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Transition Program Experience: How Does it Affect Employment for 18- to 22-Year-Olds With Significant Cognitive Disabilities?

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THE TRANSITION PROGRAM EXPERIENCE: HOW DOES IT AFFECT
EMPLOYMENT FOR 18- TO 22-YEAR-OLDS WITH
SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES?

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Department of Special Education
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This Dissertation by: Supattra W. Andrade

Entitled: *The Transition Program Experience: How Does It Affect Employment for 18- to 22-year-olds with Significant Cognitive Disabilities?*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, School of Special Education

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ABSTRACT

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     Employment for 18- to 22-year-olds with Significant Cognitive Disabilities?
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The transition from school to adult life, especially with respect to employment, is

a longstanding and critical concern for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Unfortunately, models of services in which schools work with minimal contact with the

work community or in which students are trained in isolation (e.g., sheltered workshops)

have not proven to be as effective as originally hoped. An emerging model that has

promise is one in which the business community has a more direct role in service

provision and in which there are partnerships between businesses and service agencies.

The purpose of this study was to examine processes and outcomes associated with Project

SEARCH, a transition program for students with significant cognitive disabilities that

involves public-private partnerships of the type the literature is calling for. Multiple data

sources were used to analyze characteristics of the program, including semi-structured

interviews, ethnographic observations, and textual materials (documents). An

institutional ethnographic qualitative design provided the framework for exploring the

work processes of Project SEARCH. Findings from this study revealed that the Project

SEARCH transition program has high potential for supporting and preparing students

with significant cognitive disabilities to become successful within integrated

employment. The model's expectation of direct collaboration between public and private

organizations, its use of techniques of customized employment, and its reliance on

integrated employment during student internships were presented as program work

processes that have a direct bearing on program success. Using the stories and

recommendations of the participants, six main areas were found for future program

development and improvement: expanding educational opportunities; expanding long-

term funding; expanding the criteria of student selection; expanding host employers in the

program; expanding the curriculum; and expanding parent understanding of supplemental

security income (SSI). The promising findings of this study make it apparent that more

research is needed on components and processes within public-private partnership

operated transition programs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A very important part of life is the transition from being a student to being part of the adult world. The experience of transition from high school to adult living is especially difficult for students with significant cognitive disabilities. It is critical that they receive the services they need to discover their aspirations for the future by understanding self-interests, preferences, strengths, and needs (Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Swedeen, & Owens, 2010). Therefore, transition preparation is necessary for equipping these students to develop the necessary skills for adult life and long-term employment. Some of the skills that they must learn include career awareness, job skills, independent living skills, self-advocacy skills, and social skills (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007; White & Weiner, 2004).

Over the past two decades, transition programs have evolved to better support persons with disabilities in a number of important ways. Luecking (2011) recently argued that, with respect to employment, improvements in transition programs include expanding employment training opportunities and preparing more effective advance transition planning for school-to-work. Luecking noted that these changes were made possible partially by reauthorized legislation.

Increasingly, transition programs in the 21st century focus on the idea of collaborative partnerships between public service systems to secure successful

employment for persons with disabilities in the business community. Based on federal law, there are three primary publicly funded service systems, and each service system has a different responsibility. These are: (a) the special education system, which is responsible for educating and working with the students with disabilities and their parents to develop a transition plan for preparing for adult life and employment skills (Luecking & Certo, 2003; Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007); (b) the vocational rehabilitation system (VR), which is responsible for employment preparation and providing short-term funding for eligible individuals with disabilities after leaving school (Muthumbi, 2008; Luecking & Certo, 2003); and (c) the developmental disabilities system, which is responsible for providing long-term employment outcomes after the students leave school and begin to receive VR funding for their employment preparation (Luecking & Certo, 2003).

Despite improvement in both transition services and understanding of transition processes, there are still concerns about employment for persons with disabilities, particularly those with significant cognitive disabilities (Carter et al., 2010). Many students with significant cognitive disabilities continue to experience: (a) low public expectations for potential in integrated work, (b) low incomes, (c) lack of job skills to meet demands of competitive employment, (d) lack of paid employment opportunities, and (e) lack of opportunities to work in integrated workplaces (Luecking, 2011). In addition, students with significant cognitive disabilities are more likely to be unemployed because many school-to-work programs do not fully include these students for learning in real work experiences (Burgstahler, 2001). Most of them have been leaving high schools without gaining experience practicing job skills that lead to meaningful competitive employment within business workplaces (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011; Condon &

Callahan, 2008). Recognition of these concerns can cause pressure for students with disabilities to meet demands of competitive employment with other people without disabilities in the integrated community.

To achieve the goal of this study, it was decided to explore the model of the Project SEARCH transition program from school-to-work. This program has reported high potential supporting successful employment for students with significant cognitive disabilities in an inclusive environment. The Project SEARCH program is designed by implementing a new transition model to promote the cooperative partnerships beyond working together between public and private organizations. Additionally, the Project SEARCH transition program provides intensive job opportunities for students with significant cognitive disabilities to be exposed to actual work environments with other employees without disabilities. The program focuses on engaging these students to practice and learn understanding and acceptance of the natural consequences of working with actual business providers. Hence, this Project SEARCH transition program school-to-work is a suitable examination for this qualitative study to investigate the program's work processes, relationships of partnerships' roles, and the program's components on how it can be a powerful model to support students with significant cognitive disabilities become successfully employed.

Statement of the Problem

Pursuant to the transition movement, the authorizing legislation has shown the importance of having students with disabilities engage in career education and employment opportunities after their secondary education (Luecking, 2011). Transition preparation should insure opportunities of integrating students with significant disabilities

with other typical peers receiving employment training within the community at actual job sites and following job training (White & Weiner, 2004).

Highly beneficial outcomes of employment are found in the literature for employees with disabilities when they are successfully employed in the social community, rather than in segregated work (Brewer, Erickson, Karpur, Urger, & Malzer, 2011). Successful *integrated employment* allows persons with significant disabilities to improve their quality of life, dignity, independent living, self-determination, self-esteem, socialization, communication, social expectations, and economical and political strengths (Brewer et al., 2011; Hendricks, 2010; Wehman, 2011). As described by Hasnain and Balcazar (2009), the U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration is trying to eliminate sheltered workshops from the list of successful employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. Yet, only 5% of persons with significant disabilities are employed within the community, while the majority of these employees are still performing in sheltered workshops (Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009). Many students with significant cognitive disabilities continue to be placed in sheltered workshops after high school graduation without considering integrated employment opportunities (Cimera, Wehman, West, & Burgess, 2012). In addition, the report from the National Organization on Disabilities (NOD) in 2004 found that persons with disabilities participate in full-time or part-time jobs only 35% of the time, while compared with 78% of persons without disabilities (Brooke, Revell, & Wehman, 2009).

As previously discussed, students with significant cognitive disabilities still experience low public expectations and a lack of job skills, and they are not well prepared to meet the demands of employers in competitive employment. Most of these students

have little hope for receiving either supported living or employment services. Unique concerns for employing youths with disabilities within integrated workforces include safety, transportation, accommodations, communication strategies, career advising, and medical support services (Burgstahler, 2001). This means that employers are hesitant to hire these students, which results in their having little hope and likely staying on long waiting lists (West, Targett, Steininger, & Anglin, 2001). These processes help sustain patterns of unemployment and segregated employment on the vocational landscape for many students with disabilities, particularly youths with severe disabilities (Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Swedeen, & Owens, 2010).

Although the developmental disabilities system, public schools, and vocational rehabilitation services recognize the importance of collaboration if students with cognitive disabilities are to be successful, there are significant gaps in the way services are presently provided. As described by Burgstahler (2001) and by Chappel and Somers (2010), stakeholders in education must creatively develop on-the-job learning opportunities and have an understanding of the demand-side of competitive employment. This means that, in order to be successful, a new model needs to emerge in which there are collaborative partnerships between competitive businesses, transition service organizations, and the students/families that are served. Within such a model, services are provided directly on the job, and supports are provided by these organizations in a cooperative manner.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of public-private partnerships, these have received little attention in the literature and empirical research. This is especially true with respect to the employers' role for supporting hands-on experience

opportunities; there needs to be more empirical studies of these processes in current research. Specifically, research is needed on models of collaboration between public and private organizations for establishing efficient on-the-job transitions for students with significant cognitive disabilities from school-to-work in inclusive employment.

The Purpose of Study

As discussed above, advancing of the collaborative effort between the public service systems and business systems needs more study. The purpose of this research is to investigate the links between a transition program's work processes and its relationships with its partners. The study also explores what principal core components of the Project SEARCH transition program contribute to the program's success.

The Project SEARCH transition program was chosen for this research for three reasons. First, the Project SEARCH program is one example of a model of public-private partnerships, working together with the business level and within the local community. Secondly, the program provides intensive internships within real workplaces for students with significant disabilities who are between the ages 18-22 that are matched with the target population of this study. Finally, the main goal of this high school transition program is to encourage the students' success in competitive employment by matching job demands and students' preferences (Rutkowski, Daston, Kuiken, & Riehle, 2006).

The study was designed using institutional ethnography (IE) to gather multiple data resources including: (a) semi-structured interviews for understanding diverse perspectives of 14 participants who have been experiencing the Project SEARCH transition program, (b) field observation at actual internship worksites to explore the realities of integrated work, and (c) textual materials to seek deeper detailed information

about the Project SEARCH transition program. Findings of this study present the

program's work processes and how various aspects of components within the

collaborative partnerships between public and private systems are able to establish strong

transition from school-to-work and contribute to the successful employment of

adolescents with significant disabilities in the community.

Research Questions

Q1   Does the Project SEARCH transition program support successful inclusive employment opportunities for 18- to 22-year-olds with significant cognitive disabilities?

Q2   What work processes contribute to the project's success?

Q3   What components of the project contribute to its success?

Significance of the Study

Even though transition services have received attention in many education

research studies, transition from school-to-work is still considered to be of inadequate

quality for serving students with significant cognitive disabilities in successful integrated

employment. Getzel and deFur (1997) discussed the outcomes for students with

disabilities after they existed high school. Their study showed "a disturbing picture of

chronic unemployment . . . and isolation from the regular daily activities of the

community" (p. 39). Students with significant cognitive disabilities have deficits in

characteristics of successful learning such as working on complex and multiple tasks,

adjustment to new work situations, and making decisions for solving problems (Smith,

Stuart, & Smith, 2002). These students may also require different or additional supports

in transition services from other students with disabilities such as health care needs,

transportation, assistive technology, visual support, or other accommodations to imply students' achievement in working (Getzel & deFur, 1997).

These unique challenges in learning and characteristics may lead some to strongly believe that persons with significant cognitive disabilities lack the capabilities for learning successful employment skills (Smith et al., 2002). Hence, the consequences of poor transition from school-to-work are still apparent, and schools are facing many challenges to develop job skills for these youths with disabilities and prepare efficient transition services to obtain necessary competitive employment requirements within the businesses community (Carter et al., 2009; Rutkowski et al., 2006). Zhang, Ivester, Chen, and Katsiyannis (2005) also noted in the list of the best transition practices, "interagency collaboration" (p. 16) needs be included in processes. Interagency collaboration might help employers perceive a young adult with significant disabilities as a good investment toward meeting their business demands. Of course, work experience and additional support and accommodations are key factors, and these need to be considered when seeking successful integrated employment for students with significant cognitive disabilities (Rutkowski et al., 2006).

As previously discussed, the transition movement requires a strong integration and collaboration of three public primary systems, including the public school, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Developmental Disabilities system (Certo & Luecking, 2011) to develop ultimate outcomes for confronting challenges of competitive employment between persons with and persons without disabilities. The demand-side of the industry sector, coupled with the transition planning process, must integrate the local businesses' sector to be involved as a partner with the public system.

Finally, providing opportunities in integrated work environments may offer support for students with significant cognitive disabilities to actively discover their natural talents and their place in the work world. Phillips, Callahan, Shumpert, Puckett, Petrey, Summers and Phillips (2009) discussed three universal needs of the discovery process, including "competency, autonomy, and relationships" (p. 50). Research is needed on whether and how integrated employment can enhance these three universal needs.

Definition of Terms

Community Centered Boards (CCB). The Official Colorado State Web Portal (March, 2014) defines Community Centered Boards as "private non-profit organizations designated in statute as the single entry point into the long-term services and support systems for persons with developmental disabilities."

Competitive employment. McDonnell and Hardman (2010) described competitive employment as employment that"…occurs within the local labor market in regular community businesses" (p. 301).

Customized employment. The term customized employment came from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) in 2001. McDonnell and Hardman (2010) offered the following clarification: "customized employment is set of strategies and inventions that are designed to help an individual with significant support needs obtain paid employment" (p. 305).

Discovery process. This process is a step in customized employment. It is referred to as "gathering comprehensive information about an individual to support the development of a customized job" (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010, p. 307).

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). Wehman (2006a) described DVR as "a federal/state cooperative program that exists in all 50 states and the U.S. territories" (p. 114). The Official Colorado State Web Portal (March, 2014) characterizes the mission of DVR as follows:

> DVR is committed to helping our employer partners find candidates who are skilled, loyal, and committed to your success. Even after placement, employers and employees get ongoing support from DVR's professional staff, including job training, guidance on the ADA regulations, and information on disability and employment guidelines.

Employment agency. Pierangelo and Giuliani (2004) defined the meaning of employment agency as "public employment services funded by the federal government and administered by states" (p. 101).

Integrated employment. This refers to the context of the workplace. White and Weiner (2004) described integrated employment as "placement in a paid community-based job with non-disabled peers at the time of graduation, with post graduation follow-up support by an adult agency that provides supported employment services" (p. 150). This is in contrast to segregated employment, such as sheltered workshops.

Internships. Wehman (2011) described internships as when "a student is assigned specific tasks in a workplace over a predetermined period of time. Internships may be paid or unpaid, depending on the nature of the agreement and the nature of the tasks" (p. 12).

Individual Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004*).* Two primary purposes are stated in the reauthorizing of IDEA that include: (a) "provide an education that meets a child's unique needs and prepares the child for future education,

employment, and independent living," and (b) "protect the right of both children with disabilities and their parents" (Wright & Wright, 2007, p. 15).

Individualized Education Program (IEP). Wehman (2011) has noted that IEPs for students who are ages 16 years or older must contain:

- Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessment related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills
- The transition services (including courses of study) needed to help the student reach those goals. (p. 4)

Individualized Transition Planning (ITP). Wehman (2011) offered the following meaningful definition of Individualized Transition Planning:

Individualized transition planning assists students in learning about themselves, developing statements of their future goals, and negotiating with their IEP team members for a plan of objectives and activities that are necessary to accomplish their goals. (p. 25)

Wehman (2013) also defined two specific goals of Individualized Transition Planning:

- To identify the postsecondary outcomes desired and expected by students and their families along with services and supports desired and needed to achieve this outcome. (p. 97)
- To use data from State Performance Plan Indicators 13 and 14 to drive the way transition services are delivered. (p. 97)

Job coach. Daston, Riehle, and Rutkowski (2012) described the characteristics of job coaching as "…the assistance that a person with disabilities receives when learning a new job" (p. 5).

Job-site support/developing natural support. McDonnell and Hardman (2010) discussed the definition as "supported employment is designed to provide an individual with assistance necessary to ensure success in the job" (p. 278).

Person with significant cognitive disabilities. In this study, this term refers to students who have significant intellectual and developmental disabilities. This category

of disability is the target population of the Project SEARCH transition program. Daston et al. (2012) also defined the term of intellectual disabilities as "a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18" (p. 29).

Public-private partnership program. The term public-private partnership describes and is an aspect of the Project SEARCH transition program, "a novel collaborative approach that brings the education system, employers, and rehabilitation services together in unique ways to create a productive and comprehensive transition experience for students" (Rutkowski et al., 2006, p. 85).

Sheltered workshops/facility-based employment. Pierangelo and Giuliani (2004) defined the character of a sheltered workshop as one in which "individuals with disabilities work in a self-contained unit; they are not integrated with workers who don't have disabilities" (p. 97).

Transition. "refers to the passage from adolescence to adulthood, wherein each individual is faced with a number of life choices" (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010, p. 4). In addition, Bakken and Obiakor (2008) defined the term of transition as "the movement from secondary school to postsecondary education, work, and community involvement" (p. 5).

Transition services. Wright and Wright (2007) defined the definition of transition services as "a results-oriented process" to improve "the academic and functional achievement of the child with disabilities" (p. 21). They also described the goal of

transition services as one that "is to facilitate the child's transition from school-to-employment and future education" (p. 22).

Chapter Summary

School-to-work transition is a very important process for young students with disabilities to gain experiences with vocational skills and discover their own strengths before leaving secondary education. However, many research studies have reported high proportions of students with significant cognitive disabilities that are still experiencing limited opportunities such as unemployment, work in segregated setting, or deficient vocational skills (Carter et al., 2010). In the 21st century, the transition movement focuses on using collaborative partnerships of public and private organizations to establish efforts for supporting persons with disabilities, especially those with significant needs, to achieve integrated employment.

This study was conducted using an institutional ethnographic design to explore and gain a better understanding of the Project SEARCH transition program. The purpose of this study was to investigate the link between the program's work processes and the services and opportunities provided by both public and private organizations. Another purpose of this study was to examine what principal core components of the program strongly contribute to its success. The study selected one program site in a western state to examine how the program fully supports students with significant cognitive disabilities to become successful at employment in the community.

The next chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to this qualitative study. Chapter III presents the research methodology, including research assumptions/framework, the institutional ethnographic strategy, data collection, and the

process of data analysis. Chapter IV describes the findings of the data analysis. The final

chapter, Chapter V, presents discussion, conclusions, limitations of this study, and

recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore transition processes to support students who are recognized as being at the level of significant disabilities to achieve inclusive employment. The ultimate goal of transition services for students with disabilities is to assist them to accomplish their long-term employment outcomes and become active members within social communities (Bakken & Obiakor, 2008). However, students with disabilities, particularly students with significant cognitive disabilities, are still considered by many as unproductive learners and incapable of employment skills. These considerations have begun to lead people in the community to lack belief in these students' unique talents and their potential (Smith et al., 2002).

This chapter discusses the literature to provide a framework for this study, and it addresses in detail six major components, including: (a) history of special education law and legislation in transition services, (b) transition movement for students with significant cognitive disabilities, (c) employment for students with significant cognitive disabilities, (d) integrated employment and community/business involvement, (e) public-private partnerships for transition programs related to school-to-work, and (f) what we know now about Project SEARCH. The end of this chapter presents a summary and a brief overview of the structure of the research methodology which leads into the next chapter.

History of Special Education Law and
Legislation in Transition Services

Historically, the first transition services were provided to students with hearing

impairment in the early 1930s. Ten years later, in the 1940s, a group with intellectual

disabilities received transition services (Morningstar, 2012). The family members were a

group of strong-minded contributors that showed strong passion for pursuing success for

their youths with disabilities to achieve employment (Stodden & Whelley, 2004).

Although transition services have been available to students with significant disabilities

for more than 80 years, federal law has only been mandated in the last 20 years (Bakken

& Obiakor, 2008).

For the past decade, transition services have had a significant impact on

supporting life-long outcomes for persons with disabilities to achieve career goals and

independent living. The legal foundation for transition development appeared in the

missions of legislative policies, including (a) Rehabilitation Act of 1973, (b) Americans

with Disabilities Act (ADA), and (c) Public Law 94-142: The Education for All

Handicapped Children Act (reauthorized as IDEA 1997).

Before the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was mandated, the ideas of legislation and

policy for transition program development had begun in the 1960s in medical models and

community support models for persons with developmental delays (Stodden & Whelley,

2004). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 established and provided financial assistance and

training support for students with disabilities in order to enhance their quality of

employment and community living.

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandated significant protection of civil rights for persons with disabilities by supporting self-advocacy. ADA also focused on supporting school life where students had the right to access facilities such as transportation, public buildings, communications, assistive technologies, and other transition resources. The determination of the ADA, Sections 504 and Sections 508 of the Vocation Rehabilitation Act, and Section 188 of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), promoted accessibility to support persons with disabilities in successful work situations and reduced employment barriers. The main goal of ADA provided accessibility and accommodations for persons with disabilities and promoted their rights of equal opportunity to access education, careers, and independent living within social environments. Richards (2005) discussed how the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) implemented the concept of universal access strategy to advocate for persons with disabilities to be a part of programs and activities of employment services.

In 1997 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 1997) focused on providing opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in general curriculum and promoted least restrictive environments or inclusion. IDEA 1997 supported teachers, parents, and students with disabilities to participate in transition planning for secondary school preparation, including assessment planning as early as 14 years of age (Stodden & Whelley, 2004). Finally, the main goal of IDEA 1997 highlighted quality preparation in secondary education, transition to postsecondary education, transition to independent living, and transition to employment.

More recently, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA 2004) was amended on December 3, 2004, to include supporting individuals' needs and

preparing students with disabilities in future education, employment, and independent

living (White & Weiner, 2004). Additionally, IDEA included critical statements:

transition-aged students' requirements, transition services, related services, the content of

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and the Summary of Performance: SOP

(Wehman, 2011). Public schools must provide transition planning to all high school

students who receive education in the special education program under the qualifications

of IDEA (White & Weiner, 2004).

Federal law mandated that school policies for transition services should provide

maximum support for students to fulfill their potential, and transition planning must be

based on and designed for the individual student's needs (Rutkowski et al., 2006).

Transition policy should provide all students with disabilities appropriate access to

services and be able to expand their knowledge, which matches their individual needs. It

should also provide students with disabilities support for vocational education,

postsecondary education, transportation, financial income, medical, recreation, job

coaching, independent living, and community living (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2004).

The IDEA transition components are intended to provide support to all students

with disabilities; however, some professionals may disregard students with more severe

disabilities, such as profound mental retardation and deaf-blindness. Under the

Rehabilitation Act (1973), when students with significant disabilities leave school, they

are entitled to continued services for supported living and employment services. The

Rehabilitation Act promotes individuals with significant disabilities and their rights to

gainful employment. Specifically, the Act defines a person with a significant disability

as an individual whose ability to function independently in family or community or

whose ability to become gainfully employed is limited due to the severity of his or her

disability. Both the IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act are equally important in providing

support, such as supported employment and educational training programs, for persons

with significant disabilities, as there continues to be significant problems. Students with

significant disabilities have unique learning characteristics, such as difficulty in

generalizing learned skills to new work situations that need to be addressed.

Transition Movement for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Transition is a pathway for students to continue growing and learning well into

their adult lives, and one can encounter positive or negative experiences. Indeed,

transition from school-to-work can be a significant challenge for some students,

particularly students with significant cognitive disabilities who require additional

supports and attention to overcome individual unique needs (Phillps et al., 2009). During

this period, it is also important that special education and the Division of Vocational

Rehabilitation be involved in helping students pass through to the next steps of life

beyond the classroom (Wehman, 2013). Transition from school-to-work has evolved in a

number of ways over the last four decades. The reflection of the transition movement has

appeared in four primary periods within the last 40 years. The section presented below

will describe changes in the transition process in four primary periods, from 1975 through

2014.

**In the 1970s: Promoting Employ-
ment and Community–Based
Instruction**

Prior to the passage of PL 94-142, Certo and Luecking (2011) described the

teaching method as "focused on teaching typical school-like skills such as language, pre-

academic, and academic skills" (p. 157). This academic instruction supported students towards adult life; however, it still lacked matching with what the students' immediate needs were, regardless of the age. As students approached adulthood, prevocational and vocational instruction might occur first in their schools, and then in sheltered workshops. This pattern of instruction preacademic and communication instruction in the early years, followed by prevocational instruction in the teenage years, and ultimately sheltered workshop placement was all that was available.

In the late 1970s, instruction in vocational and community skills began to occur more in community settings. Students had opportunities to go out of school and improve academic and functional skills within actual situations such as accessing stores, using public transportation, accessing recreation and leisure activities, and practicing in employment within the actual community settings (Certo & Luecking, 2011). Accommodations were also provided to equip students to facilitate tasks and to develop communication and social interaction within the actual settings. This community-based instruction model represented a significant improvement over isolated instruction in self-contained classroom because the skills learned were more likely to be maintained.

In the 1980s: Person-Centered
Planning and Natural Support

Community-based instruction proved to be an efficient and effective way to teach students with disabilities the skills that they needed to function across home, school, and community environments. At the same time, it became clear that this instruction was not enough to secure for students authentic careers and real adult living opportunities (Certo & Luecking, 2011). Person-centered planning and natural supports became the primary innovations for the transition movement during this period. This transition model

focused on understanding and identifying personal characteristics of individual students such as student needs, interests, preferences, dislikes, goals, strengths, weakness, and lifestyles (Certo & Luecking, 2011). Using this information, social activities, community settings, and sometimes jobs could be matched to the characteristics of the individual students, and natural supports could be developed to ensure success. The Person Centered Planning model could be described as a "discovery process" (Phillips et al., 2009, p. 50) that allowed students to determine goals and understand more about themselves within the context of personal growth such as self-preferences and self-control (Phillips et al., 2009).

With the advent of natural supports, a logical extension of this was the creation of the job coach role during the late 1980s. Job coaches could go out from the adult agency and provide support for the students at the job site, even as the special education teachers assisted by teaching skills back in the classroom. Certo and Luecking (2011), however, noted that, during this time, the job coaches knew very little about disabilities, and teachers knew very little about job sites. To address this concern, it was necessary for teachers and job coaches to coordinate their services. Consequently, teachers had an opportunity to learn jobs and business process and build relationships with employers for greater long-term collaboration.

A consequence of the growing working relationship between teachers and job coaches was the emergence of a more effective transition model that included "public schools, the state rehabilitation system, and the state developmental disabilities system" (Certo & Luecking, 2011, p. 159). As a result of bringing these three public systems in to work together, "it created a seamless transition for exiting students, resulting in 60%

being employed in direct hire jobs at the point of school exit" (Certo & Luecking, 2011,

p. 159).

**Early 1990s: Integrated
Employment**

As previously mentioned, persons with significant cognitive disabilities were

routinely placed for employment in segregated settings, such as sheltered workshops.

The dynamic of promoting integrated employment for students with significant

disabilities began in 1985, and this was a significant step. According to Novak, Rogan,

Mank, and DiLeo (2003):

> In 1985, the U.S. Department of Education issued a request for proposals with the
> intent of fostering systematic statewide efforts to provide paid, integrated
> community employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities who
> require ongoing support to participate successfully in the competitive labor force.
> The federal grant initiative emphasized conversion of traditional segregated day
> activity program to integrated support employment services program. (p. 157)

In the early 1990s, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was

reauthorized and afterward, the Rehabilitation Act reauthorization occurred in 1992 and

1998. This legislation highlighted "equal access, inclusion, choice, anti-discrimination,

and control by individuals with disabilities over their own lives" (Rogan, Novak, Mank,

& Martin, 2002, p. 47). As a consequence, the number of persons with disabilities

showed higher participation in the area of competitive employment than ever before.

Rogan, Novak, Mank, and Martin (2002) reported the number of students with significant

disabilities who participated in supported employment had increased "from fewer than

10,000 in 1986 to approximately 140,000 in 1995" (p. 47).

Late 1994-Present: Collaborative
Public-Private Partnerships:
A Demand-Side Model

Progress in transition from school-to-work has been moving forward looking for

greater employment outcomes for students with disabilities. Legislation, policy, practice,

and community attitudes have developed to help these students achieve better access to

competitive employment and social integration (Migilore, Grossi, Mank, & Rogan,

2008). A major contributor to these successes was the model of collaboration between

the three public systems, the schools, DVR, and DDD. By the late 1990s, these

collaborative efforts were beginning to be extended to include the workplace; i.e., private

employers became part of the partnerships (Muthumbi, 2008). This model, the public-

private partnerships model, represents an important innovation in the development of

transition programs.

In recent years, legislation has promoted the development of partnerships to build

strong collaboration for facing the challenges when students with significant disabilities

leave school to interact with the work world (Muthumbi, 2008). The significance of the

transformation from the three public systems model to the partnership model is made

clear in the comparison of the two models offered by Buys and Rennie (2001):

> Primary traditional approaches: (1) rehabilitation counselors provide placement
> assistance by contacting employers and supporting clients through the interview
> and placement process, (2) use of specialized "job search" officers to undertake
> the time-consuming tasks involved in cold canvassing and other methods of
> employer contact, and (3) contracted services are used to bring the vocational
> rehabilitation industry closer to business and employers.
>   New models of job placement based on a market driven approach have
> emerged over the last few years. The "demand-side" approach differs from
> traditional models in that rather than "pushing individuals with disabilities into
> jobs, more concerned with creating a demand among employers, or pulling people
> with disabilities into the workforce. (pp. 95-96)

The public-private partnerships model creates benefits and develops productive transition from school-to-work by bringing collaborative efforts of public and private organizations. They include public schools, the state rehabilitation, the state developmental disabilities, local businesses, and other agencies in the community. Successful public-private partnerships: (a) increase society's responsibilities by employers, (b) assure better service delivery by agencies (Buys & Rennie, 2001), (c) build trust between two organizations, (d) retain the business orientation and customer focus of the worksites (Buys & Rennie, 2001), (e) reciprocally benefits both the private and the public sectors, and (f) foster strong long-term relationships (Buys & Rennie, 2001).

Employment for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

School-to-work transition programs increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Work is a basic need for all humans to live, no matter with or without disabilities (Wehman, 2011). Lindsay (2011) addressed the importance of employment for students with disabilities in that it improves social inclusion and reduces the poverty lines of living status. Lindsay also mentioned that:

> Participation in employment can help people with disabilities to feel important, included, and appreciated. Young people in particular need sustained participation in social and employment activities to develop relationships and to foster their physical and psychological well-being. (p. 844)

Moreover, Wehman (2011) noted four reasons why adults need to work, including: (a) work is a way of human life to enhance many other skills associated to living in society, (b) many laws promote and support meaningful access to work opportunities, (c) work promotes economic well-being in the community, and (d)

employment that is inclusive results in more opportunities for upward mobility and career development. In addition, Hendricks (2010) asserted that having a job enables the person with a disability to earn a living and support him- or herself and pursue life interests. Employment also promotes individual personal dignity, motivates the individual to improve quality of life, and creates a stronger economy.

Unfortunately, persons with disabilities, especially those with significant needs, are an easy mark to be refused employment, especially inclusive employment. Along these lines, there are many factors for the lack of successful employment for persons with significant disabilities within the business community. The unique deficits of persons with significant disabilities are difficulties for learning in multiple and complex tasks, communication, and self-care skills (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011). This can lead to low expectations, ambivalent attitude, and lacking belief towards these persons incapability for career accomplishments (Smith et al., 2002; Wehman, Gibson, Brooke, & Unger, 1998). Another factor is that the employers become overly apprehensive regarding high safety concerns for persons with significant disabilities. It makes employers avoid hiring employees with significant disabilities for keeping any negative contingencies out of the workplace environment (Kaletta, Binks, & Richard, 2012). The majority of these students are also reported to leave secondary education without receiving training for developing sufficient employment skills for transition from school-to-work (Carter et al., 2011; Condon & Callahan, 2008; Luecking, 2011).

