, but is rather informed by the individual needs of both jobseeker and the employer;
4. the jobseeker’s skills, talents, and interests are carefully identified prior to locating potential employers and negotiating a mutually beneficial customized work experience;
5. the jobseeker ideally ends up with a job that previously did not exist prior to the negotiation process and the employer’s bottom-line needs are met by a qualified individual with a disability. (p.133)

Griffin et al. (2008) further elaborate on CE by stating that the job search should ultimately begin by using the individual job seekers as a primary source of information (what is their home or bedroom like, what do their friends say, what do they like to do for fun and recreation). The job search itself might even end by creating a work experience through starting a business (via means such as self-employment, opening a business within a business, or other such ways) or even by starting a new post-secondary schooling/training experience altogether (Griffin, 2009). In all of these ways, Griffin (2009) sees CE as being a completely person-centered *process* not at all like a traditional job search, which typically starts by a jobseeker trying to track down a job title, filling out applications or mailing resumes, and ends when the job is attained.

Griffin (2009) outlines a few additional basic but essential characteristics of the CE process, paraphrased here:

1. comparison is avoided: in order to bypass the usually negative outcome of the jobseeker with a disability being forced to be compared to their nondisabled competition, CE promotes the usage of personal networks, internships, informational interviews, and a focus on smaller businesses, among other concepts;
2. there is a focus on demonstrable skills: everybody has interests, and they are definitely important, but proponents of CE believe that starting by assessing the jobseeker's verifiable skills will give them the competitive edge. It is an action-based approach rather than the passive, "take your word for it" approach of traditional job seeking;
3. expectations for the jobseeker are raised and action is taken: the jobseeker's support system should expect that the jobseeker enter the community, "grow up," and take on real challenges, disabled or not. Actions in this direction should begin at a young age;
4. find real-world work experiences: the jobseeker's school or service provider should do whatever they can to provide them with real work experiences because those experiences can help to confirm skills, determine interests, build work ethic, allow for networking and community activity, illuminate teaching approaches and support needs, and generally help the jobseeker to earn peer/societal status among other things;
5. find and use exploitable resources that the jobseeker brings to the table: basically, if the jobseeker has special equipment, tools, or access to other moneymaking

resources, employability is enhanced and can offset the lack of marketable skills a student with disabilities may have.

Overall, usage of CE strategies for the jobseeker with disabilities presents a person-centered and flexible approach which can lead to positive outcomes.

The Discovery Process, also known as the Discovering Personal Genius process (DPG) is an emerging form of CE that is gaining popularity, and many vocational service providers are now using, some almost exclusively for their job development work. According to Stevely (2009), DPG is essentially an information gathering process that starts with the service provider getting to know the job seeker deeply, determining the ideal conditions of employment, and locating a handful of vocational themes that serve as the basis for the job search.

The process is done in multiple stages and includes the completion of a set of paperwork known as the staging record, thus providing a clear structure for the execution of CE strategies when working with a jobseeker with disabilities. This is the process used by Bob whom I referenced in chapter one, and many others including Griffin, which often leads to highly unique and successful job placements, though specific quantitative data regarding the efficacy of the DPG process currently seems to be lacking. It has also been difficult to obtain case studies about individuals whom have successfully completed the DPG process.

Overall, the fields of supported employment, customized employment, and the Discovering Personal Genius process are important to keep in mind when researching vocational best practices for TAY with ID. Concepts used by practitioners of these fields may be able to help teach critical job-seeking skills and help to close the employment gap

for current transition students and graduates alike. Next, I will outline a selection of qualitative research I have found regarding student, teacher, and parental perceptions of vocational transition programs for youth with ID.

### **Perceptions of Students, Teachers, and Parents**

To conclude this literature review, I felt it very important to include a brief overview of other published qualitative research documenting the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers on vocational transition programming and the work life of the student after graduation. Given the topic of this capstone, and my qualitative research approach, I want to be sure to include similar research directly highlighting the voices of individuals involved in all levels of transition programming for students with ID, beginning with the students themselves.

It was difficult to find much research which interviewed, surveyed, or otherwise directly included the voices of transition students with ID. Though there was some student inclusion, much of the research I have already reviewed above involved surveying and interviewing parents, teachers, administrators, and employers. I was only able to locate two published articles offering student perceptions on the transition process, and also specifically related to ID.

A 2013 dissertation by Rich-Gross examined the perceptions of the transition schooling process by Ohio students with ID by reviewing survey data given to students at various stages after exiting high school. At one, three, and five year intervals, students were asked to answer four basic questions (paraphrased here): What critical courses of study do students with ID identify as being unavailable, what experiences did they find most valuable during their transition process, what kind of work did they anticipate

versus what they actually found, and what are the participants' reported reasons for unemployment if unemployed (Rich-Gross, 2013).

Survey respondents pointed to employment and employability training, and related themes, as being the critical courses of study they found unavailable to them—specifically the ability to have paid work on their own, career and technical education, or an in-school job. However, just as many respondents also found those same things to be what was most valuable in their transition process (Rich-Gross, 2013). Anticipated and actual work situations broadly varied by individual student, though the majority of respondents indicated that they could simply not find any kind of job following graduation whatsoever (Rich-Gross, 2013). Respondents identified reasons for unemployment mostly hinged on what was seen as bleak economic conditions impacting potential employment opportunities (Rich-Gross, 2013).

Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, and Owens (2011) conducted focus-group interviews of 16 adolescents with cognitive, emotional/behavioral, and learning disabilities in order to gain the adolescents' perspectives on summer employment, community involvement, adult guidance, and factors that may help or hinder access to such experiences. Carter et al. (2011) found that this set of participants held high expectations around maintaining summer work, in order to earn their own money, but they were only able to find limited success when they pursued work and community experiences on their own. Focus group participants also generally expressed low expectations for adult guidance, but yet expressed desires for adult mentorship and various forms of indirect adult support (Carter et al., 2011). Finally, participants identified numerous, frustrating barriers to employment, such as lack of response to their applications, available work not matching

their interests, difficulty in getting along with coworkers and supervisors, and challenges in living up to workplace skills and expectations (Carter et al., 2011).

Overall, Carter et al. (2011) viewed summer as being an opportune time for TAY to gain employment and community-based experiences, though the focus group participants identified distinct challenges and barriers to finding and maintaining work in general. Carter et al.'s study (2011) was not specifically limited to students with ID, pertained to only one geographic location, and the sample size was fairly small, so not many broad conclusions can be drawn from it to inform transition programming as a whole.

Beyond the survey data that many of the research I reviewed above, it was also difficult to find much rich, qualitative research showing the perception of American teachers regarding transition programming for TAY with ID. In order to gain perspective from special educators, Trainor, Carter, Owens, and Swadeen published research in 2008 based on direct interviews with 14 teachers from 10 U.S. high schools. Although the teachers were aware that connecting TAY with disabilities to early work experiences- especially during the summer months- has emerged as a key best practice in transition services, they articulated that several barriers may hinder youth from access those experiences (Trainor et al., 2008).

Identified barriers include a lack of formal programming during summer months, limited availability of jobs (though some teachers differed on this point), jobs being limited to entry-level type work such as food services, lack of youth awareness regarding employment opportunities, lack of parent involvement and assistance with student networking with potential employers, and so forth (Trainor et al., 2008). Again, this study was not limited to students with ID, transition programming, and it was limited to

one specific geographic area and a small group of teacher respondents. Thus, again it is unclear if many broad-based conclusions can be drawn from it to assist transition students with ID as a whole.

Bell (2010) conducted interviews with a number of transition educators, including teachers and administrators, in order to gather their opinions. Bell found widely dissimilar opinions from participants regarding transition program effectiveness (2010). By in large, participants indicated that transition program ineffectiveness was caused by weak transition assessment practices, and improvements were seen as needed in student-centered planning, interagency collaboration, family involvement, and program structuring (Bell, 2010). These results, as articulated directly by a number of people working in the transition field, certainly match well with much of the research reviewed in previous sections of this literature review.

Conversely, there was no shortage in the amount of published research presenting parental perceptions on the experiences of transition students with ID, of which I will summarize here. Martinez (2009) surveyed Virginia parents of transition students with ID to determine their level of involvement in transition planning. The resulting data indicated a variety of themes including that parents want to be more a part of formal planning sessions, they feel they have a low degree of knowledge regarding how the program is going, they would prefer their children be connected with community-based businesses, and the parents expected (or at least desired) that their children would be given quality general career or vocational preparation training (Martinez, 2009).

Harkins (2014) presented research based on interviews with 12 parents of transitions students with ID, and uncovered a number of key themes to consider when helping

students with ID through the transition experience. Themes included: challenges with personal development for the student during the transition process, affect the transition process, high levels of direct support are needed from schools, students need structured and proactive programming, students benefit socially from inclusive activities, environmental factors influence adjustment throughout the transition process, parents are concerned with potential social isolation as the student transitions into adulthood, and parents express a desire for their children with ID to receive highly individualized supports and services (Harkins, 2014).

Although not focused specifically on students with ID, Robick (2010) presents similar interview-based data as Harkins (2014) regarding parental perceptions. Further, Robick (2010) identified that parents indicate a need for additional transition program development in order to increase the number of work opportunities available to students in both in-school and postsecondary work options.

Overall, although there seems to be a skew towards research recounting parental perceptions versus those of students and educators, themes uncovered during my review of this literature seem to mesh well with themes and potential best practices already uncovered above.

### **A Summary of Possible Deficiencies Found in the Available Research**

I have found a plethora of research related to American secondary transition programming, but there are still areas of deficiency in the current body of literature as it relates to students with ID. First, there seems to be a shortage of rich, interview-based qualitative research presenting the voices and opinions of transition students with ID themselves. Second, there seems to be a limited amount of the same kind of research

sharing educator perspectives on the manner. I hoped that my research for this capstone can help fill some of that gap. Third, there may be room for more research in the areas of transition-programming specifically for students with ID (especially mild to moderate levels of ID).

Much of the literature focuses broadly on all students with disabilities as a large group without breaking out students with ID as a separate research group. I believe this is especially important as students with various forms of ID have their own unique educational and vocational needs, as all students do. Fourth, I have identified a possible deficiency in research related to applications of Supported Employment, Customized Employment, and DPG within secondary transition programs. If there are schools teaching and helping students with ID use such strategies, I was unable to locate any substantial research about it. Also, there does not seem to be as much research related to public-private collaborations. This may be one area where SE/CE/DPG can start to bridge the gap with an entrée in to American transition programs. Fifth, and related to that, the literature seems to include many lists of potential best practices for transition programs overall, but not as many studies focus on model programs or programs using potentially “disruptive” strategies such as DPG or extensive usage of modern technologies. I was only able to find a handful of research related to assistive technology and specific applications for ID students in transition programs. Given how prevalent technology is, and how the information age is making it more and more accessible, I imagine more research in this area will be forthcoming.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, I have presented and synthesized a variety of research related to transition programming for students with ID who, as a group, continue to struggle to find and maintain community-based, competitive work following completion of their transition programs. Beginning with an overview of the employment gap and history of disability-related services and legislation, the tone was set for an analysis of current research about transition programming. Strengths and challenges of transition programs were identified, as well as many potential best practices from researchers in the field. A variety of reasons why students with ID may or may not fail to find and maintain employment following graduation were presented and put into conversation with the rest of the research.

Supported employment-related strategies were further examined as potential tools to further assist TAY with ID to find inclusive work. Finally, some of the qualitative research focused on the perceptions of transition students, their parents, and transition educators was presented. The literature review concluded by outlining some potential deficiencies in the current body of research.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Research Methods**

#### **Study Overview**

The purpose of this capstone is to build an interview-based study of one phenomenon: the teaching of job-seeking skills to pre-graduate transition students with intellectual disabilities in and around a major U.S. metropolitan area, as filtered through this writer's advocacy/participatory worldview. From there, I synthesized the interview data into a set of recurrent themes that may benefit transition educators and researchers as they build programs or seek to enhance their curricula. To accomplish my goals, I used a qualitative research approach. I believe this is the best way to research the question of this capstone: What specific job-seeking skills are currently being taught to students with intellectual disabilities in multiple major transition school programs? By interviewing a small, but representative group of people directly involved with such programs, a detailed picture of the job-seeking skills being taught to TAY with ID would emerge.

By having individuals describe their reality in their own words, space was created for a grounded, person-centered understanding of the subject that focused on different dimensions than an analysis of curricular documents or the already well-documented statistics. Interviewing is an efficient way to present information related to what is actually happening in one crucial cross-section of today's school system and, potentially, to make positive change for a group of students already facing daunting challenges.

I believe that students with intellectual disabilities remain a highly underrepresented and misunderstood group in American society despite the progress that has been made over the last few decades as described in the literature review. More than anything, I settled on completing an interview-based study since it will allow a group of these students, as well as others involved in teaching and raising them, to have their voices be heard. In this way, I may be able to discover if the job-seeking skills being taught in certain large transition programs are adequate and encompassing of relevant strategies. Regardless, it is my belief that positive change in our society always begins with listening to the voices of the people most in need, and it is important that research projects such as this one include an actionable agenda to help marginalized people.

The remainder of this chapter explains what qualitative research is, states the reasons for a qualitative research design, defines the philosophical worldview framing my research, and describes the participants, means of data collection and data analysis.

### **Qualitative Research Paradigm**

The phenomenon researched for the capstone is a complex, shifting, and challenging one. There are many human players, moving parts, emotions, and ethical considerations involved. I feel that using only quantitative data would have limited the scope too much. Since the student interviewees are marginalized in American society and their employment gap is a dynamic issue, it is imperative that the research design is person-centered and also that the interviewees' voices- both of students and teachers- are presented as primary sources.

Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as a tool that can be used to explore and understand the meaning people give to a social or human problem. In this study, I see the

problem as being the ongoing struggle that many students with intellectual disabilities continue to have with finding and maintaining work once they graduate high school. This is why I am using a qualitative approach to answer my primary research question- what vocational-related skills are being taught to pre-graduate students with intellectual disabilities in large transition programs? Creswell writes that qualitative research, “involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data” (2009, p.4). All these aspects fit well with this study.

Practitioners of qualitative research typically engage methods and practices such as asking open-ended questions, focusing deeply on a single phenomenon, collaborating directly with the participants, building case studies, making an agenda for change/reform, and framing their research in such philosophical assumptions as an advocacy/participatory worldview (Creswell, 2009, p.17). These also fit this study.

Creswell also points out that another key characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is a key, if not *the* (italics added) key research instrument (2009, p. 175). In conducting this study, I was the primary research instrument. I set up and conducted interviews with participants I located. I used interview protocols that I created, instead of data collection tools that have been developed by other researchers. Creswell defines another critical component of qualitative research as being at that the researcher, “keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers express in the literature,” (2009, p.175). In this way, the researcher has control over keeping the focus directly on

the participants and their experiences. The researcher makes a final attempt to interpret the meaning of the research data, but that meaning really comes from the primary source of the participants so long as the researcher avoids manipulating the data or hiding any personal agendas and/or biases.

Creswell states that a qualitative research design includes an emergent research process, involves the researcher making interpretations of the data, and ultimately provides a holistic account of a problem or phenomena (2009, pp. 175-176). The research plan should not be too tightly prescribed, and plans can change and shift as the process continues. Allowing interpretations to flow from the data leaves room for multiple, and possibly new, perspectives. This flexible and holistic approach is critical when dealing with sensitive human issues and dynamic situations. It allows for a broader view of a subject.

The qualitative researcher typically frames the research with a philosophical lens, which could also be called paradigms or guiding beliefs. Creswell calls these lenses “worldviews,” and defines them as a “general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds” (2009, p. 6). In this capstone, I use an advocacy/participatory worldview. An advocacy/participatory philosophical worldview compliments qualitative research design. The advocacy/participatory worldview holds that all research inquiry needs to be intertwined with some sort of political agenda and includes an action item (or items) that may change the lives of the participants involved in many possible ways. It includes direct collaboration with the participants so as not to further marginalize them (Creswell, p. 9). I believe that such a worldview connected directly to the problem I am trying to solve with this study. Further, I see myself as an

advocate for individuals with disabilities, and this worldview allows me to maintain that stance overtly throughout the research and writing process. The action item that stems from this study is that I expect educators and researchers to take information and themes presented here in order to make immediate changes or enhancements to existing transition curricula where needed.

### **Participants and Settings**

Qualitative interviewing requires that the number and type of respondents cannot be specified in advance. Some room needs to be left so the researcher can change course as data is collected and new information currents emerge. In dealing with the complexities of human experience, and what those experiences mean to the respondents, qualitative research plans need to be constructed that allow the researcher to be able react to the information that is being uncovered (Fox, 2009, p. 11). However, for this study, advanced planning and selection of a small, but fairly representative set of interviewees of three teachers and four students is critical to eliciting at least a tentative and useful picture of the phenomenon at hand.

My study is limited to one specific geographic area, so it was especially important within that to cast the widest possible net when searching for subjects so as ensure the study might be at least somewhat helpful to people living in many other diverse areas. Thus, I focused on a few fairly large and diverse school districts and a handful of the major transition programs in and around those areas. These choices are connected with my desire to have as representative a sample as possible from the chosen districts and programs.

It was easy to locate the up-to-date public demographic information on the district and transition program websites. Obviously, given that they will all be diagnosed with an intellectual disability and are pre-graduate secondary transition students, the students selected as subjects automatically represent one specific subset of students. That made my job of selecting subjects a bit easier. Then, by using the demographic information available, I honed in on the distribution of race, age, and gender as factors for contacting and selecting a representative group of students. I was connected to students via district members and transition program teachers/administrators that I emailed or called. I explained my study and was given contact information for students that the people I talked to thought best matched my needs. I contacted the students, their parents, or guardians directly via phone or email to explain the study and to see if they had any interest in participating.

Selecting teachers, administrators, and other related parties involved locating key names and contact information online, or via basic social networking, and then contacting everyone via email and phone calls and seeing who got back to me. Once connected, I explained my study and its rationale. For those who were interested and available, we determined when and where to meet for a private, individual interview at a setting of their choice. The logistics were coordinated primarily via email. Ultimately, I was able to interview all the participants one-on-one, in private settings within their actual schools.

### **Overview of Participants and the Interviewing Process**

In order to locate potential interviewees, I did cold calls and sent emails to various districts and transition schools within about a 100-mile radius from my home. After presenting information about the “what” and the “why” of my project to whomever

fielded my initial contact, I asked to talk to principals, transition-school department heads, special education liaisons, or anyone that could help me. The process of narrowing down candidates took months. There were numerous dead-end leads and a lot of back-and-forth emailing before I was finally able to hone in on a viable set of interviewees.

My criteria for candidates were simple: I was looking for teachers currently teaching vocational-related skills in a transition program, and current secondary transition students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities who were taking career development-related courses. Potential interviewees also needed to be willing and able to be interviewed by me within the next 1-2 months. I wanted to gather a pool of candidates that encompassed many geographical areas, sexes, levels of cognitive functioning, and experience levels.

With help from a few generous district workers, my recruitment letter was disseminated to hundreds of faculty members across the state via email (See Appendix A for a copy of the letter) and a few teachers directly contacted me based on that letter. Two teachers were found to be good candidates meeting my criteria and interviews were scheduled with them. Another district contact helped to connect me to a large, urban transition school. After talking to the principal at that school and getting my research approved by them, I was able to tour there, meet with lead faculty members, and I was given permission to set up interviews with another teacher there and four of their current students. Thus, I had a small, but diverse pool of interviewees that I believe is representative of the current state of secondary transition services in America.

The first teacher (hereinafter referred to as T1) is a veteran special education teacher currently working in a large, semi-rural special education cooperative setting

encompassing multiple districts. T1 is a female with over thirty years of experience in the field, including continuous work with students with intellectual disabilities, mostly in a vocational/transition capacity. Her current position is Work Coordinator within her cooperative. She specializes in helping students with disabilities train for and find all kinds of community-based work placements, when possible.

The second teacher (hereinafter referred to as T2) is also a veteran female special education teacher. T2 is currently a work coordinator at a large, outer-ring suburban school district. She works directly with transition students coming from a specific high school in order to help them assess their skills, train on job skills, and find community-based work experiences. Her primary specialty is in skills training. She has worked with students with intellectual disabilities in various transition-related capacities for multiple decades.

The third teacher (hereinafter referred to as T3) is a veteran male lead teacher at a transition program in a major urban area. He has decades of experience working with all levels of students with intellectual, and other, disabilities as they transition from high school to the working and college world. He is currently helping to train and place relatively higher functioning students with disabilities as they complete their transition programs. He specializes in performing skills assessments and helping students determine their best strengths.

Due to the logistics and challenges around my candidate search, all of the student interviewees ultimately came from the same large urban transition program where T3 teaches. The first student (hereinafter referred to as S1) is a 21-year-old male with an intellectual disability. He hopes to finish his transition program this year in order to find

community-based work in the computer-aided design field. He has some work experience, including a current position as a fast-food worker and some past short-term volunteering experiences he got through his school. He is also interested in pursuing college courses related to his chosen field.

Student two (hereinafter referred to as S2) is an 18-year-old female transition student with an intellectual disability. She is in her first year of the program, and may decide to stay for additional years, though she is unsure. She has no paid-work experience apart from some volunteering, short-term placements through vocational service providers, and general training-related experiences in the past. She is primarily interested in preparing for college and learning study and community-living skills. However, she would also like to learn job skills so she can find a quiet office job that meshes with her personality or, eventually, to work in her ideal dream job as a comic book story writer. She is currently pursuing her dream job on her own via her personal networking and contacts she has made online.

Student three (hereinafter referred to as S3) is a 19-year old-female transition student with an intellectual disability. She is in her first year of the program, and is considering coming back for a second year. She is ultimately looking for community-based work as quickly as possible, ideally in her chosen field of cosmetology. She has some paid work experience as a photographer, an experience that she was connected with through the transition program. Her dream is to do professional makeup work for movies and television, and like S2 she is also using her own personal network and contacts to pursue that dream on the side.

Student four (hereinafter referred to as S4) is a male transition student of unknown age. S4 has an intellectual disability, and is in the transition program to learn basic job skills and to ultimately find a community-based job, during or after the program. S4's dream job is to work in retail, or to develop video games once he has adequate experience. He wants to have a career related to video games so he can help others find joy and happiness in their lives in the way that gaming has helped him to find those things.

### **Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations**

The study was approved by the Hamline University Institutional Review Board and the Hamline University School of Education Human Subjects Committee prior to contacting and collecting data from participants. I received approval from legal guardians of all underage participants and from school administrators to interviewing teachers or other relevant employees of the schools. Each interviewee signed a written, standardized informed consent to participate in the study. Parents or guardians of the student participants signed consent forms and were welcome to sit in during the interview. The consent form included a description of the study, its purpose, an assurance of anonymity and confidentiality, and their full rights as study participants. None were interviewed without their signed informed consent forms, which I had securely locked up at my home. Now that the study is complete, I will destroy all consent forms and any other identifying information I had maintained as the study proceeded.

Protecting the private health information and identities of the participants was of utmost importance. All interview transcriptions were securely stored on password-protected media and did not include any information about the interviewees that could

identify them. Participant pseudonyms were assigned (T1, T2, T3, T4; and S1, S2, S3) All obvious identifying information was omitted from the transcriptions.

All recorded data was immediately destroyed following the completion of my written transcriptions. No published data contains any identifying information about any of the subjects. My personal notes and writings were kept securely in a password-protected computer, and will now be deleted since the study is over.

Another ethical consideration was the possibility that the researcher could exploit the power dynamic during a face-to-face, one-to-one interview. For example, this could come into play during an interview with an underage student with an intellectual disability. In such cases, I eliminated this by using interview protocols, meeting with students in their own schools, being open my research agenda, and forcing myself to listen and gently probe for information rather than “strong-arming” for information. A final ethical consideration is how the researcher’s biases could result in misinterpretations of data and skew the findings.

### **Data Collection**

This section outlines the specific procedures and instruments used to accomplish the interviews, the interview settings, the data analysis, and validation procedures.

The data was collected through semi-structured, audio-recorded individual interviews with all participants. All interviews were conducted in a standardized manner by using interview protocols I created. The semi-structured interview approach is somewhat open-ended and flexible, but still requires the organized usage of specific instruments and procedures to ensure that data is collected , which can then be easily coded and interpreted by the researcher (Fox, 2009, p. 15).

Semi-structured interviewing in a qualitative study usually involves the researcher using pre-planned interview protocols as a uniform starting point when meeting with subjects. An interview protocol can best be described as a guide for the interview itself (Creswell, 2009, p.183). As the starting point for all my interviews, the interview guide consisted of a written set of instructions for the interview and a list of basic open-ended questions, many of which had potential prompting/probing questions that could have been used or not. An interview protocol may also include some basic scripting that the researcher would read to the participants, such as an introduction to the study, a statement of intent, or a statement about what will happen following the research process (Creswell, 2009, p. 183). I wrote two protocols: one for students and one for teachers. (See Appendixes C and D for the actual interview protocols used in the study.)

Privately held, face-to-face individual interviews provided a more intimate, free-flowing, and safe environment for sharing ideas and information versus the potentially higher-pressure and limiting group environment. In a group interview environment, not everyone may feel completely free to share their opinions on this sensitive topic, or they may contaminate others' stories as the group talks further and bounces ideas off one another (Fox, 2009, p.8). It is my opinion that face-to-face interviewing allows for a high level of flexibility in the moment as well as being a great way for the interviewer to build rapport with the interviewee.

Semi-structured interviews are often used to collect data in qualitative case studies and ethnographies and can be defined as a more open-ended means of interviewing that still includes a certain degree of predetermination and advanced planning, a specific list of

questions, and topics to be covered. However, it leaves a lot of room for follow-up/probing questions and general flexibility (Fox, 2009. p. 6).

Semi-structured interviews are primarily based on open-ended questions, unlike a quantitative interview that includes a completely predetermined list of closed-ended questions that are always asked in the same order to all participants. Qualitative interviews have more flexibility to ask probing questions, and, thus, gather emerging ideas (Fox, 2009, p. 6). This form of interviewing clearly lends itself well to the kind of inductive research I wished to perform. Within the frame of a defined topic, the researcher using semi-structured interviews may pursue details and topics not specified in the interview protocol, when warranted. Since I will be working with individuals with intellectual disabilities, the option to use verbal cuing or prompting/probing questions may also help to elicit more elaborate and useful responses from subjects who may at times struggle with some aspects of verbal communication. However, the ability to probe and follow unique lines of inquiry into deeper territory will likely prove to be helpful when interviewing all of the participants, not just the students.

While the usage of strict protocols/guides is not required for open-ended, semi-structured interviewing, it was important to me that the interviews began with a consistent starting point to ensure a smoother execution, to guarantee that all important ideas were addressed, and to provide me with a framework to insure that the interviews stayed on track.

I audio-recorded all of the interviews using a portable digital recorder with a stereo microphone and transcribed them verbatim in a word processing program. This allowed for accurate and detailed information collection because I did not want to miss or

misinterpret a single word spoken by the interviewees. I also took some handwritten notes during most of the interviews to help me capture some more subjective elements of the meeting such as mood and body language. The intention was to help me paint a more detailed picture or to jog my memory in the data analysis process. Complete interview transcriptions from all participants are located in Appendix E.

In sum, I chose a form of interviewing that would best allow me to paint a detailed picture of the phenomenon under study. It was also a form that allowed me to maintain my advocacy/participatory stance.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Creswell says that data analysis involves organizing and making sense out of text and image data collected by the researcher, moving deeper and deeper towards an understanding of the phenomenon under study, and in qualitative research is something akin to peeling back the layers of an onion (2009, p. 183). Ultimately, the qualitative researcher is looking to make a final interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. What follows is a description of how I analyzed and interpreted the interview data.

Given the holistic nature of this case study, I preferred to use a more generic form of data analysis to allow for flexibility and emergence of themes. Creswell describes a basic form of qualitative data analysis as involving the researcher holistically analyzing all of the collected data for general themes or perspectives, and then reporting on 4-5 main themes. He adds that case study research often specifically involves a detailed description of the setting and participants followed by an analysis of the data for themes or issues, moving from the specific to the general through multiple levels of analysis (Creswell, 2009, p. 184). This is the framework I will use.

More specifically, Creswell (2009) suggests that the qualitative researcher use a Multi-step, semi-linear, hierarchical approach to analyze and interpret the data. First, the researcher organizes and prepares the raw data for analysis. In my case, this meant transcribing the interviews and organizing my field notes. Second, the data is arranged into different types depending on the information sources. In my case, I simply organized it by basic source type, such as student and teacher.

Creswell (2009) suggests reading through all of the data to gain a general sense of the information and what overall meaning is conveyed. This is a holistic process that to gain impressions and a sense of tone versus quantifying hard-coded data. Some note taking may occur at this level as the researcher works through general data to start to make fuzzier concepts and themes more clear.

Third, some sort of coding or categorization of the collected data should occur. This is where the researcher moves from a higher-level overview into a more granular analysis of specific data in order to break the data down into key themes. Data categories are naturally uncovered and labeled, and codes should include both those that the reader may expect, given the nature of the research, as well as those that may be new, surprising, or even shocking in certain cases (Creswell, 2009).

Fourth, the researcher uses the coding process to build a description of the setting and participants as well as categories and themes for analysis. This is where the “picture painting” of qualitative research really occurs as a detailed rendering of the information about the people, places, and events under study. Further themes may be uncovered here, helping the researcher to group all the themes under broader categories. They should

display multiple perspectives from individuals and be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence (Creswell, 2009).

Finally, the fifth and sixth steps involve turning the gathered research themes into a detailed narrative passage of some sort. The researcher then takes the leap of making an interpretation out of all the data. The question to ask here is what lessons were learned, or what meaning can be derived from this study? Again, the researcher moved from specific, raw data into a big picture, general viewpoint throughout the data analysis process (Creswell, 2009). Further questions may yet emerge at this point, which is one of the main reasons why I chose to use an interview-based approach. I feel this is a topic that warrants ongoing attention and my ultimate goal is to have an agenda for some sort of change and reform to emerge from the data collected from real people facing a real issue.

Overall, I have shared the basic framework that I will use to analyze and interpret the research data that I gathered throughout my study. I have shown how it makes sense to use this kind of holistic framework for qualitative research. In the next section, I will briefly describe some of the limitations of these research methods.

