EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS DURING TRANSITIONS

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The Experiences of Students with Disabilities During Transitions

by

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The field of Special Education has evolved over the years. There has been and continues to be a steady increase in the number of students with disabilities transitioning out of high school and into post-secondary institutions. This has become the natural step of growth for students. As the number students with disabilities enrolling into post-secondary increases there is a need for post-secondary institutions to identify how students can access supports to be successful. This study focused on the skills and knowledge students utilize as they transition to post-secondary and access required supports. A descriptive, mixed methods online and hard copy survey was implemented for this study. The purpose of the study was to discover the knowledge and skills identified by participants as they transition into post-secondary education after the completion of high school. In particular, self-determination skills and knowledge such as self-advocacy, goal setting, problem solving and self-efficacy were found to be important. The results of the study indicated that education systems need to continue their efforts in supporting the development of student’s self-determination skills and knowledge to improve transition programs and inter-institutional relationships for students with disabilities.
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Dedication

This study is dedicated to all of the students with disabilities who are transitioning into post-secondary institutions. I hope this study contributes to making a difference in your journey into post-secondary.
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Chapter One

Introduction

The field of special education has evolved over the years and for individuals with disabilities the transition from high school to adult life can be either a time of new independence or a time of disappointment and challenges. In Canada, public education supports are available during the school years; however; at the end of high school, these supports are no longer available. At this time, students who make the transition from high-school to post-secondary settings start facing new obstacles which could be avoided with appropriate transitional processes in place (Wood & Cronin, 1999).

Currently, there is a steady increase in the number of students with disabilities enrolling into postsecondary institutions. Integration into university life and successful completion of one’s goals are not easily attainable (Wood & Cronin, 1999). In my experience, working in a post-secondary institution as a Disability Advisor and presently as the Coordinator for Instructional Associates in the Access Program for People with Disabilities, I have observed that many students with disabilities find it difficult to integrate into university and the better prepared students are for the academic setting in university, the more successful they are at attaining the services they require.

For the context of this study, the term transition will be used to describe the movement from high school to post-secondary environments which involves three major moves in the public education system. These would be when students move from elementary to middle school, from middle school to high school and from high school to further education. These stages within the education system are the building blocks for a student’s academic, social, emotional, physical, and developmental stages that all contribute to the educational performance of that
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With ever increasing numbers of students planning to continue their education after high school, appropriate transition strategies, such as how students will continue to receive support in postsecondary, need to be established for the success of each student.

**Transition Background**

Education for students with disabilities has come a long way. In recent years, there has been increasing interest and concern focusing on the services and postschool outcomes of youth with disabilities. With more and more students planning to continue their education after high school this has become the natural step of growth for students with disabilities. One of the areas of concerns for students with disabilities is the lack of a successful transition process into post-secondary institutions; this process places students at a disadvantage as they are not able to access the supports, they may require to integrate into university classrooms. Special education uses the term transition to “describe to the movement of students with disabilities from school to independent, productive, satisfying post-school environments” (Trash, 2012, p. 40). This process of movement within and from schools is a “unifying framework to ensure effective alignment between several education and transition services as a way to guide planning and decision making among students, families and professionals” (Bassett, Li, Hutchinson, 2009, p. 170). The components within transition planning are the following:

- **Planning**- evaluating programming to date and planning post-school outcomes
- **Assessment**- determining what needs to be assessed and how to assess
- **Implementation**- conducting the activities identified through planning and assessment
- **Evaluation**- assessing the programmatic efforts and student satisfaction
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• Placement- choosing post school environments matching goals
• Follow up-providing long-term support


With these steps in place students are able to begin the process of planning for their transition.

As the number of students with disabilities enrolling into postsecondary increases there is a need for post-secondary institutions to identify how students can access these supports.

“Supports” in post-secondary education refer to accommodations. This refers to a “support or service that is provided to help a student fully access the general education curriculum or subject matter. An accommodation does not change the content of what is being taught, the expectation is that the student meets a performance standard applied for all students” (D’Ottavio, Dycke, Martin, and Nickerson, 2007, p. 19). Accommodations include things such as use of reader, note-takers, extra time to complete exams, course registration or alternate format texts, all of which might be required for the students, to ensure they have met the essential learning outcomes of the course (Hadley, 2007). To be approved for accommodations students are required to self-identify to the disability departments and access the supports they require. In my practise, I have met with many students who were not aware that such services exist at university. Unfortunately, for these students and many others, for the first year of university they are left struggling, stressed, and anxious in university classrooms. In comparison, students who were able to access the accommodations, had the opportunity to learn with the accommodations they felt were needed to improve their outcome in the classrooms.

For these students who were able to access the accommodations at post-secondary, many of them enter post-secondary “self-determined” to succeed. One of the largest challenges facing those involved with transitions is ensuring students are prepared to deal with the differences and
demands of being successful university/college students. In order to fulfil these demands, students need to be self-determined to successfully navigate through post-secondary. Self-determination is the “ability to identify and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself” (Field & Hoffman, 2007, p. 182).

The core components of a self-determination are:

- Choice/Decision making
- Problem solving
- Goal setting and attainment
- Self-regulation
- Self-instruction
- Self-advocacy
- Self-awareness-knowledge

(Baker, Thoma & Saddler, 2002, p. 82).

Self-Determination is important in the development of transition outcomes as this leads students to have increased awareness of goals and the skills required to attain these goals leading to increased academic productivity. (D’Ottavio et al., 2007, p. 19). Students with disabilities who lack self determination skills are not prepared to advocate for the academic challenges they face in post-secondary. However, I have worked with many students who have self-determination strategies in place. These students advocate for their needs, they voice their concerns to instructors, and work with the disability support departments to have access to the accommodations they require for their learning. These students are far more successful at attaining their educational goals. Research demonstrates that “supporting student’s self-determination is an effective strategy to help students attain educational goals” (Field &
Hoffman, 2007, p. 182). Students need to be self-determined in order to receive the supports they require.

Another challenge in transition planning is the role of parents or advocates in students’ transitional plans. In the K to 12 education system, parents, advocates and educational assistants are profoundly involved in supporting students. Research indicates “to assist students to plan for transition, many different individuals from different systems must come together along with educators” (Trach, 2012, p. 40). The collaboration of this support provides the student with the required knowledge to transition within the education organizations. However, parents and advocates are not as actively involved as they had been high-school, primarily, because the polices in post-secondary change as the student’s transition. In my role, I have met with a number of parents who have a difficult time adjusting to the policies and procedures surrounding their child in a university setting.

Furthermore, institutions of higher education are starting to pay more attention to the transitions of students with disabilities into post-secondary (Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 2018). With these concerns being considered a priority, institutions need to devise a distinctive transitional program that provides a process of navigation for atypical students. There is no one size fits all approach with students. The transition of students into post-secondary “must provide services and techniques that are unique, flexible, and on an individualized basis for the success of each student” (Cook & Schirmer, 2003, p. 201).

Given the value of self-determination in self advocacy and the increasing inclusion of students with disabilities in post secondary institutions, it seems important for transitional education curricula to be implemented in high schools and post-secondary institutions. Therefore, when considering the support that students need for self determination, it is important
to know more about the experiences of students and the role of their parents as they transition from secondary to post-secondary education, identifying how they access the supports required for success.

Overview of the study

In order to explore this issue, transitional experiences of students with disabilities in post-secondary were investigated in this study.

Research Question What knowledge and skills do students utilize as they transition to post-secondary and access required supports?

Methodology

A descriptive, mixed methods online and hard copy survey was implemented with participants for this study. The purpose of the research was to discover the knowledge of students with disabilities during the transition into post-secondary after graduation from high school within the previous one to 10 years. This data was collected through closed questions, Likert-type scales, and short answer questions. The data was analyzed and interpreted to discover similarities and differences in participant experiences and perceptions, and to identify key themes and understandings. The survey was distributed online and hard copies were placed at the institution.

Participants

The ultimate goal was investigating the knowledge students have regarding transitioning into postsecondary, and advocating for support; therefore, the participants were recruited from a post-secondary institution. After approval from REB boards at VIU and the institution, the directors/deans of specific departments provided permission to distribute flyers and recruit participants across the four campuses.
The limitations that occurred with using mixed methods is that the knowledge that can be created is limited to the responses of the specific questions that are being asked of the participants. Further, survey data includes self report so the data gathered was based on the what the participants are willing to disclose. Also, due to the student population being researched, students may not have felt comfortable coming forward to participate in this survey.

