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PROMOTING POST SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY
JENNA JOSWIAK

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BETHEL UNIVERSITY

PROMOTING POST SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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APPROVED

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Abstract

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was created to meet the needs of students with disabilities and prepare them for life after school, including employment, further education, and independent living. Even after transition services were added in 2004, students with disabilities have lower success rates in those areas than their non-disabled peers. The guiding question for this literature review was: how can special education teachers promote post school success for students who receive special education services? Literature suggested that being knowledgeable of the indicators of post school success, curricula and practices that support students, family involvement, planning and IEP writing, interagency collaboration, and an increase in teacher training in the area of transition services may lead to increased post school success for students.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The goal of educators and the public school system is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in life both during and after school. Students who receive special education services are entitled to individualized support throughout their schooling experience and the need for support often extends beyond their last year in the classroom. In acknowledgement of this continuation of needs, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 required schools to provide transition programs to address the need for support of students with disabilities as they move from the structured school setting into post-secondary life.

Success in post school life can look very different to each individual. However, common indicators of success in the United States include employment, post-secondary education, and independent living. Special education professionals strive to provide the best learning environment for student growth and progress, but post school outcomes show that students with disabilities tend to find less success than their non-disabled peers in post school life (Sprunger et al., 2018; Bakken & Obiakor, 2019).

As the field of education continues to adapt and improve, transition planning to better prepare students for post school life is an area to address and refine. In the last 50 years, the United States has gone from having no laws protecting the educational rights of individuals with disabilities to the requirement of individualized education programs (IEPs), transition services, related services providers, as well as several other protections. Yet, there is still room for growth to ensure that individuals with disabilities are given the opportunity to reach their full potential. Until students with disabilities experience post school success at a rate similar to that of their peers, the special education field must continue to improve and adapt.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The laws protecting the educational rights of individuals with disabilities have been evolving since the implementation of the first such law in 1975. The U.S. Department of Education reported that in 1975, a national law called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was signed into effect (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). That law has evolved into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The enactment of this federal law marks the beginning of the requirement that all children be offered a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Prior to 1975, schools were not required to provide support for students with disabilities. In 2004, IDEA was revised to include the requirement of providing transition services to students with disabilities.

The first stated purpose of IDEA is:

to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living,” (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

While as a nation we have come a long way in supporting students with disabilities through IDEA which ensures that students with disabilities are supported and provided FAPE, there are indicators that more is needed to ensure that students with disabilities are experiencing similar outcomes to those of their non-disabled peers. Transition services were required by law less than 20 years ago, so compared to other areas of education, special education transition services is a relatively new area. As such, research and information are needed to keep moving forward in bettering the support that is provided to students with disabilities post school.

National Gaps of Post School Success

The gap between students with disabilities and those without in the areas of “employment, postsecondary education, and independent living,” has been addressed in literature, yet little progress has been made to close the gap (Mazzotti, et. al., 2020, p. 44). Even though IDEA aligns with preparation for post school success in these areas, there continues to be a gap between the rate of post school success for young adults with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The requirement for schools to provide transition services was established in 2004, and yet nearly two decades later, the literature continues to suggest that young adults with disabilities have lower rates of enrollment in post secondary education and employment than the rates of their non-disabled peers (Sprunger et al., 2018; Bakken & Obiakor, 2019). As a society, we should be working to ensure that all individuals are given the opportunity to use their skills and better the community, as each works to achieve their full potential. When individuals are able to share their skills through employment or other avenues such as community involvement, not only does society benefit, but those individuals have their much deserved experiences of success.

Special Education in the State of Minnesota

In 2019, the Minnesota Department of Education reported that 16.3% of all public school students in the state of Minnesota were enrolled in special education. The data reported shows a steady increase in special education enrollment in Minnesota over the past 15 years (Mechler and Ferrin, 2019). As stated in a press release from the Minnesota Department of Education, 65% of students receiving special education services graduated high school in 2020, compared to 83.8% of all students in Minnesota. School districts in Minnesota spend money on special education to

meet the needs of students within the school setting; however, data also shows that statewide, students receiving special education services are less likely to graduate from high school.

High school diploma status is one predictor of post school success (Mazzotti, 2020) and the data suggests that students receiving special education services are not receiving their diplomas at a rate comparable to their non-disabled peers. The difference in graduation rates demonstrates a need for improved support for students receiving special education services, especially in the area of transition. As a state, Minnesota needs to identify strategies to better support students receiving special education services so that more of those students receive high school diplomas and move on to find post school success.

A purpose of IDEA is to better prepare students for post secondary education, employment, and independent living. The current data about the Minnesota graduation rates of students with disabilities shows that there is room for improvement in the special education services provided. These services include transition planning and providing services and instruction to support students in their transition from public school to finding success in their adult life. To determine what can be done to better support students with disabilities, educators must evaluate the current systems in place and analyze both what is working and what needs to be improved.

Defining Relevant Terminology

The following terms and definitions were derived from the U.S. Department of Education website and are relevant to the conversation of promoting post school success for students with disabilities.

- special education - specially designed instruction to meet the individual needs of a student with a disability. Special education is to be provided within public schools at no cost to families.
- Individualized Education Program (IEP) - A document that states the needs of a student with a disability and the services the school will provide to meet those needs. These documents include measurable goals and objectives for students based on their specific needs that derive from the disability.
- transition services - a personalized set of activities for a student receiving special education services that aims to improve functional and academic outcomes for the student and supports the transition from school to post school life. These services include: instruction, related services, community experiences, employment and other post school objectives; and functional living skills.
- transition age - IDEA requires that schools must begin planning transition services for students with IEPs by the time the student is 16 years of age, and can be provided through age 21 when appropriate. In this thesis, transition age refers to students receiving special education services who are between the ages of 16 and 21.

Additionally, two terms used within this thesis that deserve clarification are post secondary education and post school. In this thesis, post secondary education describes educational opportunities after the secondary school experience is completed, such as but not limited to attending a community college, trade school, or four-year college or university. Post school refers to all areas of life that are likely experienced after secondary school including post

secondary education as well as work, social activities, independent living, and recreation and leisure.

As I enter the world of teaching a special education transition program, it is my goal to provide the most effective planning and instruction to increase post school success for the students I support. I know that the students I will teach all have strengths and abilities that can make the world a better place, and I want to ensure that I help them share those strengths and abilities with the world.

Being aware that current data shows lower rates of post school success for the population of students I will soon be working with, I know that it is crucial for me to be as prepared as possible with information on how to best promote post school success for my future students. To better prepare myself for my upcoming role, I wanted to research and answer the guiding question: how can special education teachers promote post school success for students who receive special education services?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

The essential question for this study is: how can special education teachers promote post school success for students who receive special education services? When researching how to promote positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities to help close the gap between these students and their non-disabled peers, literature for this thesis was collected through searches conducted using EbscoHost, ERIC, Proquest, Academic Search Premier, Research Gate, and Sage Premier. Sources published between the years of 2000-2021 were considered and searched for using the key words “special education,” “work experience,” “transition,” “outcomes,” “disabilities,” “adulthood,” “best practice,” “success,” and “IDEA 2004.” Articles that focused on transition age, students with disabilities, and were from peer reviewed journals as well as textbooks that were cited in peer reviewed articles were selected.