Shandra and Hogan (2008) noted that the Federal Law and State policies have invested approximately a quarter of a million dollars in funding to support students with disabilities in preparing for transition from school-to-work. However, there are still a

high number of students with significant disabilities that are unemployed after high school graduation (Shandra & Hogan, 2008; White & Weiner, 2004). A big gap of employment between persons with and without disabilities is still noted in many current research studies, particularly persons who have significant disabilities, who were found to have 75% unemployment (Brooke et al., 2009; Luecking & Certo, 2003). Shandra and Hogan (2008) stated that the majority of these students who are unemployed become dependent on the publicly funded welfare system and have poor quality of life. Given the federal investment in transition from school-to-work, secondary education needs to realize the importance of providing quality transition services.

Transition from School-to-Work
in Secondary Education

As indicated earlier in the literature, employment is a fundamental need of individuals living in the adult world. Transition from secondary education can facilitate students with significant cognitive disabilities in moving forward into the work world. Wehman (2011) discussed six challenges that students with disabilities are still facing in transition from school-to-work: (a) persistent low rates of employment when compared to peers, (b) inadequate employment support services for meeting the needs of transitioning youth, (c) high levels of unemployment and poverty, (d) unevenly supported employment services from community employment agencies, (e) continued reliance on segregated services, and (f) unacceptable subminimum wages across the life span.

The foregoing challenges appear to be related to a major gap that exists between public education and the business community. This gap has four components: (a) inadequate transition goals in Individualized Education Programs, (b) a lack of

supporting job experiences, (c) absence of job accommodations, and (d) disconnection and lack of cooperation between public schools and businesses communities.

Inadequate transition goals in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Students who have significant cognitive disabilities receive less attention from their teachers because of a lack of understanding on how to support these students' futures. These teachers are being held responsible and accountable for providing opportunities to the students to be successful in their future, seeking a job that addresses their needs, interests, and strengths, and improving their necessary skills, learning to respect themselves, and learning to believe in their self-efficacy (Walker & Rogan, 2007).

The transition services that need to be provided must be identified in each student's Individualized Education Program (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007). In addition, IEP plans must provide information on students' strengths, interests, preferences, and needs related to employment; they must direct teachers to provide meaningful work opportunities to students; and they must provide a basis for matching students to jobs in the community (Bakken & Obiakor, 2008; Carter et al., 2011; McDonnell & Hardman, 2010).

Lack of supporting job experiences/internships. Supported employment services are important for students with disabilities to provide highly fulfilling job experiences from school towards the actual work world (Burgstahler & Bellman, 2009; Lindsay, 2011). According to the research, the benefits of job experiences include: (a) encouraging students with disabilities to become aware of employers' expectations and the work world, (b) building a strong resume toward demanding competition, (c) promoting and facilitating access to technology and other accommodations, (d) closing

career barriers, (e) developing independent skills, (f) gaining self-determination skills, and (g) providing political strength (Brewer, Erickson, Karpur, Unger, & Malzer, 2011; Burgstahler & Bellman, 2009; Lindsay, 2011). Burgstahler and Bellman (2009) also mentioned:

> Missing such opportunities may interfere with successful transitions to meaningful careers. It is important that educators and service providers help students with disabilities overcome barriers because unemployment and underemployment continue to be significant problems for people with disabilities. (pp. 155-156)

Unfortunately, many school-to-work programs do not provide supported employment services to fully include students with disabilities for learning and gaining vocational skills in actual work experiences (Burgstahler, 2001). The majority of students with significant disabilities have been leaving secondary education without receiving job experiences that meet the demands of competitive employment within business workplaces (Burgstahler, 2001; Carter et al., 2011; Condon & Callahan, 2008). Sabbatino and Macrine (2007) also discussed how students with cognitive disabilities have lacked the educational experiences needed to build the necessary skills for leading them towards becoming productive employees. Recognition of these concerns occurs during transition, and there are studies that noted that these students are more likely to be unemployed as a consequence of leaving high school without qualified skills for working in the integrated community (Condon & Callahan, 2008). Bakken and Obiakor (2008) noted that students who participated in the vocational experiences and job experience opportunities in secondary education had a higher probability of getting competitive employment.

Absence of job accommodations. Students with significant cognitive disabilities have insufficient skills for adapting to new environments, working on multiple tasks, making complex decisions, and solving problems (Smith et al., 2002). Indeed, these students require additional supports and accommodations to facilitate transition services (Getzel & deFur, 1997). Rutkowski et al. (2006) noted that providing job accommodations is the key to students with significant cognitive disabilities becoming independent and productive workers. Luecking (2011) described the methodology behind successful employment outcomes within the integrated workplace for students with significant needs. These include providing step-by-step directions, picture cards, and supervisors' and coworker supports. Unfortunately, instructors sometimes fail to make and maintain job accommodations to assist students with disabilities in their worksites (Janus, 2009). Wehman (2011) stated that "only 6% of accommodations and supports are mentioned in transition planning, an incredibly low percentage" (p. 7). Three reasons are found in a research study by Janus (2009) that might explain lack of attention to the accommodation process: "ambivalent attitude toward disabled students . . . . limited understanding of disabilities and their implications . . . and concerns about balancing obligations toward the disabled students and the class whole" (p. 101).

Disconnection and lack of cooperation between public schools and businesses communities. As previously discussed, promoting the collaborative partnerships of school-to-work transition began in late 1994 and has continued through to the present. Legislation has provided incentives for school-Vocational Rehabilitation collaborative programs in secondary transition services (Brewer, Erickson, Karpur, Unger, & Malzer, 2011; Muthumbi, 2008). However, school transition services continue to face the

challenge of connecting students with disabilities for job experiences with local

businesses (Baer, Flexer, & Dennis, 2007; Carter et al., 2009). This challenge may be a

factor affecting adequate employment preparation and actual job placement (Carter et al.,

2009). The cooperation between school and local businesses needs more attention in the

research literature.

The local businesses are the private system, and the role of employers is likely to

influence and promote vocational preparation, career development, and provide greater

paid job opportunities for all students with disabilities. There is a 30% gap in the

employment rate between people with and without disabilities, and it has also been found

that employers have shown low expectations and lack knowledge about persons with

disabilities' capabilities in work performance (Luecking, 2011). Hence, the benefits of

having additional partners, especially a high number of businesses, may change

employers' attitudes toward expectations and willingness to employ students with

disabilities in the future (Carter et al., 2009). Carter et al. (2009) also indicated "that new

and innovative partnerships are needed if more youth with disabilities are expected to

leave high schools equipped with the skills, experiences and aspirations that prepare them

for their future careers" (p. 146).

Successful transition from school to work is a primary goal of secondary

education. Indeed, without a well-prepared vocational experience and accommodations,

students with disabilities are not likely to become productive workers and, consequently,

are more likely to become unemployed.

Integrated Employment and Community/
Business Involvement

The 1997 IDEA amendments focused on improving the capacity of schools and

communities to work together to deliver transition services that are focused on student

outcomes (Mellard & Lancaster, 2003). The literature addressing these issues focuses on

three primary discussions: (a) the controversy between integrated employment and

sheltered workshops, (b) the benefits for employers to hire and retain employees with

disabilities within integrated employment, and (c) the possible transition process to

establish school and local businesses to collaborate in public and private partnerships.

Integrated Employment versus
Sheltered Workshops

The majority of students with significant cognitive disabilities entering the

workforce are not well prepared for the world of work, lacking essential job experiences

to match the business demands within their local communities (Burgstahler, 2001;

Condon & Callahan, 2008). Therefore, as indicated by Cimera et al. (2012), many of

these students leave secondary education and enter sheltered workshops as their primary

placements in the world of work. As a result, a majority of students with significant

cognitive disabilities are below the poverty line and are dependent on their families or on

government services for the basic necessities of life.

The controversy between sheltered workshops and integrated employment is still

relevant to the transition movement and employment outcomes for students with

disabilities. It is argued that certain students with disabilities may receive the benefits of

working within a sheltered workshop environment. For instance, some youth with autism

spectrum disorders have difficulty with sensory integration or sensory defensiveness.

Over-stimulating environments may disturb and cause these students to respond toward frustration and negative outcomes (Cimera et al., 2012; Wildes, 2005). Sheltered workshops may work for these students who are experiencing higher risks of losing social interaction and opportunities to gain employment skills as career development within competitive employment (Cimera et al., 2012).

Recently, many education research studies promote person-centered planning, natural supports, and specially supporting integrated employment for improving efficient transition services (Migliore, Mank, Grossi, & Rogan, 2007; Wehman, 2006b). In the past few decades since 1985, persons with disabilities have been experiencing greater opportunities to participate in their local social and economic communities, which can increase their employability skills for working in integrated work settings (Migliore et al., 2007). Integrated employment options, when made readily available and offered as alternatives to segregated employment options, allow students with disabilities to experience employment success in their local communities (Brewer et al., 2011).

The benefits are found in many studies regarding successful integrated employment for persons with significant disabilities such as increasing their quality of life, dignity, independent living, self-determination, self-esteem, communication, and economical and political strengths (Brewer et al., 2011; Hendricks, 2010; Wehman, 2011). Besides, integrated employment opportunities lead to a fulfilling life, increased social activities, better incomes, and increased interpersonal relationships within society (Lindsay, 2011). Novak et al. (2003) showed that employees with disabilities working within integrated settings versus working in sheltered facilities had significant differences in wages, in fact, earning twice as much if they were in an integrated setting. Finally, the

group of employees in integrated employment is found having higher performance

toward vocational outcomes (Cimera et al., 2012).

Benefits for Employers to Hire
Employees with Disabilities

Barriers to the employment of persons with disabilities include employers'

perceptions such as low and discriminatory attitudes, concerns about expenses for

providing job accommodations, and concerns about the capability of employees with

disabilities to perform complex functions (Luecking, 2011; Hartnett, Stuart, Thurman,

Loy, & Batiste , 2011). Despite these barriers, education research studies show that

integrated and competitive employment offers increased benefits for both the persons

with disabilities and their employers. According to a research study by Wehman (2011),

the author clarified four useful advantages for employing persons with disabilities,

including:

- Outstanding workers. Outstanding is defined as working every day, producing at high level of reliability, and being highly productive. Productivity, which is basic business language, means how much work is produced with the lowest amount of labor expense.
- The public and coworkers have consistently demonstrated giving business to companies with strong hiring practices for individuals with disabilities.
- People who work in companies and for their suppliers or their customers often have children youth and adults with disabilities in their families. The sensitivity which many employers and supervisors feel toward including young people with disabilities is very high, but schools and rehabilitation programs have not figured out the best ways to maximize the possible long term relations that can exist here. Business will increase their likelihood of hiring when they have more exposure to workers with disabilities.
- The prospect of hiring young people with disabilities and helping to give them a start in the world of work is highly consistent with this social responsibility philosophy that so many companies, private and public sectors believe in and practice. (p. 148)

Hartnett et al. (2011) confirmed these findings, adding that employers can increase business profits and investments. Additionally, as noted by Carter et al. (2009), an indirect benefit of hiring persons with disabilities is that it promotes the economic interests of the larger community. However, in order to be able to hire and retain quality employees with disabilities, employers must address three important requirements of integrated employment: considering employees' strengths and needs, providing a positive work environment, and offering necessary accommodations (Chappel & Somers, 2010; Hartnett et al., 2011).

Collaborative Efforts between
Public Education and
Local Businesses

Kaletta et al. (2012) indicated that many local businesses are determined to employ persons with disabilities; however, they are still facing concerns and challenges. Wehman (2002) addressed "how business and schools can work together most effectively to facilitate employment outcomes for youth with disabilities" (p. 195). In order to understand employers' concerns and respond in effective ways, public schools need to become aware and take consideration of businesses' viewpoints (Hartnett et al., 2011). This literature highlights potential processes for collaborative efforts between public education and local businesses to forge greater partnerships. These include such cooperative processes as: developing connections, promoting vocational experiences, using customized employment, and increasing employers and resource access for hiring person with significant cognitive disabilities. Each of these is discussed below.

Developing connections. Hartnett et al. (2011) mentioned in their study that "Employment opportunities for all people have long been considered an important

component of the self-society connection" (p. 17). In the meantime, some employees

with disabilities have been isolated, and ignored, and are being excluded from integrated

work routines by their coworkers, supervisors, and employers (Janus, 2009). Employers

may have a lack of knowledge and understanding of the accommodations that can be

implemented at an inclusive work placement to support persons with disabilities become

productive workers in job functions (Carter et al., 2009; Janus, 2009). Thus, connections

between school and the business community can efficiently improve transition processes

by way of recognizing that "the employment of people with disabilities also benefits

employers" (Hartnett et al., 2011, p. 17). Mellard and Lancaster (2003) noted that

"successful transition is more than a sustained employment outcome, but an employment

outcome is usually necessary to provide for successful adult life in the community" (p.

363).

Promoting vocational experiences. Most students with significant cognitive

disabilities often miss out on vocational training opportunities to develop their job

experiences, communication skills, and social attitudes that employers look for when

hiring or decision making (Rutkowski et al., 2006). Consequently, these students have

missed career development opportunities, lacked strong resumes or employment profiles,

and lost competitive employment opportunities (Burgstahler & Bellman, 2009).

Promoting vocational experiences can help students with significant cognitive disabilities

increase their employment skills, which can lead to future employment success. These

students can learn new skills and discover their own strengths (Phillips et al., 2009).

Vocational experiences can be linked to the discovery process strategy that allows these

students to explore and identify their preferences and skill strengths and limitations

(Phillips et al., 2009). Employers also receive the benefits from their vocational

experiences as indicated earlier in the literature about employers' advantages for hiring

persons with disabilities. Finally, families play an important role in preparing youth with

disabilities to engage in vocational training, promoting better outcomes of financial

security and self-sufficiency (Lindstrom, Doren, & Miesch, 2011).

     Using customized employment. As discussed above, vocational experiences can

provide opportunities for students with significant cognitive disabilities to observe and

discover their self-interests and capability strengths. To assist successful transition from

school-to-work, Phillips, Callahan, Shumpert, Puckett, and Petrey (2009) suggested that

students with significant cognitive disabilities should have the opportunity to "discover

who they are, deploy strengths, provide career development, identify natural support, use

inclusive settings, foster interagency collaboration, and use customized employment" (p.

50). Phillips, Callahan, Shumpert, Puckett, and Petrey have defined customized

employment as the process of identifying "skills and preferences" and matching "them to

job tasks one client at a time" (p. 52).

     Buys and Rennie (2001) described a model for job placement that focuses on a

"demand-side approach that differs from traditional models in that rather than pushing

individuals with disabilities into jobs, it is more concerned with creating a demand among

employers, or pulling people with disabilities into the workforce" (p. 96). Such a process

is made possible by using customized employment processes, and, clearly, both

employers and employees with disabilities benefit. As noted by Phillips et al. (2009):

> The employment relationship between employees and employers can be
> developed in ways that meet the needs of both. Rather than being based on an
> evaluation, assessment, or a comparison, customized employment is based on an

individualized determination of the strengths, needs and interests of a person with disability and at the same time, specific needs of the employers. (pp. 53-54)

Increasing the number of employers and resource access. There are many reasons persons with significant disabilities meet employment barriers such as biased community attitudes, low expectations, and lack of vocational training opportunities. Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities still continue to be a challenge, and higher numbers of supportive and hiring partners are needed (Luecking, 2011). In addition, Mellard and Lancaster (2003) identified the importance of school and community resources and how incorporating school and community services can create positive results of participation in society, integration, the community, and full employment options. Furthermore, Hartnett et al. (2011) discussed available online transition resources that can be easily accessed for public and private organizations. According to Hartnett et al., they also noted the following:

Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) serves as the nation's most comprehensive resource on workplace accommodations in support of increased employment opportunities for persons with all types of disabilities. (p. 17)

Community and business involvement with school transition programs can deliver career opportunities and employment success for persons with disabilities within an inclusive setting. Employment of persons with significant cognitive disabilities could have a significant impact on creating and developing economic well-being within a community. Moreover, "the cost of community supports would decrease creating less reliance on day programs and activities, such as adult day care" (Hendricks, 2010, p. 126). When paid competitive wages, employees with disabilities can become self-

sufficient and responsible for paying bills and managing their own needs for daily living

(Hendricks, 2010).

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Public-Private Partnerships for
Transition Programs Related
to School-to-Work

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An important marker of adult success in modern society is sustainable and

adequate employment, leading to financial security, self-sufficiency, personal satisfaction

and higher self-esteem (Lindstrom et al., 2011). To accomplish higher employment rates,

federal law now emphasizes that "public and private partnerships" are needed to provide

strong employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the inclusive workforce

(Unger, 2007, p. 40). A model of public and private collaboration may be especially

important to effectively promote competitive employment opportunities for students with

significant cognitive disabilities as part of transition programs (Migilore et al., 2008).

The aim of this partnership model is for job developers, employment specialists or job

coaches, and school personnel to work together to understand employer needs and meet

those needs through promoting the skills and success potential of persons with significant

cognitive disabilities entering the workforce. The study discussed in this paper addresses

one such public-private partnership, the Project SEARCH transition program. This

program is an example of a demand-side model, providing internships and integrated

employment for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Project SEARCH High School
Transition Program

Daston et al. (2012) defined the Project SEARCH transition program as "a novel

collaborative approach that brings the education system, employers, and rehabilitation

services together in unique ways to create a productive and comprehensive transition

experiences for students" (p. 85). In 1996, the Project SEARCH transition program began at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center (CCHMC) by Erin Riehle who was Clinical Director of the Emergency Department at that time. This program has expanded to over 200 locations across 39 states in the United States of America and four other countries (Daston et al., 2012; Unger, 2007). The philosophy of the Project SEARCH program started from working and interacting with the rehabilitation system in Cincinnati Children's Hospital. Her experiences with the program motivated her to conceptualize the program and its major components and to begin expanding the program to other locations. She found that a business perspective was what was needed for improving transition outcomes for students with significant cognitive disabilities (Daston et al., 2012).

The critical part of the Project SEARCH program is to promote employer-based interventions for students with significant disabilities from secondary education to adult life. The program also works with the premise that this is best achieved when students are directly supported within integrated and competitive employment options (Daston et al., 2012; Rutkowski et al., 2006). A primary goal of the Project SEARCH transition program is to increase inclusive employment and reduce sheltered workshops through collaborative efforts between public and private organizations in the community.

What We Know Now about Project SEARCH

Empirical research about Project SEARCH and its outcomes for student with significant cognitive disabilities is presently very limited. A search through the literature revealed only five studies that are germane. Two of these studies are descriptive (Rutkowski et al., 2006; Unger, 2007), two are case studies (Wehman et al., 2013; Wittig,

Holland, & Dalton, 2014), and one examines job readiness or group of participants

(Muller & VanGilder, 2014). These five studies are reviewed next.

Rutkowski et al. (2006) described the Project SEARCH program in Cincinnati.

They assert that Project SEARCH represents best practices for transition because it fully

addresses such critical areas as: (a) *preparation*, meaning to provide education and

vocational experiences for students with significant cognitive disabilities to gain

knowledge, employment skills, and confidence in reaching their goals; (b) *linkages*,

meaning to build the connections with a variety of businesses for providing these students

better access to the network of local businesses and services; and (c) *connection* meaning

to support and motivate these students to achieve in adult roles of employment,

independent living, and social participation in the community. Rutkowski et al. (2006)

discussed the Cincinnati program's outcomes, indicating that it represents a successful

local implementation of a school-to-work transition program.

In another study by Unger (2007), two public-private partnerships were examined

and how each operated as a demand-side model. The two programs were Project

SEARCH and Manpower, Incorporated. Unger focused on how the two programs

addressed the demand-side model's emphasis on the role of market-driven forces and on

shared concerns among partners for improving employment outcomes that address

customer needs. Unger discussed how Project SEARCH was a successful program

because its outcomes included successfully facilitating employment and promoting long-

term job retention for students with significant disabilities.

Wehman et al. (2013) examined the Project SEARCH program and how it

supported two young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to gain competitive

employment. The results were that Project SEARCH was an effective program for the school-to-work transition of these two students. The successes were reflected in the fact that these two young adults were employed in better jobs when compared to other students with significant disabilities, and they had improved performance and increased employment potential after their Project SEARCH internships. The study also provided what Wehman et al. believed were the essential components that helped to make the program successful. These included: offering intensive internships, providing behavioral training for staff, and using customized employment.

Wittig et al. (2014) explored integrated employment training sites of Project SEARCH within a rural area and how they impacted three students' lives. These three case studies included: a student with multiple disabilities, a student with intellectual disability, and a student with intellectual disability who also had significant difficulty reading and writing. The study examined these three cases during their provided Project SEARCH internships at the integrated employment sites, and they compared what they observed with the more traditional transition experiences that these students had been receiving before they entered Project SEARCH. The authors noted that "the majority of interns have been employed at least part time" (p. 220) as a consequence of Project SEARCH. And, when they compared the outcomes achieved with Project SEARCH with what happens in traditional transition programs, their analysis favored Project SEARCH. Based on their findings, they recommended that secondary education programs for students with significant disabilities should include: (a) community employment training, (b) technical education programs, (c) training students about the demands of the adult world, and (d) and building transition portfolios.

Muller and VanGilder (2014) examined Project SEARCH's relationship to job readiness using the Job Readiness Assessment Tool (JRAT). Ten young adults with various disability diagnoses were included in the study. The study used both quantitative and qualitative designs. The quantitative results were that the JRAT scores indicated that all interns showed significant developments in most areas of entry-level job skills and in workplace behaviors such as social interaction and independent travel. The qualitative analysis revealed that the Project SEARCH model benefitted all of the interns by increasing their job readiness, self-esteem, self-confidence, and their offers for permanent employment. In addition, 60% of the interns were employed within three months of the program's completion.

In summary, the available research offers descriptions of the Project SEARCH model and provides preliminary evidence of its potential for success. Clearly, more research is needed to establish the value and the effectiveness of the Project SEARCH approach to vocational programing. In addition, research is needed that addresses in detail the components of Project SEARCH, how they work, and what additional innovations are needed to improve outcomes. Project SEARCH represents the best that we have so far for addressing the school-to-work needs of young adults with significant cognitive disabilities. The research that is described in this study begins the explanation of what makes Project SEARCH a promising new practice.

Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on communicating an understanding of the public-private partnerships transition model and how it supports students with significant cognitive disabilities to move forward from school-to-work as competitive independent employees

within the social community. The literature review was framed by organizing this chapter into the following sections: (a) history of special education law and legislation in transition services, (b) transition movement for students with significant cognitive disabilities, (c) employment for students with significant cognitive disabilities, (d) integrated employment and community/business involvement, (e) public-private partnerships for transition programs related to school-to-work, and (f) what we know now about Project SEARCH. The findings of this literature review suggest that successful transition programs utilize public/private partnerships, customized employment, and the use of "real life," integrated work sites.

The purpose of the qualitative study that is described in subsequent chapters was to gain a comprehensive understanding of one Project SEARCH high school transition program, uncovering its major components and exploring its work processes. The analysis focused on young adults with significant cognitive disabilities who are perceived by Project SEARCH representatives as successful, analyzing program components and outcomes in relation to this claim. Finally, the findings of this study are used to identify program challenges for improving transition services for future generations of students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the processes of transition when guided by collaborative efforts between public education and local businesses to support the successful employment of persons with significant cognitive disabilities. Specifically, this study explored the work processes of the Project SEARCH program, which is a model public-private partnership supporting integrated employment for young adults who are between the ages 18-22 with significant cognitive disabilities (Rutkowski et al., 2006). As was described in Chapter II, transition programs that are based on public-private partnerships hold the potential for successfully preparing persons with significant cognitive disabilities for integrated employment.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study were:

Q1   Does the Project SEARCH transition program support successful inclusive employment opportunities for 18- to 22-year-olds with significant cognitive disabilities?

Q2   What work processes contribute to the project's success?

Q3   What components of the project contribute to its success?

In order to answer these research questions, the study was conducted using qualitative research methods, which have been recommended when a researcher seeks

knowledge about human knowledge, experiences, and social organizations in natural settings (Higgs & Horsfall, 2009; Merriam, 2009). The specific framework that was employed was institutional ethnography (Smith, 2006), a research method that is designed for exploring work processes within organizations, such as the Project SEARCH transition program.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the field of qualitative inquiry as it relates to this study. In the next section, the viewpoints and beliefs of the researcher are described, providing the philosophical assumptions, theoretical perspectives, and the interpretive framework for this study. Next the institutional ethnographic approach is detailed to show explicitly the research strategy that was used. These opening sections are followed by specific information on the research procedures to be used in the study. The discussion of these procedures includes detailed descriptions of the participants, settings, the organization of program levels that guided data collection, and the data gathering procedures. The data analysis procedures are then described. Finally, trustworthiness is discussed at the end of this chapter.

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research is a field of inquiry designed to provide insights into holistic human experiences, the social world, and culture without controlling and predicting the outcomes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Diverse perspectives of people's experiences are obtained to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and its particular aspects (Higgs & Horsfall, 2009; Patton, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research focuses on achieving an understanding of how people construct their worlds and interpret their experiences without anticipating right or wrong responses. Additionally, the role of

the qualitative researcher is as a primary instrument for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data such that thick descriptions of phenomena are constructed (Merriam, 2009).

In this study, qualitative research was applied to the exploration of the naturalistic experiences of a group of people who have been participating in the Project SEARCH transition program. The researcher expected to gain a better understanding of how these people perceived the social organization within the Project SEARCH program (Merriam, 2009). Much as one might put together a puzzle, the perceptions of individuals within the program and the perceptions of the researcher would be pieced together to form a holistic perspective on how transition services were provided to achieve successful employment outcomes and whether there are any gaps in these processes.

Assumption, Paradigm, and Framework

Creswell (2007) suggested that the process of writing qualitative research should begin with the researcher's perspectives, beliefs, and worldviews to guide him/her in shaping the framework of the study. Good research requires three elements before starting the research procedure: (a) a specific philosophical assumption, (b) a clear theoretical paradigm, and (c) an interpretive framework (Creswell, 2007). This section describes each element, and how each has been applied in this study.

Philosophical Assumption: Epistemological Perspective

A principal concept of epistemology is to understand the "nature of knowledge" as it is expressed by the participants and is understood by the researcher (Merriam, 2009, p. 8). To achieve this objective, the researcher must be close to his or her participants,

gathering data through field observation and related techniques as one inside the

organization (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). This meant conducting the study in a

natural setting, getting to know participants, and coming to understand their social world

within their own reality (Creswell, 2007).

Theoretical Paradigm: Social
Constructivism Perspective

Guba (1990) described the definition of a paradigm as "a basic set of beliefs that

guide action" (p. 17). A paradigm shapes the qualitative research because it defines "how

the researcher sees the world and acts in it" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 19) and how the

researcher gains knowledge from seeing the world.

Social constructivism is the paradigm that guided this researcher toward seeing

the world as it was perceived and organized by the participants in this study (Creswell,

2007). This required the researcher to actively set aside his or her own preconceived

notions so that the participants' world view shined through. In order to do this, the

researcher used open-ended questions and listened carefully to the responses of

participants, but still acknowledged the impact of the researcher's biases.

Interpretive Framework

A critical role of the social constructivist researcher is to organize the information

that is provided by participants so that a coherent knowledge framework is revealed

(Creswell, 2007). The interpretive stance of this study was shaped by disability theories.

Disability theories emphasize the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in society, and

they seek to understand this inclusion through the voices of "administrators, teachers, and

parents who have children with disabilities" (Creswell, 2007, p. 30). When a disability

theory's interpretive framework is used alongside a social constructivist perspective, this

means framing the world views of the participants in relation to seeking greater

inclusivity of people with disabilities in the broader community.

Research Strategy/Institutional
Ethnographic Design

The methodology of this study was designed using institutional ethnography to fit

the three elements of the research framework that were described above. Before

exploring the meaning of institutional ethnography and how it has been applied in this

study, this section begins with a description of ethnographic research, a type of research

that focuses on studying human society and how the cultural behavior of people in the

group are shaped by values, beliefs, and attitudes towards social issues (Merriam, 2002).

Atkinson (1988) defined ethnography by saying, "it has made a major contribution to

sociological theory and to the empirical investigation of everyday life" (p. 441). The

purpose of ethnography is to share knowledge in order to gain insight into the dynamics

of the social group, and present a socio-cultural interpretation of data and outcomes of the

research (Merriam, 2002; Miller & Salkind, 2002).

Traditional ethnography and institutional ethnography are at the root of

anthropology which was based on studying sociology and observing field work, in

particular social settings (Silverman, 2000). Institutional ethnography draws from the

ethnomethodology of qualitative research, examining the social relations and experiences

of people in everyday life within particular local settings (Smith, 2005; Wright, 2003).

Institutional ethnography is a major contributor to the investigation of social

organizations, enhancing understanding of the coordination of work processes described

using textual data derived from empirical observations (Devault, 2006; Devault &

McCoy, 2001). Institutional ethnography encourages the use of multiple data sources to

derive a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the power of administrative control and work processes within society (Devault & McCoy, 2001). The goal of this study was to apply these techniques to investigate the work processes and relationships between partnerships' roles that provided job opportunities for persons with significant cognitive disabilities so that their workings could be better understood.

Dorothy Smith was the author who first introduced institutional ethnography in qualitative methodology. Smith (2006) described four major concepts of institutional ethnography associated with exploring work process within social organization, including: (a) *work practices in everyday life*, focusing on understanding the tasks and activities of people immersed in particular organizations (p. 5); (b) *frontline organizational work,* focusing on understanding the views of frontline workers (p.27); (c) *ruling work,* focusing on understanding the views of administrators who work at the level of policy making and implementation within the organization (p.29); and (d) *processing interchanges,* focusing on understanding the exchanges within the organization that practitioners engage in with one another (p.30). These four key concepts of institutional ethnography guided the researcher in understanding how the roles of work and organizational processes of Project SEARCH impact successful employment's outcomes.

Research Procedure

This section focuses on describing how this study was conducted including recruiting participants, selecting the location of the research setting, and gathering data. The goal of this study was to deeply understand the social structure of people's experiences and perspectives about the Project SEARCH program. All participants were selected to match with the qualifications of this study's requirements.

Participants

Creswell (2007) discussed the concept of purposefully selecting individual participants for a study as "they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomena in the study" (p. 125). This study used a purposeful selection strategy to guide the selection of participants matched with the criteria of this study. All the participants that were included were employees of Project SEARCH within the local school system, members of supporting public agencies, private agencies, and Project SEARCH clients. They included 14 participants who were identified as follows:

1. Two young adults with significant cognitive disabilities who were employed working within local communities and who received transition services before their graduation from high school. The Project SEARCH coordinator helped to select two persons with significant cognitive disabilities who they believed were successful employment outcomes within the local community.