The intention of this mixed methods survey was to provide an opportunity for participant experiences to provide new knowledge regarding the experiences of transitions. With this knowledge, post secondary institutions may have a sense of what students and families know about self determination and how confident they feel about self-advocacy. This information will contribute to planning in secondary and post secondary education and will add to the growing field of knowledge to support effective transitions.
Chapter two: Literature Review

Introduction

Education for students with disabilities has come a long way. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest and concern focusing on the services and postschool outcomes of youth with disabilities. Students are planning to continue their education after high school making this the natural step of growth for students with disabilities. Ideally, a strong effective framework is required when transitioning in order to provide students with disabilities the tools required to successfully navigate into post-secondary environments (Wood & Cronin, 1999).

To support this study of the transition experiences of students with disabilities the literature review will define and explore the following areas: (a) definition of transition (b) laws (c) services (d) parents (e) teachers and (f) self-determination. The intention of this review is to place transitions within the framework of policy, developing knowledge in the field, and emergent themes and questions.

Transition

The term transition seems simple, but when it is used in a context with students with disabilities, it encompasses complex concepts. Transition, therefore is a “comprehensive unifying framework to ensure effective alignment between general education and transition services that serves as a guide to make decisions among students, families and professional, (Bassett, LI, & Hutchinson, 2009, p. 170). The British Columbia Ministry of Education defines transition planning “as the preparation, implementation, and evaluation required to enable students to make major transitioning during their lives from home or preschool to school, from class to class, from school to school; from school district to school district, and from school to post-secondary, community or work situations” (BC Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 6) For
young individuals who are concluding compulsory, secondary education, and choosing to attend post secondary education, the word transition reflects their changing roles as they navigate through the Canadian education system.

In order to improve transitions, there is a critical need to develop assessment curriculum and instructional strategies that are relevant to all students, allowing students to successfully achieve and develop the essential skills required through vocational education, training, and community participation. Further research in universal design, integrated academic and applied learning need to be broadly adopted to increase the success in transitions (Emanuel, Johnson, Luecking, Mack & Stodden, 2002).

**Laws**

Transitions by nature, are difficult and require time for adjustments and efforts to minimize the impact of the problems that will inevitably be confronted. Transitioning from high school to higher education is particularly difficult for student with disabilities. In both the United States of America and Canada there are laws and policies in place to protect the educational freedom of individuals with disabilities. In the USA, since 1990 special education law has been reauthorized about every five years, the latest in 2006, as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which has mandated that secondary school educators and the teams of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) include transition goal in the IEPS of students with disabilities (Eckes and Ochoa, 2005, p. 7). Through jurisdictionally distinct, the US experience can provide context and guidance for the development of Canadian policies and processes.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) first originated in 1975 as the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA). It was renamed in 1990 and has been reauthorized about every five years, the latest in 2006, as the *Individuals with Disabilities*
*Education Improvement Act.* The purpose of the law is to “identify eligible students and provide services to them that are educationally focused and aimed at helping the student achieve academically to the best of their ability” (Cawthon and Cole, 2010, p.131). Once a child is determined to having a disability, schools are required provide an Individualised Education Program (IEP) plan. This way when a student reaches a high school the role of this IEP plan is not only to identify and document current services, but also to articulate what the student’s postsecondary goals might be. By age 14 and no later by age 16 the IEP team must meet with the students (and parents) and lay out a plan for the transition from high school to postsecondary (Cawthron & Cole, 2010).

However, IDEA does not apply in higher education. Once students start post-secondary, they are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (APA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the fourteenth Amendment are the provisionary postsecondary special education laws. The ADA and Section 504 are anti-discrimination and access rather than laws regarding education. Section 504 and the ADA are civil right acts that provide access to education (Eckes and Ochoa, 2005).

In comparison, Canadian law, the main disability rights in Canada which protect individuals with disabilities are the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Act. Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms “makes it clear that every individual in Canada is to be considered equal” (Government of Canada, 2017). This means that governments must not discriminate on any of these grounds in its laws or programs. In 1995, a Special Education Policy Framework for British Columbia was established; this policy guided the development of legislation and guidelines for special education programs and services in British Columbia (Government of Canada, 2017). Both the USA and Canadian policies have
been implemented to provide equitable access and opportunities for education program for individuals with disabilities.

**Services**

Cawthron and Cole (2010) state that “Students with disabilities face unique challenges when entering post-secondary education after high-school. One of the largest challenges is ensuring that they obtain the necessary disability services needed to be successful in their post secondary programs “(p. 112). Service decisions regarding individuals with disabilities in the K to 12 systems in the USA are guided by IDEA, with the focus of the services based on goals, curriculum and performance-based assessments and objectives in the Individualized Education plan (IEP).

However, in post-secondary education, “Section 504 mandates that services provided by post-secondary institutions must provide students with an equal opportunity to learn. However, “Universities must provide an accommodation that does not fundamentally alter the program or study” (Cawthron & Cole, 2010, p. 115). Educational support in the post-secondary setting is guided by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Both of these federal legislations have influenced the policies and practises used to make accommodation decisions at institutions of higher education (Hughes, Ofiesh, & Scott, 2004). For an individual at post-secondary institution to receive test accommodations, the student must: 1) self identify 2) provide documentation and 3) request accommodations. There is a vast difference between the process of accommodations across high school vs post-secondary. As Stodden (2001) stated, “There is a marked difference in the types of assistance that are offered across these environments (secondary and postsecondary) and in the entire process of accountability and decision-making concerns assistance provision” (p. 58).
This divide between secondary and post secondary legislation and support is echoed in British Columbia as K to 12 and postsecondary and are the responsibilities of different government ministries.

Post-secondary institutions define services/ supports as “accommodations”. An accommodation can be defined as a “support or service that is provided to help a student fully access the general education curriculum or subject matter. An accommodation does not change the content of what is being taught” (D’Ottavio, Dycke, Martin & Nickerson, 2007, p. 19). Post-secondary institutions have a “duty to accommodate”, some common accommodations students can apply for are: 1) Personal care attendant, 2) Tutors, 3) Interpreters 4) Longer exam times 5) Priority registration 6) Taped recorded lecture 7) Notetaking modifications (Payne & Sitlington, 2004).

If the accommodation requested by a student is not offered, post-secondary settings have the “responsibility to explore alternative accommodations that would allow the students to participate in the institution’s program” (Payne & Sitlington, 2004, p. 6). This shift that occurs places more responsibility on the student. Rojewski (2018) indicates, “Academic support becomes more critical at the post-secondary level because of decreased teacher-student contact, increased academic competition, increased need for self-discipline, changes in personal support networks and unrealistic expectations of the demands of post-secondary education” (p. 138). For these reasons, it is recommended that transition planning for students with disabilities should start at an earlier stage.

Parents

Parents play an important role in facilitating the transition process. It is important that
parents support their children with disabilities and provide them with the opportunities they require. Cawthron & Cole (2010) state that “Parent involvement in a student’s education is often thought to include actions such as reinforcing learning that occurred in school, emphasizing the value of education, modelling appropriate school behaviors and attitudes and participating in the student’s instruction by assisting with homework and providing additional learning opportunities” (p. 8).

Warren (2016) indicated that although “parents may not know a lot about the transition process, they have a lot of insight about their children that can be useful during the transition planning process” (p. 13). Parental participation is linked to beneficial outcomes, things such as the development of positive parent and school staff relationships and higher rates of employment for students after high school. However, parents often report the feeling of lack of involvement in their child’s educational goals. Ankeny, Spain, Wilkins (2009) indicate, “Mothers believed that educators devalued and ignored their personal knowledge of their children whereas education promoted the belief that professional’s expertise is correct” (p. 29).

In comparison, in secondary institutions, students with disabilities are considered adults; policies and procedures of education of higher institutions are not always supportive of parental involvement. As Warren (2016) states, “Parents often report feeling like they are alone in transitioning their children into adulthood and emphasize the need for support from others” (p.31).