This chapter will review the literature on promoting future, adulthood success for transition aged students with disabilities and closing the gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in their post-school achievements. In the majority of the articles, post school success is defined in terms of employment, post secondary education, and/or independent living. The literature reviewed has been organized into the categories of: Instructional Approaches, Family Engagement, Planning and IEPs, Interagency Collaboration, and Teacher Preparation.

Instructional Approaches

To increase the rate of post school success for students with disabilities, researchers have investigated what categories hold the greatest impact on post school success by comparing the school experiences of students who are successful after school and those who are not. These

categories have been labeled as “success predictors” by Test et al. (2009) and Mazzotti et al. (2020) and have served as a building block for instructional planning for transition services. Test et al. (2009) conducted a literature review to determine predictors of post school success and as a result, 16 predictors were identified. Later, Mazzotti et. al. (2020) assessed the existing predictors identified by Test et al., as well as discovered new predictors of postsecondary success for young adults with disabilities who are leaving high school and preparing to begin their adult lives. The success predictors and the post school outcomes they impact, as identified by Test et al. (2009) and/or Mazzotti et al. (2020) are listed below:

Table 1

Post School Predictors of Success

Predictor of Success	Identified by	Outcome Areas
exit exam/high school diploma status	Test et. al (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al., (2020)	employment
inclusion in general education	Test et al. (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education employment independent living

Predictor of Success	Identified by	Outcome Areas
paid employment/work experience	Test et al. (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education employment independent living
self-care/independent living skills	Test et al. (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education employment independent living
self-determination/self advocacy	Test et al. (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al. (2020), Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education employment independent living
social skills	Test et al. (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education employment
student support	Test et al. (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education employment

Predictor of Success	Identified by	Outcome Areas
transition program	Test et al. (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education
		employment
work study	Test et al. (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al. (2020)	employment
community experiences	Test et al. (2009), Mazzotti et al. (2020)	employment
interagency collaboration	Test et al. (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education
		employment
occupational courses	Test et al. (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education
		employment
parent involvement	Test et al. (2009), confirmed by Mazzotti et al. (2020)	employment

Vocational education/Career	Test et al. (2009)	education
Technical Education		employment

Predictor of Success	Identified by	Outcome Areas
travel skills	Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education
psychological empowerment	Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education employment independent living
technology skills	Mazzotti et al. (2020)	employment
goal setting	Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education
parent expectations	Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education employment
youth autonomy/decision-making	Mazzotti et al. (2020)	education employment independent living

Researchers speculate that if programming can be provided to support students in the areas of these success predictors, the students will experience greater post school success. Once researchers had a list of success predictors, they moved to identify what topics could be taught as well as what evidence based practices and curricula supported those topics. This resulted in Test, Fowler et al. (2009) generating a list of 32 topics, practices, and curricula for special education teachers to consider when planning instruction for transition age special education students.

Those topics, practices, and curricula are listed below.

Topics to teach:

- life skills;
- purchasing skills;
- banking skills;
- how to complete a job application;
- cooking skills
- food preparation skills;
- functional math;
- functional reading;
- grocery shopping;
- home maintenance skills;
- leisure skills;
- job specific employment skills;
- restaurant purchasing skills;
- safety skills;
- self advocacy skills;

- self-determination skills;
- self-management for employment skills;
- social skills;
- job related social communication skills;
- teaching parents and families about transition.

Evidence based practices to use in teaching:

- community-based instruction for teaching employment skills;
- self-management for teaching life skills;
- computer assisted instruction for teaching job-specific skills;
- “one more than” strategy for purchasing;
- provide community based instruction;
- structure program to extend past secondary school;
- check & Connect program;
- involving students in IEP meetings.

Curricula to support identified topics:

- Self-Advocacy Strategy (SAS);
- Self Directed IEP.

In addition to the lists above, Rowe et al. (2021) categorized nine evidence based practices and 22 research based practices for teaching transition services, many of which are aligned with the teaching topics identified by Test, Fowler et al. (2009).

The evidence based practices identified by Rowe et al. (2021) were:

- Check & Connect;
- EnvisionIT;

- parent training;
- Project SEARCH;
- Self-Advocacy Strategy (SAS);
- Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) for self determination skills;
- Self-Directed IEP;
- Take Charge, and video modeling - specifically for food preparation and housekeeping skills.

The research based practices identified by Rowe et al. (2021) were:

- Communicating Interagency Relationships and Collaborative Linkages for Exceptional Students (CIRCLES);
- mentoring - specifically in STEM;
- Multimodal Anxiety and Social Skills Intervention (MASSI);
- peer assisted instructions/supports;
- person centered planning - specifically for employment skills;
- response prompting - specifically for grocery skills;
- SDLMI for on task behavior;
- simulation for finance skills;
- Student-Directed Transition Planning (SDTP) for self-determination;
- Whose Future Is It?;
- Working at Gaining Employment Skills (WAGES);
- video modeling for technology skills.

Rowe et al. (2021) highlighted that while no one strategy will work for every student, the results of the study provide high quality options and resources for special education teachers to use with transition. The study suggests that further research is needed to broaden the range of resources supported by evidence and research based practices (Rowe et al., 2021).

Analyzing Instructional Approaches

After Test et al. (2009) identified the original 16 predictors of success, Haber et al. (2016) examined those predictors to determine which had the most impact on post school success. With the goal of strengthening the foundation of research in the area of post school outcomes for students with disabilities, Haber et al. coded and analyzed the existing work to expand on the original 16 identified predictors of success and assessed the strength of each predictor in relation to the others.

While some of the findings were less significant than the original literature suggested the interventions should be, Haber et. al (2016) found positive impacts on outcomes when using strategies to support students in each predictor. Using strategies to support students in success predictors that involve collaboration between the school and other groups had the largest effect on student success but the least amount of research to support them. Haber et al. highlighted the importance of not relying on one single study when planning transition services and that additional meta-analysis should be completed to continue determining the most impactful interventions. Finally, Haber et al. recommended special attention be given to using interventions to promote relationship building skills for students (Haber et al., 2016).

Similarly to Rowe et al., Landmark et al. (2010) sought to analyze what is best for programming and instructing in the transition services field, but instead of focusing on which was most effective, Landmark et al. sought to find the longest standing best practices. Using a

literature review, Landmark et al. studied the previously identified best practices, identified 18 new documents and were able to rate the practices from most to least substantiated based on the number of articles that support the practice.

The most substantiated practice was that of paid or unpaid work experience, followed by employment preparation programming, inclusion, family involvement, social skills training, daily living skills training, self determination training, and community or agency collaboration. This ranking of practices was based on the number of articles found supporting the practice, rather than effectiveness of the practice. This indicates that future research focusing on the lesser of the substantiated areas may be beneficial.