2. Two family members (e.g., parents), one from each family of the participants;

3. A group of people who were partners with the Project SEARCH program, including: (a) the director of local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), (b) the director of local Community Centered Board (CCB), and (c) the job coach at the Employment Agency;

4. Two host business supervisors who represented each job's location and had been working closely with the persons with significant cognitive disabilities;

5. An employer who had hiring responsibilities for the employees with significant cognitive disabilities in their business;

6. Two special education teachers from the high school that assisted these young adults with significant cognitive disabilities during their transition with the Project SEARCH program; and

7. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator; and the State Director of Project SEARCH.

Settings

The settings for data collection were divided into three locations. First, field notes occurred in two areas which are internship sites of the Project SEARCH program and work sites. The internship sites were the locations where the job training was provided for the two participants who are persons with significant cognitive disabilities and also where they practiced their employment skills before leaving secondary education. The worksites were the places where job opportunities are provided for these participants and could be the same location as the internship sites.

Second, the location for gathering interview data for all participants was determined by the comfort and convenience needs of the participants. However, the researcher provided alternative sites for their privacy, such as a meeting room at the Project SEARCH campus or a meeting room at the local library to encourage the confidentiality of the participants.

Third and finally, textual documents were collected from the Project SEARCH program and from the work sites that were associated with Project SEARCH. These documents were analyzed on site, or if permission was granted, duplicates were analyzed in a secure location at the University of Northern Colorado and then destroyed when the analysis was completed.

Data Collection Procedures

It was critical that data collection in this study address a variety of organizational levels. This was because casual processes associated with successful employment outcomes could result from events at many different points within the operations of the Project SEARCH program. Six levels were identified as important for exploring the organization of the Project SEARCH program:

Program and policy. The goal of this level was to understand what model and mission guided the Project SEARCH program and how the program was funded. The Project SEARCH program offered an integration of services to help students with disabilities to develop their employment skills within the community and within real-life work environments. Each student had equal opportunity to receive a one-year internship for improving his/her necessary skills with timely training and consultation from their employers and special education teachers (Rutkowski et al., 2006).

Program partnerships. The goal of this level was to determine how the Project SEARCH program connects and collaborates with public agencies and businesses in the community, including policies and practices in the employment and the management of student workers. The Project SEARCH program had connections with many local businesses such as restaurants, libraries, supermarkets, and the local university.

Student selection and transition assessment. The goal of this level was to investigate the processes of defining criteria for selecting employees with disabilities, types of job matching, and identifying suitable employers.

Delivery processes. The goal of this level was to learn about how the program organizes and structures the provision of its services, including needed manpower and

time to support client employment and related activities. This included procedures for

transferring support responsibilities from Project SEARCH to employing sites in the

community.

Individual student program configuration. The goal of this level was to

determine what instructional activities, interventions plans, accommodations or other

assistive devices are used for supporting the individual employees with significant

cognitive disabilities.

Program monitoring and evaluation. The goal of this level was to follow up

employment outcomes for employees with significant cognitive disabilities and how the

program evaluates success for supporting inclusive employment.

A number of questions were developed to guide the exploration of the Project

SEARCH program to learn about how successful inclusive employment is achieved.

These questions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Organization of Six Program Levels and Guiding Questions

Program Levels	Guiding Questions
Program & policy	- What is the model or design of the program? - What is the mission or goal? - What are the policies and how are the programs funded? - What kinds of job schedules and tasks are provided?
Program partnerships	- How does secondary education make connections with local businesses? - What are the partnerships roles of public and private organizations?
Student selection and transition assessments	- How are students with significant cognitive disabilities selected for the program? - What are the criteria for employers and locations? - What are the criteria for job-types, and how are they matched with student skills? - What assessments are used for matching jobs to skill levels and for determining training and support needs?
Delivery processes	- How is instruction delivered? - How is job support delivered? - Who delivers the instruction? - Who delivers job support? - How are problems solved or resolved?
Individual student program configuration	- What types of intervention plans are developed to support behavior and social interaction? - What kinds of intervention plans, accommodations, or assistive devices are used to support communication? - What are the processes to support safety and personal health care? - What kinds of transportation services are provided?
Program monitoring and evaluation	- What assessments are used for proving that a specific transition program was successful?

Three different methods of data collection were used in this study. These were:

(a) interviews with significant stakeholders, clients, and families; (b) ethnographic

observation in key work-related sites; and (c) content analysis of textual materials. These are described in the following pages.

   Interviews. The qualitative interview is the ultimate opportunity to bring new information from learning different aspects of people's experiences and aids in understanding their worlds, the way they live, and the way they work (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). A principal of the institutional ethnographic interview has been defined by Smith (2006) as "talking with people" (p. 22), meaning observing and learning from conversations with and between participants. Institutional ethnography is divided into two techniques of interviews that include the formal interview and the informal interview. The formal interview is also called a planned interview. Planned interviews are set up following a set script of questions and often occur before the researcher spends time in field observations. On the other hand, informal interviews are more likely conveniences for the interviewers. The researcher can open general questions during both field observations that have no associated expectations and planned observations that have associated researcher goals. Additionally, Smith (2006) suggests that it is possible to combine both interview techniques during the interview. By combining both techniques, the researcher was able to set up the questions when preparing for the interviews and add other open-ended questions during observations, if needed.

   My semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders associated with Project SEARCH were open-ended questions and lasted approximately 45 minutes. These interviews are shown in Appendix A. Before the interview process, all participants were requested to provide authorization to accept an audio-recording device for recording the interview. Each participant could decide his or her own interview schedule and

accommodations. Finally, the interview questions were not designed to test hypotheses or evaluate and judge the activities of the participants (Seidman, 2006); rather, they were designed to learn how the participants perceived and understood the program in relation to achieving employment success.

Ethnographic observations. Natural setting observations as a method of inquiry are drawn from social sciences such as anthropology and sociology (Hobbs & Wright, 2006). The researcher conducted observations of the participants in the field at worksites and internship locations of Project SEARCH, where job opportunities are provided for individuals with significant cognitive disabilities. The researcher recorded continuous field notes while naturally observing participant activities in these settings, following the advice of Silverman (2000), who recommends that field notes should be a "record of what we can see as well as what we hear" and in expansion "beyond immediate observation" (p. 126). Hence, the notes taken included what the researcher saw and heard during observations of the environment, atmosphere, communications, and social interactions during work activities.

The researcher used both hand-written notes and electronically recorded audio for making field observations. Afterwards, the field notes were reviewed, put into written form, and placed in digital files. The research advisor had an opportunity to review field notes, checking the transcriptions for accuracy and making final clarifications and/or contributions.

Content analysis of textual materials. Smith (2006) described textual data as "text based forms of knowledge and discursive practices central to large-scale organization and relations of ruling in contemporary society" (p. 33). Accordingly, the

researcher collected textual data and materials, including formal and informal documents relevant to the Project SEARCH program and work sites. Formal artifacts included Individual Education Programs (IEPs), Individual Transition Plans (ITP), transition assessments, policy documents, and/or other documents of the Project SEARCH transition program that were used by the organization. Additionally, informal artifacts included brochures, websites, newsletters, photographs, journals/articles, and voice recordings.

Sometimes during field observations, the researcher observed a person using a document. The researcher at times needed to find out what the document was and what it was being used for. Following the advice of Smith (2006), the researcher would ask participants to explain their use of the textual materials and the importance of its use within the context that the researcher was observing. The researcher also used discretion when requesting documents to make sure that the researcher received the data from the right person or right sources.

Before gathering the textual materials and documents, all participants were requested to provide authorization for disclosing formal documents and informal documents. As an ethical researcher, one should understand the concern about the confidentially of all documents. The researcher kept only those documents which were allowed via participant authorization. All documents were kept in file cabinets that only the researcher and research advisor were able to access. In a case where the researcher could not make copies of certain documents, concise or short notes would be options for reviewing the document and its purpose.

Approval and contact visit. This study received approval by the University of Northern Colorado's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district's IRB. The Project SEARCH Coordinator also agreed to assist the researcher in the following five activities. First, she assisted the researcher by identifying and contacting potential participants. Second, she helped develop the observational schedule. Third, she provided access to needed documents and records. Fourth, she invited the researcher to critical meetings and communications. Fifth and finally, she assisted in analysis of policies and procedures so that a complete view of the organization and how it worked could be constructed.

To ensure confidentiality, the researcher provided individual consent forms that had been pre-approved by UNC's IRB and by that of the school district. The researcher explained the consent forms in explicit detail to ensure that each participant understood the purpose of the study, the processes, their rights to confidentiality, the right to withdraw at any time, and the right to be a part of a member-check process before starting the research process. In the case that a participant had limited or difficulty of language or communication, the researcher requested assistance from his or her guardian(s). These consent forms are shown in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research uses words to express rich descriptions, rather than using numbers to describe the answers to research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Rabinovich and Kacen (2010) discussed the view of interpretive qualitative analysis, which is to understand the relationships among various pieces of data from the investigation. For that reason, it is better that the researcher begin the analysis

procedure while at the same time, gathering the data (Silverman, 2000). Hence, data analysis in this study occurred throughout the collection process, including transcribing, reviewing, and creating the coding while finishing taking notes during interviews and observations.

Data analysis in this research project focused on examining the activities, materials, and work processes at each of the six program levels to explain the successful outcomes of the Project SEARCH transition program. There were three steps to the process: (a) characterizing through description how Project SEARCH was organized and how it operated its services in relation to the six levels shown in Table 1, based on analyzing and synthesizing data from the three data sources; (b) using thematic coding to reduce the data into themes, to answer the three research questions, was Project SEARCH successful, what work processes contributed to its success, and what project components contributed to its success; and (c) developing an institutional ethnographic descriptive model that shows the relationships between different organizational levels that are operative when a student receives services in the Project SEARCH framework.

Using Thematic Coding

Coding is accomplished by using various symbols such as labels, single words, numbers, colors, or combinations to condense a large amount of information (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 2009). The importance of coding is that it reduces and organizes data to help the researcher construct themes and categories that characterize patterns in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study used a coding system to organize the data into major themes.

Using coding in this research project was an essential process for analyzing and

sorting data which was collected from three sources including interviews, field notes, and

textual materials. In a manner similar to that described by Silverman (2000), the data

from these sources were sorted into meaningful segments. Color codes were used to

differentially code external reality and internal perspectives (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The researcher used the red color to associate with data from external reality for

presenting the facts, policies, and documents of the Project SEARCH program. The blue

color associated with data of participants for presenting their feelings, perspectives, and

experiences.

Developing a Descriptive Model

A goal of this study was to identify the components of Project SEARCH that lead

to outcomes such as successful employment. In order to do this, the researcher developed

a descriptive model to enhance the explanation of connections between components of

Project SEARCH and the institutional ethnographic concepts of:

1. The *work practices in everyday life* contribute to the employment of persons

with significant cognitive disabilities as it is arranged and organized by Project

SEARCH. This study explored the stories of two young adults with significant cognitive

disabilities who had attended the Project SAERCH program, and then were employed in

integrated employment.

2. The *frontline organizational work* consists of the roles and responsibilities of

the local Project SEARCH Coordinator and job coaches who were working closely with

students at the worksites every day.

3. The *ruling work* was the public and private organizations at the administrative level in the Project SEARCH program including administrators, directors, employers, and others that help sustain operations and funding.

4. The *processing interchanges* were the links between model components that revealed how Project SEARCH monitored student job performance and program outcomes.

Trustworthiness

Good qualitative research focuses on presenting the truth to understand the phenomenon of people's experiences or particular situations (Golafshani, 2003; Silverman, 2000). Therefore, the researcher needs to pay close attention to validity and reliability when conducting research, including data collection, data analysis, findings, interpretation, and presenting the results (Merriam, 2009). The concept of trustworthiness is what is used in qualitative research, and there are a number of strategies that can be applied to manage reactivity and bias in a research study and to confirm that the findings of the study match the data (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006). Thus, this study included three strategies to increase credibility, or trustworthiness. These were triangulation, expert reviews, and researcher's reflexivity.

Triangulation. Three major ways of gathering the data were used in this study, including semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observations, and textual materials. All data were transcribed and analyzed using triangulation to cross the three areas of data collections. Triangulation is a process that uses multiple sources of data to confirm apparent findings (Merriam, 2009) and, thereby, promoting the credibility of the findings.

Experts reviews. The process of expert reviews provided an opportunity for discussion with colleagues regarding the processes and findings of the study (Merriam, 2009). This study included an expert review by the research advisor and knowledgeable members of the research committee overseeing this study. Their suggestions and feedback regarding the use of the institutional ethnographic method, the processes of gathering data, the selection of categories for coding, and for analyzing the data contributed to the quality of this research. Furthermore, the research advisor and research committee have a high profile of professional writing that they used to help the researcher in the communication of her findings to others.

Research's reflexivity. Merriam (2009) describes the primary role of the researcher in qualitative research as an instrument to collect and analyze the data. In addition, Merriam (2009) described an inductive process in qualitative research as the role of the researcher to describe the meaning behind the information collected, to build concepts, to check interpretations with responders, and to communicate through rich descriptions. Therefore, during the research process, the researcher reflected on how she, herself, was using and understanding the data throughout this study, taking care to tell the story of the participants as they would mean for them to be told and using interpretation processes carefully when reaching conclusions about a descriptive processes. Both factual information and interpretations were periodically checked and confirmed through discussions with the Project SEARCH Coordinator.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher described the goal of this study as an examination of work processes and collaborative partnerships between public education and local

businesses for supporting the employment of persons with significant cognitive disabilities who were perceived as successful. This research used a qualitative design to explore human experiences and related phenomenological perspectives. To shape the researcher's perspectives and beliefs into this research framework, the researcher discussed the theoretical lenses of epistemology, social constructivism perspective, and disability theories for interpretive stance.

The methodology of this study was drawn from institutional ethnography to gain better understandings of in-depth work processes and the role of social relationships within the Project SEARCH program. Data were transcribed and triangulated across three areas of data collection that included semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observations, and documents/textual materials. Data analysis included descriptive analysis of Project SEARCH operations and thematic coding to address the research questions. Then, an institutional ethnographic descriptive model was used to create a network diagram that clarifies relationships between operational levels of the Project SEARCH transition program.

The next chapter discusses the results of the study and the outcomes of the analysis. The analysis showed how activities between worksites and school settings were coordinated to support students with significant cognitive disabilities as they are moving into adulthood.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter describes the results of this qualitative study, which used institutional ethnographic design to derive a more comprehensive understanding of the Project SEARCH transition program and how it manages and impacts the integrated employment of students with significant cognitive disabilities. The aim of this study was to investigate how this public-private partnership model and its components and work processes function to achieve employment outcomes that are perceived as successful by Project SEARCH partners. The Project SEARCH transition program was chosen for this study because it is a unique partnership model of public-private entities that reflects a collaborative effort between these organization systems. To the extent that the findings of this study are able to verify project successes and to delineate the operations that lead to these successes, our field's investment in a demand-side, multi-agency collaboration model as an approach to transition services is supported. This chapter provides an analysis for considering the value of these claims.

Research Questions

Three research questions were addressed in this research:

Q1   Does the Project SEARCH transition program support successful inclusive employment opportunities for 18- to 22-year-olds with significant cognitive disabilities?

Q2   What work processes contribute to the project's success?

Q3   What components of the project contribute to its success?

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section describes the processes of data collection and data analysis, and the second section discusses the 14 participants' demographic information. Descriptive results of the investigation are presented in the third section, and they are organized according to the six organizational levels identified in Chapter III: (a) program and policy, (b) program partnerships, (c) student selection and transition assessment, (d) delivery processes, (e) individual student program configuration, and (f) program monitoring and evaluation. The fourth and final section is a chapter summary.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Institutional ethnography was used in this study to investigate the operations of Project SEARCH in the delivery of transition services to two young adults who were deemed successful. The results of this study were analyzed by triangulating data across three sources, including ethnographic observations, documents/textual materials, and semi-structured interviews. The data were organized by categories and coded into themes.

Data collection was conducted over a six-month period at local Project SEARCH internship worksites located in a western state. The researcher received support from the Project SEARCH Coordinator who welcomed the opportunity to provide information about their operations and its results. Field observations were conducted three to four days per week over a six-month period in different locations, in different periods of time, and across various program activities including classroom activities, job internships at actual worksites, and Project SEARCH meetings. Textual materials were examined

using content analysis processes. Materials were drawn from a number of different sites including local Project SEARCH classrooms, internship work sites at local host businesses, public school transition services, the local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), and the local Community Centered Board (CCB). Documents that were reviewed included mission statements, employee benefits packages, program description brochures, project and agency websites, student selection policy documents, individual transition plans, transition assessment documents from the school, worker assessment documents used on the worksites, and training documents such as interview questionnaires. An external document, a published Project SEARCH program textbook by Daston, Riehle, and Rutkowski (2012), was also examined because it represented the definitive text on Project SEARCH at the national level.

Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted using directed face-to-face interviews with 14 participants. The interview questions examined the perceptions of the participants regarding the processes and outcomes of Project SEARCH from the perspective of their respective roles: employees with significant cognitive disabilities, parents, host business supervisors, an employer, a job coach, special education teachers, the Director of the DVR, the CCB Director of Case Management, the Project Search Coordinator, and Director of Project SEARCH for the state. Each interview was approximately 40 minutes. All interviews were recorded, and all transcriptions were produced with several checks to confirm the accuracy of the interpreted information.

Participant Demographic Information

This section describes the demographic information for the 14 participants who were selected for this study. All participants were from four groups, based on their roles and experiences with the Project SEARCH transition program.

The first group was the employees themselves, two individuals with significant cognitive disabilities. These two gentlemen, "Jim" and "Tim," were graduates of the program who were defined as program successes by Project SEARCH staff and partners. They had attended the Project SEARCH transition program during their last year of high school, and both had been out of the program for between one and two years. Jim and Tim were pleased to cooperate in the interview section and reveled proud stories about having become successful at employment and living independently in the community.

Jim was diagnosed with low-functioning autism when he was 2 years old at a Children's Hospital. During Jim's interview, the researcher requested his mother's assistance to interpret his meanings because of his communication and language deficits. Jim was part of the first generation of students who attended the Project SEARCH transition program. He started to attend the Project SEARCH program by practicing in an intensive internship when he was 18 years old. He is now 22 years old, and he has been a permanent part-time employee at a health center for four years. His tasks include working on vending machines, recycling, and cleaning equipment. He is an active worker and athlete. Jim is a very busy and very social person. After his work and on weekends, he likes to spend time with his peers and family for cooking, skating, swimming, or playing basketball.

Tim was diagnosed with high-functioning autism. He is verbal; however, he still has a difficult time to explain and respond in expressive communication. Hence, the researcher requested assistance from his mother and interviewed both of them at the same time. Tim had just graduated from the Project SEARCH program and high school the year prior to this study. He is 21 years old, and he is working at the same health center as Jim, but in a different department. He has been working in the medical records department for one year as a permanent part-time employee. He also has another part-time job working for 2 hours on Monday at a local television station. Tim's hobbies include spending time searching and learning about new things from the internet, and he also likes to drive and enjoys going grocery shopping.

The second group was the parents of each employee with disabilities. Jim's mother was working full-time on her own business, operating a preschool. Jim's mother and Jim enjoy spending time together at the skating rink at least once a week. She has shared her goals for Jim's future and that she expects Jim to be able to live on his own and make his own choices as a young adult. Tim's mother did not mention her career in this interview. She has shown her support for Tim and encourages him to work with other people, since he was in high school. She strongly believes in Tim's potential, especially his computer skills.

The third group consisted of the Project SEARCH program personnel and staff at its externally located partners. The four partners were all public and private agencies. There were seven respondents representing Project SEARCH and its partners. These individuals were:

1. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator; she had been working at the Project
SEARCH transition program for five years. She was a school district teacher, along with
being the Project SEARCH Coordinator.

2. The Director of the local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; she had been
working in partnership with Project SEARCH for five years, since this transition program
started in 2007. She had been a rehab councilor for about 13 years with Vocational
Rehabilitation.

3. The Director of Case Management at the local Community Centered Board;
she had been working in partnership with Project SEARCH since its inception. She had
been in case management for 10 years before moving to the local Community Centered
Board, 27 years ago.

4. A job coach, working with local employment agencies, was based at the
Center for Community Partnership. This employment agent directly coordinated with the
local Project SEARCH Coordinator for assisting students who were under the
responsibility of DVR to achieve independence. She had been partnering with the Project
SEARCH program since it started.

5. The Director of Human Resources at the health center that employed the two
individuals; she had been working at the health center for 10 years, and she had worked
with the Project SEARCH program since it began.

6. Jim's host business supervisor at the health center; she had been working at the
health center for 12 years. She also had experience working with persons with
disabilities at an occupational program for 6 years before she went to work at the health
center.

7. Tim's host business supervisor at the health center; she had been working at the health center for 16 years. She had experience working with people with disabilities at a respite program in an out-of-state family home for a few years before taking this job.

The final group's participants in this study were a group of people who had a working knowledge of Project SEARCH and could contribute to an understanding of how Project SEARCH impacts its clients, including Jim and Tim. These three participants were:

1. The State Director of the Project SEARCH program who was also the Chief Executive Officer of an employment agency in another town in the same state. He had been the Project SEARCH statewide director for about 4 years.

2. A special education teacher for students with mild/moderate disabilities who had been working in a transition program for the local school district since 2008. She had worked with Jim and Tim when they were in the transition program.

3. A special education teacher for students with severe disabilities who was the transition program specialist for the school district and had been in this position for about seven years. However, her total experience in the special education field was about 30 years.

The demographic information for the 14 participants in this study is briefly summarized in Table 2. As this figure shows, all informants, except Jim and Tim and their parents, had been involved with Project SEARCH since its inception.

Table 2

Demographic Information

Group/Organization Level	Gender	Length of Involved Time with Project SEARCH	Job Position/Descriptions
Group 1: Employees with significant cognitive disabilities			
Jim	Male	1 year	Employee with disabilities at Health Center
Tim	Male	1 year	Employee with disabilities at Health Center
Group 2: Parents of employees who have significant cognitive disabilities			
Jim' s parent	Female	1 year	N/A
Tim' s parent	Female	1 year	N/A
Group 3: Project SEARCH partnerships			
Local Project SEARCH program	Female	5 years	Educator and local Project SEARCH Coordinator
Local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)	Female	5 years	Local Director
Local Community Centered Board (CCB)	Female	5 Years	Director of Case Management
Local Employment Agency	Female	5 Years	Job Coach
Employer (The Health Center)	Female	5 Years	Human Resource Director
Supervisor (The Health Center)	Female	5 Years	Jim's Host Business Supervisor
Supervisor (The Health Center)	Female	5 Years	Tim's Host Business Supervisor
Group 4: Others			
State Director of Project SEARCH program	Male	5 Years	State Director of Project SEARCH program
Special Education Teacher for moderate level	Female	5 Years	Transition Specialist at the School District
Special Education Teacher for significant level	Female	5 Years	Transition Specialist at the School District

The Project SEARCH Transition Program

As discussed in Chapter II, the original concept of Project SEARCH began in 1996 at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital. Its mission since the beginning was promoting economic self-sufficiency of persons with significant disabilities within their local communities by providing exposure to career experiences within the business sector (Daston et al., 2012). Project SEARCH is a unique transition program in that it works through partnerships that are guided by the demands of the private sector to enhance the integrated employment of clients within the community.

The local program described here was started in 2007, and it was a pilot transition program conducted by the public school district. It operates with cooperation from the local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the local Division for Developmental Disabilities (DDD). This section of Chapter IV describes the operations of Project SEARCH in relation to the six program levels: (a) program and policy, (b) program partnerships, (c) student selection and transition assessment, (d) delivery processes, (e) individual student program configuration, and (f) program monitoring and evaluation. The descriptions provided in this section are designed to show the day-to-day operations of project SEARCH and its partners in serving students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Program and Policy

This section focuses on exploring the program and policy level in three areas: (a) program model, (b) program mission/goals, and (c) program funding. Specific goals of each are delineated here.

Program model. Through its partnerships, the Project SEARCH transition

program focuses on developing student knowledge of skills related to competitive

employment and finding the right match between local community business needs and

the students' with cognitive disabilities interests and skills. To achieve these ends, the

model consists of three principle areas: (a) using public/private partnerships, (b) using

customized employment, and (c) using work experience together with classroom support.

These are discussed in turn below.

With regards to public/private partnerships, the Project SEARCH transition

program is a collaborative model that assembles people from different roles in each

organization and expects them to work together and share the common intention of

developing transition programs for students that increases their opportunities for

integrated employment in the community. As previously discussed, the public and

private providers included the school district, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation,

the Community Centered Board, the employment agency, and the health center.

During the interview with the State Director of Project SEARCH, he indicated his

beliefs about meaningful cooperation and teamwork between public and private

organizations. Specifically, he stated:

> I have been in the field for many years, as you know, and transition from school
> to work has been talked about since the 80s, and nothing has been done. . . .
> Project SEARCH is the first. I shouldn't say nothing, but there has been, there
> has not been a model created like Project SEARCH that has been so effective in
> having all of these partners work together because DVR, and the local DD
> system, and advocacy, and the school district, and the businesses, and the job
> coaching agencies all have to work together to make this work, and the beauty of
> Project SEARCH is that they have developed a model where I can go in and say,
> "This is your role, this is your role, this is your role, this is your role," and instead
> of going in and saying, "What do you think your role should be?" That is what
> we had done for 20 to 30 years, and nobody is going to need to agree on what
> their role should be. So, by having a template of Project SEARCH, we can fit

people into those roles, and they don't have to have so much deliberation about what thing they really should do because we have demonstrated it across the country that it is a successful model, and this is your role, so it takes a lot of that negotiation out of there. Of course, there is a lot of local negotiation at the local level as far as exactly what your role is, but broad strokes, it provides a role for each partner, and it allows them to get moving forward and get something done, so it is very powerful that way in that it allows for agencies with differing interests to just be kind of, fit into a model and move forward.

The State Director of Project SEARCH program also believed that this inter-agency collaborative model effectively brought these differing agencies together with the common goal of creating successful transition plans for students. Although each organization has different policies, management structures, and agency goals, their roles come to be connected together in the service of creating success for individual students within the local business community.

With regards to customized employment, the process of matching students with job demands and configuring supports to enhance success, this process both diminishes the need for sheltered workshop employment and increases the likelihood that competitive employment will be successful within integrated employment settings. This strategy only works if agencies first understand the competitive employment needs of the local community and its associated business markets, then finds the best possible match between employers and employees with disabilities. The State Director of the Project SEARCH program explained:

> The whole idea with customized employment is to look at what a job seeker needs as far as specific duties and schedule and see what an employer needs as far as work done, and then get the two of those to come together though a negotiated agreement on how the work will be done.

According to the Office of Disability Employment Policy (2005) brochure, the three steps of customized employment are getting to know the person, getting to know

employers, and finding negotiation points. During my field observations, I observed the

Project SEARCH transition program applying this three-step strategy to meet the

program's goals and missions. For example, with respect to "knowing the person," I

observed the Project SEARCH program providing multiple job experiences to several

students with significant cognitive disabilities to better understand their preferences and

their strengths. Simultaneously, the local host business has an opportunity to learn about

the student's talents and their capabilities and whether they can be accommodated with

their business demands. In my field observations of six different interns, while all six

eventually found employment, I was impressed that two of these interns were hired by

the health center after only two months. It was my impression as the researcher that the

customized employment strategy was what made this possible.

The local Project SEARCH Coordinator told me that her goal, before the end of

job internships, was that all students would be hired. The customized support strategy

made this possible because students with disabilities learned about their strengths within

actual work environments, and employers saved time in looking for or having to

outsource to find employees. The Human Resource Director of the local host business at

the health center said:

> So, it saved time for me as an HR Director, and then it was obviously a more . . .
> structured program that we had to integrate into our culture. I mean, we just
> didn't take one person from a school system and place them in here. They
> became a part of our company, and now everybody is very familiar, and is very
> relaxed and understands what Project SEARCH does, and so, it is just a way of
> life. . . . We are going to have kids every semester, and every semester all the kids
> are different, their disabilities are different, their personalities are different, and
> whether or not we have good success with them from an internship standpoint or
> whether not, we want to hire them. We have already hired a couple people
> already this semester, so it has been very nice. . . . We had success stories that
> demonstrate that these are great kids, they're talented, they have great
> personalities, they fit in with our employees, and our residents. And we said,

"Why not? They're just like any other applicants off the street." All we did was just adapt the work environment to make sure that they can do the job efficiently the way we wanted it done. And so, I don't perceive them as anything other than another applicant, and that is what is nice. I have a pool of applicants standing in the hallway that I get to know. . . . They are fun to watch in and out of the building. . . . I talk to them on a daily basis; we have lunch together and stuff. So that is another added benefit. The benefit as an HR person, people that they are applying on the computer, you have no clue who they really are until you get them in, and you interview them, and then you still don't know whether or not they are good. So, have the kids been exposed to the environment to see they fit in. . . . Do they fit in with the environment? . . . Do they fit in with the people? . . . Can they actually do the job? I mean, it's such an easy win to say, "Just hire them, why not?" They just get so much good out of it as well, and I think the families benefit as well. They really know that their kids are working, they're contributing, and they get to interact with a wide range of people.

During the interview with the Human Resource Director of the health center and her two employees with significant disabilities, I also found that customized employment contributed to the positive long-term outcomes of employment. The Human Resource Director discussed her decision for hiring these two employees because the company recognized their strengths as matching what the business needed. The two employees with disabilities described how they had explored several jobs; they expressed happiness at having a paid job that matched their preferences and they could now live life like everyone else.

Finally, with regard to providing actual work experiences with classroom support, combining realistic job experiences with classroom skills instruction increased the meaningfulness and apparent relevance of the instruction for students. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator explained the concept:

I think that the classroom is a good support to that . . . although, it is not as important to talk about it as students are actually doing the process. I think, the only way to teach is through that tandem, you know, having that classroom support with the actual work experiences. . . . Yes, it just wouldn't work, if you were having them try to learn by standing up there and talking to them about it. The hands-on work piece really hit it home. They really get to understand then

and having real mentors, real expectations, and there is natural consequences. If you work hard, then everybody will come around and support you, and you will get hired and, if you don't, then there is also natural consequences for the other side which is much more powerful than me trying to just tell them, this is going to happen. They really need to feel the intensity of that situation, and feel the consequences. And, the interaction with their co-worker, it is a very powerful thing.