Therefore, when processes of transition begin in early childhood, families can encourage their children to develop independence, decision making skills, and social skills. During adolescence the roles of families may include providing material and emotional support. When considering the process of transition, Ankeny, Spain, Wilkins (2009) indicate, “Mothers view the
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transition process as an ongoing quest for options and opportunities for their children. With a child with a disability, you’re constantly thinking of what’s going to happen to that child when you’re not around, you start the process earlier because there are so many more unknowns” (p. 33).

Research in the field indicates that family involvement has shown to improve things such as school attendance, increase education attendance, assessment scores, improvement self-esteem, confidence and reduce drop out rates. Family participation in transition needs to further develop in increasing family members ability to work effectively with educators and other service providers while focusing on key elements such as: a) participation & roles, b) empowerment c) training (Field & Kohler, 2003).

Teachers

Effective transition planning is crucial to students with disabilities who wish to pursue higher education. Therefore, qualified transition personnel are required in order to improve the postsecondary transition outcomes for students with disabilities. Good transition planning requires special education teachers to coordinate and develop relationships with students, families and agencies. However, recent research suggests, “Special education teachers report a lack of knowledge of transition competencies and that this hinders their abilities to implement effective practices” (Benitez, Frey & Morningstar 2009, p. 6). With teachers being the main contact in high school for students with disabilities, unless teachers are trained and understand the processes regarding transitioning, students will disabilities will continue to face barriers.

A recent survey, the secondary transition survey (STTS), was implemented to collect data on special education teachers’ level of preparedness, the extent to which the services are created and satisfaction with transitioning. In this survey, the authors Bentiz, Frey and Morningstar
(2009) collected the data and concluded that “almost half of the total respondents had no transition training at all, leading special education teachers to feel less prepared and confident to implement effective transition planning” (p. 13).

Research in transition best practises was conducted by Lubbers, Repetto and McGorray (2008). They investigated the barriers that exist, effective practises and suggestions for improvement in transitions. A survey was used as a method to collect data and a letter was sent to participants with a follow up postcard a week later. In this study, of a random sample of 2,000 middle school and high school teachers were studied. The results concluded that the top four barriers were a) lack of resources; b) lack of stakeholder involvement; c) systems and policy issues; and d) information and training. The top effective practises were identified as: a) communication and collaboration from parents, b) more information, and c) resources and training. From this data, the authors concluded “Teacher knowledge is crucial because teachers are often the central contact for students, families and others in the transition process. Lack of transition knowledge and skills will impede teacher’s effectiveness in this area and teachers are likely to lack many of the skills needed” (Lubbers, Repetto & McGorray, 2008, p. 288).

Educators in the classroom should be required to develop appropriate curriculum content for student’s post secondary goals. As authors Li, Bassest and Hutchinson (2009) indicate, “Special educator involvement in transition services is essential for better post-school outcomes for students with disabilities” (p. 163). In this article, the transition involvement for three types of special educations teachers was measured: 1) Transition coordinators/specialists 2) Special Education teachers and 3) Those who play both roles at school. The participants, in this survey research were members of the Council for Exceptional Children (EC). This national organisation included members such as parents, teachers and other professionals and scholars. From this
study, the results indicated that interactions between special education teachers and school personnel contribute to student’s positive post school outcomes. Teachers are frequently involved in conducting or using assessment tools for transition planning.

**Self-Determination**

Preparing students with disabilities for life after high-school is a crucial component in supporting successful outcomes. Self-determination is a concept that is widely used within the transition literature, but much of the research describing transition planning process indicates a lack of student involvement and participation (Baker, Thoma & Saddler, 2002, p. 82). Self-determination should be promoted in transition assessment by encouraging students to play an active role in organizing, preparing, and establishing goals for the outcome of their future. Wehmeyer (1992) states that the “development of self-determination allows students to make decisions and choices about the quality of their lives, free of excessive influence from others” (p. 41).

The term self-determination is defined by Field and Hoffman (2007) as: “self-determination is the ability to identify and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself” (p. 182). The core components of self-determination are: 1) Choice-making skills 2) Decision making skills 3) Problem solving skills 4) Goal setting and attainment skills 5) Self-regulation/Self-management skills 6), Self advocacy and leadership skills 7), Positive perceptions of control 8) Efficacy and outcome expectations 9) Self-awareness & Self-knowledge. The promotion of self-determination skills in students with disabilities has become an avenue by which educators can actively involve students in their transition planning (Field & Hoffman, 2007).
Thoma and Rogan (2001) identify that teaching self-determination skills to students has been not sufficient to ensure that students are able to use these skills during transitions. The process of teaching self-determination skills must begin in early childhood and continue through an individual’s life (p.16). Few studies have explored what skills and knowledge students with disabilities have and use as they begin their post secondary education. Therefore, this study will address these issues regarding self-determination and transition. Young (2007) states, “One of the reasons why students are not being taught self-determination skills is because teachers think students could not benefit. Teachers did not feel they had the training to teach the skill” (p. 42). In addition, in a study conducted by Baker, Thoma, and Saddler (2002), teachers who were surveyed regarding self-determination stated, “They did not know self-determination existed, nor did they learn about it in either undergraduate or graduate level classes” (p. 83). Therefore, more emphasis needs to be placed on disabilities and pre-service teachers and the components of self-determination.

**Conclusion**

An early focus in transition planning would therefore need to include teaching students to make choices to set goals, to monitor progress on these goals and to learn other skills believed to be the core components skills of people who are self-determined. Students need to be encouraged to play an active role in organizing assessment data, preparing for and presenting data and being actively involved in understanding and using that data (Field & Hoffman, 2007).

In an effort to increase the access, participation and success of students with disabilities in postsecondary education several strategies needed to considered. These strategies include ensuring that students with disabilities leaving their secondary education programs, have the self-advocacy skills necessary to successfully negotiate the postsecondary education environment
while making sure that students have access to appropriate support services provided by postsecondary education institutions as well as, supports provided by the community service agencies (Emanuel, Lucking, Johnson, Mack & Stooden, 2002).

This chapter highlighted some of the key concepts in the areas of transition:

1) Laws- When reviewing the current laws in place for students with disabilities, greater importance in addressing deterrents to students seeking services is indicated for promoting students with knowledge about procedures, range of disability services and an understanding on ones one disability to be successful (Emanuel, Johnson, Luecking, Mack & Stodden, 2002).

2) Services- In the area of services, future research should focus on how education systems can improve student’s independence and understanding of their disability, strengths and weakness, with this knowledge there needs to be improvement to transition services (Costenbader, Janiga, 2002).

3) Parents- The field would benefit from a closer longitudinal look at the specific roles’ parents play in the transition journeys of their children (Cawthron, Cammeron, 2014).

4) Teachers- There are gaps in the degree of transition knowledge that teachers possess and the frequency with which they provide transition services. More skills and a wider range of knowledge are needed to create effective transition programs for students with disabilities that lead to improved postsecondary outcomes. Preparing qualified transition personnel is crucial to improving the outcomes of students with disabilities. Teachers need to have the tools before they enter the classroom, not just so that they feel empowered to step into their complex roles but to meet the needs of students with disabilities. (Benitez, Frey, Morningstar, 2009).
5) Self-Determination- Attention to student self determination is emerging in the field of special education. This term pulls together success, self-advocacy, goal setting, problem solving, self-management, and self-efficacy. Further research in the areas of self-determination recommend continuous strategies to integrate the philosophies of self-determination into the BC curriculum (Conway & Stodden, 2002).

A continued effort in promoting increased levels of general education and special education collaboration at the local levels needs to remain a major goal in bringing about the needed improvements for transitions in schools and postschool services (Costenbader, Janiga, 2002).
Chapter Three: Research Methods

Methodology

A descriptive mixed methods survey is utilized for this survey. The purpose of the qualitative research was to answer the research question: *What knowledge and skills do students utilize as they transition to post-secondary and access required supports?* With the goal to improve transition outcomes for students with disabilities, the aim of this study was to gather data regarding student’s knowledge and skills utilized in transition from high-school to post-secondary.

