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# INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION-MAKING FOR STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY-BASED TRANSITION PROGRAMS

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INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION-MAKING FOR STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY-BASED  
TRANSITION PROGRAMS

By

Rachel R. Knoepfle

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INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION-MAKING FOR STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY-BASED  
TRANSITION PROGRAMS

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Rachel R. Knoepfle

## DEDICATION

My first and biggest “thank you” is to my family: Mom, Dad, Jeff, and Jaz, thank you for being the best support system I could imagine. To my friends, specifically Janelle, Danyelle, Sarah,

Tracy, Stacy, Melissa, and Erin, thank you for your endless patience with me.

To the It Depends Crew, I wouldn’t want to do this without all of you, and, I probably wouldn’t have been able to; last one done buys the tattoos. Other Rachel, there aren’t enough pens, washi tape, or planner stickers to say how happy I am we’re friends. And, if you’re reading this, I’m

*finally* done. Let’s tip our Panera coffee to that!

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## INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION-MAKING FOR STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY-BASED TRANSITION PROGRAMS

### Abstract

By Rachel R. Knoepfle

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2020

Per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities are eligible to receive transition services beyond twelfth grade, if they have not met the requirements for a high school diploma. There is not a formal model for how transition services should be implemented and there a number of factors in play when considering instruction for students in transition classrooms. Thus, the following questions arise: what does teaching and learning look like in such a classroom? How do teachers of CBT programs explain and understand their curriculum decision-making processes?

This study employed the methods of basic interpretative qualitative inquiry to explore the ways in which teachers of community-based transition programs develop and engage students with instruction. The research questions were as follows: In what ways do teachers in community-based programs perceive and understand their curriculum decision-making processes? What factors play a role in curriculum decision-making for this population of students? In what ways do teachers of community-based transition programs design and implement instruction?

Findings from the data analysis consisted of three themes: determine what students need to learn how to do, let students make instructional decisions, and meet instructional needs using available materials and opportunities.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 50.6 million students received public education in the United States in the 2016-2017 school year (2019a). Of those students, 6.8 million received special education services, which are provided from age three through age twenty-one, and 430,000 of those students receiving special education services qualified within the category of Intellectual Disability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b). These 430,000 include students ages 18-21 and public school special education programs for this age group are typically community-based, and have an emphasis on functional, independent living skills (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). Typically, there are no standards or benchmarks for classes or programs beyond twelfth grade.

This study focused on the public school special education services available to this population of students; specifically, the public school classrooms for students ages 18-21 with intellectual disabilities. During the 2016-2017 school year, 42,857 students exited the public school system and received an alternate certificate, meaning they did not meet the requirements to graduate with a high school diploma; 12,446 of these students had received special education services under the category of Intellectual Disability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019c). Literature on students with intellectual disabilities who have aged out of services indicates that this population is likely to experience low employment rates and poor outcomes, such as not obtaining living-wage employment or living independently (Bouck, 2012; Bouck, 2013; Bouck & Joshi, 2015; Karpur, Brewer, & Golden, 2014; Katsiyannis, Zhang, Woodruff, & Dixon, 2005; Papay & Bambara, 2011; Shogren, Kennedy, Dowsett, & Little, 2014). Public school services are available until students reach the age of 21, providing extra opportunities for

instruction that might mediate poor outcomes. A public school district can provide these services, commonly referred to as transition services, to students who are ages 18-21 years old. Programs are often housed in a facility other than a public school campus and are referred to as community-based transition programs (CBT programs) (Gaumer, Morningstar, & Clark, 2004; Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). CBT programs are part of K-12 education, even though the students receiving services have completed high school, and they can be located in a storefront, a modified house, or on a college or university campus (Gaumer, Morningstar, & Clark, 2004). The actual structure of these programs varies widely.

### **Background**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) is a federal law first passed by Congress in 1975 to provide special education to students with disabilities (Lee, 2014). It has since been reauthorized, most recently in 2004. IDEA provides educational services for students. To qualify for services, students must have been diagnosed with one of thirteen specific disabilities; these disabilities are listed in Figure 1 (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2012). Any student who qualifies within one of these categories is eligible to receive special education services, which differ based on the student's need. For example, services for a student who has speech impairment, such as stuttering, would look very different from services for a student who has a specific learning disability, such as dyslexia. These public school services are available for students between the ages of 3 and twenty-one.

This study focuses on community-based transition (CBT) programs available to students with intellectual disabilities (ID). CBT programs are special education classrooms or programs for students with moderate to severe ID who are 18 to 21 years old. These programs are run by a

public school district or county office of education, that are located within a community (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). While CBT programs may consist of a whole campus, they can also be a storefront or converted home (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). CBT programs are not Postsecondary Education (PSE) programs, which are also for students with ID, but which are located on a junior college, college, or university campus (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012).

ID is defined as a disability that significantly limits intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, and that impacts everyday social and practical skills, (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2013). According to the American Association on Intellectual and Development Disabilities (AIDD), there are three major criteria for intellectual disability: “significant limitations in intellectual functioning, significant limitations in adaptive behavior, and onset before the age of 18,” (2019, Frequently asked questions on disability section). Intellectual functioning refers to the mental capacity for learning, reasoning, problem solving, and so on, and an IQ test score below or around 70 indicates a limitation in intellectual functioning (AIDD, 2019). Adaptive behavior refers to conceptual skills, social skills, and practical skills, and a student’s adaptive behavior abilities are determined through other tests and measures (AIDD, 2019). Students with ID have a cognitive ability level that is much lower than their chronological age; for example, a student with ID who is 18 years old may read at a fifth grade level, or a second grade level, or he/she may memorize sight words, or the student may not read at all.

All students who receive special education services, including students with ID, have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which is required by the IDEA and defined as a “written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting,” and includes the student’s present levels of academic performance, measurable academic and

functional annual goals (referred to as IEP goals), and a statement of the services the student receives (Turnbull, Huerta, & Stowe, 2009, p.42). IEPs are an annual requirement, for which meetings must be held and documents written every twelve months. IEPs are developed by a team consisting of the parents of the student, the classroom teacher, a case manager (who may be the classroom teacher or who may be a special education teacher if the student is receiving services in a general education classroom), an administrator (such as an assistant principal), a special education administrator (such as a program specialist or program coordinator), and service providers for any services the student receives (such as speech, occupational therapy, etc.). Together, the team creates and approves the IEP, which will dictate the student's services, including instructional goals, for the next twelve months. IEPs move with a student throughout their education career, ending when a student exits services, graduates, or ages out of the public school system.

The educational goals included in the IEP are expected to be standards-based and to provide access to the general education instruction, which can vary depending on where a student is placed. With regard to state standards, forty-two states and the District of Colombia have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), while Alaska, Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia, use their own respective state standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016). The CCSS for English/Language Arts and Math are written for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade, which excludes special education students who are over 18 and have completed high school. In Alaska (Alaska English/Language Arts and Mathematics Standards, 2012), Indiana (Indiana Department of Education, 2014, 2014b), Minnesota (Academic Standards K-12, 2016), Nebraska (Nebraska Department of Education, 2014; Nebraska Department of Education, 2015), Oklahoma

(Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2016a, 2016b), South Carolina (South Carolina Department of Education, 2016a, 2016b), Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2015a, 2015b), and Virginia (Virginia Department of Education, 2016a, 2016b), the state standards for English/Language Arts and Math are written for grades K-12.

Placement refers to the type of services a student receives and the type of class in which a student receives instruction (Mauro, 2015). For example, a student with a mild disability, such as a specific learning disability, may receive resource services in a general education class. A student with moderate/severe ID may receive academic instruction in a specialized class, and therefore outside of general education. Depending on a student's placement, the IEP goals may make up varying amounts of the instructional content. For students in a mild to moderate placement, such as a resource program, IEP goals may only address deficit areas in the content, such as reading comprehension. For students in a moderate to severe placement, such as a class for students with ID, IEP goals may address social skills, behavior, and independent skills, as well as deficits in the content areas. In addition to the goals, the services included in the IEP shape a student's school day, including academic instruction and other applicable services, such as speech and language services, behavioral support, health needs, vocational awareness, etc.

Per regulations that are part of the 2004 amendment of IDEA, beginning at sixteen years of age transition services are included in a student's IEP in addition to any other services provided. Transition services are activities focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student, as well as aiding in the student's movement from school to post-school activities (Turnbull, Huerta, & Stowe, 2009, p. 54). These services are individualized and based on the student's strengths, preferences, and interests (Turnbull, Huerta, & Stowe, 2009, p. 54). Transition services include an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP), which is added into the

IEP, and which summarizes the supports laid out in the definition. It also includes space for the student's post-school goals, which should tie into the IEP's measurable, annual goals. For students with ID, transition services are added into the IEP during high school and help guide preparations for postsecondary education. From ages 18-21, postsecondary education is provided by the school district in a community-based transition program.

While most classrooms, including classes for students with disabilities, have a general, expected structure, this is not true of transition programs. With regard to location, for example, one district may house their program in a strip mall storefront, while another may use a converted home, and another may use a commercial facility. The number of students being served also impacts the program, in that some districts are large enough for multiple transition classrooms while others may only have one class to serve the entire district. The ways in which behavioral and health needs are met may vary from district to district and there is no baseline or general guideline as to how best to meet these needs. Most districts address vocational and career awareness in one form or another but there is great variety in this area as well, including partnerships with the Department of Labor, the Department of Rehabilitation, and local universities.

As a result, transition programs vary greatly between districts and counties and there is little information available as to how this service is being provided to students, particularly with regard to instruction. Much of the research on instruction for students with ID revolves around providing functional versus academic instruction (Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, & Sievers, 2011; Browder & Spooner, 2006), with limited information on how teachers of students with ID make decisions for their students. Ruppert, Gaffney, and Dymond's (2015) study of how literacy decisions are made with regard to literacy instruction for secondary students with severe



disabilities is one of the few studies examining how teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities make instruction decisions. Unfortunately, a similar study has yet to be conducted with regard to teachers of postsecondary students.

### **Federal Requirements**

IDEA provides educational services through the age of twenty-one but state standards and frameworks are not available beyond the twelfth grade. As a result, students with intellectual disabilities receive transition services without state or federal instructional guidelines or instructional input. While IDEA defines IEPs and transition services as well as a host of other special education services, it does not provide any information as to how services for students between eighteen and twenty-one should be provided. Research from Grigal, Hart, and Weir (2012), Gaumer, Morningstar and Clark (2004), and Thoma (2013) provides examples of CBT programs based in communities or on college campuses, as well as information on how to establish such programs, however these findings focus on data, on the “what” of CBT programs, such as how many students attend what type of program, rather than the experience of teaching and instruction in such a classroom. As a result, how teachers make decisions in these classrooms is still largely unexplored.

IDEA mandates access to general education, but it is difficult to meet this mandate for students in transition programs. Transition students have completed twelfth grade and while they can continue to receive public school services, they do so in a special education setting. While some CBT programs are located on college and university campuses (Thoma, 2013), allowing for interactions with same-age peers, this is not true of every program.

### **Provision of Transition Services**

There is limited information available on transition programs, most of which comes from the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT), and state departments of education who make transition program-specific information available.

Transition programs, by their nature, do not look like other special education, or even general education, classrooms. Aside from considering the needs of students with disabilities and accommodating services students receive, the program houses adult students (so placement on a campus with minors, such as a high school, may not be preferred), who are expected to access their community.

### **Instruction and Instructional Decision-Making**

With regard to special education, classroom instruction has added considerations, such as student ability levels and disabling conditions, the addition of particular goals and the individualization of instruction. Delivering instruction to students with intellectual disabilities who are educated in contained, as opposed to mainstream, classes is a unique process, particularly with regard to how instructional decisions are made.

Instructional decisions in classrooms for students with severe intellectual disabilities usually revolve around the type of content (Ayres, Lowrey, & Sievers; 2011 and Bouck; 2012), with minimal attention to how teachers choose said content (Ruppar, Gaffney, & Dymond, 2015). While there is much information on how to write and develop goals for students (Wehman & Kregel, 2012; Browder & Spooner, 2006), there is a lack of insight as to how teachers make instructional decisions for their students. This is true of teachers of transition classrooms in which the students have intellectual disabilities, and are over the age of eighteen, meaning there are no state standards for instruction. For students who are beyond K-12

education, the IEP is the only influence on the school day. There are no state standards to address, no state assessments to prepare for, and no school-based activities and sports to participate in. The IEP is the basis, and could be the entirety, of what school looks like for a student in a transition program. How, then, are the IEPs developed if there aren't state standards to use? How are deficit areas identified? And, since IEPs at this age include transition planning, how are the ITPs developed?

Ideally, the IEPs and ITPs would be written with post-school opportunities in mind. Many students with disabilities are clients of regional centers, which take over programming after students age out of public school. Working with a variety of vendors and organizations, regional centers provide the funding for people with disabilities to access day programs, supported employment opportunities, and services from the Department of Rehabilitation. As families begin planning for the transition from public school to adulthood, regional center case workers can work with transition program staff to make informed decisions about placement based on the student's skill level, interest, and need. Once a placement is decided, or at least being considered, transition teachers can tailor instruction to prepare students for a particular setting. More research is needed on how teachers of students in transition classrooms make instructional decisions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There a number of factors in play when considering instruction for students in transition classrooms, which begs the question: what does teaching and learning look like in such a classroom? How do teachers of CBT programs explain and understand their curriculum decision-making processes? Empirical evidence available is focused on program type,

curriculum receipt, functional versus academic instruction, postsecondary outcomes, teacher preparation, and teacher competencies.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which teachers of community-based transition programs develop and engage students with instruction.

### **Research Questions**

This study will address the following research questions: In what ways do teachers in community-based programs perceive and understand their curriculum decision-making processes? What factors play a role in curriculum decision-making for this population of students? In what ways do teachers of community-based transition programs design and implement instruction?

### **Significance of the Study**

Per the IDEA, students with disabilities are eligible to receive transition services beyond twelfth grade, if they have not graduated from high school with a diploma. Those students not receiving a diploma have a legal right to continue their education until their 22nd birthday. These services are defined to be a need-based set of activities for a child with a disability that prepares the student for the transition from school to post-school life (Turnbull, Huerta, & Stowe, 2009). This definition fails to provide specific objectives that can be used to develop lesson plans, and the content standards used by teachers to guide instruction are only available for kindergarten to twelfth grade. This population of students has a legal right to receive services, but without any instructional objectives or frameworks to guide instruction; exploring exactly what developing the instruction looks like is necessary insight into how services are being delivered. Transition-specific competencies have been developed by the Council for

Exceptional Children's Division on Career Development and Transition (Division on Career Development and Training, 2013), and researched by Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2009), Knott and Asselin (1999), Kohler (1996), Kohler and Green (2004), and Morgan et. al. (2014), but there is little information on the extent to which these competencies are being put into practice.

While IDEA allows students who qualify for special education to receive services through the age of twenty-one, there is not a formal model for how these services should be implemented. Information in the literature is almost exclusively focused on program specifics that can be quantified, such as the types of post-secondary programs available to students with ID (Gaumer, Morningstar, & Clark, 2004; Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012), and CBT programs on college and university campuses and access to college courses (Thoma, 2013; Papay & Bambara, 2011).

The knowledge base available could be expanded to include more information on providing transition services to students between eighteen and twenty-one, especially what the programming looks like. The literature available on transition services has a strong emphasis on post-school outcomes (Bouck, 2012; Bouck 2013) and teacher perceptions related to providing transition services to secondary students (Park, 2008 & Mariano-Lapidus, 2013) but there is little representation for programs serving students ages 18-21.

### **Description of Study**

#### **Methodology**

This study will employ the methods of basic interpretative qualitative inquiry, as laid out by Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 197):

At the outset of a qualitative inquiry, the investigator knows what the problem is and has selected a purposeful sample to collect data in order to address the problem. But the

researcher does not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will be like. The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process.

In order to answer the research questions, I will collect data from interviews with and documents provided by participants who will be identified using purposeful sampling. This data will be analyzed as it is collected in a simultaneous process recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). I will analyze the data using memos, codes, and categories to develop themes that can explain some part of the process of designing, developing, and delivering instruction in CBT program classrooms.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Career Awareness:* Career awareness is “learning about opportunities, education, and skills needed in various occupational pathways to choose a career that matches one’s strengths and interests,” (Rowe et al., 2015, p.118).

*Community Experiences:* Community experiences are “activities occurring outside the school setting, supported with in-class instruction, where students apply academic, social, and/or general work behaviors and skills,” (Rowe et al., 2015, p. 120). These experiences can also be referred to as Community-Based Instruction, or CBI.

*Functional skills:* Functional skills include the “variety of skills which influence a student’s ability to perform as independently and as productively as possible in home, school, and community. Nonfunctional skills, by contrast, are those that have an extremely low probability of being required in daily activities,” (Brown, et. al 1979).

*Individualized Education Plan:* An Individualized Education Plan, IEP, is defined as a “written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting,” and includes a statement of the present levels of academic and functional performance,

measurable annual goals, and a statement of the special education and related services (Turnbull, Huerta, & Stowe, 2009, p.42).

*Intellectual disability:* A disability that is “characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills,” (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2013, Definition of intellectual disability section).

*Paid Employment/Work Experience:* Paid employment or work experience is defined as “any activity that places the student in an authentic workplace and could include work sampling, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment,” and feature minimum wage (at least) paid directly to the student (Rowe et al., 2015, p. 118).

*Parental involvement:* Parental involvement is defined as “parents/families/guardians [who] are active and knowledgeable participants in all aspects of transition planning (e.g., decision-making, providing support, attending meetings, and advocating for their child),” (Rowe et al., 2015, p. 122). It should be noted that unless a student’s parents have conservatorship, any student over the age of 18 retains all rights, including education rights.

*Self-care/independent living skills:* Rowe et al. (2015) defined these skills as being “necessary for management of one’s personal self-care and daily independent living, including the personal management skills needed to interact with others, daily living skills, financial management skills, and the self- management of healthcare/wellness needs,” (p. 121).

*Self-determination/self-advocacy:* Rowe et al. (2015), defined self-determination as “the ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, take initiative to reach one’s goals, and accept consequences of one’s actions,” (p. 121).

*Social skills:* Rowe et al. (2015), defined social skills as “behaviors and attitudes that facilitate communication and cooperation (e.g., social conventions, social problem solving when engaged in a social interaction, body language, speaking, listening, responding, verbal, and written communication),” (p. 122).

*Transition Program:* A transition program is one which prepares students to move from secondary settings (e.g., middle school/high school) to adult life, “utilizing comprehensive transition planning and education that creates individualized opportunities, services, and supports to help students achieve their post-school goals in education/training, employment, and independent living,” (Rowe et al., 2015, p. 123).

*Transitions services:* Per the IDEA transitions services are “a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities” (Turnbull, Huerta, & Stowe, 2009, p. 54). Also, these services must be based on a valid, or scientifically researched, transitions assessment.

*Vocational Education:* Vocational education is defined as “a sequence of courses that prepares students for a specific job or career at various levels from trade or craft positions to technical, business, or professional careers,” (Rowe et al. 2015, p. 119).

*Work Study:* A work study program is defined as “a specified sequence of work skills instruction and experiences designed to develop students’ work attitudes and general work behaviors by providing students with mutually supportive and integrated academic and vocational instruction,” (Rowe et al., 2015, p. 119).



## Chapter Summary

Students with special needs can qualify for special education services under one of 13 categories, including Intellectual Disability, which affects cognitive abilities and processes (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2013, Definition of intellectual disability section). For many students, public school services end with the completion of high school, but because of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with moderate to severe disabilities who have not received a diploma can receive services until they are 21 years old. These services include specific transition services, which begin at the age of 16, and consist of activities focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student, as well as aiding in the student's movement from school to post-school activities (Turnbull, Huerta, & Stowe, 2009, p. 54).

These services can be delivered in Community-Based Transition (CBT) programs, which are run by public school districts or county offices of education, but are situated within a community, and therefore look very different from a traditional k-12 classroom. CBT program teachers, therefore, are teaching students who are 18-21 years old, who have moderate to severe ID, and in classrooms that are not on a traditional campus. State standards end at the high school level, meaning that instructions in CBT programs cannot be standards-based. Given the unique circumstances of these programs, this study examined the curricula decisions-making process of CBT teachers by asking the following questions:

1. In what ways do teachers in community-based programs perceive and understand their curriculum decision-making processes?
2. What factors play a role in curriculum decision-making for this population of students?
3. In what ways do teachers of community-based transition programs design and implement instruction?