The job coach at the employment agency also talked about the benefits of having composed classroom supports for the ongoing work experiences at the business sites:

I think that . . . the small numbers of kind of the small class sizes . . . it is very helpful for the Project SEARCH Coordinator to be able to work very individually and kind of support each person in individual needs. I think that it's a big piece, and I think that . . . some of the topics that the Project SEARCH Coordinator is able to cover in her curriculum in the morning class time and in the afternoon class time with the students and their days off of internship, I think are really helpful. And then, we, the job coaches, are able to reinforce some of that stuff on the job sites which I think it's really helpful. Like for instance . . . I can think some of the examples, I guess . . . like in the interview practice that Project SEARCH Coordinator is able to work on with the students here in class and then, you know, we're be able to reinforce that when we were helping them in the job sites interviewing.

Program mission/goals. A primary goal of the Project SEARCH transition program is to promote persons with significant cognitive disabilities in integrated employment and attempt to reduce sheltered workshop placements in the community. The State Director of the Project SEARCH program said that the mission is to eventually eliminate sheltered workshops and to prevent barriers when employing persons with disabilities in the State:

Our agency has been one of the leaders in promoting employment for people with disabilities since the 1970s. In the 1970s, we started reaching out to businesses here and employing people . . . when I came here to be the leader in 1989, the board of directors and myself made a plan to get everybody employed, or at least into community-based programming, so we closed the sheltered workshops, very large work centers . . . in 94 and . . . in 96 and have had a reputation of trying to get people into regular employment within business. So, when we saw the opportunity here in [the State] and with the Developmental Disabilities Council and their requests for proposals that went out in 2007, we realized that there was a

good match between what we had traditionally done and our mission. Our mission is to actively, to actively support the inclusion of people with disabilities within our community, and so our history of doing employment and the fact that Project SEARCH had a focus on employment seemed to be a good match for the agency.

The State Director of Project SEARCH explained his experiences and knowledge about

sheltered workshops' environments:

Thousands of adults living with a severe handicap and who are currently enrolled in a sheltered workshop, work activity centers, and adult daycare programs, their placement is not a function of their inability to learn the skill necessary to obtain and maintain employment in integrated environments, rather, it is a function of our inability to design service systems that are responsive to their learning needs. . . . In this chapter, the inherent inadequacies of sheltered work environments are examined from the perspectives of cost effectiveness and programmatic philosophies. Our central thesis is the sheltered work environment should be systematically phased out in favor of employment opportunities in integrated settings.

Regarding his experiences to attempt developing inclusive employment in the

community, he explained:

This was my attempt to try to describe how to get out of sheltered workshops and move towards integrated employment and convert a program over. What we did here was, in the 1980s, we were able to get many of the people that we served into integrated employment. So, they were in sheltered workshops, but we got them into . . . and other locations around the community to work and to get paid at a much better rate than they did in the sheltered workshop. So, I was part of this agency in the early 80s as well. So, I started here in '81, my wife started here in '82, and my wife wrote a grant in '83 to start employing people in jobs in the local community . . . but, this is . . . when she did that in the '80s and . . . she and my son are still with me, but she wrote a grant and basically helped to point this agency in the direction of really getting people community employment. So, in the '80s a lot of people got that experience of either being out on jobs through . . . work or group employment . . . and we had group employment sites like. . . . When I came back to lead the agency, I left in '86, but when I came back in '89 to lead the agency. I interviewed every single person that we served, and I asked them what they wanted to do, whether they wanted to be employed in the community, or if they wanted to be employed in a sheltered workshop, and what I found was that only of the 180 people we were serving, only 14% told me that they wanted to remain in the sheltered workshop, everybody else said "community," or some people didn't express an opinion. They were willing to do just about anything only; 14% of the total said that they really wanted to stay in

the sheltered workshop. So, we made a plan to gradually employee more and more people and to close our sheltered workshops and get people fully employed. We currently have a seniors program that is based here, and we have what we call employment access which is a volunteer program, so what happened was the state thesis happened in the '90s, the state no longer is paying adequate rates for this to happen, the numbers of people [in our State] was second in the nation, we had more people employed than any other state in the union, except for one, and now we are down, we were up above 50% and we are now.

During the interviews, the researcher also found that one purpose of integrated employment was to increase the value of social interactions between persons with and without disabilities, impacting the evolution of humanity within society. Tim is an employee with autism and has expressed his feelings that he is happy to work with other people without disabilities. He said that we can help each other at making work complete and in his response, said:

> Yes, I like my job. . . . I've been working with my coworkers because I want to help each other out or something. Because without helping each other, they cannot do it alone.

From his perspective, it was shown that being a person with or without disabilities does not matter because everyone needs each other. One person will not be able to complete a task without support from another person. His mother also shared her perspectives on integrated employment. She said:

> I prefer that he works with other people, because I think it is important for Tim to be able to use the social skills that he's learned, and he can only do that when he's working with people who don't know him so well. They know him, but they don't . . . they have expectations of him, so they don't let him get away with things . . . he needs to follow the rules of the office and that is good for him.

Another perspective was offered by the Human Resource Director at the health center who discussed integrated employment's significant impact on changing people's beliefs and attitudes toward persons with disabilities. With respect to positive outcomes

of integrated employment regarding her experiences of having employees with

disabilities in the company, she explained:

> She has got Down Syndrome, and I can't even understand how she speaks. . . .
> Well, guess what, your resident, you have trouble learning and hearing what she
> has to say. Then, you are going to treat her just like anybody else. And, these
> kids have a way of communicating, and we are going to teach you how to
> communicate with them. And so, it was a cultural change for a lot of people, I
> mean the barriers from what people think what people with disabilities are, are
> there. There is people out there that went, "Woo this is not going to work." Five
> years later we're still working with them.

Jim's host business supervisor shared her experiences from other employees without

disabilities and their opinions on having Jim working with them:

> I think, they respond favorably, they . . . I hear comments of, you know, asking
> Jim do something, and he knows, yes! And, he smiles, and when they make jokes
> with him, um, or we tell him about how we think he is the Michel Phelps . . .
> because he is swimmer. It actually is . . . I have been told about how awesome it
> is, how wonderful it is, to see Jim thrive, um, and see Jim be happy, and it is
> refreshing.

All participants shared that integrated employment positively impacts

expectations, attitudes, beliefs, and culture changes within work environments. From

interviews, it is inspiring to see people caring and supporting each other.

Program funding. The Project SEARCH transition program is funded through

the Developmental Disabilities Council which represents the Community Centered

Boards. As discussed above, Project SEARCH in this study is a pilot transition program

which has been active for five years. The overview history of the program is explained

by the State Director of the Project SEARCH program. The program began because of

the potential opportunities for employees with disabilities to gain inclusive employment,

instead of being placed in sheltered workshops. He considered applying the grant

funding through the Developmental Disabilities Council at the state level because the

mission of Project SEARCH is determined to advocate for persons with cognitive

disabilities working within an inclusive environment. The State Director of the Project

SEARCH program said:

> We responded to the request for proposal, and we were successful in applying for that grant so that grant has been supporting my efforts to go around the state and persuade school districts that this is a good idea and then to locate business partners in the local community.

The State Director also explained that the grant funding started on October 1 of

2008, and this funding ended September 30 of 2013, with a grant of $15,000. He

described that the main expense of the program has been program development including

(a) providing technical assistance and training to five other sites in the Project SEARCH

program in the State, (b) promoting professional development of the Project SEARCH

team to attend the national conference, and (c) bringing the National Project SEARCH

team into the state for direct training for the local team. However, he is concerned about

limited grant funding and the current grant's running out by September; he expects other

funding will be provided after this application.

The State Director indicated that the Project SEARCH program has been

managing the existing budget with limited funding, so each local Project SEARCH has to

be self-sustaining and conservative about budgets. He stated that each Project SEARCH

site must achieve high performance for supporting internship students' achievements in

integrated employment in order to be considered for receiving other funding. The Project

SEARCH team in this region has also reported successful accomplishments since the

program started, a productive effort that has shown 100% of students having attended the

program and having been hired with paid careers in inclusive employment.

Program Partnerships

The Project SEARCH transition program is a model for supporting students with significant cognitive disabilities from school-to-integrated employment. The model requires collaborative efforts between public and private organizations. This study investigated this cooperative network of public and private systems at a local level and how they worked together to prepare students with significant cognitive disabilities for integrated employment after their high school graduation. The local Project SEARCH transition program has collaborative partnerships with five main organizations including: (a) the public school system, (b) the community business network system, (c) the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) system, (d) the Community Centered Boards (CCB) system, and (e) an employment agency.

Public school system. The viewpoints of school system personnel were examined by interviewing two special education teachers and the local Project SEARCH Coordinator. The study focused on understanding how the Project SEARCH program was started in the school and how it worked as a transition service within the school system.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA 2004) requires all public school systems to provide transition services for students with disabilities (Daston et al., 2012). IDEA 2004 emphasizes that school systems must provide high quality transition opportunities from school-to-work for these students. In its work to comply with the law, the school district implemented the Project SEARCH transition program as a pilot study. In this district, the program provides transition services in the age range of

18 to 22 years. The special education teacher for students with moderate needs presented

the background of the program as described here. She then went on to state that before

these students apply to the local Project SEARCH program, the students have been

attending high school transition services and are either participating at a moderate level

or at a significant support needs level.

Transition services at the moderate level prepare students who have mild or

moderate disabilities to participate in different adult activities and to also assess students'

skills to ensure qualification for the Project SEARCH program. The special education

teacher for students with moderate needs discussed her program, which is connected to a

one-year job internship within the Project SEARCH program, as follows:

> In my program, we, depending on the students, focus on the other domain areas
> daily living, functional academics, recreation and leisure, accessing the
> community, like learning transportation, riding the city bus, and then
> employment. We look at the whole student, and then we try to get them ready for
> Project SEARCH. Before they go to Project SEARCH, they come here, so that
> we can kind of assess their skills to see if they will be a good fit for Project
> SEARCH . . . if, they would be a good fit for Project SEARCH and they meet the
> criteria for Project SEARCH.

The special education teacher for students with moderate needs also indicated that

two of her students entered the Project SEARCH transition program, and both had been

hired for paid positions while they were doing their internships with local host

businesses.

A second transition service operated by the school district serves students who

have significant support needs such as severe cognitive disabilities, physical disabilities,

autism, Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury, and severe behavior

problems. This transition service also assesses students who might be qualified to apply

for a one-year internship at the local Project SEARCH transition program. Hence, the

roles of special education teachers within the school district are related to the Project

SEARCH program by assessing and preparing students to enter the next level of

employment skills.

Project SEARCH candidates are only eligible during their last school year. As

described by the Project SEARCH Coordinator, if they are accepted into Project

SEARCH, they then become the responsibility of the Project SEARCH Coordinator, who

is also identified as a teacher in the district. Her role as a teacher is to create curriculum

and to teach students with disabilities how to develop their employment skills. She also

noted that she has numerous coordinator duties, including responsibility for coordinating

the network of Project SEARCH partnerships, recruiting students with disabilities into

the program, evaluating students' internships, planning job development, arranging

partnerships' meetings, providing training and staff development, coordinating technical

assistance with the internal Project SEARCH team, and organizing paper work. These

responsibilities are consistent with what the literature indicates should be the roles of this

person (Daston et al., 2012).

Community business network system. According to Daston et al. (2012), local

Project SEARCH programs should create a Business Advisory Council (BAC), which

must be powerful enough to affect hiring practices, must be committed to the 100%

employment goal, must be connected within the local community, and must be willing to

reach out to other businesses to promote Project SEARCH. The local Project SEARCH

Coordinator explained her role in coordinating local business partnerships:

> It's called the Business Advisory Council (BAC); that is, a group of business
> leaders, who if a student doesn't get a job through Project SEARCH, can help the
> student to network, or they can help maybe review resumes. And so, we have the
> Human Resources Director from a health center. . . we have a representative from

human resources from . . . Hospital. We also have . . . School District. That is our main group of people.

The local Project SEARCH Coordinator also discussed the benefits of the BAC:

The Business Advisory Council, if a student doesn't get a job, then they can help the student to network in their network. I think, we are really lucky to have the Health Center. My boss, and the State Director were instrumental in presenting Project SEARCH to the number of large organizations, and the Health Center is the organization that came forward to want to be a partner with us. So, I think that initial work is really important to find that match. Then, I think, the Business Advisory Counselor is very helpful to connect the students with more of the community with the jobs that are available.

In addition, the Human Resource Director at the health center, which was the host business for the two employees who were participants in this study, shared her perspectives on partnering with members of the business community. She discussed how businesses can be encouraged to consider cooperating with the school system for integrating and hiring students. In her interview, she identified three techniques to build working connections with businesses: (a) using the expression "Return on Investment" (ROI), she emphasized promoting business profits as reasons for employing these students; (b) she emphasized that the owners of the company must become supportive; and (c) she discussed the importance of school personnel intentionally building explicit communications between the school system and the business system.

With respect to emphasizing promoting businesses' profits as reasons for employing these students, the Human Resource Director suggested that businesses must see productive outcomes for hiring persons with disabilities, especially helping the company save on expenses, and increase efficient work: "The advantages of Project SEARCH were not only integrating people with disabilities into our work place, but also we have to have a return on our dollars, if we want to hire them. Just like anybody else."

She described her outcomes her company has experienced by hiring persons with

disabilities:

> I think she works 24 hours a week for us, and she actually saved the company about 40,000 dollars worth of time and effort because all of those people that were coming to get the mail were pretty highly paid people . . . it definitely made business sense and made dollar saving sense that we said, "OK, there is a great example of thinking outside the box, we are looking at inefficiencies, and seeing what the dollar or the ROI (Return On Investment) is."

With respect to emphasizing that the owners of the company must become

supportive, she noted that owners of businesses who care about contributing to the

community and have a passion about quality of life for all persons are especially open to

working with Project SEARCH. She shared the example of her boss who has a strong

passion to dedicate himself to making differences in the community:

> He is very passionate about a lot of different . . . community . . . groups such as the Boy Scouts. . . . He is very supportive of the Veteran Association, and so he is very passionate about those two organizations, so he contributes a lot of dollars, but also, then, those people get to come in our company, and get exposed through volunteering and all that kind stuff. So, I think that he knew that with the school district and . . . that venture . . . saying that "I helped a person with a disability," it is a great satisfaction to him.

In support of the foregoing, the local Project SEARCH transition program has

been receiving powerful support from the health center for five years. During the

interview, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator mentioned that a main proponent for

encouraging student success in career development is the Director of Human Resources

at the health center:

> You know, with all the support in place. It is much easier to have the Health Center as the employer and then also, you know, we have kind of an in-house advocate, because HR has been a real proponent to say, "Ok, he has done this internship, so why can't we hire him if it is financially good for us?" So, she has been able to turn some of the tides and get some of these kids hired from having that internal support. That's been a very huge plus for the Business Advisory Council and yet, more people going to bat for you and more than me the teacher, I

help people with disabilities, you know, it is coming from business people saying, "This should be good for us to do," which is powerful, very powerful.

With respect to the importance of school personnel intentionally building communications with the business system, the Human Resource Director said that she was impressed with the school system's Integrated Services Coordinator when she came to speak with her about the Project SEARCH program. The school's coordinator also introduced her to a national Project SEARCH team that came to town promoting the program and was looking forward to working with local businesses. Effective communication from the school coordinator and National Project SEARCH teams inspired her to think outside the box and be more passionate about opening opportunities for employment to persons with disabilities.

Once a business has committed to the Project SEARCH goals and is ready to be a partner, there are specific roles that can be identified that are associated with a "host business." Based on observations and on interviews with the Project Search Coordinator and with the Human Resource Director, the main roles of the local host business level can be organized as follows: (a) educating other employees without disabilities to understand working with persons with disabilities, (b) making sure the business receives the benefits of return on its investment, (c) creating accommodations and environmental adaptations for employees with disabilities, (d) evaluating employees with disabilities, (e) participating at the Business Advisory Council meetings, and (f) being proponents of integrated employment.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation system. The Director of the local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation explained that DVR is the state agency funded by federal law to assist persons with disabilities in finding successful employment that meet

their individual needs. First, the role of DVR is to analyze and gather information on

persons with disabilities who are applying for eligible services. After gathering and

compiling each students' with disabilities information for eligibility, the next step in the

process is to identify individual needs and the services that match those needs, finally

providing a plan and supporting these students to become successfully employed.

The local DVR Director indicated that her role with the Project SEARCH

transition program is to help select students for the program and to work collaboratively

with them so they can become successful at working in the community. DVR has been

working with Project SEARCH from the beginning; she stated that she has seen the

program be successful in helping students with disabilities secure a paid career after their

internship. She shared experiences in cases where family members required a specific

Project SEARCH program for their child to participate in internships. DVR's role is to

analyze eligibility, and then provide job coaches for planning job development. DVR

supports funding to provide on-site job coaches who work closely with students with

disabilities and to coordinate teams working with the local Project SEARCH Coordinator

and the local host business' supervisor.

Another role she has is to participate in Project SEARCH team meetings, in which

the client, the family, the job coaches, and others plan and coordinate services. DVR's

responsibility is to make sure the students with disabilities receive all of the benefits that

they need for developing their employment skills. She also described her role as

including responsibility for assessing the internship performance of students with

disabilities and providing additional support in cases where there are concerns about

employee development. Hence, it is possible that extra funding may need to be provided

in cases where students need additional resources in order to secure successful employment. According to DVR documents about their services (2009), DVR provides individual needs services that included medical examinations, vocational testing, physical restoration, vocational training, occupational tools, occupational clothing, vocational counseling, and career guidance.

Summarizing, results of the interview, DVR document reviews, and observations of meetings, the roles of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Director are critical for the effective support of employees. These include: (a) analyzing and assessing individual needs, (b) educating and providing consultation to family members for understanding the benefits of job internship programs like Project SEARCH or other agencies, (c) making decisions to support the funding for employment agencies to provide job coaches, (d) finding a good match with employment opportunities, (e) participating in meetings, and (f) ensuring the completion of paperwork and making sure the processes follow states' policies.

Community Centered Board system. According to the Division for Developmental Disabilities electronic resource (November, 2013), 20 Community Centered Boards (CCBs) are contracted in the state for Developmental Disabilities services. CCBs provide long-term services and individual support programs for persons with developmental disabilities. This study investigated the local Community Centered Board located in the local Project SEARCH region. According to its electronic resource (November 2013), the program for adult services includes supported living services, comprehensive services, community activity services, and vocational and employment services.

To understand the role of the local Community Centered Board in relation to Project SEARCH, the Director of Case Management was interviewed. She explained that CCB funding is provided from multiple resources: 80% comes from Medicaid, and the remainder of the funding is either from the State or the local mill levy. She also mentioned that the local Project SEARCH transition program has been receiving grant funding through the Division of Developmental Disabilities Council at the state level for educating students with developmental disabilities in real-job experiences. Thus, a major role for the Director of Case Management from the standpoint of the grantors and the Project SEARCH partnerships is to participate in advisory board meetings to ensure that this grant project establishes efficient transition services in the community. However, the Director of Case Management discussed having seldom met everybody in this partnership, which makes it complicated for her to clearly understand partners' tasks for working together to make this project become an even more successful model.

Another important role of the CCB is to monitor student recruitment into the Project SEARCH transition program to make sure that the students qualify. To better understand the qualifications that CCB uses in this process, the researcher searched for more details on student eligibility requirements from the electronic resource of the Division of Developmental Disabilities (November, 2013):

> Persons with a developmental disability are those who have a "disability that is manifested before the person reaches 22 years of age, which constitutes a substantial disability to the affected individual, and is attributable to mental retardation or related conditions which include cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, or other neurological conditions when such conditions result in impairment of general intellectual functioning or adaptive behavior similar to that of a person with mental retardation.

The local Community Centered Board also provides case managers who develop plans, monitor services, and coordinate with local Project SEARCH coordinators, employment agencies, and other people in the group of Project SEARCH partnerships. Case managers' roles are to insure all students with developmental disabilities receive appropriate support for their individual needs, even when they are on the waiting lists.

Summarizing, the principle roles of the local Community Centered Board in relation to supporting employees with significant cognitive disabilities in Project SEARCH include: (a) providing grant funding, (b) participating in advisory board meetings, (c) assessing student recruitments, (d) providing case managers, and (e) making sure correct processes are followed with respect to state policies. CCB also has continuing responsibilities for providing extended support for students once they have graduated from Project SEARCH.

Employment agency. To understand the working relationship between the Project SEARCH program and the local employment agency, the researcher had interviewed a Job Coach Coordinator from the Center for Community Partnership within the Project SEARCH region. She stated that the local Project SEARCH Coordinator made a decision to select only her employment agency with which to work in order to simplify the administrative processes. Her employment agency started a cooperative partnership from the beginning of the local Project SEARCH program. She explained that the majority of funding for her work comes from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

She mentioned, from the standpoint of the employment agency, that she has two main roles. First, as a job coach, she assists with the internship students, and her focus is

on helping the students successfully work within their integrated employment situations.

Second, her main role as a coordinator is to work with the Project SEARCH Coordinator

in planning job internship schedules and being a job supervisor onsite with students

within their actual work places. She indicated another role of a job coach was to develop

appropriate accommodations to assist students completing their tasks and assist them in

becoming efficient employees. In addition, she suggested that the key to supporting

students with disabilities to become successful workers is to provide direct education and

demonstration at work sites with their supervisors and co-workers to help them

understand the processes of their work and how to adapt accommodations:

> I think, it is just about finding a good fit, finding a good match as far as . . . the
> actual tasks that they are doing and the environment, the level of support, and
> whether the people in that site are open to having someone and are willing to
> support them and kind of like go above and beyond to make accommodations, and
> it really does take a pretty big commitment on the employers' side.

She further explained that these students' internships are evaluated by her

observations during their work practicum to find a good job match and the right work

environment. Additionally, during Project SEARCH meetings, providing additional

services might be requested from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for

supporting individual needs to improve their employment and independent living skills

such as a self-care routine or personal hygiene. As a job coach, she may recommend that

she be permitted to work on a flexible schedule so that she can assist students within

different living situations beyond the work environment.

Summarizing, based on the interview and on observations, the major role of the

local employment agency is to provide a job coach for the Project SEARCH program,

and this person's major responsibilities include: (a) supervising internships on work sites,

(b) working with the Project SEARCH Coordinator to develop internship plans and schedules, (c) evaluating students' internships on work sites and reporting their progress to other Project SEARCH partner members in the meeting, (d) working and coordinating with students' supervisors and their coworkers within the workplaces, (e) developing accommodations for the student on the work site, and (f) working with students who need additional supports and time to improve their employment skills and independent living skills.

**Student Selection and Transition
Assessment**

The Project SEARCH transition program has a mission to serve young adults with significant cognitive disabilities; however, as is true with any human service agency, they must set specific criteria for choosing who they will serve. This requires that assessments be conducted, addressing not only the clients, but also the job sites. This section discusses the three main assessment processes that are used by Project SEARCH, which are (a) criteria for student selection, (b) criteria for employer selection, and (c) assessments for matching students to jobs.

Criteria for student selection. As described in an earlier section, Project SEARCH is required to use eligibility criteria mandated by the Division of Developmental Disabilities services. Additionally, it adheres to eligibility guidelines of national Project SEARCH (Daston et al., 2012), including the following: (a) 18 years of age or older; (b) high school is completed when the program is completed; (c) will accept a diploma or certificate at the end of the program; (d) meets eligibility requirements for vocational rehabilitation, necessary for follow-along services (optional); (e) has independent personal hygiene, grooming, and daily living skills; (f) is able to maintain

appropriate behavior and social skills in the workplace; (g) is able to communicate effectively; (h) can use public transportation when available and participate in travel training; (i) has previous experience in a work environment, which could be a school, volunteer, or paid work; (j) is able to pass drug screening and felony checks and has his/her immunization; and (k) wants to work competitively in the community.

The special education teacher for students with mild/moderate disabilities explained that students with disabilities who attend transition services in high school are expected to develop their employment skills for application to the Project SEARCH transition program. However, not all of them qualify or can even be accepted into the Project SEARCH program because not all of them meet the criteria of the Developmental Disabilities Council.

The foregoing insight was confirmed in observations and in interviews with other Project SEARCH partners: student selection is negatively impacted by the fact that agencies and businesses have differing and conflicting criteria that they apply to the process of selecting who they will serve and/or employ. Hence, the students must already be able to adapt successfully in differing work and non-work environments before they are even considered for acceptance into Project SEARCH.

A concern was also raised by the Project SEARCH Coordinator that, even when students are eligible, not all can be accepted because Project SEARCH only uses business sites and there are presently a limited number of business sites that are available. However, she indicated that the program is improving and is growing bigger. She also indicated that she expects more long-term funding to be provided in coming years, which could expand program capacity to serve more for more students across more sites.

Criteria for employer selection. Project SEARCH also has eligibility criteria for selecting businesses to host its clients. Daston et al. (2012) discussed the ideal host, identifying four major areas: (a) has at least 200 employees at a given location, (b) can provide convenient access through public transportation, (c) can accommodate cafeteria or some other type of food services within the businesses' locations, and (d) can provide onsite exercise facilities. Thus, accordingly, the health center is an ideal host business in the local region.

The health center is a good model for a host business because it has diverse job internships available for persons with disabilities in which to practice their skills. The Human Resource Director of the health center explained that her business has a great capacity to integrate employees with and without disabilities. She discussed that after she acquired the knowledge about the Project SEARCH transition program from a national source, she has seen her business become a great fit for persons with disabilities. The health center is actually composed of 19 different companies, which include many different types of jobs and are located within many different business facilities. Therefore, the diversity of the business itself is an asset for students with disabilities to discover and learn about their self-preferences and their skills. She also indicated that a business which has only one company or process would face a greater challenge when integrating students with disabilities:

> Nineteen companies, so that is pretty easy for us to place different kids in different arenas, but if you only have one company that only did one thing . . . it would be pretty challenging to integrate the program with 12 students on site . . . so, that is the challenge there, and a lot of . . . sometimes these kids come to our place, and go, "I don't have any interest in health care," so, guess what, we have IT, we have a graphics department, we have an HR, we have payroll, all of that . . . plays out at any company. . . . We have a medical supply company, inventory, distribution, all companies have that. So, we've been lucky enough to entertain

those kids that don't want to be in a health care environment to do others, but other companies might not have that diversity.

With respect to the degree to which the health center meets eligibility requirements, Project SEARCH partners asserted that it truly met these requirements. Among other things, they spoke to the fact employers and coworkers at the health center cared for and understood persons with disabilities, and they said that this was a powerful support for constructing successful integrated employment in the local community. The special education teacher for students with severe disabilities shared her perspectives of the characteristics of supportive people in work environments.

> I would say having employers who are caring, and interested . . . and really want to help the students to be successful. That's the biggest thing . . . important. And, that it is not only employers, but also the coworkers . . . supportive, because the one fellow who worked in the restaurant as a dish washer, he also played basketball on the weekends, and his coworker from the restaurant would come and cheer him on. . . . So, that not only supports him at work, but they also supported him in the community. And, what a difference that they made . . . him feel so good like he was one of them. . . . I mean, the feeling is wonderful, so, I think that is a big thing to have those really supportive employers and people at the job site.

Another special education teacher for students with mild/moderate disabilities shared her idea of promoting successful employment:

> I believe that they can be successful within the right environments and right supports. So, it is all about making sure that it is a good job match and good job support. And, if it is not a good job match and a good job support, it doesn't matter whether you have disabilities or not, you are going to leave the job.

Three participants at the health center suggested two major ideas to overcome challenges for integrating employees with disabilities to work with other employees without disabilities within manufacturing businesses: (a) eliminating stigma within the work environment, and (b) providing education to other employees without disabilities to understand working and interacting with coworkers with disabilities. Jim's host business

supervisor discussed the techniques of preparing and educating other employees without

disabilities:

> Yes, actually, when I interview employees, I tell them that we work with Project SEARCH . . . just try to get the feel for . . . have they ever worked with people with disabilities and just kind of like get a feel for them in the interview because, you know, making sure that they know the work environment, and, you know, what we do as a company, and we work with Project SEARCH, and we intern and who possibly hires, and actually everyone would've brought up their own personal story of a family member or a friend that they had growing up or somewhere in their life.

When interview results are combined with my observations, it is clear that the

health center easily meets employer selection criteria as a local Project SEARCH

internship site. Nevertheless, as noted by the Project SEARCH Coordinator, there is a

need to expand the number of host business sites available for serving these students,

especially given the population increases that are happening every year in this region.

Assessments for matching students to jobs. As previously discussed, most

participants indicated that employment success is achieved by matching students with

jobs, based on student interests and skills and on employer needs. The local Project

SEARCH Coordinator discussed how finding a job that matches a student's preferences

is an essential part of transition assessment. She said, "It is called the discovery process,"

and it is a process to evaluate a student to discover his/her particular interests and talents

The discovery process really begins with determining at the start of the internship

what jobs the student may be interested in. The Project SEARCH coordinator said:

> I think, they have been really happy with the work that they are doing, and I think, if the employees have a worker who has a good job match, and has resources. They know how to access, if they need support, then everything works out pretty well. I think sometimes it doesn't work out so well with . . . I've seen some other programs where they just put them on any sort of job, and the student might not be interested in that job tasks, or it might not be the best fit, and it doesn't work. It ends up not working at all, so they have to be a lot of front work

with gathering. It is called a discovery process that students really understand what they're wanting, what they are good at, and matching it with the job. So, that up front work really helps a lot.

She also mentioned that another benefit of the discovery process is that the students with significant cognitive disabilities are then placed in jobs in which their motivation is high, and they are more likely to be cheerful and productive employees.

To further clarify the processes involved in assessing students in relation to matching them to jobs, the subsequent sub-sections discuss (a) pre-placement activities, (b) ongoing assessment activities, and (c) post-program assessment activities.

First, with respect to pre-placement activities, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator explained the observation techniques that are the main assessment tool that job coaches use for implementing the transition assessment. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator also mentioned that she starts observing and learning about each student when they are still in their high school transition programs. She indicated that the process of transition assessment begins by getting to know and understand each student's information before he/she participates in the Project SEARCH program. She said, "Well, we mainly do observations, you know, of the students, sometimes we will go out and observe them before they come into Project SEARCH. And, see what they do, how they do it, if you know if it is a good match."

Tim's mother also discussed the process for transition assessment of the Project SEARCH program and that it was helpful to support her son become accomplished in employment:

> So they noticed that Tim has really good keyboarding skills, he is very fast, he is accurate. So, they notice that, and then they said, "Oh, he likes the computers," and "he likes to do things with computers," and "he is organized." So, through high school and then . . . starting Project SEARCH when they interviewed Tim,

they talked about "how much he likes to use computers, and how much he likes to follow a process, to make the decisions on that." If it needs a signature, they need to do this, if it comes back unsigned a second time, you put the "sign here" sticker. So, they found him the internship opportunity and so, that he has been training in this job for a long time.