Studying the impact of specific instructional approaches

Analyzing the instructional approaches and how to best support students with disabilities and promote post school success, Wehmeyer et al. (2010) researched relationships between interventions and one predictor of success: self-determination. Gil (2007) highlights the importance of self-determination in promoting post school success as students will need this skill in the college setting where they will have less structured support provided for them than in previous school experiences. To move on to a higher education setting, students need the self determination skills to take control of their future and advocate for their needs. Wehmeyer et al. (2010) recognized that while teaching self-determination had become a common practice in special education, there had not been many studies on what strategies were effective in doing so. To determine what strategies, if any, were effective in promoting self-determination in students receiving special education support, Wehmeyer et al. (2010) conducted a study consisting of 50 school districts, 371 high school students ages 14-20, all of whom received special education services. Each school was either part of an intervention or control group, with the control group

given training on interventions that were not directly related to self-determination, and the intervention group receiving training on multiple strategies that were thought to promote self-determination (Wehmeyer, 2010).

Curricula that were provided to the intervention groups include: “The ChoiceMaker Curriculum, “Self-Advocacy Strategy” (SAS), “Steps to Self-Determination,” “Whose Future is it Anyway,” “Self Determined Learning Model of Instruction” (SDLMI), and the “NEXT S.T.E.P Curriculum” (Wehmeyer et al., 2010). Researchers used three methods of fidelity checks to ensure that the interventions were being implemented as they were intended over the three-year study. Assessments were then administered and analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the interventions (Wehmeyer et al., 2010).

Researchers analyzed the results using two different scales. On one scale, results showed that the participants of the intervention group saw more of an increase in self-determination ratings, while the other scale showed both the control and intervention group having a similar amount of increase in self-determination ratings (Wehmeyer, 2010). Since both groups saw an increase in self-determination, Wehmeyer et al. (2010) suggested that multi-component intervention models are important as educators must address a wide range of needs to promote post school success.

Both Rowe et al. (2021) and Wehmeyer (2010) identified the SAS, “Whose Future Is It?”, and SDLMI curriculum sets as being impactful in student outcomes. However, Wehmeyer’s results show that on one scale, both groups of students that utilized these curricula and groups that did not showed similar, positive results. While the need for evidence and research based practices for supporting positive post school outcomes has been shown, conflicting research shows that additional research is needed to determine what curricula are most effective for

promoting positive post school outcomes.

Getting even more specific, Park et al. (2018) took a deeper look at the impact of using video modeling and the use of videos to model social skills needed for employment. The study focused on young adults with intellectual disabilities and the social skills of “offering assistance, responding appropriately to feedback, and asking clarification,” (p. 40). The researchers aimed to determine the effect of the use of video modeling on social skills by documenting if students were able to generalize the learned skills once the video was removed. Three students were studied, all of whom were participants in the same transition program (Park, et. al., 2018). The videos were shown on iPads at their transition program site and focused on modeling the social skills previously listed (Park, et. al., 2018). Baseline data was collected prior to administering the videos and the videos were administered weekly for fifteen minutes at a time. After five weeks, the researchers checked for generalization through acting out scenarios with the students (Park, et. al., 2018).

After the intervention of the videos were used to model social skills, each participant improved in the three areas of focus (Park, et. al., 2018). Participants expressed positive feelings toward the intervention through thumbs up and verbal feedback, while their parents provided input about the importance of their students learning social skills (Park, et. al., 2018). The article suggested that video modeling be used to teach social skills needed for employment to students with intellectual disabilities. The study also highlighted the addition of support from a speech language pathologist (SLP), and how future researchers may focus on the inclusion of an SLP in social skills instruction and how that impacts learners’ outcomes. Additionally, as a result of this study one could also pose the question: does the use of video modeling increase positive post school success for students with disabilities? Park’s study was conducted over five weeks, and

results were assessed while students were still attending the program, so there is a need to research if the video modeling had long lasting effects.

Park's study focused on social skills for employment, but there are other post high school opportunities for students with disabilities. Post secondary education programs (PSEs) are designed to support individuals with disabilities by providing opportunities to gain skills in many areas including those that have been mentioned previously in this thesis to promote positive post school outcomes (Francis et al., 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2020; Wehmeyer et al., 2010). Francis et al. (2018) noted that even with the growing presence of PSEs at colleges and universities, individuals with disabilities are still enrolled in college far less frequently than their non-disabled peers. To gather information from parents of young adults who completed a PSE, Francis et al. (2018) used convenience sampling and conducted interviews with 22 mothers and four fathers that met these criteria.

Interview questions ranged from broad to specific and included general impressions of programs, their role in supporting or letting go of the control as their child became a young adult, and ideas for educators to improve family-teacher relationships and positive outcomes for students (Francis et al., 2018). Francis et al. (2018) then reviewed the interview transcripts, which resulted in the identification of seven strategies that support transition age students that are: start earlier, maintain high expectations, permit choice and risk, recognize family interdependence and involvement, prioritize parent skill development and support, maximize technology, and promote inclusion.

These strategies align with many of the predictors and best practices already defined in literature, but this study provided a unique look into the parent/family perspective to provide educators with more reason to ensure they are using the most effective strategies (Francis et al.,

2018). Francis et al. provided information about families' perspectives of important strategies; however, it is missing the idea of using evidence or research based strategies. In addition, the research could be expanded to see what barriers are preventing teachers from meeting the families' expectations.

Researchers have presented a vast range of what to teach and how to teach topics in the transition field of special education, and one could spend an entire career attempting to address the range of categories that have been highlighted in this thesis so far. Oftentimes in the field of education, there can be so many factors to consider that it is difficult to know where to start. For the sake of this thesis, I have narrowed the extensive list down to topics and strategies that I feel passionately about, and will take a closer look at in the following sections.

Family Engagement

Parent involvement is one of the predictors of success identified by Mazzotti (2020) and it is one predictor that involves collaboration between the school and other groups, in this case families, which Haber et al. (2016) identified as the most impactful predictor. Rabren and Evans (2016) noted the existing literature supporting family engagement as a best practice in transition services as well as a lack of literature providing evidence for specific strategies to use to promote family engagement. Focus group meetings were held by Rabren and Evans to collect information about the concerns and strategies that parents of youth with disabilities have about improving transition services. Through purposive sampling using a statewide advocacy group, Rabren and Evans gathered 20 female and three male parents of youth with disabilities. Transcripts of the focus groups were typed and analyzed using the Consensual Qualitative Research methods.

Through the analysis transition areas of concern identified by parents were: transition preparation, integration, adult services, parent support, advocacy, and professionals' roles. Every

single participant mentioned concern about transition preparation in some way, most frequently in terms of the IEPs, postsecondary education, and/or future employment (Rabren & Evans, 2016). Access to, delivery of, and effectiveness of the current transition services were also concerns reported by parents (Rabren & Evans, 2016).

The study highlighted parents reporting the desire for better collaboration between families and schools to support students with disabilities to have more positive post school outcomes (Rabren & Evans, 2016). Another strategy suggested by parents was to ensure the transition staff has the training needed to be competent in student needs (Rabren & Evans, 2016). Rabren and Evans noted the limitations of the study included a lack of random selection, a lack of diversity in participant's culture and ethnicity, and the sample being from only one state. Even so, Rabren and Evans (2016) suggested educators have open and honest communication with families about transition services to promote better teacher-family relationships and ultimately promote positive post school outcomes for students.