The following chapter will include a review of the literature on transition services and programs, including, the provision of services, instruction, instructional decisions, and recommended practices. This will be followed by chapter three, which details the methodology of the study. Chapters four and five will be comprised of articles written on the experiences of teachers of community-based transition programs, and the structure and workings of the programs included in the study, respectively. The final chapter will include my reflections on the study and its impacts on myself as a classroom teacher.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Transition in the literature shows up in many forms: as transition services, outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as a reference to the movement between schools and programs, and sometimes to the specific instructional program for students ages 18-21 with intellectual disabilities. To minimize confusion, for this study I will use community-based transition program (CBT) to refer to the public school special education program (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). Literature available on CBT programs looks at the postsecondary special education service available to students ages 18-21, with some examination of instruction (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012; Thoma, 2013; Gaumer, Morningstar & Clark, 2004). Thoma (2013) separates post-secondary education programs (PSE), which are usually housed on a university campus, from CBT programs, and found that the typical signifiers used to differentiate between programs are no longer effective due to the growing inclusive nature of PSE programs. While an increase in inclusive programs is encouraging, it then becomes more difficult to effectively research both CBT and PSE programs due to overlapping definitions (Thoma, 2013).

In addition to the difficulties in researching programs themselves, there is little explicit information available on the actual workings of such programs, including the instruction of students ages 18-21 with severe intellectual disabilities. This chapter will provide information on the history of special education and current special education legislation, special education service provision, “transitions” and Community-Based Transition Programs, instruction in transitions classrooms, evidence-based practices, teacher decision-making, and teacher self-efficacy.

### **Purpose of the Review**

The purpose of this review is to examine the literature regarding community-based transition programs and services for students ages 18-21, instruction for students ages 18-21 with intellectual disabilities, and the ways in which teachers design instruction for students within transitions programs. This includes addressing the following domains/areas: a history of special education, teacher decision-making, teacher self-efficacy, standards, curriculum development, and transition programs.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **History of Special Education**

Public education has been compulsory in the United States since the early 1900's, and yet students with disabilities were often excluded (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). While inclusion for students with disabilities has become the norm, the provision of special education services is fairly new when compared to the availability of public education. Laws passed between 1893 and 1969 gave states the authority to exclude certain groups of students from compulsory attendance (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Buoyed by the Civil Rights movement, parents and advocates began pushing for public school inclusion for students with disabilities and by the late 1960s and early 1970s, most states had passed laws requiring schools to educate students with disabilities (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Unfortunately, some states began providing substantial educational rights to students with disabilities while others provided little beyond admittance to public schools (Yell, Rogers & Rogers, 1998). Students with disabilities were either denied an education outright, or were provided with services that were not appropriate to their needs (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001).

In 1973, the first major effort to protect persons with disabilities against discrimination based on their disabilities occurred when Congress passed Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

(Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Originally proposed in 1972 as an amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the primary purpose of Section 504 was to “prohibit discrimination against a person with a disability by any agency receiving federal funds,” (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Section 504 defined a "handicapped" person as “any person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of that person's major life activities, or a person who has a record of such an impairment, or a person who is regarded as having such an impairment,” (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998).

In 1975, federal legislation brought the various pieces of state and federal legislation into one comprehensive law regarding the education for students with disabilities: P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). While P.L. 94-142 provided the foundation for current special education procedure, it is preceded by important educational legislation.

**Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.** The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, or Public Law 94-142 (P.L. 94-142), was passed in 1975 and is the first piece of legislation to specifically address educational access for children with disabilities (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services 2010). This law came out of lawsuits filed in the early 1970’s, two of the most influential being *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education, District of Columbia* (Project IDEAL, 2013). Bolstered by the 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in which the United States Supreme Court determined that “it was unlawful to discriminate against a group of individuals for arbitrary reasons,” [and] that “education was characterized as a fundamental function of government that should be afforded to

all citizens on an equal basis,” a precedent was set that allowed parents and advocates to secure equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities (Project IDEAL, 2013).

In 1971, the *PARC* filed a lawsuit against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, contesting a state law allowing public schools to deny services to students who had not attained a “mental age of five years by the start of first grade” (Public Interest Law Center, 2016). The case, which was the first right-to-education suit in the country, was settled before the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, with the state agreeing to provide a free public education for children with mental retardation, (Public Interest Law Center, 2016).

The *PARC* ruling “laid the foundation for the establishment of the right to an education for all children with disabilities [and] also established the standard that each child must be offered an individualized education and that children should be placed in the least restrictive environment possible,” (Public Interest Law Center, 2016). The requirements for individualization and placement within the least restrictive environment are foundational to special education services and remain an important part of providing special education services.

A subsequent case, *Mills v. Board of Education*, reached the Supreme Court under the same principles on which *PARC* was brought, finally establishing the fundamental Constitutional right to education of all children with disabilities (Public Interest Law Center, 2016). The *Mills* case, also filed in 1972, expanded on the *PARC* findings as it represented children who had been “denied placement in a public educational program for substantial periods of time because of alleged mental, behavioral, physical or emotional disabilities,” (Disability Justice, 2016). *Mills* is particularly important in that it is the case which “established the standard of appropriateness - that is, that each child be offered an education appropriate to his or her learning capacities - and established a clear preference for the least restrictive placement for each child,” (Martin, Martin,

& Terman, 1996).

Twenty-seven federal court cases were filed following the *P.A.R.C.* and *Mills* decisions, leading to the pressure of federal laws guaranteeing a public education for all children, which culminated in P.L. 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (Disability Justice, 2016). P.L. 94-142 “was a response to congressional concern for [the] more than 1 million children with disabilities who had been excluded entirely from the education system . . . [and the] children with disabilities who had had only limited access to the education system and were therefore denied an appropriate education,” (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2010). The four purposes of P.L. 94-124 include access to a free and appropriate public education with special education and related services for all children with disabilities, protecting the rights of children with disabilities and their parents, assisting states in the provision of these services, and assessing the effectiveness of special education efforts (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2010).

To be eligible for special education under P.L. 94-142, children had to be defined “as being mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, orthopedically impaired or as having specific learning disabilities,” (Triano, 2000). These disability categories have undergone minor changes in the 1990 and 1997 reauthorizations of the law, and the current categories of disability under IDEA are Autism, Deaf-Blindness, Deafness, Intellectual Disabilities, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairment, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Visual Impairment (Triano, 2000).

The EAHCA is responsible for the Individualized Education Program (IEP), which must

be developed for each student in special education, and updated on a yearly basis. The IEP Individualized Education Program (IEP) was the centerpiece of that act, and it contains the goals and objectives of the student's program as well as placement, the length of the school year, and evaluation and measurement criteria, all of which is developed by an IEP team as part of the IEP process (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998).

Now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), P.L.94-142 “codified the right to a free, appropriate public education for all students, including those with severe disabilities,” (Disability Justice, 2016). At this point, with the introduction of the IEP process and the specified, mandated right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), special educators can begin to see practices and requirements that are part of the current system. In other words, the passage of P.L. 94-142/the EAHCA did more than lay ground work for special education services, it established protocols that are still in place.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.** In 1990 P.L. 94-142 was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). Other amendments made in 1990 changed the language of the law to emphasize the person first, including replacing the terms “handicapped student” and “handicapped” with “child/student/individual with a disability,” identified students with autism and traumatic brain injury as a separate and distinct class entitled to the law's benefits, and required that a plan for transition be included on every student's IEP by the age of 16 years (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). A specific definition for transition, as well as a more detailed explanation of what this requirement means will be provided later in this chapter. With regard to the disability categories, this amendment also created a separate category for "autism,"



independent of "seriously emotionally disturbed," and a new category of "traumatic brain injury" was added (Triano, 2000).

There are four parts to IDEA, Parts A through D. Part A is the section in which Congress justifies the need for the law (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001). Part B applies to students ages 3 through 21 years and “sets forth funding mechanisms by which states obtain federal money, principles under which students with disabilities must be educated, and procedural safeguards to ensure that parents have an opportunity to be meaningfully involved in their children’s educational programming,” (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001). This section of the law exerts the most influence over public school special education service provision. Part C pertains to infants and toddlers, and Part D created a variety of national activities to improve the education of children with disabilities, including research, training, and technical assistance (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001).

In 1997, Congress acknowledged that IDEA had been “extremely successful in improving students' access to public schools, and the critical issue in 1997 was to improve the performance and educational achievement of students with disabilities in both the special and general education curriculum,” (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). As a result, Congress mandated the inclusion of students with disabilities in state- and district-wide assessments (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Other changes were made including adding to the IEP a statement of measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives. This requirement allowed parents and educators to accurately determine a student's progress (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998).

Congress also attempted to alleviate what was believed to be the overly adversarial nature of special education by encouraging parents and educators to resolve differences by using non-adversarial methods and required states to offer mediation as a voluntary option to parents and

educators as an initial process for dispute resolution (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). A very significant addition of the 1997 amendments affected the discipline of students with disabilities, specifically addressing making decisions about disciplining students with and without disabilities who violated the same school rules (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). To address these concerns and to deal with behavioral problems in a proactive manner, the 1997 amendments required that if a student with disabilities has behavior problems, the IEP team shall consider strategies, to address these problems, and that behavior management plan, should be included in the student's IEP (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998).

In sum, IDEA requires all public schools accepting federal funds to provide equal access to education to children with physical and mental disabilities. It also requires that each child have an “individualized education program” (IEP) that is implemented in the “least restrictive environment” possible. However, the meaning of “appropriate” education is an ongoing source of controversy and litigation (Disability Justice, 2016).

### **Current Special Education Legislation**

In 2004 IDEA was reauthorized and aligned with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Turnbull, 2005), which resulted in several changes to the law. For example, as of 2004, IDEA provides that students will participate, with accommodations and sometimes by alternate assessments, in the NCLB assessments (Turnbull, 2005). In further alignment with NCLB and its requirement for highly qualified teachers, IDEA also requires special education staff to be highly qualified and to use scientifically based instruction (Turnbull, 2005).

While a reauthorization of IDEA has not been announced or scheduled, the law is undergoing changes periodically. Regulations clarifying language or addressing service provision are made every few years. For example, in December 2016 the United States

Department of Education published regulations to improve equity and “address widespread disparities in the treatment of students of color with disabilities,” (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2016).

Thanks to updates in October 2006 and December 2008, IDEA’s newest iteration specifically addresses secondary transition (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). While this topic has been addressed in greater detail in chapter one, the term transition services refers to a coordinated set of activities, based on the results of an appropriate assessment, for a child with a disability that is focused on facilitating a student’s movement from school to post-school activities (Q and A: Questions and Answers on Secondary Transition, 2011). These activities include postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation (Q and A: Questions and Answers on Secondary Transition, 2011). Transition services are also based on individual needs and can include instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (Q and A: Questions and Answers on Secondary Transition, 2011). This study focuses specifically on postsecondary education for students who have not graduated high school with a diploma, which can be provided by the public school system or a two or four year college/university (Thoma, 2013).

With regard to the IEP process, it is required that the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, must include appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills, and the transition services (including courses of study)

needed to assist the child in reaching those goals (Q and A: Questions and Answers on Secondary Transition, 2011). As a result of this legislation, writing IEPs for students takes on a new dimension and a new importance once students reach the age of 16. As IEP goals play a large part in classroom instruction, that instruction must now include a transition-specific component.

Johnson, Taga, and Hughes (2018) noted that the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has established twenty monitoring indicators to support indicator consistency across the states.

“Of the twenty indicators, indicators 1, 2, 13, and 14 relate to transition. Indicator 1, graduation rates, requires states to report “the percent of youth with IEPs graduating from high school with a regular diploma.” Indicator 2, dropout rates, requires “the percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school.” Indicator 13 requires evidence of student involvement in the IEP development process and appropriateness of goals to meet the student's transition needs. Finally, Indicator 14, post-school outcomes, requires data pertaining to postsecondary education and employment outcomes.”

Of the indicators listed, Indicator 13 has the most bearing on this study, as it applies directly to students' transition needs.

In 2008, the Higher Education Act of 1965 was amended and reauthorized as the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), and contained several provisions aimed at increasing access to higher education for youth and adults with intellectual disability (Grigal, Hart, Smith, & Domin, 2018). One of the provisions of the reauthorized act was the appropriation of funds by Congress to create a model demonstration program aimed at developing inclusive higher education options for people with intellectual disabilities (Grigal, Hart, Smith, & Domin, 2018).

As a result, postsecondary programs were created at institutions of higher education, allowing students with intellectual disabilities to attend university programs. As Love, Baker, & Devine put it, the HEOA “has provided students with intellectual disabilities a pathway to college,” (2019, p. 122).

### **Special Education Service Provision**

During the 2017-2018 school year 774, 665 students from newborn through twenty-two years of age received special education services in California (California Department of Education, 2018). The Council for Exceptional Children’s Policy Manual states that the “particular function of special education is to . . . identify children with unusual needs and to aid in the effective fulfillment of those needs,” (Council for Exceptional Children, 1997). The Manual goes on to state that a primary goal of educators should be to help build learning opportunities in regular education programs, which is in keeping with IDEA’s emphasis on general education placement (Council for Exceptional Children, 1997).

The special education process consists of three stages, the first being determining eligibility (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006). The process of determining eligibility varies by county and district but, with regard to qualifying under the category of Intellectual Disability, this process always includes knowing the extent to which a student does not perform like his or her same-age peers (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006). Once a student has been deemed eligible for special education services, the second stage, service delivery, begins. This stage includes parent consent and the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006). The final stage in the process is evaluation, which is part of the IEP process. Special education students are evaluated yearly, and a formal evaluation is completed every three

years as part of a reevaluation to determine if a student is still eligible to receive special education services (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006).

Special education services are provided in a variety of settings that “allow infants and their families, preschoolers, students, and young adults to be educated with their peers as much as possible,” and include day-care, preschool, regular classrooms, resource classrooms, separate classrooms with an emphasis on specially designed instruction, the community, and work environments (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006; Special Education-*CalEdFacts*, 2016). The setting and type of service a special education student receives depends both on the qualifying condition and the individual needs and abilities of the student, as determined by the IEP team. Service delivery also depends on the school district and county in which students are being educated.

There are three basic, broad types of special education services, the first of which is direct services. Direct services are provided by working directly with students to “correct or compensate for the conditions that have caused them to fall behind,” (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006). Separate classrooms for students with disabilities fall into this category. Many districts designate special education classes by the level of disability of the students being served. For example, there may be classes for students with mild to moderate disabilities, and classes for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The actual structure of the program and the classes available vary by school district and county, but the designation of mild/moderate and moderate/severe mirrors the special education credentials offered by the state of California.

A second type of service is indirect services, which are provided by special services personnel and usually occur over a period of time (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006). Indirect services are usually provided to small groups of students, or one-on-one and indirect service

providers work with special and general education teachers to address specific student needs. The United Federation of Teachers (n.d.) defined indirect services as being “collaborative consultation between the special education teacher and the general education teacher which focuses on adjusting the learning environment and/or modifying and adapting instructional techniques and methods to meet the individual needs of the students.” Algozzine and Ysseldyke (2006) provide examples of indirect services as helping to identify the best method for teaching a student with a learning disability how to read, or repositioning a student with a physical disability.

The final type of services, related services, is both direct and indirect; related services are direct when provided to the student, and indirect when they are in the form of support to the classroom teacher (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006). Trained personnel provide these services, and service providers include school psychologists, school social workers, special education teachers, occupational therapists, and speech/language pathologists (Algozzine & Ysseldyk, 2006).

## **Transitions**

In a 1983 paper for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, Will defined transition as “as period that includes high school, the point of graduation, additional post-secondary education or adult services, and the initial years in employment.” She goes on to state that transition from school to working life is “an outcome-oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment,” (Will, p. 2, 1983).

Per Will, the OSERS view of transition is that “a conceptual framework that describes transition opportunities is needed if public efforts to help individuals with disabilities move from school to working life are to be well planned, coordinated across agencies, and evaluated

responsibly,” (1983). Will also states that transition services can be grouped into three categories: transition without special services, transition with time-limited services, and transition with ongoing services, and that all of these service options have the same foundation: instruction in high school. Will goes into detail about the importance of transition-focused high school instruction, and what that looks like, but there is no mention of special education services provided between high school and aging out of services.

While Will’s definition is still widely used, Johnson, Taga, and Hughes (2018), note that when defining the term “transitions,” it is important to understand

that the term has undergone evolution since it was initially identified as a research topic. . . . The current understanding is that the concept of transitions is the process of passage between life stages—for example, between secondary and postsecondary life or between formal education and the workplace. This current understanding also encompasses self-determination and autonomy for learners, as well as the potential and systems of support for success before, during, and after the passage from one stage to another (p. 9).

They go on to state that transitions services have changed within the past decade, specifically noting the emphasis on self-determination, and, more recently, “a movement toward learner-directed transition opportunities that are more like the transitions opportunities available for more mainstreamed students,” (Johnson, Taga, & Hughes, p. 15, 2018).

Rowe et. al. (2015) defined a transition program as one that is defined as “preparing students to move from secondary settings (e.g., middle school/high school) to adult-life, utilizing comprehensive transition planning and education that creates individualized opportunities, services, and supports to help students achieve their post-school goals in education/training, employment, and independent living” (p. 123). Using Rowe’s definition, transition programs prepare students for leaving the public school system, and there is no specific mention of the program being provided as part of public school education after completing high school, or if the program is part of an institution for higher education.



## Community-based Transition Programs

Community-Based Transition (CBT) programs are special education classrooms for public school special education students with moderate to severe Intellectual Disabilities who are 18-21 years old. This population has completed high school but continues to receive special education services under IDEA because they have not met the criteria for graduation with a diploma. Rowe et al. (2015) have developed the following comprehensive list of the essential characteristics of a transition training program:

(a) highly qualified staff (including administrators) with defined roles and responsibilities in monitoring and guiding students to reach post-school goals; (b) integrated instruction in all areas of independent living (e.g., community living, transportation, recreation, leisure, self-advocacy); (c) individualized transition-focused curriculum, instruction, and services related to student's post-school goals in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living; (d) instruction and training in natural environments (e.g., community, job site placements) supported by classroom instruction; (e) opportunities to engage and interact with their peers without disabilities in the school and community; (f) interagency collaboration with clearly defined roles and responsibilities to provide coordinated transition services at multiple levels (i.e., student, school, districts, region, state) to assist students in meeting their postsecondary goals; (g) multiple assessments and progress monitoring of students achievement in academics, daily living, personal and social, and occupational skills; (h) training and resources for families to encourage their involvement in transition planning and to connect them with adult agencies, support, and information networks; and (j) program evaluations to assess effectiveness of students' transition programs.

**Program types.** The public school services mandated by IDEA can be provided by the public school system in the form of community-based transition programs (CBT), or postsecondary education (PSE) programs located on a two- or four-year college/university campus (Thoma, 2013). CBT programs are off-campus classrooms providing public school services in the community (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). PSE programs, however, are much more varied and Grigal, Hart, & Weir (2012) provide very specific descriptions of the varied forms transition services for public school students ages 18-21 can take: for example, *mixed model* programs allow students to participate in social activities and/or academic classes with

students without ID, while also participating in classes with other students with disabilities. A second model, the *substantially separate model* is a program in which students with ID receive services in a postsecondary setting (i.e. a college or university), but only take classes with other students with disabilities (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). The *inclusive individual support model* is a program in which students receive individualized services so they can access college courses, for audit or credit (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012).

The Higher Education Opportunity Act led to a more specific type of program when it authorized the establishment of a national coordinating center for the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSID) to support coordination, training, and evaluation (Grigal, Hart, Smith, & Domin, 2018). The National Coordinating Center was awarded to Think College, at the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston (Grigal, Hart, Smith, & Domin, 2018). A model demonstration program was first implemented in 2010 through five-year grants awarded to 27 institutes of higher education, and more cohorts followed; in 2015, a second cohort of 25 institutes of higher education were awarded grants and in 2017 another 25 programs were given grants to develop or enhance TPSID programs (Grigal, Hart, Smith, & Domin, 2018).

While PSE programs are represented in the literature (Grigal, Hart & Weir, 2012; Thoma, 2013, Grigal, Hart, Smith, & Domin, 2018), particularly via Think College, there is much less information available on CBT programs. This may be because PSE programs are, by definition, located on a college or university campus, which makes them more distinctive than public school programs and easier to locate. Think College offers information on college options for people with intellectual disabilities, including a searchable database of more than two hundred PSE programs in the United States (Think College, 2017). Thus, finding a PSE program in a given

state is a simpler process than finding a CBT program run by a school district or county office of education. CBT programs are essentially in whatever form the local education agency chooses to provide services, and they are harder to find in the literature.

**Comprehensive postsecondary and transition programs.** Grigal and Papay (2018), have noted that the Higher Education Opportunity Act was reauthorized in 2008, and included provisions that increased access to higher education for students with intellectual disabilities. Specifically, that the HEOA removed barriers by “defining that a financially eligible student with ID can access federal financial aid if they enroll in an approved Comprehensive Postsecondary and Transition (CTP) Program,” Grigal & Papay, 2018). They go on to define a CTP program is one that supports students with ID in academic, career and technical, and independent living instruction at [an institution of higher education] in order to prepare for competitive employment,” (Grigal & Papay, 2018). This movement towards instruction as a college or university campus has grown quickly, and Grigal and Papay report that as of February 2018, there are seventy-three approved CTPs. However, there are still many school districts and county offices of education providing special education at the public school level, and those programs are largely not addressed in the literature.