### **Limitations of the Research Methods**

Five limitations and challenges that emerged when conducting this qualitative research with human subjects are outlined below. This is not to be viewed as a comprehensive list of limitations, but rather the most obvious ones I was aware of throughout the study.

First, since this study was structured so that I (the researcher) made the final interpretations of the data, it is very possible for my biases and personal agenda to cloud

the interpretation. I made every effort to follow the procedure of data analysis and interpretation outlined above objectively. I have also been completely open throughout this writing about the advocacy/participatory philosophical worldview underpinning this study and my ultimate desire to help other educators and researchers take action to improve the vocational education through an action agenda that may stem from this research.

Another possible limitation of the study is that not all subjects may be fully trustworthy, honest, or sharing accurate information. This is one of the main pitfalls of an interview-based study, and there is no way to avoid this. I sought to validate any questionable information, though I may not always have been able to know if certain information I received was inaccurate.

Subjects might not be as open to speaking to an interviewer, or to openly revealing much of their thoughts and feelings on the subject. The teacher participants might have felt that their job is at risk, even with the promise of anonymity. The student interviewees might have felt shy talking to an adult researcher. These are some basic examples of what might have occurred. I strove to put the participants at ease by meeting with them one-on-one, on their own terms, at locations of their choice, and being fully up front about every aspect of the study.

Another inherent limitation was that I did not have not have a comprehensive set of viewpoints because of the small number of participants. I sought to put together a fairly representative group of subjects, but I had access to a limited number of potential participants and a limited amount of time to conduct the interviews and finish the project.

There is also the general limitation of time and space. I was at the whim of the participants' schedules and locations. Some people may have more time than others to really dig into an in-depth interview. Others may be much more restricted in how much time they could spend. The interview protocols might have limited depth of conversation and information that might have been greatly helpful to the study.

### **Summary**

This chapter described the rationale and methods for my study, how I planned to execute the steps of this qualitative study, from data collection to final analysis interpretation. I have described a process of research methods that allowed me to pursue my research question and for an action agenda to be set forth, following my final analysis and interpretation. It is my hope that this study can help positive and meaningful change occur for students with intellectual disabilities who seek to find and maintain work in their communities.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with a description of how the interview process proceeded, and information related to the research question: What career development skills are being taught to students with intellectual disabilities in secondary transition programs?

I will then discuss the main themes I found to be common across all the interviews. The chapter concludes with final thoughts about the data and then some other interesting, and helpful themes that emerged from the interviews but which might not necessarily answer the research question. However, the ideas presented will definitely benefit many transition educators and researchers.

I was able to conduct lengthy and comprehensive interviews with three veteran transition teachers and four transition students. Interviewees came from a variety of schools, backgrounds, and geographical settings. Many wide-ranging themes and ideas emerged from the interviews I conducted with these current transition students and teachers. It is possible that various best practices and new concepts for educators could emerge from these collected themes. If information culled from these themes are adapted and shaped into best processes by educators, it may help more transition students with intellectual disabilities achieve competitive, community-based, independent careers once they graduate.

### **Interview Process Conclusion**

It took about a month and a half to complete and transcribe all of the interviews. I manually transcribed all of the interviews verbatim- grammatical errors, false starts, laughs, trailed off thoughts, and all- so as to preserve the integrity of the information the participants were providing me, as well as aspects of their tone and personality (see chapter three for more information on the chosen research methodology). I felt this to be very important as the whole purpose of this qualitative project is to allow the data, as gleaned directly from the participants, to move from particular information to general themes as directly as possible.

What follows is the data analysis structured as a participant-by-participant summary of the data gathered in the interviews. A later section outlines the key themes that were common to all the interviews, with discussion on how they might be beneficial to transition educators and other researchers.

### **Teacher One: Data Summary**

T1 has been involved in transition education for decades. Her current program mostly involves helping students with ID and autism from four semi-rural districts- and some open-enrollees- perform work assessments, training, and to find jobs. Incoming students are first given basic assessments via performing in-house job tasks in a work room. The primary reasoning for this is to assess basic behaviors and skills in a controlled environment. As T1 put it, she wants to start at an extremely basic level to determine a behavioral and skill-level baseline and to see, “if they are able to follow one or two step directions, if they need to sit, stand, move around, [...] if they’re distracted, if they need more quiet, or if they’re fine working in where there’s more commotion.” After that, T1

and her team will move quickly to help the students find jobs, or job shadowing experiences, within the community that will best meet the students' needs and skill level.

She said she often takes students to various job sites to watch other students work and then has them take notes on an iPad as to what they like or do not like about the job, ranking jobs, taking pictures of the sites, and so forth. She wants to help students determine their ideal working conditions and to create realistic learning experiences for them out in the community (as she says, "it's easy to talk about a job but it doesn't really mean a lot to a student if they haven't seen what that means"). Once enough information is gathered, she will do what she can to customize job settings for student workers. She will act as a sort of job developer at this point, working with potential employers to negotiate work experiences for her students.

T1 identifies a number of issues related to helping students with ID find work in a smaller community. First, transportation to outlying areas can be an issue, especially once the students leave the transition program and they have even fewer transportation resources of their own. Word of mouth in a small community can be a good and bad thing. On one hand, it makes networking easier for her, and news about good workers travels fast. She sees employers becoming more accepting of hiring workers with ID as word gets out that they have skills and positive attributes. T1 acknowledged that she has a longstanding presence in her community, so she is more able to capitalize on opportunities and call on certain contacts. Other teachers may not be so established. Nonetheless, she identified that the transition educator needs to be a master networker and salesperson in order to help students find unique and well-fitting job opportunities in any community. In fact, her top advice to an incoming transition teacher would be to

focus heavily on being a salesperson in their community, especially since the teachers relationships with business owners can sometimes help smooth over issues that stem from the behaviors sometimes exhibited by students with ID. It was not clear if she is training students about networking skills or overcoming transportation barriers in their community.

T1 noted that the parents of the student can often present a barrier as they might be on the fence about what they want their son or daughter to do following graduation. Thus, T1 does what she can to involve parents in the process, including inviting them to directly visit job sites and training settings so it is more of an open experience for them. She said this helps her be able to take more risks in training students and helping them find work, whereas transition programs in other smaller communities do not always have as established of programs or highly open lines of communication with parents.

T1 has found it highly important to focus on the behavioral components of working with students with ID, and prefers to look at her program as a training program, not a placement program. She identified some types of traditional jobs for people with disabilities: cleaning, fast food, and custodial. She believes that in order to move past those kind of jobs, or even for a person to be successful at them, behavioral issues need to be dealt with early in training. One way she tackles this is to have a specific set of 22 “Golden Rules” that she feels must be adhered to at all job sites, and to then help all students focus on tightening up on their 3-6 weakest areas. She would rather spend time helping the student to build upon weaker areas because she sees them as so foundational to job success: “We can train you, just about, to do anything if you’re interested [...]

but...it's [...] that work behavior piece. If that's not intact, it's really gonna be hard to move forward to do a job."

For T1, it is about normalization. For example, if a student requires two job coaches in order to find any success at the job, that is not a normal situation and something is likely missing from the foundational level of soft job skills (the Golden Rules) that she has identified. She mentioned many times that this is of utmost importance to her since the challenging behaviors of students with ID can be such a barrier. She feels it is more important to move slowly, to work on building up the weaker skill areas one-by-one, and to set the student up for success with a realistic approach.

However, once the student is actually placed at a job, she feels it is then important to let the student work through their own process, make some mistakes, and that, "success will come when some of these other things we shelter and harbor them from start to change." It is a fine line for the transition educator between being too overprotective and too hands-off.

T1 identified other barriers for transition students with ID. One barrier she identified is that students, and their parents, sometimes have an unrealistic sense of the student's skills and what jobs the student can and cannot do. T1 will do what she can to help parents and students fall in line with realistic expectations through parent-teacher communication and being transparent about the process. However, she does see that patience pays, and she has seen great success in teaching specific skills, even for lower-functioning individuals, with consistent work, as long as their team is on the same page. This is why she sees creating realistic assessment situations as so paramount. As she put it, when a student is being assessed at a site, "it's not just a job site, it's my curriculum.

Because, from those sites is what I determine what they work best in, so then I can share that information with voc rehab [...] so we all have that in front of us, then we work together even to find sites within the community.” Ultimately, she does not want students to end up in places where they are set up to fail, and she feels the entire IEP team needs to be on the same page to get the students placed jobs that are truly a good fit for them.

T1 identifies numerous frustrations with the IEP process and feels she is often finding out about the dates and times of IEP meetings late or that communication within the team is otherwise convoluted and confusing. She is often frustrated due to miscommunication within the team that causes misaligned expectations and missing information, which can directly lead to poor placements for students. And, when that happens, she tends to “get the aftermath of it.” For her, the best IEP teams also include general education teachers, vocational rehabilitation workers, work coordinators, parents, and all other relevant parties.

Taking a closer look at the actual career development she is doing, she has noted that she tries to connect students with smaller, family-owned businesses when possible. She has connected students with work experiences at dairy farms, potato farms, and other types of locations which exist in and around her small community. She does not have any students working at “big box” stores like Target or Wal-Mart, and finds smaller businesses easier to work with and more flexible. Such small businesses are nice, because she says that with them, “there’s smaller amounts of people to work with [,] less pressures [,] They’ve actually been really good to our students over the years.” In her experience, she has seen students move into unique roles when they take the path of the

smaller business, including one student who became a farm hand after starting with entry-level work at a farm and having little prior experience.

Other elements of her school's curriculum focus on more of the traditional approaches of career development education. For example, she brings in guest speakers, does job fairs, discusses dressing for interviews, teaches how to fill out applications, does practice interviews, and has work-skills days. She said that some employers have hired her students on the spot following an interview at a job fair, or have been so impressed with certain students following a visit to the school, that they hired them based on an initial meeting alone.

Overall, it seems that in her smaller community, networking works very well and is critical to helping students find work in a place where there are less opportunities overall. She had one student who wanted to be a doctor, so she did assessment work with him to determine what he liked about doctors and that job in order to find a more realistic path to help him get on. She found out he liked working with people and had many personality assets related to that, so she was able to connect him with a contact at a small bank where he has hired grew to become a higher-ranking employee whom actually supervised others and had managerial-type responsibilities.

To her, maintaining realistic expectations and helping students get work experience that matches their actual skill level and strengths are key approaches. She mentioned other students that wanted to be sports players, work with food, work at a movie theatre, or work with animals. She spends a lot of time digging into the "why" behind the wants of the students, and then getting students into practice work situations or site visits to help align their wants and needs as quickly as possible.

Often times, following assessments or site visits, it turns out students just “liked” certain things so they felt they needed to work in those areas, although they would not actually enjoy them in a work setting. A key example of this that she cited is that her students will often say they love movies, and therefore feel they would love working in a movie theater. However, the day-to-day reality of the work in a theater involves cleaning, food work, and helping customers, so the student is quickly turned off once they realize they will not simply be watching movies. Because of this, T1 says she values, “job shadowing as much as I do a kid working at a job, because they get to see a variety of things going on.” Through shadowing, the students are quickly able to glean the realities of a given job and what the typical work day looks like.

Overall, T1 is a believer that students with ID have a lot to offer the workforce. Her approach is rooted in elaborate skills training, assessment, practice, and realistic preparation in school. She feels that working on building up student weaknesses in a controlled environment is the best approach to helping students with intellectual disabilities find work. She believes that transition educators need to be salespeople and community resources, especially in smaller communities where word travels fast.

Finally, she believes students, parents, educators, and employers need to have realistic expectations and work goals in order to help students find success. Her programs strongly front load skill training, mostly focused on helping students practice skills and see expectations in action at site visits. School day curriculum also involves traditional skills training, such as interviewing, dressing, resume writing, and other such skills. All in all, T1’s approach offers a mix of the traditional with other customized employment approaches as she also seeks to dig into the themes behind a student’s interests, thus

maybe helping them to find customized employment in settings that are flexible and a good match for whom the student actually is.

### **Teacher Two: Data Summary**

T2 is also a veteran work coordinator. Her suburban transition program works with students with all levels of ID. The program focuses on trying to help students get as much unpaid and volunteer work experience or community-based work as possible. Thanks to the high school connected to this program, almost all incoming transition students have at least two job experiences before starting the transition program. Unfortunately, she did not clarify how the partner school was able to help so many students find so many early job experiences. This same program also focuses on helping students get connected with an adult service provider very early on, and that provider will help them with work placements before or after graduation. Overall, many of her students with intellectual disabilities do end up in contract-type placements through those adult service providers, but her program's ultimate goal is to help students get into competitive, community-based work when it is possible.

In T2's program, much of the very basic skills assessment happens in high school, before the transition programming actually starts for each student. By the time students enter her program, in-house, specific work skills assessments are given, much like T1's program, in order to determine if students possess certain skills such as how to use a cash register. She also has students take standardized assessment tests on a computer, which are similar to some career aptitude tests traditionally given at high schools. She will also use contacts she has at three local community colleges to help those students who wish to move onto post-secondary education rather than going right into a job.

Like T1, T2 sees the behaviors that some students with ID exhibit as being the biggest barrier to their job success. She would rather setup controlled job shadows and practice environments where the students can work with job coaches while in school in order to learn how to surmount certain behaviors. For example, one student is working with coaches who use consistent visual cues to help the student stop flailing his arms and making noises at a practice job site. As she puts it, teaching specific job skills is, “pretty easy. It’s all in the behavior stuff. That messes them up.” She sees training and placing lower-functioning students with ID as a huge challenge for the transition educator. In her opinion, it is hard to set them up for success on job sites when such a high ratio of staff/coaches is often needed for them to be successful. Thus, many of her students are getting placed with contract work or in enclave and sheltered-workshop settings as opposed to community-based jobs.

T2 admits that her program is not doing much work in terms of connecting students with small businesses, family-owned businesses, or otherwise putting students on a non-traditional path towards employment. However, she has seen some examples where skills assessments have led to learning that students possess certain aptitudes in unique areas such as web design. She cited two current students who ended up doing web design for their city after their teachers found out the students had interests and real skills, in that area. She has also seen students with ID start work at smaller, family- owned grocery stores in more traditional roles, and then move up into higher-level assistant-type roles. She has also helped a student to job shadow with the police because he showed an interest in the field. T2 is now working to set up some other experiences for him at their county courts and the 911 department. T2’s program nurtures those kinds of placements

and experiences when possible, but does not intentionally pursue any non-traditional approaches as an actual documented part of their curriculum.

Like T1's program, T2's program is also teaching students to use iPads as tools for various purposes such as skills training. Lower-functioning students with ID use an iPad application to learn specific job tasks via watching short videos that help to break the tasks down and show them in action. Higher-functioning students are taught to use their iPads and phones to take notes in and out of class, make daily schedules, and to stay organized.

Overall, T2 believes that students can work in their "dream job," they just need to start small by working on building skills and dampening any disruptive behaviors when they are younger. Like T1, hers is an approach based on building up weak areas and then scaffolding the student bit-by-bit into higher-level jobs that match their needs. T2 also agrees that the IEP process can be cumbersome, and all members of the team need to have realistic expectations and be on the same page to best help the student find work. She says, "the earlier they can get out on jobs, the better," and she will even want to see them try work experiences as young as age 14.

All in all, her program really focuses on trying to provide work experience, though mostly traditional experiences are achieved. Basic, traditional skills are taught in classes. There is less of an emphasis on community networking in T2's program than the program described by T1. Both programs focus on trying to correct key weaknesses versus primarily focusing on, and capitalizing on, the strengths of the student.

### **Teacher Three: Data Summary**

A big part of T3's job is to "sell" his program to high school students who might be on the fence about pursuing transition programs. One major selling point, to him, is that the students would potentially have an whole "army" of people working for them to find jobs--case managers, work coordinators, employer contacts the school has access to, and others--and this increases the students' odds of finding employment opportunities. To T3, a transition program is about much more than assessing or teaching skills to students or both. It is a networking and interpersonal support system. A main goal of his program is to help students find any kind of work experiences, paid or unpaid. It is all about exposing kids to opportunities and experiences, early and often.

Although every student has a custom experience based on her or his IEP and personal goals, T3 says that his students with intellectual disabilities who actively want to find work go down a typical path once they enter his program. First, there is a heavy frontloading of basic skills training--sort of an "everything you need to know" about job-seeking--when students enter the program. He says that, at this point, the teachers really focus on teaching the basic, traditional aspects of the job search, such as filling out applications, navigating online applications, interviewing, and so forth.

He tries to give students specific tools they can use, such as interview tip sheets. These help students understand how best to answer certain questions that may come up, such as questions about expected wage. He has other similar worksheets and easy-to-use tip sheets that he helps students to assemble into a folder that they can take with them on interviews or to study at home. One thing he likes to work with new students on is creating and learning how to give "30-second commercials" where students really learn

how to “sell themselves” to potential employers and respond well to the often tricky “tell-me-about- yourself” question that comes up in many interviews. T3 sees that question in particular as a huge hurdle for students with disabilities.

Other classroom curriculum provided at T3’s school involves students working with teachers, or on their own in labs, to build up their resumes. They will also create reusable templates for cover letters, thank-you letters, letters of resignation, a disability disclosure letter, and so on. Students are also taught to use new technology to help with some of these tasks such as saving templates of the above mentioned documents on cloud-based Google Docs accounts that can be accessed from any computer, phone, or tablet with internet.

He sees this sort of technology as being an efficiency tool and a means of cutting out some of the repetitive tasks that have historically held students back during the job search process. With the cloud-based account, the students can call up a cover-letter template, quickly adjust the information to match the current job application that they are working on, and then copy and paste the information into an online application.

With this technology, students are also trained to do calendaring, make to-do lists, and are taught other organizational skills they can use through their own Google Docs account. His school also teaches students to use iPads as part of the job search process. They are mostly teaching students to use basic internet and email capabilities to find jobs in “new traditional” ways, such as searching online job portals and digital versions of newspaper want-ads. Some students are also given laptops they can take home with them and are taught how to use them for job searching. If needed, students are given needs-specific applications and programs on their devices to improve on specific skills they

need to work on such as reading or writing. Other applications are commonly taught to many students as needed, including one where the students can practice interviewing and watch good and bad examples of interviews.

Students have fairly customized days based on their functional level, IEP goals, and general support needs. Some students take courses on dealing with self-advocacy issues at the workplace and during the job-search process. Others take courses on basic reading. Yet others spend a lot of time in a structured in-house assessments lab where they can learn which specific traditional job skills they excel in, as well as to gauge their interests and aptitudes. In this lab, students' productivity level is measured in certain tasks, such as data entry or kitchen work, to see if the student compares to the industry average.

T3 says this is a newer program that has been working well for a lot of students. Students can work in the lab independently or with help from teachers. He says that students find out unique things about themselves in these labs, including one student who struggled with English, but realized she was extremely good with data entry. T3 helped her to understand that her bilingualism is actually a selling point for many clerical and office-type jobs. That student is now looking into jobs she previously might not have thought were possible for her.

Although T3 is aware of the Discovery Process and customized employment concepts, his school is not specifically using such customized employment methods. T3 did not clarify why his school is not using such methods at this time. Nonetheless, their Work Coordinators will always help students take non-traditional routes towards employment if opportunities are available and make sense. Although it is not extremely common, T3 has seen students go to work for smaller, independent businesses while in the program

and to then have unique placements carved out for them in those businesses with the help of job coaches from the transition program. For example, he had one student who went to work at a small nursing home and was able to try a variety of jobs until the employer actually ended up creating a brand new job for the student: short order cook.

T3 recently helped a student get a more traditional fast-food job, and helped her to develop skills there over time with job coaching to the point where she became an Assistant Manager. T3 believes in the ways in which students with ID can move up into unique or higher-level positions, in either traditional or non-traditional jobs, as long as they have the right supports.

Much like the other teachers I interviewed, T3 sees the teacher's community networking skills and abilities as a salesperson to be a large contributor to the success of students with ID in finding viable, lasting jobs in the community. He says that such networking can help break down a barrier he sees in that many workplaces are not willing to be flexible with customizing positions for students with ID who might have a slightly limited skill set or demonstrate certain behaviors. He sees many other barriers to job success of students with ID, including the intimidating forum of the IEP Team and their meetings. For example, he says students are often intimidated by the large group of adults found at the meetings. The students can feel on the spot, and they are also sometimes overwhelmed by the amount of information presented to them that can go over their heads.

One thing T3 teaches students is to go slowly through the IEP paperwork and goal writing, and do structured exercises to find and explain information in the IEP paperwork. This is not something I heard about from other schools, and seems like it

would do well towards empowering students to get more involved in taking the lead with their transition programming. T3 sees that when students take an active role in leading their IEP tea, that is a critical aspect of their finding employment success and reaching their goals. Hence he feels it is important to teach them deeply about the process instead of having them be taken along by the momentum of their team's decisions.

T3's school mostly partners with local non-profit businesses and various social services providers that have access to contract work placements in a variety of settings. Many of the job-shadowing and coached-work experiences that students get during their experience come from those contract locations. T3 says they have long-standing relationships with many local businesses, and he has seen some short-term practice jobs turn into permanent paid positions that work well for the student, although this is not common.

Overall, T3's program is steadily growing, and he and his fellow teachers are trying to access more resources and learn more about how to help students with ID, over time, via trial and error. They are mostly prioritizing teaching their students traditional job-seeking skills, soft skills, and other needed basic curricula during their first year. Then, they seek to get students' interests and aptitudes assessed before sending them out on as many paid- and unpaid-work experiences as possible. All students have fairly customized school days based on their needs, and some of the higher functioning students with ID are hardly even at the school. Instead, they are spending more time actually out working at a job, shadowing at certain sites, and otherwise just checking in with a Coordinator as needed as they search for their own work. Over time, T3's school is

adding more internet-based technology into its curricular mix and making those tools an integral part of its program.

### **Student One: Data Summary**

Student one is a 21-year-old male transition student in his final year at a large, urban program. Around the time of his senior year in high school, he decided to be involved with a transition program in order to gain work experiences and build towards his longer-term career goals. Though diagnosed with an intellectual disability, he was always typically in general education courses, with some services in place to help him along the way.

In describing his experience with his current program, he mentioned the assessment lab that T3 previously talked about as something he uses to good effect. As he put it, within the lab, “there’s usually just little workshops you do [in] customer service, assembly, processing, production [...] computer, construction. So, just different career [...] related workshops that kind of help you figure out, like, ‘oh, what do I like?’” S1 notes that through work he has done in these labs, he honed in on personal interests he has with computer-related and hands-on work, which then directly led him to pursue a career as a CNC Machinist. S1 is a great example of how teachers taking the time to perform realistic work assessments in a transition program can help a student hone in on areas that match their skills and personality.

Since making this discovery, S1 has not been connected with any related internships, mentoring, or job-shadowing opportunities. One of the work coordinators at his school did help to set him up with an instructor at a local community college who has some knowledge of the field. It is unclear if the coordinators are working on fostering further

connections and experiences related to the computer-aided design work S1 wants to pursue. He mentions that teachers have helped him find some training videos related to the field to help gauge his interest and learn a bit more about potential jobs.

Like most students in his program, S1's school day is fluid and customized to his needs. As he describes it, his typical day starts with arriving sometime in the morning, eating breakfast, then listening to announcements about current job opportunities, job sites of interest, and so on. From there, students break up into different classrooms, depending on their planned coursework. S1 takes classes related to job skills, transition, and something he calls graduation seminar (it is unclear what is taught there). After those morning classes, students will usually have lunch, and then move into more independent-study type courses and activities in the afternoon. At that time S1 heads over to a local middle school to take a Computer Aided Drafting (CAD) program related to the interests he discovered during his assessment process.

On certain days, the schedule will be a bit different for all students. He says there are often guest speakers and group outings that involve touring work sites or learning about careers. There are also general recreational outings for many students, but S1 does not usually go on them due to the CAD course he is taking.

Regarding specific curricula, S1 says a lot of work is done in the computer labs, and he has time scheduled to work on building his portfolio. This lab work involves writing and editing his resume or looking up job opportunities online with or without help from teachers. He will also work on practice job applications, sometimes as a guided practice led by a teacher.

While working on their portfolios, S1 says students can ask for whatever help they need from teachers. In his case, he often has trouble navigating online personality tests that a lot of employers have now added to their application process. S1 says teachers will help coach him through certain applications and give him tools on how to best navigate such tests.

Overall, S1 feels supported at his school. He feels that he understands the IEP process and usually has his say in the meetings and with defining his goals. He is already connected with a Vocational Rehabilitation worker who will help him with any placements at a future job or also with navigating college, should he choose to go that route.

When asked what further supports he would want from his program, he mentioned that he would like to do more internships or mentoring related to his chosen career field. He has brought it up to teachers, and they have said they will do their best to help him, but not much has panned out as of the time of this writing. However, he does feel the program is greatly customizable and is structured around the individual student's goals. Therefore, he sees the coordinators and teachers within the program more so as guides and coaches. They will tell a student about upcoming opportunities and help the student as needed. Given that, S1 believes that it is highly important for students to define their own goals, self-advocate, and take the lead in the process. They have to do so in order to get the most out of a student-centered, custom program. This is what S1 is doing, so he feels he is getting a lot out of the program and is on track toward his goals despite not gaining much real world experience with the type of work he wants to do just yet.

### **Student Two: Data Summary**

Student 2 is an 18-year-old, female, first-year transition student at the same program as S1. She is mostly pursuing college preparation and trying to learn about independent living skills, although she would like to find work. She is not currently working and has no long-term paid employment experience. She has had some help with finding short-term practice jobs, some for pay, and contract-based work through vocational service providers that she obtained via coordinators at her school.

Regarding the job skills she is learning, she points to a strong focus on traditional skills, and says she has mostly been building her resume this year. By that, she means she is trying to amass any kind of work experiences she can put on her resume. For example, coordinators helped connect her with a volunteer position at a coffee cart within their district office building. Since college is her main goal, she is not extremely concerned with finding long-term paid work at this time, and would rather build up various skills.

She says that courses in her transition program have taught her a lot about soft skills such as punctuality, knowing how to dress appropriately for the environment, interviewing, and exuding a positive personality. More than anything, she says that simply gaining real work experiences, even short-term, has boosted her confidence and abilities. To her, this exposure to realistic learning opportunities is a key benefit of the transition program.

S2 confirms using the technological tools that T3 discussed. She said that she has taken a college and career reading course in her program, and they use a note-card application to take and organize notes. Both have been very useful to her. She says many

students are using iPads and laptops, but does not describe much of their usage beyond job searching and word processing.

When asked what has been most beneficial to her in the program, she cites her career-seminar class and a college-readiness course. The career seminar helps her to think about the kind of jobs she might want and the specific skills she will need to succeed in those jobs. Through this course, and also her own self-knowledge, S2 discovered that she has an optimal set of work conditions for herself, and specific interests she would like to pursue that will work well for her personality.

Like S1, S2 mentions that student experiences in her program are very customized to the unique needs of each student and that students should take the lead and self-advocate in order for them to get the most out of the program. She feels supported by her IEP team, but also recognizes that she is a “pushy person” who will, “insert [herself] into the conversation if [she feels] left out.” So, she has no issues with asserting her wants and needs and trying to direct the team toward focusing on her goals. She recognizes that not all kids have that ability, or the motivation to do so, so not all may be able to shape their own goals as much as possible.

S1 has a realistic view about her dream job in that it may take some time to get there, although she is not currently being helped to connect with any professionals in the field, mentorship, or other experiences connected to her passion with creative comic book writing. As she puts it,

This program has not helped me with my overall dream of, like, trying to find comic book stuff. They are very much focused towards actual work force, like ‘you can do this, you should do this,’ kind of thing [.] It’s not really focused on

what I could be doing or what I want [which is] why I'm focusing more on office jobs instead of writing, because I don't know how to find these things. And I don't think [the school] would have the resources to help me with that stuff.

However, she mentioned that teachers have tried to connect her with other students who have the same interests, in order to see if they could spark up some side work, mostly on a hobby level, but this was not to the caliber of what she actually wants to pursue with her dream job down the line.

Thus, she is taking the matter into her own hands and is resorting to using her personal network to connect with people who may help her gain some inroads into the field. She has also developed her own comic book and continues to refine her skills and process in that area on her own. Nevertheless, even though unconnected to her dream job, she finds the real work experiences she is getting from her program provide an essential boost to her confidence level. The experiences also help her to focus on finding work in places that will match her personality (she wants a quiet, low-stress type of work environment), thus even further refining her self-knowledge and increasing the odds she will find employment success in the future.

S2 cites independent living and study skills as being critical areas she would like to learn more about in her program. She says it would be helpful "if someone could help me draw up a sort of plan for what my ideal, like, budget would be and what kind of job I would need to work towards to get that." For her, success in work might be hard to find without the basics covered, and she, "would love to learn more about the general prices of, like, utilities and how much I would need to start saving up for if I wanted to get, like, an efficiency apartment out of college." She is not sure if there is an advisor, or anyone

else, at the program that could help her with those things, and I did not hear about any such classes as being offered in any of my interviews.

Overall, S2 is gaining a lot of real-world experience from connections given to her by her program. She brings a lot of self-knowledge and direction to her programming, which many other students might not. She has clear goals, and is not afraid to tell her IEP team what she wants. She is learning traditional soft skills and building her confidence through actual job experiences. She would like more movement toward getting practical education about independent living and starting working towards her passions in writing and the comic-book industry. She is able to build a customized curriculum within her program, but some needed elements are still missing for her. She is not sure who will help her when she is done with her program, so she is taking the time now to move through it step-by-step and get everything out of it that she can.

### **Student Three: Data Summary**

S3 is a 19-year-old, first-year transition program who attends the same school as all the other students I interviewed. Her primary goal is to gain real work experiences to learn job skills. She has had some paid work experience as a photographer for kids who would pose with Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny during holidays at local malls. This was a temporary placement via a social services provider. Beyond that unique experience, she is not currently looking for a new job, but says she will be soon.

When discussing her take on the transition program, her descriptions and opinions do not diverge much from the other interviewees. Some helpful things she has learned resulted from doing mock interviews, dressing for interviews, attending job fairs where she could meet face-to-face with employers, and learning how to write a well-formatted

resume. She confirms that all students have different day-to-day experiences at this school depending on their goals. S3 is taking a variety of courses which include Career Seminar, College and Career Reading classes, plus Transition-related courses and workshops customized for her. Some days are shorter than others.