A study conducted by Talapatra, et. al. (2019) used a literature review approach to address family engagement and the gap of postsecondary success when comparing students with intellectual disabilities to their peers without disabilities (2019). The researchers suggested using Transition Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation (TPIE) (Talapatra, et. al., 2019, p. 315) as a way to promote better family-school relationships. Four foundational beliefs are outlined for improving the approach, and those are: prioritizing choice and personal dignity, a transition team that includes the student and others who have a common goal of supporting the student, strength centered, individualized plans, and family engagement (Talapatra, et. al., 2019). Defining positive family - school relationship strategies throughout the transition process is this article's

main goal, with an added component of how school psychologists can support in building these relationships.

As outlined in the article, when using TPIE, the first phase is to plan and develop services, which includes identifying the key team members and agreeing on a plan (Talapatra, et. al., 2019). During the second phase, interventions are developed and implemented; this should be done with input from all team members (Talapatra, et. al., 2019). In the third phase, the team evaluates the current program and determines what improvements can be made to ensure that the supports in place are sustainable after graduation from the transition program (Talapatra, et. al., 2019).

Both Rabren and Evans (2016) and Talapatra (2019) highlighted the need for strategies to promote family engagement in the transition process to improve post school outcomes for students with disabilities. Rabren and Evans provided parent perspectives and feedback that educators may use for future communication with families while Talapatra suggested a framework that supports family engagement. Talapatra suggested that the school psychologists can play a large role in family-school relationships while Rabren and Evans placed the focus on the special education teacher. Areas for future research include breaking down barriers between families and school professionals in the transition programs, how transition programs can better utilize school psychologists to promote student success, and identifying factors to better relationships between families of students with intellectual disabilities who are also culturally and linguistically diverse (Talapatra, et. al., 2019).

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Families

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families may have unique expectations of the transition process, impacted by their cultural norms and backgrounds. Cote et al. (2012)

highlighted that both transition planning and family involvement in IEP meetings are legally required for students who receive special education, but both of these requirements can be difficult for students and families that are CLD. Since “Success in transition planning is positively associated with situations in which CLD families and students take an active role in planning for the future,” Cote et al. (2012, p. 51) proposed four steps to empower families and teachers to better collaborate in transition planning.

Step one includes finding ways in which the lives of families as a whole can be enriched through transition services. Step two requires educators to show cultural competence through open conversations, welcoming input from families, and community mapping. Step three encourages teachers to take a supportive role in the families’ values, which may include developing transition goals that support students’ active roles within their families and communities as well as possible academic and employment goals may be relevant. The fourth step presented by Cote et al. is to utilize a family-centered approach through strategies such as a student led IEP meeting.

Cote et al. (2012) stated that the success of students’ post school outcome can be heavily impacted by family engagement and that engaging families is a responsibility educators should not take lightly. Properly engaging CLD families in transition planning can lead to a smoother transition for students with disabilities into adulthood and more positive post school outcomes for those individuals and their families.

While Cote et al. (2012) reported steps to promote family engagement of CLD students, a study conducted by Landmark et al. (2020) aimed to better another evaluation system for teachers' understanding of how to best support CLD families through the transition process. Landmark et al. recognized the importance of family engagement in transition planning and the

positive impacts it can have on student outcomes. Additionally, Landmark et al. highlighted the importance of understanding the barriers CLD families may face. Understanding these barriers and addressing them with families can help close the gap between post school outcomes of students with disabilities and students with disabilities who also have CLD families. Many of the transition programs in the United States are “grounded in individualistic, Western-assumptions,” meaning there are likely differences in goals and expectations that CLD families and students may have for their transition age student (Landmark et al., 2020, p. 318). For example, a common goal type in transition planning is independent living. Some cultures have the expectation that several generations of family members live in a household together rather than young adults moving out to live independently after completing school. In this example, the difference in cultural expectations could greatly impact transition goals in the area of independent living. These differences should be acknowledged, respected, and supported by educators by using culturally competent strategies that may lead to better student outcomes (Landmark, 2020). Landmark, et al. reviewed the CLD Transition Knowledge and Skills (CLDTKS) Evaluation Instrument for validity and reliability, revised as needed, and selected a small sample of educators to complete the survey as the CLDTKS had not previously gone through field-testing. Landmark et al. sought to determine how valid and reliable the CLDTKS is, how well special educators feel they are prepared to support CLD students and families, and address any gaps that may be present.

Landmark et al. (2020) first conducted a review of the evaluation by recruiting 16 experts in the field who had studied two or more of these areas: transition, family engagement, and cultural or linguistic diversity. As a result of the review, Landmark et al. (2020) changed the directions of the survey, defined CLD within the survey, separated knowledge and skills into

individual statements, and included additional statements they felt necessary. Next, special education professionals, found through professional connections, organizations, and forums, were asked to participate in the survey. This led to 206 of 314 secondary special educators completing the survey, with the rest of the participants starting the survey but not completing it (Landmark et al., 2020). A majority, 82.5%, of the participants were Caucasian, 4.4% were African American, 2.4% were Hispanic, 2% were American Indian or Alaska Native or Asian, 4.9% were two or more ethnicities, and 3.4% did not report their ethnicity (Landmark et al., 2020).

The results of the survey identified a difference in skills and knowledge reported by educators. The survey indicated that educators reported a higher level of knowledge than skills in supporting CLD families in transition. Limitations for this study included the convenience sampling selection of participants and those that declined to participate, small sample size, and the educators reporting on their school or district's personnel as a whole rather than self-reporting due to the original design of the survey. Landmark et al. suggested that emphasis on skill development in addition to knowledge in the area of transition services, and recommended doing so through staff development, professional learning communities, and research projects focusing on supporting CLD families in special education transition.

Cote et al. (2012) and Landmark et al. (2020) took different approaches to complete studies regarding engaging CLD families, however Landmark et al determined that educators may have knowledge about how to interact with CLD families, but they do not necessarily have the skills to do so successfully. Taking that into consideration, educators from Landmark et al. may benefit from utilizing Cote et al.'s four step process. Further research could surround developing skills of educators, determining if using the four step process from Cote et al. in

training and possibly role play scenarios might be helpful for educators looking to apply their knowledge of CLD family engagement to improve their skills and effectiveness.

While Cote et al. (2012) suggested family-centered transition planning as a strategy for improving post school outcomes for students with disabilities, Achola and Greene (2016) took a closer look at person-family centered transition planning. The person-family approach includes learning the students' roles within their families as well as within their community and creating goals to support success in both areas. Achola and Greene acknowledged that even though transition services are in place to support positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities, there is still a gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers when it comes to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. When they took an even deeper look, Achola and Greene noted that the gap was even wider for students with disabilities who are also part of a CLD family. To address the need for improved post school outcomes for students with disabilities, Achola and Greene reviewed literature surrounding CLD families and transition outcomes. They then proposed a person-family approach as a way to better connect with CLD families and promote more positive post school outcomes for students who have disabilities and are a part of a CLD family.