### **Instruction in Transitions Classrooms**

What does instruction in transitions classrooms look like? Specifically, what is the content and how is the content determined? In most classrooms, lesson content is based on state standards, with some leeway given to teachers in terms of choosing the order of instruction and activities. In addition, in special education classes for students with moderate to severe intellectual disability, lesson content is also determined by IEP goals, which are individualized and expected to be different for every student. There is information available on instructional

methods and strategies for K-12 special education classes for students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities (Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, & Sievers, 2011; Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, Sievers, 2012; Browder & Spooner, 2006; Courtade, Spooner, Browder, & Jimenez, 2012), but very little on classes for transition age students between the ages of 18 and 21, if they have not graduated with a diploma. Much of the discussion about instruction focuses on the type of curricula used. For example, the Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, and Seivers 2011 study reviews evidence-based practices for standard (or academic) and functional curricula, and was responded to in the 2012 article from Courtade, Spooner, Browder, and Jimenez 2012. In 2012, Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, and Seivers published another response and all of these writings dealt exclusively with teaching functional versus standard curricula.

IDEA allows for students with moderate to severe disabilities to receive public school services until the age of twenty-two, as well as transitions services, which are intended to be based on the student's needs and to develop post-school objectives, such as employment and independent living. With regard to students with severe intellectual disabilities and transitions, the literature focuses heavily on the importance of individualization and independence (Kamens, Dolyniuk, & Dinardo, 2003; Bouck, 2012; Park, 2008; Mazzotti, Test, & Mustian, 2014). The Kamens, Dolyniuk, and Dinardo 2003 study looked specifically at a transition program developed on campus at a university. Bouck found that there is limited evidence regarding secondary curriculum for students with disabilities particularly with regard to research comparing curricular options and research linking curriculum to outcomes (2012). Park's study examined data from teachers who provided transition services, and identified themes related to service provision. Essentially, while there is a body of research on what to teach, there is not as much information on the actual instruction or materials. The 2014 article from Mazzotti, Test,

and Mustian looked at evidence-based practices for transitions students and postschool success predictors.

There is even less information on how special educators make instructional decisions. Stough and Palmer (2003) contributed to this topic with their study, which found that “instructional decision making by . . . teachers relied heavily upon their prior knowledge about educational practice and upon their background knowledge of student characteristics,” (p. 211). However, according to Rupp, Gaffney, and Dymond (2015), “despite the potential consequences of special education teachers’ decisions, not much is known about how teachers of students with severe disabilities make curricular decisions,” (p. 209). Rupp, Gaffney, and Dymond (2015), specifically explored instructional decisions regarding literacy, and used multiple case study and grounded theory methodologies to identify four key influences “that form the basis for a preliminary theoretical framework of teacher decision making about literacy for students with severe disabilities,” (p. 209).

**Evidence-based practices.** Cook and Cook (2011) note that educational interventions that have been shown to be effective are not implemented commonly in special education classrooms, while practices that have shown little effect are applied frequently (2011, p. 2). They go on to state that when educators use personal experience, tradition, and expert opinion to determine what works in the classroom, they are prone to errors, “determining that ineffective practices are effective and that effective practices are ineffective,” (2011, p. 2). As a result, great importance has been placed on identifying evidence-based research practices (EBP) in education. In 2005, Horner et al., determined that single-subject research can document a practice as evidence based when the following factors occur: the practice is operationally defined, the context in which the practice is to be used is defined, the practice is implemented with fidelity,

the results from single- subject research document the practice to be functionally related to change in dependent measures, and the experimental effects are replicated across a sufficient number of studies, researchers, and participants to allow confidence in the findings (p. 175).

Moving forward from Horner et al.'s work, Cook and Cook have defined evidence-based practices as instructional techniques “that meet prescribed criteria related to the research design, quality, quantity, and effect size of supporting research, which have the potential to help bridge the research-to-practice gap and improve student outcomes,” (2011, p. 11). They elaborate that this definition was developed:

To guard against the likelihood that some research-based practices are actually ineffective, EBPs were introduced to identify practices shown to be effective not just by any research but by a number of high-quality studies that utilize research designs establishing causality and that demonstrate meaningful effects on student outcomes (2011, p. 9).

A number of studies have been conducted in order to identify and develop evidence-based practices in transitions. Kohler's Transition Taxonomy was included within a chapter in *Taxonomy for Transition Programming: Linking and Research* and served as the first link between research findings and practice in the transition of students with disabilities (1996).

Kohler stated that

An effective linkage of research and practice would identify proven practices and communicate this information in a format that facilitates use by administrators and service providers. This monograph represents a major effort toward establishing the much-needed link between research and practice by presenting a taxonomy for transition programming that provides a "user-friendly" framework for designing educational programs that reflect a transition perspective for students with disabilities, (1996, p. iii).

Kohler's study resulted in a taxonomy that provides a framework for “designing educational programs that reflect a transition perspective for students with disabilities,” (1996, p i). (See Table 1)

Table 1  
*Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition Planning*

Component	Features
Student-Focused Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IEP Development</li> <li>• Student Participation</li> <li>• Planning Strategies</li> </ul>
Student Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life Skills Instruction</li> <li>• Career &amp; Vocational Curricula</li> <li>• Structured Work Experience</li> <li>• Assessment</li> <li>• Support Services</li> </ul>
Interagency Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative Framework</li> <li>• Collaborative Service Delivery</li> </ul>
Program Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Philosophy</li> <li>• Program Policy</li> <li>• Strategic Planning</li> <li>• Program Evaluation</li> <li>• Resource Allocation</li> <li>• Human Resource Development</li> </ul>
Family Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Training</li> <li>• Family Involvement</li> <li>• Family Empowerment</li> </ul>

To further contribute to Kohler's Taxonomy, Test, Bartholomew, and Bethune (2015), identified seventeen evidence-based predictors of post-school success for individuals with disabilities: 1) career awareness, 2) community experiences, 3) high school diploma status, 4) inclusion in general education, 5) independent living, 6) interagency collaboration, 7) occupational courses, 8) paid employment/work experience, 9) parent expectations, 10) parental involvement, 11) program of study, 12) self-determination, 13) social skills, 14) student support, 15) transition program, 16) vocational education, and 17) work study. In 2016, Mazzotti et al. identified four additional predictors including 1) parent expectations, 2) youth autonomy and decision-making, 3) travel skills, and 4) goal setting.

Given the list of predictors, Rowe et al. (2015) set out to operationally define "the predictors of post-school success for educators to understand what is necessary to develop,

implement, and evaluate secondary transition programs based on predictor research,” (p. 113). While they acknowledged the use of many research-based activities, Rowe et al. notes that “many teachers continue to provide services shown to have little to no effect on outcomes of students with disabilities,” (2015, p. 113). The study resulted in developing an operational definition and essential program characteristics for each predictor of post-school success: career awareness, occupational courses, paid employment/work experience, vocational education, work study, community experiences, exit exam/high school diploma status, inclusion of general education, program of study, self-determination/self-advocacy, self care/independent living skills, social skills, interagency collaboration, parental involvement, student support, and transition program (Rowe et al., 2015, p. 113). Test et al.’s study built upon Kohler’s Transition Taxonomy, and Rowe et al.’s work provided a synthesis between research and practice, providing practitioners with a research-based foundation of skills to work on.

In recent years, information about evidence-based practices has become easier to find and utilize. The Council for Exceptional Children’s (CEC) Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT), using Rowe et al.’s list of characteristics, developed a number of Fast Fact sheets that provide teachers and administrators with lists of evidence-based practices for areas such as community experiences, exit exam/high school diploma status, interagency collaboration, program of study, and so on. In addition to materials provided by the DCDT, the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT), a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, has also developed an Effective Practices and Predictors Matrix, along with Practice Descriptions and Lesson Plan Starters (2019).

Availability to this information is questionable, as Mazzotti et al. found that “transition service providers had limited training, access, and preparation related to secondary transition



[evidence-based practices].” Mazzotti’s finding is concerning given that there is legislation, such as IDEA, requiring educators to use research-based interventions (Test, 2015).

**Standards.** The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which have been adopted by all but the following states, Alaska, Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016), were written to be adaptable to students with disabilities and to serve as the foundation for a new, national alternate assessment for students with moderate to severe disabilities (Saunders, Spooner, Browder, Wakeman, & Lee, 2013). Those states that chose not to adopt the CCSS had the option to develop their own alternate standards for education students with disabilities (Saunders, Spooner, Browder, Wakeman, & Lee, 2013). However, both the CCSS (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016) and state standards for Alaska (Alaska English/Language Arts and Mathematics Standards, 2012), Indiana (Indiana Department of Education, 2014a, 2014b), Minnesota (Minnesota Department of Education, 2016), Nebraska (Nebraska Department of Education, 2014; Nebraska Department of Education, 2015), Oklahoma (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2016a, 2016b), South Carolina (South Carolina Department of Education, 2016a, 2016b), Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2015a, 2015b), and Virginia (Virginia Department of Education, 2016a, 2016b), are written for grades K-12 only.

Thus, after twelfth grade, state standards are not available to guide instruction or the development of instructional materials. While there are a number of transition-specific programs available, there is not a list of state recommended publishers or adopted curricula, meaning that districts and programs must do their own research to determine what will best fit their needs.

**Curriculum development.** Dymond and Orelove’s (2001) evaluation of effective curricula for students with severe disabilities, while over ten years old, provides an

understanding of the challenges involved in developing curricula for this population. They begin by positioning their evaluation within the guidelines and boundaries of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and then use the following questions to guide a discussion and review of curriculum development: to what degree does the literature define strategies for implementing the instructional framework set forth in IDEA, what challenges exist for implementing the instructional elements of IDEA, and what future questions must be addressed to extend our understanding of effective education for students with severe disabilities? (Dymond & Orelove, 2001). While this evaluation and review of the curricula for students with severe disabilities does not specifically address students over the age of 18, it is important to understand the challenges present in instructional development for this population.

Choosing curricula for a transitions class is a decision that can be informed by the results of Shurr and Bouck's (2013) review of literature written about instruction for students with severe intellectual disabilities. The authors concluded that in the last fifteen years the majority of articles published have a primary focus on functional skills (2008). With regard to instruction, special education literature is primarily focused on the discussion of functional versus academic content, with several studies examining the benefits of one type of instruction over another (Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, & Sievers, 2011; Bouck 2012; Courtade, Spooner, Browder, and Jimenez 2012).

With regard to functional instruction, Bouck has authored or co-authored several studies that use an analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) to look more closely at students who received functional instruction in high school, including a study to explore a possible relationship between secondary students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and receipt of functional instruction (Bouck and Joshi, 2015), a study on enacting

functional instruction in self-contained high school special education classrooms and the factors impacting such an enactment (Bouck, 2008), researching which students receive functional instruction (Bouck, 2013), and an examination of possible connections between instruction and outcomes for students with moderate/severe intellectual disabilities (Bouck, 2012). These studies, which contributed to the literature on instruction for students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities is focused exclusively on students in secondary grades. While Bouck's findings demonstrate the importance of life skills instruction for students with disabilities, the types of instruction students in CBT programs are receiving remains largely undocumented.

Informative texts, such as Browder and Spooner's *Teaching Language Arts, Math & Science to Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities*, Test's *Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies for Transition*, and Wehman and Kregel's *Functional Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Students with Special Needs*, provide domains of instruction, as well as sample IEP goals, but these are academic texts and while they can aid practitioners in making instructional decisions, they cannot serve as instructional materials.

What is known about instructional development for students with moderate/severe intellectual disabilities is fairly broad, looking at K-12 classrooms, with some emphasis on secondary students. Bouck, in particular, has looked at connections between secondary students and post-school outcomes, but there is little attention on instructional development for students beyond twelfth grade. It should be noted that while there are numerous transition-specific resources available on transitioning students with disabilities (of all kinds) between grade levels and into post-school environments, there is less information on what types of instruction and programs are used in CBT programs.

### **Teacher Decision-Making**

Once the instructional materials have been chosen, how do transitions teachers choose what to teach their students? Many curricular programs include various lesson modules and activities. Taking those options into consideration and factoring in student interest and ability level, how do teachers choose their lessons?

Instruction in transitions classrooms can be driven by IEP goals, as there are no state standards or assessments to influence instruction. As a result, understanding the components of a IEP, particularly those related to transition, and being able to write IEPs that meet IDEA guidelines is an important part of instruction. Flannery and Hellemn's (2015) qualitative study of high school transition IEPs examined special education teachers' understandings of IEPs and transition, and found that professional development focused on IEP components and alignment changed teacher practices and perceptions. Not all IEPs require the inclusion of transition services, only those for students aged 16 and older. As a result, instruction for these students must change as IEPs align with transition requirements. It is this alignment that the researchers examined via a qualitative study using professional development. Flannery and Hellemn found that "prior to the [professional development], teachers lacked clarity about the transition requirements and had not given much thought to the idea of alignment," but afterward, "the teachers were able to better define these relationships; spontaneously discussed connections as part of their definition and description of each component; and shared strong beliefs about the importance of the alignment of IEP components," (p. 74). As IEPs essentially guide instruction for students in transitions classes, it is important to know how well teachers understand the transition components of an IEP.

Aside from an IEP, any adopted curricula will also impact instruction, and will factor into how teachers make instructional decisions. Bouck's (2008) study of functional instruction

enactment examined two rural transitions programs and the enacted functional curricula, which is defined, citing Nolet and McLaughlin, as reflecting the decisions a teacher makes during implementation. Bouck found enacted curriculum was affected by the following seven factors: policy/legislation, community, school, teachers, paraprofessionals, students, and curriculum materials. In examining the teacher factor Bouck found that the “intricacies of the teacher factor are worth discussing,” (p. 301). These intricacies include personal history, pre-service preparation, beliefs, philosophies, and expectations of students, all of which impact the enacted curriculum. Thus, the intended, or written, curriculum a teacher receives is directly impacted by personal factors.

Ruppar, Gaffney, and Dymond’s (2015) study of literacy decisions made with regard to literacy instruction for secondary students with severe disabilities examined influences on teachers’ decision-making. They concluded that the following concepts contribute to how such decisions are made: contexts, beliefs about students, teaching, and learning, expectations, and self-efficacy (p. 209). While the purpose of this study was to develop a framework for teacher decision-making regarding literacy instruction for students with severe disabilities, it provides insight into how teachers of students with severe disabilities make instructional decisions is relevant. The four concepts identified by Ruppar, Gaffney, and Dymond could potentially be applied to other areas of instructional decision-making, including transitions classrooms and writing IEP goals.

**Transition-specific teacher preparation and competencies.** Instructional decision-making can be influenced by a teacher’s skill set, and given the connection between transition skills and post-school outcomes, it is important for transition teachers to feel comfortable with transition requirements and expectations. However, multiple studies have found that transitions

teachers feel unprepared to teach transition skills, and unclear as to their responsibilities.

Findings that impact teacher preparation programs can also be used to inform teacher practice in the CBT classroom. It is important to take the current knowledge and ensure that pre-service teachers are aware of the transition requirements and expectations.

Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2009) developed the *Secondary Teachers Transition Survey* to “explore the relationships between levels of preparation to plan and deliver transition services, satisfaction with preservice transition training, and frequency with which secondary special education teachers perform transition activities,” (p. 7). They surveyed secondary special educators and found that teachers reported feeling unprepared in transitions, somewhat unsatisfied with transitions training, and occasionally engaged in transitions activities. Overall, the results found that “special education teachers felt somewhat prepared to plan and deliver transition services to their students with disabilities . . . somewhat unsatisfied to somewhat satisfied with transition training, [and] the overall frequency with which teachers planned and delivered transition services fell between rarely and occasionally,” (p. 12-13). These findings are less than encouraging and are in line with other calls to increase and improve transition-specific personnel preparation.

Park (2008) examined the perspectives of special educators with regard to transition service delivery for students with disabilities and identified barriers to effective transition, asserting that the barriers were areas that needed to be addressed by transition service providers. The study of Canadian high school special education teachers looked at teacher practices with regard to transition service delivery in order to identify what service provision looked like within the classroom. Park identified the following common themes from interviews: roles of the school and teacher, students and family involvement, functional and comprehensive instruction,

inclusive placements and experiences, and inter-personnel and interagency collaboration in the transition process (p. 101). With regard to teachers and instruction, the participants “defined their role as a manager or coordinator,” and reported that their job duties went beyond that of a classroom teacher (p. 101). They also reported that instruction varied from academic to functional (it ranged from teacher to teacher), and that vocational development was the area most focused on by the participants (p. 101). Park found that, according to the participants, most of their students remained in high school until the age of 21, possibly because eligibility for a government-sponsored adult program did not begin until that age and because of a lack of programming for students ages 18-21 (p. 101).

Mariano-Lapidus (2013) examined the perceptions of new teachers towards their students with disabilities and concluded that all of the teachers held negative perceptions of the abilities of their students with disabilities. The six teachers involved in the study were in their first year of teaching and also students in a certification program. Using reflective narratives, the teachers recorded their answers to scaffolded questions (p. 261). Analyzing the findings, the author found that four themes emerged: the belief that the student was responsible for learning, negative statements regarding student personalities and academic performance, teacher and classroom staff as part of the learning problem and solution, and deficit student ability (p. 270).

The fact that first year special education teachers perceived their students in a negative way or saw deficits regarding ability is disheartening, as these attitudes can impact instructional decisions. However, the author notes that early in the semester, “the novice teachers in this investigation made statements indicating frustration and an inability to address the learning needs of their students . . . but at the end of the semester made statements indicating a shift in the focus of responsibility for learning to occur,” (p. 271). Mariano-Lapidus asserts that this

suggests that courses providing strategies for analyzing and implementing research based teaching strategies are “effective in creating the perception of control in these novice teachers,” (p. 271). Mariano-Lapidus did not include the grade levels the teachers taught, or the disability category of their students, and this lack of information, is a limitation to the study.

Blalock et al.’s (2003) position statement from the DCDT was written in order to explain the need for changes to personnel preparation. The authors analyzed research findings and practices related to transition and personnel preparation and concluded that a change is needed in preparing general and special education staff to implement transition services. This change is presented in four pieces: a broader context for personnel preparation, core content in personnel preparation, recommendations for programs, and implications for policy, practice, and research (p. 207). Although instruction is not specifically mentioned in the call for changes to teacher preparation, a better understanding of transition as a service can impact classroom instruction.

Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, Hoffmann, and Kupferman (2014) identified essential transition teacher competencies in order to guide and develop instruction for a graduate program/coursework in personnel preparation, as well as to identify targeted teacher skills for a graduate level program. (See Table 2) Beginning with a synthesis of the literature, the researchers identified 67 competencies in six domains (assessment and evaluation, transition planning, instructional planning, curriculum and instruction, communication and collaboration, and family involvement) needed by transition teachers and then surveyed transition experts and practitioners and asked participants to rate the importance of the competencies (p. 149). Responses were then analyzed for levels of agreement. The four items with the greatest levels of discrepancy in agreement were: ranking “implementing evidence-based transition practices” as essential (experts: 88%, practitioners: 51%), ranking “teaching daily living skills” as essential



(experts: 46%, practitioners: 73%), ranking “selecting assessments with consideration for cultural and linguistic diversity and family values” as essential (experts: 67%, practitioners: 43%), and ranking “ensuring transition processes and outcomes are consistent with families’ cultures, beliefs, practices, and values” as essential (experts: 80%, practitioners: 51%) (p. 156).