This study was framed with a survey standpoint. Rummill (2011) wrote, “The primary purpose of survey research is to draw inferences regarding the constitution of a population of people on the basis of the characteristics of a sample of individuals drawn from that population” (p. 141). This study was seeking to examine the population of students with disabilities during transition.

Surveys “gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared or by determining the relationship that exist between specific events” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011 p. 256). As the intention of this study was to investigate the skills and knowledge of students regarding transitions, survey research was an appropriate choice to access a broad population. From this method, I gained insight into the current practise of transition for students with disabilities, with the intention, to make comparisons, to determine the variables that exist and provide recommendations of how to improve the outcomes of transition for students with disabilities.

Participants
The ultimate goal was to access the knowledge students have regarding transitioning into postsecondary and advocating for support; therefore, the participants were recruited from a post-secondary institution in British Columbia.

To identify the potential participants, the Director and or Deans of the disability departments at the institution were contacted along (see Appendix A for Departmental Consultation Letter) with the research ethics board at both at both institutions. To recruit participants, posters were posted around the campuses that make up this institution. The posters were posted in the a few different areas. Those are: a) News bulletin board for students b) Department for Services for Students with Disabilities Office c) The Access Program for People with Disabilities office and d) The Learning Center. The criteria for choosing participants was be based: a) graduation from a local high school is required with the last 1 to 10 years, b) students’ self identification as a persons with disability, c) students meet the criteria to enter post-secondary. There was a section in the survey that allowed an advocate or family member to complete the survey. There were a total of 27 participants who responded to this study.

**Ethical Considerations**

“Surveys are conducted because of the need to know; ethical considerations protect the individual’s right to privacy or even anonymity” (Fink, 2013, p.17). The individual responses to the online survey questions were kept confidential and were password protected by the online database. The surveys that were done by hand, upon completion, were placed in a sealed envelope and dropped in a locked box. I was the only person with that password and access to that box. A consent statement appeared prior to participants completing the survey. Participants were also informed that the consent is voluntary and that they could exit the survey at any time. There were no academic or economic advantages or disadvantages for participation in the study.
**Data Collection**

The data was collected by two methods. The first was through an online format using Google Forms. The second was with hard copies of the survey. These were made available at four campus locations. This provided participants with an opportunity to access the survey by a method that met their needs.

The survey was composed of both quantitative and qualitative questions. The main themes that the survey focused on were 1) self-determination advocacy, and goal; b) the role of parents as students’ transition; c) services offered in post-secondary and; d) high school and the transition process. See Appendix B for the survey questions.

In the survey, the open-ended questions allowed for participants to provide full expression and develop their answers. This also allowed the research to identify any similarities, differences, skills and knowledge among students. In comparison, the closed ended questions assessed an individual’s attitudes or opinion (Gray & Guppy, 2003). These opinions and attitudes were measured on a Likert scale. The purpose of using a Likert scale is that these scales measure “people’s attitudes and opinions by using intensity scales” (Nardi, 2003, p. 66).

Further, the questions in this survey were created carefully in order to obtain high quality evidence. Initially, the intent of the survey, “was a form of social conversation between the surveyor (or interviewer) and respondent (Grays & Guppy, 2003, p. 107). There was no manipulation, control, or intervention for the purposes of this study.

**Data Analysis**
Data analysis uses “statistical and qualitative methods to describe, compare and interpret respondents, attitudes, preferences, values and behavior” (Fink, 2013, p. 142). For the purpose of this study, the data from the online survey was entered into a database and by using descriptive statistics enabled “simple summaries about the sample and the responses to the questions” (Fink, 2013, p. 116). This information allowed the construction of meaning with the quantitative data, providing patterns for the number of frequencies and percentages.

For the qualitative data, coding was used. This allowed the process of breaking down segments of text data into smaller units. Content analysis involved coding, categorizing, and creating meaningful categories into which the units of analysis were placed and then drawing theoretical conclusions from the text (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

By combining the quantitative and qualitative methods and by using multiple techniques, the data was analysed with a goal of providing more insight into the experiences of transition. This process is referred as to a triangulation. By triangulating data, findings had more validity than Likert types responses or short answers alone (Nardi, 2013, p. 213). Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2011) state that it “important for the data to complement each other to be combined together or grouped and aggregated adding an overall picture” (p. 237).

**Limitations**

The findings for this study are limited in their breadth and scope by the sample size and the self report nature of survey research. It may not be also assumed that the participants in this study represent the views of other students with exceptional needs in post-secondary institutions.

**Value of Method**
The value of using survey research was that surveys are “information collection methods used to describe, compare or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings and values, preferences and behavior” (Fink, 2006, p.1). In this way, the data collected provided information about the knowledge and skills that students with disabilities who have (or who were) transitioning between secondary and post secondary education expressed, with attention to their access to support services. The knowledge gained from this survey research can offer a breadth of perspective with an opportunity to identify trends, perspectives and influences about the knowledge, skills, and experiences of this under-researched group of participants.

From this analysis, the information will contribute to planning secondary and post-secondary education and will add to the growing field of knowledge to support effective transition planning. This may change people’s knowledge and attitudes regarding the effectiveness of the transition policies that are in place today. This method allowed anonymous participation which may potentially access a broader group of participants while protecting their privacy and confidentiality. The benefits of this methodology are that it allows the sample to be drawn anonymously and with the open-ended questions allowing the participants to be candid regarding their experiences in transition.
Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

This study focused on investigating what knowledge and skills students utilize as they transition into post-secondary and access required supports. The research was conducted through online and paper surveys. This chapter will discuss the findings from the data collected.

The data provided topics from which patterns emerged. As these topics emerged, some were more prevalent than others and codes were developed. Participants responded to questions by exploring the following topics:

- Student accommodations things such as requesting, approving and seeking accommodations
- Participant goals
- Independence
- Relationships with teachers, SEA, resource teachers
- Awareness of needs/services
- Information
- Legal changes from high school to post-secondary
- Accessibility
- The role of parents in transitioning
- Advocacy

From this study the following important understandings emerged. This chapter will discuss these themes, supported by evidence from the data collected in this study. The following themes are discussed in this paper:
EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS DURING TRANSITIONS

1) Special Education Teachers and Assistants are key participants in successful transitions.

2) Parental involvement declines in post-secondary therefore, information regarding pre-transitional meeting are very important for the success of the student.

3) Transitioning students understand that accommodations are provided in post-secondary similar to that of high school.

4) The most frequently used service for transitioning students is the one on one support received from Special Education Assistants in high school and Accessibility Services in post-secondary.

5) Self-determination includes self-advocacy, goal setting, problem solving, self management, self-efficacy all which are required for the success of each student.

6) Successful transitions require each student to have the preparation, skills and knowledge to transition into post-secondary.

The following chapter will discuss these themes in further detail.

Special Education Teachers, Assistants and Transition

Students with disabilities in the education system rely heavily on the support of their K to 12 teachers as they transition into post-secondary. In this K to 12 education system, students have been supported by Special Education Teachers and Special Education Assistants.

Special Education Teachers assist students who have a wide variety of disabilities in the classroom. They adjust general education lessons, teach various subjects and ensure that each student has the tools and guidance needed to maximize their success. Special Education assistants (SEA) work with the classroom teachers, counselors and family members to assist children who are struggling academically, socially and personally. Many of the special education
assistants are involved in the writing of the individualized education plans. In the classroom, they serve as advocates, provide support for the student, and sometimes support the classroom.

The results of this survey indicated that transitioning students rely on the support of both the Special Education Teachers and Special Education Assistants; however, students may be confused by the differences between the two. In this survey, participants were asked “What supports did you use in high school?” All of the participants responded by indicating they relied on the support of Special Education Teachers. In the comments section of this survey, participants indicated that, “SEAs are a key element of support during transitions.” For example, one participant mentioned that the “SEA gave a suggestion to where I should continue my education.” This indicates that the relationship between a student and the (SEA) is one that grows over time and students depend on SEAs for support throughout the year. Another participant stated, “I would have a SEA accompany me to class and take my textbooks out from the back of my wheelchair. I also sometimes had a scribe during exams.” Students spend years relying on the support of special education teachers and assistants and many become dependent on this support as they start the process of transition. However, many students are not aware that this support will not be available in post-secondary and that in order to receive support in an institution of higher education they are required to self-disclose and advocate for any services they require.