Achola and Greene highlighted the differing perspectives that may be present between school staff and the families. CLD families may have values based on their culture, rather than the values of the United States' school system. To better serve these students, Achola and Greene recommend a person-family approach that allows the school staff to better understand the family values, beliefs, and interdependence of the family members. This approach includes aligning transition goals with the families and students' expectations rather than basing goals on American school system values (Achola & Greene, 2016). For example, the family may have a

cultural expectation that family members continue to live at home after high school, so a transition team may focus on skills needed for the student's role within their household, rather than living independently and finding housing (Achola & Greene, 2016). Achola and Greene urged educators to be aware of their own bias and to enter transition planning without judgement of the families' beliefs and goals for their children. To utilize a person-family approach, educators should look for information through a variety of sources such as the student, parents, siblings, other educators, and the students' cultural community. When collaborating with these different groups of people, families may have preconceived notions that the family is to play a passive role in the transition process, and to encourage and empower family members, educators should create a dialogue through questions and opportunities for the family to speak and provide input. These types of conversations allow for the best collaboration between members of the transition team, which creates a more sustainable transition plan with family members who are informed and empowered to support the post-school success of their child, when the school is no longer involved. Achola and Greene suggested that implementing these strategies in a person-family-centered approach to transition planning will lead to better success in post-school outcomes from those with disabilities who are also CLD.

Bakken and Obiakor (2019) aligned with Achola and Greene in the need to address what is causing the less positive post school outcomes for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students with disabilities. Similar to Achola and Greene, Bakken and Obiakor suggested the importance of the student playing an active role in the transition process for best possible outcomes. Bakken and Obiakor also focused on cultural competency and knowing cultural expectations, and recommended making sure the family and student are familiar with all of the transition options available to them to increase the likelihood of positive post school outcomes.

Strategies for Family Engagement

Overall, it is widely agreed that engaging families in the transition process will improve post school success for students with disabilities (Landmark et al., 2020; Rabren & Evans, 2016; Cote et al., 2012; Achola & Greene, 2016; Talapatra et al., 2019; Bakken & Obiakor, 2019). Strategies that the literature suggested to be effective in engaging families and, in doing so, improving positive post school outcomes include:

- skill development of educators through methods such as staff development or professional learning communities (Landmark et al., 2020)
- better collaboration through frequent communication (Rabren & Evans, 2016)
- finding ways to enrich the whole family's life, showing cultural competence through open conversations, welcoming input from families, community mapping, support family and cultural expectations (Cote et al., 2012)
- use of family centered (Cote et al., 2012), or person-family centered approach (Achola & Green, 2016)
- use of the Transition Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation (TPIE) (Talapatra et al., 2019)
- ensuring the student plays an active role in their transition planning (Bakken & Obiakor, 2019).

Transition Planning and IEPs

The literature review showed that many of the strategies for supporting family engagement related to communication and collaboration between families and schools. Transition and IEP meetings are key pieces of the communicating and collaborating puzzle. Transition and IEP meetings are likely some of the settings in which educators and families can

collaborate and learn from one another about the expectations and goals for the student. Rabren et al. (2013) noted the requirement of transition planning to include students' interests and post school goals, and stated that if planning and IEPs are done well, they should lead to students feeling satisfied with their post school situation. Rabren et al. (2013) acknowledged that society's view of success can be different than an individual's view of success. The study aimed to gain the perspective of students with learning disabilities, to show how satisfied they are with their post school outcomes, rather than basing success solely on employment or post-secondary education. With all of this in mind, Rabren et al. sought to find answers to determine if post secondary education and/or employment are indicators of post secondary satisfaction.

Surveys were given to students who were in the state of Alabama, one year post high school, and had received transition services while in high school. These surveys were analyzed, and the results show that individuals with high levels of postsecondary education reported higher levels of satisfaction compared with those with low levels of post secondary education. The same was found to be true for individuals with high levels of employment compared to those with low levels of employment. Since the two areas of employment and postsecondary education show positive correlation with post school satisfaction, further research on if the inclusion of IEP transition goals targeting employment and postsecondary education can increase post school satisfaction is needed. Rabren et al. suggested that this is further evidence that attention needs to be paid to how educators can help improve post school outcomes for students with disabilities. This study was conducted in Alabama, so generalization to the entire country should be done with caution, and an area for further research could be to expand this study to a national level. Another possible area of study would be to see if there is a correlation between students' transition goals, post school outcomes, and their level of satisfaction with their post school

situation.

The results of Rabren et al.'s study seem to align with the idea that post-school satisfaction is consistent with rates of employment and post-secondary education status. Grigal et al. (2011) sought to determine whether there was a relationship between transition planning and post school outcomes of employment and post secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) and students with other disabilities. Using secondary data analysis, Grigal et al. analyzed the NLTS2 data that included participants from all over the country. The study determined that the most common type of transition goal for students with ID was independent living. Students with ID were less likely to have a transition goal focused on post-secondary education than their peers with other disabilities (Grigal et al., 2011). Additionally, when reviewing which outside service providers were contacted for students, schools contacted colleges less frequently for students with ID than for students with other disabilities.

Students with ID show significantly lower rates of positive post school outcomes than students with other disabilities, with the rate of employment for students with ID being 46% and the rate for those with other disabilities being 74% during the time of the survey. When analyzing data for the difference in transition planning for those who were employed after high school and those who were not, the only goal that was identified as an indicator for employment was that of attending a 2- or 4- year college. Post secondary education programs that support the development of skills for students with disabilities have been linked to improved employment rates, which aligns with the findings of Grigal et al. (2011). Grigal et al. proposed that educators must ensure that rigorous academic opportunities are provided to students with ID, in addition to building self advocacy skills to support the adding of goals related to post secondary education.

Grigal's findings prompt questions about the impact that the types of transition IEP goals

created for a student may have on that student's post school success. Could creating goals about post secondary education for those students with ID result in an increase in employment rates? Does the creation of supported employment or sheltered employment goals have a negative impact on post school outcomes? Addressing the gap in the rate of employment between those with ID and those with other disabilities may be one way to close the gap in post school success between those with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

In addition to the types of goals that are being created, another way to analyze IEPs and post school success is to determine if there is correlation between IEP compliance and disability categories and/or ethnicities and IEP compliance, and if correlation exists between IEP compliance and the use of evidence-based transition practices. That is the approach Landmark and Zhang (2013) took to complete a study to determine the compliance of student IEPs in regard to the IDEA requirements. The study analyzed data about students with disabilities, ages 14 to 22, all who were secondary students within seven counties of Texas.

Results of the data analysis included that the average level of full compliance within IEPs was low, the level of evidence based practices was moderate, student's ethnicity or disability correlated with compliance, and compliance and transition practices were positively correlated. Factors that were found to be commonly noncompliant were: documented invitation to all meeting attendees, meeting transition timelines, including all of student transition goals written in measurable terms, and a higher focus on independent living goals compared to postsecondary education and employment. Less than two-thirds of the IEPs demonstrated interagency collaboration, a known predictor of success identified by Mazzotti (2020).