She mentioned that some coordinators are “pushing” her to work in a retail position at a local mall since they are aware of her interest in makeup and cosmetology. She says that job is too far away for her, so she will ask her coordinators to help her look for work at a local costume company or at another mall. It seems that some efforts are being made by the work coordinators to connect her with jobs directly related to her chosen career field, including presenting her with an opportunity to volunteer at a local theatre/playhouse. The coordinators at her school are well aware of her interest in this area, and though not much headway has yet been made, they are trying.

S3 says she is very passionate about costume design and makeup and has known this about herself for some time. In the future, she would love to work for movies and TV, and she is pursuing some contacts on her own time, primarily through family friends in the industry or online contacts, in order to gain momentum in that direction. She has even done some of her own research to find local businesses, such as costume stores, that relate to the field and where she could work and gain real skills and connections. On her own, she has volunteered to do makeup at a summer camp. In these ways, S3 is definitely deciding to take matters into her own hands to get closer to her dream job, much like S2 did with comic book writing.

S3 seemed a bit unclear about when she will meet next with her IEP team, and was not able to describe much about the meetings. However, she did mention feeling sort of left

out at past meetings, but she admits it was because she often chose not to speak up and advocate for herself. At her next meeting, she says she is ready to, “get to talk and tell people, ‘this is what I want to do. How can we make this work?’” In terms of program continuity, she is also unsure as to who would be able to help her find, or keep, a job once her transition program is over. Nevertheless, she describes feeling supported and she is glad to have a Case Manager who is a good listener and provides her with ideas and resources directly related to her goals.

Different from the other interviewees from this school, S3 notes that the iPads are not working right now and there have been some technical difficulties throughout the year. However, she confirms there are iPads and laptops available for students to use at the school and to take home if they so choose. She says that students performing job searches on the internet is a key way in which the technology is used. She is not sure of the kind of applications that would be used on the iPads since they have, “had a lot of malfunctioning,” and it is unclear why.

Overall, S3 would still like to learn a lot more about the skills needed to excel in her ideal job as a makeup artist. As she puts it: “I am hoping this current program can help me find a program that could help me learn a few more things about makeup, because there is still a lot that I don’t know for everything I do.” She readily acknowledges that mere passion and interest are not enough, and she needs real tools to succeed in that career.

She says that work coordinators are currently pushing her into getting as much “job experience as [she] can,” and sticking things out at non-ideal (in her opinion) placements, but S3 is, “a little bit more picky and want[s] to try to find [...] small entry-level jobs that

would help me get experience towards my career.” Although she says she often “butted heads” with the teachers and coordinators as to the direction she wanted to go with getting work experience at the start, she feels they are more flexible with her now. She says things especially changed when she spoke up and said she was unhappy with a volunteer retail position that he placed her in. In that case, she says she, “kind of took charge and said, like, ‘this is how this is gonna work. This is what I’m gonna do.’ Cause, I didn’t like that job and I wanted to do something that was actually going to be useful, so I went out and I actually found a job two weeks later.”

Many comparisons can be drawn between the experiences of S2 and S3. Both are well-aware of their interests and have clear goals for their future that they can define themselves. Both also acknowledge that every student has to advocate for her own needs to truly get what she wants, despite the fact the program is mostly supportive and highly customizable. Without the direct input from the students, it is likely challenging for the support staff to best get students on a realistic path towards their dream jobs. Finally, both S2 and S3 understand that a student has to take realistic steps towards her or his goals. According to S3, “you have to start at the bottom. There are no short cuts to life, so you have to take it one step at a time [...] Work hard. And do what’s necessary to get there.”

#### **Student Four: Data Summary**

S4 is a young male student of unknown age attending the same transition program as the other three I interviewed. He is in the program in order to gain basic job skills and any work experience that will help him to move step-by-step towards his dream of designing video games, or otherwise building a career in that industry. The interview

with S4 was relatively brief, and he did not have much information to add about the specific curriculum of his school. However, he paints a good picture of one student's motivations for partaking in a transition program and offers a positive and inspiring message for others in similar situations as him.

Regarding what he has learned or experienced within the program, S4 mentioned that he had been recently placed within a temporary volunteer position with the organization, Meals on Wheels. He said this coached experience, "helped me to be a leader. It helped me to be organized [.] It helped me to be a team player. And, it worked pretty good, actually." Like S2, S4 was able to pull many learning experiences from a short-term volunteering experience, not the least of which was a major boost his confidence and leadership skills. Of course, he also learned many basic job skills (what he calls "the ropes") and simply how to work with people in a team- general skills that will carry over to other jobs.

S4 was unable to describe much else about the day-to-day curriculum or assessment-based practices he has experienced at his school in detail. He did say that he has done some work in the assessment lab, and described it as, "a simulator for [...] different jobs," which is a part of his normal school days. He also says he does a lot of work on computers, searching for jobs in the computer lab, with or without teachers helping him. He said he has taken a portfolio class where teachers help students learn job-searching skills, and help students prepare for interviews.

He has learned about what questions the interviewee should or should not ask the interviewer, how to research into the potential job opening before the interview and other related job-searching skills. He said that there are recreational activities such as yoga that

some students do on Mondays. He cannot remember exactly where they came from, but he did recall that there have been many guest speakers from local businesses that have come to speak to groups of students during the day.

Beyond the volunteering experience described above, S4 said that he once completed a real job interview at a video game store for a paid, permanent position. He said he received the job lead from a teacher in his program, and someone from the program drove him to the interview along with a few other students. Nothing panned out from that interview, but this information shows that teachers within the program will take students out into the community on job searches and to real interviews which is something the other student interviewees did not mention. That is a significant red flag to me showing that some teachers and transition programs may be doing too much networking work on behalf of students, thus keeping many students from the potent learning experience of going into the community on an actual job-seeking mission.

S4 says he feels supported by many of his teachers within the program and that they have helped him to feel ready to find and maintain a job, even on his own. However, S4 did not seem to have much of an understanding about the IEP process, where he was in the program, when he would finish, or what adult services are available to him after he graduates. Like some of the other students I interviewed, there seems to not be much clarity around whom-if anybody-will be available to help the student after graduation.

S4 has a dream career, and that is to work in the video game industry in some way. He believes he can do so as long as he starts at the bottom (he believes a retail job would be a good starting point) and builds from there. He says that, in general, he feels that the things he is learning at his school are preparing him for such work. However, he would

like to learn more about the specifics of how to find a job on his own. As he says: “It’s hard out there for people. You know, newcomers [...] and they’re looking for a job and it’s hard for people to actually get there. And I’m just trying to learn how to be that.”

All in all, S4 has a positive message for other potential transition students. He suggests students take things slow, listen to their teachers, and to truly believe in themselves and their own goals; “make sure that you know you can get yourself there.” He also suggests that all transition teachers actively listen to their students, work closely with them, and in doing so; “you should see your students soar.” Guided by his self-knowledge and personally defined goals, S4 takes a bigger-picture view of transition programming and is out to patiently gather as many experiences as he possibly can before he is done with the program. It appears his program is helping him to do just that for the time being.

### **Data Synthesis: Introducing the Three Key Themes**

When considering what is to be learned from this research process, the data collected from the seven interviews I conducted with four transition students and three teachers provided many answers to the research question underlying this project. The informative curricular and program descriptions given by the teachers encompassed a fairly wide subset of schools, districts, and geographical areas.

The information gleaned from the students represents the program of only one school. However, due to their different backgrounds and custom curricula, the student interviewees offered unique viewpoints, which painted a good picture of many of the different things that are being taught at a modern, large, urban transition program. The total data combined to build a rich and descriptive study of the many types of career

development skills and experiences that are being provided to current transition students with intellectual disabilities.

Three main themes emerged from the interviews. These three themes stood out to me as the most pressing and recurrent across all interviews. These connecting themes offer the transition educator and/or researcher a great starting point from which to develop new best practices, and ultimately to piece those practices together into best processes to better help students with ID find more employment-related success.

### **Theme One: Mostly “Traditional” Approaches are currently used**

This is one of the more prevalent themes I found across all of the interviews I conducted. It is also the theme that comes closest to answering my primary research question. To sum up the outcome of this research in one sentence, the above heading would suffice, with the possible addition of the phrase “and that may not be enough.” I will summarize highlights from the data here. It appeared that transition students with ID are still firmly put on the traditionalist path when it comes to career development. In my opinion, this is likely a primary reason why so many students with ID are still not finding consistent employment success once they graduate.

It seems obvious to me that early work experience- any sort of real experience- is important for students to build skills and maintain work placements after graduation. As T2 puts it, “the earlier they can get out on jobs, the better [,] and the kids that we’ve had the most success or have had the most choices are the ones that have had a lot of work experience in high school.” Many of T2’s incoming students have work experience going back to when they were 14, as soon as their IEP was initiated.

All of the students I interviewed were able to experience many types of community-based work while still in their transition program, whether via volunteering, contract placements, job shadowing, or permanent job placements. All of the teachers I interviewed also offered examples of how they helped to connect many of their students with a variety of real work experiences. However, most of the work experiences cited in the interviews leaned towards unpaid volunteering, temporary contract-work, or other short-term experiences in traditional-type placements.

T1 mentioned that she saw even shorter-term, one-day job shadowing experiences as being important: “I value job shadowing as much as I do a kid working at a job, because they get to see a variety of things going on. They can ask questions,” and students might learn that they like, or dislike, something even more than they thought they would. She sees such quick experiences as being very information dense and efficient ways of learning about student interests and skills.

T1 puts in a lot of work to help her students find as many work experiences, whether short or long term, as possible. However, she is frequently surprised that many of her students enter their transition program with no work experience at all: “We get kids in the program that never had any kind of work experience or cooking, or any of this life skill type things [...] And, I just [can’t] believe that in this day and age.”

Given that challenge, and the many other difficulties of helping students with ID find work, T1 does what she can to help students find work, traditional or not. She defines a more traditional job for students with ID as being, “a cleaning job, or custodial job. That type of thing. And we do have a lot of those.” But, she looks at the situation differently; “we’re a training program, not a placement program.” So, she is not as concerned with

the type of job so much as helping students to gain as many experiences and skills as possible while training within her program.

All of the teachers said that many of their students were working, or having practice work experiences, in more traditional settings such as fast food restaurants, non-profit volunteering sites, grocery stores, cleaning jobs, and so on. It should be noted that teachers also offered many examples of students finding success via taking less traditional routes with the help of job developers, such as by bypassing the application process to connect with work at a small family farm (T1) or to receive multiple custom positions at an independent nursing home (T3). Whenever such quasi-customized employment type approaches were cited, interesting, longer-lasting, and more satisfying outcomes seemed to occur for the students. Discussion of the second theme below examines this more phenomena more closely.

It is interesting that most of those kinds of non-traditional connections stemmed from the teacher's own personal networking, and no examples were given of pulling resources from the student's own personal network, even though S2 and S3 had people in their circle directly connected to their dream jobs. Also worth mentioning is that the teachers in the smaller communities, T1 and T2, did not see many students working at "big-box" corporate stores. It is unclear if that is because there are fewer of those jobs available in their areas. It could also be related to a lack of mass transit options. Only one teacher, T3, mentioned a Customized Employment approach by name. He was aware of Discovering Personal Genius (see chapter two), and that is being used in some programs, but his school is not actively using it nor are teachers trained about such approaches on an

ongoing basis. Again, it was not made clear why his school was not using such approaches.

In terms of students, all of the student interviewees mentioned that they saw their peers working mostly in traditional jobs such as fast food, volunteering, cleaning, or simply not working. Student interviewees S1, S3, and S4 had worked, even in less traditional jobs such as S4's photography gig, but most positions held were temporary or were group placements through vocational service providers. Only S1 held a regular community-based job at the time of the interview, and it was at a fast-food restaurant.

Job development practices cited in the interviews almost entirely involved the classic approach of basic job searching by "keyword" via the internet, applying online or in person, building resumes and cover letters, dressing well for interviews, effectively completing interviews, and seeing what comes from that. It is worth noting that all interviewees cited job fairs and hiring events as a regular practice in their programs, and many students were hired directly from connections made at those types of events. One could construe that type of approach as a way of kind of bypassing some of the typical barriers for students with ID as they seek employment. These include online personality tests, transportation to and from interviews, long applications.

S1, S2, and S4 all mentioned wanting to have more internship-like or mentoring experiences in their chosen fields. I did not see many examples such as a student mentioning a passion for something specific, and then having the student meet with established practitioners or small businesses related to the field, such as the case of S2 who said she had directly asked her teachers for such writing mentorship. As mentioned above, there were few examples of nontraditional work experiences within the

interviews. T2 provided one example of a student trying to start their own small business with the help of the school, but said the business quickly fell apart.

Finally, the teachers I interviewed gave many examples of their programs as being centered on identifying student weaknesses, such as disruptive behaviors or weak skill areas, and then finding ways to minimize the impact of those weaknesses, or to build skills, so the student can then fit into a given work place. Student interviewee, S3, also felt like she had almost being forced into certain experiences that were not a good fit for her in an attempt to build up certain skills their teachers had themselves identified as being important, but in actuality they did not matter as much to the student. An important example of this is S3's self-described frustrating experience in a volunteer retail setting.

Many proponents of supported employment strategies would take issue with these kinds of approaches as they do not seek to build on the existing strengths and assets of the student, customizing work around them, such as the approaches used by practitioners of DPG or other Customized Employment strategies.

### **Theme Two: Students Find Success by Defining Their Own Goals and Taking the Lead**

Throughout all of the interviews, students and teachers brought up the notion that students need to advocate for themselves during the transition process in order to get the most out of the experience. This means that, as early in the process as possible, students should define their own realistic goals, be able to verbalize those goals to others, and take a leadership role when working with the transition team. When these components are missing, some students often find that they lose interest in the program, have little say in

the direction of their education, and that momentum can get away from them quickly, such as shown in S2's description of her early experiences in the program.

Second, all of the interviewees described the idea that students need to buy into the transition process in general, know why they are in the program, and to believe that they can achieve something by being in a transition program. In my opinion, without that, student ownership of the process is impossible and they are likely doomed to either fail or to be swept up into the momentum created by the whims of their parents, teachers, and other workers. When all of the above components are intact, students are much more likely to find meaningful, community-based employment, or to even work towards, or find, their dream careers.

T2 mentioned that the student ideally should understand their specific interests, and have them "honed in" with the help of teachers, even as early as by the time they get to the transition program. According to her, this helps to ensure teachers are quickly, "focusing on what they [the student] want, and [...] putting the emphasis on the skill that they would need to have more training in." She also mentions that it is highly important that, "the students [...] participate in [the IEP process] and that they can also verbalize their goals, so they know what they're supposed to be working towards and what they want to achieve [...] before they exit [...] it's all up to them and what they want to get accomplished."

When asked if he sees students taking a lead in coming up with goal ideas or advocating for themselves at IEP meetings, T3 says it is rare. T3 concurs with T2, mentioning that, "the cutting edge, sort of, philosophy would be that at this point in the transition- high school and transition- the students are taking an active leadership role."

However, he says that he would love to see it happen, but due to the sheer size of many IEP teams, “all here to talk about the student,” can intimidate the student. T3 says teachers should do as much as they can to prep the students ahead of time, help them to be comfortable, and vocalize their goals. Nonetheless, he says, “I don’t always have the opportunity, or get that done [...] It’s an intimidating forum for people. Anyone, especially if [...] you’re an 18 year old with a disability.” T1 and T3 directly address the idea that severely overworked teachers may already be overwhelmed with meetings and might not have much time to work with students on this level.

All of the students I interviewed agreed that it is critical for students to be able to buy into the program, vocalize their goals and take the lead, but that the IEP meeting forum can be intimidating and the students sometimes feel powerless. S1 feels like he is on a clear path as he has an early understanding of his goals and interests. The assessments provided by his transition program have helped him to define his goals, and he is able to have a customized school day based on his interests. Because he has defined his own goals, S1 does not feel pressured by others in the IEP meeting process, but he says it is, “kind of cumbersome when there’s, like, a room full of eight people and I’m just kind of put on the spot.”

Led by his own goals, S1 feels that the program is, “structured around you. It’s designed to kinda...figure out what’s best for you, your individual needs.” S1 recommends that all new transition students, “find out what is offered, I guess [and see] what can the teachers do for you. And what can you do for yourself, really. Self-advocate a lot.” He fully believes that students do have say and control over the process if they want to, but they need to be proactive: “If you feel like there could be

improvements, ya know, say ‘I think there could be improvements in here’. And, maybe figure out what you need to do to do that, but...don’t be nervous. Don’t be afraid to ask questions [and if] there’s other opportunities. Just take advantage of what you’ve got.” He goes on to say that he often sees other students failing to take on a leadership role, being impatient, or perpetually feeling “forced” into things they don’t want to do as they are swept up into a process they do not really buy into.

S2 seems to have a similar story in that she came into her program with enough self-knowledge to be able to define her goals early in the process. Then, when she meets with her IEP team, she is able to confidently make needed adjustments and to know if she is on track towards her goals. She is able to have her say at IEP meetings, as she puts it, because, “I myself can be a very...just pushy person. I can insert myself into the conversation if I feel like I’m being left out. I know a lot kids don’t have that skill.”

S2 goes on to poignantly explain that not all students, “are used to being heard, so they have to hear themselves. Or, you know, try to make themselves heard.” In fact, when asked what advice she would give to an incoming transition student, T2 said that she “would tell them to really think about their goals and what they want from the program or from their life. And, if they don’t know, then...that should be what they focus on their first year. Really figuring themselves and their goals out so that they can move forward with everything.” She believes that she could not have even made any, “of the progress that I have made if I did not know what my goals were, what my passions were, what I wanted to do with it.” This is important information for all transition students and teachers. It seems like much time needs to be spent frontloading work

related to very clearly defining goals and passions in the student experience. Like S1, S2 also feels other students often struggle with this.

S3 also concurs with this idea, and mentions that there is no way for teachers to effectively, “help you if you don’t know what you want first,” and that students should be, “kind of independent.” S3 also had self-knowledge of her goals and passions going into the program, so she felt empowered to tell her IEP team and teachers that she was not happy with a certain direction they were going in with putting her in volunteer retail placements. This helped her to get on to a better path she was happier with before her time ran out. In that situation, as she puts it, “I kind of took charge and said, like, ‘this is how this is gonna work. This is what I’m gonna do.’ Cause, I didn’t like the job and I wanted to do something that was actually going to be useful.” This kind of self-empowerment and knowledge can truly change the course of a student’s life as they transition into adulthood as it can help them to find success on their own terms, ask for what they want, and work towards achieving bigger goals over time. .

The three students I interviewed were able to clearly define their own goals and dream jobs. That seems to give them the motivation to keep gathering skills and experiences as they push toward those goals. They all understood that there is a difference between a job and a career, and that many times jobs are means to an end. Without the guiding light of their personally-defined goals to give them energy, it is no wonder why so many students with ID might get stuck in dead-end jobs or simply stop trying to work altogether. The interview data above shows that good things happen when students own their own goals and take the lead in their transition program, even if that good thing is

just the student having boosted confidence or energy to dig into the process one more day.

Given the above information, in my opinion, the most obvious best practice to help students be able to better define, vocalize, and take ownership of their goals and the process relates to methods used in Customized Employment processes, as described in the literature review. A possible best practice is for teachers and IEP teams to spend a lot of time helping the students to define their own goals, and locating deep themes around their work interests and personal passions, in a highly structured manner very early in the transition process.

Not only does this sort of work help the student to take greater ownership of the process and to be working towards their actual passions, but it also increases the chances that the best possible transition services are individually tailored to the student, as recommended by the research of Carter, Brock, and Trainor (2012). The research of Andrade (2014) and Sabbatino and Macrine (2007) further backs up this notion.

Based on my research, the Discovery Process and Customized Employment approaches seem to provide an answer to teachers and curriculum writers with transition programs (See chapter two for more information). Specifically, Inge (2008) identifies a critical early step in the customized employment process as being the early identification of the jobseeker's skills, talents, and interests prior to locating potential employers and negotiating a custom work experience. Griffin et al. (2008) suggest that those helping the job seeker should use the individual job seekers as a primary source of information, even to the extremely detailed level of analyzing their homes, bedrooms, interviewing friends and family, recreational activities, and so forth. This is a primary aspect of the Discovery

Process, and is found in the completion of the formal Staging Record for those who use the process.

The crux of this best process would be to move beyond using a semi-generic work skills assessment type approach that seems common across the programs I researched. Instead, educators should truly interview and analyze the lives of the students so that deep themes could be uncovered and used to catalyze movement towards more specific goals that also mean something to the student. This would help students to take ownership of their goals and they would also be more likely to define their own goals.

The three students I interviewed had this kind of knowledge about their own passions and interests, but they could also probably go deeper with the guided help of an educator. For example, S2 knew that she really enjoyed writing for comic books, but it is possible that there are even deeper themes behind that interest that could be uncovered with guided help and analysis. Such deeper themes, typically rooted in her strengths and passions, could be used to help her find even more options for work or school following graduation, or to even build her own business one day.

The student interviewees also understood that many other students did not have such self-knowledge, thus it is imperative that educators help students define them in unique ways. Such front-loaded deep interviewing and life-analysis of the jobseeker is currently used in social services programs using Customized Employment strategies across America. However, my research shows that it seems to be missing from many transition schools, and that they may be favoring in-house assessments of traditional job skills where students are fit into existing structures, rather than building unique, strengths-

based structures around the students themselves as suggested as a best practice by much of research into transition education presented earlier in this study.

### **Theme Three: Bypassing the Traditional Job Search Leads to Lasting Careers**

This final theme that I found to be common all of the interviews I conducted (save for S4) provides an actionable element to the findings on the previous two themes. This theme shows a bright spot in current transition programming that could serve as inspiration and useful information for transition educators building out their own programs. Though the programs described by the interviewees did not seem to include any official Customized Employment-based approaches as a part of their curricula, almost all of the teachers and students other than S4 were able to describe at least a few examples of where such an approach led to positive employment outcomes for students with ID. Best of all, it seems to work well in all geographical areas and for different functional levels of ID students.

All of the teacher interviewees offered examples of times when the teachers were able to help their students bypass the traditional job search process in order to find lasting work. In many cases, such as an example of T1 helping one of her students to work in a grocery store and T3 helping his student customize a unique job in a nursing home, such success was due to the transition educators' ability to create their own network of business and other community contacts. In this way, direct connections were made between job-seekers and employers with the teacher/job developer acting as a referral source or go-between to cut out the extra barriers that often inhibit jobseekers with ID such as having to do multiple interviews, resume work, HR department "gatekeepers", personality tests, and so on. Especially in the smaller communities of T1 and T2, word of

mouth and direct networking are critical job development tools that can even leading employers to directly seek job candidates from their trusted contact at the transition schools.

Other examples cited in the interviews included students getting jobs through semi-formal meetings with employers at job fairs held at their transition school and of students finding work at smaller, independent businesses with the help of their transition school staff. Many times, the interviewees would talk about how those kinds of placements turned into long-lasting careers for the ID student, leading them into higher-level leadership positions, or other customized roles that are a good match for their needs as well as the employer's needs. Almost all of the examples the interviewees gave me about students finding unique, paid, community-based positions, and then growing within those positions, involved some form of customized employment strategies. For example, T1's student workers on small farms, T2's bank workers and grocery store supervisors, T3's custom jobs at a nursing home, and so on; these examples all relied on direct networking to bypass the traditional application process, and then using support structures to build jobs around the students. People writing curriculum for transition programs should definitely take note of this, and officially include elements of those approaches in their programming.

Students with ID have many unique assets and attributes that may help them to achieve better employment outcomes if transition programs were able to help the students capitalize on them. All of the teachers I interviewed listed many positive attributes they saw as common of most students with ID. Beyond basic soft skills and personality characteristics, my interviews also uncovered the consistent theme that students with ID

often times do not recognize some of their own unique assets they have to offer, such as being bilingual, having a great personal network, or a special talent. Educators helping students to understand and exploit these attributes in creative ways seems to be critical for helping TAY achieve better employment outcomes.

In her years of helping students with ID find work, T1 has noticed that many of her students consistently have good attendance and seek to please others. T1 points out that many students with ID that she has worked with often have very specific talents that they can do much better than others, such as high-detail work. This may lead more flexible employers to break bigger jobs down into compartmentalized tasks so as to involve the workers with ID in segments of the task where they shine. Or, it may mean that the employer is more easily able to customize a complete job around the employee with ID. Some of the employers cited in the interviews I conducted are currently engaging in these practices with positive outcomes. I am advocating that further employers do the same breaking down of tasks when possible. Employers may find that having a worker performing highly efficiently within their areas of strength (as opposed to struggling through a variety of tasks that are not a good fit) actually increases productivity in a variety of other areas for all their employees.

T2 points to dependability and positive personality attributes (specifically friendliness) as being big selling points with would-be workers with ID. She has also seen high loyalty to workplaces and a willingness to move up in the ranks amongst many students with ID she has helped to place. She has noticed that many workers with ID eventually surprise their coworkers by doing even more than what is expected, learning quickly, or doing very well with coaching and training other workers, or students when the work

experience is part of training while in the transition program. As mentioned earlier in the study, this “pleasant surprise” is usually because the coworkers often have low expectations of the worker with ID, usually based on the fact that they have not worked with many people with ID before.

Looking beyond surface-level personality traits, T3 will often try to help his students realize some of the great resources they bring to the table that they might not realize. He cites an experience with one female student who struggled with the English language, but she was fast and accurate with data entry. T3 says he tries to help such a student recognize that being bilingual is a huge potential selling point for many jobs. It is a unique strength that can be built upon and something specific for a resume that can help the student stand apart from other candidates, in contrast to students just saying they are “hard workers” or another generic reason as to why they should be hired at a job.

T3 also notes many of the same positive personality traits among students with ID as T1 and T2 did. He has seen a consistent, “genuineness about them. Kind of a pleasant disposition.” He sees a willingness to work, though many may need certain customizations or accommodations at the workplace. To T3, if employers were just a bit more willing to customize jobs and be open to not having students with ID have to take on so many disparate tasks at once, such as having to run a cash register while at the same time handling cleaning and stocking at a store, much more success for employees with ID—and more efficiency and a bottom-line impact for the employer—would be seen.

In terms of students capitalizing on their own personal networks, both S2 and S3 are using their personal networks to pursue careers that they are passionate about. For

example, S2 is using a relative who works in the industry, and also personal online networking, to try to work her way into the comic book industry. These are all things she is doing on her own with little help from her transition program. She identified that she has connected with that relative and is now using them to try to make further connections in the field.

S3 is taking a similar route with costume design and cosmetology. She has some people in her personal social network that she has reached out to in order to find unique opportunities and real connections. Although no job has been offered, it is a start and a crucial element of keeping her inspired. Both S2 and S3 have taken this independent route as they claim they are not receiving much help from their transition programs when it comes to pursuing their ideal careers. Nonetheless, they have identified that they have key people in their personal networks that they can turn to and try to utilize. Personal networks are assets that all of us have and use, but students with ID and their teachers might not capitalize on this enough when it comes to finding work. With the growth of social media and ease of communicating with others the world over, I foresee it being much easier for educators to help students with ID connect with small businesses, established professionals, and others who can help get the student on a path towards building a career they are truly passionate about.

Given the above information, I think a possible best practice for transition educators may be to use specific exercises to help students with ID identify the unique assets they bring to the table very early on in the transition process, and to then make a step-by-step plan to exploit those assets to find employment opportunities. Furthermore, the best of these student assets--the ones that will truly help students to find meaningful employment

in non-traditional spaces--will often be those that are creative, less obvious, and that can create clear win-win situations for employee and employer. Again, research into Customized Employment strategies and the Discovery Process shines much light on simple ways educators can better help transition students with ID in this regard.

According to Stevely (2009), the Discovery Process is primarily an information gathering process at its outset. Though skill verification is a critical component of the Discovery Process, much time is spent getting to know the jobseeker and their network before doing actual skills assessments or seeking work. Inge (2008) states that such an approach is all about finding out what strengths and resources a jobseeker has to offer, and then customizing work experiences around those things rather than trying to fit the jobseeker into roles that do not best suit their unique strengths. Transition educators could model an early assessment process after the Staging Record process used by Discovery Process practitioners. A big part of this process could involve the educator digging deeply into the student's personal network, such as by completing activities like brainstorming a "six degrees of separation" type list to see how the student's personal network could possibly connect her or him to key people involved in the ideal job or interest areas.

Other brainstorming activities might help the student and teacher to discover actual tools, equipment, or various resources the student has access to that might be beneficial to helping that student work in a certain field. Does the student have access to a vehicle, knowledge about certain technology, a computer? Maybe those things can be part of a "sales-pitch" when it comes to working for a certain company and creating a win-win scenario for employee and employer. As Inge (2008) sees it, this sort of approach may

help the jobseeker negotiate a customized type of job which meets the needs of both the jobseeker and the employer.

Overall, it does not seem to matter much which exercises or processes are used by transition educators to hone in on the students' assets. The key to this best practice is that educators are indeed spending a lot of time figuring out the more hidden assets and resources a student offers very early in the transition process. Teachers should then help the student to understand how to describe them and be able use those assets as much as possible throughout the career building process. My research reveals that such a strengths-based approach can only lead to better work outcomes for students with ID. Again, the transition education field could learn a lot from the field of Customized Employment.

Unfortunately, my research has not shown much of this kind of work happening intentionally within transition programs, though my interview data shows it can grow organically out of frustrations stemming from the more traditional job-seeking approaches many transition schools are still using. Often times, the more proactive student themselves has to catalyze this type of approach once they realize they are not getting to where they would like to be on the traditional path.

### **Other Findings of Interest**

This chapter provided a detailed summary of the interview data I collected. I also outlined the three key, recurring themes I found across all interviews. By drawing such connections, and generalizing the collected data as much as possible, it has been my hope to provide helpful information to transition educators seeking to refine their job development curricula for their students with ID. In this section, I will very briefly

discuss a few other interesting findings that emerged from the data which may also helpful to transition educators and researchers. Though these findings did not fit cleanly into the key thematic areas discussed above, I feel it is important to look at them in their own section here as these findings may help to shed more light on why transition students with ID continue to struggle with finding and maintaining community-based employment.