Table 2

*Transition Teacher Competencies*

Assessment and Evaluation Transition Planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assessing young adults’ interests/preferences related to postsecondary goals and educational and vocational experiences</li> <li>2. Using a variety of formal and informal postsecondary, career, vocational, and transition assessment methods to identify transition needs</li> <li>3. Applying results of student assessments to transition plans</li> <li>4. Interpreting results of transition assessments for students, families, and other professionals</li> <li>5. Matching/aligning strengths, preferences, and interests to skills and/ or demands required by postsecondary, employment, residential, and other community-based settings</li> <li>6. Using student data to evaluate effectiveness of transition teaching</li> <li>7. Selecting assessments with consideration for cultural and linguistic diversity and family values</li> <li>8. Assessing young adults’ work-related skills in the actual training environment or workplace</li> <li>9. Observing/assessing postsecondary, vocational or employment settings for potential placement opportunities</li> <li>10. Assessing natural support systems (i.e., available in existing environment) in a variety of settings</li> <li>11. Implementing strategies for shared use of student assessment data across different agencies</li> <li>12. Coordinating/facilitating assistive technology needs assessments</li> <li>1. Developing transition goals and objectives based on the young adult’s interests and preferences</li> <li>2. Developing transition-related goals and objectives that focus on postsecondary education or training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, independent living, and/or community participation</li> <li>3. Developing the young adult’s skills to participate to the level of their ability in the development of their IEP</li> <li>4. Including appropriate team members in the transition planning process</li> <li>5. Including transition services and courses of study in the IEP that will reasonably enable the young adult to meet his or her postsecondary goals</li> <li>6. Aligning postsecondary goals with instructional activities</li> <li>7. Identifying and addressing young adults’ nonacademic personal issues that affect transition</li> </ol>
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(Table 2 Continued)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Developing transition IEP goals/objectives based on strengths and needs identified from career, vocational, and transition assessments</li> <li>9. Facilitating referrals related to school, postsecondary, and community services/agencies</li> <li>10. Providing information about school, postsecondary, and community services/agencies available to specific populations of individuals with exceptional needs</li> <li>11. Using transition planning and communication strategies to facilitate input from team members</li> <li>12. Coordinating and facilitating IEP meetings/transition planning meetings</li> <li>13. Including assistive technology in the IEP as needed</li> <li>14. Aligning IEP goals and objectives with state and local core standards</li> <li>15. Knowing about and applying Department of Labor regulations</li> </ul>
Instructional Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identifying supports needed for young adults to be successful in work experiences and training opportunities</li> <li>2. Planning/developing educational experiences that correspond with IEP postsecondary goals and objectives</li> <li>3. Selecting and/or developing appropriate job placements</li> <li>4. Facilitating appropriate accommodations/adaptations across a variety of settings</li> <li>5. Developing natural support systems that facilitate transition to postsecondary environments</li> <li>6. Selecting and/or developing appropriate community-based educational programs</li> <li>7. Knowing and applying models or philosophies of transition programs and practices</li> <li>8. Knowing how the history of national transition initiatives affects current directions</li> </ul>
Curriculum and Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teaching self-advocacy and self-determination skills</li> <li>2. Implementing evidence-based transition practices</li> <li>3. Teaching social skills</li> <li>4. Teaching appropriate job readiness skills based on developmental needs, functional limitations</li> <li>5. Coordinating instructional activities related to young adult's postsecondary goals</li> <li>6. Providing experiences to increase awareness and knowledge of careers</li> <li>7. Teaching vocational/work-related skills</li> <li>8. Teaching job retention skills identified by employers as essential for successful employment</li> <li>9. Implementing behavior management strategies in academic, community, and work environments</li> <li>10. Ensuring young adults with disabilities have the same career and vocational development opportunities as their peers without disabilities</li> </ul>

(Table 2 Continued)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Providing community-based instruction</li> <li>12. Being familiar with and evaluating transition education methods and curricula</li> <li>13. Teaching young adults how to access and use assistive technology in academic, work, and community environments if needed</li> <li>14. Teaching learning strategies and study skills</li> <li>15. Teaching daily living skills</li> <li>16. Providing experiences and teaching leisure and recreational skills</li> </ul>
Communication and Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collaborating with professionals (general educators, administrators, group home providers, employers, etc.) to improve transition outcomes</li> <li>2. Knowing and implementing procedures and requirements for referring young adults to community service agencies and other postsecondary organizations</li> <li>3. Facilitating partnerships among service providers within school and community to maximize transition outcomes</li> <li>4. Training, managing, coordinating and evaluating job coaches and school-based paraprofessionals working with young adults in vocational and community settings</li> <li>5. Providing transition-related resources, materials to students, parents, educators, service providers, and employers</li> <li>6. Monitoring participation in transition planning and implementation</li> <li>7. Specifying roles and responsibilities of each team member and/or agency</li> <li>8. Resolving differences that may arise in collaborative relationships and interagency agreements</li> <li>9. Facilitating and/or providing training on transition-related topics</li> </ul>
Family Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Including and collaborating with parents, family members in planning, decision-making, implementing transition services</li> <li>2. Providing information to families about transition services, programs, and postsecondary options for their young adult</li> <li>3. Ensuring transition processes and outcomes are consistent with families' cultures, beliefs, practices, and values</li> <li>4. Developing relationships to ensure commitment of family members or other caretakers to assist in transition</li> <li>5. Identifying family service needs related to transition outcomes</li> <li>6. Working with family systems and the dynamics of individual families and understanding how systems affect the transition process</li> <li>7. Assisting families to network with extended family, neighbors, church, employers, and so forth, to promote transition outcomes</li> </ul>

While the rankings between experts and practitioners were similar for most items, the differences found could be important, and the authors offer potential reasons for the disparities, mostly relating to practitioners' awareness of evidence-based practices and levels of preparedness (p. 158). The researchers noted that competencies may vary depending on the student population being served and suggested that "future research should more closely examine differences in competencies related to the level of disability of the student in transition," (p. 158). While the DCDT has provided standards for transition specialists, this list assembled by Morgan, et al. is the most specific information transition teachers have with regard to job duties and expectations.

Kohler and Greene (2004) examined the need for transition-specific teacher development, cited the lack of preparedness reported by transition teachers, and provided approaches for including transition-related content into teacher preparation programs, and transition-related competencies, as well as specific instructional activities and ideas. The authors begin by citing the DCDT guiding principles for transition-related personnel preparation, while arguing that a lack of teacher preparedness and familiarity with transition requirements and services can be mediated by specific changes to programs (p. 147).

Transition teachers perceive themselves to be unprepared and unsupported, and the competencies have been identified. As a result, there is groundwork for stronger professional development and potential changes to teacher education programs. We also have more reason to examine transition teachers with regard to instruction, as they may not know what to do, or how to do it, or they may feel the need for more support.

**Progressivism as a philosophical framework.** In his "Case for Progressivism in Education," Kilpatrick (1941), laid out six tenets of a progressive education:

1) the curriculum which begins with children's natural interests gradually prepares them to assume more socially responsible roles; 2) learning is most effective if it addresses students' purposes and concerns; 3) students can learn to become worthy members of society by actively participating in socially useful work; 4) the curriculum should teach students to think intelligently and independently; 5) the curriculum should be planned jointly by teachers and students; and 6) students learn best what they practice and live (231).

The kind of education Kilpatrick describes is one that situates the student within the learning and lessens some of the teacher's decision-making power. This comes from a place of understanding that children will be more motivated to learn that which interests them and connects to their purposes. Thus, the curriculum being used is not designed wholly by the teacher but includes student input while also teaching the student to "think intelligently and independently," (Kilpatrick, 1941, p. 231).

Progressive education has an emphasis on a student's place in society. While the curriculum is influenced by the student's interest, it is also influenced by teaching students to be socially useful and responsible (Kilpatrick, 1941). Instruction should ensure that students understand ways to positively contribute to society. Beyond learning for their own sake, students must learn how to be a part of society, which Kilpatrick describes as doing "socially useful work," (1941, p. 231).

### **Chapter Summary**

Investigating this topic requires looking at how teachers make instructional decisions, and how they design and implement the results of those decisions.

Exploring the instructional decisions made by teachers of transition classrooms involves looking at several areas of literature. While there is much information on the transition services provided by IDEA, instruction in special education, and postsecondary programs for students ages 18-21, there is less information on public school programs for transition-age students, and

how teachers choose what to teach these students. Many public school special education students stop receiving services at the age of eighteen, and those who continue to receive services may attend public school classrooms, but those classes are not reflected in the literature. Research on this age group and population tends to focus on either transition as a service mandated by IDEA and included in IEP documents, or students attending postsecondary programs that are a partnership between school districts and community colleges or universities. As a result, there is a specific service, public school special education for students ages 18-21, that is not represented in the literature.

Instruction for students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities is a well-researched area, with a strong emphasis on the split between academic versus functional instruction. Research on instructional decision-making for teachers of students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities of any grade level is a relatively unexplored area, indicating that how teachers of this student group choose what to teach is unknown.

Despite the lack of research on the specific topic, public school special education students are currently receiving services past the age of eighteen. Defining these services and understanding what they look like, can inform practitioners and administrators and ultimately lead to better quality of service for students.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Some public school students who receive special education services are eligible to receive services until the age of twenty-two. For students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, placement may be in a community-based transition program (CBT). CBT programs are placed within the community, typically in a storefront or a home that has been converted for classroom use (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). These programs differ from Postsecondary Education (PSE) programs, which are located on a junior college, college, or university campus (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). CBT programs are special education services that are provided by a school district, and include services outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including transition services and academic instruction. Beyond these services, there is little information to guide instruction in these classrooms. Students over the age of 18 are outside of the testing age for state assessments, and there are no state standards or guidelines available for this age group or population. As a result, school districts make individual decisions regarding the development and maintenance of CBT programs, and programs vary greatly. While there are professional development resources regarding CBT programs, there is little information in the literature to guide teachers in these classrooms.

The purpose of this study was to use basic interpretative qualitative inquiry to explore the ways in which teachers of community-based programs make instructional decisions and design instruction for their students. This study addressed the following research questions: In what ways do teachers in community-based programs perceive and understand their curriculum decision-making processes? What factors play a role in curriculum decision-making for this population of students? In what ways do teachers of community-based transition programs design and implement instruction?

This study sought to understand how teachers in CBT programs make instructional decisions for their students, particularly with regard to the general lack of standards. This chapter outlines the methodology that was applied to the study, as well as the methods for data analysis, data collection, establishing reliability, the limitations of the study, and the researcher perspective.

### **Methodology**

This study focused on the ways in which teachers make instructional decisions, including how they chose instructional content and material, and the ways in which they design and deliver instruction. Of particular interest was the decision-making process that underlies these factors. To collect data best suited to answering these questions, I employed the methods of basic interpretative qualitative inquiry. Merriam and Tisdell note that researchers “conducting a basic qualitative study would be interested in 1) how people interpret their experiences, 2) how they construct their worlds, and 3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences,” (2016, p. 24). These interests were an appropriate match for a study of instructional decisions and choices and examining how teachers experience lesson planning and delivery for a specific population of students.

Creswell described qualitative research as studying a problem through the collection of data, inductive and deductive data analysis that establishes patterns or themes, and concluding with a report that includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, an interpretation of the problem, and a call for change (2013). Going into more detail, a basic qualitative study focuses on meaning, understanding and process and collects data through interviews, observation, and documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data analysis techniques are comparative and findings are presented as themes or categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The



overall purpose of basic qualitative research, according to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), is to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences, which reflects the purpose of this study.

### **Description of Participants**

In order to identify participants for the study, I used purposeful sampling, and determined what “attributes of [the] sample are crucial to [the] study and then find people or sites that meet those criteria,” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 97). Since this study looked specifically at teachers of community-based transition programs, the first criteria was finding CBT program teachers. For the purposes of this study, CBT programs are defined as public school programs or classrooms run by school districts or county offices of education, that serve students ages 18-21 with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. In addition to being teachers of CBT programs, teachers should have at least three years’ experience in the classroom. With regard to the size of the study, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend using “an adequate number of participants to . . . answer the question posed (p. 101). For this study, there were two participants teaching in two different counties.

Having identified the criterion used to identify prospective participants, I reached out to teachers and administrators, asking if they knew of CBT teachers who met the criteria and could be potential participants. I made contact with several teachers and explained the study, offering the opportunity to participate. Two teachers agreed to participate in the study, and I met with each separately to review the consent form, explain the commitment to the study in greater detail, and to answer any questions.

### **Data Collection**

The primary form of data collection was formal interviews. Interviews were recorded via a digital recorder and an Apple iPhone 7, with participant consent. Interviews were semi-structured, which refers to interviews where participants are asked preset open-ended questions, (Jamshed, 2014). Semi-structured interviews used questions that “are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions,” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 110). This is in contrast to a structured interview, where “a list of predetermined questions [is] asked, with little or no variation and with no scope for follow-up questions to responses that warrant further elaboration,” (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick, 2008, p. 291). A list of open-ended questions was developed that allowed engagement in conversation with the participants, and guidance of the topic, without predetermining exactly what was needed to ask. The initial interview was guided by a list of questions pertaining to developing, designing, and delivering instruction in the CBT program classroom, without a predetermined order to the questions, allowing the researcher to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic,” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 110). Questions for follow-up interviews were determined as the data from the initial interview was analyzed. Due to initial interviews resulting in insufficient data, a new interview protocol was developed and used for the second round of interviews. All interviews were transcribed by either the researcher or a transcription service.

### **Data Analysis**

Per Merriam and Tisdell (2016), basic interpretive qualitative inquiry includes the following components: a focus on meaning, understanding, and process; purposeful sampling to find participants; data is collected via interviews, observations, and documents; data analysis is

inductive and comparative; and findings are richly descriptive and presented as themes or categories.

Data analysis began with reading the transcript from the first interview, reviewing the purpose of the study, then reading the transcript again while taking notes on the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process was repeated several times for both initial interviews, and included writing reflections of the interview and noting statements to pursue or clarify. After the second interviews were conducted, those transcripts were read through multiple times, referencing the purpose of the study, and continuing to take notes on the data. The first set of data was then compared with the second, and after collecting data from two interviews with each participant, a tentative set of themes that could be used to answer this study's questions was developed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Theme construction involves the use of codes, which are defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), as assigning some form of designation to aspects of the data so that pieces of data can be retrieved easily. The coding process is used to identify any data that might be useful and can then be assigned themes. Notes from reviews of the data provided initial codes such as classroom information, demographic information, instructional practices, and student choice. The transcripts were cut into strips with one participant response on each strip and then moved the strips between categories.

After determining my themes, I analyzed all of the themes I had developed and determined whether or not they held up as I examined subsequent data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). At one point I determined I needed more data and sent both participants questions via email. That data needed to be analyzed and sorted into themes. After reviewing all of the themes, some remained solid, while others did not. These themes were then named in ways that

corresponded to the research questions; for example, themes related to making decisions and providing instruction to students.

### **Ethical Considerations**

It was very important for the participants to feel safe during the course of the study, particularly as they were asked to share their experiences in detail. The study was explained in detail to prospective participants, so as to make sure that each person was well informed before agreeing to participate. To protect confidentiality, all hard copies of the data, including interview tapes, transcriptions, notes, documents, etc., were kept in a locked filing cabinet. Electronic copies of all data were kept on my personal computer, which is password protected. All documents containing identifying information about students were blacked out before I receive them. Identifying information about participants, including their names and the district and program they work for, were kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), rigor in a qualitative study is derived from “the researcher’s presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description,” (p. 191). In order to provide credibility to the study, I engaged in member checking, which Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe as soliciting feedback on emerging findings from participants. I emailed the participants separately and asked them read the preliminary themes, and then again once those themes were further developed, making sure to let them know that their feedback was important and appreciated. By taking the preliminary research back to some of the participants and asking if the interpretation “rings true,” I was able to minimize the possibility of misinterpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246).

### **Researcher Bias/Positionality**

Creswell discusses the process of bracketing, in which the researcher discusses personal experiences with the phenomenon in order to identify and set aside those experiences (2013). Rather than take the researcher out of the study, this allows the researcher to focus on the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Engaging in bracketing during this study meant identifying my own experiences with the process of making instructional decisions, and then putting those experiences aside in order to fully focus on observing the participants engage in the same process.

At the time of writing this dissertation, I was in my fifteenth year as a special education teacher, and my education philosophy is one of progressivism. As a teacher, I believe it is my place to guide student learning according to what students want to learn and what they need to learn to reach their goals, and to live as independently as possible. Kilpatrick (1941) noted that learning is most effective if it addresses students' purposes and concerns, and I agree with that statement. My students should feel invested in their education, that it is happening with them and not to them.

I spent seven years as a teacher in a community-based transition program in Central California, and my experience in designing and delivering instruction to this population motivated the exploration of other teachers' experiences. During my first year teaching in the program, I found myself frustrated by the lack of information available on CBT programs, particularly with regard to instruction. According to my students' IEPs, I provided "specialized academic instruction," "career awareness," and "other transition services," for 360 minutes a day, but what those services actually looked like was up to me to decide. Faced with a lack of academic content to guide curricular decision-making, I took student interests into account,

agreeing with Kilpatrick's statement that, "students learn best what they practice and live," (1941, p. 231). I also focused on life skills, wanting to prepare my students to be independent adults to the greatest extent possible.

I worked with limited materials and limited guidance. I did not have state standards to access, or state assessments from which to teach, and my district did not provide me with any kind of pacing guide or benchmarks with regard to instruction. My students entered the program with goals and a transition plan (the ITP), but those goals varied greatly and did not always address employment and independent living skills (which they should, according to IDEA's definition). My teacher beliefs are that every student can learn, that learning happens when students want to learn, and that experience is an excellent teacher. These beliefs align with progressivist thinking, reflecting Kilpatrick's (1941) statements that the "best work is interested work," and "the presence of interest or purpose constitutes a favorable condition for learning," (p. 232).

While I had access to transition specialist standards (Transition Specialist Standards, 2013), Kohler's transition taxonomy (1996), and was able to read articles on teacher perceptions and competency, I found myself feeling as if I was "reinventing the wheel" every year when I attempted to design instruction and develop IEP goals for a different group of diverse learners. While I attempted to create a curriculum that was "built jointly by pupils and teacher," (Kilpatrick, 1941, p. 232), I found that many of my students needed practice with similar functional skills, and all of my students benefited from practicing those functional skills within context; for example, exchanging money with a cashier rather than exchanging pretend money in a classroom store, or placing an order at a fast food restaurant, rather than asking for seconds from me.

Through conversations with colleagues at different sites and grade levels, I began to suspect that a lack of curricular direction (commonly provided via standards) had a strong impact on how teachers design instruction. As a result, I wanted to know, in greater depth and detail, how teachers whose students are ages 18-21, have intellectual disabilities, and attend a community-based transition program, make instructional decisions for their students.

As part of the bracketing process, a written reflection of my experiences as a CBT program teacher was developed prior to beginning the study. This practice served to make a place for my experiences and opinions that can be separate from those of my participants. After completing the study, I added to that reflection, specifically focusing on the ways that this study changed me as an educator.

### **Chapter Summary**

Community-based transition Programs (CBT) are a public school service for students with intellectual disabilities who are 18-22. These programs are a sort of postsecondary option for students who have not aged out of the public school system, and function as both a classroom with instructional services, and a preparatory program for adulthood. However, there is a lack of instructional guidance in the form of standards for education, and there is little information about how instruction is developed and delivered. This study employed basic qualitative methods in order to explore and describe this process for Community-Based Transition program teachers, hoping, as stated by Denzin and Lincoln, to “get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand,” (2005, p. 4).

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which teachers of community-based transition programs (CBT) develop and engage students with instruction, and specifically explored how teachers in CBT programs perceive and understand their curricular decision-making process. As a result, two CBT teachers were interviewed and asked to talk about their respective curricular decision-making processes, and data from those interviews was analyzed using basic interpretative qualitative inquiry methods. Both participants were teachers of CBT programs who had been in their current position for at least five years, and who were considered by colleagues to be strong teachers. Over the course of in-person interviews and e-mail correspondence, the participants shared their experiences as CBT teachers, and how they understood their curriculum decision-making process.

Data analysis revealed that decision-making consisted of asking questions related to student needs and wants, and that each question was answered via the consideration of various factors. Table 3, “Curricular Decision-Making Themes,” lists themes developed from analysis of the data.

Table 3  
*Curricular Decision-Making Themes*

<i>1. Determine what students need to learn</i>	<i>2. Let students make instructional decisions</i>	<i>3. Meet instructional needs using available materials and opportunities</i>
Determine a student’s current skill level Develop job-seeking skills	Allow students make to choices Develop IEP goals with students and parents	Consider classroom and student schedules Use provided programs Modify provided programs Teach without programs

### Background of Participants



The participants, Lori and Megan (both pseudonyms), are teachers of two CBT programs in Central California. Both teachers are women, and experienced teachers. Lori taught in a program run by her local school district and Megan taught in a county office of education-run program. Each participant was recommended by a colleague for participation, because she is a special education teacher of students ages 18-21 with moderate to severe disabilities, and is considered a strong teacher and instructional leader.

### **Lori**

At the time of this study, Lori had been a special education teacher for ten years, working in the same district that entire time. She is a native Californian and attended local universities. Lori intended to go into teaching, but she did not start out with the intention to be a special education teacher. She shared that,

I started out earning my regular ed credential, completed that, then went on to special ed. I was asked by the special ed director to please consider [teaching students in the] moderate the severe classrooms, which I did, and the rest is history. I believe it was meant to be, because I love my job.

She began her career teaching students ages three to five in an Autism program before moving into her current position, which she had held for five years at the time of this study. Speaking on what she liked best about working in a CBT, Lori stated that she loved, “how the students are able to experience ownership of their educational path.” She stated that she specifically enjoyed helping her students navigate the adult world.