During field observations, it was also discovered that the local Project SEARCH Coordinator provided opportunities for clients to "tour" businesses prior to any form of placements, to learn about them, and to meet the people who work there. While students were on tour, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator would observe her students' interactions and their responses to the types of work that they might be interested in practicing for their specific job internships. After that, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator had open discussions with her students to guide her in developing an efficient plan for assisting students to receive the right training that matched with those students' desires working in a future career.

Second, with respect to ongoing assessment activities, while students were participating in Project SEARCH internships on worksites, job coaches and the local Project SEARCH Coordinator worked closely with the host businesses' supervisors to evaluate students' work performances, evaluating their responding in during real work experiences. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator discussed that in the beginning of each job practicum, she provided the checklists and evaluation forms to each host business' supervisor for assessing students' performance during their full work in job internships. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator also explained that each student received two evaluation reviews per job internship. The first evaluation is provided after two weeks of their practicum, and a final review evaluation is provided after completing their job practicum. Student work performance is reviewed in four areas:

1. Social behavior, which includes having self-emotional management, showing respect for the supervisor, making eye contact, using appropriate conversation, being honest, and cooperating with other employees.

2. Communication, which includes listening and paying attention, expressing personal needs, using an appropriate tone of voice, asking for help, and using effective communication with other staff.

3. Appearance, which includes maintaining self-care and body hygiene and dressing appropriately for working.

4. Job performance, which includes following directions, rules, and regulations, being willing to complete tasks, accepting of feedback and comments, being responsible to arrive and leave on time, and demonstrating the ability to solve problems that may occur.

During each evaluation, the host business' supervisor, the student, and the job coaches all participated in the review meeting. Observations of six student meetings indicated that the purpose of a review meeting was to support student understanding about their specific job skills in relation to business' requirements and policy. Students learn from these meetings what they need to develop so they are better able to perform and meet employer goals for the rest of the practicum. After the evaluation review meeting, job coaches and the Project SEARCH Coordinator create a job plan to concentrate on individual student improvement.

The evaluation described above is reported by the Project SEARCH Coordinator in another meeting that includes the student, a family member, the local Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, a case manager from the local Community

Centered Board, and a job coach from the local employment agency. The goals of this

meeting are to arrange additional support for the student's job improvement and to secure

parent involvement. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator shared her perspectives on

how this meeting promotes the involvement of various team members, including parents:

> We initiate the Project SEARCH process to meet as a team with the parents, students, and all the team members. To just know what project SEARCH is and expectations that are here, and then we also use them as experts, and so we can understand much better who the student is and what their responsibilities are like, and how they function in their environment now. Which helps us then align what sort of internships would be a good fit.

Finally, with respect to post-program assessment activities, the researcher

investigated the evaluation process in cases where students had become permanent wage-

earning employees at the health center. It was found that, generally, all employees with

significant cognitive disabilities were asked to follow the same evaluation process as

other employees without disabilities. The Director of Human Resources explained that

her business' policies apply to every employee equally. Her business obeys and follows

the state's employment policies; thus, all employees with and without disabilities receive

the same benefits:

> They're treated like any other employee, so they get a three-month review, a six-month review, and then an annual performance review every year after that. So, they go through performance reviews just like every other employee at three months, six months, and then annually, so . . . as soon as they get hired, they are treated exactly like any other employee, they have to work 24 hours a week to get part-time with benefits, so you accrue paid time off, vacation pay that minute you start working, regardless of what status or how many hours you work, but then if you work at least 24 hours, you get the opportunity to enroll in health benefits, dental and vision, and benefits. If you are 21 years of age, you get to participate in the 401K plan. . . . Yes, we don't break out different benefits for anybody that has got a disability.

The local Project SEARCH Coordinator described that other Project SEARCH

sites may use different assessment processes than is used by her site. Nevertheless, the

State Director of Project SEARCH indicated that they are similar to what occurs at other

sites nationally. The program delivery processes are described next.

Delivery Processes

This discussion of how Project SEARCH delivers its services examines six

processes. These are: (a) annual timeline, (b) initial orientation and transition weeks, (c)

daily program schedule, and (d) program completion and graduation.

Annual timeline. The annual schedule of each Project SEARCH site depends on

the local school district's calendar year; consequently, most Project SEARCH sites have

dates that begin in the middle of August or in early September. Presented in Figure 1 is a

diagram that outlines the annual timeline of the National Project SEARCH program

(from Daston et al., 2012), which is also followed by the local Project SEARCH.
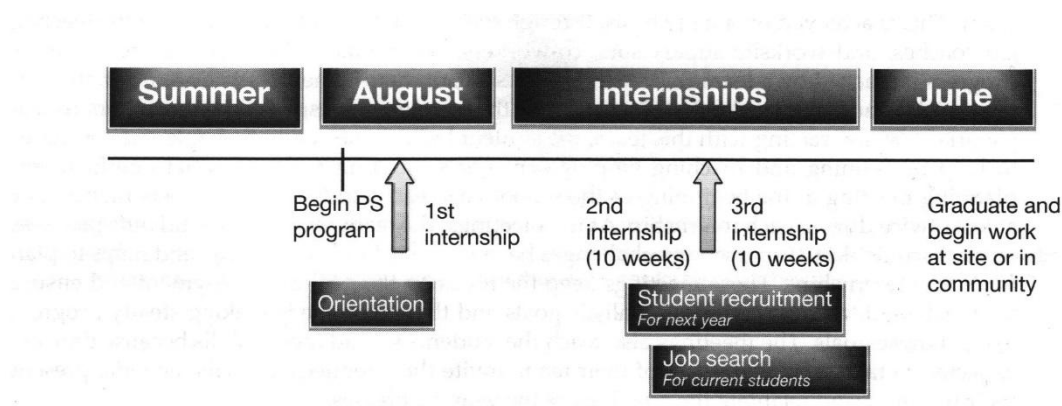
Figure 1. Annual timeline of the National Project SEARCH program (Daston et al., 2012, p.40).

As shown, the timeline indicates that the student application process should be

completed, and new students should receive notice of their acceptance into the Project

SEARCH program in spring. After that the Project SEARCH school year starts, the

students who have been accepted into the program come to participate in intensive internships and program activities every weekday until the date of graduation.

During the school year, the Project SEARCH transition program schedule is divided into three different internships. Each of the internships takes place during 10-week rotations through three different worksites throughout the host businesses. Thus, each student has a good opportunity for job exposure in different skill areas and learns to adapt in different work environments.

Initial orientation and transition weeks. My field observations started the first week of the local Project SEARCH program school year. During the first few weeks, the program focused on three main activities: (a) holding Project SEARCH partnership meetings to learn about new students, meet their parents, and begin providing program information; (b) assessing and providing orientation within each facility of the host business; and (c) planning internship schedules and full-day classroom activities.

First, with respect to holding Project SEARCH partnership meetings to learn about new students, meet their parents, and begin providing program information, the meetings usually occur in the week before the program starts. These meetings include the local Project SEARCH Coordinator, the local Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, a representative of the local Community Centered Board, a representative of the employment agency, the new students who have been accepted in the program, and their parents. The purpose of this meeting is to provide information to new students and parents. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator verifies that everyone in the meeting understands and will follow the program policies. Documents are also reviewed, including the Project SEARCH application, the student's individual transition plan (ITP),

the student's transition information, vocational training information, and his/her medical and health care plan.

Second, with respect to assessing and providing orientation within each facility of the host business, these "field orientations" provide opportunities for a student to explore each facility within the local host business. It was observed that students initially seemed hesitant to interact with supervisors and other employees; however, they gained more confidence after two or three facility visits. The Human Resource Director at the local host business also provides a welcome meeting for new interns and provides a presentation about the company and its work environment. Her presentation focuses on helping students understand the company's mission and policies and the employees' roles such as following work schedules, using appropriate communication, using appropriate behavior in the work environment, wearing appropriate clothing, self-care, self-safety, transportation, and the supervisors' contact information. After their field orientations, the students return to the classroom and share their perceptions about what skills they have learned and what kinds of jobs they liked or disliked doing. These field and classroom activities occur during the first few weeks. They are critical for the local Project SEARCH Coordinator and job coaches who use these to assess the students' interests and to contact the local host business to determine what types of work will be available for them.

Third and finally, for about a two-week period before the actual internship starts, internship schedules and full-day classroom activities are planned by the local Project SEARCH Coordinator and the job coaches. Based on observations, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator and job coaches assess student job interests and start arranging

potential job positions. During this period, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator develops a classroom curriculum to prepare students' employment skills, including practicing interview skills, creating a resume, writing a letter, filling in job applications, and using technology. For these hands-on job experiences, these students have to follow a job application and interview process with the host business that is similar to the other employees without disabilities.

As noted previously, students received three 10-week internships. Hence, many of the same activities that occurred during the initial orientation were repeated twice during the year, in transition weeks, which were one-week periods between the second and third internships. During transition weeks, students prepared themselves and were prepared for learning and adapting to their next jobs through classes and evaluation efforts. This process was an especially important chance for students to review their previous internship evaluations, develop their portfolios, update their resumes, and plan career goals.

Transition weeks were also used for special guest speakers who presented on topics that were related to developing employment skills or independent living skills. For example, a representative from the Sexual Assault Victim Advocate Center, or SAVA, was invited to provide education for students on how to find resources and prevent sexual abuse and assault in the community.

Daily program schedule. After students completed their initial orientation and job application processes, daily activities for students started, both in the classroom and on their actual worksites. During the six months of the study, the researcher conducted observations of classroom and worksite activities for three to four days per week, and this

section reports on those observations. It was noted that the daily program schedule followed the patterns recommended in the literature for Project SEARCH sites, including the recommendation for sites to follow the school-year calendar (Daston et al., 2012).

The classroom was provided onsite by the host business, the health center, and it provided space for seven student interns. The classroom was near the main entrance and lounge, and the students were invited to use the lounge for any activities which required a larger space than their classroom provided. The classroom location was also convenient for students to be able to access their individual work sites, and it also provided easy access to public transportation. The local host business provided the necessary teaching materials, supplies, classroom furniture, and other technology devices such as desktop computers and printers.

Daily classroom activities were divided into two period sessions including a morning session and afternoon session; each session was one hour. The rest of the daily activities occurred at the worksites, which focused on learning job skills. A typical day's schedule for Project SEARCH students is the following:

8:00 a.m.-9:00 a.m. Classroom morning session. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator discussed with students their roles, responsibilities, and any concerns about their job tasks. Morning activities also focused on helping students to enhance their capacity for related skills. For instance, activities were provided for improving skills in the areas of communication, social behavior, independent living skills, problem-solving skills, money management, time or schedule management, self-safety, and self-care.

9:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m. Internship at the worksite morning session. Next, the students went to their actual worksites to learn and practice their specific job tasks and

skills. Job coaches and local Project SEARCH coordinators worked with students individually to guide and direct job instructions in order to help students understand the processes and complete their tasks on time.

11:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m. Lunch and break time. Commonly, students had an hour and a half for lunch; however, it depended on the host business' schedule. Most students bring their own lunches, and the local Project SEARCH Coordinator and job coaches encouraged students to have their lunches with their co-workers at the internship worksites. However, some of them would have lunch in the lounge next to their classroom because of medical or personal circumstances.

12:00 p.m.–2:00 p.m. Internship at the worksite, afternoon session. All students returned to learning specific job activities at the worksites. During the afternoon, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator and job coaches would sometimes come in to observe students for determining job skills' improvements or remain to support students' needs.

2:00 p.m.–2:30 p.m. Classroom afternoon session. At the end of the day, before they left the program, the students had approximate 30 minutes for reflecting on their job internship or any events they wished to share with other students and the local Project SEARCH Coordinator. Students also received productive comments and feedback from the local Project SEARCH Coordinator for further professional development, and they were given reminders of upcoming professional development opportunities and school or business closures due to holidays or weather.

Program completion and graduation. The competitive goal of the Project SEARCH transition program is that students who finish the program are able to apply

employability skills from their internship experiences into situations of competitive employment. Daston et al. (2012) described program finishers as meeting two main qualifications: (a) 95% attendance in every program's activities for the full year, and (b) successfully demonstrating employability skills at each of the three internships. According to Daston et al., these students take with them a "Career Passport," which is a package containing (a) a resume, (b) a letter of recommendation from each supervisor at the host worksite, (c) a portfolio, (d) any awards or certifications, and (e) a certificate from an education partner or Project SEARCH Coordinator. Field observations and interviews with the Project SEARCH Coordinator indicated that these same requirements were adhered to and the same package was prepared for each graduate, although the term "career passport" was not used.

Both Tim and Jim, who were my cases representing perceived success, got paying jobs on the sites in which they received their training, either before completing the training (Tim) or immediately after (Jim). Additionally, Jim's mother reported that he received six job offers from various departments around the health center.

During my observations, the seven observed students all received paying jobs at the health center by the time they had completed their programs. Two of these students were offered paid employment in the middle of their internships. These two students received permission to participate in the classroom activities of the other students, but they chose, typically, not to attend. All program participants who were in a position to get a job at the health center had to meet the qualifications and follow the hiring process mandated for all applicants with or without disabilities. The Human Resource Director explained:

Yes, they have to fill out an application online, they have to sit through the interview process. We have already done their background check, so as soon as they interview and get feedback from whoever that student was working with in the internship, then it is the manager's decision to extend the offer, and then they go through the normal paperwork process just like any the other applicant, fill out an I-9, and W-2. They get offered the position, and if they pass the job functional test that they have to go through on certain positions, we have job function tests for physical requirements of the job . . . they go through that as well. And, they have to pass it; if they don't pass it, they don't get the job.

At the end of the school year, the students received their high school diplomas. The graduation ceremony was held at the health center and not at the school. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator said:

Students graduate from high school with their graduating class. They just withhold their diploma until the end of Project SEARCH. The student receives their diploma at the Project SEARCH ceremony, for finishing the program since they already graduated from high school.

According to the Project SEARCH Coordinator, this graduation ceremony is an important event for celebrating the accomplishment of the students and an opportunity to share a warm moment of appreciation for the students, their parents, and the Project SEARCH partners. The health center also highlights the collaboration success and the employment outcomes for the students. This event can also be a great opportunity to bring students together as a part of the planning and organization for promoting their teamwork skills, learning formal communication, and practicing behavior skills.

**Individual Student Program
Configuration**

The interview data revealed that many participants believed in the students' potential for work and their unique talents. The interviewees asserted that students would be successful in employment if they receive the right supports, accommodations, instruction, and demonstrations, even when work tasks are complicated. Achieving the

right combination of these variables requires an individualization process that configures the student to both particular and general aspects of their internship job. These processes are discussed in four sections: (a) instructing students, (b) developing accommodations, (c) enhancing communication and social behavior, and (d) using public transportation.

Instructing students. Project SEARCH internships are unpaid work experiences in which students are provided opportunities for constructing for themselves a future that offers the chance for paid employment and self-sufficiency. Students have the opportunity during their internships to make their own decisions for selecting specific jobs that they are interested in learning in order to reach their own career goals. While students are working on their specific jobs, they receive assistance and support from job coaches and the local Project SEARCH Coordinator, who are their mentors at the worksites.

These mentors are critical because they help break down complex tasks and incrementally teach the skills such that individual students come to understand and be able to independently complete their assigned work. This process is withdrawn after students are able to work independently and be responsible to complete their tasks on schedule. Project SEARCH students benefit by working closely with these experienced mentors in their real workplaces. These benefits also extend to the business side. The Human Resource Director at the health center discussed her standpoint on business; she felt they have more confidence to accept and allow students with disabilities doing internship within the businesses:

> So, there is a buffer zone, and that is what I like about the program the most is my supervisor got really worried about how much time they would have to manage the student and then when they found out that a coach was there to walk through that first couple weeks of that internship to make sure that they're doing their job

fine, making sure the adaptations got accommodated. . . . I think there is a big
sigh of relief to say, "Oh, there is a person that I can speak to about the student, if
I have an issue." "Do I speak to the students first?" "Yes," if they can understand
that I didn't like the way they did this task, and they need to change it. The coach
was a big piece of the program that was a selling point for us from the health care
standpoint.

She also strongly supported the Project SEARCH practice of providing the job coaches

onsite with the students:

> The supervisor wasn't having to eagle-eye watch that those students all the time,
> or somebody was going to have to be with them all the time because they could
> screw something up. They are going to touch something that they shouldn't.
> They do something with the residents that they shouldn't . . . and because they
> have that coach there, it really did provide a good support system. And, I think
> that was one of the biggest benefits that a community or an employer would be
> concerned with, is that they would just watch them go, and I have to be
> responsible for them . . . and that was a little bit of a relief for us to go, "Okay . . .
> that coach was really that the employee agency . . . that occupational therapists
> that walks through that process with them. And, gets pulled back in on regular
> basis, if something goes wrong, and that challenge, so that is the big thing that I
> like the most.

Jim's host business supervisor also shared her thoughts on having job support at

the worksites and how it can make efficient support into successful inclusive employment

outcomes:

> The job coaches are the most needed because I think that what didn't make the
> local college program successful, maybe they just didn't understand their client as
> well as the job coaches from Project SEARCH. Yes, their skills are superior.

Tim's host business supervisor also shared her satisfaction:

> I thought it is wonderful. I thought, they did a great job of . . . I like the fact that
> they actually stay with their person, they work, like, right beside them, I mean, so
> they hear me giving them instructions, so they can follow up. I just think it is a
> really good way to introduce somebody into a job and to have that support for so
> long, and then they try to back off a little bit to see how they do without that
> support.

> It is apparent from these comments that it is not just the instruction that matters.

It is within the responsibilities of the job coach and the Project SEARCH Coordinator to

serve as a mentoring instructor not only for the student, but also other people on the job site, such as employees and supervisors. This clearly distinguishes the instruction processes of Project SEARCH from the instruction processes of other models, such as sheltered workshops, in which job preparation is separated from job performance, job preparation is focused on the student and not on the job site, and successful instruction is seen as a prerequisite to job placement.

Developing accommodations. Providing accommodations that fill the gap between a student's skill capacities and a specific job's requirements is a critical component of the Project SEARCH program. Three participants, talking from the business side, asserted that they had no concerns about integrating persons with disabilities in the company, and they pointed out that accommodations to the job were one of the things that made students successful in competitive employment.

Referring to my observation, the students received close support onsite from their job coaches, who approached the accommodation process using such supports as using visual instructions, breaking and making short instructions into step-by-step guides, making checklist inventories, making words or labels bigger and/or easier to read, using slow speech and clear directions, and using reminder schedules/instructions to guide the work. Job coaches and the Project SEARCH coordinators also provided useful advice and techniques to the students' host business supervisors and co-workers to assist them in providing effective support and directions for students.

Jim's host business supervisor answered questions on what the business side believed about what made Jim successful at work and how the tools (accommodations) contributed:

Because I believe, Jim . . . we give him tasks, I mean, we just have to look at it a little differently how you give him the tools to do the job. It is a little bit differently than someone who doesn't have a disability . . . but you know, it . . . having the job coaches, but, I think if I had to do it on my own, it would be probably be harder. I don't have those . . . that tool . . . that skill set to show that person to support them, so having that job coach piece who they understand, and train them first is key, and then training us, as well. And then, Jim, again, who is successful in terms of what he does. . . . Yeah. I do think that training and education for the Project SEARCH is key to employers.

The Human Resource Director discussed her perceptions of believing in students'

potential and on how to work with them effectively:

I mean, we didn't go in with the attitude that we were gonna change our way of doing business because we have a person with a disability. We just said that this is the way our business is . . . and you can adapt and do a role within the company, and if we can then make adaptions for you and make it happen for you, that sounds great . . . and we are very flexible about making those adaptions for that person to get the job done, but we didn't say, "What new jobs can we create for people?," if it didn't make sense from a business standpoint. . . . I think that was an interesting evolution of working with these students. And now, every semester they're like, "OK, yeah, bring it on, we know how to work with them, we know what potential the way that we have to adapt with, we have to speak slower, we have to show twice, we have to make sure that there are adaptation cards there for them so they know what to do."

She also discussed the benefits of the collaborative effort between the host business and

Project SEARCH in developing workplace accommodations for supporting students and

promoting efficient business outcomes:

Yeah, I mean, depending on what the role is, usually the coach and the administrator of the building, the manager at the building, will work together to say, "Okay, this is the task that I want the student to do and there needs to be some accommodations or adaptations." Their coach and the administrator work that out, but there are staff members that would go "Okay, she is going to clean this room, but . . . she likes to go left to right," well . . . guess what, all other staff go right to left. "Well, okay, staff, culturally we are going to make a shift, and she is going to go left to right, instead of right to left with this task." And then they are going to go, "Oh, really," and then they are going to go, "Okay, that's cool." And so, I think they become aware of the adaptions or the accommodations and then whether not they have to work, allow them or not. That's not a lot to work around, I mean, I don't think that our staff had to make a lot of accommodations for that student. I mean, the task themselves are driven by

the coach and the administrator in the building, and they don't normally affect any other employees. Now the other employees have to work around them, and that student might be a little slower, so they might be able to do three rooms, and the other staff does five . . . but, when that person gets hired, we will say, "You are going to have to do five rooms if you want that job." And . . . the job coach does a pretty good job of pushing that student to get to that five before she gets hired, so they know that they can functionally do the job.

Tim's host business supervisor shared her experiences providing accommodations to help Tim understand working on complicated tasks and how she has supported him to feel comfortable in the workplace:

In the beginning, like I said, we were having to do that spreadsheet so he knew exactly what to do, but that didn't take him too long to pick up. If it is a new task, right, sometimes I will copy the documents and highlight things. So, he understands, I mean, he does some complicated stuff, he does the mail for us . . . getting envelopes ready for doctors, highlighting names, making sure that names and doctors match on the forms. He does a lot of that and the . . . so, yes . . . no other accommodation really, rather than visual and just verbal cues at first, like I said, he picks stuff up very fast.

With some documents . . . said he does because he does a lot, he does a lot of data entry, he does a lot of filing. So, at first, we used to have very detailed document lists, you know, the name of the document, where it went, what it looks like. So, a lot of explanation for him, and then we make copies of the document. So, he can see what it was, and now he has got pretty much of all documents. If it is a new document, I will make him look at it to see, and sometime I will highlight it and will leave it in his space for a while so he can look at it. But really, he has gotten to where he can recognize all the forms that are coming to the office, he knows where they go, and if he doesn't feel comfortable, he is very good about asking. He won't do anything that he is unsure of, and he would say, "What about this form, I don't know."

Enhancing communication and social behavior. During my observations and while interpreting the interview data, I investigated the atmosphere of the integrated workplace and how it impacted communication and social interaction. As a general rule, the business side interviewees indicated that they had no concerns regarding effective communication or behavior problems in the ongoing interactions between the employee with a disability and either other persons on the jobsite or health center customers. Part

of the reason for their lack of concern related to student recruitment processes, and part of

it related to how the job context and instruction shaped student behavior. These are

discussed below.

One participant from the business' standpoint talked about how the Project

SEARCH team effectively recruited students who could be successful working within

actual business' environments and situations. The Human Resource Director explained:

> Well, with Project SEARCH, they do a very good job. The Project SEARCH
> Coordinator, the school system . . . and then the employee agency, the director
> there, and the Division of Vocational Disabilities. They sit on a committee, and
> people from the outside community with their kids in high school apply, and we
> screen, and we have a pretty good bio for who these kids are and what kind of
> mental state they're in, what kind of physical state they're in, and they are very
> much exposed to say whether or not they can be ready for a working environment
> . . . and if they feel that there is any potential risk in regard to erratic behavior or
> threatening situations that these kids can't control themselves. . . . Then we won't
> accept them into the program because they would potentially put themselves at
> risk, and then our residents at risk. And, of course, our residents are what we
> protect the most. We also have to think about our employees, too, so I mean, our
> employees are around working right side by side with these kids, and if there was
> something physically challenging or even mentally exposed that it's challenging
> to keep them in control, we wouldn't have them on the campus, and so from the
> health care standpoint, that was probably the one, number one critical challenge is
> to make sure we got the right fit, and the right internship.

Tim's host business supervisor also shared her story about when he first started working

in her department. She had seen his social behavior improve when interacting and

working with other people. She said:

> I think a little bit afraid because of the elderly people, so because most people
> here are not the employees, but when you're out here walking, you have people in
> wheelchairs and screaming for help . . . now, he will, you know, he won't get
> upset, he will say, "One moment, please," and he will tell somebody that they
> need help and, you know, so, he just got more comfortable by being around us, so
> he was definitely more timid and afraid and has learned that . . . they are not
> gonna hurt him, everything is OK, he learned how to allow people into his space
> a little more because it used to be you couldn't get in his space at all. So now, he
> learned that it is ok for people to be a little bit closer to him, and he will be okay.

I said our office is very small, very tight, and I can introduce you to Tim . . . but, he really, yes, so, he has really opened up.

Tim's host business supervisor also shared her experiences for developing communication with Tim to help him learn and understand different tasks within the work environment. For example, making a conversation clearer, planning a decision ahead before changing the schedule, repeating commands, and following guided task's directions. Tim's host business supervisor said:

> I think just by making them feel comfortable and by interacting and letting them know in a situation how they have handled it well, or how they could have handled it better. And then, they kind of like learn how to handle it . . . like . . . our employee medical record used to get very upset, if he was doing something, and we were to ask him to hand us a chart which you should be able to do that. He would, "Can't you see I am busy?," but he has learned to relax and see that. He can do something else and then go back do the same tasks when he was asked . . . where at the beginning . . . he just wanted one task at the time. Right, not any more than one, and he really has learned how to multi-task, and I think just through working in the environment, he's working through us giving him input to say, "It is ok, you can stop with that task," . . . he is very responsive . . . yes, I mean, I think sometimes we take a couple times to explain it . . . very routine orientated. So, yes, so, I think, also, routine is good, yes, but giving him fair warning if the routine is going to change like by saying, you know, "Tomorrow we have to change because this is going on," and preparing him for that change, and then he does very well. As long as he has prepared ahead of time, and even now, since he's been here so long, I can even give him a change just right beforehand, and he is handling it very well.

In addition, she shared her thoughts about Tim's communication improvement at the workplace as well:

> Yes, he has really come a long way and does not get near as upset, at least here in this environment, I don't know how he is outside. I would hope he is better, because I think he . . . I've seen him growing better in here . . . and he feels occasionally . . . will do that . . . just occasionally, he doesn't understand what I'm saying . . . we just try to explain it to him in a different way, so he does understand, and he seems to. We kind of figure it out how to explain things to him so he does understand. Well, I don't really have to help him anymore, once I explain it and tell him what to do with it, he usually gets it right the way.

Using public transportation. To be qualified for working as paid employees and

being responsible employees, these students needed to have the ability to learn to use

public transportation. The Project SEARCH transition program encourages students to

become self-efficient and independent; therefore, teaching how to use public

transportations is a major part of the curriculum. The Human Resource Director

answered questions about the transportation policy for coming to work:

> . . . the students all have to find a way to get here. Whether it is through bus
> systems or Dial-a-Ride, so agencies support, they financially support that process,
> or their parents deliver them. We prefer that the students are independent and
> either rides the bus system, or get here, but the Project SEARCH Coordinator
> works on all of that beforehand.

During my field observation, I found a few students who rode with their parents

and others who used a Dial-A-Ride service; however, most students used the public

transportation system. These students were taught how to ride public transportations by

job coaches. The researcher discovered that job coaches also created an instructional

card to help students learn to use and recall bus numbers, times for the bus schedule, and

home-to-work directions.

Summarizing, Project SEARCH made it possible for students with significant

cognitive disabilities to work in integrated, competitive jobs by providing instruction,

creating accommodations, enhancing communication and adaptive behavior, and teaching

transportation skills. These processes were configured such that they matched specific

students on specific job sites, and they addressed not only the students, but the

employers, their staffs, and the physical layout of the jobsite and its place in the

community.

**Program Monitoring and
Evaluation**

Outcome evaluation is an important part of any program in human services.

Project Search's processes of evaluation consisted of (a) monitoring post-graduation

progress, and (b) evaluating the Project SEARCH transition program.

Monitoring post-graduation progress. This section focuses on investigating the

processes of monitoring student achievement after their Project SEARCH graduation.

Two relevant situations were explored during interviews: (a) student interns who ended

up with paid jobs, and (b) student interns who ended up unemployed.

In the case of students who ended up with paid jobs, all were hired by their host

businesses. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator described the process of evaluating

student progress after program completion; it is an informal evaluation. Generally, she

receives student information from DVR job coaches who are still working with these

students in their permanent positions. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator said:

> My teammates, which are job coaches for the employment agency, they are still
> his job coaches. So, we will get information. And, yes, we do, it is more
> informal than formal to check in and see where I am, say, "Hey, has he had work
> evaluation lately where he might increase his pay, you know?" So, it does seem
> more informal.

In the case of students ending up not being unemployed after their Project

SEARCH graduation, the results revealed that there are no such students. Since the local

Project SEARCH program started, 100% of its students graduated from the program, and

they are, in fact, all employed with a host business or other business in the community.

The local Project SEARCH Coordinator and job coaches noted that if a student were to

be in an unemployment situation, they could be signed up for employment waiting lists at

the local Community Centered Board. The Job Coach described:

> And, even though the Project SEARCH Coordinator no longer works with them because they are no longer in Project SEARCH, our employment agency still works with them. We're still coaching them because we do the job coaching for the adults in the community, and they are now adults in the community. So, we are able to see their progress. To see their progress and stick with them and continue supporting them on into adulthood.

She also provided me with an answer about how long the process of following up with

the students' progress usually takes:

> It could be ongoing, it could be ongoing forever. A lot of them, unfortunately a problem we are coming across . . . a lot of them are on the waiting list for Community Centered Boards, and so, luckily, we have a grant that is paying for their job coaching because otherwise, they have to be paying for it themselves, out of pocket. But their grant that they, we are able to use to fund their job coaching. Hopefully, all of the graduates will soon be coming off of the waiting list. I don't think, I think, it could take a year, it could take 6 or 10 years for some of them to come off from the waiting list. But, once they do, if they need it, they can have ongoing job coaching for the rest of their lives through the Community Centre Board…

One factor that may contribute to retaining successful employment is that the

graduates of the program continue to be held to the same standards they were held to

during their training, and these standards are those that the business needs to be

competitive and successful. As permanent employees, students are given an evaluation

by their job supervisors, like any other employee. Jim's host business supervisor talked

about following business' rules in the treatment of an employee with a disability; she

indicated, "Yes, we have a yearly evaluation, which will be due in May. . . . He will be

treated like any other employee." She also discussed the evaluation process for all

employees and mentioned that she would probably request assistance from DVR if he

needs additional support on specific jobs. Jim's host business supervisor said:

For the first year, you have a 90-day review, and then you have a 6-month review, and a year for your first year of employment, and then every year after that it is annually. Obviously, if anything comes up, we talk about it . . . he was going to the wrong building, so we had a job coach come in and help us with something, things to ensure that . . . there are not any real issues, but I usually will address them if they should come up in the year. . . . But, we do have annual review evaluation for every employee.