First, almost all of the interviewees identified the IEP meeting and paperwork process as being cumbersome and confusing. Issues cited include miscommunication between team members, disorganization, misaligned expectations among team members, student misunderstanding or ignorance of the process, related paperwork as being overwhelming for teachers, and students not having their say in the process, among many other concerns.

Obviously, a deep analysis of this could encompass a separate study of its own, and this phenomenon has already been well-researched and identified as a potential barrier for transition students (please see chapter two for more information). I just want to briefly highlight it here as the many issues with the IEP process may really be hindering the success of the transition student with ID. However, I do not offer any better options or ideas other than the suggestion that all transition schools take a close look at their process, including how they are training teachers and students, to see if further refinements can be made.

A second interesting finding I want to highlight is the idea that parents of the student job-seeker seem to be a surprisingly large barrier to success for the student in many cases. Both teachers and students that I interviewed made a point to let this be known. Please

refer to the data summaries above, and to the transcripts, for numerous examples of both teachers and students voicing frustrations parental involvement in the job search, as well as the transition process in general. This is important information for transition educators to consider. Educators should ask themselves how they are communicating with parents, how are the parents involved directly in the process (or not), how are parent-student-teacher expectations aligned (or not), and if the student has their own say, amongst other critical questions. Again, this concept could be the subject of its own study, so I will leave it at that.

Finally, one last idea which emerged from the interviews that I wanted to point out is the concept that teachers also need to advocate for themselves as much as their students do if they want to be able to fully help their students. All of the teachers I interviewed mentioned that transition education is not for the inexperienced teacher. It often involves high-level salesmanship, networking, and creatively finding one's own resources. Schools are often operating with slim budgets. There does not seem to be a central "think tank"- or research clearing house- for transition educators helping students with ID find work.

Teachers mentioned having to do quite a lot of their own research; digging into information online, seeking their own mentors, finding their own trainings, and so on. For teachers already overburdened with massive amounts of paperwork, huge workloads, and classrooms full of students, it is no wonder it is hard for teachers to remain on the cutting-edge of research and to quickly implement burgeoning concepts such as Discovering Personal Genius into their curriculum.

Technology is also improving and expanding at an ever-increasing rate. Without their own districts funneling new technology, research, training, and other concepts directly to the teachers, it is no wonder employment outcomes for students with ID continue to lag. It is not enough to say that the best transition teachers will need to simply get out there, do their own research daily, to ask for all the resources they need, and push themselves to stay current in every way, but that seems to be the only answer for now.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter presented in detail the findings of my research. To show what was learned, I summarized the seven interviews I completed with current transition teachers and transition students with ID. I then synthesized the data, further generalizing it into three key themes. Between the general summaries, and the thematic synthesis, I was able to provide an answer to my research question and also to provide a starting point for researchers and educators to build their own best practices or do further research into the problem of why so many transition students with ID struggle to find and maintain quality employment following their graduation. In the following chapter I will conclude the study by revisiting the literature review to draw further connections, discussing some of the limitations of the study, looking at the implications for future research, looking at some final lingering questions, providing personal reflection, and some concluding thoughts.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

The results chapter presented the results of the study in order to answer my research question. I summarized in detail the data collected from the interviews and synthesized it into three key themes, as well as other important ideas, that transition educators and researchers may use to enhance career development programs for students with ID.

In this chapter, the study will conclude by briefly revisiting the review of literature in order to draw further connections. I will also examine some possible limitations of the study that I have identified after having gone through the entire research process. I will then discuss some implications for future research, lingering questions I have, and next steps that I may take as the study comes to an end. Finally, the chapter will end with a few final thoughts and reflections, as well as with a word or two on the personal growth I experienced as I worked through this project for over a year.

#### **Revisiting the Literature Review**

The summaries presented in chapter four already drew many connections between the data I collected from the interviews and some of the research presented in Chapter Two, the Review of Literature. In this section, I would briefly like to circle back to the existing body of research in order to see if any further connections can be made to address the research problem which inspired this study: why so many transition students with ID

continue to struggle to find lasting community-based work. This will help to place my own study in direct conversation with the current literature, fill in some gaps I may have missed in the previous chapter, and may be of further help to educators and/or researchers seeking to use this study to build or improve their own transition programs for students with ID.

First, though my sample size was small, the information I gathered from my interviews seems to confirm the research of Simonsen and Neubert (2012) which showed that TAY with ID continue to struggle with finding jobs in non-segregated settings. Many of the jobs held by my student interviewees, and those jobs the interviewees say their peers have, involved contract work in groups with other students with disabilities.

Though students say that much of the work experience gained in those settings is valuable, and the student interviewees said they have learned a lot from their experiences, these placements could be construed as segregated settings, or as the non-mainstream supported employment style of experiences as identified by Simonsen (2010). Further, my research seems to mesh with that of Rogers et al. (2008) which shows that even modern job-seekers with ID continue to face pronounced barriers in level of employment and amount of hours worked. Many of the job experiences discussed in my interviews were part-time, short-term and/or unpaid.

Many additional barriers were discussed in the interviews as well, including transportation, behavioral, and community misunderstanding. Money for programmatic resources may also remain a barrier. As Griffin's 2009 research states, the increased amount of money funneling into vocational support programs is not catalyzing significant change in employment-outcomes for people with ID. As he may be referring to post-

secondary type programs, it seems that the same issues exist for transition programs. I was not able to ascertain whether or not school funding was a major issue for any of the programs I looked at, though some quips about money always being an issue were made by some of the teachers. However, whether money is flowing in or not, there is no readily correlated and obvious sea change occurring with employment outcomes for students with ID, at least in the region I looked at.

Another common barrier already discussed in the previous chapter is the idea that parents of ID students have emerged as a surprisingly consistent barrier to student success in the transition process, at least within my sample set. This should be looked at further in light of Carter et al.'s 2012 research which showed that students whose families had higher work-related expectations for their children (encouraging their child to hold community-based jobs) directly correlated to increased odds of employment success for the student with ID following graduation.

On a more positive note, my research seems to validate the research of Carter, Brock, and Trainor (2014) as they stated that age appropriate transition assessment for students should include individually tailored services and supports. Though most of my subjects identified the paperwork and meeting aspect of the IEP process as being cumbersome, confusing, and imperfect (the 2014 research of Carter et al. also showed this same issue to be common across the country), all of the interviews pointed to students receiving some form of services that are customized to them and at least some of their wants and needs. I also noted many ties between the transition schools and outside agencies throughout the transition process (such as Vocational Rehabilitation or other adult service

providers). Noonan et al.'s 2008 research showed this sort of interagency collaboration to be a critical indicator of TAY success as they move into adulthood.

Though I did not hear about many programs really helping students to pursue their less traditional dream jobs, the services described in the interviews did reflect the multi-dimensional and supportive educational planning suggested by Carter et al. (2014) as being the most effective for TAY. However, many of the plans in action seemed to be based on locating and fixing student weaknesses as opposed to building programs around existing student strengths.

I also noticed that much of the student assessments performed at these schools missed some unique aspects of the students' lives, such as the family and personal connections that S2 and S3 had in their ideal fields. This does not fully reflect the best understanding of the students' individual strength and multiple aspects of the students' lives that Cartel et al. suggest as being critical to the best transition assessments (2014).

Simonsen and Neubert (2012) identify family engagement in transition planning, self-management skill instruction, and students getting direct work experience as being critical when it comes to helping more students with ID find and maintain work.

Fortunately, all of these elements were shown across the boards in my interviews. Many researchers have also identified that transition students with ID having any amount of participation with the business community or work experiences before they graduate categorically increases post-school outcomes for the students (Andrade, 2014; Joshi, Bouck & Maeda, 2012; Moon et al., 2011; Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007; Simonsen & Neubert, 2012). Again, all of my interviews revealed a variety of real work experiences

and contact with employers as occurring, whether in the community, at job fairs, or via guest speakers.

All of my interviewees noted some element of technology as being in use within their programs. This included newer technology such as tablets and cloud-based programs and applications. Bouck, Maeda, and Flanagan (2012) specifically identify that usage of assistive technology helps increase positive work outcomes for transition students with ID. I did not hear of much assistive technology being used in the programs I looked at, but it is good to see newer technology being adopted and programs being built around them.

The last aspect of the review of literature I would like to revisit is the research I outlined around customized employment strategies, including the Discovering Personal Genius process. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I did not see any “official” usage of such strategies within the curricula the interviewees presented to me. Inge (2008) identifies a customized employment approach as including grounding the job search process in an “abilities perspective”, as opposed to focusing on the student weaknesses, and then seeking customized jobs that fit well with the strengths of the student. The programs I looked at tended to work hard to identify weaknesses and then to build them up. Inge (2008) also says that job-seeker choice is a critical component of customized employment approaches. The programs I looked at certainly included some level of student choice into their processes, but in many cases the students were not being helped towards their main choices of career fields if they seemed too unobtainable (see S2 and S3 for example).

I did not see many examples of the sort of mutually beneficial, negotiated types of job and sites that Inge (2008) and Griffin et al. (2008) highlight as hallmarks of customized employment. However, interviewees did identify some examples of bypassing traditional structures to obtain less traditional, slightly more “custom” types of positions that lead to positive outcomes (see chapter four). Griffin (2009) sees the customized employment approach as being fully person-centered and, in many ways, opposite of the traditional types of job searching which involves tracking down job openings by title, filling out applications, doing interviews, and ends when a job is found (as opposed to created).

Not much of this job creation was shown in my interviews. Nor did I see teachers helping students identify their ideal conditions of employment, as Stevely (2009) discusses in relation to the Discovering Personal Genius process. This would involve helping students find workplaces where they can be themselves fully. In many cases, programs I looked at tried to find ways to “fix” student issues with behaviors and weaker skills so that the student fit in better.

Overall, as the study comes to a close, I can say that the transition programs surveyed are indeed using many of the best practices identified in the current published research, and can be considered person-centered. Most importantly, all programs are helping to connect students to all kinds of real work experiences (though they are frequently unpaid). Not many programs are intentionally or deeply using customized employment strategies, so there is probably room for deeper research and expansion there, especially since a few of the students I interviewed wanted more help with connecting to their dream careers. There is some usage of outside professionals in the job-seeking process

(networking, guest speakers, job fairs, and so on), but they are usually not directly involved in the IEP process or via more elaborate mentoring and internship experiences.

### **Limitations of the Study**

I believe the qualitative, interview-based approach I took for this study revealed quite a lot of information that is immediately useful, but I saw seven limitations to the study. All provided learning experiences.

First, there are inherent limitations with my group of subjects. This will be an issue with almost any interview-based study since it is impossible to interview all relevant people regarding any issue, but nonetheless my sample size is small and maybe too particular. Due to logistics and difficulties with locating subjects, all of the student interviewees came from a single school. Further, though diagnosed with intellectual disabilities, all of the students were diagnosed at a higher-functioning level of intellectual cognition.

Second, all interviewees were still in their program, mostly at the start of it, so their viewpoints reflect those just starting their transition journey. It may have been helpful to interview some students who had recently finished their program, and then some a few years further out. This has been handled by other researchers and was beyond the scope of my research question.

Third, all of the interviewees were Caucasians due to the semi-randomness of my interviewee selection process. I was truly at the whim of others' availability and willingness to participate. In general, the relative homogeneity of the student subjects was not ideal, but I was able to diversify the viewpoints by finding subjects ranging in age, gender, backgrounds, and those pursuing various goals.

Fourth, the interviewees, students and teachers alike, are all from one region and state. However, I was able to gain a small sample of diverse viewpoints from teacher interviewees with different backgrounds, genders, and levels of experience,

Fifth, aspects of the interview selection process also limited my outcomes. There were time constraints for finishing this project and for the interviewees 'availability. There were administrative restraints. As I reached out to contacts at various schools and districts, I often got caught up with research-approval processes that hit dead-ends, or email exchanges and calls that never panned out. All of these severely limited my data set, and I had to take what I could get. Nonetheless, I am happy with those who participated and believe that the interviews yielded rich, representative information that can be used in similar transition programs.

Sixth, there were limitations in the ways I collected the data. I used a semi-structured interview approach and protocols for the interviews. I often went completely "off script" and followed more deeply whichever threads stood out at the time of the interview. This caused the data, and ideas discussed, to vary widely from subject to subject. I believe that such an approach is suitable for allowing unique information to emerge directly from the truth and reality of the subjects' experiences, but a more controlled or structured approach may have yielded more consistent data that could be useful to more quantitative researchers and curriculum writers.

Regarding curriculum writers, I would have probably benefitted from interviewing one or more of them, or at least someone on a higher administrative level. The study also may have benefitted from a second source of data in the form of analyzing actual curricular materials or documents from the schools involved. These would have helped

me to provide a much more detailed answer to the research question, but would have also broadly expanded the scope of the project beyond something that might have been possible for me to complete in a timely manner.

A final limitation of this study was already anticipated in chapter three. It is that the summary and analysis of the data to generate themes is inherently filtered through my own worldview and biases. In this case, it is possible that my advocacy/participatory bias (wanting to find immediate ways to help TAY students with ID achieve better employment outcomes) led me to subconsciously follow certain threads more deeply while interviewing in order to confirm my own biases going into the project. A more structured interview approach may have helped to limit the effects of this. However, it is nearly impossible to avoid this in a semi-structured interview-based qualitative study where the researcher is the primary research instrument, and I have been open about this from the first pages of the study.

### **Implications for Future Research, Lingering Questions, and Next Steps**

Many implications for future research emerged from the interviews I conducted when linked with the existing body of literature. Transition educators and researchers may pull many potential best practices or ideas on how to enhance curriculum from the data I presented earlier in this study. I saw three main implications.

First, I believe that researchers, and districts, likely need to look into ways to simplify the IEP process, paperwork, and try to find ways to further empower students and their parents within the process. I believe that research needs to continue and new ideas need to be put into action to help all stakeholders in the transition process have more success and efficiency. Researchers may want to look more deeply into how to train students to

be more involved in the process, to take ownership of their role as leaders of their transition process, and to clearly define and vocalize their own goals. Three questions come to mind: How are students being involved in the process across the country? How are they learning to advocate for themselves (or not)? Do they understand the process? Are teachers bogged down by unnecessarily cumbersome paperwork and processes?

Second, I think researchers and districts may want to look more deeply into the resources, or lack thereof, that transition teachers related to groups where teachers can share research and ideas, think-tanks generating novel research, and ways for teachers to consistently have access to modern training related to supported employment, and other burgeoning, concepts. Some areas of focus include: What tools do teachers have? What tools should they have? What can be learned from districts with the highest outcomes for recent transition graduates? Are there groups of teachers sharing resources? Where do teachers find research? Is it high quality research? How are new burgeoning approaches tested and ultimately implemented?

Third, a major theme that definitely needs further research is the application of Customized Employment approaches, possibly including the Discovering Personal Genius approach (or related approaches), directly in transition programs. There is not much available research on this topic. My research showed such approaches may be lacking in transition schools, and their usage could greatly benefit transition students with or without ID. I wonder about the following: Are there schools that are specifically using such approaches? If so, how did they implement the programs? Who supports them? Are there “model” programs others could emulate? Who are the researchers, if anyone, that are currently researching these approaches and where can their research be found?

Finally, more research could be done through interviewing more transition teachers and students, especially from students with ID and from more longitudinal studies specific to students with ID and their experiences with employment following completion of their transition programs. I believe that broader data is needed before a real impact can be made on the employment gap.

Overall, next steps for this project include publishing it online (via my university) and then trying to get this data out to as many transition educators, districts, and researchers as I can. I may choose to send copies of the study to specific transition schools in my area, or email it to other researchers across the country. I hope that it can spread by word of mouth, and could also be located via online searches by anyone in the world as it will live on in my school's research database. I will happily present my findings directly to any schools or other groups if I am invited to do so.

### **Final Thoughts, Personal Reflection, and Growth**

All in all, this project has been quite the journey for me, spanning well over a year. I learned even more than I expected, and I am quite pleased with the results. Although I am currently working in the residential services arena for people with disabilities, I will definitely apply what I have learned here in my day-to-day work. I will help my clients to build skills based on their unique strengths, wants, and needs. I will do what I can to help them connect with community-based work experiences, early and often. I will help them to pursue their dreams, even if it means starting at the dead bottom of a field or skill, and patiently working at it for years. I will spread the word about what I have learned to the other service providers I come into contact with daily due to my work, especially the vocational service providers. In these ways, I hope to make a positive

impact on people with intellectual disabilities and how they can find and maintain meaningful, paid work in their communities.

This was a huge undertaking for me, and I had to simplify the scope of the project multiple times. I initially wanted to do classroom observations and interviews. I was hoping to interview ten students and 10 teachers. I realized that would be nearly impossible for me with my work and life schedule, so I narrowed the scope to fewer interviewees. I also wanted to focus on generating a specific set of best practices I could present to educators and researchers based on the themes that emerged from the interviews. I quickly found that to be too broad as well. Also, given my lack of experience in the field of education and teaching, I felt that I was not really qualified to prescribe a specific set of best practices for schools. Thus, I ended up with the study presented here, and I think it worked out very well. I believe that researchers and teachers will be able to pull many great best practices from the research within this study, and that a positive impact can be made right away if it is applied.

Overall, throughout this process, I grew to more deeply understand the unique struggles and successes faced by transition students with intellectual disabilities as they try to move ever closer to building their independent, adult lives. All students have hopes and dreams, and it is the job of teachers, service providers, parents, and communities to help young people follow those dreams in a safe, healthy, and enriching manner. I am so proud of all of the hardworking students and teachers I met and interviewed for this study. They are truly making things happen every single day, on the ground level, and even the small victories that mostly go unnoticed are making a difference for all students. If and when I do decide to teach in a classroom, I will apply what I have learned from this

study in every way, to the best of my abilities. I pledge to seek the ongoing mentorship I myself will need, and to forever challenge myself so I can best help others find their way in a challenging world.

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## APPENDIX A

### Participant Recruitment Letters

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Dear Educator,

My name is Anthony Dosen and I am completing a master's degree in teaching at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct interview-based research throughout the winter and spring of 2016. The purpose of this letter is to ask your permission to take part in my research as an interviewee.

I wish to interview current secondary transition program teachers of students with intellectual disabilities who have been closely involved in teaching vocational-related curricula. Interviews will take about a half an hour, will be conducted on school grounds, or at another location of your choosing, and will be held one-on-one with me. Example questions might include asking you to describe specific job-seeking skills you teach, finding out more about "nontraditional" skills that student may learn, hearing your thoughts on transition programming in general, determining unique challenges faced by students with intellectual disabilities, and more.

The purpose of my research will be to find out what specific vocational skills – especially related to job-seeking- are being taught to students with intellectual disabilities. I hope to determine what is working well, and what could possibly be added, to vocational transition programs in order to improve employment outcomes for students following graduation. There is a longstanding employment gap for people with disabilities, and your input may directly help us to close that gap in the future.

There is little to no risk for you to participate, and participation is fully voluntary. All results will be confidential and anonymous. I will not publish any private information about you, such as your name, nor report any personally identifying information, private health information, specific employment information, or characteristics in the study.

I have received approval for my study from the School of Education at Hamline University and from the principal of [insert school name], [insert person's name]. My results might also be included in an article for publication in a professional journal or in a report at a professional conference. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will remain fully confidential. If you choose to participate, a written informed consent letter outlining your rights as a participant will be completed and signed by us both prior to doing the interview. This is a great opportunity for your voice to be heard and added to the scholarly research on this topic.

If you have any questions, or are interested in participating in the study, please email or call me via the contact information below. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Anthony Oliver Dosen

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Dear Student (or Parent/Guardian),

My name is Anthony Dosen and I am completing a master's degree in teaching at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct interview-based research throughout the winter and spring of 2016. The purpose of this letter is to ask your permission for you to take part in my research as an interviewee.

I wish to interview current or recently graduated students with intellectual disabilities who have been closely involved in learning vocational-related curricula while attending a secondary transition program. Interviews will generally take no longer than an hour, will be conducted on school grounds, one-on-one with me, and your parent or guardian may be present with you. Example questions might include asking what job skills you have learned, finding out which skills you find most important, having you describe your typical school day, talking about what kind of job you would like to find after graduation, describing your unique experience as a student with a disability, and more.

The purpose of my research will be to find out what specific vocational skills – especially related to job-seeking- are being taught to students with intellectual disabilities. I hope to determine what is working well, and what could possibly be added, to vocational transition programs in order to improve employment outcomes for students following graduation. There is a longstanding employment gap for people with disabilities, and your input may directly help us to close that gap in the future.

There is little to no risk for you to participate, and participation is fully voluntary. All results will be confidential and anonymous. I will not record specific information about individual students, such as their names, nor report any personally identifying information, private health information, or characteristics in the study.

I have received approval for my study from the School of Education at Hamline University and from the principal of **[insert school name], [insert person's name]**. My results might also be included in an article for publication in a professional journal or in a report at a professional conference. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will remain fully confidential. If you choose to participate, a written informed consent letter outlining your rights as a participant will be completed and signed by us both, and your parent or guardian if applicable, prior to doing the interview. This is a great opportunity for your voice to be heard and added to the scholarly research on this topic.

If you have any questions, or are interested in choosing to participate in the study, please email or call me via the contact information below. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Anthony Oliver Dosen

## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent Form

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Dear Interviewee (or legal guardian),

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this study to help determine what vocational and job-seeking skills are being taught to secondary transition students with intellectual disabilities! Your input is valuable and will be highly beneficial to the scholarly research in this area. As we previously discussed, no research for this study can be completed prior to obtaining your consent by signing this letter. This letter also explains the basic rights of participants in this study and some other key information to be aware of.

- I wish to inform you that this research is public scholarship; the abstract and final product will be cataloged in Hamline's **Bush Library Digital Commons**, a searchable electronic repository and that it may be published or used in other scholarly ways in the future.
- There is little to no risk for you to participate. All results will be confidential and anonymous. I will not record specific information about you, such as your name, nor report identifying information, private health information, or other characteristics in the capstone. You, your school district, and school name will all be masked via pseudonyms.
- Participation is fully voluntary and you may decide at any time and without negative consequences that information about you will not be included in the capstone. Deciding to exit the study, or declining to participate, will also not affect your relationship with Hamline University or your own school whatsoever.
- There will be no form of monetary or other compensation for participating in this study.
- Interviews will typically last no longer than one hour, and will usually last around a half hour. All interviews are not fully structured, and may go in various directions as topics come up, but will be guided by sets of general questions in the form of interview protocols put together by the researcher. Teachers and students being interviewed will have separate protocols.

- As mentioned in my recruitment letter, I have received approval for my study from the School of Education at Hamline University and from the principal of your school **[insert school name]**, **[insert person's name]**. My results might also be included in an article for publication in a professional journal or in a report at a professional conference. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will be fully confidential.
- As researcher, I may contact you after the interviews are complete to clarify any information provided by you, and I will make every effort to limit this contact and it is highly unlikely that repeat interview sessions will be requested.
- Any and all complaints, questions, or concerns about the study that may arise can be directed to my Primary Advisor for this study, Barbara Swanson, EdD

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

If you agree and consent to all of the conditions described above, please keep the first two pages of this letter for your own records. Please sign the duplicate agreements to participate on page three and four, keeping your copy (“participant copy”) for your own records, and return my copy (“researcher copy”) to me in person, by mail, or copy the form in an email to me.

If you have any questions, please email or call me via the contact information below.

Sincerely,

Anthony Oliver Dosen

*Keep this full page for your records.*

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will be interviewing students with intellectual disabilities (or teachers) about what vocational-related skills they are learning (or teaching) in their secondary transition programs. I understand there is little to no risk involved for me to participate, that my confidentiality will be protected, and that I may completely withdraw from the project at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewee or Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Participant copy**

*Return this portion to Anthony Oliver Dosen*

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will be interviewing students with intellectual disabilities (or teachers) about what vocational-related skills they are learning (or teaching) in their secondary transition programs. I understand there is little to no risk involved for me to participate, that my confidentiality will be protected, and that I may completely withdraw from the project at any time.

---

Interviewee or Guardian Signature

---

Date

---

Researcher Signature

---

Date

**Researcher copy**

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Teacher Interview Protocol**

DATE:

LOCATION:

INTERVIEWER:

INTERVIEWEE:

#### **INSTRUCTIONS AND OPENING STATEMENT:**

Thank you for allowing me to interview you today. I am greatly appreciative of your time and willingness to discuss this topic. Today, I will be asking you some questions about your experiences regarding teaching job-seeking skills to students with intellectual disabilities in a transition program. You can choose to answer them, or not, in as much or as detail as you are comfortable with. I will be taping the interview so that I can have a completely accurate record of our conversation. Though I may jot some notes of my own, taping will free me from the distraction and delay of taking full notes so that I can give you my full attention. As mentioned in my consent form, your identity will be protected, no identifying information will be shared, and the recordings will be destroyed once I have transcribed this interview. Please let me know if you have any questions, and please feel free to add any information you feel as relevant during our discussion. This conversation has the potential to benefit others and your ideas are important!

#### **QUESTIONS (probe as needed):**

- 1.) What do you see as the promise of transition programs?
- 2.) Describe the transition program in your own words?
- 3.) What job-seeking skills do you teach?
- 4.) How do you define traditional/non-traditional job-seeking skills?
- 5.) What “nontraditional” job-seeking skills do you teach, if any?
- 6.) What do you see as the promise of transition programs?
- 7.) What are some challenges with teaching ID students?
- 8.) What are your successes with teaching ID students?

- 9.) What do you see as the most important element(s) of vocational programming for transition students with ID?
- 10.) What changes have you observed in vocational programming over the years?
- 11.) How do you work with the IEP team?
- 12.) What is working with IEP teams?
- 13.) What are challenges of working with IEP teams?
- 14.) Who supports/helps you?
- 15.) How is your curriculum written and developed?
- 16.) Any interesting success stories about ID students learning job skills or finding work? Describe.
- 17.) How do you get feedback from parents?
- 18.) How do you get feedback from students?
- 19.) Do you or your school partner with any businesses or local organizations? If so, describe.
- 20.) Do you interact with small/family-owned businesses for your teaching? If so, how?
- 21.) Do you involve mentorship/internship in your teaching? If so, how?
- 22.) Do you believe your students can find and work a version of their “dream job”? Why or why not?

#### FINAL STATEMENT AND DEBRIEFING:

Thanks again for your time. It is much appreciated. I may be back in touch with you if I have any questions or points that need further clarification. You may also contact me if you have any questions or concerns following this interview. Again, your input is valuable and makes a difference in improving learning for all.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Student Interview Protocol**

DATE:

LOCATION:

INTERVIEWER:

INTERVIEWEE:

#### **INSTRUCTIONS AND OPENING STATEMENT:**

Thank you for allowing me to interview you today. I am greatly appreciative of your time and willingness to discuss this topic. Today, I will be asking you some questions about your experiences learning about employment in your transition program. You can choose to answer them, or not, in as much or as detail as you are comfortable with. I will be taping the interview so that I can have a completely accurate record of our conversation. Though I may jot some notes of my own, taping will free me from the distraction and delay of taking full notes so that I can give you my full attention. As mentioned in my consent form, your identity will be protected, no identifying information will be shared, and the recordings will be destroyed once I have transcribed this interview. Please let me know if you have any questions, and please feel free to add any information you feel as relevant during our discussion. This conversation has the potential to benefit others and your ideas are important!

#### **QUESTIONS (probe as needed):**

- 1.) What is a transition program?
- 2.) Describe some of the things you have learned or done in your program.
- 3.) Tell me about your typical school day.
- 4.) What do you feel are the most important job-seeking skills you have learned?
- 5.) Do you feel ready to find a job?
- 6.) Have you worked before?
- 7.) What are you most looking forward to in a job?
- 8.) What do you fear when it comes to working?
- 9.) Who is most helpful to you with learning more about work?

- 10.) What is it like working with your IEP team?
- 11.) How do they help you?
- 12.) Do you feel like you have your say in the IEP team?
- 13.) What are your biggest interests?
- 14.) Do you feel like you will be able to find work related to those interests?
- 15.) What kind of job do you really want?
- 16.) What is your dream job?
- 17.) Do you believe you can find and work in your “dream job”? Why or why not?
- 18.) What do you feel you still need to learn to get a good job?
- 19.) What kind of jobs, if any, do your peers have?
- 20.) What does the word “career” mean to you?
- 21.) Do you believe you can be happy in your job? Why or why not?
- 22.) Have you met with or talked to business owners? If so, describe.
- 23.) Have you worked with a mentor, internship or done job shadowing, etc?  
If so, describe.

#### FINAL STATEMENT AND DEBRIEFING:

Thanks again for your time. It is much appreciated. I may be back in touch with you if I have any questions or points that need further clarification. You may also contact me if you have any questions or concerns following this interview. Again, your input is valuable and makes a difference in improving learning for all.

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Transcriptions

#### Transcribed Interview 1- Rural Teacher

2-8-16

AD= Anthony Dosen, Interviewer

T1= Teacher, Interviewee

AD: Could you tell me a little bit about your particular program, just-I guess-broad level?

T1: Sure. Well, I'll preface it with I just came into this role in April. Um, I've been in my district for thirty, this is my thirtieth year. And I was a DCD teacher for the first four years at- it was junior high back then [chuckling]. And then from there I became a work coordinator for three other school districts including [identifying information removed- district name]. And, with students learning disabled, EBD, autism, DCD, so I know, like, all the ranges of Special Ed. And then I've kind of come full circle now with the gal that retired in this position. Um, so I am back in the role of just working with the DCD and autistic population. But, within having known all the staff people and having been within the district for years, so I have actually worked with a number of the students as well cause they are coming from other districts that I worked in. So, the setup of this program is a little different than what I've done for a lot of years. We have 18-21 year old students come from- we're a cooperative- so, four districts, but then we also have some open enrollment with students out of the district. And, we're [identifying information removed- program name] for the five transition areas. And so the students work on various things, and my component being the employment area. And what we do is, uh, we meet- and it's nice that I came in when I did because I know a lot of the students coming in even before the teachers did, so I know what their capabilities were. And so what we usually do when they first get here is we do some in-house jobs. We have a work room within our building, and basically to assess students work behaviors. Um, and what that entails is if they are able to follow one or two step directions, if they need to sit, stand, move around, what- you know- the environment and how that works best for them. If they're distracted, if they need more quiet, or if they're fine working in where there's more commotion. And then from there we look at jobs that will best fit them, their needs, and their abilities, and then we start, students start working out in the community. Some sooner than others. And then we- I- do a lot of job shadows. So I take students around to jobs that are currently in place and they'll watch other students working. And I often have them, they'll take an iPad, maybe take some pictures of the job site so that they can remember them, and then they come back after they've been to

half a dozen and they rank them, of things they would like to do or wouldn't like to do and then why and why not. And then we create some job settings for them based on those kind of things, too, so that they know. It's easy to talk about a job but it doesn't really mean a lot to a student if they haven't seen what that means. So that's a big part of what we do.