Parental Involvement through Transitions

Parents of students with disabilities have often spent many years advocating for their child. In the K to 12 education system, parental involvement is encouraged; however, parents re-evaluate their role once their child transitions into post-secondary (Martin & Marshall, 1995, p. 55). In this study, the research indicates the role of parents shifts within the education system as
students navigate from high-school to post-secondary. This drop in parental involvement may be due to the regulations of law around parental involvement in post-secondary (Field & Kohler, 2003, p. 178). One participant from the survey stated: “On occasion they may have attended a few meetings; however, they stopped attending a majority after high school.”

Illustrated below is a diagram that represents parental involvement between high-school and post-secondary. As the chart shows, there is higher parental involvement from parents in high school and that number slowly declines as these young adults’ transition into post-secondary.

*Figure 1. Parental involvement*

The chart shows that 60% of parents remained involved in post-secondary transitions. This indicates that these participants are members of the population of students who have parents who have remained involved as they transition into post-secondary education. Further, the data reported that, 76% of students whose parents attended meetings in high school and post-secondary felt that they had successfully transitioned into post-secondary. This claim is supported by authors Field & Kohler (2003) who indicated, “Parents may not know a lot about the transition process but they have insight about their child. And parental participation is linked to beneficial outcomes for the student” (p. 15). As the chart below illustrates, of the 23 students who responded, 10 parents attended meetings in high school and eight attended in post-
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secondary. All of these 18 students felt they had successfully transitioned into post-secondary. Two parents did not attend meetings in high school and three in post-secondary; from those students three of them felt unsuccessful in transitioning into post-secondary. The data reports that students feel more successful when they are supported by their parents in parents in high-school and postsecondary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents Attend Meetings in Education Setting</th>
<th>Parents Do Not Attend Meetings in Education Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school Meetings</td>
<td>High school Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary Meetings</td>
<td>Post-Secondary Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Successful</td>
<td>Not Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Parental involvement in education

For students with disabilities, parental involvement is associated with quality of life. Parents need to remain active advocates for their children in the K to 12 system and as they navigate into the world of post-secondary. However, the field of secondary transition for students with disabilities is still working on defining, measuring, and creating interventions that may increase parent involvement in post-secondary to a more parent friendly service in order to ensure students are successful (Garbacz, Hira, Lindstorm, Leslie, Shanley, Rowe, 2018, p. 22).

Accommodations

In the K to 12 system many students have supports in place. In post-secondary, supports can be referred to as: “Accommodations which are a support or service that is provided to help a student fully access the general education or curriculum or subject matter. An accommodation
does not change the content of what is being taught; the expectation is that the students meet a performance standard applied for all students” (D’Ottavio, Dycke, Martin and Nickerson, 2007, p. 19). Accommodations are also the responsibility of the institutions. Students are not expected to pay for any supports; however, many times the institution may recommend further funding in order to ensure that students are able to access all the supports that are available to them. The results of the survey indicate that participants expressed an understanding of the changing responsibility for requesting accommodations as 83% of participants indicated that they will request accommodations to be successful. The accommodations that were used most frequently are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodations</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra time for exams (41%)</td>
<td>This allows students to have extra time than their peers on exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note-taker (33%)</td>
<td>This accommodation allows for students to request a volunteer note-taker in the classroom to take notes. This service is offered by the institution and through the Ministry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers (9%)</td>
<td>Are used to assist in providing printed material in audio format.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribe (9%)</td>
<td>Allows for a student to have an exam written on their behalf. A reader allows for a student to have material read to them, this may be peer to peer interaction or by a form of adaptive technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistive Technology (8%)</td>
<td>Allows for assistive, adaptive and rehabilitation devices for students who may be in need.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples include, laptops with specialized programs, speech to text, text to speech and smart pens.

*Figure 3. Accommodations*

**Services being used**

**Highschool.** It was valuable to investigate the kinds of services offered and accessed by participants in both high school and in transition to post-secondary. In high school, the services that were offered are: a) High-school counsellor, b) Brochures c) Special education teacher d) Transition Fairs & e) Other. From these services, the results highlighted that 91% of students indicated that the most commonly used service in high school was that of Special Education Teachers. This includes resource teacher and special education assistant.

**Post-Secondary.** Services in postsecondary may vary from institute to institute. The services offered at the post-secondary institution in this study were: a) Learning Center; b) Academic and Career Preparation; c) Services for Students with Disabilities; d) Funding; e) Assessment and Testing Services. The services most commonly used were those of the Services for Students with Disabilities. This service entails working with students who require personalized plans to ensure access to the university and success in achieving academic goals. The second most used service was that of the Learning Center. The Learning center provides “free individual help, programs focusing on topics such as developing stellar study habits and one to one small group training.” The third most commonly used service was the Academic Career Preparation department. This faculty allows for several qualifying pathways such as upgrading grade 12 courses and university qualifying studies. The fourth most common service is the funding department which supports student success by reducing financial barriers and
recognizing achievement. Lastly, in the Assessment and Testing services, students receive accommodations for exams and many re-write missed exams.

The charts below provide information regarding the services used in high school and post-secondary.

Figure 4. High school service

In high-school 54% of students used Special Education Teachers and the remaining 33% of students relied on counsellors.

Figure 5. Postsecondary services
In post-secondary, 58% of the students rely on the Services for Students with Disabilities department which provides one on one support for students. It is essential for students transitioning to post-secondary to understand that the course work in college is considerably different and more demanding than course work in high-school. It requires more time and effort to maintain the same grades. As a result, more academic accountability is placed on the student in post-secondary. Commitment and time management become crucial ingredients to the formula for success (English, Graham, Vasek, 2002, p. 496).

**Self-Determination Goals**

Self-Determination is a key component of this study. It is defined as “the ability to identify and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself (Field & Hoffman, 2007, p. 182).” The core components of self-determination were discussed in Palmer and Wehemeyer (2003) and are represented in the diagram below.

*Figure 6. Components of self-determination*
Goals. Self-Determined individuals are able to define and achieve goals from the base of knowing and valuing oneself (Martin & Marshall, 1995, p. 143). 82% of participants in this survey were able to identify goals. This is an indication that transitioning students with disabilities can identify one or more specific goals. The most common goals identified in this research are:

1) Social goals 2) Acceptance/inclusion goals 3) Independence goals 4) Learning goals

Social goals ultimately refer to social involvement with others. 30% of students identified social goals. Some common language used to describe social goals was “Meeting students with similar interests, and “Students are wanting to be a part of an all-inclusive place.”

Acceptance goals can be referred to as a goal with a sense of meaning and purpose in experiencing some connection with others. It was evident from the data gathered that 40% of students are wanting to be accepted and recognized by their teacher and peers.

Independence goals prepare learners for skills required that contribute to personal independence. 61% of the participants highlighted the importance of being successful in life with a new job.

Learning goals are goals that are established based on each learner. 94% of the participants in this study demonstrated learning goals that reflect an important component of self determination. These included things such as “graduating from high-school,” and “attending post-secondary to get good grades.”

These comments indicate that transitioning students with disabilities have some of the principles of self-determination as they have a variety of goals that they are working towards. Pursing they are able to make choices, they make decisions, and are setting goals regarding their future. Conway & Stodden (2014) indicate that “self-determination skills or the ability to
understand and express one’s needs and to make informed decisions based upon those needs is considered to be one of the most important skills for students with disabilities before they begin their post-secondary experience (p. 25).” Many special education students leave high school without a version of their future or any idea of how to plan for it” (Field & Kohler, 2003, p. 181). Students need self-determination skills to advocate for themselves and reach their goals.

**Self-Determination- Advocacy & Decision Making**

Self-advocacy is another key unit of self-determination. It can include the realization of strengths and weakness, the ability to formulate personal goals, being assertive, and making decisions. In this study, the results indicated 81% of students were able to advocate for themselves. When participants were asked, “I will seek assistance from my instructor if needed,” all of the participants responded by indicating that they will seek support. These results concluded that students have been taught advocacy in seeking support. Self advocacy is a concept and skill associated with self-determination and research has suggested that people who are self-determined have better post-school outcomes (Brewer, Eddy, Fowler, Wood, 2005).