Evaluating the Project SEARCH transition program. Program evaluation focuses on understanding on how the Project SEARCH transition program assesses its own processes and how to identify its successes and failures. Most of the evaluation processes that were described during interviews were informal. During interviews, for example, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator said that she is always open to the opportunity for students, parents, host businesses, and other Project SEARCH partners to provide her with advice and feedback for increasing the efficiency of the programs to support students' success:

We ask the parents for the feedback, we ask the students for the feedback, and also the supervisor and the employer for feedback, how are we doing? . . . and, we try to make changes based on what feedback they're giving us. For example, we had a supervisor say, "You know that will be very nice to have a question-and-answer sheet so that when we start the process, you can give much more information to know what to expect with Project SEARCH." And . . . so that was really helpful, and we included that in our initial kind of our introductory packet for the supervisor to understand what it is all about.

However, the program does track its successes, recorded as the number of students who are employed after their Project SEARCH graduation. As previously discussed, 100% of Project SEARCH students have been hired as paid employees since the program began. The State Director of Project SEARCH mentioned that the local Project SEARCH that was being researched here had an excellent record of supporting students with significant cognitive disabilities to achieve self-efficacy and put employees in the inclusive community. He also shared his plan to re-initiate a more formal

evaluation process, something that had not been required to do since 2011. He expected

to collect all the data evaluations for each Project SEARCH site within the state before

the end of the current school year. The State Director of Project SEARCH said:

> Before our project ends, I need to get all the projects to do that again. We have
> not had formal evaluation. The state didn't fund Project Search last year, and so
> we stopped doing formal evaluations in 2010 where we had students actually, and
> students and families evaluating the programs. Now, the local Project SEARCH
> Coordinator has some good data that she can show you if she hasn't already, but I
> need to, before the program ends, I will be asking each project to formally, here in
> the spring as students are getting ready to leave, to make sure that we get those
> evaluations done on each student and each family to see what they think, but
> certainly, anecdotally, over the last several years. I think people have had very
> positive experiences with it, and certainly our success rate of right around 80% of
> all students employed would indicate that we have had some good success, but . .
> . we stopped doing formal evaluations back in 2011, 2010-2011 school year and
> we need . . . we are going to be doing it again this spring, hopefully, we will have
> some good data.

High numbers of students have become paid employees, and that speaks to the

program's accomplishments and successful long-term outcomes for promoting integrated

employment in the community. My discussion of evaluating the outcomes of Project

SEARCH will end with presenting the stories of Tim and Jim, who have been reported as

successful outcomes of the project.

Tim's story. Tim was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. He has been

working about one year as a part-time employee at the health center. He works in their

medical records department approximately four hours a day. The reason for working as a

part-time employee, Tim's mother explained, is because "he remains eligible for the other

supports through the system, so some Social Security benefits, and other things. That is

why he is just part-time." He described his job responsibilities as including mailing,

filing, building up the new resident charts, and doing project note attachments.

His business supervisor reported her satisfaction for the quality of his work and that it required a lot of detail for data entry and required using complicated documents. Tim's mother expressed her strong belief that her son would continue to be successful:

> Yes . . . he has very strong computer skills . . . and so, he is good at that, and we knew that he likes to do a job that has a lot of routine to it. So that once he knows the steps of job, that he can do it perfectly, and he does it right most every time, and he doesn't get tired of it, he is a really good worker. And so, we learned that during high school, so we knew that once he was out of high school through transition, that we thought he would be successful.

The mother also shared her thoughts on Tim having a great career because the Project SEARCH transition program provided on-the-job internships within professional environments for her son and other students who have disabilities to become efficient employees. She explained that during his first internship, his host business supervisor found his strengths in computer skills and his strength in a job which required a lot of routine data input. Tim's mother said, "It is a good match for him."

Tim discussed that he likes to work with other people because his co-workers need his help for completing some specific jobs. Tim also explained that when he needs help or some support, he could ask for help from his boss and his co-workers. He has confidence in working independently, without support from the job coaches. After he graduated from the Project SEARCH program, he did not request assistance from job coaches. He said, "I haven't got one . . . because . . . because since I turned 21, I became myself." This is a statement of pride for him to become an independent employee at the health center. Tim's mother responded that she also prefers him having social interaction with other co-workers. She seemed unconcerned about him because the Project SEARCH team had provided job coaches to assist him side-by-side for supporting his success during his internships.

Tim has a very interesting lifestyle, even though he still lives with his parents. Tim explained the reason he stays with his parents for now is because of the cost of living in an apartment and how he considers it expensive for his budget. He loves using a computer, and he is able to drive his own car for getting to and from work and for getting around the town for groceries and shopping. He said, "I also like to drive around, have breakfast, go grocery shopping . . . anything I do . . . I like to study many things." He also manages his own paychecks, using direct deposit to his account. His mother responded that she prefers allowing him to use a credit card, instead of cash, in case he runs out of money and for safety reasons. Tim is a very responsible person who pays his own bills and takes getting to work on time very seriously. His mother agreed, noting that he rarely had been absent, and he would not take unnecessary absences:

> Yes, he likes the schedule, he follows the schedule . . . they offered Tim a job because after the internship or during the internship, they realized that if he left, they wouldn't be able to get their work done . . . so, they created the position for him because he . . . is an excellent worker. If they had a big backlog or big piles of stuff, he helped them get through all their work. When he goes on vocation, they're sorry to see him go.

Finally, Tim's mother discussed her goal for Tim since he was very young, and it was for him to have a job. Tim's mother said, "I was glad that if he was able to do a transition program and get into Project SEARCH, because I thought that would give him a good chance to . . . get a job that matched his skills." Tim also responded, "Project SEARCH helped me to get through this job." His mother shared her positive thoughts about the Project SEARCH transition program; she thinks that it is an excellent program to help students with disabilities become successful people and that it provides long-term benefits for them when they are in their adult lives.

Jim's story. Jim was diagnosed with low-functioning autism spectrum disorder.

He had a lack of language and communication skills. Therefore, his mother assisted

during the interview with him by interpreting his words. Jim was in the first generation

of students in the Project SEARCH transition program, and he has become a successful

employee; so, his story has inspired subsequent student interns in the program. Jim has

been working for four years at the health center, and his job descriptions include

recycling, cleaning equipment, and filling vending machines. He is a part-time

employee, and his schedule is 20 hours per week. The study found that he has the same

reasons as Tim for not taking on the extra work hours, to continue his eligibility for

Social Security disabilities benefits.

After Jim completed the Project SEARCH transition program, six departments

offered him paid job positions. He made his own decision about the job he wanted. His

mother talked about this: "But, this program opened up six opportunities for employment

for him because they trained him in six different jobs . . . and then, they asked all six of

those jobs, those employers . . . all six of them wanted Jim." Jim has become an

independent worker and lives independently in his own apartment in town. Jim's mother

expressed how proud she is of her son, saying, "He's come a long way, this is really . . .

there is nobody on his level who is really even living on their own." She also explained

her determination about Jim's future:

> My goal for him from the time he was diagnosed with autism was to someday live
> on his own. That's what my goal was, that he would be able to do it by himself . .
> . live the way he wants, but, if it's his goal when he got older, but my goal was to
> get him prepared to make that choice . . . my goal from the time he was 2, was for
> him to have the job. . . . That was my goal. If it was his, I mean, my goal to get
> him to that point, he can make that choice, and let him make that choice. I didn't
> want to tell him everything, he had to do it, but he needs to learn certain skills he

had to do. That's why I told him that he had to do it. He had to learn the skills first.

His mother explained that he deserved to be successful because he is a great worker and a hard worker. Jim goes to work on time, he follows his work routine, and he is never absent at work, even when using his vacation. Jim's mother also explained that he is a very responsible person. For example, he always wants to be to work on time. When Jim rode the public transportation system, he was afraid of something happening to him to make him late for work, so he changed to Dial-A-Ride services.

Jim initially indicated that it did not matter to him, whether or not he worked with other people. However, when the researcher rephrased the question by saying, "Do you want to work with your boss?," he responded suddenly, "Yes . . . like to work for her," and he said, "Yes" when I asked him, "Are you happy?" and "Do you like your job?" He apparently enjoys being around his co-workers and his business supervisor. His mother told me that he is a very busy and a very social person who loves to go out with his cousins, family, and friends. She explained that the reason that everyone likes him and wants to be his friend is "because he is so respectful to everybody . . . he treats everyone with respect all the time, so everyone likes him. He doesn't have enemies at all."

After his work, he likes to go exercise at the gym, play basketball, go rock climbing, go swimming, and play Ping-Pong. On Tuesday nights, he must be at home for learning cooking with his service providers from the local Community Centered Board. His mother also showed the recipe book that she and Jim had made together. This recipe book is helping him cook and learn to cook the food that he wants, step-by-step. His mother said she has made every effort to support him to become independent, as illustrated by this cookbook story.

Jim's mother asserted that Jim understands how his job is very important for him. She said, "because he wanted to work, and he is taught to work . . . and working is the part of your life. . . . I do not care that you can or cannot, but you will learn . . . and so he learned to work." Hence, he has learned how to be responsible, to pay his own electric and cable bills and to pay for food and other entertainment activities such as games and movies.

When helping Jim answer a question about what might happen if he lost his job and what the consequences would be, Jim's mother said:

> The government will have to pay more money; we don't want that to happen, do we? We trying to get him to where we use as little of the government's money as we can. We don't want to use that money. We want him to be as self-sufficient as he can be . . . and then, you got too much time on your hands, don't you? So, we have to find volunteer work for you until you can find another job, don't we, because, we don't want him to have much time on his hands because too much time on your hands, it isn't a good thing. You need to keep busy at all times . . . he needs to have some things to do, and if he doesn't have anything to do, what comes out . . . the TV, the games, and that is the waste of life. It is a throwaway of life, no quality. . . . Your quality of life goes away . . . so we have to find him a volunteer job until he get a paying job again.

Jim's mother has always believed that her son would eventually have a job and be successfully employed in the community like everyone else:

> I could, I could see him working in the community, and I could see him living on his own or. . . . In my head, if he can't live on his own, maybe he can live with other people with some assistance. I don't know where he is going to be, but the ultimate goal was, if we can get him on his own, you need to get him on his own needs, and that is our ultimate goal.

When the researcher asked her, "Why do you believe in that?," Jim's mother responded, "Why not?," and she said:

> Does every parent believe in their child? Why will it be any different? No reason, whatsoever, why he should be any different. He is totally capable. I don't believe in handicapping your child twice, they were already born with one, so don't do it again. And that's what so many parents do when they don't make their

kids work, and they give them another handicap. That's wrong, why would you mess them up on purpose?

Finally, Jim's mother shared her gratitude for the Project SEARCH transition program, especially the Project SEARCH Coordinator who supported her son in gaining his job training skills and provided the opportunity for having a paid career. She explained that it would be difficult for parents to look for a job for their child. She also shared her perceptions about the possible non-existence of Project SEARCH in this community. Jim's mother said:

> I never even want to think about it, it would have been so hard, it would have been so hard, because we as parents, we can't go out and help him get a job. It might be he's still looking for the job. . . . I would find volunteer work for him, I know, I would I have done that because I wouldn't let him sit down at home, that's not OK. It's not appropriate at all. I know, I would have found volunteer work for him, but he also need to be self-sufficient.

Jim and his mother showed appreciation for the Project SEARCH team, indicating that Project SEARCH is a great transition model, and they hoped that it would expand the benefits to other communities and other countries for encouraging people with disabilities to gain quality lives in working and living within their society. Jim's mother said:

> Everything is awesome. The whole world needs to do this, the whole world needs to do this, they need to be . . . they are a part of society, and they need to be productive of society. That is important, and they can be. They can be, they can have a life. And, they can be happy, and they can work, and they can have it the same.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative study used an institutional ethnographic methodology to examine in detail the processes and outcomes of a regional Project SEARCH transition program. This chapter began by delineating the data collection and analysis procedures and participant demographic information. Then, it provided an extensive and comprehensive

analysis of the program and its current outcomes. This analysis examined the program

using six levels: (a) program and policy, (b) program partnerships, (c) students selection

and transition assessment, (d) delivery processes, (e) individual student program

configuration, and (f) program monitoring and evaluation.

Summarizing briefly, the program has very clear policies and procedures that are

used with all of its students, and these policies and procedures adhere to national

guidelines. The program also has an outstanding track record, and it perceives itself to be

a successful program, a point of view expressed by its employees, partners, parents, and

by students. In the next chapter, I will examine this record of reported successes in

relation to Project SEARCH program components and outcomes, thereby arriving at

conclusions about the program and how it serves young adults with significant cognitive

disabilities during the transition process. I will include in this next chapter a model of the

program's processes, and I will answer the three research questions.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate and gain a comprehensive understanding of the collaboration between public and private organizations that hold the potential for successfully preparing students with significant cognitive disabilities for school-to-integrated employment. The Project SEARCH transition program model was selected in this study and is examined by exploring a local program located in the western United States. Institutional ethnography was used, and multiple data sources were required for this study including: (a) completing ethnographic observations at actual business worksites; (b) examining the lives of 14 participants who were engaged in the Project SEARCH program; and (c) reviewing documents and textual materials related to Project SEARCH transition program operations.

This chapter first presents the discussion and conclusion with respect to the three primary research questions examined in this study. Next, future program development and anticipated challenges are explored. Finally, limitations and recommendations are provided for guiding future research. A chapter summary concludes this chapter.

Discussion in Relation to Research Questions

Research Question 1

Q1 Does the Project SEARCH transition program support successful inclusive employment opportunities for 18- to 22-year-olds with significant cognitive disabilities?

Yes, this study found that the local Project SEARCH transition program was successful at a number of levels. First and foremost, although the project is still relatively young, it was able to report that all students who have completed the program are currently employed in paid integrated employment. Some of these students were even offered employment with their host business while they were still in their internships. Seven major themes were found in this study that reflect how the Project SEARCH transition program contributed to community employment of, and integrated opportunities experienced by, persons with significant cognitive disabilities. These seven themes are: (a) changed attitudes and higher expectations from people in the community; (b) reduced employment barriers; (c) integrated employment, supporting meaningful adult lives; (d) more job opportunities for persons with disabilities; (e) reduced gap from school-to-work; (f) strong public-private partnerships; and (g) real workplaces, which enhance professional employability skills. These seven themes are described in detail below.

Changed attitudes and higher expectations. Low expectation of employers, administrators, educators, and parents highlights a concern affecting poor transition and employment barriers for persons with disabilities (Luecking, 2011). Low expectations are caused by a belief that persons with significant cognitive disabilities lack the capacity to obtain or maintain employment in the businesses community (Wehman et al., 1998).

The evidence of this study, based largely on the interviews, was that participant

experiences with Project SEARCH positively impacted their attitudes and beliefs about

these students.

Indeed, in response to one of the interview questions addressed, "Do you believe

that persons with disabilities can be successful working in the community? Why or why

not?," all participants showed their strong passion believing in persons with disabilities'

potential for being successful working in the community. All of them showed confident

opinions appearing in the words "absolutely," "most definitely," "oh, yes," and "of

course." The study revealed the rationale of beliefs that appeared from these participants'

experiences through touching and involving stories of persons with disabilities who

became accomplished in their employment. The special education teacher's statement

showed her strong belief in that statement: "I do, and the reason why, I think they can be

successful is because we have proven it so." Also, the local Project SEARCH

Coordinator said, "Absolutely, because I've seen it work over and over again."

A statement from Jim's mother shows how the program can prove that the student

is able to meet the expectations and demands of paid employment:

> You never ever say they can't because there is so much that they can . . . and, you
> have to give them a chance, if you don't give them a chance, how can you know
> that they can or can't. You can't make up in your mind what they can or they
> can't do. They have to try, and this is the only way that you know . . . and, you
> never give up. No, you don't give up, and there's nothing, I mean, if he tries it,
> and tries it. He may get it, and if he doesn't, then we can go on to what else he
> can do. It is all about what he can do, figure out what he can do, and that's . . .
> that is, we all do, we all do that. We use what we can do, and then we try to find a
> career.

The Human Resource Director at the health center was asked to comment on how

the Project SEARCH successes with students who are typically associated with low

expectations can be communicated to others. She shared her perspectives as an

employer, and her suggestion was to expand and use successful stories about employees

with disabilities who are working in industries and communities. The Human Resource

Director said:

> This is a great example of Project SEARCH being successful because you have relatable stories. You can say that I got an inventory person that does all inventory for the medical supplies; he supplies all the closets every single day, gloves, masks, toilet paper, tissues. That is a great example, but if you're a manufacturing line, they are not going to understand that. So, you got to have stories that are relatable to your industry before you start thinking that you can buy into it . . . and then, you have to have some hard dollars on the piece of paper to say, "This is truly what it is going to cost you, but, guess what, you can probably hire 8 out of the 12 kids to do those jobs and move those other people into other roles that are more efficient and more cost effective for you to put them in.

The foregoing comments illustrate how the stories of success that come out of

Project SEARCH impact people's opinions and expectations about these students. As

more students succeed, there are more stories to tell, and the dissemination of these

stories can influence how society views these people over time.

Reduced employment barriers. As previously discussed, the program can

change attitudes and increase expectations that people have for these students. When

beliefs change, barriers that impede employment can be lifted. The local Project

SEARCH Coordinator shared her perceptions; she believes that high expectations have

an important impact on providing more job opportunities for persons with disabilities.

She said:

> Expectations, I think, is a key of that . . . a lot of people even in, even people working with people with disabilities and have worked with them for a year maybe still have low expectations . . . and so, I think that a high expectation is very important. You know, where this isn't based out of pity, this is based out of that we really believe that these students are contributing members of society and have a lot to give and have very good work skills.

To increase the expectations within the business sector, the study recognized that it is necessary to understand businesses' concerns and what caused employers to hesitate in employing persons with disabilities. Kaletta et al. (2012) discussed that many businesses intend to employ persons with disabilities; however, businesses are still facing concerns for the match between the student's abilities and the job requirements, which not only involve being able to do the job, but also concerns such as safety. This study found that the activities of the job coaches and the Project SEARCH Coordinator working with the businesses assisted employers in their understanding of how to accommodate the workplace for job performance and safety when integrating employees with disabilities. The job coach indicated that her critical role was to provide relevant knowledge and encourage understanding for both employees with disabilities and the employers. She mentioned the significant challenges faced by employers. However, if employers can see the benefits and understand how to integrate employees with disabilities into their jobs and work settings, then the impact of this as a barrier to employment is reduced. In addition, she shared her perceptions that people became more open-minded because they have experienced working with persons with disabilities:

> I think, the people who have had an experience with someone with disabilities attempt to be more open to . . . maybe hiring someone. Many times I come across people here . . . at the Health Center and in the community that said, "I have a sister with Down syndrome, and I really wish that people would have been open to hiring her and finding where her skills lie when she was young." So, I think people who have experience are more open.

The evidence of this study, based largely on the interviews, was that barriers to employment were reduced by the experienced successes of the employers and the supporting instruction and guidance provided by job coaches. Employers learned that

they could match students to the jobs such that the work was done successfully and safety concerns were eliminated, which makes possible the hiring of other students facing similar employability challenges.

Integrated employment, supporting meaningful adult lives. As described in Chapter IV, the mission of Project SEARCH is integrated employment, and all of their services and outcomes reflect this mission. The two employees examined in Chapter IV, Jim and Tim, expressed their happiness with their jobs and with working with other people, rather than being segregated at work. Tim shared his reason that he prefers to work in an integrated environment because helping each other makes more efficient work than working alone. As presented in Chapter IV, employers also described their satisfaction, noting benefits such as: (a) return on investment, (b) improving economic well-being in the community, and (c) developing a positive and respectful environment without discrimination.

Many students with significant cognitive disabilities experience chronic unemployment (Condon & Callahan, 2008). The purpose of job training, whether provided in a segregated facility or in an integrated placement, is to both train people for and provide them with meaningful work, to promote their independence, and to offer better quality of life. If these outcomes can be achieved directly in the job sites that are part of the community, then this brings into question whether segregated settings are of any benefit whatsoever. As the State Director of the Project SEARCH transition program said when discussing the mission of the program, it is to actively support inclusion for persons with disabilities within community.

More job opportunities. One of the interview questions in this study focused on how things would be different for persons with disabilities if Project SEARCH did not exist? Six participants indicated negative outcomes would become apparent and that there would be fewer job opportunities and fewer training opportunities for persons with disabilities. The parents in this study also mentioned that their youths with disabilities had benefitted from productive outcomes of employment by participating in the program. For example, Tim's mother said, "We would have to rely on DVR or just try to find a job on your own is hard, and one of the reasons is that would be hard for Tim because of his communication difficulty."

As described in Chapter IV, the Project SEARCH model uses a customized employment strategy, providing each employee with three different jobs to help them find the job that matches best with their skills and with the businesses' demands. The stories of Jim and Tim who have been successful in employment shows Project SEARCH program accomplishments with respect to helping these students find their own career choices. Hernandez, Wadsworth, Nietupski, Warth and Winslow (2008) described the benefits of job matching, stating "interest-job match is positively related to the measure of well-being, such as self-esteem, work satisfaction, and lower levels of anxiety and burnout" (p.15). The benefits of job experience are also discussed by Hernandez et al., and it supports the potential of the Project SEARCH transition program for increasing job opportunities for students with disabilities. Hernandez et al. (2008) described the benefits of job experience:

> Students with disabilities should benefit from job tryouts or internship-type-experiences that provide them with career experiences and choices. . . . Students with disabilities in transition from school-to-work should participate in community-based interventions that target the identification of their career

preferences. Experiences will allow these students to develop job expectations that could lead them to economic success. (p. 21)

Finally, employers' perspectives about Project SEARCH confirmed that the program made possible more job opportunities. Tim's host business supervisor said, "I think that without the program, I would probably never hire anybody in my department because it is so detailed . . . and it's a lot of people's information . . . so without Project SEARCH, I probably wouldn't have ever hired anybody."

Reduced gap from school-to-work. As previously noted, Smith et al. (2002) mentioned that meaningful transition for students with significant disabilities needs to be created by linking school setting services and employment skills. Chapter IV reported the positive implications of classroom support provided side by side with job practice during internships, a key feature of this local Project SEARCH program. Also, the strategy of providing classroom supports in the business workplace helps build the connection between school transition services and business demands.

The Project SEARCH program provides educators an opportunity to coordinate and work directly with a group of businesses that are called the Business Advisory Council. Indeed, the benefits of this collaboration with businesses are that it assists students with disabilities with practicing real-job experiences during high school and having a better chance to access the network of paid employment with the business community. For instance, Tim's mother explained that the relationship between the school and the businesses was an important connection for helping her son and other students with disabilities to move forward from school-to-work. In addition, she also indicated that her son was prepared for job tryouts since high school, and this was furthered in the Project SEARCH transition program. She believes that it is for this

reason that employers decided to hire her son to work in medical records and were able to

recognize Tim's great capacity for working with computers.

Tim's host business supervisor at the health center showed her experience of

working with another agency as a host business. She said, "We have hired people with

disabilities before through those other agencies, but it's very limited, and it was a struggle

to get them into the interview process and get them justified that they could do the job,

and then some of them didn't stay that long." The employers in this study noted that they

have had positive experiences working with the Project SEARCH transition program, and

the four main benefits of cooperation with the school system included: (a) preventing the

hiring of unqualified employees, (b) reducing the need to use employment agencies, (c)

saving time to review applicants and background checks, and (d) matching skills with

businesses' needs.

Strong public-private partnerships. Since 1990, the collaborative efforts of

public agencies and schools have been mandated for improving transition services

(Chappel & Somers, 2010). As previously discussed, building the bridge of transition

from school-to-work works best to encourage business involvement for enhancing higher

quality of support for employment training.

This study discovered that the Project SEARCH model is a great example of the

evolution within the transition movement to promote the employers' demands and sustain

the retention of persons with disabilities in the workplace. This study found that the

health center is a productive and competent partner in providing a variety of experiences

in different job areas for students with significant cognitive disabilities. These students

have the opportunity to develop employment skills and self-interests for pursuing their

career choices.

As previously discussed in Chapter IV, the State Director of the Project SEARCH

program also mentioned that each role of partnerships is very important to make Project

SEARCH strong, and if without even one of them to support it, the Project SEARCH

program would not become a successful program. Indeed, the Project SEARCH

transition program has shown strong collaboration of public and private partnerships that

are beneficial at promoting network relationships for raising the quality of transition from

school-to-work and also to enhance career development experiences for students with

disabilities, particularly students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Real workplaces, which enhance professional employability skills. Many

research studies noted that internships at actual workplaces are important for students

with disabilities to deliver highly fulfilling experiences as they go from school to their

actual careers. Work experience opportunities may motivate students to become aware of

the work world and enhance their understanding of the picture of expectations from

employers and other people (Burgstahler & Bellman, 2009; Lindsay, 2011).

Two parents in this study have shown strong appreciation for the Project

SEARCH transition program to help their child become successfully employed within a

professional career. Tim and Jim have become a pair of incredible employees and shared

wonderful stories for developing their skills to fit into and live in this world. They are

taught being independent in working and living in the communities, and their stories will

be disseminated and shared to inspire other people with disabilities.

Behind the scenario of Tim and Jim's success, the Project SEARCH transition program remains a strong contributor. This study found that the program's model is designed for helping students with disabilities learn to solve problems by experiencing natural consequences at the actual work environment. The internship experiences have taught these students career development to improve their essential skills in various areas such as self-determination by making their own decision for selecting job practicum opportunities and self-management by managing their own time and schedules, and they have learned to be responsible. Burgstahler and Bellman (2009) mentioned that missing internship opportunities may cause students to lack strong resumes, may increase their difficulties in competitive employment, and impede their discovery of meaningful careers.

Research Question 2

Q2   What work processes contribute to the project's success?

Having answered Question 1 in the affirmative, it then becomes important to identify the work processes within Project SEARCH and within its relationships with its partners to determine what leads to the reported successful outcomes. As described in Chapter III, institutional ethnography was used in this study. Smith (2006) indicated that there are four major concepts for understanding work processes within organizations: (a) work practices in everyday life, (b) frontline organizational work, (c) ruling work, and (d) processing interchanges. Hence, these four concepts are used in the descriptive analysis that is presented below. The discussion of these processes is followed by a model that relates these processes to the operations of project search, as they were explored in the previous chapter.

Work practices in everyday life. Smith (2006) defined work practices in everyday life: "exploration of work practices in everyday life; the point is to learn about what the informant actually does" (p. 26). In this study, it is recognized that students have explored by participating every day in the Project SEARCH transition program. The results found that these students received transition services before moving forward into integrated employment training at the Project SEARCH program. In the meantime, the students had an opportunity to perceive, understand, and adjust for developing into adulthood as part of the program. The students spent a full school year attending the program and experienced exploring three different types of job skills at the actual worksites. In addition, the students gain the knowledge of the job skills, and they also have an enhanced understanding of the concept of learning about themselves, growing up as adults, having a job, and being responsible.

The results found that during the transition from school-to-work, it has been challenging and confusing for students who have low motivation and misunderstand the concept of adult lives after leaving high school. Furthermore, most students have had difficult times adapting themselves to basic employment skills for working in integrated environments such as self-determination and social interactions skills. However, Sabbatino and Macrine (2007) discussed many students with cognitive disabilities have lacked the educational experiences necessary to build their essential skills for leading them towards becoming productive workers and who are likely unemployed. The findings of this study discovered that the Project SEARCH transition program has shown high potential of successfully preparing and providing actual work experiences for students. The opportunities for practicing in three internship experiences helps prepare

these students to gain a better understanding of the natural consequences of working. The students have also gained better chances for developing themselves before they walk into real competitive employment situations in the community.

The Project SEARCH transition program can also be powerfully equipped for helping students to improve their responsibilities and deliberation of their own future's outcomes. For instance, the study found that the students are motivated by their peers who are employed with the host business during the first internships. The stories of successful employment can be associated to inspiration to other students for understanding the concepts and values associated with having a job and being a part of a social community, instead of losing opportunities just to stay at home.

Frontline organizational work. Smith (2006) defined frontline organizational work: "They make linkage between clients and ruling discourses, 'working up' the messiness of an everyday circumstance so that it fits the categories and protocols of professional regime" (p. 27). In this study, it is recognized by investigating the local Project SEARCH Coordinator and job coaches as the mentors who are working closely with students from the first day until the last day of the program's completion. On the business side, host business supervisors are also recognized in this category for interacting directly with students at worksites. Host business supervisors work closely with the Project SEARCH Coordinator and job coach to assist students with achieving their work tasks and adapting to their work environments. Furthermore, the main roles of the local Project SEARCH Coordinator and job coaches are to coordinate the link between program's work processes and the roles of partnerships to ensure cooperative work is stable.

As discussed in the literature review, there is a significant gap in the employment rate between people with and without disabilities. The major reason is the concern that employers have shown low expectations and misunderstand the potential of work performance for persons with disabilities (Luecking, 2011). The implementation to gain understanding for employers can be found in this study, the roles of job coaches are key to building connections and understanding between employers and persons with disabilities. In this study, the perspectives of host business have shown the main point that Project SEARCH has been a more successful transition program than the other employment agencies is because the program has provided job coaches to coordinate with employers and closely support students on worksites.

This study included three benefits for the host businesses for having job coaches on worksites: (a) job coaches understand each individual's needs and supervise them until they become independent with employable abilities; (b) job coaches establish productive integrated work environments between people with and without disabilities; and (c) job coaches build culture changes in work environments in that more persons without disabilities become open-minded to, and therefore believe in, the potential capacity of persons with disabilities. The results of this study appear in the roles of the Project SEARCH Coordinator and job coaches being powerful components to coordinate the program's accomplishment and to support students' success in employment.

Ruling work. Smith (2006) defined ruling work: "conducted with managers and administrators who work at the level of translocal policymaking and implementations" (p. 29). This study recognized the collaborative partnerships between public and private organizations that are presented at administrator levels in the Project SEARCH program,

and described the links to administrator level between public and private organization as follows.

Public organizations include the school district, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Division for Developmental Disabilities, or the local Community Centered Board. The study revealed the main roles of public partnerships that include: (a) support funding for the Project SEARCH program; (b) make sure students receive suitable support for individual needs to be successful in employment skills; (c) assess student selections into the program; (d) evaluate students employment performance; (e) educate students and family members to understand the laws, employment benefits, and other benefits for persons with disabilities; and (f) collect paperwork and make sure processes are being followed according to State policies.

Private organizations are represented by the Business Advisory Council of the Project SEARCH transition program. As discussed in Chapter IV, it is a group of business leaders to help students' success in hiring practices within their businesses. In addition, in cases that students are not hired through a host business and the Project SEARCH, the BAC members would help students to reach out to other employers in the community. They also help students to review resumes for their professional career opportunities. Thus, a group of employers is an important partnership for the Project SEARCH program to open opportunities for students to get into paid careers and to help them find a professional career in the field of competitive employment.