AD: Great, yeah. So looking back at that, the career- from then until now-and kind of what you're doing now, what are some of, like, the biggest changes that you've seen? In terms of job-seeking or job searching skills, or?

T1: Yep. Well, one thing maybe I'll say that hasn't changed or what's still considered after all these years; transportation is such a huge barrier. Um, especially in a more rural area, the schedules, especially if there are buses or whatever don't always coincide with what we need for students. And that's something even when they are leaving a transition program that often- we're leaving still with the big question mark- what are we gonna do? Because, that's just been an issue forever. That'd probably be the number one thing. Um, as far as student employment, um, I think our communities are becoming more, um, accepting. I don't know what word- if there's a better word- of employing. They find out- and a lot of it is word of mouth in small communities that some of their best employees are people with a disability because they'll have good attendance, they want to please, and they're more willing to divide jobs up into pieces knowing...I have this person- instead of looking at the whole picture assuming everybody's the same- they start to look at it as pieces, like wow, he's really good at detail so this is gonna be his job! Yep, he maybe can't do these other parts, but then we'll give him more of that detail work. So, I feel like people are more willing to work with us in the school system. And, probably the biggest time frame that was happening is when in the nineties when all these jobs were out there and they couldn't fill jobs. The days when I had the phone ringing off the hook, 'Do you have a student for me? Do you have a student for me?' which rarely happens anymore. [AD: Hm] And, I think that with those kind of things going on that they, um, are more willing to work with us. And, again, some of that is just being established in the community and that they know who I am and how I can help place kids and that the comfort level- I'm part of a volunteer organization in the community as well, so I can get the word out that way. And, I have people that bring us jobs to do. You know, like, I just think of the one, you know, everyone gets those magnets in the mail that have the Twins schedule on from Edina Realty or something like that. Hey! We can do that for you. So, pulling in some of those things, and then all the sudden the word of mouth is out, 'hey, we have students that do this'. And then it just kind of explodes from there. And so I see- I think it's harder for the lower students, but I do see more opportunities for students that- than there were in the past, you know, as the years go on. I think there...other people might not see it that way, but when you've done it for so long I see that there's been a lot of gains of accepting students with disabilities, that they can be productive workers.

AD: Um-hm. So, I don't know if this is an issue, but, are there parents who are on the fence about helping their son or daughter go into a transition program? And, if so, what do you see is the special promise of the transition programs, or, the reason to do it?

T1: Um-hm. I think sometimes they are on the fence until they are invited to come check it out. Because, it's more fear of the unknown than it is not wanting them to be in it, in part of the program. So, when they come in, we have open house and they come and visit. I welcome parents to come to job sites, you know, just so I know I get a heads-up and I like to go with, so I can answer questions or whatever and, um, so it's more when they don't know something, but once they see it, most of the times they think, 'wow, that's great. I want my kid there'. So, I don't...I don't think there's a lot of problem with that. In fact, a lot will come back and say we have a great program, special ed in general, it's so well established, um, that there's a lot of people from different districts. Those are the ones I like to see, because they come in and sometimes we feel like, uhh I wish we could do more or we're not ahead of the times here, but then you talk to some people in other areas and they just think it's fabulous because they really- we get kids in the program that never had any kind of work experience or cooking, or any of this life skill type things that the programs are in. And, I just, I can't believe that in this day and age. But, I guess in the rural areas there's still a lot of that not happening.

AD: Let's see. Um, how do you personally define- if you do see a distinction between the two things- uh, traditional versus non-traditional job-seeking approaches or skills? Like, for example, I don't know, maybe like job carving or something would be more...You could different types of non-traditional, I don't know...Do you see a distinction between those two kinds of things, or like?

T1: Well, I guess I think that, uh...a traditional job- or like what people want to place someone with disability, is in a cleaning job, or custodial job. That type of thing. And we do have a lot of those, but...my, the way I look at a program is not so much, because we're a training program, not a placement program. Even up to age 21, we invite, you know, voc rehab and other services to come in to help make that transition based off of our information. So, what I've found that these people are looking for to help make successful transition into a job is to focus on the work behavior piece, not so much the task piece, so...This is what I tell my students. I don't care if you're flippin' burgers at McDonald's, or if you're a brain surgeon. If you can't follow these- and I have 22 of them- we call it the "gold sheet". I always print it in gold. I use it for every one of my students no matter what their ability level is. And, we pick anywhere from three to six of these work behaviors. It's kind of what we see in their IEP that maybe, okay, they have attendance problems at school so they're probably gonna have issues with work. So we kind of overlap them with the school component where they have trouble following two step directions in class, so they're probably gonna have trouble at a job site. We make it work within their whole entire day. Whatever those skills might be. Taking initiative. Problem solving. Um, eye contact. You know, whatever, but it's like a work behavior piece that, if you're never at work, it doesn't matter what your job is, you're not

gonna be able to do it, you know. Or if you're- if you can't follow directions- it doesn't matter what your job is, you're not gonna be able to do it. And, you know, that skill piece comes with the work behavior piece. If you're gonna lip off to your employer, you're probably not gonna have a job, so it really doesn't matter what the job is. You know, and that's a big focus that I've always placed with students. We can train you, just about, to do anything if you're interested and...and we are there to help that with that. Employers feel that way, too. But...it's that work skill, or, excuse me, that work behavior piece. If that's not intact, it's really gonna be hard to move forward to do a job. I have one student right now who, it's a behavioral thing and he has two staff on him. And...the, I was looking at employing him with an employer I've used for years whose pretty laid back and [unintelligible] and we've got a lot of variety of students. But, his first question to me was, 'hmm, why does he have to have two staff people with him?' [AD: Right...] And, I said, you know what, you're right. I said, that's not normal. And so- my- and I was just at a job, that job site, for him to job shadow today, and our goal isn't going to be right now to get him a job. He's gonna look at all these other jobs where kids are working and do that component that I talked about ranking what he liked and didn't like, and then our next piece of work is going to be backing off one of those staff people. Because, I said, that's not real life. You're not gonna go to a job with two staff on you. I mean, nowhere. Whose gonna hire you and wonder what's going on. It's just, that's not real life. And, I have that same thing with some of my students here that are 20, 21, and their real rigid about- especially with a couple of students with autism. They're real rigid on having a routine every day, and we have to do this and we have to do that. Well [chuckles] I'm coming- and then, the teachers in the class have this setup, and I'm like, okay we need to shake this up a little bit. And, I have a student who she's now just started at a program where she rotates the different jobs. Yep, it's hard. She's struggling a little bit with it, but I said, we need to prepare her now that she's not going to sit in the same spot every day at, if she goes to a job, you know. There's routines, but then you oughta be able to figure out if you're not in routine how to handle that appropriately. So, I'm not really caring what she's doing right now at this job. I'm saying, okay now you're gonna sit here today and we're gonna do this, and she's not liking that. I'm like, whelp, that's how it is! You know, and, it's just, let her work through the process of change, because the success will come when some of these other things we shelter and harbor from them start to change. And it's hard with kids with autism. I have another student, he's just like very rigid with what he does, and I said, okay, if you tell him the day ahead here's what we're gonna do and lay it all out, and then little baby steps for making changes. I said, some of these students, they have six months, five months, and they are out of here. I don't- I'd rather have them act up, have issues, while we can still work on it...so, I'm more about that behavioral piece than I am a task at this point. To make-to help with that success.

AD: Looking at students with intellectual disabilities- MR, different levels of MR [T1: Um-hm]...What, besides behavioral, what are some other challenges you have experience in the vocational realm?

T1: Um...Well, under, sometimes you think they understand you know...Speaking to the level of understanding. Like, you and I might just know how to do something, but breaking that down really...Maybe something we just do has to be broken down into five steps. From putting on your coat. We don't even think twice about putting on our coat. We just do it. So, task analysis of, uh, breaking down things of very- into very small steps. That often is something that's hard to do because we don't have to do that for ourselves [AD: um-hm] and then trying to think on the level of the student until they get something. And, sometimes- I remember a student who tying her shoe, how do you- It's so hard to get- and the mom, she wanted to ties her shoes because I said well, we can do that. Nope. This is a goal that she and mom had. And, I had seriously worked with that girl, she was [unintelligible] with a teacher in the classroom. Every day we had a twenty-minute shoe-tying session and I was just, like, thinking in my head 'why are we doing this?'. And, one day, she got it! [laughing] It was like the biggest moment of my year! But, so, sometimes you just don't-if we keep doing, we keep doing. Is it worth it? And then, one day it just clicks, but it might be a long way down the road, but it's better late than never.

AD: Yeah, I definitely see that. I work in residential group homes right now, and sometimes it will take two years just to [T1: Yeah!] to see a tiny light-bulb go off on one particular skill, but...

T1: But, it's so worth it.

AD: Yes, absolutely. Let's see here. Going back to voc rehab. So, you said voc rehab will handle the actual job placements when it gets to that point. Um...let's see. I guess, uh, what- just in very broad strokes- what is your experience working with an agency like that in terms of, you know, is it helpful?

T1: Yep. Well, it totally depends on the counselor you get. Um, even though we have a workforce center in [town name removed] and I've worked on the [location removed] jobs and training piece of that. I've worked with the voc rehab piece of that, and it really depends on who you get, because we rotate lots of counselors over the years, and they're assigned to different areas. Um, it's great when you have someone that has- we have one now, she has a teaching background in special ed. She's awesome. We have others that have a real hard time relating to young people, and so they talk over their heads and you kind of wonder, how did you get here? [laughing] But, um, if it's all said and done in the process of a perfect world, they're really great because they come in the students' last year, to the meetings, and then that's when we piece it all together and you start to see things come together with- here's the information they want from us, so they'll look at those work behaviors, that stuff I do, you know. And, they'll say- and we- and a lot of my career assessment sites are about, what I was saying earlier. We have environments of work where they sit, other ones where they stand, other ones where they move around, noisy, quiet, large spaces, small spaces. So, you know, and we- it's not just a job site, it's my curriculum. Because, from those sites is what I determine what they work best in, so

then I can share that information with voc rehab so when their looking for jobs- ooh, this kid, no way, don't put them with little kids, they just freak out. Or, this student loves detail. So we have all that in front of us, then we work together even to find sites within the community. Well, they'll call me: 'what do you think of this site? Doing a job tryout here?' Perfect, or ooh, I don't know about that. You could try it, but the student always hated touching clothing. He'd put gloves on at one of the sites I did. So, it probably would look kind of weird if he's at Target and he's supposed to be, you know, moving clothes around and he has to have these plastic gloves on, you know. So, it's like, I don't know, you know. Some of that you have to work through with the client, and I feel like when you have a real good connection with the voc rehab people that it's awesome and it does work out. But, that's in a perfect world and sometimes we don't get that.

AD: So you mentioned that voc rehab enters the- is it the IEP team that they become a part of? [T1: Um-hm] Okay. Um, taking a look, just zooming in on the IEP team process, uh, just big picture I guess; what do you think are some of the best parts and worse parts, or anything you would change, about IEP team or advice you would give to maybe a younger teacher?

T1: OK. Well, remember to include all team members is huge. I, over the years, I can't tell you how many times as a Work Coordinator I wouldn't even be- I would find out about a meeting after the fact. It's not- where I am now, it's great, because it's pretty much I'm with the same group of people. But, when you're out and about all over as a support staff person, they'd forget about me and then all of the sudden there'd be a decision made that the student needs- oh, they need a job coach, or they need this. I'd go, 'look, I wasn't even a part of this'. And, so just always remember to include all of your team members, even if they can't come, you know, because they can submit a piece of information or, if they need something- that's probably the biggest frustration I've ever dealt with just because of the role I'm in and I'll- you know- I can't...I'll get the aftermath of it, you know. I'll say, 'I wasn't there. I can't tell you that this is gonna work or whatever'. That part is probably the most frustrating. But, when you have a good team that does work together, its- it just gels and it is really nice to have that. And I always think having a regular ed, general ed, teacher at, um, IEP meeting, is so neat because when you have students that can be part of- a part of some class where you see a different perspective from that general ed teacher or the principal or somebody who is really involved and not just sitting there because they have to be there...Um, I see our students in our one school that are in the FACTS classes. Uh, she's so- this teacher is so awesome and she'll include that student and come in with just meetings with all this excitement about it. And I just think that's a huge piece that has gotten better over the years. I tell you, when I was first teaching [laugh] I could count on one hand how many teachers would allow my students to come into their room, and I always felt bad because they'd get bombarded because they were good teachers, but all the special ed kids would be in their classes. And...and I had an awesome working relationship with some of the, like the science teacher. And I had a student, he always answered 'mol-e-cules' to everything. So, this teacher would incorporate questions so that this student would

answer the right answer. You know, and, he'd let him take the test with the kids, and you know, just, he wouldn't- but he'd tweak things so that it would work for that one particular student. And, I just-it's so neat when you can work together with general ed like that. And, I also had another FACTS teacher, it was in Home Ec. back then. She wouldn't want any of my students in her room except for one when it was disability awareness week. Then they could all come in during that work, and basically she would let them help out, because when they would leave she would talk about Down Syndrome and what it meant by based on what that student had. [laughing] I look back at that and just shake my head, like wow, we've come a long way since that.

AD: Yeah, absolutely. Um, so, you know, taking a look here at the kind of intra-school team. Zooming out a little bit, do you partner with, or work with, like small or family owned businesses when you're helping students do like say job practice in the community or internships or anything like that?

T1: Um-hm. Um, yes. We've actually- I've had students work- I had a student work on a dairy farm. Um, I had a student work at a small potato farm that a family owned. Um...The only thing we don't allow is students to work for their own family. [AD: OK] It's just, it causes too many...it's too, uh...you know they want the child to succeed so they might give them an "A".... [AD: Right, exactly] Even if they don't- but, then, they also have it the other way where they're really hard on them. You know, over the top. So, it doesn't work real well. And we also don't have students that work in establishments where there's alcohol, where it's not a separate area. So, if there's a student whose dish washing, that dish washing area has to be totally removed from a bar area. And that's just our policy with our district. I know there's other schools that they're okay with that kind of thing, but we have some of our own policies with, like, you know, to write "Jim's Bar" on a training plan doesn't look real good when you have a student that's still in the school system so...That would be- but mostly, where I'm at, it is a lot of small business. We don't-I mean, I have no students that work at Target or Wal-Mart. Um, and not that they haven't. Some of my students have got jobs on their own, but it's not- I haven't partnered with those places because I have enough of other establishments I have been able to use and I feel like they're more, um...uh...They're easier to work with because they can be. You know, they're smaller, there's smaller amounts of people to work with. I feel like less pressures. That kind of thing. And they've actually been really good to our students over the years.

AD: Right, yeah. So, coming from the customized employment type school thought, do you feel...and I mean, like trying to get away from the "big boxes" and all that stuff. Do you feel like, you know, a student having experience in a dairy farm or a potato farm- have you seen, like, successes come out of that that are longer term?

T1: Um-hm. Yep. Actually, uh, one of the students- I don't remember who it was- it was a farm. He ended up becoming a farmhand after. They hired him after he was done in our program. And, so, that's neat, too. We always tell families, 'we're a training

program. We're not placement, so.' If there's a bonus where they end up getting hired somewhere after our program, then, ya know, more power to them. So, sometimes that works out, too.

AD: Do you have any other interesting success stories about students after they've gone out into the community?

T1: Well, we do some things during the year like work skills day and job skills day, and we have career fairs and that type of thing and we've had students- we'll bring in different employers in the communities and they'll come in to tell kids about how to dress for interviews, how to- they'll practice doing job applications and that type of thing and some-and, students will actually get hired on the spot. Um, and that isn't even the purpose of what we're doing. But, they'll-some of these employers come out and they're so impressed with their appearance or their attitudes or whatever that they'll give them opportunities that just...you know, they- we don't tell them that could happen, because, it doesn't always and you don't wanna set them up for that, but we've had that happen. I've probably- once every couple of years where that just out of the blue, someone will get hired based off of experiences we've given them. So, now, here go use what you've learned. And a lot of the schools will take, like, their job skills day. That's like your final exam. Now you gotta go show us how to be interviewed, fill out a job application, tell us about some general problem solving skills you've learned on the job. And, so if they've-if you've had them in your program two or three, four, five years, all the way through transition, that's kind of...uh...what we're hoping for in the end. So, some of the students are better prepared than others. Some just have those skills where they're gonna be successful no matter where they are.

AD: Okay, just a few more questions for you here. Thank you. This is painting a really awesome picture of this program. Sounds incredible. Um, do you... believe... that your students can find and work a version of their quote unquote 'dream job'? Why or why not? For example, like say a student is like really into motorcycles or something. Do you see it going to the point with some students where they can even start their own business down the line, or things like that?

T1: I do, and also I'd never want to put a kibosh on any student's dreams. But, I also feel to lead them on for years and years thinking that they can do something...Like, I had a student- he was a DCD student. When I was in the classroom. He's a great young man. Just always smiling, and he...but he couldn't read or write. And he had been told for years he wanted to be a doctor. And people never told him he couldn't be a doctor. And, um...I burst his bubble. But, in a way, I think that still...I just didn't like that he was led to believe this and I said- called him by name-and I said, 'you know what.' You know, I told him some of the things he would have to do, and I put some math problems in front of him. He goes, 'I don't know how to do that.' And I said, 'Well, you know what, I could never be a doctor, cause I couldn't do that- I don't even like the sight of blood.' So, he just- he has been to so many doctors in his life because of his medical needs. Then he had

really good doctors and experiences, so that's what made him think he was gonna be a doctor 'cause he was a nice guy. And, when we start talking things, he decided that he didn't like blood. And I said, 'well, that will limit you,' and I said, 'what do you like about it?' And, then he ended up-he ended up actually being a helper in a bank {AD: hm!} And, because we started narrowing his skills down to what he could do, and what he liked to do, and what realistically... You know, it's like, people didn't want to hurt his feelings! And that's- you know, I love my students. I'm compassionate about them and I believe they all have skills, but sometimes we have to be realistic about what that skill is and we can take it to a different level or a different angle. You know, you're not gonna be a nurse, but guess what? Maybe you can go into the hospitals and you can bring water pitchers to the people. You know, like, find what they want to do....and, also, if you can't it for a job, there's things you can do for hobbies. You know, and so we angle it that way sometime as well, that there's things they can do, or working for someone else. Um, maybe you could do parts of the job. And, I never want to take away, their-what they see as what they want. But, then that's why that I think job shadowing is so crucial, too, because...students may think they know what a job means, but they...really don't. Because they've heard about it or seen a picture. And usually, like, I've had so many students that wanna be a - this is one of my favorites- he's gonna be a professional basketball player. [AD: Um-hm] And I said, 'Oh! Do you play basketball on your team at school?' No. Do you play like in your yard?' No. He didn't play at all. He just watched it on TV, so that's what he was gonna do. So, that's, you know- I actually had a former Minnesota Vikings player come in and talk to all the schools and my students and they talked about the percentage of people that make it in professional sports. You know, he gave the kids [unintelligible] it was cool, and wow, and whatever, but it was a reality check, too, to say, 'you know what, you better have a backup plan.' He gave them real good messages along the way that- I go, what do you do when these students think they're gonna do some of these things that you know just aren't gonna happen? So, that whole reality check and letting them see...We have an animal shelter that students go work in. And, there's cats everywhere. It's cats. And, so some students think that's the coolest thing. 'I wanna work-I wanna work with animals!' And then they get there and they hate it. 'The cat scratched me!' Or, you know, it's like- they have no clue, 'cause they might have a cat at home, or they think cats are cute. But, then they get into the environment and it's just not what they thought it would be. So, I think a lot of that puts it out there, too, with what's in their head and what's in reality to that. Like, have ya done this? No. [chuckling] That's a huge component, and to give- I value job shadowing as much as I do a kid working at a job, because they get to see a variety of things going on. They can ask questions, like 'oh! I didn't know you had to do this for part of this job'. Oh, yep, you do! You know, so, things that they think- I said, you're never gonna like every part of your job. I mean, we all have components that we still do 'em, and then when they have that in front of them, to see it, then it's- it might be a whole different story.

AD: Um-hm. Yeah, I liked what you were talking about there. With kind of, like, determining what's really going on behind what people think that they want. Like, I

talked to another guy in the field and he said, 'yeah, almost every student's gonna say they wanna work with pets and animals and stuff, and then it, you know, then [laughing] they don't always want to, but it's like figuring out what is it behind your want to do something [T1: Right]. Like, you mentioned the student who wanted to be a doctor. Well, they actually liked interacting with people or [T1: yep] that kind of thing, but it wasn't so much just-The doctor was just the surface level idea of it, right?

T1: Right! [chuckling] I have another work coordinator who years ago, um...she had a student. He wanted to work at McDonald's. He, and mom, was pushing it. 'He's gonna work at McDonald's. He LOVES McDonald's! He wants to work at McDonald's!' So, they got him a job cleaning the lobby. And, this work coordinator went in one day to check on him and she couldn't find him anywhere. He had the rag that he was wiping the tables off with and he was in the bathroom wiping the toilet seats. {AD: Hmm] And, he was hiding because he did NOT want to work at McDonald's. He just like to eat there. [Laughing] SO, it's like, and that part of it. No, he didn't want to work there, you know. I have student who'll say that to me all the time. 'I want to work here'. Well, why do you want to work there? 'Well, I like watching- I wanna.' The movie theater. I have students that work at the one in town here. 'I wanna work at the movie theater.' Why do you wanna work there? 'Well, I like watching movies.' Well, you won't be watching movies. You know, so, I bring them and they see what the jobs are and they're watching the other students do those jobs and then all of a sudden think, 'well, I don't know if I wanna work here now.' Because, you never did, you just liked going to the movies [laughing]! SO, it's the reality check. And, uh, I think that's a big piece of even when we work with voc rehab. And if we've given students several experiences- and I usually switch their jobs halfway through the year, semesters since we just made a switch here a couple weeks ago. And, uh, especially with my seniors that still want to try a couple things out, that they have-like, 'I wanna work with kids!' Okay, well we better get that in, you know, so. They'll switch it up so that they can try as much as they can before they graduate.

AD: Thanks you. Yeah, so just a couple more questions quick before we wrap up. So, say- um, I just came up with this question but I think it might be interesting- so say there's a new transition school teacher who is just getting into the field, in a different state and maybe their program isn't as thorough. What's one piece of advice you would give that new student or the program that you think would make the biggest impact to helping these students get placed in jobs?

T1: The student, or teacher?

AD: I'm sorry, I jumbled through that. It's truly Monday today. Um, what advice would you give to the teacher as to what would make the biggest impact for helping students find a placement that means something to them after [graduation]?

T1: Go out and be a salesperson. Um, that's what I feel like I- well, now I'm established but when you're first learning the ropes you basically have business cards in your hand, and say 'hi, this is me, this is what I'm doing. I'm trying to get a program rolling.' Because, once you've got a buy in from one place, that talks to another place, and you just little by little do- you know, they'll know that they can be...Especially because- you always want to start out with a student that you know has the skills to be successful because I've had- I had a student burn a bridge with- he, uh...EBD kid, and he took the fire extinguisher, and decided to shoot that off in the locker room...at a community center. And thankfully- and he had a job coach with him and everything. He did it- he just went in by himself. He was gonna go get something. And it was all on camera. So, they saw him come out of there. But, thankfully it was an employer that I had worked with for a long time. And so we didn't lose that site because we'd never had that kind of thing happen. But, if you start out with that kind of thing that happens right away, pretty much can guarantee that's gonna go around town just as fast as if you have a good program, so you've gotta be careful of that, too, and think about getting to know your students before you place them. Just for the fact that- and that's why I start with all my students in house and we have a backpack room job. We have jobs here. Clerical things in this whole building that we work at just so I can get to know them because you can't really go sell a student to an employer if you don't know anything about them, you know? I said it's kinda like they're your product. How do you go sell them to an employer if you don't know them at all, and now something happens? They have a behavior. There's something that you didn't know that creates a concern or a problem. So, you really do need to know them and then...from there...then, you're knocking on the doors telling someone about your program and what you have to offer and what your students can offer for the community.

AD: Okay, I know this is a super big picture question, but is there one or two reasons you think that, um...there is for the massive employment gap for post-graduate students with intellectual disabilities? I don't have the numbers right in front of me, but it's just-it's been massive.

T1: I do. I think a couple things that, um...they're not well prepared. And like I said, there's so many programs, it just amazes me that they get to transition age and all they've done stock the milk cooler for two years, you know? So, they haven't really expanded in skills and then all the sudden they're handed off to the post-secondary people with nothing. And, so if...if nobody has helped them to work on these skills, you can't expect somebody to employ them when you don't have any, you know? And I just think that that's a huge factor. I don't see- I think...I'm proud to see we are-we don't have that here, because of all the years we put into having the students prepared. But, I think that's a huge piece of it. I also think the other part of that is...the fear of the unknown. The uneducated employers that don't understand what people with disabilities have to offer. And, whenever there's a show on TV- there's this man in- I think it's Florida- who started a car wash business for his autistic child. I tried to contact him. I didn't have any luck. And, it was the coolest story because if everyone could see that, you could watch

that video or send it to employers and go, 'this is what you can have'. He has all these students with autism working there, because they are attentive to detail. So, they are washing and detailing cars. So, it was so amazing to just see that they're better workers than some of us, you know? And it's, um- the people are afraid, and they'll only see something like, 'oh, that kid screams and hollers.' But, they...they're just on the outside looking in. They don't have the whole picture. And I'm not faulting people for that. I just think that people don't understand disabilities.

AD: Thank you so much. Yeah, this has been really great. Was there anything else you wanted to add, or you feel like I missed?

T1: Hmm, I can't think of anything off hand...Do you have the Olmsted act in your paper? The Olmsted act is what's freaking out a lot of people. I just had a meeting recently about- we have a community transition group that meets monthly, and even among us- so, we all have a special ed interest, so it's amazing to sit at the table and listen to the people that say, 'well, according to the Olmsted act, everyone should be employable to work and, you know, minimum wage jobs,.' And, you know, other people are like, 'that's not even possible,' or, you know, 'how do you even do that?' It's just a lot of upheaval with that because of how people believe, or perceive, that to be. And, we had a gal who- she said, 'all individuals have to be given a chance.' That's what the act is saying- to be competitively employed. If you can prove they can't be, you've given them the chance. And other people see it as, 'Nope! Everyone has to be employed at nine dollars an hour,' so it's really interesting to listen to because I see what they're saying on both sides, but I'm also not on the bandwagon that everyone's gonna make minimum wage, because, just skill level doesn't-you know, there's students that just hit a switch and, you know, they might do one piece of work and it takes them a half hour to do something that takes a minute for someone else. So, it's like, that's okay, but it isn't going to be to the standard of what they're saying and how they see that. So, it's causing a lot of conflict amongst special ed people.

TD: Yeah, I'll have to make sure that I am up on that in my paper.

T1: And then you go back to that whole- that gap, then- you know, people see that gap as getting wider now because an employer is not gonna pay somebody nine dollars an hour when their productivity is less than half that of the so-called average person. And then the other person on the other end is saying it's discriminatory, you know. So, it's like there's somewhere gotta be fine line there where that's figured out because you don't want to drive people away either that maybe would have hired someone at a sub-minimum wage, or just-that's where I'd look at that components piece to a job. That there's so many things that they can do, so let's just focus on that and have somebody else do the other part of the job that they can't do. You have to be creative, you have to be flexible, and you really have to think outside the box because I think every person with a disability has something to offer to a level that they can do it. You know, so, we have to get rid of the rigid thinking that it's this way, it's always been this way, or, you know, this job's like

this, and that doesn't work. In today's world it really doesn't work with all the changes, and, you know, it should become easier with technology, no harder for people to be employed.

AD: Excellent. Thank you again!

### **Transcribed Interview 2- Suburban Teacher**

2-18-16

AD= Anthony Dosen, Interviewer

T2= Teacher, Interviewee

AD: What do you see is the promise of transition programs for 18-21 year old students with developmental disabilities?

T2: The promise of?

AD: Yeah. Or, the purpose of? For someone who doesn't know anything about them.

T2: Our vision for our program-it's called the [identifying information removed] program. And, it's really broad because we have all different abilities, so there's kind of different visions. So, the students who are more profound and lower functioning- what we're trying to do right now is- we've always done non-paid work experience and used a lot of volunteer sites and then, um, community sites, too. And, all our kids start this in the high school, so by the time they go to our transition, they've had minimum of, um, two job experiences. And then, um, a lot of them that are higher functioning will have experience in a paid position. So, for the lower functioning, the one goal right now is to get them connected with an adult service early on. And, like, we have, I think, um, five who are graduating. So, right now, we're sending our staff over there and they're working at [identifying service provider program name removed]. And, that's where hopefully they'll be placed and, um, their ration right now is- I think we have two staff for the five students. Hopefully, by the end of the school year, they'll be able to, um...either go into the larger groups with more students versus staff, or on to an enclave. Our other students- kind of our middle group- is- the goal when they get to [our program] is to work a minimum of four hours a day. And, by the time they graduate, hopefully they're in a job that they can keep that's competitive. And then, um...another group of students that are kind of, uh, higher- that we don't see everyday- just maybe, um, they drop in for a few hours a week. So those- that's a combination of post-secondary support and then employment, and then we try to match the employment to their post-secondary career. Does that answer it?

AD: Oh yeah, absolutely. And, then, looking at those who are definitely seeking competitive, paid employment- are they taking classes? Like, other types of classes where they learn different type of skills, or job searching, or anything like that?

T2: The ones who are competitive?

AD: Yeah, who are definitely going out there to get a paid job in the community.