Like other teachers in her program, Lori had a small office off of her classroom. Her office was decorated with pictures and notes from students and featured professional texts and teacher’s editions of programs scattered among the filing cabinets and student learning materials. Her classroom resembled an arts and crafts studio, with a large assortment of crafting supplies and projects in various stages. A large bookcase held several different small projects for students

to assemble independently. A workbench and woodworking tools took up one corner; Lori shared that a student and a classroom aide had attempted to make a wooden ring but hadn't mastered the technique yet. In talking with Lori and visiting her office and classroom, her passion for her students was obvious. Her statement about students taking ownership of their own paths reflected the high level of individuality that is present in Lori's instruction. A number of different interests, or educational paths, were represented in Lori's office and classroom, and she was committed to helping each student find success on his or her path.

Lori's class was run by the local school district in a southern part of the San Joaquin Valley, and her classroom was one of four that make up the off-campus CBT program for that district. The classrooms were in a large building located in a business/industrial part of the city, near shopping centers and day programs for adults with disabilities. The classes did not have access to vans, but used school district buses or public transportation to get to job sites, shopping destinations, and so on. Within the building were four classrooms, a large cooking and eating space, restrooms, offices for each teacher, a conference room, and storage space for the class' microbusiness supplies. Lori and her colleagues allowed their students to move between the classroom based on interest in the activities available, increased socialization opportunities, and the chance to interact with different teachers.

Lori described placement in her classroom as being a blend of student personality and ability level:

This is more ability level, but it's not 100 percent that way because sometimes it has to be a personality fit, because there's some kids that may be high [skilled] but yet they don't want to be in that super quiet structured room [across the hall]. They want to listen to music. You can kind of get a gist of their personalities, what they're going to go with. So, there's four different personalities here.

Aside from the four classes at Lori's site, there was another CBT classroom at a local high school, and the school district owned a small house near the district office which all five classes had access to. The house provided students with opportunities to practice cooking, cleaning, and yard-care skills within the context of a home, versus a mock setting in a classroom. Lori's district had recently purchased a program called "My Transitions Portfolio," which came with a teacher edition and student workbooks. She also used the Circles program, which covers personal space and developing boundaries with others. In addition to district provided materials, Lori had also pulled transition planning activities from the internet, and provides an example:

It talks about their transition planning. So, we'd just have it on the overhead, and we'll just kind of do it as a group. You know, 'do you want a full-time job?' And then we kind of go over, you know, 'what do you think a job coach is going to do?' It provides IEP goals, which is nice, because [students] don't know what their options are.

She advocated for increased instruction in health, hygiene, and sex education, sharing that a student had had a baby earlier in the school year, and several previous students are now parents. Speaking on the possibility of sex education presentations, she noted that "the majority of the kids would need to have a personal safety presentation, where ten percent need the sexually active presentation."

Although the school district offered a workability program, Lori shared that her students did not participate because the opportunities were limited and the district viewed high school students who had milder disabilities and were not clients of the local regional center as higher priority candidates than her students. Students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities may complete high school with a Certificate of Completion rather than a diploma, and are often clients of regional centers, meaning there are day programs and supported employment opportunities available at no cost. Students who were earning a diploma were given more priority in the job-training program. As Lori explained it, "[the district] is committed to students

[with milder disabilities] that are going to get a diploma, that will be able to get jobs. [My students] have difficulties because they don't have a diploma, they have a certificate." As a result, the school district had a strong emphasis on providing as much job training as possible for these students. This meant that any work experience Lori's students had was unpaid, and on a weekly, rather than daily, basis.

Lori felt strongly that her students need exposure to job skills and training, so she and a co-teacher formed a microbusiness club in which the students make craft items that were sold at the local Farmer's Market, the district office, and multiple craft fairs. Lori served as the club leader, but the club was run by students who are responsible for choosing the craft items that are made, shopping for supplies, running the booth, and handling sales. While the students were exposed to vocational skills, during the Market Season in particular, Lori introduced and practiced a number of concepts:

[During Market Season] we'll talk about who's going to do what and who's going to come early by the bus. And those are lessons, too, because it's like, you have to take the city bus to get there. You have to have somebody take you there. We practice, 'What are you going say to people when they come up to you?' 'What is the microbusiness?' 'What do you do at transitions?' So, they have to practice with each other; 'Hi. Would you like a business card?' So, they have to practice all of that stuff up front.

As Lori described it, getting the students and merchandise to the Market is work in and of itself:

The kids have to load my car the night before or the day before. They have to box it, price it, [and] put it in the car, because I have to leave at, like, 6:45am to get the car and load it, but, bless these kids' hearts, they'll come. They'll have their parents drop them off at 7:00am, or they'll take the city bus there. We unload, and then 8:30am [students at the school site] will catch the public bus, and then they stay till 12:30pm and catch the bus and come back, and then my city bus riders will stay and help me load the car back up, and then they can go home, themselves. And then I come back and the group that's here, now has to unload. So, it's a big production.

Aside from their in-person sales, the club also took orders through their Facebook page.

Funds from sales went back into the club, which allowed students to expand the range of items

they sold, including baby clothes, wreaths, soap, candy dishes, and wall art. Many of the items were seasonal, and nearly all of the items could be customized as well. Funds were also used for club trips, such as visiting an aquarium. Lori shared that when planning a trip to an aquarium, the students discussed the importance of equal contributions to the business:

It's like, 'Do you think it's fair that Johnny shows up once a month, does a little something-something for ten minutes, and he gets to go to [the aquarium], and you guys have busted butt every day?' 'No, that's not fair.' I said, 'Ok, how are we going to fix this?' So, we bought a time card system.

### **Megan**

Megan stated that she had always known she wanted to teach but,

It wasn't until my friend got a job working for the ARC (Association for Retarded Citizens) that I first considered working with our population. Once I was hired with the ARC myself, I was paired with an elderly lady with Down Syndrome. She became my best friend and is the reason why I made the change to Special Education.

She shared that what she liked best about working with students in this population was “being involved in long-term planning to support not only the students, but the families. Sharing information, touring adult programs and offering trusted support through a very big change in their lives.” She went on to note that her favorite part of being a CBT teacher is “teaching independence, self-advocacy, and choice.”

Megan is a native of Central California, and attended a state university out of the area. At the time of this study, Megan was in her thirteenth year teaching, and her third year working with the transition-age population. Prior to teaching the CBT program, she taught at the high school level, and as a result, she taught some of her former students. Her classroom was a storefront that included an open classroom area, kitchen/eating area, and an office for Megan. Her office was clearly an area where a lot of work went on; calendars, phone lists, schedules, and student artwork decorated the walls while surfaces were home to learning materials, teacher

editions of learning programs, communication symbols, electronic augmentative communication devices, and more.

Megan stated that her favorite part of teaching her class is teaching choice, and that was evident in how her classroom is arranged. The main learning area had a calendar and daily schedule with options for activities and outings, there were desks or tables to sit at, and learning materials were set up in such a way that students could retrieve what they wanted to work on, and then choose a place to work. It is obvious that Megan had worked hard to provide her students with an environment in which they could exercise their preferences and interests.

Megan's caseload was fifteen students, with four classroom paraprofessionals who assisted with instruction and classroom management. "Caseload" refers to the students in the class, as Megan serves as the case manager for their IEPs. This term is commonly used in special education. Her class was one of four CBT classrooms run by the local county office of education in a central part of the San Joaquin Valley. The classroom was a storefront located in the city's downtown area and was across the street from another county CBT classroom, which provided opportunities for collaboration and socialization. While Megan's classroom was within walking distance of a park and the local branch of the library, she was also able to use county-provided vans as well as public transportation to get around the city. Her classroom had a small kitchen, and hot meals were delivered from a central kitchen, and then kept in a warmer. Some students, however, chose to shop for food items that they kept on site and prepare for themselves.

Seven of Megan's students participated in a workability program, which allowed students to work in a paid internship position for 40 hours during the school year. Students were paid minimum wage, and completed two training sessions a week, with each session running between one and a half and two hours long. A job coach from the workability program provided support

to student workers, and the connections to local businesses that served as job sites. She explained:

So, we have a job coach that comes and then just kind of shows us or tells us the different things that are available, and then we kind of pick and choose based on what we think our students would benefit from; but we typically try to interview the students to see what's the best fit for them. If they're interested in food service, or, you know, retail, those types of things, or working outdoors.

Five more students were scheduled to join the program later in the school year. When considering placement, Megan looked for potential job opportunities after the student ages out of the CBT program.

Megan wrote a grant for her class to receive funds to start a microbusiness, which would provide students with opportunities to practice their job-related skills. The class made tie-dyed aprons and tote bags that they sold at a local business fair, and also through a brochure that was available to service providers and school personnel. At the business fair, students were tasked with handling sales and running the cash register. In-class instruction built on necessary money-handling skills, as well as all of the math skills related to running a business. She explained,

We did the microbusinesses too, we're trying to teach the students, building on their skill set so they could potentially make a little bit of money. And then we try to have a boutique in December, so that they can sell their items, too. The workability program that we have is based on a grant but, the women over there, they've been great about helping us to put this event on for us, and people can come and buy our products. We've made tie-dye aprons and little tote bags.

Megan was looking into other sales opportunities for her class; while the students benefit greatly from the work skills, the funds generated allowed the class to purchase more supplies as well as to take trips and buy supplies for the classroom.

Megan used the following instructional programs: TouchMath, Basic Math, Menu Math; which are supplemented with the local newspaper and free demos from the Attainment instructional program. While Megan liked Attainment because she was able to use it for free,

she found that it does not work for all of her learners. She shared that she was not provided with any type of pacing guide, calendar, or specific expectation of what she would be teaching and, as a result, she relied on interviews with students and parents to determine interests and specific areas to address.

### **Findings**

Data analysis showed that prior to actually teaching their students, Megan and Lori ask themselves questions about student needs, wants, and ways to incorporate available materials. As shown in Table 4.1, both teachers asked three main questions that were answered by considering various factors.

#### **Theme 1: Determine What students Need to Learn How to Do.**

Megan and Lori shared that they ask themselves several questions before they begin planning instruction for their students, questions such as: What do my students already know how to do? What can they do independently? How much help do they need to complete a given task? They both referred to this process as finding a student's baseline with a particular task. "Baseline" refers to a student's level of performance at the start of instruction, and "is generally the most recent data available and can include the prior year's assessment scores or grades, results from a beginning of the year benchmark assessment, a pre-test, or other evidence of students' learning (Rhode Island Department of Education, p. 6). This data is then used to develop a plan for instruction; this could be a plan to teach a specific skill, or an overall course of instruction for a student.

Both Megan and Lori begin by being aware of what skills their students currently possess, and what skills their students will need in their placement immediately following aging out of their CBT. For some students, this placement is in a community or day program, but the



features and demands of those programs vary greatly. For other students, participation in a workability program has led to employment, perhaps supported employment. Lori and Megan must then prepare all of their students for the individual paths ahead of them. For this group, the “next level” is highly individualized and personal, which means the teaching and preparation must be highly individualized as well.

**Determine a student’s current skill level.** Megan and Lori initially get to know their students and develop baselines, or starting points, for a variety of skills, and then pair those baselines with skills necessary for life beyond the CBT. They have an idea of what skills students need to be successful in the workforce and to live independent lives, which would be that next level they refer to, and determining baselines through observation allows both teachers to instruct students and build skills towards that next level. Those skills are reflected in the IEP goals each teacher writes her students. IEP goals are where the individual needs and abilities of each student stand out, and that plan drives each students’ instruction. To best determine how to prepare students for leaving public school, and what to teach, both Megan and Lori look at what their students can currently do. Megan shares her experience:

Kids come in where you’re like, ‘Oh, this guy can do so much for themselves.’ And then you throw them into the kitchen and they’re like, ‘Oh, wait, you’re not going to prompt me through this.’ Or, ‘you’re not going to do this for me.’ And so sometimes you get those little surprises but then it’s like, ‘Oh, I have so much work to do, too,’ so it gets exciting. You never know what they have coming in until you plunk them in it, you know?

Megan’s statement reveals how easy it can be for an educator to assume a student’s overall skill level, and how that perception can shift when students are asked to perform independently. By allowing students to perform tasks independently, the teacher is able to more accurately determine areas of strength and areas of improvement. That knowledge is used to help prepare

students for life beyond public school, which for Lori means focusing on her students' next steps:

When I first came [to this program], I was like, 'what's the next step?' You're always supposed to teach to the next step, right? If you're teaching third grade, you're supposed to teach what you need for fourth grade. So, our job is to teach them after this, well what are you guys going to do? Because you're not going to get our support anymore. So, what are you going to do? So, we've gone to day programs and we've seen what's out there for them. So, you kind of prepare them for that world. At the beginning of the year we'll tour the different day programs as the teachers before school starts. So, just like in high school, you're teaching to the next grade. You've got to get them ready for the next grade. So, that's our job, [to] get them ready for program, or jobs, or whatever.

Preparation for the next step circles back to independence. Whatever program or employment opportunity or activity students choose to pursue, increased independence across a variety of contexts is important. In Megan's classroom, preparing students for adulthood has a large focus on what students can do with minimal help. She stated that,

The main thing that I love about this age range is that it's real life. The push for academics is less and it's more functional and independence. I feel like you're really getting into the meat of what they need to help themselves be as independent as possible. When I first came into the young adult world, it was like, you spend kindergarten, even preschool, up to high school where the students are sitting and they're attending to a task and then once they get into the job world, it's like, they're standing and they're maintaining a wider area, so [addressing that need] is just staging the classroom. Like, hey, let's have the students stand in this space and see, you know, how many times they leave the area. So, it's like, developing those borders. It could be anything from that to, you know, matching or sorting, or those more [rote] tasks that they're really good at.

As a teacher, Megan is examining her students' skills, and the ways in which her students can demonstrate and grow their independence. She notes that traditional kindergarten through twelfth grade education can miss skills that students need to enter the workforce, such as being able to stand and work in a certain area. She is assessing her students by determining what they can do for themselves within the contexts of working or shopping or cooking. As Megan and Lori look at the skills their students need in order to gain a job or prepare a meal, or do any of the things normally associated with adulthood, they conduct almost constant observations of their

students to determine where the instructional needs are. Lori shared an example of assessing life skills:

You start, you know, what can you do for yourself? I say, ‘really, you make your food by yourself, or does your momma do it?’ ‘My momma.’ I said, ‘Okay, then don’t mark that you can do it. So, maybe we need to work on [learning] how to make a sandwich.’ So, these are good jumping points on okay, so, if you want to live in that group home, what are you going to do to get there?

The “jumping off points,” as Lori calls them, are numerous, and vary by student. In order to tackle all of those needs, the teachers must have a clear idea of what the needs are. Lori and Megan are aware that there are number of opportunities available to their students after aging out of the program, and in order to prepare the students for those next steps, instruction must be highly individualized, which depends on both teachers determining their students’ current skill levels.

**Develop job-seeking skills.** Looking at the next step includes being able to get a job; for Lori, since her program does not have a paid workability component, she teaches her students how to find and apply for a job. Lori’s students have a voice in their instruction; as she develops lessons and instruction for the “next level,” she asks her students what they want that next level to look like. Student interests and passions are taken into account in equal measure with student skills and abilities. Lori provided an example:

Somebody wanted to be a DJ. I said, ‘Okay, there’s no DJ curriculum,’ but we talked about what kind of jobs could you do? So, his IEP goals were, you need to find a DJ that you can shadow. So, we don’t have curriculum for everything these kids want to do. But we’ve got the basics to tell them, ‘Okay, you have to do step A, B, C, to get whichever job it is.’ Everybody’s got to have an ABC.

One of the advantages of this type of program is that the expectation of individualization allows for Lori to essentially build her own plan for a student who wants to be a DJ. She begins with the basics, which in this case meant learning what the job entailed. As she noted, every job has

an ABC, or those initial steps or skills a student needs to start down that particular path. She went on to share about a student who went to work in a day care setting, and carried a clipboard that listed her tasks and duties:

We do have a student who takes her little clipboard because she's working at a daycare, and so she has to check off, okay, I got on the bus. Okay, I washed my hands. Okay, I have to count the diapers. So, she's learning those skills there. She has to go back and look at her checklist, you know, what's next? You know, they have that saying that you only retain 10% of what you hear, but 90% of what you do? You see that when these kids are doing it. You know, because the little girl with the clipboard, it's only been four weeks and she started out with prompting, prompting, prompting, prompting, prompting. And then it was, you know, prompting, prompting, 'Oh, you got an independent. You washed your hands.' And now there's a few promptings. So, just by her being accountable for it, [she's] doing it. We don't have to sit there and keep saying ['what should you be doing?'] She's at the job. Sometimes that outside environment is the cue.

In Lori's first example, she and the student who wanted to be a DJ explored what being a DJ would look like. In this second example, the student is already working, and is relying on visual cues to help build her job skills. The combination of the visual cues on a clipboard and the daily repetition (which is a common need for students with intellectual disabilities), helped this young lady increase her independence in a way that is not socially visible. She is able to get the support she needs in a way that is similar to the ways many people remember to complete their job tasks. For example, Lori and I talked about the fact that while she shared that anecdote, I was referencing my own visual cues: the interview protocol I had on the table.

After sharing about a student who identified the steps to pursue a desired job, and a student who was using supports to be successful in a current employment setting, Lori shared about how she helps her students to find a job:

We'll have mock interview day. We have to schedule for that because they have to dress up. Once or twice a semester I'm taking a different group and we're just cold knocking on doors. We just went to Starbucks, there's Dollar General and Taco Bell. We did that just to give them exposure. 'Okay, what do you do when you go into a business? Say, "I'd like to apply for a job." We're not going to get a job right now, but we're practicing.'

There is a progression to teaching the job-seeking skills that students need, and the instruction must progress accordingly. At some point, job-seeking skills cannot be taught in the classroom. Teaching a student the steps to becoming a DJ, or helping a student check off the tasks needed to work in a daycare are skills and lessons that can fit into a classroom lesson time. Learning how to get a job, however, is a very different skill set and really must be placed in the correct context. Students can practice asking staff for job applications, but that classroom practice looks very different from actually walking into a place of business and asking for a job.

Based on Lori and Megan's experiences, teaching to the next level looks like determining what students can do and with what level of independence or prompting, increasing independence, student involvement in developing IEPs, identifying interests and potential jobs, gaining experience on a job site, and finding a job.

## **Theme 2: Let Students Make Instructional Decisions.**

Both Lori and Megan recognize that they are teaching young adults, and it is important to both of them to incorporate their student's opinions into the school day. This is with regard to instruction, lesson content, class activities, community outings, and so on. Lori shares that she sees it as a group discussion, "It's just information, and the kids will say, 'Well, I don't like this,' or, 'I do like that.' And then somebody will chime in, 'Well, what about this?' And so, to me, it's more like sitting around the kitchen table talking as a group." She goes on to say that:

We do a lot of inventory, like, 'What do you want to do?' Because my philosophy of transitions, and I believe it's the philosophy of the program, is this is a choice program, you don't have to come to transitions. So, my point to the kids is, 'What do you want me to do for you? Because this is your extra four years to get the extra help, so where do you want to go?' So, we'll do inventory, 'Do you like to work inside or outside, noisy or quiet?' And then we just kind of go from there, because not everyone's going to be in the same boat.

Lori's approach lets students make choices in collaboration with one another and allows practice for problem solving. Choice making, collaborating, and problem solving within a peer group are skills that are necessary for success in a variety of contexts, such as employment, day programs, living in group homes or assisted living, etc. It is important for Lori to note that "not everyone's going to be in the same boat," not just because of the individualized nature of instruction in special education, but because students need to see their own preferences and individuality recognized. From kindergarten through twelfth grade, students know what their next step is, and who is moving forward with them. After first grade comes second, and then third, and so on. In high school, students know they are part of the class of 2019, 2020, etc. For students who are eligible for CBT, they know that after completing high school, their next step is more school, and that their classmates are most likely coming with them. But after aging out of public school, there is no predetermined next step, and students no longer move forward in groups. The choice-making in Lori and Megan's classrooms allows students to explore future possibilities, and to provide ownership over the changes that are coming.

**Allow students to make choices.** Both Megan and Lori stated that they wanted their students to feel ownership and participation in their instructional day. As a result, Lori allows her students to make individual choices that impact their day and drive their individual instructional programs. For example, several students chose to contribute to the class microbusiness:

I give them choices for everything. Some of the students are just content doing the business here. Other ones, who make wreaths, I've tried to encourage [that], because that's what they like to do, and they can do it at home. So, I've given them the material, they make it at home. And if they sell it, they get the money. So, [I] try to encourage them that way, that's where they want to go towards. I do have one student who wants to be a paraprofessional. He wants to come back and work in my class. So, I said, 'honey, let's get on that No Child and Left Behind, and see if you can take the practice test.' Oh, and I have a soap maker.