Productive collaboration in the Project SEARCH program's partnerships is a significant component to establish the program's strong network for supporting students' achievements in competitive employment opportunities. As discussed in the literature

review, a major benefit of collaborative partnerships that also appears in this study include: (a) eliminating students on employment waiting lists (Luecking & Certo, 2003), (b) eliminating employment boundaries, (c) reducing segregated employment, and (d) increasing inclusive and customized employment in the community.

Processing interchanges. Smith (2006) discussed the statement of Pence (1996, p. 60) as, "Processing interchanges are organizational occasions of action in which one practitioner receives from another a document pertaining to a case" (p. 31). In this study, it is recognized as Project SEARCH's partnerships for documenting the evaluations of students' job performances and monitoring the program's progression and outcomes.

The Project SEARCH student evaluation meeting is held for each internship after the students attend the evaluation process through the host businesses. During the evaluation processes, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator and job coaches gather the important information for helping students pursue better performances in their next internships. All student data are reviewed and analyzed by Project SEARCH's partnerships to ensure that students receive the right support or any additional supports, if they are needed, to meet their employments' goals. The students' evaluation documents are used to find students matching jobs and develop their employability skills by following the employers' requirements. Finally, the evaluation documents can also be used for establishing strong resumes for students to use when applying for future careers.

The program's evaluation is developed using students', parents', and employers' feedback and comments information. The feedback and comments can be useful information for the local Project SEARCH program to improve organization and work processes for establishing an efficient transition program from school-to-inclusive

employment. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator also indicated that all comments

are very helpful to make the change occur in better ways for developing the program.

Finally, the evidence from students who are employed has proved the program's

effectiveness in providing strong support of the employment opportunity for students

with cognitive disabilities in the community. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator

mentioned the high number of students' success and that it would be documented in the

formal program's evaluations for requesting potential long-term funding in the future.

An operational model. Figure 2 offers a descriptive model of the operations of

Project SEARCH. In this figure, the bottom level represents (a) student recruitment; (b)

program sequence; and (c) intern assessment, training, and support operations. The

middle level represents persons that work directly with the student to train and evaluate

them and assist them in their decision-making. The top and final level represents the

organizations that provide funding and the structure for the overall process. With respect

to colors, the color green represents the actual activities that students with significant

cognitive disabilities experience. The color blue represents public organizations, and the

color purple represents private organizations**.** With respect to the connecting lines, the

solid arrows represent work practices in everyday life, those which most directly affect

the students. The dotted arrows represent frontline organizational work, the workers in

the organizations who have the most direct contact with the students. The dash arrows

represent ruling work, that which is the administrative level. And lastly, the red

connecting arrows and lines represent processing interchanges, the discourse that occurs

between persons and within activities that evaluate student performance (arrows) and

evaluate program performance (lines) for decision making about student progress and

program development.

Business Advisory Council (BAC) / Host Businesses
-Health Center

-Supervisors/ Coworkers

Local Division for Developmental Disabilities (DDD) / Community Centered Board (CCB)
- Funding

Case manager
-Support Adult Services

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Funding

Employment Agency
-Job coaches

School District
- Started local Project SEARCH as a pilot program

Local Project SEARCH Coordinator/ Educator
-Job Developer / Mentor

Transition program (moderate level)

Transition program (significant level)

High School Program:
Students with disabilities (18-21 years of age)

Graduation

Inclusive Employment

Program's evaluation

On DDD waiting lists

"Project SEARCH Internship"

Student Selections	1st Internship (10 weeks)	Transition week (1 week)	2nd Internship (10 weeks)	Transition week (1 week)	3rd Internship (10 weeks)
- Last school year (21 years old)	- Orientation and assessment	- Full day classroom activities & workshop	- 2nd internship begins	- Full day classroom activities & workshop	- 3rd internship begin
- Eligible for DDD's qualification	- Classroom activities	- Review job evaluation	- Classroom activities	- Review job evaluation	- Classroom activities
-Project SEARCH meeting	- Job application and interview	- Visiting workplace	- First evaluation (week 2 or 3)	- Visiting workplace	- First evaluation (week 2 or 3)
	- 1st internship begin	-Job application & interview	- Final evaluation (final week)	-Job application & interview	- Final evaluation (final week)
	- First evaluation (week 2 or 3)		- Project SEARCH meeting		- Project SEARCH meeting
	- Final evaluation (final week)		(Possibility for paid job)		(Possibility for paid job)
	- Project SEARCH meeting				
	(Possibility for paid job)				

Work Processes and the relationships of partnerships' roles:

Students (Work Practices/in Everyday Life),
School District, DVR, DDD, and BAC (Ruling Work)

Students with disabilities
Local Project SEARCH coordinator/ Job coaches/ Supervisors (Frontline Organizational Work)
Students' evaluation
Program's evaluation (Processing Interchanges)

Public Organizations
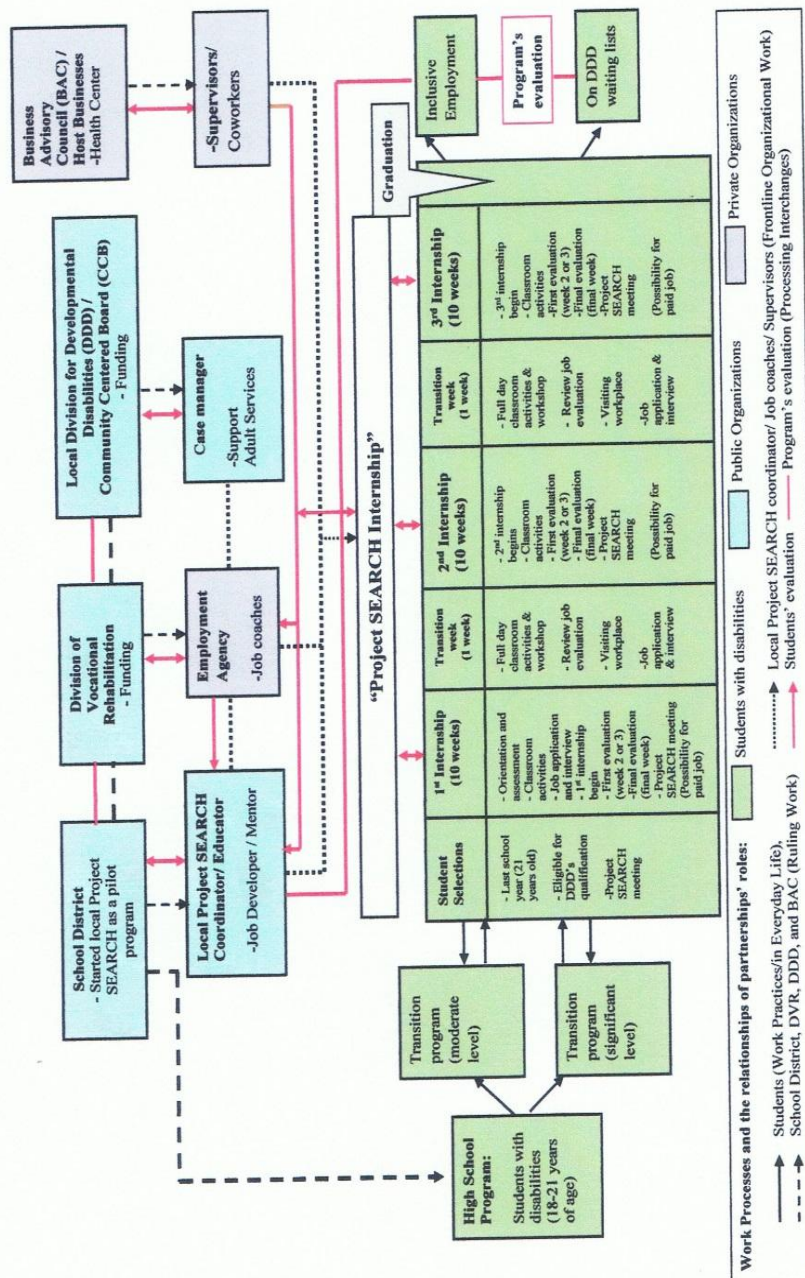Private Organizations

Figure 2. A descriptive model of local Project SEARCH operations.

The chart shown in Figure 2 takes the delivery processes, organizations and partnerships, and roles and responsibilities of key personnel that are described in Chapter IV and relates them to the work processes that define the activities and collaborations between the public and private systems. For the researcher, this model provides a blueprint for applying Project SEARCH practices in other settings and circumstances.

The model also reveals one potential weakness of the Project SEARCH implementation that is in this local region. As illustrated, the private host business (purple, top level) does not interface with the public administrative organizations that are at the same level, and the supervisor/co-workers (purple, middle level) do not collaborate with the case manager. Project SEARCH replications may want to consider building in these connections and communications.

Research Question 3

Q3   What components of the project contribute to its success?

This section presents the research findings regarding components of the Project SEARCH transition program which contribute to supporting a successful program for supporting students with significant cognitive disabilities in integrated employment. Eight major themes are found in this study that include: (a) intensive internships in real work experiences, (b) job coaches on worksites, (c) job matching and customized employment, (d) networking and collaboration, (e) characteristic of the Project SEARCH coordinator, (f) small class sizes and classroom curriculum, (g) community education, and (h) characteristics of employers and coworkers. There are described here.

Intensive internships in real work experiences. Phillips et al. (2009) described the purpose of work experiences as, "teach students new skills and observe what they

have learned" (p. 51). All participants have shared strong perspectives towards providing internships in actual work experiences that are the most beneficial for students to gain their knowledge of work skills experiences. In addition, two parents discussed the internship opportunity for working with host businesses; it has contributed to their children's possible access into a professional career. The job coach also mentioned that even though these students could not get the paid employment with their host businesses, they still have strong resumes with which to find other good jobs in the community.

Furthermore, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator discussed that it is very important to provide job training that supports students with their hands on in actual work. She explained that these experiences impact students in understanding the nature of consequences in real-work situations and that it is a more powerful model than teaching them only in classrooms. She provided some examples of real-work benefits that students would perceive the knowledge of understanding: (a) work harder to keep the job, (b) feel high expectations from people at the workplace, (c) learn how to be responsible at work, (d) learn self-management, and (e) learn how to interact and communicate with other people.

Job coaches on worksites. Carter et al. (2009) discussed the goal of special education transition is to promote students with disabilities in career development in real-work experiences. However, many restrictions have met to build relationships with employers. The reason a barrier with employers occurs is because employers have limited understanding of the potential of persons with disabilities (Carter et al., 2009). The findings of this study found that the roles of the job coach have a high potential to

close barriers and create effective connections with employers for working together to

support career development in students with significant cognitive disabilities.

The participants' perspectives from the host business side have revealed in this

study that having job coaches who work side by side with students at the workplaces are

an essential component of the program. The Human Resource Director said, "And

because they have that coach there, it really did provide a good support system." The

viewpoints of the host business has shown that meaningful benefits from having job

coaches to teach them how to understand the work processes on site, is very helpful for

the business. Tim's host business supervisor responded with her satisfactions with

having job coaches on the worksite:

> Yes, I think the job coach is a key. Yes, I mean, it is all good, but I think that is
> what does it for them. They are right beside them, they work with them, they
> explain it, they make sure they understand. I think it is wonderful. Yes, I would
> think that would be the most important thing, and the most helpful thing would be
> the job coach . . . and, Tim, obviously, did very well, so I thought it's a great
> program, I thought they did a great job of interning and explaining things to me
> and explaining things to him. I really think it's great. If I have more room for
> people in my department, I would probably hire more.

The State Director indicated that the roles of job coaches are the key component

to link each piece of work processes, connecting together to establish the program's

accomplishment, especially helping to find a good match for students, and promoting

customized employment:

> The job coaches are training these students, and the job coaches also typically
> help with placement plan and in finding the job, so that is another good
> component, is job coaches get to know the students for a year and by having, by
> working with them in an individual job, and they have a better idea of how to
> make the match for customized employment, and so these job coaches can have a
> direct impact on the plan and then find a good job that will have a good job
> match.

The Job Coach also shared her experiences that a part of her role is to make the

employers feel more comfortable and increase their confidence to integrate people with

disabilities within their business sites:

> We found that providing ongoing support, even just a little bit, like once a month or once a week, just to make sure, we found that it is really helpful. I think, it's kind of comforting for the employer to know that if there is something that has come up, that they can . . . that they will have the job coaches as a resource to be able to ask questions and help problem solve through difficult situations . . . just knowing that resource is there. I think, it is really comforting for employers and helpful . . . and even when things seem to be going smoothly, sometimes there is a problem that comes up, and so we found that if we are kind of doing the ongoing support even if it is very minimal, that that is very helpful for maintaining employment.

In addition, parents shared positive thoughts that a part of a successful program is

to have job coaches who closely teach students at jobsites, and they also develop

coordination with people in the host business. Tim's mother discussed that job coaches

are very important pieces of the program to establish a strong relationship between the

school and business. Jim's mother also responded that job coaches are a very important

component to build the program's success and also help the students' success. Jim's

mother described,

> When he was training in that job, they need to have somebody be there to help until he learns that . . . so, yeah, it might take him a little bit longer to learn that, but once he has got it down, and then he's got it for good. And then, he doesn't need that help anymore . . . but everyone needs someone to train them, everyone needs someone to help get started and learn. Job coaches are very important.

Job matching and customized employment. Luecking's (2011) statement

supports this study with similar thoughts that even though these students participated in

job internships, they were not fully guaranteed to get paid employment. Thus, this study

discovered the key to support successful employment is the need to combine good job

matching for employees with disabilities and good matchmaking for businesses' market

needs. Morningstar (2012) discussed, "It has been theorized that matching individual types with corresponding work environments will lead to greater vocational satisfaction, stability, and achievement" (p. 307). Furthermore, McDonnell and Hardman (2010) also discussed that "systematically matching the strengths and weaknesses of an individual to demands of a job before placement is strongly associated with the individual's long-term success (p. 268).

The study also revealed that it is important to train students in different job skills for finding a good match, and it is also important to understand accommodations behind their need to match with employers' requests. The State Director of the Project SEARCH program mentioned that "there is a real productive capacity as long as we have a good match and a good fit between that person and the job that the business is offering, so customized employment is the answer. I think that is a current best practice and that is what we are trying to do." He indicated that the program has been exploring customized employment, and it is a powerful model to bring balance to both sides by seeking consultation between employers' interests and employees' job matches. The study by Phillips et al. (2009) also noted four main strategies which are the foundation to develop transition from school-to work, including "discovery profile, work experiences, job development, and customized employment" (p. 49).

The participants in this study discussed the idea of providing several job opportunities for students to explore learning different employability skills and understanding their own strengths and needs. The idea of finding a good matching job is to promote students to become more efficient employees, and it also benefits business to know about the individual student's talents. Thus, the beneficial outcome for both sides,

the employees and the employers, is how to approach customized employment in the

community. For instance, in Jim's story, he had a chance to be exposed to job practicum

in different jobs, and then he had a chance to choose the most interesting job for himself.

Then, these results have found that the host business has high satisfaction for having Jim

as a productive employee because he is a hard worker and exhibits high responsibility

and he would be with the company longer than four years.

Additionally, the Human Resources Director shared her perspective of providing

the opportunity to students to learn about themselves and learn about what types of jobs

that they are interested in working. The job exposure process is the key to find the right

matches, and that is very important:

> Having the exposure to a job setting before they take the job whereas, you know, a lot of people or kids with disabilities will go and work at fast food, will go work at the easiest place to get the jobs, but they might not like it, and don't know what the heck is going on. So, the luxury of having Project SEARCH is giving them that environment to learn and see whether or not they like it and then, obviously, having the job. I think that is the biggest positive for them, is that they get the opportunity to experience it first . . . make a decision about what their interests are, and then potentially getting the job with us. And then, if they didn't have that, they might end up working at Kentucky Fried Chicken for the next 30 years, and not being very happy at all, and not thinking that they can do more.

The State Director also discussed the benefits of three different internship experiences

and where they are linked to develop effective customized employments in the

community:

> In Project SEARCH we have a teacher with the teacher in the classroom right on site in the business. So, that is a critically important component to have those students right there in the business and then, of course, we have got the individual internships which are all important because they are allowing students see a variety of different jobs that might match up with this one. It gets down to job match. So, we want students to understand that they can be competent in certain jobs, but we don't know which ones for sure, if they haven't had extensive work experience. So, Project SEARCH helps students to try on many different job hats

and to see where we might get information from all this to develop a customized employment plan that, then, would allow us to find a good job.

Networking and collaboration. A major reason that this study selected to explore the work processes of the Project SEARCH transition program is because the model of this program is to strengthen the collaborative efforts and partnerships between public and private organizations. The study by McDonnell and Hardman (2010) indicated that the success of the transition program "in securing paid employment for students depends on developing a strong relationship with the business community" (p. 259). The State Director of Project SEARCH had a strong discussion about the program's success and that it is because of relevant components including job coaches, internships in real work, and collaborations. He has pointed out powerful connections to the collaborative work between the public and private organizations that have made program accomplishments especially beneficial if long-term funding exists. The State Director of Project SEARCH said:

> I think all the components are important, now in [the State], of course, and anywhere else around the country. Once a person has a job, then you need some kind of long-term funding to do the supported employment part. By that I mean, the long-term support. That, of course, comes from our local DD agency and in this case, come from the community board system in [our State]. So, that component is important, too.

The State Director of the Project SEARCH program also indicated that it is of critical importance to have both public and private sides of the systems cooperate and work together. He mentioned that if it is done without the collaboration, it means it was done without the model of Project SEARCH. The benefit of the school and employers connection also promotes the potential of increasing economic interests and economic well-being in the community (Carter et al., 2009).

Additionally, Tim's mother shared a great point that the Project SEARCH

program has a strong collaborative network with businesses in the community. She

explained about her son's internship experiences; Tim has had a wonderful opportunity

for demonstrating his computer skills, so that has changed his life, having credibility

working in a professional career. The Project SEARCH transition program has the ability

to connect and support students from school into professional businesses, so Tim has a

better chance to learn different job skills in order to find a good match. Tim's mother

shared her thoughts:

> So really, without Project SEARCH, I think it would be a lot harder to find
> internships for students because he is good on the computer but, you know, who is
> gonna let student into their office to do computer work. So, I think what it really
> made this transition program work for Tim and the other students is that there is a
> relationship between the school district and host business. The Project SEARCH
> Coordinator is the person to make those fit together. You know, she said, "I have
> a student who can be successful in an internship that they trust, that she has
> picked somebody to do it," because, I imagine, if the host business had, if they
> had students who didn't come to work or whatever or caused problems, that they
> wouldn't want to do Project SEARCH anymore. So, I think the host business gets
> people who are interested in doing those kinds of jobs . . . it is not a glamorous
> job, it is not high-paying, but these things need to be done. and there a good
> match for.

The Job Coach also shared her perceptions that the Project SEARCH provides a

lot of benefits to students because the program has a strong connection with a variety of

professional employers. She explained that a great network can support students to have

greater opportunities working in different areas, and that helps them to build strong

resumes for future employment:

> I think that the students coming out of school would have a very difficult time
> finding jobs. Mostly because of the lack of experience and lack of references . . .
> things to put on the resume, and just experiences to draw from . . . I know that
> sometimes with the other transition programs that are in places beside Project
> SEARCH, students work on independent living skills and using public
> transportation, and they sometime get to do some internships . . . trying out

different jobs in the community, but not as intense, not for a full time or a full day every day a week and with as much support as we are able to provide and in a professional of a setting. Oftentimes, the internships they do will be in a fast-food, restaurant, or, you know, like a community place like a library or something like that. But here, through Project SEARCH, we are able to give them sometimes more professional . . . different kinds of opportunities.

Characteristic of the Project SEARCH Coordinator. In the previous statement about collaboration**,** most participants in this study brought up the point that the local Project SEARCH coordinator is a main contributor to the students' successes in employment. This study found the Project SEARCH Coordinator is an influential role to support the transition program's success and students' success in employment, where as this role still lacks presence in practice.

Two parents shared their strong appreciation of the local Project SEARCH Coordinator and how she dedicates hard work to helping students become successful, and she also makes the effort to build stronger connections and relationships between the schools and the employers. The parents explained her dedication like a fighter putting each piece of a puzzle together to make the students' future. The parents also indicated that if the program did not have a person like her, the program would not be a success, and these students would not have a job. Tim's mother described that it is important for the Project SEARCH program or any program to have a person who understands, is dedicated and is willing to pursue these students' achievement for a better future. She said that this local Project SEARCH program has the right person to support the program's success:

> Well . . .the only reason that worked out that way is because of the Project SEARCH Coordinator. So, Project SEARCH is good, but without her . . . having it begin to make the connection for the parents on how this is good for this student, we would not have done it. So, I think that it is important for your

research to know that there could be the program, but it is only as good as the person doing it.

Jim's mother further shared her thoughts about the local Project SEARCH Coordinator and she said, "Yes, she is wonderful. I absolutely love her. She really loves these kids . . . and she really cares about them. They picked the perfect person, they could not picked better than her."

Furthermore, the perceptions of the host business side was also included in this study, as they were asked, "I want your perspective or your suggestion for how can I collaborate with businesses, because . . . some companies will not want to hire people with disabilities because they have low expectations, and they don't believe in these people's potential." The Human Resource Director suggested to me that it is important for the program to have a person such as this Project SEARCH Coordinator who works very hard to make connections and is passionate about supporting these students to be successful in employment and understanding the business side. She suggested that it would be a great example to bring forward the story of this Project SEARCH Coordinator who works hard in supporting her students to attain employment success:

> I have to say, the Coordinator has been critical with that, she's been unbelievable.
> She will go out to the 19 facilities, and she's taking tours and understood how we
> do business, and then she would go, "Well, what is it about this job and how
> much is that person being paid?" and "Is there a solution that we can have maybe
> a Project SEARCH student do an intern there, and see whether or not they can
> handle the job" . . . and then potentially extending an offer of employment after
> that internship. You have to have somebody passionate about the program and
> passionate about people with disabilities and a fighter to say, "They're no
> different from you or I," and that's the Project SEARCH Coordinator . . . and
> she's talented . . . and was unbelievable to go out to my facilities, and look and
> review and say, "What is that person doing for a job?" and not just ask, ask
> another question. "How often you do that in a day?" "Do you walk back and
> forth 15 times a day to get that box?" . . . "How much is that person being paid?"
> and "What could that person be doing if he doesn't have to walk 15 times to get
> that box every day?" And, "Maybe my students can do that for him, and you

would be saving money because that person can go to higher level function job and be better at his job." So, the story telling and the investigation on what kind of roles you can fit into your organization is truly where you are going to sell the business person.

Small class sizes and classroom curriculum. Providing classroom support with the actual work experience is noted in this study as a critical component of Project SEARCH's model. Classroom support is also an essential element to provide useful curriculum for assisting students in learning and preparing specific skills before they confront the complex situations at worksites. This study found that transition programs that provide job internships with side-by-side classroom support are very uncommon

The job coach has shared her impressions about working with the Project SEARCH transition program, which has a solid model and organized planning. She explained that the Project SEARCH program is not only providing intensive job internships at actual worksites, but it is also approaching useful curriculum to support students to fulfill their individual needs. The benefits of classroom activities are to develop students in employment skills and independent living skills. She discussed that some topics need to be taught or practiced in the classroom for preparing students before they perform in real situations. She said, "Like for instance, interview practice." She also mentioned small classroom size. It helps the local Project SEARCH Coordinator, and the job coaches are able to work closely with each student and focus on improving individual needs. Her response was, "I think that the small numbers of the small class size is very helpful for . . . being able to kind of work very individually and support each person in individual needs." In addition, the State Director of the Project SEARCH program indicated that the benefits of providing small class sizes are to work closely and help solve problems with individual students. He also mentioned that the classroom is

located at the business site which is a great benefit for students to learn the job skills and

the independent living skills at the actual worksites.

Community education. Besides the benefits of actual work experience to

enhance employability skills for students with significant cognitive disabilities,

community education is the best way to approach and promote education. The Human

Resource Director discussed at the beginning that she has had concerns about how to

integrate people with disabilities within business; however, they have turned into positive

outcomes for the business' surroundings. She has confidence that this is a good way to

provide education in real places. The education has changed people's attitudes, reduced

stigmas, and increased people's knowledge about how to work, communicate, and

interact appropriately with employees who have disabilities. The Human Resource

explained:

> I just think education. My concern was how people perceive people with
> disabilities and do we need to educate our staff on how to handle or work with
> people with disabilities. That stigma of . . . if I've seen them struggling, I want to
> either help and pick it up and do it for them, or "What are they doing here?"
> "They shouldn't be here." And so, those stigmas have to be kind of broken down
> by some education, and I think that one of the key things, that if you don't do
> education up front and make sure that you speak to them, that this is just another
> person coming in to fill a job, and there will be people to support them in that
> process.

Finally, the Case Management Director at the local Community Centered Board

mentioned, "The education of students and coworkers is really important." Thus, this

study found that the Project SEARCH has been a supportive education up front in the real

workplace by providing job training opportunities. This program component is able to

generate great benefits to students with disabilities and their coworkers so that they have

a chance to learn and embrace each other within social work environments.

Characteristics of employers and coworkers. As discussed in the literature review, Buys and Rennie (2001) described a new model of job placement that focused on a "demand-side approach differs from traditional models in that rather than pushing individuals with disabilities into jobs, more concerned with creating a demand among employers, or pulling people with disabilities into the workforce" (p. 96). However, some employees with disabilities are working in an inclusive environment; they still have been experiencing social isolation by their coworkers and supervisors (Janus, 2009).

This study found that the model of the Project SEARCH is to promote customized employment to engage businesses' demands with students' interests. Connecting the relationships with employers is important for students with significant cognitive disabilities to perform at their highest potential in specific jobs that meet employers' needs, especially dealing with current situations of competitive markets. Thus, this study showed that employers are also the key components to establishing the program's success and support student interns' achievement in future employment opportunities.

Jim's mother explained that job coaches are an important component, and employers are also important when she said, "Components are set already, his employer has to be a part of that." She also discussed that the social community needed to have some businesses that are able to provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Jim's mother said:

> Yes, and the cooperation with the employer, you know, if they don't cooperate, and they don't really want them there, then the program is not gonna work, and the employer has to be on board all the way . . . and there needs to be a job coach to help, because the employer can't do it. No, they're busy. . . . So, I think both are very important, and the places are willing to take the risk and see that they can do this. They are totally capable for doing this. If without all of those components, it would never work . . . there will be a lot of people jobless.

Additionally, the special education teacher for students with severe disabilities shared that the workplace in the integrated environment should be provided by people who are caring, understanding, and willing to help these people to be successful. She also explained a great idea that it is not just about having a job, but it also about having social relationships and friends. She shared some of her students' parents' thoughts that social relationships are the most needed for their child. The special education teacher for students with severe disabilities said:

> What I hear from parents is that they want . . . it is the most important, that they really want . . . the relationship, and friends, because when you think about it, us as adults, your life is more, is definitely richer and better when you have friends to share it with.

In addition, she indicated that employers and coworkers are the most important to create strong supportive environments within workplaces and in the community for supporting these students to be successful. The special education teacher for students with severe disabilities said:

> That is not only support for him at work, but they also supported him in the community. And, what a difference that they made, he feels so good, like he was one of them. . . . So, I think that is a big thing to have those really supportive employers and people at the job site.

Various benefits of building strong relationships with host businesses are found in this study by sharing participants' perceptions that include: (a) providing a better chance for students to be hired with a paid career; (b) building strong resumes by referrals from professional businesses; (c) providing opportunities to practice in professional career skills; (d) increasing social interaction within inclusive employment; and (e) creating a positive atmosphere and bringing cultural change to inclusive environments.

Program Development and Challenges

This section presents the perceptions of participants regarding program improvement needs and future program development recommendations. The experiences of participants, as expressed in their opinions, can provide a strong basis for expanding the program and for increasing its effectiveness. There were six main areas for improvement identified in this study: (a) expanding educational opportunities, (b) expanding long-term funding, (c) expanding the criteria of student selection, (d) expanding host employers in the program, (e) expanding the curriculum, and (f) expanding parent understanding of Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Expanding Educational Opportunities

Six participants described challenges that they face regarding not only the education of students but of the families and communities as well. First, the job coach and the special education teachers discussed their challenges, which were to provide education to parents for understanding the difference between children and adult worlds and between the school systems and the work systems. These three participants also indicated that parents need more support for helping their child understand the value of transition toward meaningful adult lives. They also mentioned that parents need to step up in preparing and believing in their child's potential of being successful. The job coach explained that these students need to understand the value of being part of the adult world, such as working and making money to live:

> There are many challenges . . . one of the biggest things is helping students and families understand the adult world. They go from . . . from school where their student . . . their child has one-on-one support with the teacher and . . . services like occupational therapy if they need it, or speech therapy if they need it, all of that stuff provided, and the students' days are totally full to having nothing. . . . If

the student graduates and didn't do Project SEARCH and doesn't have the job, they may sit on the couch and watch TV all day, every day, for five days a week . . . the funding, that is the hardest thing for families and students to understand those, it's different . . . just different from the school system to the adult world. Big change. So, and we are able to, it's, it's nice having Project SEARCH because we are able to, because of our employment agency, we provide a lot of the services for adults in this community. So, we can kind of bridge the gap and, you know, introduce parents and students to the Division of Vocational Rehab and help them get familiar with that system and make sure they don't fall through the cracks, or get missed.

The State Director of the Project SEARCH program also believed in expanding the educational process to people in the community in order to help them truly understand that everyone is capable of employment. His statement is:

They have low expectations . . . and that is very challenging. So, all the community groups have low expectations, and it is part of the reason that we tend to see people who have pretty high skills in Project SEARCH because nobody understands that through customized employment . . . and I shouldn't say that they don't understand it, but that . . . there is a lack of understanding that everyone can work if you find the right job and the right job match and the right employer, and you have a good trainer.

Furthermore, the Directors of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Community Centered Board described providing more education resources. The Director of DVR offered this: "Improving connecting the dots to the resources, and then making the education awareness to them."

Hence, it is apparent from the points made by these participants that both the content and the receivers of educational opportunities need to be expanded, and resources should be provided to make this happen. Parents and students need to understand the differences between the school and adult worlds, and the community needs to know more about the potential these students have for employment and independent life.

Expanding Long-term Funding

The job coach described need for the long-term funding; it is very much needed

and it could have a major impact in helping students who require additional supports for

reaching their employment goals. She also shared her experience with one student who

needed a financial budget for nutrition, work clothes, and hygiene/personal care. She

indicated that this budget support would help the student look more professional and help

get employers' attention for hiring him. She said:

> Sometimes the funding isn't really possible. . . . I mentioned to one of my
> students that we are going to his house and do the home evaluation. We were
> able to get that authorized and get that paid for because we . . . documented that it
> is a pretty big need for him to be clean and look more professional . . . but . . . we
> don't have the time or the funding.