T2: Um, well, from- If I'm doing my job right at the high school, we should have their interest really honed in by the time they get over to [our transition program]. So that we're really focusing on what they want and, um, kind of putting the emphasis on the skill that they would need to have more training in. Like, some of our kids have a difficult time with the cash register. So, um, you know, that's one skill that we, um, might put them in the site and really work with them so that they can get that so that they can, you know, go to a lot of other...jobs. We even push post-secondary- my goal is, at the high school, to have everybody take the accuplacer before so we can see how they do. And then, um, my first step is to push them in a path for a certificate or diploma. And then, based on that, uh...you know if they can make- if they can go on form an A.A., that's great, but...So at least shoot for that diploma or certificate. We use [three specific local community colleges listed- possibly identifying information removed] right now. They're the three that we use quite often.

AD: Now, are you aware of any, quote, non-traditional job-seeking skills that transition students are learning in programs you're aware of? By that I mean maybe like something as unusual as starting their own business or a business-within-a-business, or?

T2: Yep. We haven't had any business- A long time ago we had, you know- we were trying to do even just like the vending machine with one. But, that didn't work out. Um...

AD: Or, I guess, uh, like very small businesses, or family owned businesses. Like, connecting people with those kind of experiences? Internships? Mentorship?

T2: Let me look at my- I gotta look at my names and then I'll...Right now, I have a non-paid that hopefully will, uh...get into something. But, I have two students who are ASD who are at the city of [identifying city name removed] and they're developing a part of their web page for -um, what do you call it- land that is for sale. And, so then they're going in and describing that property and attaching all the information from different agendas and stuff. Cause that's been an area that we're trying to expand in. We do use a [local cooperative- name removed], and so we have several kids over there that are into- that will be taking computer networking or computer repair there. We use that class a lot. Let's see here...Um, I don't know if there- I mean Walgreen's...That's not really that different, but that's a company that's been really good for us. We've had quite a few kids do jobs there that have been hired on. Byerly's grocery stores. We've had kids that have moved from, like, bagging, and um...I've had one that moved into produce and one that is actually into...I don't know, like maybe an assistant? Um, a laundry- dry-cleaning. Trying to pull my list up here. Not getting it.

AD: No, that's okay. Those are some great examples. It sounds like students are really getting out into the community a lot here. Are there any other types of mentorships that stand out to you that you can think of? Maybe, like a student really pursuing an interest with...?

T2: Well, I have one that- he had a really good chance, and that was with the police department. And then they had taken- the Sheriff had thought that there was an opening. They only take two students. And, um, then when he went back and checked, there was another one from the community college. So now, what we're trying to do is do more of a job shadow...and he's gonna do some ride-alongs and then, um...do some shadowing in the 911 department and, uh, possibly the county courts.

AD: And, just real quick, is there any other type of technology that students are using or being taught to help them with jobs, maybe separate from their interest in technology, but- you know, for example, like using computers to find jobs or anything like that?

T2: Oh, yeah that- I mean, we have an employment class and so they do all the job searching and, different job tools, and interest tests and stuff.

AD: So, they're using computers a lot for that?

T2: Yeah. We use iPads for some training. And, for lower functioning, we'll have, um, like a visual- short videos broken down for each task. Um, a lot of kids here now use their phones to do their schedules. Um...and more for organization, notes.

AD: Cool. Looking at students specifically with developmental disabilities, what do you feel are some challenges that come with teaching or helping them find jobs?

T2: Well, I was on my soap box yesterday on this [both laughing]. Um...so this is just my personal thought. But, I'm finding, I have a....

[At this point the audio recorder battery died and needed to be reset- some audio was lost here]

T2: [recording abruptly continued after audio lost for about one minute as recorder was plugged in and reset] ...and he's big anyway, so when he kinda hops down the hall and makes huge movements with his arms and then he'll make a noise. But, he, um, likes to play the keyboard, or-I think it's a can of pop. So, he has job coaches. He has two visuals of those, and he'll get one warning, uh...if he does it. And as soon as he gets a warning he stops, but he's trying to go- just pointing to the picture that he knows that if it happens again he'll lose a reward. Or, he won't get that. Um...so it's just kinda getting more-I think my biggest challenge is what can we do at school to prepare them to be more-to be able to blend in...in then, you know, in the community better. So, the skills are pretty easy. It's all in the behavior stuff. That messes them up.

AD: And some other teachers I've talked to have mentioned- and, again, I'm not super familiar with this- but the Olmsted Act and some other things. So, people have mentioned that there's a big push to get pretty much everyone out there working. Um...does that add to the challenge with students with behaviors? Um, I guess managing people's expectations. Is that something that comes into play for you?

T2: Um...well, the bigger challenge is with the really lower functioning. And, my challenge is just because we have still a really high ratio of staff to students. And, teams have the goal for them to shoot to be in an enclave. They have to have usually the ratio of one to five or one to six...so, um, and, um, being able to work on staying on a task at least for an hour at a time...So, I'm seeing our- I mean, I think it's a good act because I think there's- I've seen a lot of kids from the past that, um, have been competitive for me, and that have their jobs, but the parents wanted to have the security of an adult...uh...an adult service kind of over them. And so, to me, I've had a lot of kids who I think have been, um...who were able to do more. And, they're- because they're higher skilled- they're kinda used to...um...being the best working or something at an enclave. Does that make any sense?

AD: Oh yeah, that makes perfect sense. And, sorry, my recorder got a little weird there for a second there, so if I stammer over you every now and then that's because I was having trouble hearing [T2 chuckles]. What do feel are some of the, maybe, unique strengths that students with developmental disabilities bring to a workplace?

T2: Strengths?

AD: Yeah.

T2: Oh, dependability. Um...personality. I mean...my kids are all really, really friendly and, uh, I mean some of the students that we've had, if they have left a job that we've gotten- that they've gotten in school from the transition program, they- some have been there for ten years. So, I've seen them move up. You know, it's taken a lot longer, but, um...they're never absent. I mean, they're- everybody likes them. Um...No, they have really, really good skills and I think they blend in well. They get a lot of respect, um..you know, once they get the skill, because I think they surprise coworkers that, maybe at the beginning, um, you know didn't feel that they could do as much or it was more of a...strain on them. But, the longer they are there...you know, they're basically doing just about everything. I've actually had some past students job coaching or kind of mentoring other students I've put at the same site, which is kind of fun. And they're a lot stricter than I am! [both laughing].

AD: Taking a quick glance at IEP teams, was there anything you wanted to speak to about them? Are they challenging? Are they beneficial? Is there something you would change about them?

T2: The IEP Team?

AD: Well, yeah. The meeting frequency? How they're managed? I guess that differs so much from team to team, but um...Any big picture thoughts on IEP teams?

T2: I guess I think that we tend to have more than just one meeting a year. And I think that once they make that transition to either to graduate from high school or to go on to the transition meeting- or, um, program- that that year there needs to be, um...more meetings. Cause it's just a lot...to cover and to explain. And the earlier that you can explain about the transition and the vision of it, I think the better. We have a really good relationship with DRS, and so she's at all of ours. And she, um, right now comes into the high school and the transition twice a month...and meets with each student.

AD: When students wrap up their transition program, are they connected with a voc rehab worker? Is that how that works? Or does it depend on the student?

T2: Yeah, we connect them when they're in high school still. And then she follows them to the transition, until they either stay with her or go into an adult service.

AD: Oh great, okay. Um...Let's see here. How is curriculum written and developed? I guess. I know that's a big, giant question, but...

T2: Um...well, I pretty much use best practice and I get a ton of stuff from the internet. [chuckling] And just, you know, pulling from past experience and stuff. I mean, there's good curriculum out there, too, but, uh...I don't know. In special ed, you're pretty good- you have to be good at- grabbing things and stuff, because your budget is never..big enough. [chuckling]

AD: Sure. Is there like a- again, I don't know this at all- but, is there like a key organization that transition programs specifically go to, you know, train or get research or anything like that?

T2: Um...

AD: I just realized I never looked into that.

T2: Yeah, I don't- see, I'm really old so...I've been around for a long time. [both chuckling] We have, um, the CTICs [Community Transition Inter-agency Coalitions] that- we do a lot- I'm on that for two counties, for [two county names removed-identifying information] counties. Um, we meet as a transition team of all different areas and agencies and stuff, and so we always put on a reality store for the districts and the students. And, we used to come into the buildings and then teachers could, um, kind of meet with a group of us and we could help brainstorm with them on, um...strategies for kids that they were having a difficult time with or they wanted some ideas with. And,

probably just more of the training that our district offers. We have a lot of training that we can get from our district and from the cooperative, so...And, I...I've been at a level four program and in this position for ten years- or, in the district that I'm in now...um, but a transition teacher really needs to- in my mind- really needs to be an experienced teacher. I think it would be really difficult to go into that position right from college. It's just so different.

AD: That actually dovetails into a question I had which is, what would be your advice to a new transition teacher who is working with students with developmental disabilities? And that sounded like you would suggest that they have high levels of experience...

T2: Well, they better have a good mentoring program, cause, um..You know, usually, transition programs are offsite. They don't have administrators, um...right on the grounds. So, you're really independent and...um...So, I would say, if you're brand new, um...yeah, you need to- you really need to advocate for yourself to get- either to have weekly meetings to reflect or, um, hopefully a mentorship with somebody with experience.

AD: And then what advice would you give to a- an incoming transition student whose, you know, maybe a little nervous about starting the program but they really want to work in the community?

T2: Um...Well, their IEP should reflect exactly what they should do. I think it's important that the students- well, that they participate in it and that they can also verbalize their goals, so they know what they're supposed to be working towards and what they want to achieve to be, um...before they exit. 'Cause, we tell everybody, you know, you have the right to be there 'til 21, but you, um, you know, you may meet your goals by the time you're 20. Um, it's all up to them and what they want to get accomplished.

AD: Yeah, I've been interviewing a lot of students and I noticed there's- you know, it's like fifty-fifty split from what I've seen- um, some of them are just so clear on their goals and they can describe it to you so well, and others are still trying to feel it out. How do you get feedback from students other than through IEP meetings? Are there formal ways? Like surveys or anything like that?

T2: Yeah. We've done surveys and then, um...Well, when they're out on the job, they have...they either have a work coordinator if they're totally independent. And, so I meet with those kids probably...I don't know, I try to get into their jobs at least every two weeks. And then, um, I have the employer fill out an evaluation twice a semester. And then students have to do a self-reflection. And then if they're- if they have a job coach with them- that job coach does data with them and, every week, I have my job coaches sit

down and they do an evaluation and the students do a reflection. So, they have to give feedback. [chuckling]

AD: Right, yeah, it sounds like there's a lot of ways that you get feedback. Um, just a couple more questions as we're approaching a half an hour here. Um...In terms of parents, do you find that sometime parents have, um, I guess fear for their students to succeed in community-based jobs? Or, not to succeed, but to try different types of community-based jobs, or? Is that something you've seen, or is it a mixed bag?

T2: Okay, can you say that again? I didn't quite get all that.

AD: Yep, sorry. Um, so when it comes to parents of students who are looking to work in the community, do you find that sometimes parents are maybe fearful for their students to try new things? In terms of work?

T2: `They want them to find new things?

AD: Do you find that sometimes the parents are actually scared for the students?

T2: Oh yeah! And that's why, um- you know we do...I mean, they're always told that there's gonna be a job coach with them, and it's between really the school and the employer that we would not pull back until the employer feels like that student is, you know, capable and...ready to be left alone, or- for more time. So, I mean-and the parents, I let them know that we're pulling back or, you know, now their student is ready, and um...so...

AD: And how do parents give feedback? Do they call? Email?

T2: Um, mostly- well, they do both, but um...I tend to push the emails more. Just cause I'm not really in- at my desk that much and, um, it's just easier I think, too, to be more clear, you know, if you have it in writing, too.

AD: And just a couple more questions here. Do you believe your find a version of their dream job? You know, so say a student is, like, really interested in something like art, or bikes, or something like that. Have you- are you aware of any, you know, interesting success stories of students kind of finding that kind of job?

T2: Um...Yeah, well, I mean, sometimes I shoot for...uh, they might not be able to do exactly what they want to do at this time, but let's get them in the industry, ya know, if we can or, um...Like, I have some students who really like daycare, and they- you know, they're doing this to become a teacher, um...but, then once they get in there, you know, then we kind of...um...And, you know, that goes with taking the "Accuplacer" and stuff, and then saying, 'well, you can still work with kids, but you know, here- if you go ahead and get this certificate or we can shoot for this diploma, um...you know, that can happen.'

I guess we try to show them, you know, what the next step is. And I think that's just- after each experience, even after a non-paid, you know, if you can start developing a list with them and saying 'what are some things that you really liked about this job site and environment and what didn't you like', and, you know, what the plan is that we want to get your likes a lot longer and, um, you know, keep building on it. Some people have wanted to be, um- to work in the library, and uh...more behind the desk or, you know, say a librarian or whatever, and, you know. So, we'll start with, um, being a shelver. And then, trying to help them look at other programs that might have...um, other skills that they can use. Or, you know, them kind of being more open to, uh...where they can go. I don't know. You know, some depends on where they're going to live or if they're gonna drive, or...um...I don't know...I think it's just trying to give them more of a road map and to see more than one option.

AD: And then, my last question is what do you think is one thing that transition schools offer that can make the biggest impact in helping students find paid community-based employment, and maybe closing this employment gap that's out there?

T2: One thing to find the employment that they want?

AD: Yeah, like, of all the things that are taught and done in these programs, what do you think is the one thing that can make the biggest impact in helping more students find more work?

T2: Um, I just think starting earlier. They earlier they can get out on jobs, the better. I mean, and it starts- you know, we're saying at 14- they start working on work skills and, um...looking at their IEP and, you know, just keep talking about the future. And, the kids that we've had, um...the most success or have had the most choices are the ones that have had a lot of work experience in high school. And, that's a challenge because there's some parents who really, um...want their students to be into classes that, um...you know, we're not really into an agreement. They might really want to push the science and, um...You know, so, it's a rocky road to go from...traditional high school to more of a functional one. When you start making that change of what you're gonna drop and what you're gonna push.

AD: Was there anything else you felt like we missed today that you wanted to add to this conversation?

T2: Less paperwork! [both chuckling]

AD: Less paperwork for teachers, is it? For everyone?

T2: For teachers. Less paperwork and more emphasis on mental health.

AD: Thank you so much! That's about all I have unless you had anything else.

T2: Okay, well I hope some of that was okay.

AD: No, that's great. I got a lot of good info! Thank you again for your time!

### **Transcribed Interview 3- Urban Teacher**

2-23-16

AD= Anthony Dosen, Interviewer

T3= Teacher, Interviewee

AD: What do you see as the promise, or purpose, of transition programs as it relates to helping people find jobs?

T3: The purpose in helping them find jobs? Okay.

AD: Well, I guess a better way to put this would be like, why would someone want to enter a transition program?

T3: Ah, yep. So, that's timely. So, part of my job is I go and meet with high school students- special ed students- who could be candidates for transition. So, I was just talking to a young man yesterday who's...trying to make the decision. Everyone thinks he should go, but he's, like...on the fence. Cause, partly because he just doesn't process things the way- you know, due to delays- like he could. Uh, so, I was telling this young man, you know, who has no job experience and his efforts to get a job have gone by the wayside. He'll say he either doesn't hear an email back or, ya know, he's kind of listing off what happens when he applies. Basically, he never hears anything. His mom was saying that the only time that he's even applied is when somebody has helped him. So, uh, what I told him was that, um, it's basically- it's like a big group of people who are here- case manager, social worker, work coordinators- that are acting as an advocate for him. The work coordinators have- they're out in the community, uh, making relationships, kind of paving the way for opportunities for people, so I'm quite confident that people who are here are exposed to many more chances to get jobs because of the work than this person who takes their diploma whose ultimately on their own or they can apply for vocational rehabilitation services, which we have them do that with us anyway. But, then, the difference is that there's a whole army-basically, an army of people- to work for that student. But they're kind of, you know, turning down, so...That's kind of how I present it to students. Not maybe in those exact words- just kind of talking to them about what's gone on in terms of getting a job and the progress towards career planning, too, on their own, and it's usually kind of minimal progress and, you know, they might have a career goal but they never really have gone to a college and met with an instructor, or job shadowed, or any of those things. So, then we talk to them about all those things that our job is to help set them up, you know, with experiences and hopefully paid work. Not guaranteed paid work...at least meaningful unpaid experiences. But, generally if they come with us they have the opportunity- almost all of them have the

opportunity- to work for pay and just part of that is the economy and if entry level positions are open and opening up more or something.

AD: Do different transition programs have, like, different themes or approaches that they use that you're aware of?

T3: Uh, I mean, I think they're- in general, it's pretty close. You know, we all have to follow the same kind of rubric from the- you know- the state that tells you what you need to include in your transition program. I mean, I think that there's subtle differences. Like, we have gone to other programs to try to get ideas and try to get an idea of what they're doing in [two different nearby cities listed- possibly identifying information removed]. And they've come here, too. So, I think we're...similar, you know. I'm sure that there's some difference in, kind of, how they...uh- well, certainly in the out state [state name remove- identifying information] where there's not the numbers, they'll often times serve everyone still in the high school. You know, up through 21, which is an ideal, so...

AD: Okay, that's interesting. I hadn't heard that. So, there's not actually a separate transition program, they just create an individual plan?

T3: Well, they might have that, but they'll have to find space in the high school.

AD: So they don't have separate facilities?

T3: No. Yeah, not really. They're- they can't afford to- you know- their numbers, they might have, you know, nine kids in transition, or students in transition, so...It's not economically possible to...

AD: So, you mentioned cross-program, like idea-sharing, and things. Are there other organizations, or trainings, or anything like that, that serve transition programs specifically. Or, like, research think-tanks, or? Is there any, like, one place transition people go to...get ideas?

T3: Well...I mean, they have a transition point-person at the state of [state name removed- identifying information], you know. The Department of Education. [Name removed- Department of Education Chairperson] is her name, and, you know, they- over the years, we've had- there was that group that would go, and- kind of a think tank, ya know- and, representatives from all over [state name removed] would come once a month, but that doesn't happen anymore. There's other things that are going on. You mentioned Olmsted, you know, where there is- there are groups that are meeting, trying to, uh...meet the requirements of Olmsted, so...It's mostly through- yeah, I think it's mostly through the Department of Ed.

AD: And, I've been a part of a CTIC in the past, because I was a job coach. That was the work I did for many years, and my boss had me go to CTICs in [city name removed] and {name removed-Department of Education Chairperson] would come to it from time to time. [T3: Oh, okay. Sure] Are you a part of- they do that everywhere, right?

T3: Yeah, we still have a CTIC. I'm not- I have been a part in the past, not currently, but, uh, some of our staff are involved with that though.

AD: Do parents come to the ones out here, in this neck of the woods?

T3: I don't think it's, uh- less than typical I think. You know, occasionally.

AD: Okay, that was just an aside. I'm curious to hear how, you know, the different schools interact across the state. Um...zooming back into this program here, um, I guess big picture question. What kind of job-seeking skills are taught here for, say, the students who are really ready to go to work?

T3: Um-hm, um-hm. So...we start, uh- you asked about another program. We visited one program. I really liked the fact that they had, like, a year curriculum, and then you kind of- 'here's everything you need to know', kind of in a nutshell. And, the ones that can complete that in year and maybe have a job and don't need you anymore, they graduate. The ones that need, you know, a refresher or something, the repetition, they come back a second year and maybe go through the same thing. So, in our year curriculum, I mean we kind of developed it into a thing where we will focus on applications and some of the basics. What I have, sort of, evolved to this point- I try to give them, what I call them "tools", you know. We've developed an application hint sheet. You know, like, how do you handle the question of, uh, what wage do I want, and um...oh, social security number. What if they ask for that? What should I write? Or, then online applications, too. Kind of some guidelines and try to give them this folder of stuff that, if they so choose, they can use it to, um...So, applications and then we do, like, practice interviewing and model- and, you know, I use a lot of video to show them different things and stuff about- within interviewing, I mean, I spend weeks on that. Within that we look at what we call a 30 second commercial. That part of the interview where you're basically telling them about yourself, answering that question, 'tell me about yourself', but doing it in a way that makes sense, maybe chronologically and, um...selling themselves. I guess the biggest thing that I've noticed working with transition-aged students is, uh, they won't, like, have the...like, the instinct or the ability to sit down at a table to tell an employer, 'look, this is why you should hire me over all the other candidates you have. This is what I will bring. I'll be on time every day. I'll do that,' so, you know, that's the biggest that- a big thing that I work on. And, then again, with the tools, we'll try to get them a good resume, a good cover letter example, a thank you letter, a letter of resignation, and try to put all that, now- you're talking about technology earlier- putting that all onto their Google docs and then they can- and then talk to them, teach them how to edit, you know, and then they can easily fire off a resume

and a cover letter with minimal changes for most entry level jobs, and trying to have it all make sense. If they have a career goal, to have it all line up into that sort of track. Uh, that, to me, makes a lot of sense. So, that's kind of- I guess that's the overview. And then we hit self-advocacy really hard, too, so that they have to know...what laws protect people with disabilities and how do they advocate for themselves if their disability is impacting them on the job, and disclosure. Disability disclosure. Most of them don't know any of those terms. They don't know what ADA is. And then we'll finish that up with an advocacy letter. That's kind of how I've evolved, so they can hopefully walk out of here with a letter that says, 'this is who I am, this is my learning style, this is what my disability is, this what this means. This is how I learn best. This is...' And then, whether they-I tell students- whether they ever use it or not, they have it there, you know. 'Cause most of the students can't really articulate their disability and, you know, it's all involved, so...That's it in a nutshell I guess.

AD: Great, yeah, thank you. That's a good picture. Um...taking a look at the technology. So, you mentioned using Google Docs, teaching students how to use that so they can have- like, edit- templates of resumes, and thank you letters, and save it and have access to it. [T3: Yeah, exactly] And, I think students were telling me here that they use iPads, too, for some things?

T3: Yeah, and they can get right on their Google. They have a button, you know, for their drive, and they download- if we didn't have it- we download Docs on there, and uh...It's a- it's...yeah. That's new this year for us, iPads.

AD: Are pretty much all students using iPads and Google Drive?

T3: Pretty much now, this year, yeah, because uh- I mean, in the past we used it, but this is the first year we've had iPads, so.

AD: Are students responding well to that technology? Do they, like, already know how to use it pretty well?

T3: Ya know, uh...pretty well. I was surprised, cause we were a second year school, so some of them had them last year, and then they came to us, and I was, like, asking them what do they think about the iPad, and it wasn't the response that I thought. It was more lukewarm, you know. Most of them like them, I think...They were playing a lot of games in the beginning, and then they took those away, and you know...They like to- yeah, I'd say for the most part. It's a positive thing and, um, they're learning. I think they're learning to use them more for, you know, their jobs, and job searches, and stuff like that.

AD: Beyond job searching and resume writing and stuff like that, are there any, like, software programs you're using to help teach skills, or anything like that?

T3: Um...Yeah, I mean there are. There are, uh- I know, like I don't teach- I teach employment and self-advocacy. That's my main thing. And then I work in the PAYS lab, which is a structured whole different thing. But, uh, I know [co-teacher's name removed], he's a- he teaches reading, and he has some reading apps, and the students are following up and they're working on these reading, ya know, things outside of class, which is really cool to see. I have used a couple apps. There's one called, something like "Get Interviewed" or something. It's kind of a fun game, you know. So, I've used a little bit, but probably other teachers have apps and so forth more.

AD: That PAYS lab, I think I gleaned from another student I interviewed that- so, that's where they're, it's like an assessment thing, or?

T3: It's a structured, um, it's a lab with close to 300 workplace activities, and the students will go in there, anywhere from an hour to an hour and a half, you know, three or four times a week. And they'll be doing tasks. Maybe two or three a day, and their timed and they- it gauges their interests and their aptitudes and kind of where they intersect. For example, they'll do a cooking module. And, if they can do it in certain- it's all timed- so if they do it in a certain, like, lowest time that's like the industry standard's time, so if they do all those things really quickly that should translate into them- they have the ability, the aptitude, to go into a kitchen and do things at a competitive rate. So, there's even five different areas, and, uh, all skill levels and all areas, so, yeah. I think it's really- it's a- it's really designed for them to work independently, so it's just- it's a great addition to our transition program. And, we went to others to look at it, and then we convinced the powers that be to invest in it, and it's been really well worthwhile.

AD: Um-hm. Has anyone- like, any student- really surprised you with something that they had aptitude for that you maybe didn't expect?

T3: Oh yeah, yeah! That happens quite often, I think. You know, there's a guy that never had done a sewing machine before, and he- ya know- he finds that it's really good fine motor skills, or whatever that particular- you know- yeah. From time to time you'll see a...It's just- so being in there with one of our students whose English is- not a native English speaker, but has some struggles with disability and...being new to our country. And, she's, uh, just fabulous on the data entry, and very accurate, very fast. And, then when I work with her in other areas, like if I'm just helping her with her resume, I just can help her, you know, recognize these skills and talents that people would pay for. And, same thing with students who are bilingual. You know, they don't realize that that's a vocational attribute! [AD: Right] You know, I'll say, 'why should they hire you?' 'Um, I'm a hard worker.' 'Well [chuckles] you're bilingual, you could help, you know, with all these...all kinds of stuff, so'. It's great to help raise awareness of different skills and so forth.

AD: Are there any students who have taken more of, like, a non-traditional path towards finding work? And, by that I mean, like, maybe starting their own business or, like, uh,

doing a job shadow with, like, a small business or a family owned thing, or like, uh...doing some online business, or...I guess just anything kind of in that realm?

T3: Yeah. Yeah. Um...I can't remember the name. There's a whole- I think it's Project Discovery or something like that. There's , uh- kind of that...

AD: Oh, the Discovering Personal Genius? IS that what you're saying?

T3: I'm not even sure now.

AD: Yeah, I know about that in job coaching, where people determine their themes that they're interested in and then they go do, uh, informational interviews in small businesses and...

T3: Yeah. And then some- there's one thing, then, that they're- the idea is then that they're making...their working in they're...you know. It's like starting their own small business. I know for somebody it might be selling things on Ebay or something, you know. Maybe they're not able, because of their disability, to be competitively employable, but they're having some meaningful- you know, I think that's...I don't have any personal knowledge of that. I've heard things like that. We have had people that have taken certainly non-traditional, um...approaches to it. Well...one example that comes to mind, a guy named [male student name removed]. He worked at one of the nursing homes at- which kind of evolved to, uh...So, we had this thing setup with a nursing home where they'd go for, like, four or five weeks and do laundry. And, then they'd shift to building maintenance. And, then...he was there and he did so well that, like created a new thing. They had him become a short order cook for the residents. And, he was meeting with an older Hmong gentlemen as a sort of a social thing, and they ended up hiring him as a laundry guy! And, he was really set up with a nice full time job and things like that. And then graduated. And, unfortunately, I heard that he lost his job, because they wanted him to work Saturdays and that didn't fit in with his, um, you know, narrow view of what- so, I don't know what happened to him. He left us employed in kind of a unique way where they- I don't know if he'd have been able to get the job had they not, you know, gotten to know him. So, that's one...unique thing. Uh...

AD: Yeah, I guess that's kind of what I'm getting it. It's like, how do people find jobs where you can like bypass the regular old application process. Or, like the online personality tests and all that stuff that can be a barrier to people.

T3: Yeah, yeah. So, there's a- so, there's that way- that's what I was telling you in the beginning about how I kind of talk to students about- who are struggling with the traditional way of getting jobs- uh...you know, just having the...the road paved, so to speak, for, uh, them with the relationships with the work coordinators. Oh yeah, I have colleagues out that will come to me and say, 'yeah, I got a job that want to hire

somebody. I don't have anyone for it.' The U [university], Arby's. I have a gal- this is kind of cool- a young lady got a job through him at Arby's just through networking that I have developed. And, she's still there and worked her way into Assistant Manager, you know, which is really a cool, non-traditional way. I'm sure there's tons of, um...you know, different kind of- there's other- there's a guy that became quite indispensable at {local college name removed} in the cafeteria. They had an enclave there and then they liked their work and then they hired a few and some of them, you know, stayed on. Uh, he's still there, you know, so...

AD: So, it's fairly common for you to see that organic growth of when a person finds a place that they really are fitting in with and enjoying that they can arrange a unique position?

T3: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you know. If somebody has a- the right work ethic- and their productive and they're socially able to fit into a work setting, or they can't get through the interview and the application process, the chances- because they're in transition- certainly increases, you know, to get a position. Or at least they can leave here employed. Um...there are other options, you know, through Voc Rehab and they will hire- job placement people, but, um...you know. So there's....I know there are success stories, too, beyond, just what the other services that, uh...down the road, but uh...I mean, to me, that's the best, though. The relationships and the networking that have kind of existed over time with the work coordinators, and things like that.

AD: So, looking at students specifically with intellectual disabilities- you know; MR, different levels- what are some of the strengths that those students often bring? I know you can't really stereotype. Every student's an individual, but...

T3: Um...[sighs] Well, um...I think sometimes, you know- again, not stereotyping, but- sometimes you just have that, um...it's like a genuineness about them. Kind of pleasant disposition. A lot of times they can be willing workers. Um...they would need some accommodations where they could be very, very helpful to a business. And obviously this is with people with autism, too. If you could overlook some of the rougher spots and put them in a position where they could gel and really be successful, I mean, many, many would be employed that are not employed. If there were, maybe- I don't know, I guess if the workforce were able to be a little bit more accommodating. It's not always that friendly to our students. You might talk to a business and say, 'you know, I really got a student who loves pizza and they can clean and they can do this and this,' and the pizza place will say, 'yeah, but we also need 'em to run the cash register.' They just have to have them do everything. And, that happens in, like, Holiday gas station and some of those, and I can understand that, but, you know. I just think that there are...um, yeah...

AD: I remember that from job coaching. I'd try to go to a gas station, maybe, or a smaller store or whatever and you'd have to be able to run the register, and clean, and fix this, and do ten things, so...And, so, work-forces not always being super accommodating,

are there other challenges for working with this population of students in terms of finding work?