Lori clearly encourages her students' individual interests and individualizes their experiences in the classroom. Student interest drives the instruction, instead of student ability. What a student wants becomes the main question, instead of, what a student can do. This is a natural shift; once Megan and Lori have a baseline idea of a student's skills, they move on to determining a student's interest, and then all of that information is used to design instruction. Megan states that:

I always tell them, 'you guys are adults. You need to choose your day.' They have a choice between if they go to work, I have an icon up [on the board] so they have to put their name up for work. But then they can choose, a free to no-cost outing, or a shopping outing. So, they make choices on where they want to go. And then, I have a class icon as well, so if they want to stay in class then I'll tell them, you know, you need to pull your folder out and do their worksheets that I have printed out for them, or other things to work on. If I know a student is kind of a home-body and wants to stay in class, then usually I'll do a visual where they have their own separate visual, so that they know they have to choose at least three days out.

While the students are able to make choices that impact their lessons and learning for the day, there are responsibilities that accompany those choices. Lori's students are choosing to help with the microbusiness by planning, crafting, and creating. For Megan's students, there are opportunities to safely navigate the neighborhood while walking to a store, or practicing important skills in class. Whatever the students choose, there are functional and educational benefits to be had, and they are more likely to be invested in activities they chose. Choice-making is an important skill in itself, it is even more fun and reinforcing when students can make choices about their instructional content and settings.

**Develop IEP goals with my students and parents.** As they increase their students' opportunities to provide input about their education, both Megan and Lori include their students' parents in the process as well. While students are minors, their teachers, parents, service providers, and school administrators comprise the IEP team who develops IEP goals and

determines services. After students come of age, however, they can be included in the process as well, which is the case for Megan and Lori's students.

Megan includes her students in the process of writing their IEPs, and specifically seeks out their input when developing goals. In her words, she is, "giving students that opportunity to have a voice, and go into that self-advocacy. [I tell them], this is your IEP, you're writing it."

Lori's process is similar, and she provided an example of working with a student, and allowing the student to choose her own goals:

We sat down together, and I said, 'OK, girlfriend, you don't need [to work on] domestic skills because you're living with your boyfriend, you're cooking, you're cleaning, you're taking the bus, you've got domestics under control. 'OK, so, let's find another area of need.' And she was, 'I'd like to work on social speaking.' I said, 'What do you mean social speaking?' I said, 'You're talking to me just fine.' She was, 'No, but like when I go out and if I want to get a job.' I was like, 'That's a perfect goal. Let's write that.'

Lori went on to share that some of her students may not want a job, and as a result, "their IEP is going to be more geared towards them in whatever is going to make them happy." While many students want to get a job after aging out, others do not, so conversations with families are held, to determine that the students' interests, whatever they are, are being represented in the IEP.

Both Lori and Megan work with students and their parents to develop IEP goals, again, with an emphasis towards recognizing what skills a student currently has, and how to develop more independence. It is important to Megan to give her students a voice in their educational planning, and to use developing IEPs as an opportunity to use that voice. She shared her process:

You know, it's a little more challenging, I think, just because there are lots of different levels, but primarily it's just looking at, you know, your IEP, the different domains, and where the need is. Typically, because they are young adults, and we want them to be more independent, I start with an interview with the parents to see where [the student] is kind of lacking or what areas in the home they could be helping with. And then, kind of build from there, so that typically drives my goals for my students, but you know, you think about their basic needs; so, is it making a meal? Can they prepare a simple



sandwich for themselves, or you know. We just start from there basically, their basic needs, and then kind of build up.

Both teachers use the information gathered from students and parents to draft IEP goals that are presented to the team during the IEP meeting. IEP teams are typically made up of the teacher, the student, parents, administrators, any service providers (such as Occupational Therapists or job coaches), representatives from the regional center, and anyone else the parent may choose to invite (such as advocate). At that point, the team works together to either approve the goals the way they were written, to make changes as needed, or to draft new goals based on need.

Lori's district provides learning domains for IEP goals, so her instructional content falls within these domains.

Basically, we have the five core domains here: domestics, functional academics, commerce, vocational, and rec and leisure. But I've added self-advocacy in there, which could be in the domestic part. So, those are our domains and that's how we go within that five categories.

There is a bit of a balancing act in writing IEP goals with students, as Lori has to blend a student's desires and ability level, and sometimes there is quite a gap between the two. She explains:

They tell me what they want, and we go from there. Like, if someone says they want to be a gamer, they want to learn how to program video games, alright, that's fine. I'm not telling a kid they can't do something. What do you need to do first? Let's write a goal on [that].

It can be easy to see the gap between where a student's abilities are and the student's dream or goal, and Lori recognizes that gap, notes that she will not tell a student they can't meet that goal, and then determines the steps needed for the student to move forward.

### **Theme 3: Meet Instructional Needs Using Available Materials and Opportunities.**

With regard to choosing lesson content and instructing students, both Megan and Lori implement a blend of formal academic skills and functional life skills. Their decision-making

process is informed by their access to instructional programs provided to their respective programs, their knowledge of their students' respective ability levels, and also ongoing observation; both teachers look for instructional opportunities throughout the school day, particularly with regard to social skills and life skills. Both teachers also shared that while they plan some lessons, they have a large amount of instructional flexibility within the school day, which allows for times when the students are off-campus, as well as being able to meet needs as they arise.

Like many teachers, Megan and Lori were provided with instructional programs and materials by their respective school administrators. These programs are intended to provide lessons and instructional content that teachers can use for all of their students. Megan and Lori both modified these programs to meet the individual needs of their students. There are also skills that can best be taught without a program, such as being able to butter bread or cross a street. When working on those kind of life skills, both Megan and Lori provide their students with multiple opportunities to practice the skill in order to learn.

**Consider classroom and student schedules.** When planning lessons for her class, Lori shared that she does not use a lesson planner, and that, due to her students' varied schedules she has minimal time with the whole class, so she schedules lessons as best she can, and looks for instructional opportunities throughout the school day. Sometimes these instructional opportunities look like addressing social needs and walking students through conflict resolution, and other times it looks like taking advantage of available time.

I've had other co-teachers that go, 'You need to be more, you know, organized and have your schedule two weeks out. You know, what you're going to do.' I said, 'I can't do that.' And they say, 'Well, why not?' I said, 'Because somebody may come in with a drama issue, and that's our lesson right then today. Somebody's posting something on Facebook and they're spreading this rumor. Okay, so what do we talk about rumors today? What are we going to talk about bullying?' What I had planned or whatever,

that's out the window. So, I can't tell you that I'm going to do math on Tuesday and this on Wednesday, because it's what these kids need on that day. That's what it's going to be. Because they're here from 7:30am, say 7:30am to 8:30am is when they get here, they do a little morning [work], and they eat breakfast, and then by 9am they're gone. Everybody's gone somewhere, and then they come back about 1:00pm, and then we leave at 2:00pm. So, I only really have two hours of an instructional day to actually do like a lesson. So, for me to pencil them ... I mean I'll have a gist of what we're going to do, but if something comes up, that's the lesson that's going to be taught.

Two things can be noted from Lori's perspective; first, a "lesson" isn't an instructional time to be scheduled, it is an instructional opportunity. Second, instructional opportunities don't always look like academics, and don't always happen while seated at a desk in a classroom. Lori sees lessons throughout her day because she perceives any need as teachable moment. For Lori, student needs trump everything else, and her instruction and lessons happen in response to those needs.

While Lori maximizes her instructional opportunities within the classroom, she also looks for opportunities to teach outside of the classroom. She went on to share examples of lessons that happen outside of the classroom:

I don't do lesson plans per se. I know that's probably wrong to say on [a recording], but, well, for my group, we're different than the other groups. I mean, I know we have our schedule on when we're going where, so I only have little bubbles of time that we can do that. So, at one point, we had the binders that had their personal information, what their job interest was, and so we just kind of proceed through that book. You know, when we get that one hour on Wednesdays, I'd tell them, 'Okay, pull out your binders. We're going to work on that.' So, it's all kind of sequentially laid out for me, but a lot of the time our lessons are at the job sites. Are you following your checklist, your step-by-step? Are you showing up dressed appropriately? So, those type of things.

While she does have typical instructional time in her classroom, Lori also sees her job sites as classrooms, and recognizes that a lot of learning happens while students are working.

Fundamentally, learning happens everywhere and Lori teaches whenever and wherever she sees a need or opportunity.

Rather than using a traditional lesson planner, Lori uses a calendar to keep track of her students' many commitments, and this calendar serves as a planner of sorts. Megan uses a calendar instead of a lesson planner as well, and also takes advantage of lesson opportunities as they arise; for example, on a daily basis her students are learning out in the community, and on job sites. She elaborates:

The day kind of unfolds itself. So, certain situations come up, or you see a certain student is struggling in a certain area, even if it's just social communication and, [having trouble asking] 'Hey do you want to hang out?' Or, 'Do you want to play this game with me?' So, I just kind of try to be self-aware and keen to what's going on around me, so I can develop the lessons accordingly. So, that it's in the moment. It might not happen the day of something happening, but I might point it out to the student like, 'Hey it looks like you need some help with this situation, we're going to address that tomorrow.' And then try to make a lesson that would fit that need. But, it's more on the fly I think for this age range.

While she describes it as being "on the fly," Megan teaches in response to needs and context. She is looking for instructional opportunities beyond a math lesson or a page in a workbook and observes the students to see where extra instructional support is needed. Students with intellectual disabilities can have deficits in social and communication skills. Megan is aware of that and while she does have planned lessons to address those needs, she also addresses them as they arise. It should be noted that because both Megan and Lori have spent time determining what their students can do and have established those instructional baselines, they are attuned to their students' individualized needs.

**Use provided programs.** Both Megan and Lori have various instructional programs available and provided numerous examples of using and/or modifying instruction, and both teachers also have examples of seeking out specific curricula or programs to address a specific skill or area. Megan spoke at length about the various programs she has access to:

We use Attainment as the curriculum. We are out in the community, the majority of the day. So, our students have workability, and they have CBI, so, it's just trying to plug in

that curriculum. So, we have four programs within our county that are young adult, and so, we will share ideas as well; you know, it's looking on Teachers Pay Teachers, or on different sites, and then sharing that material. We do a lot of that, the sharing part of it. We have workability as well, and so they have a library of material that we can go and look at. They have videos and different items as well. I have the [Attainment modules for] self-care for both male and female. We have the community instruction, and, safety in the community, and there's vocational. So it's, kind of social pieces in the workplace; there's a social [module] as well. And then there's self-advocacy, and that's a big one actually, because I do have some students that really need to learn how to speak up for themselves. So, we do use that one on a regular basis. We do use Edmark county-wide, but we don't use it with our young adult population. I came from high school to young adult, so it's just remembering those words that they might have learned, or should have learned, and then piecing it in the community. For math, it's more of staying in a budget, shopping lists, things like that. More functional.

The Attainment program provides Megan with instructional materials for teaching job and work skills, and social skills, but the lessons need to be modified for student ability levels. Megan also has access to materials via the supported employment job coaches she works with. She referenced Edmark, which is a sight-reading program, meaning that students essentially memorize the words, rather than using phonics to sound words out. There are several different Edmark libraries, including Fast Food/Restaurant words, Grocery words, Job and Work words, and Signs Around You. Megan stated that she does not have access to a specific math program, but rather teaches math skills as they are used in the community. There is a strong feeling of collaborative efforts in how Megan describes using different instructional programs. She is one of four teachers in the county teaching a CBT program, and they work together, sharing materials and strategies. Being able to talk to people who do the same job, and ask them how they do it informs Megan's instruction.

**Modify provided programs.** While she has access to a few different programs, for Megan, finding the right fit between a lesson and a student requires some modification; she elaborates:

I guess its individualized again. Just looking at the student and what their needs may be. Some of the curriculum that we have, like, the videos for example in [the Attainment program], they move really quickly. And, so, that's not beneficial for all of our students. But, you know, you've got to take what you can get and then kind of scaffold down or up. If I'm really organized for my [lower skilled] guys and we're having a lesson on hygiene, I need to bring in all the items that we need to be taking care of our hygiene, so that they physically hold the real item. And then I might say, 'Where do you put this? How do you use it?' And then see if they could model that for me. I guess that would be the lower scale, and then, the reading and whatnot, [they might need] pictures paired with it. But Attainment does use a lot of pictures embedded within [the modules].

Megan begins by noting that her students have varied abilities, which requires both teaching different concepts, and teaching the same concepts in different ways. There is no one-size-fits-all-learners program, so Megan and Lori take what they have and tailor it to their particular classroom needs. The “scaffolding” that Megan mentioned refers to the educational practice “through which a teacher adds supports for students in order to enhance learning and aid in the mastery of tasks. The teacher does this by systematically building on students’ experiences and knowledge as they are learning new skills. As students master the assigned tasks, the supports are gradually removed,” (IRIS Center, 2019).

Lori has similar experiences in her classroom:

Here we do group work. It has to be tailored, because if you're talking about resumes for some groups, the other students are, you know they're learning to write their name, so, they're not going to be working on their resume. They can follow along and they can participate in the conversation, but then you pull out some students and you may have a paraprofessional work with them at their level. For example, ‘okay so, if you were filling out an application, what's your name? What's your address?’ You know, tailor it to them . . . this one gentleman, he was writing his name from, you know, probably as soon as he could write. All through high school, ‘Write your name. Write your name. Write your name.’ The kid hated to write his name. He was getting mad, so it's like, ‘so, teach him to do this.’ [Pulls a business card from her wallet.] Doesn't matter how they get his name as long as they get his name. There's his card. ‘Take it out of your wallet.’ That's a lot easier to teach.

Lori reflected that, when it comes to modifying lessons for students, she has had to “teach my brain how to go in five areas.” Allowing her students to make choices allows for more

personalization to their instruction, which helps address the gaps between students' abilities and skills but can also mean that a lesson on one specific topic looks more like three or four different lessons on the same topic. She shared that she teaches students, "who are not verbal and have minimal skills to kids who are living with their boyfriend, taking the city bus and having babies, and everything in between. So, how do you do a lesson?" This disparity in ability levels can make it difficult for Lori to develop and deliver whole class lessons, whereas she is better able to meet needs by working on an individual, choice-informed basis.

**Teach without programs.** In addition to modifying the programs they do have, Megan and Lori are familiar with teaching functional skills and life skills without specific programs or materials or formal lesson plans. Megan shared what this process looks like with an example of cooking:

Typically, you start with like a simpler meal. Can they make a piece of toast? Can they spread the butter? Or, do they like peanut butter? And then [attempt] maybe more complex meals with them, [such as items with] simple recipes on the back, so can they make their own Top Ramen? Or, microwave a meal from the freezer? So, just kind of building on those skill sets I guess and seeing where they're at. I have a student who is more independent, so his thing is, 'I want to know how to flip an omelet without it bursting open.' So, that's just based on their interest, too. You know, what's motivating for them.

Cooking is an easy way to introduce students to life skills because they can eat the results of their lesson, many students have a favorite food, and most students want to be able to make a preferred snack without help (so they aren't subject to someone else's timetable and availability). There is a level of personal investment with cooking that students may not have with learning other skills. Being able to wash your own clothes just isn't as fun as making your own lunch, especially when cooking has been something other people have traditionally done for you. Lori's class has a similar cooking opportunity and experience:

We do our cooking lessons, and it's pretty well the same with all of the classes. Well, we vote. We look at the ads, and [choose] what's on sale. [We tell the students] 'we can make this but give me three ideas of what you want to do, and then vote, because it, if you're ever going to go to a group home, you vote.' Or, if you live on your own, you'll have to decide what you want to eat. So, they'd pick three things, we vote, and then we have to do the budget. We have to see, "OK, so, if the recipes says it makes enough for six, now we got a group that's a three times that, so how much cheese do we need?" So, it's the math lesson, a health lesson, budget lesson, and so on. So, there's a wide variety of lessons that are going on just if we're going to make chili dogs. So, one group may be doing the budgeting. Okay, we have \$50 that we get to spend. We come together as a group and [decide], what's the menu going to be? What's the ingredients that we need? If [one student's] IEP says they need budgeting to they move out on their own, then [they] have to go to the store with a calculator and budget that. While the other kids, they're still in the domestic domain, they're learning how to chop the hot dogs with the butter knife. So, everybody's getting the same lesson, but it's to them, specific.

This example lesson is the culmination of previous factors: knowing what students can do independently and where they need help, allowing for their preferences and input, addressing the skills that need to be worked on as part of highly individualized IEP goals that have been built as a team, and teaching beyond a boxed instructional program. In Lori's example she shows an awareness of her students next steps beyond the CBT – are students living independently and determining their own meals? Are they deciding as part of a group? She also points out that math skills are inherent in cooking, as are the opportunities to talk about health and nutrition, which adds to the richness of her instruction.

In addition, she also shared a lengthier example, detailing all of the instructional features included in a Community-Based Instruction (CBI) outing:

We have fun. I have one group that loves to go to the thrift store and then the other group loves to go to the mall. On Fridays you bring money, because we're going out. And, so, then you get your budgeting, you get your social skills because some of them will tell me, 'Miss, I want a cheeseburger.' [And I say], 'Oh, I'm sorry, I'm not taking your order, you've got to tell [the cashier].' So, those aren't lesson plans, but yet it's teaching in the everyday world. [In reference to students bringing money from home] You can't go to the mall with \$5. That's just really not happening. But you can go to the thrift store, and you can still learn that money exchange, and then go to McDonald's and get a \$2 burger, you know. Or, if they don't even have anything, then I put it on myself and say, 'Okay, Miss Lori's looking for something red, go find me something red.' And I have to buy



whatever's red. You know? (laughs). Sometimes it costs me more money. And we've done scavenger hunts at the mall. Find a payphone. Try to find that. Find the security guard's office. Get a business card from a company, things like that.

Like her cooking lesson, shopping in the community also includes knowing what students can do independently and where they need help, and letting students choose where they go and what they do. Other, more context-specific features of this lesson include students knowing how much money they have and whether or not they have enough money to make a specific purchase, knowing and using the specific social skills required to order food, and an awareness of their surroundings. There are myriad instructional opportunities available in a lesson like this, and Megan sees this type of outing as a personalized experience for each student:

It's mainly individualized. So, we look at their baseline of what they're coming in [with] as far as their skills go. But primarily we focus on community-based instruction, and independent living. So, if we're looking at community-based instruction, and they're coming in as first year students, typically, we'll start with a closer proximity to the classroom. So, it might be just walking around the block without crossing any streets, are they looking up, are they staying within close proximity to the staff. And then if we feel like they're safe already, we might cross the street and just go to the classroom across to see how they form that way. And then kind of branch out further away. So, the library and the park over here are closer, so we'll start with those, and then move into stores and whatnot. And same thing in the stores. Can they identify where the milk is, or whatever item you think they might use on a regular basis. And then can they locate where the price is, do they know what the price means. If we say, 'you have three dollars,' do they know what's within their budget? So, we just kind of base it off of those things.

There is a sequence in how Megan approaches teaching in the community; she begins by establishing a baseline of what a student can do with a walk around the area close to the classroom, and then gradually increasing the difficulty. As in an earlier example, she is scaffolding instruction for her students. Once the students are at a point where they are shopping for items in a grocery store, Megan builds on a student's interest, experience, and prior knowledge by asking them to find an item they are familiar with.

Like Lori, Megan is teaching math and budgeting skills within the context of making a purchase.

She provides an example of a lesson that incorporates math skills, which are traditionally considered academic skills, with making a grocery list and determining the cost of items on the list, which would be considered a functional skill:

So, for my independent guys, if we're doing, say an academic lesson this day, they might be creating a mock shopping list of a recipe that we're going to make. Wednesday is typically our cooking lab days. So, they might identify what we should be cooking, creating a list of that. And then we might go further on, into Google, go into [the Wal-Mart website], and see if we could kind of price those items. So, they might be working on budgeting. And the other students might be working on identifying, this is the list and then they have a cluster of icons, [and have to] find each item. So, you just kind of level it off.

Regardless of a student's particular ability level, Megan's thinking and teaching process is sequential, and she builds the complexity of the lesson and task as she moves forward. Within a cooking lesson, some students are determining which items are needed, and how many of each item they can afford, while other students are identifying the various items on the grocery list. No matter the student's ability level, Megan has designed instruction that will build each student's skills. Lori operates in much the same way as Megan; she identified what a student is working on, and how to move forward and build those skills.

Lori's classroom has a strong focus on the microbusiness and in developing the microbusiness she worked for years largely without a formal program, relying on the students and the internet to find crafting ideas. Recently, she did purchase a specific book:

I actually bought microbusiness curriculum, and [a] student had [bought] one herself. She had bought a book herself because they were on Amazon for only, like, ten dollars. And so, at the next Farmer's market that we do, because she's been making her own cards, I said, 'you're going to sit at the table and you're going to sell your own cards.' So, she's been doing her own curriculum with her own microbusiness book.

Lori's student sought out a text that would help her (the student) build her skills and contribute to the microbusiness, which is a great example of independence and was greatly validated when Lori chose to buy the same book. The text that helped one student develop a plan for her

participation in the microbusiness is now available to the whole class via Lori. This demonstrates Lori's efforts to include all of her students in the microbusiness, at their individual levels, so that they can build job readiness skills.