While transition IEP compliance does not guarantee student success, it does lay the foundation for post school outcomes. It is reasonable to think that the low percentage of

compliance and the positive correlation of compliance and practices may indicate that additional training of educators is needed. This study took place in Texas; further research addressing the same factors on a national scale would shed more light on the levels of compliance across the country. With more training in creating compliant IEP goals, would data show an increase in understanding of best practices leading to positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities?

Part of a compliant IEP is clearly documenting how goals will be measured or assessed. Neubert and Leconte (2013) proposed the need for consistency in the terms and phrases that surround age appropriate transition assessment in IDEA 2004. In the position paper, Neubert and Leconte highlighted vague guidelines in the areas of transition required by IDEA and provided possible definitions to be used to clarify what is meant by age appropriate transition assessment.

Interagency Collaboration

One predictor of post school success identified by Test, Mazzotti et al. (2009), Mazzotti et al. (2020), and Haber et al. (2016) was that of interagency collaboration. Interagency collaboration requires schools to connect with community partners and local employers to provide opportunities for students who are of transition age. Bakken and Obiakor (2019) report the importance of community partners and activities in the transition process. Utilizing community partners allows students to practice important transition skills such as social skills, self-advocacy, and employment skills in a natural setting, which will lead to better generalization of the skill. These are skills that can be taught and supported in the classroom setting, then practiced and mastered in the community setting (Bakken and Obiakor, 2019).

Hartman (2009) suggested that Community Based Transition Programs (CBTPs) are one way to utilize interagency collaboration to promote positive post school outcomes for students

with ID. Through “functional community-referenced skill development, connections with adult service providers, participation in employment before graduation, school-business partnerships, college opportunities” (p.6) Hartman suggested that CBTPs can improve post school outcomes for those with disabilities. Many of the strategies Hartman referenced using in creating CBTPs align with success predictors and best practices provided earlier in this thesis. Hartman stated that CBTPs use job coaches and teachers to support students in natural environments that promote easier generalization of skills compared to practicing skills in isolation. Hartman references partnering with the local library, housing developers, and local employers as a few examples of community partnerships.

Continued evidence of community partners having positive impacts on post school success was reported by Stone-MacDonald (2012). While working with a school and community in Tanzania, Stone-MacDonald observed and recorded student activities and found benefits of curriculum used to support special education students needed to explicitly teach functional skills in the context of how they would be utilized in their local community. Without the connection between learning these skills and applying them in generalized settings, students with disabilities are less likely to retain these skills for post school use.

Another interagency collaboration that can be utilized in transition planning is the use of vocational programs. Ofoegbu and Azarmsa (2010) studied a Vocational Education Program (VEP) in Long Beach Unified School District in California to determine the acquisition and retention rates of students with disabilities who attended this program after high school graduation. Results of this study show that, on average, 64% of the participants were successful in finding employment after graduation and, on average, 62% of students were successful in retaining employment.

Further research is needed to compare the success rates of the program participants to a similar population that did not participate in the program. Ofoegbu and Azarmsa also recommend that the program should provide more opportunities for the participants to apply their skills in natural, community or work settings to improve their outcomes.

Wilson et al. (2017) described a post secondary education program (PSE) that is made possible through strong community connections. Wilson stated that the program was created to address the discrepancy between employment rates of individuals with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. They also reported that participation in PSEs have shown improvements in post school outcomes for those with disabilities. PAY Check is a program that seeks to support individuals with disabilities in participating fully in their community after their secondary school experience. Through work-based high school diplomas, post-secondary education, paid apprenticeships, and self determination training this program creates a comprehensive approach to transition that occurs in a community setting. Wilson notes that these four strategies are typically used in isolation, and that PAY Check combines them for maximum outcomes. This program is made possible through connections and partnerships with the local community colleges and apprenticeship programs.

The success of this program heavily depends on community partnerships and further confirms the importance of interagency collaboration. Further research might include the effectiveness of the PAY Check program in increasing post school success and determining if the PAY Check model could be expanded on a national level to help teachers make connections in their own communities.

Riesen et al. (2014) aligns with Ofoegbu and Azarma (2010) and Wilson et al. (2017) in the need for interagency collaboration for transition services, especially in the area of

employment. When considering the gap between the post school success of those with disabilities and that of their non-disabled peers, one contributing factor to consider is also the barrier to one of the most common measurements of success: employment. Riesen et al. looked for answers to the question: what barriers do service providers consider to be in the way of successful transitions from school to adult life? Riesen et al. surveyed service providers and analyzed responses to determine such barriers for students with disabilities. Barriers identified include: a lack of network to introduce students to, pressure to teach core standards in high school rather than functional skill development, lack of student employment skills, family engagement, lack of long term support for students after school, lack of teacher training and preparation for transition services, lack of community integration, lack of funding, and transition planning starting too late. Riesen et al. suggested that educators must increase contact with outside agencies, develop training programs for teachers and outside agencies, and be sure that community partnerships are mutually beneficial (2014).

Both Ofoegbu and Azarma (2010) and Wilson et al. (2017) described unique community-based programs that include elements supported by literature. Riesen et al. (2014) identified elements that educators see as barriers to successful transitions. Further research for these studies could include which program is most effective, which program elements have the biggest impact on post school success, whether the programs address the barriers identified by educators, and whether the expansion of these programs on a national level could help educators and students overcome those barriers and increase post school success for students with disabilities.

Teacher Preparation

In the setting of transition planning, often at the center of implementation of services is the special education teacher. While research reviewed in this thesis shows evidence of

predictors of success, evidence-based practices, curricula to support transition, and the importance of family engagement and interagency collaboration, there is still the question of whether or not special education teachers are accessing this information and implementing their knowledge of these topics successfully in the classroom or learning environment. As early as 2004, Kohler and Greene (2004) acknowledged the gap in teacher preparation for transition services. In the article, Kohler and Greene stated the need for updated requirements and courses pertaining to transition services for special education licensure. To do so, Kohler and Greene recommended infusing transition competencies in all curriculum areas and requiring specialized courses about transition services in special education licensing programs. Kohler and Greene noted that the increase in teacher preparation should likely lead to better use of best practices, and lead to positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities.

Even so, literature from years later suggests that the need for consistency in teacher preparation for special education transition teachers is still relevant. Williams-Diehm et al. (2017) noted the inconsistency of teacher preparation programs in terms of providing coursework related to special education transition services. Through reviewing the syllabi of courses in which transition services were addressed, Williams-Diehm et al. aimed to determine the extent to which transition services are included in special education teacher preparation programs.

Syllabi from 107 institutions of higher education were reviewed, and the researchers narrowed them down to 24 syllabi from 22 colleges or universities. Results showed that only 36% of the original 107 institutes of higher education had a required course dedicated to special education and transition as part of their special education licensing program. Even within those specific required courses, much more emphasis was placed on the legal documentation and creation of IEPs than on using evidence-based practices in providing transition services. While

interagency collaboration was included in 78% of the specialized transition course syllabi, evidence of instruction on the topic was only evident in 13% of the syllabi, as the rest mentioned the topic in the learning objectives. Self-determination was noted in 96% of the syllabi, and employment skills in 63% of the syllabi. Limitations of this study included the sampling of only highly notable colleges and universities and the fact that some programs offered optional transition focused courses that were not required for special education teacher licensure and, therefore, were not included in the study.