T3: Um...yeah. Oh, absolutely. Probably one of the biggies is the misunderstanding with SSI. Uh...many, many students will be on SSI when they're under 18. Uh...and when they come to us, they might still be on that. And, I think it varies when they're reevaluated as an adult, and so forth. But...there is this- especially with, I would say, immigrants, especially, um...-difficult to communicate the fact that working is a good thing. Now, will their benefits be impacted? Maybe a little bit, but they're still coming out ahead. They're getting work experience. It's just the...it's a battle we fight again and again with parents not understanding that...almost a hundred percent of the time the students are gonna be better off working. And it's really sad to see students that are families, and they'll convince them, ya know, 'I can't work or my benefits will be affected, impacted.'

AD: Um-hm. So, it's mostly a parental fear that you're seeing there?

T3: Uh, more parental. More parents. But, some students do. They, you know- some don't wanna work, and then, you know, their...so that's kind of the convenient way for some to...deal with it, I guess.

AD: Speaking of parents, how do you get feedback from parents other than the annual IEP meeting or other things like that?

T3: Well, it kind of varies. So, uh, most of our students are 18. And, a lot of them- at least in the program I work in- their more independent. A lot of them are their own guardians. So, that gets kind of- can get of a sticky situation if the student is...fairly independent and they don't want their parents to be involved and, um...yeah know, that's...we just kinda deal with those situations- that's not that common. That's not the norm. Most of the time the parents are somewhat involved and, um...I email and call and just sort of keep in touch that way, in addition, you know, to the IEP. It's more a need-based thing, ya know, when I need to talk to them, and, I do. Some parents are super involved, and some are very inconsistent, and that's part of the whole package, ya know. So...I guess that's- I found it very important to try to incorporate them into the team, you know, as much as possible.

AD: And, I have to ask about IEP processes. You know, there's a ton of research out there. It looks like, when I'm looking back ten or fifteen years ago, that was what a lot of the research was about. You know, the challenge of putting the teams together and operating interdisciplinary teams in a way that makes sense. Do you- is there anything you want to say about IEP teams? Is it a challenge? Is it beneficial? Both?

T3: Um...Well the...I mean, the due process paperwork, putting it all in that one category is, uh, you know...Of course, I think most special education teachers find it...laborious,

you know. Um...it ebbs and flows in how they want things worded and changed and it's too bad that that is such a...I mean, I know that that drives some people- just good people- out of the field. I've heard the stories, you know. I just try to do the best I can without sacrificing, you know, being able to do- you know, I mean...IEP team is critical, I think, in terms of having that group together, uh...to try to have, you know, the social worker, the work coordinator, the parent, and other outside agencies, to communicate and meet together. It can be a challenge when there's a giant meeting, both to coordinate and put together. And, also, the bigger the meetings are, sometimes they can be less productive. So, I think those core people there are really important. Yeah, the due process stuff. I know it's important and you have to have the...key pieces there, but there's gotta be a way to make it...you know, work better. Because, that document, you know- nobody can, ya know, find their way through that, really! I mean, parents and students. I had my students doing- I had them go through exercises where they find different things just so they can learn to look at it and find it, and it's just not written in a way that, you know, is really student user friendly. I don't know how to remedy that, but...

AD: Sure. Um...Oh yeah, students. So, in those meetings, do students come up with novel ideas or do they advocate for themselves? Is it more or less common for students to advocate for themselves?

T3: Eh....you know, um...Uh...The cutting edge, sort of, philosophy would be that at this point in the transition- high school and transition- the students are taking an active leadership role, and that. And I'd love to see that happen. In my experience, um...it's a...yeah. Very, very rare, just because of the...You got a big group of people and, you know, they're all here to talk about that student. And their a lot of times self-conscious about things, and um...Yeah. It's...In a big district like this, too, I'm not able to be- or, we're not able to be- at several IEP meetings in a row before they get here, you know. It's be nice to be more involved at sort of the end of the senior year usually. It would be nice to see that...like, students, like, strategically taking a more of a leadership role. And, so hopefully they're a t a little higher level in terms of facilitating and, you know, contributing and so forth. I don't know. I guess you just do the best you can and try to make them as comfortable as they can and, um...Yeah. Try to elicit as much- I think I try a lot of times to try to talk to students ahead of time about, you know, what they would like to say. I don't always have that opportunity, or get that done, but to talk about what they would wanna bring up at this meeting, but...I guess my biggest thing is it's an intimidating forum for people. Anyone, especially if you've had a- you're an 18 year old with a disability.

AD: Does your school partner with any small businesses, local businesses? For students? I mean, you listed a couple things before...

T3: Yeah. Oh, we have a lot of partnerships with mostly non-profits. Nursing homes, um...We have a longstanding relationship with [local small business name removed]

deli. For mostly unpaid work experience...Occasionally, though- I had a student that volunteered there for a semester, and they liked him and hired him, you know, and he worked for a while. But, um...yeah, I guess that's one thing that I would like to see more of is, um, not- we've got plenty of...experiences for students to volunteer, and which is really important. But, to have- especially for that population; the DCD, intellectual disabilities that we were talking about earlier- to have the relationship with more places, say , um...I don't know...Nothing's coming to my mind. I mean, I think about, like, uh, Target or something. Just some kind of a business where...students could go there like on a paid trial basis, ya know. We do some of that stuff- it's all contracted, though, through [two local disability services provider names removed], things like that. But to have a real- to have some- a partner business that would see the value in having a crew come in and do something and get to know them and then hire some, I think that would be really cool to see. We don't really have that. I don't know if anybody does, really. Maybe there's some people that have that.

AD: Do you feel like students with intellectual disabilities, are they getting more paid work over time? Say, if you look back over the course of ten, fifteen years. Does it seem like there's more placements? Is it about the same?

T3: Um...I think that a lot of it has to do with the economy, ya know. Right now, I think- work coordinators tell me- we have like seven...students that fit that category, who're employed. Partly just because it's loosened up just in terms of entry level work that's needed, um...So, I think- I think- yeah. I mean, in my experience I think yes. I think part of it is- we just kind of have evolved, and keep evolving, and keep getting better at what we're doing now. We have a school van now for the first time in my twenty years. Because, the new special ed director thought it would be a good idea. So, how that's helped up is we used to have student who would- maybe they're gonna be hired by, ya know, a Walgreen's- but, they have to go to [neighboring town name removed] for the orientation, and there's no way to get 'em there. Now we can, or, you know, so, this kind of opens things up a little bit, and um...So I guess what I'm saying is we've evolved to the point where I think we're better at what we do, and we're also better at trying to, um...foster this desire to work, which, sadly, is just not always...Ya know, again, it's partly the...the families, and there's not maybe the- perhaps no one in the family works. It's difficult to- and the students have everything they need, and they're functioning a little bit lower, so they're really not recognizing the benefit of work, and...that's a hard barrier to overcome. I think we get better at it, you know, through time and trial and error and things like that.

AD: So, some growth things you listed were: keep evolving, get access to more resources like the van for example, do more to foster a desire to work, get family buy-in. Is there anything else you think would help more people with disabilities get jobs leaving program? Anything else that would make a huge impact on it that you can think of?

T3: Uh...Well, I think that- I think if, um...[sigh]. If benefits were different. If, you know, let's just pick a...let's say you can make \$25,000 a year working part time before it had any impact on your benefits. To me...you know, have this pretty high ceiling...I think, over time, people would say, 'yeah, you're getting a little benefit,' but really- to really make, you know, to work part of it- you know, to me, it has to be system change. It's so...it's so convoluted and complex, this formula. To me, when I look at it, you know...You can make ninety dollars a month, or whatever it is, and then every dollar you make, two dollars you make, you get one dollar back or something. I mean, it's convoluted for me and I have a master's degree. I mean, and it changes over time. So, to me, to make it the incentive to be higher, I think that it would just grow- to me, it would just grow and more people would want work. That's probably my biggest thing that comes to my mind is the benefits and the...you know. If there's more incentive to work competitively, they're gonna wanna work competitively more.

AD: Yeah, as you're saying that, that just sounds like a gigantic hurdle to me, if I put myself in the shoes of a student.

T3: Yeah.

AD: Um, just a couple quick last few questions. Any advice you would give to a teacher who is new to the field of transition services? Just broadly? [chuckling] In terms of how to better help people find work?

T3: Uh huh. Yeah...well, I mean...How to find work? Or, you mean for, um..oh, for students you mean?

AD: Yeah, I'm sorry. For them to best help students find work, apart from the things we've already mentioned.

T3: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean that- I'm always- whenever we hire anybody for here I'm looking for team players, ya know. It's really part of a team. It's not like- some people might go into education and it's like, 'this is my classroom, this is how I, you know, want it,' and um...I think that's critical to work as a team...as much as possible. In high school it's a little different. But, there's work coordinators in [city name removed] and there's counselors and social workers and everything else. To try to, um...yeah. Team work. Yeah. What else? Um...I just think that the more, uh, kind of thinking outside the box and networking and...A lot of our opportunities have come through...through connections that staff have had over the years, and...relationships are always super key. Um...Yeah, and I guess, uh....one thing, too that I have to keep- I keep trying to educate the students- and, I need, too, to keep learning more about what's out there, what's the growing occupations. I take them through the newspaper a lot and try get them thinking, you know like, okay...I was using a video store as an example. Is that a good career, to go buy my own video store now? Now, that example is being dated, but, you know, to look ahead and then try to think about what jobs are growing. And...that is also

another one. The regular 18 year old might not really know much about the economy and the changes, let alone a student with a disability, so for the teachers coming in to be kind of...trying to increase their knowledge, too, of what the trends are, what the- and then to match the skills that students have. That's another thing, too. To try to look and identify, you know, vocational job skill that- you know, like I said, bilingual, just being on time, being very reliable. Students aren't, like, getting to this transition point going, 'hire me! I'm reliable! I'll be there every day. I have the attendance record to prove it. Look, here it is: I got an attendance award," ya know. Stuff like that, you know. If I could...write a book, that would be, like, chapter one or two, you know. To just really try to help these students...learn what really skills are marketable and- cause they don't know. They just don't know, and a lot of times their parents don't know. A lot of times their parents aren't working. They don't know.

AD: Excellent. Was there anything else you felt that you wanted to state on the record for people to learn more about transition programs or what help is needed? Anything else we missed here?

T3: Yeah...um...It'll probably come to me later, you know! [laughing] I think, that's my soapbox stuff. I think I got most of it out there. [chuckling]

AD: No, this has been really good. I think we'll wrap up there then.

#### **Transcribed Interview 4- Urban Male Student**

2-9-16

AD= Anthony Dosen, Interviewer

S1= Student, Interviewee

AD: So my first question is just, what is a transition program to you? What do you see this as?

S1: Um, an opportunity that I can take that will help me just to transition from maybe- well, it's transition- go from, maybe, just regular high school. Just going from a kid to an adult, basically. Um, getting those skills and learning opportunities that I may have- may not- know just going on my own, I guess.

AD: How did you end up here? Is there a process that started when you were younger, or?

S1: Um...no...well, I was...I remember being pulled out every once in a while from class just for, like, kind of special education, or whatever purposes. Um...um, I was always usually in general ed, but my- so I always had some services in place through my schooling. And, about my...senior year, or toward my end of my junior year, early senior year, we started talking about...my...me going to college. What the next step is for me. Even talking about doing, like, uh...vocational work, like, post-secondary kind of

thing. Um, and [current transition program name removed] came up, and it being an opportunity. I could either take my diploma and run with it or do this and kind of have some assistance and...yeah, you know, with getting along, so...I picked this.

AD: My specific interest is in what people are learning about to find their jobs- I hate to say, like, dream job- but, you know, a job that you actually are interested in working in, and something that's gonna last. So, thinking of that, what are some things that you've learned or done in this program that relate to finding a job, or keeping a job?

S1: Um...there is- usually, I did do the PAYS lab, which is Practical Assessment something [laughing]. I can't remember the exact name. You can clarify that later. Um...and that- there's usually just little workshops that you do that, that...customer service, assembly, processing, production, um...computer, construction. So, just different career, like, related workshops that kind of help you figure out, like, 'oh, what do I like?' you know, um, which helped a lot. I've noticed I'd do, like, computer-related stuff. More computer and hands-on um...kind of construction kind of stuff and computer stuff.

AD: You found that that's the stuff that you like to do the most?

S1: Yeah, kind of, yeah...um...which kind led me- um, right now I'm kinda looking into...CNC machinist, which is...

AD: Okay. They use, like, software to design?

S1: Yeah, software to design. You program it, but you program it into the machine and it'll cut it out of, like, metal, or whatever, sheets, so...

AD: Cool. So, those assessments really helped you kind of figure out the key area to focus on?

S1: Yeah, yeah.

AD: Do you have like a- so are you able to go to jobs like that now and, like, job shadow or anything like that?

S1: Um, I haven't been able to do it yet, but tomorrow I've got an appointment with an instructor down at [local community college name removed] to talk to him. Kind of get his...uh...input. So...and maybe possibly shadow some classes in the future and go from there, so...

AD: What's a typical school day like here?

S1: Um...For me, um, just kind of getting up in the morning. I come here, I grab breakfast and everything. Like, we sit down usually, and there's usually announcements

regarding like, oh, job opportunities that may be going around, or job sites, etc. Um, announcements, anything related to career or job things. Um...then, we'll usually break up into different classrooms, and I'll usually- um, depending on what the day is... transition, I'll have, like, a few classes. Like, this morning I would have graduation seminar and then I just kind of...goes into are you ready to [laughing]...go on. Um...and then I'll have, like, usually the classes, like, around-basically around- based on that kind of thing in the morning. And, then lunch. And then, at noon, I will head over to, um...the middle school, which is they have a CAD program which I'm taking right now. So...

AD: Computer-aided design?

S1: Yep. So, that's what I'm doing now. That's what my day looks like, so...um...Friday's, usually, um...I mean, I'll still have that, but, usually, typically, the morning will be a bit different. Sometimes there'll be like a guest speaker, a lot. Um...or something planned in the morning, and then the afternoon is a tour that's organized. And, it ranges from anywhere from, like, a recreational kind of thing...um, having to do- because of independence and whatnot- with that. Important stuff goes, but also recreation, so...So, there's usually tours usually in the afternoon. Um...I would go on that usually, but since I started the CAD I would not be doing that.

AD: So, looking at job-seeking skills. So, you know the traditional stuff; it's just, like, fill out an application, do a resume, all that, you know. How to find where jobs are posted and stuff, going out to meet...what kind of things like that are you learning, if any?

S1: Um...I've taken- there is...usually there's time, like, where they can go to the computer lab, or a lot of times all I'll have scheduled is portfolio. And, so, usually that's the opportunity I take to kind of update my resume, and they'll help you with that. Or, kind of looking online. Finding what kind of jobs are. What there are- what opportunities there are. And just kind of filling out applications. Sometimes there's usually, like, a practice application that, a, a lot of times, at the beginning of the year a teacher will have you- like, I know [teacher name removed] had me do that at one point and it's...it's nice, because once you get a practice application, then all your information is on there and pretty much you can carry most of that over to an actual application, and just add, you know, whatever extra you need to. So, um...

AD: So, you have some time to work on it by yourself, and also with assistance from people?

S1: Yep. There's usually a teacher around. Well, there is a teacher around, usually in the portfolio, that will kind of sit down and say, 'hey, I need to know what I need for this.' Especially, a lot of times with applications they have those, uh...what is it? Those tests, or those questions?

AD: Oh yeah, the personality tests?

S1: Yeah. The ones that...

AD: I'll keep my bias out of this, but yeah. Those can be a little fishy sometimes, I feel. But, it's something we have to do, though, right?

S1: Um hm. You gotta do it. They want to make sure that you're...level headed for the job, I s'pose. [laughing].

AD: Right, right. Yeah, some of them are better than others. Um...when are you- so, you're done this year? I can't remember exactly how [program teacher name removed] outlined it for me, but...

S1: Um, I'm done this year because I'm aging out. Both aging out and I'm kinda getting to the point where I feel like I'm ready as well...

AD: Okay. Which was my next question; is do you feel ready to go out to find a job?

S1: Yeah. I'm currently employed right now at [fast food job location name removed]. Um...so that's been going...okay. But, uh...I'm in the process of looking for another job. Um, however, um...yeah. You can...you can be here from a year to three years. Typically, if you want to- if you feel like you're ready to go, you got a job, and you know what you want to do and you got plans, and you're comfortable...you're comfortable with where you're at, and they're comfortable with where you're at, they'll let you go the first year. Um, or you can go to two years, and if you feel comfortable, you can leave then. So, it's up to three years. It kind of usually just depends upon...um...if you're ready really. Um...however, if you're, like, in my case- I started here late. So, I was 21, so I can't, uh...

AD: That's the cut off age, right?

S1: Um, it is. And, depending, like, if, because I turned 21 in January, so...um, there's like a certain point. Like, if I turned 21 in, say, June or July, then I could come back next year. But, because I turned- there's a specific time frame that...is allowed, so...um...

AD: Are you still working with an IEP- is there an IEP team? Or, is that before?

S1: Um, I still haven't- yeah, the IEP. Um...that's usually with, like, [teacher name removed] and a few other teachers, maybe.

AD: Do you meet with them every now and then? How does that work?

S1: That usually is...there's usually two of them a year. Kind of toward the beginning and maybe in the middle. Just to kinda...see what- where you- if you've met your goals. Or what...what we wanted you to do then, and then see how- you know- if you've met those

goals and what other things that we've noticed that might be good for me. Kind of stuff like that.

AD: Do you feel like in those meeting, or with that team, do you have your say and your input into what you want to do, and what kind of jobs you would like to do?

S1: Yeah. They usually ask me, 'does that sound interesting to you? Do you...you know, um...' It's never too much pressure.

AD: You don't feel like people are trying to push you in a certain direction?

S1: No. And then a lot of time, like, [teacher name removed] will say, you know, if you have a little bit of a...a issue with it...so, he'll make sure, he'll ask me, like, if you have any concerns or you don't feel comfortable now, you can bring it up later on. Um, so, that ways it's kind of cumbersome when there's, like, a room full of eight people and I'm just kind of put on the spot, like. [laughing] Um...so, there's basically that. Um, so, no. I always feel like I have a say in it, and it's kind of- it's very helpful. I know a lot of times if you start colleges, they'll...with a lot of the- the, uh...assistance office, or what do you call that? Well, they usually have, like, people with disabilities, or whatever...

AD: Vocational Rehab?

S1: Yeah, Vocational Rehab. And, so, ya know, if you talk to them, a lot of times they'll go off the basis of what you had set up for your IEP to make sure that..and then they decide if it's, you know, legit.

AD: Do you already have a Voc Rehab worker that's gonna help you? Or, does that come, like, right at the end?

S1: I do have a Voc Rehab worker. So, she's, um- I should contact her- but, um...that's through Vocational Rehabilitation Services, is the actual name, which is pretty straightforward. [laughing] Yeah, no, and they're- the person that I'm with and...They're designed- their purpose is to kind of keep going until you have a job. They'll help you through college and make sure you're meeting the requirements you need, etc. And, is there anything that you need with assistance. Any help you need. And, so, I'd go down to the office if I need anything. And, so that's just- it's designed to kind of help you through if you're getting- going through college, or whatever. They help you through that. And then once you have that first job outside, um, in your career choice, they'll usually help you get a job. And then they'll usually leave you alone, so. Um...if for some reason you lose that job, or decide that job, they'll help you...you can go back and say, 'hey, you know, I'm gonna need again,' um, and they'll help you...find something else and find what fits best for you again, so.

AD: Great. So, do you feel like you'll be supported then, as needed?

S1: Yeah, I feel.

AD: You're secure in that?

S1: Um hm, um hm.

AD: I have a bunch of related questions, so I'll just kinda mesh it into one, which is, I guess, what I'm trying to find out is, do you- what is your dream job, maybe, and then do you feel like you'll be able to get to that with the skills that you're learning in school, I guess?

S1: Yeah, um...Like I said, I was looking into that, uh...CNC machinist, um...and, that might be something- something in that basic technical or design field. Um, I feel like I wanna- something I wanna pursue. Um, I do like being hands-on and, uh, working with stuff like that. Being able to be a bit creative in my work. So, I suppose design is...Something in design, I guess, would be ideal. Either technical- I suppose technical design would be the key, but CNC I think would be.

AD: Have you been able to do, like, any mentoring or internship or actually, like, going to a job where people are doing this stuff and meeting with them?

S1: Um, not yet, but, as I said earlier, I got that thing tomorrow with the instructor. And, so, I'll be able to kinda look into it and see if it is something that might be ideal for me. And, if I really want to do it. Um...I have watched a few videos here and there about it, and it does look really interesting, kind of fun to do.

AD: Sure. Um...what does the word career mean to you? Kind of a random question, it seems like, but, you know, like job versus career. You know what I mean; like is there a difference?

S1: Yeah, I mean...where the job lies, that's something that you use to either get by or just...get experience. Whereas, a career is something that you wanted to do, and you chose to do. Um, something that is....something that's an ideal job that you get money. You know, the money is the important thing, you know. [chuckling] Something that you enjoy. Something that you know will support you and support others if need be. And, you enjoy it. You don't have that dread of, "ugh, I gotta go in the..." you know. Like, I have to go into work tomorrow, McDonald's. I'm like, 'I don't wanna go,' you know? Especially when the manager keeps mucking everything up, the schedule and everything. [both laughing] Anyway, um, so I guess it's just an ideal path that, ya know, you make what you need to make and...where you're not struggling, I guess, is what it is to me, I suppose.

AD: Okay. Well, just a few more questions. Do you feel like- is there anything more that you would need, or want, to get to, like, a dream job state? From your school, or from the people that support you? Like, for an example, like internships or something?

S1: I suppose maybe just help trying to figure out finding any internships or any shadowing, if possible. I suppose that would be nice. Um...I'm sure that will- that's always an opportunity. Whenever I feel like I want to try something, I just to [teacher name removed], and he says, 'oh, well, we can try and do our best to figure that out.' So, there is always that...comfort of know that I'd be able to...figure something out, or do something close to it.

AD: So, it sounds pretty flexible here. Like, you could talk to the teachers and the people that are working here and try to find a way. It's not like there's just one curriculum and it's 'here, this is what we're gonna do, and this is it.'

S1: Yeah, it's structured around you. It's designed to kinda...figure out what's best for you, your individual needs.

AD: Cool. So last two questions. I just thought of this. Um...what advice would you give to a new transition student starting, say, maybe at, like, a different that's not as great? What would you tell them, to get the most out of their experience?

S1: Um...find out what is offered, I guess, and...see what, you know- what can the teachers do for you. And what can you do for yourself, really. Self-advocate is a lot. If you feel like there could be improvements, ya know, say 'I think there could be improvements in here'. And, maybe figure out what you need to do to do that, but...Don't be nervous. Don't be afraid to ask questions...And, uh...always ask if there's other opportunities. Just take advantage of what you've got, I guess, pretty much.

AD: Do you feel like sometimes students don't take as much advantage as they can of the program?

S1: I do see that. I see kids that are just impatient, that maybe just their- they think they're ready, and they just wanna go, go for it. And, they feel maybe they were talked into, or forced into, coming here, um...which some are. There are students that came here because of...they were having too much- having issue with credits in high school and they didn't pass high school, so they came here as an option, alternate option.

AD: Okay. I guess that makes sense, yeah. It's just, some people are gonna be here because they really want to work through finding work and building a career, and stuff. Just like at any school

S1: Um hm. So, they feel like, 'I don't wanna be here.' So...but, uh...Yeah, I see that a lot, and it sucks, because, ya know, I think they could...I mean, they may very well do

better on their own. I don't know. But, they could end up just...leaving, and not doing diddly squat! [laughing]. Ya know?

AD: Yeah, I saw that from time to time as a job coach. Sometimes people would just quit the program. 'Hey, ya know, enough, I don't need this help. I'm gonna figure this out.'

S1: Yeah, especially when you get older. The older you get, the harder it is to listen to someone telling you stuff, 'cause you feel like you're an adult and...

AD: Um hm. But, it sounds like here they don't necessarily really...tell you stuff, but they're...guiding you? Trying to?

S1: Yeah. They'll guide you. And they'll let you know any opportunities that may come up here and there, so...

AD: So, you don't feel pressured? Like, '[student name removed]', do this! Do that.'

S1: No. I never felt pressure.

AD: Okay. Last question then is, what advice would you give to a, say, like a new teacher entering a transition program who has never really dealt with...Well, I mean, they have to have credentials, right, but what would you say? From your perspective, like, how can they best help students?

S1: Just kind of ask the students questions. Ask what the student wants. Um...don't be afraid to do experimenting yourself. It's a very- I think it's a good- it is a good opportunity, um...with to experiment with curriculum. If you feel like, maybe let's try this transitional-related thing...um, ya know...go for it. Just try not to do it a whole lot. [chuckling] Um...Be supportive. Don't pressure. It's not- you're not...if you're coming from somewhere like the environment of high school, where, you know, there's pressure to make sure they get their tests or get their assignments done. It's not like that, ya know. They have all the time in the world, ya know. Relax, but don't relax, I guess, is the key. Um...be willing to be flexible, too, ya know. Flexible and supportive. It's a learning experience, I guess.

AD: Was there anything else you wanted to say?

S1: Um...Other than I do enjoy the program? Um...I did honestly, last year- I will mention this- I did struggle a lot last year coming here. I didn't- I was absent. I ended up actually getting dropped the rest of the year. Um, but, uh...this last year I kinda- or, the summer, really. Some stuff happened to me, and I just kinda said, ya know, I need to get my stuff together and I'm gonna go back, and I'm gonna...hit it hard, so...

AD: So, without prying too deep, when you were struggling last year was it about the school itself? Or was it kind of external?

S1: It had some external stuff. I was dealing with stuff with my mom and sister, so...

AD: So, it wasn't that you, like, hated the program and wanted to quit?

S1: No, it was just kind of stuff that was holding me back a bit. And, uh...situation's changed. I moved. I moved somewhere else, and uh...came back, and I'm happy and I feel like I'm ready to go, so...I've got a few months left, and it's a bit scary. A little bit nerveing, but, ya know...That's what life is. You gotta take it to- take it as it goes, I suppose. So...that's about it.

AD: Alright man, thank you so much! I really appreciate it.

S1: Yep, for sure!

### **Transcribed Interview 5- Urban Female Student**

2-10-16

AD= Anthony Dosen, Interviewer

S2= Student, Interviewee

AD: I guess I'll just start with a really broad question: what, in your mind, is a transition program, if you had to explain it to someone who had no clue?

S2: Well...how I'd probably explain it is, a program... [laughing] a program that helps you get from high school to college or the workforce, or wherever you want to go or feel like you need to be going. Cause, a lot of people don't have the skills or information necessary to actually get- just jump right out of college into these, like, completely different places. High school, in a lot of ways, does not prepare you for any of this stuff. So.

AD: Are you currently working, just out of curiosity?

S2: I have. No. I was, but that was, like, a temporary thing through [local vocational services provider name removed], and I only had, like, a...part-time job, yeah.

AD: Okay. Have you, in the past, worked in a regular community-based job?

S2: Um-um. No. I've done a lot of volunteer stuff, though.

AD: Okay. Before I forget to ask, how old are you and where are you in the program?

S2: Oh, I'm 18 and this is my first year. And, I was initially looking to be in here one year, but things have changed and I may be here next year.

AD: Okay, okay. Um...so what are some of things that you've done, thus far, at this program about job searching?

S2: Well, thus far, I've really just been building my resume. Because, when I first came here, all I had on my resume was the after-school group that I did in high school. But, since then, I've done volunteer work at the coffee cart in the administrative building that we have, and I'm still there right now.

AD: Just right over here?

S2: Yeah. And, I've done [local vocational services provider name removed], which is like a 12 day temp job. That was an actual paid thing, and it was really nice. I've volunteered at the local courthouse for a couple of months as a, like, office assistant. And...I think that might be all, but I could be forgetting something. I've just done a lot of building my resume and, so that it looks- you know, gaining the skills necessary to actually join the workforce when I'm done with college

AD: So, have you learned any things about yourself from doing those things that you're very interested in for, like, a dream job, I guess, for lack of a better way of putting it?

S2: I mostly learned what I already knew about myself, because I already knew that I wanted to do mostly office work or internal jobs, if I could, because I'm not very good with people in a lot of ways. But, I am very good with computers and filing and typing and stuff.

AD: Okay, excellent. Just backing up a little bit, what are some of the most important job-seeking skills you have learned?

S2: Hm...punctuality is a really big thing. And, knowing how to dress for your environment or your interview is also really, really important and has helped me in a lot of ways. And, just like being really personable and positive and putting yourself out there, which I have had trouble doing with up until this year when I really just kind of exploded.

AD: Hm. And, by that, you mean by doing all those different things that you did, like the different temp jobs and skills, and stuff?

S2: Yeah. Yeah, it's been a huge boost to my confidence and my abilities and it's just...The program's been really good in that regard.

AD: Excellent. Um...so what's a typical school day like for you right now, in general?

S2: Well, it kinda changes per day, which is weird from high school. [laughing] But, like, most days I do not get up until like 7:00 or 8:00, and then I'm here by either 9:30 or 10:30 depending on if I have a late class or not. And, I'm usually- I usually leave by 2:00, or- by 2:00, yeah. At the latest. So.

AD: So, when you're here at school- and I've asked some other people this so I kind of have a sense of it- but, what kind of technology are you using for learning about jobs?

S2: Oh, the iPads mostly. iPads, or the school laptops, which...school tech. [chuckling]

AD: Right. Is there software on there that is helpful that you're using, or?

S2: Um...well, in my college and career reading class we do have a note- like, a note card app that is really useful. But, other than that, aside from the internet...I- I don't know...

AD: Now, were in a room right now- just for the sake of the recording- and, there's a bunch of stuff in bags [books, cords, what appears to be small technology devices in individual plastic bags]. I never asked anybody else about this. Is this stuff that you are all using, or is this just, who knows what this is?

S2: I have no idea what that is. I forget this is even a room, honestly. It's, like, behind the billboards. [laughing] It's just like, oh...

AD: Yeah, I'm just looking at computer disks in these, like, plastic bag things, so I was just curious if that was something you were using.

S2: Yeah. I would assume that might be for the...It looks like it might be for kids who are taking more reading classes or something. Because, there might be, like, at the library is where they have, you know, the audio books and stuff. But, I don't know.

AD: So it's nothing you are using in your labs?

S2: No.