In attempts to meet personal care needs, Lori's students are part of a collaborative effort between multiple classes, an informal girls club and boys club where students meet to discuss skills and interests; she explained:

All the girls come to me, and all the boys go to [one of the male teachers]. And so, the girls, what I had them do is they write down on a card what they want to talk about. And so, then we pull it that meeting, so it gives me time to prepare. The next one is going to be about relationships. Sometimes, it's glamourama, so we have the nails stuff, and the curling irons, because the girls will say, 'I want to know how to put makeup on.' Or, they need to know about shaving. I said, 'let's learn how to do this so you don't hurt yourself.' We've shaved balloons before. We've done Facebook etiquette. That was a big one because, you know, the girls can be bullies on there. We try and have a collaboration because even the parents will come in. It's more of that whole group talking, you know? I think they will pay more attention to things they asked to learn about. They are more interested so that makes sense.

The girls club looks a little more like a traditional lesson, in that it is scheduled, and Lori prepares the content of the lesson. She knows that the group will talk about personal needs and personal care, and that students have chosen the topics they want to learn about. By including parents and other teachers in the group, the lesson becomes collaborative and group-oriented in a way that a math or cooking or reading lesson might not be.

For both Megan and Lori, "lessons" begin with determining their students' current skill levels, and using that information to develop both job-seeking skills, and the skills that students state an interest in. Students make choices that impact their instructional opportunities, which sometimes mean they spend more of their school day in the community than in the classroom, and which means that both teachers are seizing instructional opportunities wherever they can. Lessons might be planned or unplanned or delivered in response to a given context or incident,

and instruction can include formal programs and curricula, or community-based or job-based instruction. Lessons might also be designed to address skills that are part of a student's IEP goals, and those goals are developed collaboratively with students and their parents. Overall, there is a great deal of flexibility in how both teachers describe finding instructional content and delivering lessons to their students.

### **Summary of Findings**

Three themes emerged from this study: determine what students need to learn, let students make instructional decisions, and meet instructional needs using available materials and opportunities. With regard to the first theme, when asked about how they plan and develop instruction, both Megan and Lori began by acknowledging the need to determine a student's current skill level, asking themselves what can my students do by themselves, and what do they need help with? And how much help do they need? Both teachers also articulated the importance of teaching students to develop job-seeking skills, and how the baselines they had developed provided the starting point for instruction.

In addition to determining what students can do, Megan and Lori want to know what their students want to do and, as a result, students in both classrooms have choice-making opportunities that impact the school day, which is theme two. Students choose whether to stay in the classroom or go out in the community, what they would like to make for lunch, and how they are going to contribute to class projects. These choice-making opportunities happen in groups, and on an individual basis, including determining IEP goals. In both classrooms, IEP goals are developed collaboratively with students and their parents, so that student choice may be taken into account, along with parent input.

Lastly, both Megan and Lori considered several factors when planning lessons and instructional content, and actually teaching their students. They consider classroom and student schedules as students in both classes participate in some type of employment program that places them in the community during the school day. There are also classroom instruction trips, called Community-Based Instruction, that happens on a daily basis, and each classroom has a microbusiness, which involves in class prep and sales in the community. As a result, teaching opportunities cannot be limited to specifically scheduled times and places. Instructional programs have been provided to both classrooms, and while those materials are available, the materials do need to be modified in order to address the various skill levels in each classroom. Also, both teachers teach lessons on cooking, meal prep, making a purchase, and so on, without pre-packaged materials relying instead on teaching functional life skills within context.

When considering the many factors involved in planning instruction and teaching their students, both Megan and Lori prioritized their students' ability levels, job seeking skills, and individual interests, which results in classrooms where instruction is multi-faceted and looks very different for each student.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study sought to address the following research questions: How do teachers in community-based programs describe or explain their decision-making with regard to instruction? What factors play a role in making instructional decisions for this population of students? In what ways do teachers of transition programs design and implement instruction?

### Discussion

Findings from the data analysis consist of three themes, each with sub-themes:

1. Determine what students need to learn how to do.
  - a. Determine a student's current skill level.
  - b. Develop job seeking skills.
2. Let students make instructional decisions.
  - a. Allow students to make choices.
  - b. Develop IEP goals with students and parents.
3. Meet instructional needs using available materials and opportunities.
  - a. Consider classroom and student schedules.
  - b. Use provided programs.
  - c. Modify provided programs.
  - d. Teach without programs.

Each of the three themes can be used to address the research questions, and can be placed within literature regarding how special education teachers make instructional decisions, curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities, transition programming and practices, and instructional practices for transitions.

**Research Question 1. In what ways do teachers in community-based programs perceive and understand their curriculum decision-making processes?**

While researchers have examined how teachers describe or explain their decision-making process with regard to curriculum and instruction, there is a gap in the literature regarding

decisions made by teachers of community-based transitions programs (CBTs). A study from Rupp, Gaffney, and Dymond (2015), comes the closest to addressing this gap, and examined teacher decisions made with regard to literacy instruction for secondary students with severe disabilities. They found that there are four factors that contribute to making instructional decisions: contexts, beliefs about students, teaching, and learning, expectations, and self-efficacy (Rupp, Gaffney, and Dymond, 2015).

Contexts includes a number of smaller factors, such as managing staff and materials, working with colleagues and administrators, demonstrating an awareness of policies, the influence of collective curricular practices, the influence of personal and professional experiences, and the influence of professional development (Rupp, Gaffney, & Dymond, 2015, p. 217). Each of these factors was taken into consideration as the study's participants made decisions related to literacy instruction.

The second factor, beliefs about students, teaching, and learning is made up of smaller factors as well: individualization, communication, and student's perspectives (Rupp, Gaffney, & Dymond, 2015, p. 217). The researchers defined individualization as "the degree to which teachers designed lessons and goals for individual students, rather than writing goals based on external guidelines, instructional groups, and materials shared among students," (2015, p. 219). This is a definition which is exemplified in examples Megan and Lori provide regarding student-led instruction in their classrooms.

Expectations consists of two pieces, beliefs about causes for student learning and assumptions about student outcomes and capacities for learning (Rupp, Gaffney, & Dymond, 2015, p. 220). The researchers elaborated and explained that, "teachers' beliefs about the causes for student learning led teachers to take more or less responsibility for their students' literacy

learning,” going on to note that “teachers who felt that they could cause student learning felt more self-efficacious in their literacy teaching,” (Ruppar, Gaffney, & Dymond, 2015, p. 220) They also explained that “teachers articulated differing perspectives on the potential outcomes of their literacy instruction, which were based on their perceptions of their students’ capacities to learn,” (Ruppar, Gaffney, & Dymond, 2015, p. 220).

The final factor, self-efficacy, was noted to be “influenced by [participants’] beliefs about students, teaching, and learning; their expectations; and their contexts,” (Ruppar, Gaffney, & Dymond, 2015, p. 220). Ruppar, Gaffney, and Dymond (2015) go on to state that

Teachers varied in their perceptions about their knowledge concerning literacy instruction and in the ways they developed their own expertise about literacy. Teachers who individualized instruction, valued communication, and saw teaching from the students’ perspective felt self-efficacious due to their understandings of their students and were less likely to seek professional development. Teachers who felt that they could cause student learning and who envisioned positive literacy outcomes for their students felt more self-efficacious in their literacy teaching (p. 220).

This echoes findings from Stough and Palmer (2003), who studied the practices of special education teachers representing a variety of grade levels and special education classrooms/settings and found that “instructional decision-making by . . . teachers relied heavily upon their prior knowledge about educational practice and upon their background knowledge of student characteristics,” (p. 211).

Although it focuses on literacy decisions and not CBT programs, the 2015 study by Ruppar, Gaffney, and Dymond provides the most insight into how teachers of students with severe disabilities make instructional decisions, and the authors noted that, “despite the potential consequences of special education teachers’ decisions, not much is known about how teachers of students with severe disabilities make curricular decisions,” (p. 209).



When attempting to answer the question “In what ways do teachers in community-based programs perceive and understand their curriculum decision-making processes?” relevant research from Rupp, Gaffney, and Dymond (2015) and responses from the participants align.

Megan and Lori’s stated need to determine students’ baseline abilities before instruction begins allows for highly individualized instruction, which is part of one of the factors identified in Rupp, Gaffney, and Dymond’s 2015 study. Also, both Megan and Lori expect their students to be able to learn, and strive to teach their students important skills, such as job-seeking skills. It should be noted that both Megan and Lori define “important skills” as being both skills their students choose and skills that will allow for increased independence. Their emphasis on outcomes also ties in with findings from Rupp, Gaffney, and Dymond (2015), who included assumptions about student outcomes as part of expectations, another factor in decision-making.

Overall, statements from the participants demonstrate that teachers of CBT programs explain their decision-making process by asking themselves what students need to learn how to do, and then following up with determining a students’ current skill level and assisting the student in developing job-seeking skills. There is an inherent understanding that students can learn and want to learn, which echoes the factors that are part of the decision-making process of special education teachers decisions regarding literacy instruction as explained by Rupp, Gaffney, and Dymond (2015). Although Megan and Lori teach different populations than the teachers in Rupp, Gaffney, and Dymond’s (2015) study, and are explaining their decisions regarding instruction overall and not just regarding literacy, the findings are consistent and Megan and Lori’s statements reflect what has been found in literature.

**Research Question 2. What factors play a role in curriculum decision-making for this population of students?**

While there is little research regarding CBT programs specifically, the area of transition services, transition planning, and transition instruction is well represented in literature, and a number of factors should be considered when teachers make instructional decisions for students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities who are ages 18-21 and attend a CBT. These factors include: a federal requirement to use programs or practices that are research based, the taxonomy for transition planning developed by Kohler (1996), the predictors of post-school success that have been identified through research, the alignment of components in the Individualized Transition Plan (ITPs) and the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), the transition teacher's competency with regard to transition services, and the Fast Fact sheets, Evidence-Based Practices Matrices, Lesson Starters and so on that have been developed by professional organizations. Each of these factors can be used to inform CBT teachers as they plan instruction and make decisions for their students.

Test et al. (2015) cited the U.S. Department of Education noting that,

Congress now requires schools and educators to use instructional programs or practices grounded in scientifically based research (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Scientifically based research was first defined in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as “research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs” (NCLB, 20 U.S.C 7801 § 9101[37]).

As a result, teachers, including those in CBT programs, should determine whether or not the instructional programs or practices they are using or considering are grounded in scientifically based research.

Kohler's 1996 study resulted in a taxonomy that can be used as a framework for “designing educational programs that reflect a transition perspective for students with disabilities,” (1996, p i). (See Table 1) Kohler's taxonomy includes the following components: student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, program structure,

and family involvement. These components are intended to be used for transition planning overall, not just for students aging out of a CBT program. For example, each piece could be incorporated into planning for transitions from elementary school to junior high school, transitions into a workability program, or transitions into a CBT program. Overall, Kohler developed a framework for teachers and administrators to use when a student is going to experience a transition in services.

A number of studies regarding post-school outcomes for youth with intellectual disabilities have found that they are likely to experience low employment rates and poor outcomes (Bouck, 2012; Bouck, 2013; Bouck & Joshi, 2015; Karpur, Brewer, & Golden, 2014; Katsiyannis, Zhang, Woodruff, & Dixon, 2005; Papay & Bambara, 2011; Shogren, Kennedy, Dowsett, & Little, 2014). Given this research, evidence-based predictors of post-school success should be considered when teachers make instructional decisions. In addition, when Rowe et al. (2015) attempted to operationally define the predictors of post-school success “for educators to understand what is necessary to develop, implement, and evaluate secondary transition programs based on predictor research,” they noted that “many teachers continue to provide services shown to have little to no effect on outcomes of students with disabilities,” (p. 113).

Studies from Test, Bartholomew, and Bethune (2015) and Mazzotti et al. (2016) have identified twenty evidence-based predictors of post-school success for individuals with disabilities: 1) career awareness, 2) community experiences, 3) high school diploma status, 4) inclusion in general education, 5) independent living, 6) interagency collaboration, 7) occupational courses, 8) paid employment/work experience, 9) parent expectations, 10) parental involvement, 11) program of study, 12) self-determination, 13) social skills, 14) student support, 15) transition program, 16) vocational education, 17) work study, 18) youth autonomy and

decision-making, 19) travel skills, and 20) goal setting. Each of these predictors should be considered when CBT teachers make instructional decisions for their students and classrooms.

To aide in that process, Rowe et al. developed operational definitions and essential program characteristics for sixteen predictors of post-school success: career awareness, occupational courses, paid employment/work experience, vocational education, work study, community experiences, exit exam/high school diploma status, inclusion of general education, program of study, self-determination/self-advocacy, self care/independent living skills, social skills, interagency collaboration, parental involvement, student support, and transition program (p. 113). Each predictor category was defined and essential program characteristics were listed, so as to allow teachers and administrators to easily identify the predictors, and what implementing those predictors into a classroom or program could look like.

Table 4

*Operational Definitions and Essential Program Characteristics of the 16 Predictors Identified in Test, Mazzotti, et al. (2009)*

Career Awareness	<p>Definition: Career awareness is learning about opportunities, education, and skills needed in various occupational pathways to choose a career that matches one's strengths and interests.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide school-wide comprehensive and systematic opportunities to learn about various careers via job shadowing, internships, guest speakers, industry tours, Career Technical Education (CTE) classes, or career fairs.</li> <li>• Identify skills and qualifications required for occupations aligned with core content areas.</li> <li>• Embed career awareness in the general curriculum to teach about occupations related to the core content areas.</li> <li>• Make explicit connections between academic skills and how those skills are used in various careers throughout all general education classes.</li> <li>• Provide systematic, age-appropriate student assessment of career awareness (e.g., interest inventories, aptitude tests) for students to learn about their preferences and aptitudes for various types of career.</li> <li>• Provide instruction in how to obtain a job in chosen career path.</li> </ul>
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(Table 4 Continued)

Occupational Courses	<p>Definition: Occupational courses are individual courses that support career awareness, allow or enable students to explore various career pathways, develop occupational specific skills through instruction, and experiences focused on their desired employment goals.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed career awareness activities, career planning, and vocational assessments in all occupational courses.</li> <li>• Design curriculum for each course to include technology, 21st century skills, and employability skills for specific career/career cluster content.</li> <li>• Provide hands-on and community-based opportunities to learn occupational specific skills within each occupational course.</li> <li>• Incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in CTE programs including cooperative education programs to provide access to students with disabilities.</li> <li>• Provide course offerings throughout the school day so scheduling conflicts do not restrict student access to occupational courses.</li> <li>• Provide occupational courses that represent a wide variety of occupational clusters to provide students course choices that match their preferences, interests, needs, and strengths.</li> </ul>
Paid Employment/ Work Experience	<p>Definition: Work experience is any activity that places the student in an authentic workplace and could include work sampling, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. Paid employment can include existing standard jobs in a company or organization or customized work assignments negotiated with the employer, but these activities always feature competitive pay (e.g., minimum wage) paid directly to the student by the employer.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities to participate in job shadowing, work study, apprenticeships, or internships.</li> <li>• Provide instruction in soft skills (e.g., problem solving, communicating with authority figures, responding to feedback, promptness) and occupational specific skills (e.g., clerical, machine operation).</li> <li>• Provide transportation training, including the use of public transportation and job-site and community safety.</li> <li>• Conduct job performance evaluations by student, school staff, and employer.</li> <li>• Provide instruction in obtaining (e.g., resume development) and maintaining a job.</li> <li>• Develop a process for community-based employment options in integrated settings with a majority of co-workers without disabilities.</li> <li>• Conduct situational vocational assessments to determine appropriate job matches.</li> </ul>

(Table 4 Continued)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a process to enable students to earn high school credit for paid employment work experience.</li> <li>• Link eligible students to appropriate adult services (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation, Developmental Disabilities Services) prior to exiting school that will support students in work or further education.</li> <li>• Involve appropriate adult services (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation or job coach when needed) in the provision of community-based work experiences.</li> <li>• Use age-appropriate assessments to ensure jobs are based on students' strengths, preferences, interest, and needs.</li> <li>• Ensure employment training placements offer opportunities for (a) working 30+ hr/week, (b) making minimum wage or higher, with benefits, and (c) utilizing individualized supports and reasonable accommodations.</li> </ul>
Vocational Education	<p>Definition: Vocational education is a sequence of courses that prepares students for a specific job or career at various levels from trade or craft positions to technical, business, or professional careers.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a sequence of entry level and advanced integrated academic and vocational courses designed to improve students' reasoning and problem-solving skills, academic knowledge, work attitudes, specific occupational and/or technical skills, and general skills needed for employment.</li> <li>• Provide a combination of in-school and community-based academic, competency-based applied, and hands-on learning experiences in the career pathways based on the local labor market.</li> <li>• Provide connection to post-secondary education and/or employment through site visits and connections with support services (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, disability support services).</li> <li>• Provide opportunities to earn certificates in certain career areas (e.g., Certified Nursing Assistant, Welding, Food Handlers Certification).</li> <li>• Develop business partnerships to ensure a relevant curriculum.</li> <li>• Provide career counseling and guidance to assist students in career planning and development aligned with the students' preferences, interests, needs, and skills.</li> <li>• Provide instruction in career development through volunteer work, job shadowing, work study, apprenticeships, or internships.</li> <li>• Provide accommodation and supports in CTE courses to ensure student access and mastery of content.</li> </ul>

(Table 4 Continued)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide instruction in soft skills (e.g., problem solving, communicating with authority figures, responding to feedback, promptness) and occupational specific skills (e.g., clerical, machine operation).</li> <li>• Measure achievement in soft skills (e.g., problem solving, communicating with authority figures, responding to feedback, promptness) and occupational specific skills (e.g., clerical, machine operation).</li> </ul>
Work Study	<p>Definition: A work study program is a specified sequence of work skills instruction and experiences designed to develop students' work attitudes and general work behaviors by providing students with mutually supportive and integrated academic and vocational instruction.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide options for paid and non-paid work experiences both on- and off-campus with options for gaining high school credit for completing program requirements in all 16 occupational clusters.</li> <li>• Develop a plan for earning academic credit on the job through an integrated curriculum focused on work-related skills with school personnel, the student, and his or her parents.</li> <li>• Develop business/school partnerships, by educating employers about the resources of potential employees, to set up training sites.</li> <li>• Develop policies to address liability, including student insurance and other Department of Labor issues/ concerns.</li> <li>• Develop a process to match student interests with available sites both on- and off-campus.</li> <li>• Provide experiences in applied real-work settings supported by instruction.</li> <li>• Place students in work settings that match their preferences, interests, needs, and skills.</li> <li>• Provide transportation to vocational training sites.</li> <li>• Provide, or partner with adult services to provide, qualified trained staff to job coach as needed.</li> <li>• Provide self-evaluation and monitoring instruction to students.</li> <li>• Provide students school-based opportunities to reflect, discuss, and share their work placement experiences.</li> <li>• Have school personnel and site employees assess and monitor students' progress by using job duty forms and task analysis for various sites.</li> </ul>

(Table 4 Continued)

Community Experiences	<p>Definition: Community experiences are activities occurring outside the school setting, supported with in- class instruction, where students apply academic, social, and/or general work behaviors and skills.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocate sufficient resources to support meaningful community-based experiences.</li> <li>• Conduct ecological assessments to determine skills needed for various community environments.</li> <li>• Provide instruction on skills needed to safely access community environments as identified via ecological assessments.</li> <li>• Conduct transition assessments with students and families to determine appropriate community environments for current and future activities.</li> <li>• Use community-based instruction to teach, assess, and monitor the obtainment of desired academic and/or functional skills.</li> <li>• Observe and document students' attainment of desired behaviors and skills across diverse environments.</li> <li>• Instruct students to use public transportation.</li> <li>• Provide supervision during community experiences to guide and direct students in the development of appropriate behaviors and skills needed for specific environments.</li> <li>• Involve parent and adult service providers to support student involvement in community experiences.</li> <li>• Cooperate with community partners (e.g., employers, recreation facilities) to develop community experience sites.</li> <li>• Provide supports for parents to arrange community experiences after school hours.</li> <li>• Train teachers and paraprofessionals in necessary safety, health policies, and liability coverage necessary for students to participate in community experiences.</li> </ul>
Exit Exam Requirements/ High School Diploma Status	<p>Definition: Exit exams are standardized state tests, assessing single content area (e.g., algebra, English) or multiple skill areas, with specified levels of proficiency that students must pass to obtain a high school diploma.</p> <p>Diploma status is achieved by completing the requirements of the state awarding the diploma including the completion of necessary core curriculum credits.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach test-taking strategies and study skills instruction.</li> <li>• Assist students to plan for and use appropriate accommodations when taking the test.</li> <li>• Administer standardized practice tests periodically to monitor progress toward benchmarks.</li> </ul>