While Williams-Diehm addressed the lack of evidence of formal education about transition services in teacher preparation programs, Mazzotti and Plotner (2016) conducted a study that provided insight into whether teachers had the necessary information to best support students in transition planning, even if it may not be taught in their preparation programs. Mazzotti and Plotner (2016) conducted a study to determine the level of training on and access to evidence-based practices for transition planning, how prepared teachers feel to use the training they receive, and the level of knowledge transition providers have about using transition evidence-based practices. Mazzotti and Plotner used an online survey and received responses from 592 participants from three southeastern states and two midwestern states. Participants included various professionals involved in transition services, including local/state education agencies, vocational rehabilitation services, and mental health providers.

After analyzing the data, Mazzotti and Plotner determined that there was a lack of training in the area of providing transition services and using evidence-based practices in doing so. In addition to a lack of training in teacher preparation programs identified, 52% of participants answered “seldom” or “never” when asked how often they were provided with professional development or resources for using evidence-based practices in transition planning.

Mazzotti and Plotner recommend evaluating teacher preparation programs, consistency in program requirements, and innovative ways such as podcasts or online learning modules as solutions to the lacking transition service training. Additionally, Mazzotti and Plotner stated the need for supporting professionals in how to take the evidence-based practices they have learned and implement them with students. Limitations of this study include service providers being asked to self-report and the lack of background information reported by participants in terms of the populations they serve.

Another approach to measuring the understanding of how and what to provide for transition services was executed by Morgan et al. (2014), who surveyed professionals to determine the level of understanding of the importance of transition competencies. Morgan et al. (2014) included both national experts in the area of transition services and professionals from school districts that are involved in transition planning. To determine how to prioritize the teacher competencies that had been identified through a literature review, Morgan et al. used surveys to collect data from participants.

After analyzing the data, Morgan et al. determined that both the national experts and the professionals from school districts had very similar ratings for the transition competencies. Morgan et al. noted three areas with the greatest discrepancy between the ratings of the two groups and suggested this may be due to a research to practice gap, meaning educators may have the understanding of the competency, but are unsure of how to teach to support it. Additionally, Morgan et al. noted the difference in the areas of competency for which transition teachers needed to demonstrate and the areas of competency for which other special education teachers need to demonstrate competency. For example, one competency that was rated “essential” by both groups was integrated employment and post secondary settings, which is very different

from the competency expectations of special educators for early childhood, elementary, or early middle school. Due to the significant differences in concepts and skills needed to be successful in providing transition services compared to other special education teaching positions, Morgan et al. suggested that teacher preparation programs may need to more directly address transition services and planning in the special education teacher preparation courses.

The literature suggests that more transition-related content is needed in teacher preparation programs as well as ongoing teacher trainings. Morningstar et al. (2008) recognized the lack of literature analyzing the impact of teacher competency in the success of post school outcomes for students with disabilities. The purpose of the study conducted by Morningstar et al. was to determine if educators who graduated from a transition personnel preparation program demonstrate higher competence in transition planning than they had prior to completing the program.

Morningstar et al. utilized surveys and focus groups to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The study concluded that after completing the program, educators reported better understanding of the importance of collaborating and networking, family-centered models, person-centered planning for transition, interagency and community connections, and a better understanding of IDEA to advocate for students' rights. An area for further research could be studying these professionals who have completed the program and analyzing the frequency in which they implement what they have learned from the program, and whether implementation positively impacts post school success for their students. Additionally, research comparing teacher preparation programs for the requirement of transition-related content to identify areas of need on a national level could be beneficial

All of the articles reviewed in this section align with the idea that additional training in

the area of transition planning is needed for special education teachers. It is reasonable to conclude that if special education teachers are not being adequately prepared for conducting transition services, then their students' outcomes are being negatively impacted. Teacher training and professional development is an essential component of post school success and further research is needed on how to improve the preparation of special education teachers in transition.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary of Literature

Researchers have explored how educators can promote post school success for students who receive special education through various perspectives. As a society, we benefit from individuals sharing their skills with the community. Individuals with disabilities deserve to find success in their post school experiences. Therefore, it is important that individuals with disabilities are provided the support they need throughout their educational experience to successfully share their skills through employment or community involvement as adults. Laws have been implemented to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities, however those individuals continue to have lower rates of employment and postsecondary school involvement than their non-disabled peers. Through this literature review, information regarding improving post school success for students who receive special education services was reviewed and common themes identified were: Instructional Approaches, Family Engagement, Planning and IEPs, Interagency Collaboration, and Teacher Preparation.

Instructional Approaches

Researchers have studied what should be taught in transition programs as well as how to teach those topics to promote post school success for students with disabilities. Between Test, Mazzotti et al. (2009) and Mazzotti et al. (2020), 22 predictors of post school success were identified. To provide students with experiences they need to increase their likelihood of post school success based on these predictors, Test, Fowler et al. (2009) determined 32 topics, practices, and curricula for teachers to consider when planning transition services for special education students. Additionally, Rowe et al. (2009) identified nine evidence based practices and 22 research based practices, many of which support the areas of success predictors.

Once all of these instructional approaches were identified, researchers analyzed the approaches through different lenses. Haber et al. (2016) determined that schools collaborating with other agencies produced the largest impact on students' post school success, but that no one method should be relied on. Landmark et al. (2010) determined that the most substantiated practice in transition planning was that of paid or unpaid work experience followed by employment preparation programming, inclusion, family involvement, social skills training, daily living skills training, self determination training, and community or agency collaboration.

When studying the impact of specific instructional approaches, researchers found that teaching self-determination skills, teaching using video-modeling, and connecting students with post secondary education programs (PSEs) are all promising strategies.

Family Engagement

One predictor of success that had several studies supporting it was that of family involvement. Similar to Francis et al. (2018), Rabren and Evans (2016) utilized parent focus groups to determine six common concerns parents shared about transition services. While Francis et al. defined common concerns, Talapatra et al (2019) noted the need for future research to determine how those concerns can be addressed and how barriers can be broken down between schools and families to better promote family engagement and in doing so promote positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Family Engagement

Cote et al. (2012) noted there are likely additional barriers for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families to engage in their students' schooling. Strategies were provided by Cote et al. that centered around valuing the students' roles within their own families as well as showing cultural competency. While research shows that educators are generally familiar with

strategies for engaging CLD families, Landmark et al. (2020) concluded that there is a gap between the knowledge or the strategies and the skills it takes to implement the strategies. A way to bridge this gap between knowledge and skills may be to take a person-family centered approach as suggested by Achola and Greene (2016). This involves asking questions to both the student and family to gain an understanding of how to best support their needs to promote post school success. Bakken and Obiakor (2019) also highlighted the importance of the student having an active role in the transition process.