As discussed in the results of Chapter IV, the State Director of the program

mentioned that Project SEARCH is funded by the Developmental Disabilities Council

with $15,000. This grant funding was effective for five years, starting October 1 of 2008

and ending September 30 of 2013. The State Director of the Project SEARCH program

has anticipated continuing to receive more funding, "I am in the process of writing a new

grant to a new entity that I think will pick it up, and we hope to have it funded into the

future." The State Director of the program and the case manager for the local

Community Centered Board both reported that they expect that Project SEARCH will be

able to earn long-term funding based on the program's achievements and productive

efforts for contributing to students' successful integrated employment.

Although it was not addressed in detail by the participants in this study, it is

important to recognize that a project such as this does not operate on a budget of $15,000.

The foregoing amount contributes to certain specific activities that relate to Project

SEARCH, but the overall operations budget that paid for the time allocations of the teachers, job coaches, and others had to come from the school system and DVR. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that these individuals would be doing these jobs with or without Project SEARCH, and perhaps what Project SEARCH adds to this is that they now have results not achievable using more traditional transition services.

**Expanding the Criteria of
Student Selection**

Three participants shared their perception that the program would someday be able to expand its services to all levels of disabilities, for all different types of disabilities, and for all different adult ages. This study found that the Project SEARCH program's mission is to provide the support for students who have significant cognitive disabilities; however, a majority of students are currently at the level of mild or moderate cognitive disabilities. The State Director of the program explained that the program has been attempting to keep reaching for a goal of a group population in the significant needs level. The program has met various aspects of barriers, and is yet unsuccessful. However, regarding his response from the interview question when I asked, "When I read about Project SEARCH's goal, is it determined to serve a significant disabilities level?," he said:

> Yeah, and it is all relative, I guess, but because the Division of Vocation and Rehabilitation considers all students from Project SEARCH, anybody who has intellectual or developmental disabilities, they could considerably be put into the category of most significant disability, but, of course, there is a range within that, too, and, yes, although the Program Project SEARCH is supposed to serve the people with the most significant disabilities, they are really only serving the top 20%, or 15%,or 10% in that range of people when there are many more people that would benefit more from Project SEARCH. In fact, that would benefit more than many of the people that are currently being served. So, that is the challenge, to expand the program to all people with significant disabilities, and not just high performers or people who have a high level of skill…

The special education teacher for moderate needs explained her perceptions that

the Project SEARCH transition program would be able to extend opportunities for all

students who have disabilities. She said: "I would like to see that Project SEARCH

wasn't so restrictive in the students that they accept. See, they can only accept kids that

are connected to the Community Centered Board." In the same vein as these comments,

Jim's mother stated that Project SEARCH is an effective program for supporting students

with cognitive disabilities to achieve working in the community. She feels that it would

be great if the program expanded their transition services to all ages so they could share

the same success as the students in the program. The special education teacher for

moderate needs said:

> That is the best project in the world, and I'm very sad that it is only offered
> through the school system. They had talked about eventually, they will invite all
> adults with special needs, but it's not happened yet. I would like to see that
> happen in this community . . . and, too, you don't have to be in school, but you
> can get through Project SEARCH, and get the job, no matter what age you are,
> there is so many adults out there, with no jobs.

Expanding Host Employers
in the Program

The Human Resource Director at the health center mentioned that additional host

businesses may increase benefits for her business and students in the Project SEARCH

program. She explained that some of her business' facilities do not fit with students'

interests or their employment goals. Hence, she thought that students would have more

opportunities for learning in specific areas by being placed directly into those businesses

that her health care business system could not provide. She also indicated that the

benefits would address her frustrations in attempting to seek matching internships with

individual preferences within her business' facilities. Regarding her experiences:

> I think that every company that this program gets integrated into . . . there is potentially an exhaustive level of what jobs that we do have available or internships. So, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator's gone through every facility pretty well . . . and said, "Here is four internships that we can do at this facility based on the structure," but sooner or later, the company is going to be limited by which internships are available or any newer internships, any new creative outside-the-box internships. So that . . . at that point in time, our mission as a program is to go get another employer to support another internship site. So, we worked with other host businesses with one of our students, it's his last year to get an internship with them . . . because he's exhausted his internship here, and so he went over to other host businesses, and did an internship. So, that was very helpful, and we still have to work that endeavor . . . to do that to find more internships at other employers, so we don't have to take the burden, if we have larger groups of kids. If we have more than eight kids a semester, I don't know that I can find eight internships or more than eight internships a semester. Because my facilities are so busy taking care of patients and residents . . . it is hard on facilities to integrate and keep them going and do it every single semester.

Since 100% of students who attended this local Project SEARCH are reported to

now be employed and earning wages, the need to expand this type of program into other

host businesses is critical. Project SEARCH clearly has a high possibility for additional

businesses' involvement in the future.

Expanding the Curriculum

Three participants advocated for additional content subjects in Project SEARCH's

curriculum; these were independent living skills, using technology, and social

relationships for the prevention of sexual abuse. The local Project SEARCH Coordinator

and job coach stated that the main goal of the program consists of a 90% focus on

assisting students with employability skills; however, the knowledge of independent

living skills can lead students to opportunities for getting a paid job. The job coach

shared her experiences:

Some of the other students might be able to benefit from some other supports, like if we were able to go into their homes and help them develop their morning routine, or cooking skills, or those kind of things, it could be really helpful . . . and carry over into their employment, but for a lot of them, we don't have the time or the funding.

In addition, the local Project SEARCH Coordinator shared her thoughts about the way the program could be more efficient:

I talked about how nice it would be if students had more independent living skills support during this process so if they weren't on the wait list . . . and if they would be getting some support for nutrition, you know, help making healthy choices when they go out in the community, maybe . . . exercise and accessing recreation. All of those things would really help to bolster . . . this program to make a really well-balanced life. I think, parents are really supportive in that way, but they also are really busy. And, they are also trying to have student to do more on their own. So, along these lines that there has to be good balance for everybody, it would be very nice if there was some support to help them learn those outside-of-work skills in the same time as they are in Project SEARCH.

Jim's supervisor also supported these points, explaining that sexual education in particular may be needed in the curriculum:

Maybe some education on . . . like I have had to approach some subjects with the Project SEARCH interns that I would probably never have to approach with someone that doesn't have a disability . . . let's say, some boundaries for sexual intimacy there are boundaries . . . and maybe need some training, those are some areas that I've . . . would feel I could get some more help that would be good.

Jim's host business supervisor also focused on additional curriculum providing the knowledge of computer skills and how it would be useful for career development. Her suggestion was, "So, obviously, I guess, to keep the students current, if they want jobs out of the norm, more computerized, the digital work. . . . I never asked Jim to do anything on the computer, but I had two interns recently that came with very high skill sets for the computer."

The local Project SEARCH Coordinator indicated that more feedback from program participants is needed to expand the content of instruction to better meet the

needs of the students. Hence, to improve the program's performance, she has been

asking parents and employers to give their feedback and comments as part of her ongoing

program evaluation.

Expanding Parent Understanding
of Supplemental Security
Income (SSI)

Most schools expect students with disabilities to retain 12 work experiences

before their high school graduation and that these students will be potentially fully

employed with a full-time paid job (Phillips et al., 2009). However, the results of this

study discovered that a full-time employment position is considered unnecessary by some

parents who have a child with disabilities.

Two parents in this study shared similar perspectives of having a part-time job

with 20 hours offered more advantages for their child with disabilities than working as

full-time employees. Their reason for preferring a paid part-time job was because of the

Supplemental Security Income's restriction on earned income over SSI's requirement.

Tim's mother explained that they have attempted to keep Tim's work hours under 20

hours per week so that Tim is still qualified to receive SSI benefits for persons with

disabilities. Tim's mother also pointed out the main reason was that if either Tim's work

hours went over 20 hours or if he earned too much money, he would not remain eligible

for any support through the system. For instance, he could lose some financial and

insurance benefits, Medicaid support, and/or other disabilities services.

The purpose of the work Incentive program is to insure keeping employees with

disabilities' benefits while holding a career, such as providing the "additional income

necessary to move toward financial independence" (Schuster, Timmons, & Moloney,

2003, p. 60). However, three main barriers to receiving benefits of SSI include: "(a) difficulty in receiving SSI; (b) a limited understanding of the relationship between SSI and work; and (c) unawareness about support offered by the Social Security Administration (SSA)" (Schuster et al., 2003, p. 54). Most parents lack knowledge of SSI requirements of working and receiving SSI, and they are struggling in an interaction with SSI (Schuster et al., 2003).

It seems that parents and employees with disabilities need to become more aware of the work incentives that are offered by SSI. Since the parents and employees with disabilities lack awareness of SSI information, they may drop their right for earning necessary benefits and funding through a disability case. This study found that parents anticipated acquiring this knowledge during their high school transition programs. However, the researcher discovered that additional information is needed by these families before they have gone too far in attempting to seek many jobs and earn higher incomes and before knowing what benefits are actually right for their child's future.

<div align="center">

Limitations of the Study

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There were five major limitations of this study. First, there were a limited number of Project SEARCH sites. This study focused on intensely investigating one location, and it used three ways of gathering and analyzing data to enhance the credibility of the findings for this location. Moreover, reference was made to the official handbook (Daston et al., 2012), and the local model appeared to emulate handbook expectations in many ways. However, replication of the study across sites would be required to confirm with greater certainty the extent to which the local model represents Project SEARCH on a larger scale and the extent to which these data reflect Project SEARCH, as a whole.

Second, the number of participants with significant cognitive disabilities was limited. The study focused on only two students, in detail, and looked at seven students during observations.

Third, there was limited time for field observations. Initially, it was intended to observe the local Project SEARCH program for a full school year to complete the program's annual timeline. Unfortunately, the field observations occurred for a period of 6 months because of the researcher's personal health conditions.

Fourth, it would have been valuable to provide copies of the transcripts to the participants for their review. This was not done; however, it should be noted the triangulation process done by the researcher using the three data sources (interviews, observations, documents) tended to show the same patterns and lead to the same conclusions.

Fifth and finally, many of the participants were part of Project SEARCH and had both commitments to its success and positive relationships with the Project SEARCH Coordinator. Their vested interest in the program can represent bias in the participants' perceptions. At the same time, the study that was accomplished here was designed to examine the components of Project SEARCH and its outcomes from the perspective of people that know it well. Hence, although this limitation is acknowledged, the value of using project participants as primary data sources is also recognized as an asset of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the implementation of Project SEARCH as a transition program addressing school-to-employment for students with significant

cognitive disabilities. The information from this institutional ethnographic study will be used to promote quality employment and successful long-term outcomes for persons with significant cognitive disabilities in my country, Thailand. To gain a better understanding of a successful model of transition services, five recommendations are offered for expanding future research.

First, field observations in other host businesses in different areas would be helpful, exploring other business systems and learning how different business systems can be supportive in finding the right job match and accommodations in advocating for the employment of persons with disabilities in integrated workplaces.

Second, research is needed that expands to more participants who have significant support needs with different types of disabilities such as visual, hearing, or physical impairments. The researcher believes the stories of persons with disabilities who have been fighting to become successful can be a great motivation in bringing the inspirations, hopes, and beliefs to other people in the society.

Third, there is a need to expand this research to more participant parents, to learn how family members can support future long-term outcomes of employment success. This study presented Jim's mother and Tim's mother, and they were great examples of a group of family members who have a dream and strong beliefs for their children's future. These parents never abandoned their expectations, and they always stood beside their youths with disabilities to support and encourage them for their entire life. It would be interesting to learn the diverse experiences and different perceptions of other parents. This information will be useful knowledge for developing new strategies and techniques to advocate for children with disabilities to become young adults with quality futures.

Fourth, although Project SEARCH made every effort to include job coaches in the meetings and in other planning functions, this is not always true in transition programs. Their input is vital for the proper functioning of the customized employment process, and it is important to recommend here that research is needed on the role these individuals play in planning and program development.

Fifth and finally, there is a need for research that expands the number of participants at administrator levels. Administrators representing different sites can provide information that will lead to a greater understand of the whole picture on a national level. The program has expanded to over 200 sites across the United States of America and to 4 in other countries. Data from the administrative level across more sites could guide future sites in developing their programs in relation to lessons learned by other locations. It would be especially interesting to learn different systems of schools, public organizations, and businesses to which the Project SEARCH model can be applied when looking at those systems in other countries. The researcher believes this information will be useful for establishing implementations within the educational system and culture of Thailand.

<div align="center">**Conclusion**</div>

This qualitative study was conducted using institutional ethnographic technique designed to explore the association of work processes and the relationship roles of the Project SEARCH transition program at one local site for approximately a year. Triangulation was used to promote the credibility of this study. It included semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observations, and textual materials and documents.

Fourteen participants cooperated in the interview sections. The findings of this study

appeared to answer the three primary research questions, as summarized below:

> Q1   Does the Project SEARCH transition program support successful inclusive employment opportunities for 18- to 22-year-olds with significant cognitive disabilities?

Yes, the study found that this local Project SEARCH transition program reported

that all students are currently hired in paid integrated employment after program

completion. The study also discovered that the program has had significant impact on

changing people and employment in the community. The study found seven main areas

of impact: (a) changed attitudes and higher expectations from people in the community;

(b) reduced employment barriers; (c) integrated employment, supporting meaningful

adult lives; (d) more job opportunities for persons with disabilities; (e) reduced gap from

school-to-work; (f) strong public-private partnerships; and (g) real workplaces, which

enhance professional employability skills.

> Q2   What work processes contribute to the project's success?

The study found three local Project SEARCH transition program work processes

that were especially critical for its success. The first was that it promoted partnerships

and collaboration between public and private organizations, including the school district,

the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, developmental disabilities, the employment

agency, and local businesses. The second was its application of customized employment.

Third and finally, it used real-world, community job opportunities, which had an

additional advantage of decreasing segregated employment and reliance on sheltered

workshops.

Q3   What components of the project contribute to its success?

The study found eight core components of the local Project SEARCH transition program that contributed to its success and student success at integrated employment. These were: (a) intensive internships in real work experiences, (b) job coaches on worksites, (c) job matching and customized employment, (d) networking and collaboration, (e) characteristic of the Project SEARCH Coordinator, (f) small class sizes and classroom curriculum, (g) community education, and (h) characteristics of employers and coworkers.

In addition, the participants in this study shared their perspectives on program challenges and future program development. The study summarized the participants' ideas into six major areas: (a) expanding educational opportunities; (b) expanding long term funding, (c) expanding the criteria of student selection, (d) expanding host employers in the program, (e) expanding the curriculum, and (f) expanding parent understanding of Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Finally, this chapter reviewed selected study limitations and offered some future directions for research. Most notably, in the view of this researcher, we need more information at the administrative level on the operations of Project SEARCH under different local and cultural conditions. Research of this type would be especially beneficial for the development or Project SEARCH programs in Thailand.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions for Employee

Date: _____ Employee Number: _____ Age: _____

Time Beginning: _____Time Ending: _____ Interview Location: _____

High School _____Work Location: _____

      Project SEARCH transition program is provided by School District, and it is a process to assist with continued employment after high school graduation. The Project SEARCH transition program is a collaboration between public education and local business. This collaborative partnership focuses on supporting students with disabilities to develop their employment skills and capabilities to work within community environments. This interview will ask you about your perceptions of your own experience with the Project SEARCH transition program, and your plans for the future.

Please respond to these questions:

1. How long have you been working in this job?

2. What tasks do you do?

3. What do you prefer, to work with other coworkers or to work alone? Why?

4. Who helped you to get this job?

5. If you need help with something, who will help you?

6. What do you do to keep your job? (e.g., listen to your boss, work hard, or come to work on time)

7. If you did not have this job, what would you be doing?

8. Has Project SEARCH helped you?

Interview Questions for Parent

Date: _____ Parent Number: _____ Career: _____

Time Beginning: _____ Time Ending: _____Interview Location: _____

Project SEARCH transition program is provided by the School District, and it is a process to assist with continued employment after high school graduation. The Project SEARCH transition program is a collaboration between public education and local business. This collaborative partnership focuses on supporting students with disabilities to develop their employment skills and capabilities to work within community environments. This interview will ask you about your perceptions of your own experience with the Project SEARCH transition program.

Please respond to these questions:

1. What were your expectations for your child after leaving high school? (Do you believe that your child can be successful working in the community? Why or why not?)

2. What do you prefer for your child, to work with other coworkers or to work alone? Why?

3. Who supported your child to get his/her job? What were the processes you had to follow in order to help your child get this job?

4.   How has Project SEARCH's transition program contributed to both the short and long term employment success or opportunities of your child*?*

5.   What components of the transition program are needed to support your child working in the community, and which ones are unnecessary or unhelpful?

6.   What do you want to see developed in addition to what is already in place to support your child's transition from school to employment?

7.   How would things be different for your child and his/her employment possibilities if Project SEARCH did not exist?

8.   What did you do to support your child in being successful in their employment opportunities?

9.   How can parent help their child be successful in the transition from school to work?

Interview Questions for Local Director of Project SEARCH

Date: _____Time Beginning: _____ Time Ending: _____

Interview Location: _____

      Project SEARCH transition program is provided by the School District, and it is a process to assist with continued employment after high school graduation. The Project SEARCH transition program is a collaboration between public education and local business. This collaborative partnership focuses on supporting students with disabilities to develop their employment skills and capabilities to work within community environments. This interview will ask you about your perceptions of your own experience with the Project SEARCH transition program.

Please respond to these questions:

1. How long have you been working at this job?

2. What does your job description include, being a local director of Project SEARCH?

3. Do you believe that students with disabilities can be successful working in the community? Why or why not?

4. What components of the transition program are the most needed to support students with disabilities to work in the community, and which ones are unnecessary or unhelpful?

5. What do you want to see developed in addition to what is already in place to support students with disabilities' transition from school to employment?

6. How would things be different for students with disabilities and their employment possibilities if Project SEARCH did not exist?

7. What are the challenges coordinating with the educational system and with the community to bring them together?

Interview Questions for Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Date: _____Time Beginning:_____ Time Ending: _____Interview Location: _____

        Project SEARCH transition program is provided by the School District, and it is a process to assist with continued employment after high school graduation. The Project SEARCH transition program is a collaboration between public education and local business. This collaborative partnership focuses on supporting students with disabilities to develop their employment skills and capabilities to work within community environments. This interview will ask you about your perceptions of your own experience with the Project SEARCH transition program.

Please respond to these questions:

1.   How long have you been working at this job and how long have you been working with Project SEARCH?

2.   What are the roles of your organization that are involved with Project SEARCH? and how important is the collaborative partnership?

3.   What does your job description include, being a collaborator with Project SEARCH?

4.   Do you believe that students with disabilities can be successful working in the community? Why or why not?

5.   What components of the transition program are needed to support students with disabilities to work in the community, and which ones are unnecessary or unhelpful?

6.   What do you want to see developed in addition to what is already in place to support students with disabilities' transition from school to employment?

7.   How would things be different for students with disabilities and their employment possibilities if Project SEARCH did not exist?

8.   What are the challenges coordinating with the educational system and with the community to bring them together?

Interview Questions for local Community Centered Board

Date: _____Time Beginning:_____ Time Ending: _____Interview Location: _____

Project SEARCH transition program is provided by the School District, and it is a process to assist with continued employment after high school graduation. The Project SEARCH transition program is a collaboration between public education and local business. This collaborative partnership focuses on supporting students with disabilities to develop their employment skills and capabilities to work within community environments. This interview will ask you about your perceptions of your own experience with the Project SEARCH transition program.

Please respond to these questions:

1.   How long have you been working at this job and how long have you been working with Project SEARCH?

2.   What are the roles of your organization that are involved with Project SEARCH? and how important is the collaborative partnership?

3.   What does your job description include, being a collaborator with Project SEARCH?

4.   Do you believe that students with disabilities can be successful working in the community? Why or why not?

5.   What components of the transition program are needed to support students with disabilities to work in the community, and which ones are unnecessary or unhelpful?

6.   What do you want to see developed in addition to what is already in place to support students with disabilities' transition from school to employment?

7.   How would things be different for students with disabilities and their employment possibilities if Project SEARCH did not exist?

8.   What are the challenges coordinating with the educational system and with the community to bring them together?

Interview Questions for local Employment Agency

Date: _____Time Beginning:_____ Time Ending: _____Interview Location: _____

Project SEARCH transition program is provided by the School District, and it is a process to assist with continued employment after high school graduation. The Project SEARCH transition program is a collaboration between public education and local business. This collaborative partnership focuses on supporting students with disabilities to develop their employment skills and capabilities to work within community environments. This interview will ask you about your perceptions of your own experience with the Project SEARCH transition program.

Please respond to these questions:

1.   How long have you been working at this job and how long have you been working with Project SEARCH?

2.   What are the roles of your organization that are involved with Project SEARCH? and how important is the collaborative partnership?

3.   What does your job description include, being a collaborator with Project SEARCH?

4.   Do you believe that students with disabilities can be successful working in the community? Why or why not?

5.   What components of the transition program are needed to support students with disabilities to work in the community, and which ones are unnecessary or unhelpful?

6.   What do you want to see developed in addition to what is already in place to support students with disabilities' transition from school to employment?

7.   How would things be different for students with disabilities and their employment possibilities if Project SEARCH did not exist?

8.   What are the challenges coordinating with the educational system and with the community to bring them together?

Interview Questions for Supervisor/Coworker

Date: _____ Host Business Supervisor Number: _____ Job: _____

Time Beginning: _____ Time Ending: _____Interview Location: _____

  Project SEARCH transition program is provided by the School District, and it is a process to assist with continued employment after high school graduation. The Project SEARCH transition program is a collaboration between public education and local business. This collaborative partnership focuses on supporting students with disabilities to develop their employment skills and capabilities to work within community environments. This interview will ask you about your perceptions of your own experience with the Project SEARCH transition program.

Please respond to these questions:

1. One of your employees/coworkers is_____. What are his/her hours? Please describe his/her job.

2. How long have you been working at this job?

3. Have you worked with other people with disabilities before?

4. Describe for me how you work with this individual?

5. Do you believe that your employee/coworker with disabilities can be successful working in the community? Why or why not?

6. What components of the Project SEARCH program are the most needed to support your employee/coworker with disabilities to work in the community, and which ones are unnecessary or unhelpful?

7. What do you want to see developed in addition to what is already in place to support your employee/coworker with disabilities' transition from school to employment?

8. How would things be different for your employee/coworker with disabilities if Project SEARCH did not exist?

Interview Questions for Employer

Date: _____ Type of Business: _____

Time Beginning: _____ Time Ending: _____ Interview Location: _____

      Project SEARCH transition program is provided by the School District, and it is a process to assist with continued employment after high school graduation. The Project SEARCH transition program is a collaboration between public education and local business. This collaborative partnership focuses on supporting students with disabilities to develop their employment skills and capabilities to work within community environments. This interview will ask you about your perceptions of your own experience with the Project SEARCH transition program.

Please respond to these questions:

1. One of your employees is_____. What are his/her hours? Please describe his/her job.

2. Have you ever hired other people with disabilities before? Tell me about that?

3. Do you believe that your employee with disabilities can support your business' success? Why or why not?

4. What benefits does your business receive hiring this employee?

5. What components of the Project SEARCH program are the most needed to support this employee with disabilities to work in the community, and which ones are unnecessary or unhelpful?

6. What do you want to see developed in addition to what is already in place to support your employee to succeed on the job?

7. How would things be different for your employee with disabilities and his/her employment possibilities if Project SEARCH did not exist?

Interview Questions for State Director of Project SEARCH

Date: _____Time Beginning: ____ Time Ending: ____ Interview Location: _____

   Project SEARCH transition program is provided by the School District, and it is a process to assist with continued employment after high school graduation. The Project SEARCH transition program is a collaboration between public education and local business. This collaborative partnership focuses on supporting students with disabilities to develop their employment skills and capabilities to work within community environments. This interview will ask you about your perceptions of your own experience with the Project SEARCH transition program.

Please respond to these questions:

1. How long have you been working at this job?

2. What does your job description include, being a state director of Project SEARCH?

3. Do you believe that students with disabilities can be successful working in the community? Why or why not?

4. What components of the transition program are the most needed to support students with disabilities to work in the community, and which ones are unnecessary or unhelpful?

5. What do you want to see developed in addition to what is already in place to support students with disabilities' transition from school to employment?

6. How would things be different for students with disabilities and their employment possibilities if Project SEARCH did not exist?

7. What are the challenges when coordinating between educational systems and the community to bring them together?

Interview Questions for Special Education Teacher

Date: _____Teacher Number : _____ High School_____

Time Beginning: _____ Time Ending: _____ Interview Location: _____

Project SEARCH transition program is provided by the School District, and it is a process to assist with continued employment after high school graduation. The Project SEARCH transition program is a collaboration between public education and local business. This collaborative partnership focuses on supporting students with disabilities to develop their employment skills and capabilities to work within community environments. This interview will ask you about your perceptions of your own experience with the Project SEARCH transition program.

Please respond to these questions:

1.   How long have you been teaching at this transition program?

2.   What does your job description include, being a special education professional in the Poudre School District with the Project SEARCH transition program?

3.   Do you believe that students like _____(name)_____ can be successful working in the community? Why or why not?

4.   What components of the Project SEARCH program are the most needed to support these students to work in the community, and which ones are unnecessary or unhelpful?

5.   What do you want to see developed in addition to what is already in place to support these student and others with disabilities to transition from school to employment?

6.   How would things be different for your student(s) with disabilities and their employment possibilities if Project SEARCH did not exist?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: The Transition Program Experience: How does it Affect
Employment for 18-22 Year Olds with Significant Cognitive
Disabilities?

Researcher: Supattra Wongvisate Andrade, Department of Special Education
Phone: (970) 302-8342
E-mail: wong7058@bears.unco.edu
To be completed in presence of parents

Dear Employee,

I would like to invite you to participate as a respondent in an important research project.
Below is the information that you will need to help you decide about your participation.

Purpose and Description: The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how the
public- private partnerships transition program, Project SEARCH, impacts successful
employment of young adults who are between the ages 18-22 with significant cognitive
disabilities after leaving high school. The study will investigate how Project SEARCH
assists students with significant disabilities to succeed in their employment. The
researcher will conduct interviews with employees with significant cognitive disabilities,
parents, local Project SEARCH coordinator, local Division of Vocational Rehabilitation,
local Community Centered Board, local Employment Agency, employers,
supervisors/coworkers, the state director of Project SEARCH, and special education
teachers to find out their opinions and perceptions about how best to assist these
employees in their career responsibilities. Observations will also be conducted of study
participants in their natural work setting. The data from interviews and observations will
be used to improve our school-to-community transition programs and the employment
opportunities that are offered to employees with significant cognitive disabilities.

Participants: Your participation is requested because we believe that your opinions and
insights on your experiences in the program are important. What is asked of you is that
you participate in an approximately 45-minute interview in which you will respond to
questions and permit your answers to be audio-recorded. You can refuse to respond at
any time to any question, and withdraw from the study without consequence at any point
before, during or after the study. In addition, for your convenience, you will be able to
specify your own time and location for the completion of the interview.

Confidentiality: Your responses to this interview will be strictly treated as confidential information. Your name and your organization will not appear nor be recorded by anyone. This research is designed not to cause you discomfort or risk.

Benefits: Your responses to the interview questions, when summarized together with those of other participants, will assist us in improving transition programs and developing a useful model of transition school-to-work for creating employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Risks: As a researcher, I will get to know information about your career, about your life on the job, and about your perceptions of Project SEARCH. It is importance therefore that you have a chance to review and revise the records I keep and my findings, and I would honor any needs for greater confidentiality.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1907.

Participant Consent: Please sign here to agree to participate in the study. Yes, I would like to participate in this research.

_____

Signature   Date

_____

Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

April 20, 2012
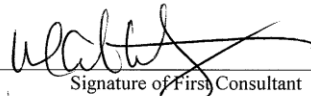
TO: Mark Montemayor
             School of Music

FROM: Maria Lahman, Co-Chair
             UNC Institutional Review Board

RE: Expedited Review of *The Transition Program Experience: How Does it Affect*
             Employment for 18-22 Year Olds with Significant Cognitive Disabilities, submitted
             by Supatttra Wongvisate Andrade (Research Advisor: Lewis Jackson)

First Consultant: The above proposal is being submitted to you for an expedited review. Please
review the proposal in light of the Committee's charge and direct requests for changes directly to
the researcher or researcher's advisor. If you have any unresolved concerns, please contact Maria
Lahman, Applied Statistics and Research Methods, Campus Box 124, (x1603). When you are
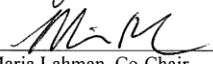ready to recommend approval, sign this form and return to me.

I recommend approval as is. _____   June 18, 2012
                         Signature of First Consultant   Date

     see subsequent revisions.

The above referenced prospectus has been reviewed for compliance with HHS guidelines for ethical
principles in human subjects research. The decision of the Institutional Review Board is that the project
is approved as proposed for a period of one year: June 23, 12   to   6-23-13 .

                                 6-23-12
                 Maria Lahman, Co-Chair   Date

Comments:

APPENDIX D

SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVAL

POUDRE
SCHOOL
DISTRICT

5/23/12

Dear Supattra Andrade,

Please consider this document as formal approval for you to conduct research within Poudre School District based on your application materials originally received 5/8/12. Research project name: "The Transition program experience: How does it affect employment for 18-22 year olds with significant cognitive disabilities?"

* Date of project: Between May 2012 and August 2013 (If additional time is needed to complete the study, please notify me via email).

* I would like to add two conditions: 1) It is requested that the researcher provide PSD an electronic copy of the project summary at the end of the project, and 2) if you decide to submit an article for publication, please provide an electronic version of the article to PSD when completed.

* Priority consideration for future research partnerships with PSD will be given to individual researchers that have a demonstrated track record of submitting final reports for PSD consideration.

* Please feel free to use this email in your correspondent with PSD schools and personnel regarding this research project.

This approval letter signifies that you have successfully met all PSD criteria for conducting research within PSD. If your study changes to include interactions at any school site, PSD will require a background check and the following information would apply. If school visits become necessary to complete your research, please be sure to contact me so we can arrange the required documentation.

Approval from building principals where research activities may occur is also needed prior to beginning research activities at any particular PSD school. Providing principal(s) with a copy of this letter is an important step in your communication with principals, but please keep in mind that principals have the right to refuse to participate in any proposed research activities that involve the students, teachers, or facilities that they are responsible for. Furthermore, a principal may exercise their right of refusal at any point during the implementation of an authorized research proposal. Thank you for considering Poudre School District as a research partner. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, and I look forward to reading your findings.

Dwayne Schmitz, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Evaluation
Poudre School District
(970) 490-3693
dschmitz@psdschools.org

2407 LaPorte Avenue · Fort Collins, CO 80521-2297 · (970) 482-7420