When participants were asked “I know the laws that protect my rights,” 58% of students were aware of the laws that protect them, 17% were not aware and, 23% did not know of the laws. This information suggests that slightly more than half of these participants have knowledge of legal rights. This knowledge is important when advocating for accommodations and support required to be successful. Researchers have emphasised the importance of teaching self-advocacy at a younger age and today’s students with disabilities report much more satisfactory experiences than those of two decades ago (Lighter, Trice, Schulle, Vaughan & University, 2012).
The chart below indicates some of these results. Students who graduated 7 to 10 years ago had no familiarity with laws in comparison to students who graduated 4 to 6 years ago they had some knowledge; however, the most knowledgeable students were those who have recently graduated from high school, 1 to 3 years ago.

![Advocacy & Years Since Graduation](image)

**Figure 7. Advocacy & years since graduation**

These recent graduates were the ones who reported the most success at having the information regarding laws that protect individuals with disabilities. With this knowledge, they were able to advocate for themselves in things such as receiving services, support with instructors, and overall quality of post-secondary experience. From this information, it is evident that knowledge of laws and protections provide support for individuals in understanding what they have a right to.

**Self-Determination Awareness/Knowledge**

Learning how to communicate information effectively with others is crucial to success of self-determined students. The results of this survey indicated that the students who were involved in their transitional planning process had previously inquired regarding the disability department,
attended the open houses, and had supportive special education teachers that assisted in the transition process. Illustrated in the diagram below is participants responses to the question, “I had the knowledge required to transition into post-secondary education,” the results to this question are illustrated in the chart below.

![Figure 8. Knowledge to transition into postsecondary education](image)

The data indicates that many students are lacking the knowledge they need to transition. The process of teaching self-determination skills must begin in early childhood, continue throughout an individual life and just in the transition years (Thoma, Rogan, 2001, p. 16). Recent research in the area of transitions indicates, “The postsecondary completion rates for students with disabilities remain significantly lower than that of their peers in the general population; therefore, improvement is needed in the area of knowledge prior to students beginning post-secondary” (Thoma & Rogen, 2001, p. 58). Further when comparing skills and knowledge, and by asking students “I am able to identify which skills I need to improve on in order to be successful”, the diagram (below) illustrates the results:
Figure 9. Comparison between knowledge and skills

Perceived data concluded comparable results between the skills and knowledge that students are learning in the K to 12 system. From the data, it is evident that students have little information regarding knowledge and the skills required to transition. Research indicates that, “knowledge of self and knowledge of rights are viewed as the foundations of self-advocacy because it is necessary for individuals to understand and know themselves before, they can tell others what they need and want” (Brewe, et al, 2005, p. 43). Many students receiving special education services don’t have an opportunity to learn how to plan and manage their lives. They leave school without a vision for their future. They do not perceive that they know their needs, are not aware of their interests and lack the skills needed to create meaningful choices (Martin, Marshall, Maxson, 1995). It is possible that students participating do not fully understand the difference between knowledge and skills. Based on these findings, it appears that effective transition programs that focus on self determination skills and a wider range of knowledge about support are required.

Further, more skills and a wider range of knowledge are needed to create effective transition programs for students with disabilities that lead to improved postsecondary outcomes.
or it is possible that student participating do not fully understand the difference between knowledge and skills.

**Transition Process**

When reviewing the term “Transition,” for students with special education, it can be defined as “the movement of students with disabilities from school to independent, productive, satisfying post-school environments” (Trash, 2012, p. 40). Transition planning services are an important part of a normal life and are designed to prepare students for self-advocacy and self-monitoring skills they will need in post-secondary. Some of common transitional themes that emerged from this data are the following:

**Preparation.** Successful preparation for post-secondary requires that students have the information needed to transition into their classrooms/programs. From this survey, participants indicated that some of the preparation that high schools provide students with disabilities in transitions is:

- Inform students about open-houses at post-secondary (33%)
- Encourage participation at transition fairs (33%)
• Prepare students with study habits, things such as completing on time, meeting deadlines and managing stress (1%)

• Provide students with knowledge regarding the disability services/department (33%)

When participants were asked, “To what extent do you agree with the statement, “High-school prepares students with disabilities for the transition into post-secondary programs,” the results specified (see below):

![High School Preparation Chart]

Figure 10. High school preparation

The results of this survey indicated that participants felt they were “a little” prepared for the transition from high school into post-secondary. Of eight students, the students who felt the least successful when transitioning into post-secondary were the ones who relied on special education teachers. Students who relied on special education teachers and high school counsellors felt a bit more successful. However, the most successful students were the ones who relied on special education teachers and the transition fairs. Transitional fairs allow for students to learn about post-secondary services, supports offered and gain information about courses and programs in post-secondary. In order to ensure that transitioning student’s have successful transitioned, effective practices need to be tailored to meet the diverse needs of students.

Research by Jangia & Costenbader (2016) states “that high-school transition teams need to better
prepare students with a better understanding of their strengths, weakness and their goals in order to ensure their success” (p. 468).

Skills. Effective transition practices should emphasise the development of practical life skills that are geared towards the goals and aspirations of the individual students. This emphasis on practical skills ensures that students are prepared for typical post-secondary settings (Field & Kohler, 2003, p. 181). Within this research, participants were asked the following questions to determine their skills.

- I am able to advocate for myself
- I am able to identify which skills I need to improve on in order to be successful in post-secondary
- I will request accommodations that I need to be successful in post-secondary

The data indicated that:

1) 92% of participants perceive that they have the self-determination skills in place to reach their goals

2) 75% of participants perceive that they have self-advocacy skills in advocating for services, support, & technology

In this survey, participants were asked, “I am able to identify which skills I need to improve on in order to be successful in post-secondary,” these results were compared with, “To what extent, do you agree with the statement, “I have successfully transitioned into post-secondary education,” 73% of these participants indicated they were aware of the skills that needed improvement and 23% were unsure, however, all of the participants felt they were successful in transitioning into post-secondary. This indicates that 23% of students are not recognizing the
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skills that they have had as they transition to post-secondary yet all of these students feel successful.

Knowledge. Participants were asked the question whether, “I had the knowledge required to transition into post-secondary.” The results of this question varied.

a) 62% students were aware of the laws that protect them
b) 47% Students were aware that post-secondary offers services/support/programs for individuals with disabilities
c) 76% Students had the knowledge regarding different accommodations

Conclusion

This research study was conducted to answer, “What knowledge and skills do students utilize as they transition to post-secondary and access required supports? The data from this study identified the following themes that are crucial for students as they transition:

1) Special Education teachers/assistants assist in preparing students for the transition into post-secondary. In connecting with post secondary institutions, SETs and SEAs provide useful information for students as they transition.

2) Parent involvement through transitions requires parents to continue to stay involved with their child’s transition into post-secondary. More emphasis from high-school transition teams needs to be placed on providing parents and students with the knowledge regarding the differences between high-school and post-secondary institutions.

3) Students who have knowledge and skills related to self determination are more prepared to access accommodations in post secondary education.
4) The most common service being used between high-school and post-secondary is one on one support. Transitioning students are relying on the support of SEAs in high-school and the SSD department in post-secondary education.

5) Self-Determination included self-advocacy, goal setting, problem solving, self management, self-efficacy which are required as students transition into post-secondary. Preparation in self determination in high school supports students as they transition.

6) Successful transitions are ones in which students have participated in open-house fairs, are prepared with appropriate study habits for post-secondary, have parental support, and are equipped with the knowledge and have the skills to access the support/accommodations required in post-secondary.

The research indicated that in order to be successful in post secondary education, students are relying on the knowledge of special education teachers in high school, the support of one on one consultation from SSD in post-secondary, and the continuous involvement of their parents. It was evident that the participants in this study perceive that they are moving towards transitioning into post-secondary as most young adults do to lead a normal life. While systems of support, things such as transitional fairs, open-houses, special education teachers/assistants are in place for individuals with disabilities, there is still much that needs to be done to enhance the effectiveness of the transitional process. Continued attention should be paid to increasing self-determinism in students, as this allows for students to have the skills and knowledge required to advocate for services or supports required, in post-secondary, so that they can build successful futures for themselves. As Field & Kohler (2003) state “One size fits all” and “Check the box” transition planning strategies do not effectively prepare students with disabilities who all have unique needs for successfully fulfilling adult roles. Through continued attention to establish
effective transitions services flexible enough to meet individual students needs, we can arm students with information and opportunities in which they can build their futures (p.181).
Chapter Five

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the main aspects that are required for successful transitions for students with disabilities. This chapter will also discuss the implications and conclusion of this study.