Planning and IEPs

Planning and IEPs are areas of transition that families and educators collaborate on. Through surveys given to young adults in Atlanta one year after completing high school, Rabren et al. (2013), determined that an individual's satisfaction with their life post school positively correlates with post secondary enrollment status as well as employment status. Grigal et al. (2011) concluded that students with intellectual disabilities (ID) were less likely to have transition goals related to post secondary education and are less likely than their peers with other disabilities to demonstrate post school success in employment. With the information Rabren provided, it is logical to suggest further research be pursued to determine if increasing the use of post secondary education goals in the IEPs of students with disabilities may lead to more positive outcomes for those students post school.

While it is documented that interagency collaboration has a meaningful impact on the post school success of students (Test et al., 2009a, Mazzotti et al., 2020, Haber et al., 2014), less than two-thirds of the IEPs reviewed by Landmark and Zhang (2013) included evidence of interagency collaboration. Additionally, compliance of these transition IEPs were low, demonstrating an area of growth for special educators. This area for growth could be supported

by Neubert and Leconte's (2013) position of needing consistency in the terms and phrases that surround transition services. Increased understanding of the terms and requirements of transition services could potentially lead to stronger IEPs, increased use of best practices, and ultimately better post school outcomes for students.

Interagency Collaboration

One of the instructional approaches that may be increased as a result of increased understanding of transition services is that of interagency collaboration. Bakken and Obiakor (2019), Hartman (2009), and Stone-MacDonald (2012) all noted that interagency collaboration allows students to practice skills in natural settings, which will lead to better generalization of those skills. The literature reviewed in this thesis analyzed these different forms of interagency collaboration: Community Based Transition Programs (Hartman, 2009), Vocational Education Programs (VEP) (Ofoegbu and Azarmsa, 2010), and PAY Check (Wilson et al., 2017). Further research is needed for all of these programs as the literature provided an overview of the programs but lacked data to show evidence of their effectiveness. Additionally, another area for further research is that of how teachers can break down the barriers of interagency collaboration to potentially increase the positive post school outcomes for students (Riesen et al., 2014).

Teacher Preparation

The analyzing of IEPs demonstrated a lack of proficiency by special educators in writing compliant transition goals. Kohler and Greene (2004) stated need for improvement to teacher licensure programs, which Williams-Diehm et al. (2017) supported by finding that only 36% of syllabi for special education teacher preparation programs reviewed included a course dedicated to transition services. Additionally, in the programs that did require a transition specific course, the courses' syllabi more heavily emphasized IEP writing and the legal aspects of transition

rather than how to best support transition age students to improve post school outcomes (Williams-Diehm, 2017). Morgan et al. (2014) used surveys to determine that special educators may have a gap in their training resulting in educators knowing information about transition services, but lacking the skills to teach and support transition age students. In addition to teacher preparation programs lacking in content related to transition services, Mazzotti and Plotner (2016) concluded that professional development about transition is also rare. Morningstar et al. (2008) studied special education teachers who participated in a program specifically designed to increase proficiency in transition related concepts. Increase in the understanding of many transition topics was demonstrated by the teachers who completed the program, so an area for further research would be if the students of the teachers demonstrate improved rates of post school success as a result of their teachers participating in the program.

Professional Application

Transition services are required on a national level by IDEA, however nationally, individuals with disabilities continue to have lower post school employment and post secondary education rates. Additionally, students with disabilities in Minnesota have lower graduation rates than their non-disabled peers. Transition services can greatly impact post school success for students, so it is pivotal that special education teachers remain current on the most effective way to provide those services and promote post school success for students with disabilities. The national guidance provided by IDEA, the state requirements for teacher preparation programs, and the continued professional development opportunities provided for special education teachers must also be sure to equip teachers with what they need to promote post school success for their students.

Educators should be aware of what topics to teach and how to teach them in order to best promote post school success for students with disabilities. This thesis highlights the need for continued growth in instructional strategies to be implemented in special education transition services. Educators may need to seek out additional training or request professional development opportunities surrounding transition services.

Personally, I will be teaching a transition age special education program for the first time this fall. Having the knowledge gained from this thesis will be valuable for me as I move forward so that I can remember which areas have shown to be the most impactful in promoting post school success for students such as interagency collaboration (Test et al., 2009a; Mazzotti et al., 2020; Haber et al., 2016). Creating a network of resources that will allow students to participate in their community and have work related experiences prior to leaving school will now be a priority for my work as I know now how impactful those experiences are.

Family engagement strategies, and specifically those to support culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families is another area to be prioritized in the special education transition field. Continually finding resources and information to stay culturally competent and build meaningful relationships with families will allow educators to better support students and their families, as their culture may value different goals than what the traditional, western school culture values.

Limitations of the Research

One limitation of this research was the limited amount of articles that provided specific action educators can take to improve post school success for students with disabilities. When selecting literature to review for this thesis, the essential question of, “how can educators promote post school success for students who receive special education services?” guided the

research. EbscoHost, ERIC, Proquest, Academic Search Premier, Research Gate, and Sage Premier were utilized for locating research articles. Keywords for my search included key words “special education,” “work experience,” “transition,” “outcomes,” “disabilities,” “adulthood,” “best practice,” “success,” and “IDEA 2004” and results that were published after the year 2000 were considered. Originally, results were filtered to articles that had been published in the past ten years, but due to a limited number of articles pertaining to the essential question within that time frame, the search was broadened. After broadening the filter of publication years, there were still limited articles that provided concrete action steps for educators to take to improve post school success for students receiving special education services. What was found were many articles with long lists of predictors of success, curriculum suggestions, and a few areas of practice such as family engagement, planning and IEPs, and interagency collaboration, which had a few articles with more specific approaches that were researched.

Additionally, some articles provided 20 or more predictors of success or best practice suggestions. A limitation of this study is that not all of those areas were addressed at a more in-depth level. Finally, a majority of the more current research articles reviewed were more literature review styles themselves, and there seems to be a lack of action research to report on the effectiveness of the best practices that were suggested in the literature review articles.

Implications for Future Research

There are many areas of further research in the field of special education transition services and improving positive post school outcomes for students who receive special education services. One gap in the literature is how educators can take the information provided about the predictors of success, evidence based practices, and research based practices and translate that knowledge into tangible, instructional lessons. The literature review identified much of what

should be taught in transition, but lacks information on how educators should be teaching those subjects to be most impactful on post school success of students. An area for further research that could be a starting point for making those knowledge to skill translations is that of more clearly defining the terminology used in transition planning. For example, some articles provided a list of “evidence based” and “research based” practices, however the list again only provided what to teach, not how to teach subjects and skills. Additionally, further research is needed to determine if the requirement of more specific courses related to transition services would increase IEP compliance and use of evidence based practices, and if the increase of IEP compliance and evidence based practices make a long term impact on the post school success of students who receive special education transition services.

Conclusion

In regards to answering the essential question of, “how can educators promote post school success for students who receive special education services?” this literature review suggests that being knowledgeable of the predictors of post school success, choosing curricula and practices that support students in those areas, encouraging family involvement, improving planning and IEP writing, utilizing interagency collaboration, and an increase in teacher training in the area of transition services may lead to increased post school success for students with disabilities. Additionally, continued research on specific practices educators can use to teach the areas of transition as well as improving the access educators have to the information needed through teacher preparation and professional development opportunities may lead to more positive post school outcomes for students.

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