AD: Um, let's see...Who is the most helpful here- and you don't have to say a specific person, I guess- but, like, how- what is most helpful for you here in terms of...And you mentioned some of the more realistic experience you had that helped kind of get you out there. What else is really helpful to you in terms of thinking about finding a job?

S2: Probably...well...I do have this career seminar class that I take that is supposed to be helping me think about the kind of jobs I want, or the kind of skills I'll need for those jobs, but I kind of already know that, so it's mostly a lot of learning about the soft skills needed in a job....And that's pretty interesting, but the class that I find most, like,

personally helpful is the college readiness course, because that's my next step after finishing this program.

AD: Going to college?

S2: Um-hm.

AD: Okay, excellent. And, I keep forgetting about that- that not everyone is here just to find a job. Obviously, a lot of people are trying to college.

S2: Like, a job would be nice, but I would prefer it to just be a summer job so that I can start college in some kind of spring or fall semester.

AD: Sure. Excellent. Are you working with an IEP team?

S2: Um...I think so, but we haven't had a meeting yet this year.

AD: Okay. Yeah, that's kind of what I'm hearing from people who are in their first year. But you did in the past?

S2: Yeah, I had an IEP meeting before I left my high school and...I'm used to it being, like, every year, or every couple of years, just because things change.

AD: Do you feel like those meetings are helpful to you?

S2: Usually, yes, because that's when my- I can see how my goals have changed and I can adjust what needs to be adjusted. 'Cause it's really important that, if I do go to college in next year or the year after, that my IEP reflects what I'm gonna need in college. So that they can make the appropriate accommodations with the disabilities department, and...

AD: Um hm. So, when you go to those meetings, do you feel like you have your say and people are hearing you, the goals that you want?

S2: Yes, especially since my mom stopped coming to them and people actually have to talk to me. [laughing]

AD: Okay. Gotcha. That's good. Um...

S2: And, it's like they can't just sit around a table talking about me while I'm there, and it's not somebody else who they can talk to about me. That would be rude. [chuckling]

AD: Yeah, one thing I've seen- just as an aside- when I'm doing the research, I see that the IEP meetings tend to be a...problem across the country, where they're- not so much here- but they're really disorganized and things like that.

S2: Yeah. Well, mostly just because I myself can be a very...just pushy person. [laughing] I can insert myself into the conversation if I feel like I'm being left out. I know a lot of kids don't have that skill.

AD: Okay. So, yeah, that's a good point, right? Not everyone is gonna necessarily- not stand up for themselves, but say what's on their mind?

S2: Yeah, cause it's like what they were talking about out there about self-advocacy. Like, they emphasize that so heavily, and I know it's because not all kids can, ya know- are used to being not heard, so they have to hear themselves. Or, you know, try to make themselves heard.

AD: So, looking forward a few years, or sooner...um...what are you most looking forward to in your job or college after this?

S2: Um, well...In college, I'm mostly looking forward to getting a bachelor's degree in creative writing with an associate's at [local community college name removed] cause they're cheaper than [another local community college name removed] even though they don't have a writing program. And, I'm hoping to have...Well, for job stuff, I'm mostly looking for a quiet office environment that doesn't drain me so much so I can go home and continue with doing my creative writing, because by then I'll have hopefully finished, or published, at least, like, five, six issues of the comic series I'm currently writing.

AD: Okay. That's excellent. Yeah, I can really relate to that cause I'm an introvert and I kind of get drained from high-pressure social situations. Um...what do you fear when it comes to, like, pursuing those goals in the future?

S2: Well...Since it's on the internet, I fear that nobody's gonna look at, or notice, my art. Mostly because, writing for comics is not really as highly regarded as the art is, like, in a lot of ways. And, plus, it's the internet! There's like hundreds, if not thousands, of...all better than my work, just being there for free, on fanfiction.net, so...

AD: Yeah, so there's a lot of competition out there? Crowded?

S2: Yeah...Eh, but mostly from the job perspective, I would be scared of having to do a high-stress job where I would not be able to, like, focus or calm down, or just, like...you know, if people didn't understand that I would- can't do certain things, especially if they yell at me about it.

AD: Right. So, do you feel like some of the stuff you're doing in the programming here is gonna help you with those- both good and bad- both the things that you're looking forward to and the things that you fear?

S2: Yeah, I think so, because, mostly, it's just been boosting my confidence enough that I don't get stressed as much. I don't freak out as badly, and I don't get as nervous, just because I have the mentality that I can do this.

AD: Okay. So, kind of like an experiential, 'I've been out there, I've-you know,'- what's the word for it? Inoculated, like when you get exposure, kind of? Yeah.

S2: Yeah.

AD: So, we talked a little bit about some of your big interests as art and comics and things like that. Are there other interests that you want to focus on in this program here...as you build towards your career and college and all that stuff?

S2: Hmm...naw. My big passion is really writing, so....I do a lot of that. Just, like, in my spare time or that kind of thing.

AD: So, would you say that kind of thing is your dream job? Like, if you had pick a dream job?

S2: My ideal dream job would possibly be a writer for DC or Marvel comics, if I could. But, that's, like, the way out there pipe dream job. [chuckling] Even better if I could noticed for my comic like Lumber Janes [comic book artist], or something, did and be able to actually publish it through an actual publisher.

AD: Okay. Yeah, that's really interesting to me. So, with stuff like that, um...are there any, like, small businesses, or business owners that are around, or people that you've networked with, or that this program has helped you to network with?

S2: No, actually, like...this program has not helped me with my overall dream of, like, trying to find comic book stuff. They are very much focused towards actual work force, like 'you can do this, you should do this,' kind of thing. It's not entirely- it's not really focused on what I could be doing or what I want. You know, like, that's why I'm focusing more on office jobs instead of writing, because I don't know how to find these things. And, I don't [transition program name removed] would have the resources to help me with that stuff.

AD: Have people talked to you about these things, though? Like, 'hey, we know that you like writing, and...'?

S2: Nooo. The most they've done is trying to point me to some of the kids in the class who can draw. But, the thing is, if I'm gonna get my art done for my comic, it's going to something a little bit more professional, that I commission probably from someone online. I don't know how to say that to them without sounding rude, though, 'cause it's like...yeah, I'm sure they're great artists, but...I have a little bit higher standards than...

AD: Right. It's not the caliber that you're looking for?

S2: Yeah.

AD: So, do you personally feel that, down the line, you'll be able to make this happen?

S2: Well, I think so. Yeah. Because, I've- well, I've shown this...I got the first issue done, and I'm working on the second one. I have to go back and polish the first issue a little more, but...And, I think it's really good. It's- the problem, though is it's really timely. Because of the nature of some of the stuff, and it's just, I have to...

AD: You mean the content of what you're- okay. So to delay it further would...

S2: Probably not work towards its advantage. Yeah. But, my mom said she would help m setup the website for it. She's really supportive of it all. And, I'm pretty pumped to actually do something with it,

AD: Okay. So, that's good. So, you mentioned, like, your mom helping you with that. So, do you feel like you have ways you could kind of piece together your own network, if needed?

S2: Oh yeah. My mom's ex-boyfriend is actually, like, wrote for Grayson on DC comics. He's an actual- he's published his own comic book series. If she could just get me in contact with him again, I'm sure I could do something.

AD: Um...so going back to the transition program real quick, what do you feel like you still need to learn here in order to kind of, like, get to a place where you can be happy in work?

S2: Well, it would be really great if somebody could actually- if they actually had the resources to help me with my study skills, because that would be my biggest problem in college. I do not really have the skills necessary to...study the amount of time they keep telling me I'm gonna have to study.

AD: Okay. Anything else you feel like you wanna learn more of, or?

S2: Independent living. I would love to learn more about the general prices of, like, utilities and how much I would need to start saving up for if I wanted to get, like, an efficiency apartment out of college and stuff.

AD: Okay. So, like practical finances and things like that?

S2: Yeah. Like, it would be great if someone could help me draw up a sort of plan for what my ideal, like, budget would be and what kind of job I would need to work towards to get that.

AD: Is there a- like, an adviser or someone here at the program- that, like, can help with those things, or they do help with those kind of things?

S2: Uh, if they do I don't know, 'cause I haven't asked. It's a little bit hard for me to actually go up to people and ask because there's so many other kids, I feel like they're problems are bigger than mine, and it's like err...

AD: Okay, I gotcha. Speaking of other people, what kind of jobs are you aware of other people having here, maybe?

S2: Well, I know other people have done stuff with- at, like- custodial stuff and stuff like cleaning up the grounds of the capitol building and...uh...well, there's the [local vocational services provider name removed] office job. And, I know that they've done, like, Goodwill and Michael's, I think. I know they stuff at, like, a local thrift store and the Salvation Army and Meals on Wheels, and...I'm not sure how much of that is actually paid, but they do a lot of, like, volunteer opportunities and stuff here, for, like, growing your resume and stuff.

AD: Sure. Um...this is a question I've been asking everyone, and it's kind of generic, but what does the word 'career' mean to you? Versus, say, a job?

S2: Career means something you plan to stay in long term. To me, career is something that you actually plan to keep doing. A job is something that, if you get fed up with it, you can turn in your two-weeks' notice and it won't, like...you won't beat yourself up over it. Plus, I just feel like a career implies- the word career implies that it pays more than a job, so.

AD: Is there anything else you wanted to say about stuff you are learning here at this program, or things that you think would be important for other people to know?

S2: Well, I know that everyone's experience here is probably very different, but, for me, it's mostly about learning about myself and less learning about the world, because...the high school I went to had a lot of, like- every year they had this class that everyone was required to take. Like, regardless of your level of, like- how you, you know- your level

of where you were at high school. And, it would be preparing you for one thing about the world. Cause, freshman focus was, like, teaching you about high school and study skills and sort of building up your resume because you actually think about- well, not building up your resume, but making you think about the career that you want. And, then, there was Frameworks, which was focusing more on colleges and post-secondary options. And, then of course there was Finale, which [laughing] was all about your senior project, actually. Which, they had us do in high school, which I'm kind of assuming is a lot like the senior projects you do in college, so. Cause it was like a community thing and a paper.

AD: Um-hm. Kind of like what I'm doing right now. This is like the end of my whole thing.

S2: Yeah.

AD: Um...just a couple more things. What advice would you give to a student? Say, another student in a different part of the country whose just starting a transition program, and they're maybe nervous, or...

S2: I would tell them to really think about their goals and what they want from the program or from their life. And, if they don't know, then...that should be what they focus on their first year. Really figuring themselves and their goals out so that they can move forward with everything. Because, for me, I couldn't do any of the- make any of the progress that I have made if I did not know what my goals were, what my passions were, what I wanted to do with it.

AD: So, for you, you have that kind of, like, end point you see; 'I want to be a writer, I want to be- I have a number of things I want to do, and I'm also growing these things right now, too.' So, you have, like, short term goals, long term goals.

S2: Yeah.

AD: Do you feel like, maybe, other students struggle with that kind of?

S2: Yeah. I would think so. I mean, I know that- I know and have been told several times by people in various programs I've been in that I had it together more than a lot of kids do.

AD: What advice would you give to a teacher? Say, like a new transition teacher, or someone who's just entering the field? And maybe they're nervous. How can they best help students find...work?

S2: Um, just talk to them! Each student is pretty different, and stuff that has worked for other students may not work for that student. Cause, in my experience, when...when I

get, like, told that I should be doing thing, or I should try things, and then they don't work, but people keep saying, 'well, it worked for other students,' I'm usually just, like, 'well, I'm not other students! I'm me!' And, I know that can get really frustrating for some people who, like, have their own way, you know, their own plan. And, if the teachers don't listen, that's a big deal. So, just listening is- would be my biggest advice to a teacher.

AD: Last question, I guess. What's the one thing in a program like this you feel would make the biggest impact for students to find, like, their dream job? I know that's kind of a big, tough question, but...[both laughing]

S2: Well, I don't know. Cause, there's kind of a big difference between dream job and a job a student could reasonably expect to make their dream job.

AD: Sure, so let's call it that, then. Yeah, it's something that- maybe it's not, you know, okay...realistically we're not gonna become a famous athlete, or something, next year, but yeah...

S2: Yeah. But like....eh....I'm not sure. {laughing}

AD: I know it's a big, weird question, but I'm always curious to- because, some people they have, 'yes, you know, if it was just this one thing, more people would work'. 'Cause, I guess, the reason why I ask that is the problem that sparked my whole study is the fact so many people across the country leave transition programs but they still don't get any job, actually. It's a high percentage unemployment rate, but again...so, that's why I'm asking. That's why I'm coming to students and trying to see what is your take on it. Like you said, it varies so much from student to student, so it's hard to pin exactly what the reasoning is.

S2: Yeah. Yeah, cause, with me, I'm pretty sure with the way my resume looks, and the way I can come off as when people meet me, that I would be able to get a job, pretty easily if I just knew where to go.

AD: Sure. Was there anything else you wanted to add that you feel like we missed in this conversation, or that you feel like people should know about transition programs?

S2: Well...I don't know... I was a little bit mixed about the idea when I first heard of it, because I was already to right into college. But, now that I've done it, I don't regret it at all. I have all these skills, and these abilities, and just the knowledge that I can do it. And, it's just kind of been a real boost to what was not a very high self-confidence level before.

AD: So, do you personally feel like maybe if you went right into college it would have been just, like, a tad...too fast?

S2: I think it would have been a little bit soul-crushing, yeah. [laughing] Cause...I would not have known where to go, or what to do, or...any of that stuff. There would have been- the good thing about this program is they help you with that kind of stuff. They'll tell you what you need to know, or what you should look for in college, or, like, be prepared for. Things that I was not entirely- did not entirely click in my brain, were gonna be issues when I went there.

AD: Right. And, so when you're done here, is there continuity where people will help you here, after you're done? Who helps you when you're done here?

S2: No. When I'm done here, I'm assuming that it's gonna be all on me to go to the disabilities department at my college and that's it. 'Cause, once you leave, they can't help you. You take your diploma, and you're just gone...

AD: If you're looking for jobs, do they connect you with a vocational worker or anything like that?

S2: Probably, yeah. I mean, I'm hoping that before I leave the program I can at least get some kind of job. But, like, cause like, right now, I'm applying for this Right Track thing where I'll be at a summer job, and if I do this program another year, I'll be able to look for something more, like, full time next year.

AD: Was there anything you wanted to mention?

S2: No. That's good.

### **Transcribed Interview 6- Urban Female Student**

2-10-16, interview held in empty classroom

AD= Anthony Dosen, Interviewer

S3= Student, Interviewee

AD: How old are you?

S3: I'm 19.

AD: In your words, what is a transition program? What does it mean to you?

S3: A transition program is a program designed to help students who aren't quite ready to step into the real world yet. So, they help us with life skills, getting a job, and being prepared for one.

AD: And, so, what are some of the things you've learned that help you specifically with being prepared for a job?

S3: Uh...we do mock interviews. And, they've helped me learn how to create a resume in the right format. And, how to dress for one.

AD: I learned a little bit from other people, but, from what I understand, everyone's day is pretty different here, correct?

S3: Yes. Some of us have longer days and some of us have shorter days.

AD: What's your typical day like?

S3: Uh, well...today's Wednesday, so I would have two- I would have career seminar and then I would have college and career reading, lunch, transition, and then I'd go home. So, it's a pretty short day for me today.

AD: So, people aren't just preparing for jobs, necessarily, but also preparing for college?

S3: Yes, we also have home living labs.

AD: Okay, excellent. So, looking at jobs...are you working right now?

S3: Uh...no, but I soon will be. I'm gonna go back to work for a local business.

AD: So you've worked before?

S3: Yes, for that business. That's it.

AD: And was that for pay? Or is it more like with the school?

S3: It was for pay. I, um...They helped me find this job, but I took the next step and I applied and actually got it. Do I kind of need to explain what the job is?

AD: No, I mean, if you want to.

S3: I basically was a photographer for Santa Claus. And, we're doing the Easter bunny soon, so I'm gonna go back and work for them.

AD: Okay, excellent. That's cool. So, what are some other job-seeking skills you've learned here in the program specifically?

S3: I guess...how to look for them. Like, we have a lot of job fairs. And, they've really been pushing me to try to get a job at [local mall name removed] which is too far away

for me, so I'm trying to look for my own. I'm hoping that after I'm done working for [photography job company name removed] I can either work for, um [local costume company name removed] or go back to [another local mall name removed] and work there.

AD: Okay. So it sounds like there's a theme to some of the jobs you like and have been looking for. Did you already know that about yourself, or did you find that out through, like, things you did here?

S3: Well...my main goal for the career I want to go into is, um, special effects makeup. So, basically, working in, like, the cosmetology parts of things. That's what I'm trying to do.

AD: Cool. Is that something you were always interested in? Or did you find out over time as you kind of went through school, and stuff like that?

S3: Well, I kind of figured out that I liked makeup when I was, like, 16.

AD: Okay. Do people here- teachers and advisers- so, are they aware that's your key interest for you?

S3: Yeah.

AD: Are they helping connect you with people who maybe have businesses in that area?

S3: They've talked about it, but we haven't really gone that far with it. Cause, we have been talking about me trying to get a volunteer job at [local large theater/playhouse name removed], but we haven't really, like, discussed it past that, so.

AD: Are there, like, small businesses or places you know that do this kind of work that you're gonna try to maybe meet with the business owners to get an internship? Does that make sense?

S3: Yeah, like, [local costume name removed] becomes a Halloween store, and I was hoping to find some connections. Last summer, I went up to a local campground and I did a volunteer makeup job for a haunted house. And I got her as a reference, so that was good.

AD: Okay, excellent. Um...so do you feel ready, like- well, let me back up...Are you done with your program after this year?

S3: Um...I've thought long and hard about this, and I'm actually thinking about coming back for a second year. Just to try to be a little bit more organized.

AD: Do you feel like that you're getting ready to- that you would be ready, when the time comes- to go find a job?

S3: I think I have the necessary skills to find and keep a job.

AD: Do you feel confident that you could find a job in the area that you really care about?

S3: I might need a little help on that, just because special effects and cosmetology is a hard...um, career to get into.

AD: Okay. Whose gonna help you if you needed the help? Say, when you're done with the program. Who helps you? Is it Voc Rehab?

S3: Um, I don't know what that is. But, if I was done with the program, I don't really think there would be anyone out there who would be able to help me in the way that this program I'm in now can.

AD: Okay. I want to take a look real quick at the- so, are you working as a part of an IEP team? Are you aware of what that is? Do you meet with a team, say like some of your teachers, and like a case manager, or a worker, to discuss your goals?

S3: We haven't done any IEP meetings since I've been here. But, we're probably gonna have one before I leave.

AD: Okay. Um...I guess it's hard to say, but do you feel like you would have your say in that? Like, do they listen to like, 'hey, here's what my goals are. Here's what I want to do'?

S3: Well...in the past when I would have IEP meetings at my high school, uh, I wouldn't really get to talk that much. I was kind of just the person who would sit there and just listen to everything. So, I'm hoping when I have a IEP meeting here that I'll actually get to talk and tell people, 'this is what I want to do. How can we make this work?'

AD: Okay. Sure. Let's see...so, who is most helpful to you here in this program?

S3: Uh...[individual's full named removed]

AD: And how is it that she helps you the most?

S3: She is my case manager and it's actually really easy to talk to her. And, she'll be like, 'okay, this is what you have to do,' and like, she'll, like, show me other people that could help me.

AD: Um...technology. Are their technological things that you can use here at the school to help you for job searching?

S3: Well, we have the computer lab, but we also have our iPads. They're not working right now, but, um, they have, like, internet and we can use those to search further if we're at home and we don't have a computer.

AD: Okay. Oh, so you can take it home?

S3: Yes.

AD: Okay, that's cool. So everyone has their own that's kind of, like, checked out to you?

S3: Yes.

AD: Okay. And you can use it for the whole year, basically, is what the plan is?

S3: Um-hm!

AD: That's cool. Is there other software on there, or anything that you would use for job searching or job skills or anything like that?

S3: Um...not that I know of. We haven't really like- the iPads have had a lot of malfunctioning lately, so we haven't really had a chance to see what kind of apps there are out there that could help us.

AD: So computers. I heard that there's laptops here, too. Is that correct?

S3: Yep.

AD: Are there any particular programs or things that you're using here that you find helpful beyond just internet?

S3: I mean, I know that the newspaper has, like, a lot of job opportunities in there. I don't really read the newspaper to be honest.

AD: That's okay. Yeah, less and less people are these days, so. Um...so we talked about your dream job already. What do you feel like you still need to learn to get to that point where you could kind of start to work a job that you really, really enjoy and care about?

S3: Um....stability. Like, I have a lot of learning to do before. So, I would have to- I am hoping this current program can help me find a program that could help me learn a few more things about makeup, because there is still a lot I don't know for everything I do.

AD: Sure. Would you be interested in doing an internship with someone who is really established in the field?

S3: Yep. Yeah, I found someone who lives in [state name removed] and I asked them, but they never responded back, so...[chuckling]. Try again.

AD: Sure. Let's see...what does the word career- and I know this is kind of a cheesy question, but- career versus job. You know what I mean? What does the word career mean to you?

S3: Uh, career is, like, a field. A job is just, like, minor, but a career is like your- like, a path- like, there are many different kinds of careers and that's, like, long-lasting.

AD: So, do you feel like what you're learning here is helping you towards a career path versus a job path?

S3: Uh, a little bit. Right now they really want us to try to get as much job experience as we can. But, I'm a little bit more picky and want to try find, like, small, entry-level jobs that would help me get experience towards my career.

AD: Okay. And do you feel like this kind of program is flexible enough that you are able to be picky and make it- shape it into what you want it to be?

S3: Sometimes. Yeah. In the beginning it was- we were constantly, like, butting heads about what was gonna go down here, but then I...it kind of got a bit more flexible. And, then, I was able to go out and actually find a job. And, then I started working.

AD: And when you say "butting heads", who was butting heads? Was it you and your advisers or teachers, or?

S3: Yeah. Cause before I started actually working, I was a volunteer at [local thrift store name removed], and I did not like it at all. But, they made me stay in it for about a month...and, the only way that I was gonna be able to get out was if I could actually find a job. So, I kind of took charge and said, like, "This is how this is gonna work. This is what I'm gonna do." 'Cause, I didn't like that job and I wanted to do something that was actually going to be useful, so I went out and I actually found a job two weeks later, so.

AD: That's great. So, what was their, you know...purpose for wanting you to stay at that job?

S3: Um...because they wanted me to get retail experience, and if I would have just quit a week into it, that wouldn't have meant anything. So, they wanted me to just stay in it and try it and see- maybe there's something there that I would like. I didn't. It was dust.

AD: Okay. So, you know enough about yourself to kind of say, 'hey, hold on now. I want to go in a different direction.'

S3: Yep.

AD: Okay. Let's see...what kind of jobs do some of your peers here have that you're aware of?

S3: Well, um...one of my friends, she works- well, it's not, like, a pay job- but, she is a computer, um...a data entry person, I guess. Um, my boyfriend, he works at McDonald's. But, he's finding a new job. And, my friend- my other friend- he's a photographer.

AD: So people have some interesting- like, a different mix of jobs?

S3: Yes.

AD: Okay, that's good. Um...Just a few more questions. What advice would you give to someone, say in a different state, who's in your shoes and is just about to start a transition program, and maybe they don't quite know what next steps to take?

S3: Um, well, I would tell them that- although this is gonna be new for you- just trust the teachers because they do know what they're talking about. Don't give up so easily and let them help you, but...be kind of independent. Cause, like, how are they gonna help you if you don't know what you want first.

AD: Um hm. And, then, what advice would you give to a teacher at a program like this, in a different world?

S3: Well, I guess I would tell the teacher that...you need to listen to the student because...everybody learns different, everybody needs something different. We're not all the same. We all learn different. And...yeah, so, listening, but it has to be listening on both ends.

AD: And then what do you think would be, like, the number one most important thing that would help you, or help any student, get to their dream career in a program like this?

S3: Well...you have to start at the bottom. There are no short cuts to life, so you have to take it one step at a time. And...work hard. And do what's necessary to get there.

AD: Thank you. Unless you had anything else you wanted to add on the record?

S3: No, I think I'm good.

AD: Okay, any questions?

S3: No, not that I can think of at the moment.

AD: Okay. Alright, thanks!

### **Transcribed Interview 7- Urban Male Student**

2-9-16, interview held in empty classroom

AD= Anthony Dosen, Interviewer

S4= Student, Interviewee

AD: What, in your own words, is a transition program?

S4: Well...I think of it as to help, um, young adults for the world that they're ready to begin with. That, to start the new chapter of their life. And, this is a great place to help you train for that. And, to better yourself, and so you know what you're doing once you get out there.

AD: So, my particular interest is in jobs, right? How does someone find a job, how does someone keep a job. So, what kind of job skills have you learned or done in this program?

S4: Well, I had a volunteering service over at Meals on Wheels. And, it helped me be a leader. It helped me be organized. And, um...uh, it helped me be a team player. And, it worked pretty good, actually.

AD: Okay. Have you done any assessments here where they help you figure out what it is that you like or don't like about jobs?

S4: No, they haven't. They haven't done that.

AD: What is your typical school day like?

S4: Okay, well. Typical day is when I get here is, um...announcements in the morning, and then you go straight to class afterwards. But, like, on Mondays we do yoga and stuff like that. Basically, it's like different things. You go to a lab, and work on computers, and see, ya know, what job openings they have, and what it's about. And, then there's

other classes like the PAYS lab which is like, um, a simulator for, like, different jobs. And then you got, um, the portfolio class that which helps you with your, uh...job applications and, um...your resume. And how to, uh...prepare for your interview.

AD: Um hm. Have you done any actual interviews with jobs?

S4: Yes, I have. I have done an interview with a video game store.

AD: Okay. Did you do that on your own, or was that through stuff here?

S4: Uh, it was uh...kind of through here. They gave me the job application and, uh, they drove me and a couple other students out to the interview.

AD: Okay, interesting. Have you worked before? A paid job in the community?

S4: Um...no. Actually, no.

AD: And this is your last year at the transition program?

S4: Um, I have no idea.

AD: Okay, okay. Do you feel ready to go out and find a job if you had to?

S4: Yes!

AD: Okay. And you could do it on your own, or do you- is there a Voc Rehab person that's going to help you, I guess, or?

S4: Yeah. I would like some little help being out there, but yeah. I like to- I'd like to do it.

AD: Okay. What do you feel like are some of the most important skills you've learned here at the program to help you find a job?

S4: Um...basically, preparing for your job interview. What questions you want to ask and you can't ask. Um...basically, um, the general stuff of how to prepare for that job and what you're gonna need to do and research so you have what you need in order for that job.

AD: Um hm. Um...so, you're working with an IEP team, correct?

S4: I don't know.

AD: Is there some team that you meet with a couple times a year that help plan?

S4: No.

AD: Okay. Do you wish you had something like that?

S4: Yeah, I do.

AD: Okay. Do you feel like you have your say, though, in general? Who do you talk to here about what you want to do with your program?

S4: Yes, I do. I talk to either [teacher name removed] or [teacher name removed].

AD: Okay. So, you know, looking at when you do finish your program, what would be maybe like a dream job, I guess?

S4: Well, for me, because I like video games, I want to, like, work in that area. Like, uh, you know, design or, uh, test, or, um...help model, like, figures for different games, or stuff like that

AD: Okay. Do you like other areas of that? I guess, what is it about video games that you like the most?

S4: Um, basically, um...well, they had the most impact on my life. They actually helped me in different areas of my life, and I want to, like, know how to make them so I can actually help more people. And actually have people have fun with the stuff I make.

AD: Okay, cool. So, looking out at maybe finding a job in that area that you care about, do you believe that that's something that you can find work in when you're done here? And how will you go about that?

S4: Um, I feel like I could actually do it after I leave here. But, I want to go and try retail to see...how that works.

AD: Yeah, and I guess that's kind of what I'm getting at. Like, how do you get from point A to point B to find a dream job, right?

S4: Um, you have to start small and then work your way up the ladder.

AD: Um hm. Okay. And, do you feel like, um...what you're learning here is preparing you to go down that path?

S4: Yeah. Yeah I do.

AD: Is there anything else that you feel like you still need to learn?

S4: Yes, I still need to learn.

AD: What kind of things do you feel like you still would like to learn to find a good job?

S4: Um...well...how to, like, get out there and, um...basically, how to, you know, get that job. Because, it's hard out there for people. You know, newcomers and they're looking for a job and...and they're looking for that job and it's hard for people to actually get there. And I'm just trying to learn how to be that.

AD: Okay. Do you have an experience with practice jobs, or going and doing an internship, or like spending time with somebody at an actual job site?

S4: Well, um, like I said I did volunteer at Meals on Wheels. And...I worked with people, they taught me the ropes, ya know. They taught me how to do stuff, you know, how to do it. Where it goes, and so...

AD: Do they have any business owners or people come in and talk to you guys here?

S4: Um, we've had...I think one person come in here to talk to us.

AD: Do you remember where they were from?

S4: Uh...no, cause that was, like, early in the year.

AD: Okay, no problem. Do you believe that you'll be able to find a job that you're, like, happy at?

S4: Yes, I do. I do.

AD: Is what you're learning here helping you to get to that point?

S4: Basically, yeah.

AD: What does the word career mean to you, if anything? Is that different than a job?

S4: Basically it means something that you want to stick with. Something that you love. Something that you enjoy doing, basically.

AD: Sure. What kind of jobs do other people have? Are there people in this program that are working right now in paid community jobs that you're aware of?

S4: Um...yeah.

AD: Is there any that stick out to you?

S4: Um, no. Not really.

AD: Okay. What advice would you give to a new transition student? Anew student starting a program, say in maybe like a different state or something?

S4: I would day, um, you know...take it slow. Listen to what they have to say to you because what they're saying to you will help you in your future. Do what they want you to do and make sure that you know you can get yourself there.

AD: And, what advice would you give to a teacher or transition programs, maybe to help students like you better find jobs, or the skills to get a job?

S4: Um, listen to the student. Listen to what they want to do and how they wanna get there, and, um, you know, work with them, you know. Make sure you're, like, on top of it. So you should see the student soar.

AD: Is there anything else you felt like you wanted to say?

S4: No.

AD: Okay, well that's about it. Thank you so much! Nice to meet you.

S4: Nice to meet you, too! Take care.