Implications

Special Education Teachers and Assistants: For special education teachers and assistants there are gaps in the degree of knowledge regarding transitions that teachers possess and the frequency with which they provide transition services. Special education teachers assist students in the classroom. They are the ones who adjust their lesson plans and ensure that each student has the tools to succeed. Special education teachers need to focus on teaching students more skills, things such as self-determination, how to advocate for accommodations in post-secondary, goal setting and encouraging students to take responsibility for their own educational services. Further, SETs need a wider range of knowledge in transitions, concentrating on what accommodations post-secondaries offer, what tools are required for post-secondary programs and services. As well as ensuring student success and highlighting the differences of responsibility between high-school and post-secondary.

Special education assistants work with the classroom teachers to assist children who are struggling. They need to focus on serving as advocates, encouraging students to pursue post-secondary education and sharing information about transition fairs. Further, they need to remain as a source of support for the student and parent during transitions while encouraging students to reflect on the practices of self-determination as implemented by Special Education Teachers.
Teacher education and professional development should consider teaching strategies, paying attention to the skills and knowledge required for self-determination. It would be useful for secondary schools to involve special education assistants in transition-focused activities such as post secondary visits, transition fairs, and activities that help them to be aware of options open to students who they support. By increasing knowledge and awareness, special education teachers and assistants can better support students to prepare them on how to access the post-secondary campus, the support services they need to obtain and the modifications they need to succeed in post-secondary (Benitez, Bruce & Morningstar, 2009, p. 11)

*Parental Involvement:* It is essential that parents of students with disabilities prepare their transitioning students for post-secondary. A common concern among parents in that once their child has graduated, he/she would be left alone without any support services in post-secondary. Often parents are not aware of the services offered in post-secondary; therefore, they are not able to provide their child with the support they need for success. Parents can encourage self determination, disclosure, self advocacy and assist with goals and objectives. In order for students to be successful in post-secondary, parents need to promote independence and prepare their child for post-secondary.

A recommendation for secondary programs is to engage parents in transition activities, things such as transition fairs. These fairs provide an opportunity for parents to learn about the services and programs offered at the institution, along with allowing parents to understand how their roles and responsibilities will shift once their child is in post-secondary. The laws that applied in high-school will not be the same for post-secondary. Further, many post-secondaries offer transition workshops prior to the school year starting. It is recommended that parents and their child attend these workshops. In these workshops, students are provided with the
expectations of post-secondary, they are required to set goals, and in many times are given a list of possible next steps to complete. These workshops are very informative for students and their parents in understanding post-secondary education.

As Garder (1997) states, “Special emphasis needs to be placed on assisting students to cope with forthcoming changes, become cognizant of how all the aspects of their lives have contributed to their development as learners and identify connections between their current and future academic experience” (English, Smith, & Vasek, 2002, p. 194). Constant encouragement for students is recommended in the areas of self-determination, things such as advocacy, focusing on strengths and asking for help in areas of weakness. With this preparation, students may find themselves better prepared for post-secondary education.

Advocacy: The research indicates that students with disabilities need to be able to advocate for themselves as they navigate from high-school to post-secondary. Strong advocacy skills allow students to access services and support and students feel much more successful in post-secondary when they have those supports in place.

Transitional Fairs: The research showed that as students transition from high school to post-secondary, those who attended transitional fairs were the most successful. Transitional fairs provide current information on services, programs, and resources that exist to support students transitioning from high school to adult life. For successful transitions, all high school students who wish to pursue post-secondary education should be provided with opportunities to attend transitional fairs.

Self-Determinism: This was the key ingredient for successful transitions. Students who were self-determined found themselves the most prepared and successful for post-secondary. Self-determination included things such as goal setting, advocacy for oneself, and remaining
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committed to post-secondary studies/education. The research indicates current transitioning students with disabilities feel they are successful in transitioning into post-secondary. Continued effort and growth in the areas of self-determination are needed for students to be successful. High-schools can support this learning by preparing students to be aware of their strengths and weakness, while educating them to articulate reasonable need for academic or physical accommodations (English, Smith & Vasek, 2002).

Recommendations

A recommendation based on the research is that transition planning in high school should be expanded to include the skills and knowledge that are needed in post-secondary settings. This includes things such as self-determination, information for parents, transitional fairs, objectives for future and essential training for transition educators in high school is needed. This training should include:

- Self-Determination- Preparing students with the self-determination skills and strategies for making appropriate decisions. Examples include, goal setting, making decisions, independence, study skills, managing timetables & deadlines, and advocating for support
- Independence- Enabling students to independently advocate for their supports and required services in high school while highlighting any requests needed for post-secondary
- Academic Responsibility- Ensuring that transitional teams make sure students are aware of the academic responsibility in post-secondary; this includes, differences in class sizes, instructional time, teaching and examination methods that they will experience at post-secondary.
• Strengths/Weakness- Preparing students to utilize their strengths and access support for any areas of weakness

• Parents- Supporting parents in understanding their responsibilities and the changes in their involvement in the level of post secondary education

• Transitional Fairs-Providing opportunities for all students transitioning into post-secondary by hosting more information sessions or a transitional fair before the completion of their final high-school year.

• Collaboration- Build and demonstrate partnerships between secondary and post-secondary institutions to address students’ needs during the transition period.

In post-secondary, it is recommended that all transitioning students:

• Self-Disclose as a person with disability to access any support or services

• Transitional fairs- Attend a transitional fair or open house as an entrance requirement to post-secondary. This will allow students to be aware of the programs, services and supports offered at post-secondary

• Accessibility Services- Connect with Accessibility Services. For students requesting accommodations, an appointment with the Accessibility Services, 3 months in advance is recommended. In this appointment, students should be aware of the services they may need to support them in their courses/programs.

• Academic Responsibility-Be prepared for the academic responsibility in post-secondary. This includes, informing instructors for any supports or services required, complete deadlines on time, managing time and assignments, making independent decisions for their futures.
• Parents involve parents as partners during the transition post secondary and more independent interaction with the institution.

Limitations

The limitations in this survey was the low participant rate. There were 27 participants in total and only one post-secondary in the metro Vancouver area and this does not adequately represent the population of students who are transitioning. Also, the knowledge that was created is limited by the self report nature of survey research and the inability of survey questions to delve more deeply into transition experiences.

Suggestions/Further Research:

Further research in the areas of successful transitions for students with disabilities should focus on defining what students with disabilities feel is success is to them. Many students feel successful just by attending post-secondary, while others are hoping to gain a degree or employment. Success may vary individual to individual.

Another recommendation is constant evaluation of how high-schools can provide continuous improvement and education around promoting students to be more independent and self-determined. Additional research should be conducted on the what kinds of professional development opportunities are needed for transition teams to adequately prepare students with the skills and knowledge to transition.

Another key area of focus is parents and the transition outcomes. More research needs to be done on how to educate parents in supporting their transitioning child in navigating into post-secondary. For example, what steps can support parents to remain involved; what services and supports can parents engage with to support children; how can parents continuously foster independence? More effort needs to be placed into transition fairs, and open houses and the
information students find most useful from them, and how can transition fairs be improved to meet the outcomes desired by students.

**Significance of Study and Implications**

This study is significant in the field of transition for students with disabilities as it discusses the skills and knowledge accessed by students who are transitioning from high school to post-secondary as identified by student participants. Recommendations for the institution of study to improve student success include:

1) Constant collaboration with high-school and post secondaries, communicating information regarding transitioning students, policies, procedures, and curriculum.

2) Transitional fairs be a requirement for entrance into post secondary education

3) Accessibility services to be available for all new students, providing information regarding accommodations, services, and funding

4) Knowledge for students and parents around the legal changes from high school to post secondary.

**Conclusion**

Transition is defined as the movement from high school to post-secondary environments and is the natural step into adult life. Many more individuals with disabilities are successfully transitioning into post-secondary institutions. As research shows, post-secondary education can significantly increase the chances of employment for individuals with disabilities (Conway & Stodden, 2003, p. 24). With many more students with disabilities transitioning into post-secondary, there needs to be continued efforts in gaining information regarding the skills and knowledge and how to support and improve transitions for students with disabilities.
In the past few years, there has been more effort in increasing awareness of the term “Inclusion in Education,” especially for students with disabilities. Educational support for students is mandated by federal and provincial legislations; however, the transition systems require further development before, smooth successful transitions are in place for all students.
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Library Cataloguing.


Appendix A- Recruitment Letter to Departments

Title: The Transition Experiences of Students of Students

I am a student in the Masters of Education in Special Education program at Vancouver Island University (VIU). My research entitled, “The Transition Experiences of Students,” aims to identify the skills and knowledge students utilize as they transition into post-secondary and access required supports. My hope is that the information collected will contribute to planning in secondary and postsecondary education and will add to the growing field of knowledge on supporting effective transitions.

Research participants will be asked to complete either an online or paper survey. And with your approval, I am hoping to provide the option of completing the paper survey to be located in your department area. This would be located in the reception area of the department at the campus. There will be survey copies placed at the front desk and a sealed box to drop the completed surveys. Research posters will be posted at news bulletin area for students.

The aim is to start the process of recruitment in early July 2018 and continue until end of December 2018. In this timeframe students will have access to the surveys. The results of this study will be published in my Masters thesis through Vancouver Island University.

If you consent to this research being done, kindly sign below and return.

Thank you in advance for your support.

______________________                                         __________________________
Director                                                      Date

Sincerely,
Kiren Uppal
Appendix B: Consent and Survey

**Share your Transition Experience!!**

I am a student in the Masters of Education in Special Education program at Vancouver Island University (VIU). And I am conducting research aimed at identifying the skills and knowledge students utilize as they transition into post-secondary and access required supports. Please find a private location to complete this survey before you proceed.

**Consent Form and Confidentiality Agreement:**

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. At any time, you may exit the survey and you are able to decline any question you wish not to answer. There will be no academic advantage or disadvantage if you decide to complete the survey or if you decide not to complete the survey.

**Benefits:**

You will receive no direct benefits from completing this survey, however the information collected will contribute to planning in secondary and post-secondary education and will add to the growing field of knowledge and supporting effective transitions.

**Risks:**

Though the information provided in this survey will be anonymous, there is a risk that you may be identifiable based on demographic information such as age, ethnicity, as well as written in the details you provide. To reduce this risk if you feel upset at any time during this survey, I recommend that you end the survey. You may wish to contact one of the support services.

**Management of Research Information:**

The data collected will be stored and located in the researchers' locked home office. Computers linked to, password protected, networks will be used to store the information and password protected will be used on home computers and flash drives. All data will be kept for 3 years and shredded through confidential on-site shredding services by June 2021.

**Privacy:**

Google forms will be used to collect your survey responses. Survey data will be stored in Google forms servers located in the United States of America and thus is subject to Google forms data privacy policies and foreign legislation. For information on Google forms privacy policy see: https://policies.google.com/

**Confidentiality:**

Contact: If you have any further questions or concerns about the study or the procedures you may contact request contact information from my research supervisor.
The following mitigating strategies will be in place. The researcher will make every effort to ensure the survey questions do not pertain to personal details regarding disability. The questions in the survey will have general questions regarding transition experiences. Comments that may lead to indirect identification of participants will be omitted from the results. Participants have the option of exiting the survey at any time. See Appendix D for a list of Counselling support and Disability advising support.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

I consent to the data I provide being used for the research study as described?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

Part A. Background Schooling

In this section you will be asked some questions about your background and education through 12th grade. Please answer these questions to the best of your ability.

Directions: Circle the answer that best describes your background and schooling.

A1. What is your ethnicity?

☐ African American  ☐ Asian  ☐ Hispanic  ☐ Native American  ☐ White/Caucasian  ☐ Other_____________________________________________

A2. Indicate your age category?

☐ 16-24  ☐ 25-29  ☐ 30-39  ☐ 40-49  ☐ 50-59  ☐ 60

A3. How many years did you attend public school?

☐ 9-12 years  ☐ 5-8 years  ☐ 1-4 years  ☐ Less than 3 years

A4. When did you graduate from high school?

☐ 1 to 3 years ago
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☐ 4 to 6 years ago
☐ 7 to 10 years ago
☐ Did not graduate

A5. I know all the differences between high school and post-secondary
☐ A very great deal
☐ Quite a lot
☐ A little
☐ Very Little
☐ Not at all

A6. I know I want to continue my education and attend post-secondary
☐ Yes
☐ No

Part B. Self-Determinism

This section will contain questions regarding Self-Determinism. This is defined as the personal decision to act and think a certain way. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

Directions: Circle the answer which best describes how much you agree with each statement.

B1. I am able to advocate for myself.
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Don’t know

B2. I am aware that, I, not my parents need to initiate a request for disability services at post-secondary.
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Don’t know

B3. I am able to identify which skills I need to improve on in order to be successful in post-secondary.
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Don’t know

B4. I feel confident that I will be successful in post-secondary.
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Don’t know

B5. I know the laws that protect my rights.
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B6. I will seek assistance at the Services for Students with Disabilities department at the institution that I attend if needed.

☐ Agree  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree  ☐ Don’t know

B7. I will seek assistance from my instructors if needed.

☐ Agree  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Neither agree nor disagree  ☐ Don’t know

B8. Use the lines below to describe a goal that you set and achieved in high school (post-secondary).

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

B9. Use the lines below, to share an experience you had at school that made you excited about learning.

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

B 10. Use the lines below to answer, when you decided to come to this institution, what were you most excited about doing?

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

Part C. Services

The institution offers support to students with disabilities in numerous departments within the institution. This section of the survey asks some questions about your life since graduating from high-school and entering programs or services at this institution.

C1. I am currently a full-time student

☐ Yes  ☐ No

C2. I am currently a part time student
C3. I am aware of the Services for Support Department (SSD)?

☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Don’t know

C4. I have visited the SSD department

☐ Yes
☐ No

C5. The high school that I attended helped me to make successful transition from high-school to university

☐ Yes
☐ No

C6. Explain in what ways that the high school you attended helped you to prepare for post-secondary education work?

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

C7. Discuss some specific examples of the help you received in high school.

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

C8. Did your parents/ advocates attend meetings with you in high school?

☐ Yes
☐ No

C9. What supports did you use in high-school? Tick all that apply:

☐ High school counsellor
☐ Brochure
☐ Special Education Teacher
☐ Transition fairs
☐ Other: _______________________________________________

C 10. Which of the following Accommodations have you used at this institution? (Skip this question if this is your first semester at post-secondary)

☐ Extra exam time
C 11. Did you receive the accommodations you requested at post-secondary? (Skip this question if this is your first semester at post-secondary)

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Other __________________________________________

C 12. Which of the following Services have you used?

☐ Learning Center
☐ Academic and Career Preparation
☐ Services for Students with Disabilities
☐ Funding
☐ Assessment and Testing Services
☐ Other __________________________________________

C 13. Did you parents/advocates attend meetings with you in post-secondary?

☐ Yes
☐ No

C 14. I will request accommodations that I need to be successful in college

☐ Yes
☐ No

Part D. Transition into Post-Secondary.

This section of the survey will provide statements regarding your transition into post-secondary. Please answer to the best of your ability.

Directions: Circle the answers which best describes how much you agree with each statement. Circle only one number for each item.

D1. To what extent do you agree with the statement, “High-school prepares students with disabilities for the transition into post-secondary programs”.

☐ A very great deal
D2. To what extent do you agree with the statement, “I had the knowledge (e.g. what services are offered, how to access them and where to go for assistance) required to transition into postsecondary education?”

- A very great deal
- Quite a lot
- A little
- Very Little
- Not at all

D3. To what extent, do you agree with the statement, “I have successfully transitioned into post-secondary education?”

- A very great deal
- Quite a lot
- A little
- Very Little
- Not at all