(Table 4 Continued)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide exit exams at the end of targeted courses designated by the state or at the end of a specific grade level (e.g., 11th).</li> <li>• Offer students, meeting criteria, appropriate accommodations, alternate, or alternative assessment procedures.</li> <li>• Provide student remediation assistance if they fail the test.</li> <li>• Provide students with multiple opportunities to take the test as allowed by the school/district for all students.</li> </ul>
Inclusion in General Education	<p>Definition: Inclusion in general education requires students with disabilities to have access to general education curriculum and be engaged in regular education classes with peers without disabilities. Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide administrative support (e.g., professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals, common planning, providing paraprofessionals) to teachers for students with disabilities included in general education classrooms.</li> <li>• Provide specific instruction to support students with disabilities who are included in general education (e.g., differentiate instruction, learning strategies, study skills, organizational skills, personal management skills).</li> <li>• Evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive programming by using formative assessment to identify when adjustments are needed to accommodate all students' learning differences (e.g., pace, communication skills).</li> <li>• Develop a receptive school atmosphere for including students with disabilities in general education by educating administrators, teachers, other staff, and students about person-first language and disability rights.</li> <li>• Observe and assess integrated environment to identify and provide interventions for needed academic, social, behavior, and communication skills to ensure a conducive learning environment for all students.</li> <li>• Use diverse instructional strategies to meet the learning needs of all students including UDL, technology, and linking instruction to student interests.</li> <li>• Provide professional development for secondary personnel to ensure personnel are qualified to use UDL and evidence-based instructional strategies.</li> <li>• Engage students as active participants in general education instructional processes utilizing multiple models of inclusive learning.</li> </ul>

(Table 4 Continued)

Program of Study	<p>Definition: A program of study is an individualized set of courses, experiences, and curriculum designed to develop students' academic and functional achievement to support the attainment of students' desired post-school goals.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure program of study is inclusive, academically rigorous, and supported by UDL principles.</li> <li>• Design multiple pathways in the general curriculum for satisfying standard diploma requirements.</li> <li>• Provide clearly defined graduation requirements leading to a state sanctioned exit document.</li> <li>• Establish planning process to assist students in developing their program of study.</li> <li>• Provide multiple opportunities (e.g., CTE; community-based work, independent living, and community access experiences; school-based enterprises; dual credit through a cooperative agreement) for students to acquire needed credits to achieve standard diploma and ensure a seamless transition to post- secondary education and employment settings.</li> </ul>
Self-Determination/ Self-Advocacy	<p>Definition: Self-determination is the ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, take initiative to reach one's goals, and accept consequences of one's actions.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize a student driven Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process to allow students to demonstrate self-awareness, goal setting, problem solving, and self-advocacy.</li> <li>• Collaborate with general education teachers to embed choices into the general curriculum and daily lessons and provide opportunities for students to practice self-determination skills.</li> <li>• Teach students to self-monitor self-determination skills (e.g., accommodations and modifications) and provide opportunities for students to practice the self-monitoring strategy.</li> <li>• Ensure all students, including those with significant disabilities, have a functional communication system to engage in choice making, problem solving, goal setting, taking initiative to reach goals, and accepting consequences for one's actions.</li> <li>• Conduct age-appropriate transition assessments for students to learn about themselves, set goals, solve problems, use information, make decisions, and identify long-range goals.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for students to develop self-awareness by engaging in honest and respectful discussions with students about their self-determination assessment responses.</li> </ul>

(Table 4 Continued)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide direct instruction in self-determination using a structured curriculum or evidence-based instructional strategy, with guided practice in natural school and community-based settings.</li> <li>• Foster the development of students' leadership skills.</li> <li>• Expect and support students to make many routine choices for themselves through the course of a school day.</li> <li>• Work collaboratively with students to facilitate achievement of their goals by informing them of their options and the potential consequences of their choices.</li> </ul>
Self Care/ Independent Living Skills	<p>Definition: Self-care/independent living skills are skills necessary for management of one's personal self-care and daily independent living, including the personal management skills needed to interact with others, daily living skills, financial management skills, and the self-management of health care/wellness needs.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide instruction, as needed based on assessment data, in (a) financial planning, (b) self-help, (c) cooking, (d) housekeeping, (e) home maintenance, (f) using transportation, (g) clothing care, (h) accessing community services, (i) time/organizational management, (j) self-determination, (k) social roles/ citizenship, (l) community/peer relationships, or (m) critical thinking and problem solving.</li> <li>• Embed self-care/independent living skills instruction into academic coursework to help students connect academic skills to post-school goals.</li> <li>• Provide instruction in self-care independent living skills in multiple settings including general education, special education, and community.</li> <li>• Provide individual, small group, or whole class instruction in independent living and self-care skills, as appropriate.</li> <li>• Provide students multiple opportunities to practice independent living skills throughout the school day in real-life situations using real-life materials and equipment.</li> <li>• Provide transition services (e.g., completing housing application, obtaining Social Security Disability) for students to accomplish post-secondary independent living goals.</li> <li>• Conduct ongoing assessment of self-care/independent living skills to identify and evaluate levels of skill attainment, maintenance, and generalized use of skills in other settings where use of skills are required.</li> <li>• Teach home and community recreation skills that can be done alone or with others in both organized and informal settings.</li> </ul>

(Table 4 Continued)

Social Skills	<p>Definition: Social skills are behaviors and attitudes that facilitate communication and cooperation (e.g., social conventions, social problem solving when engaged in a social interaction, body language, speaking, listening, responding, verbal, and written communication).</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate social skills instruction across the curriculum (e.g., general education and community).</li> <li>• Use a direct instruction curriculum to teach communication, interpersonal, conversational, negotiation, conflict, and group skills in context.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for students to practice communication, interpersonal, conversational, negotiation, conflict, and group skills in context.</li> <li>• Assist students to use problem-solving skills when difficult interpersonal situations arise in context.</li> <li>• Provide parent and school staff information and training in supporting age-appropriate social skill development for their child, taking into consideration the family's cultural standards.</li> <li>• Use augmentative communication (AC) and assistive technology (AT) devices to encourage communication for students who use AC/AT.</li> <li>• Use ecological assessments to identify the social skills students will be expected to perform in each context.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for students to practice social skills that foster authentic social interactions that foster the development of friendships.</li> <li>• Teach students to self-evaluate their use of social skills in the appropriate context.</li> <li>• Teach students the social expectations for various environments (e.g., church, school, work, recreation).</li> </ul>
Interagency Collaboration	<p>Definition: Interagency collaboration is a clear, purposeful, and carefully designed process that promotes cross-agency, cross-program, and cross-disciplinary collaborative efforts leading to tangible transition outcomes for youth.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop wide reaching state interagency teams that include disability related and non-disability related agencies (e.g., Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Labor, Social Security Administration) with a common interest in transition service delivery.</li> <li>• Develop and implement formal and informal agreements between agencies responsible for the delivery of transition services.</li> </ul>

(Table 4 Continued)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an agreed on vision and mission of transition services and programs.</li> <li>• Develop an organizational structure that includes a process for identifying membership (e.g., criteria for membership), terms of services, procedures for replacing members, orientation for new members, and web-based and print membership directories.</li> <li>• Coordinate the development of policies and procedures for service delivery and sharing of resources by both school and community agencies.</li> <li>• Implement a state-wide plan that (a) addresses gaps, (b) includes strategies for blending and braiding funding of other resources, (c) streamlines the transition process, and (d) eradicates duplication of service delivery.</li> <li>• Conduct asset/resource mapping to identify all community agencies that support youth with disabilities in the area as well as gaps in service delivery.</li> <li>• Clearly define roles and responsibilities of each organization as a part of the interagency agreement.</li> <li>• Schedule regular times for planning, developing, and measuring the progress and effectiveness of implementing a shared transition service delivery system at all levels (e.g., individual student, school, local, region, state, and nation).</li> <li>• Develop procedures for shared problem solving to address needs of students with disabilities and the barriers they may face during transition process.</li> <li>• Develop procedures for school staff to have systematic way to include students, families, community members, and agencies at different levels of the transition process (e.g., when to invite to IEP meetings, when to refer families to meet with agency, when to provide information sheet to family)</li> <li>• Establish multiple methods of communication and information sharing across agencies.</li> <li>• Provide cross-discipline professional development opportunities for all members of interagency council to ensure members are knowledgeable about services and eligibility criteria.</li> </ul>
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(Table 4 Continued)

Parental Involvement	<p>Definition: Parent involvement means parents/families/guardians are active and knowledgeable participants in all aspects of transition planning (e.g., decision-making, providing support, attending meetings, and advocating for their child).</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide relevant information about transition planning to parents through a variety of means (e.g., written, face-to-face, community-based trainings such as Autism Society) at each stage of the transition planning process such as transition from middle to high school, age of majority, and graduation.</li> <li>• Link parents with support networks (e.g., networking opportunities with other parents, advocacy groups).</li> <li>• Provide multiple options for involvement (e.g., pre-IEP planning input, flexible IEP meeting times) and alternate ways to obtain input in the transition planning process.</li> <li>• Establish a welcoming atmosphere in the school by developing a system of ongoing communication and interaction (e.g., e-mail, notes home, home visits, and regularly scheduled meetings in addition to IEP meetings).</li> <li>• Provide fairs, brochures, or workshops to educate parents about adult services and post-school supports in the community (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, mental health resources, post-secondary education institutions and supports).</li> <li>• Provide staff training on culturally competent transition planning (e.g., recognizing and honoring differences such as ethnic, socioeconomic, and values of the family).</li> <li>• Actively engage parents in interagency transition councils.</li> <li>• Collaborate with families to identify how the school and family/guardian can support the students in achieving their desired post-school goals.</li> <li>• Share transition assessment results with parents so that parents can use the information to provide training for their child in the home and the community and identify natural supports.</li> </ul>
Student Support	<p>Definition: Student support is a network of people (e.g., family, friends, educators, and adult service providers) who provide services and resources in multiple environments to prepare students to obtain their annual transition and post-secondary goals aligned with their preferences, interests, and needs.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement procedures for cultivating and maintaining school and community networks to assist students in obtaining their post-secondary goals.</li> <li>• Provide students access to rigorous, differentiated academic instruction.</li> </ul>

(Table 4 Continued)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link students to appropriate individuals who can assist students in obtaining access to assistive technology resources and teach students to use technology to enhance their academic and functional performance.</li> <li>• Link students to appropriate individuals who can provide support for financial planning, navigating the health care system, adult services, or transportation.</li> <li>• Link students to a community mentor and/or school-based mentor/graduation coach.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for meaningful engagement in the community (e.g., clubs, friends, advocacy groups, sports, etc.).</li> <li>• Ensure teachers and other service personnel provide ongoing transition assessment to assist in planning for needed supports and resources in school and beyond.</li> </ul>
Transition Program	<p>Definition: A transition program prepares students to move from secondary settings (e.g., middle school/high school) to adult life, utilizing comprehensive transition planning and education that creates individualized opportunities, services, and supports to help students achieve their post-school goals in education/training, employment, and independent living.</p> <p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide systems level infrastructure (e.g., highly qualified staff and administrators with defined roles and responsibilities, sufficient budget) to monitor and guide students to obtain post-school goals.</li> <li>• Provide integrated instruction in all areas of independent living (e.g., community living, transportation, recreation leisure, self-advocacy, goal setting, decision-making) for all students with disabilities.</li> <li>• Provide individualized transition focused curriculum and instruction based on students' post-secondary goals in post-secondary education, employment, and independent living (e.g., self-determination and financial planning).</li> <li>• Provide instruction and training in natural environments supported by classroom instruction.</li> <li>• Provide individualized transition services based on students' post-secondary goals in post-secondary education, employment, and independent living (e.g., self-determination and financial planning).</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for engagement with non-disabled peers in the school and community.</li> <li>• Use interagency collaboration with clearly defined roles and responsibilities to provide coordinated transition services (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health) at multiple levels (i.e., student, school, districts, region, and state) to assist students in meeting their post-secondary goals.</li> </ul>

(Table 4 Continued)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor and assess students’ progress in the domains of academics, daily living, personal and social, and occupational.</li> <li>• Use multiple strength-based assessments across multiple domains at different points in time to assist student and IEP teams in post-school planning.</li> <li>• Provide training and resources to families to involve them in transition planning and connect them to adult agencies and support and information networks.</li> <li>• Conduct program evaluation to assess effectiveness of transition program.</li> </ul>
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These predictors fall within the definition of evidence-based practices that was developed by Cook and Cook (2011). They defined evidence-based practices as instructional techniques “that meet prescribed criteria related to the research design, quality, quantity, and effect size of supporting research, which have the potential to help bridge the research-to-practice gap and improve student outcomes,” (2011, p. 11). Cook and Cook (2011) noted that when teachers use personal experience, tradition, and expert opinion to determine what works in the classroom, they are susceptible to “determining that ineffective practices are effective and that effective practices are ineffective,” (2011, p. 2). To guard against such errors, teachers were encouraged to engage in evidence-based teaching practices; thus, CBT teachers could be encouraged to make instructional decisions that factor in the predictors for post-school success developed by Test, Bartholomew, and Bethune, 2015, and Mazzotti et al. 2016.

In their 2015 study on the alignment of IEP components, Flannery and Hellemn begin by defining the IEP an IDEA-mandated “mechanism by which the student, family, and school staff agree on the supports and services to be provided to the student” (p. 67). They explained that “as part of the IEP process for students 16 years of age and older, the team must identify appropriate measurable postsecondary goals, transition services, and a course of study that will assist the



student in meeting their postsecondary goals,” (Flannery & Hellemn, 2015, p. 67); they are describing the Individual Transition Plan (ITP) that is required to be included in IEPs for students who are 16 years old and older.

The purpose of their analysis “was to examine how the teachers understood the four targeted IEP components [postsecondary goals, course of study, present levels of academic and functional performance, and annual goals] - what the requirements were and the alignment between them,” (p. 70, Flannery & Hellemn, 2015). The participants were high school teachers representing a mix of special education classrooms and settings, “the group primarily served students from three disability categories: learning disability (32.8%), intellectual disability (31.8%), and autism (22.2%) and were across all grade levels,” (p. 69). Flannery and Hellemn administered professional development focused on understanding ITPs and aligning IEP components and found that, prior to the training,

teachers lacked clarity about the transition requirements and had not given much thought to the idea of alignment. However, after the training on the transition related components and their connections, the teachers (a) were able to better define these relationships, providing specific examples of these connections; (b) spontaneously discussed connections as part of their definition and description of each component before being prompted about alignment; and (c) shared strong beliefs about the importance of the alignment of IEP components, (2015, p. 74).

Flannery and Hellemn’s work demonstrates that all teachers can benefit from an understanding of how the different parts of an IEP must be aligned in order to provide a successful plan for students.

Hypothesizing that “poor postsecondary outcomes may be due to special education teachers who are unprepared to plan and deliver effective transition services,” Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2009) developed the *Secondary Teachers Transition Survey* to “explore the relationships between levels of preparation to plan and deliver transition services, satisfaction

with preservice transition training, and frequency with which secondary special education teachers perform transition activities,” (p. 7). A transition competencies survey was developed which asked teachers to rate their levels of proficiency in (a) preparation to plan and deliver transition services, (b) satisfaction with transition training, and the (c) frequency with which they deliver specific competencies (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009, p.7).

Teachers at the middle and high school level rated their proficiency across 46 competencies that fell within six domains: instructional planning, curriculum and instruction, transition planning, assessment, collaboration, and additional competencies (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009, p.8). A little over half of the teachers surveyed taught students with learning disabilities, 11% taught students with intellectual disabilities, 9% taught students in multiple groups (e.g., educators who teach across multiple groups of students), 6% taught students with Emotional Disturbance, 3% taught students in the other category, and 20% taught students with a combination of disabilities (Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey, 2009). Overall, the results found that “special education teachers felt somewhat prepared to plan and deliver transition services to their students with disabilities . . . somewhat unsatisfied to somewhat satisfied with transition training, [and] the overall frequency with which teachers planned and delivered transition services fell between rarely and occasionally,” (p. 12-13).

Thus, CBT teachers individual preparedness and proficiency with regard to transition services must be considered when making instructional decisions. Given the lack of preparedness reported by the participants in Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey’s (2009) study, this is something for teacher preparation programs to consider as well.

Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, Hoffmann, and Kupferman (2014) added to the literature on transition teacher competencies when they identified essential transition teacher

competencies in order to guide and develop instruction for a graduate program. Beginning with a synthesis of the literature, the researchers identified 67 competencies in six domains (assessment and evaluation, transition planning, instructional planning, curriculum and instruction, communication and collaboration, and family involvement) needed by transition teachers and then surveyed transition experts and practitioners and asked participants to rate the importance of the competencies (Morgan et al., 2014, p. 149). (See Table 3.)

While responses were then analyzed for levels of agreement between experts and practitioners, the final list of competencies is what holds bearing with regard to decision-making. Morgan et al. (2014) stated that “although the practitioner survey was limited to five states, findings provide some degree of generalization into the range and level of perceived importance of transition teacher competencies,” (p. 159). The researchers also noted that competencies may vary depending on the student population being served and suggested that “future research should more closely examine differences in competencies related to the level of disability of the student in transition,” (p. 158). While the DCDT has provided standards for transition specialists, this list assembled by Morgan, et al. is the most comprehensive list of job tasks or duties available for CBT teachers.

The Council for Exceptional Children’s (CEC) Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT), using Rowe et al.’s list of characteristics, developed a number of Fast Fact sheets that provide teachers and administrators with lists of evidence-based practices for areas such as community experiences, exit exam/high school diploma status, interagency collaboration, program of study, and so on. In addition to materials provided by the DCDT, the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT), a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, has also developed an Effective Practices and Predictors Matrix, along

with Practice Descriptions and Lesson Plan Starters (2019). All of these resources are available online, free of charge to those who are aware of these resources.

When considering the factors that play a role in making instructional decisions for students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities who are 18-21 years old, Megan and Lori provided a fairly short and sweet response, whereas the literature provides a more diverse and complex list of factors.

Neither Megan nor Lori referenced knowledge of the IDEA mandate to use instructional programs grounded in scientifically based research, Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition, evidence-based predictors for post-school success, transition teacher competencies, or any of the fact sheets, matrices, or other materials available. However, while they did not specifically note the evidence-based predictors for post-school success, both teachers made statements that suggest the following predictors are present within their classrooms: career awareness, work experience/paid experience, community experience, self-determination/self-advocacy, self-care/independent living skills, social skills, and parent involvement.

Rowe et al. (2015), defined career awareness as "learning about opportunities, education, and skills needed in various occupational pathways to choose a career that matches one's strengths and interests," (p. 118). Lori provided an example of instruction in career awareness when she talked about the student who wanted to be a DJ. She stated that, "we talked about what kind of jobs could you do? So, his IEP goals were, you need to find a DJ that you can shadow." And, both Megan and Lori shared that they ask their students about potential jobs or lines of work. There is also some overlap with other predictors, particularly paid employment/work experience, as student job placement depends on both interest and ability.

Paid employment/work experience, the next predictor, was defined as

any activity that places the student in an authentic workplace and could include work sampling, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. Paid employment can include existing standard jobs in a company or organization or customized work assignments negotiated with the employer, but these activities always feature competitive pay (e.g., minimum wage) paid directly to the student by the employer (Rowe et al., 2015, p. 118).

At the time of her initial interview, twelve of Megan's students were scheduled to participated in a workability program. The program allowed students to work in a paid internship position, earning minimum wage for working 40 hours during the school year. Students completed two training sessions a week, with each session running between one-and-a-half and two hours long. Megan explained that, "we have a job coach that comes and then just kind of shows us or tells us the different things that are available, and . . . we typically try to interview the students to see what's the best fit for them."

Lori's students did not participate in her district's employment program due to limited opportunities, but her students did have access unpaid, or volunteer experience at a number of businesses around the area. She also ran a microbusiness club that offered students the opportunity to make and sell items at the local Farmer's Market, which allowed for more work experience.

Community experience is an evidence-based predictor of post-school success defined by Rowe et al. (2015) as "activities occurring outside the school setting, supported with in-class instruction, where students apply academic, social, and/or general work behaviors and skills," (p. 120). This kind of instruction is typically referred to as Community-Based Instruction (CBI), and is used often in both Megan and Lori's classrooms. For example, Megan shares that she tells her students they need to choose their day and, "they can choose, a free to no-cost outing, or a shopping outing. So, they make choices on where they want to go." Lori's class also has regular

outings and she shared that, “I have one group that loves to go thrift store and then the other group loves to go to the mall. On Fridays you bring money, because we're going out.”

Self-determination, a fourth predictor present, is “the ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, take initiative to reach one’s goals, and accept consequences of one’s actions,” (Rowe et al., 2015, p. 121). Lori considers self-advocacy an important part of her classroom, and includes it as one of the goal domains when writing IEP goals; “we have the five core domains here: domestics, functional academics, commerce, vocational, and rec and leisure. But I've added self-advocacy in there.” She provides her students with multiple opportunities to express their interests and desires, primarily through choice-making, such as voting on what to make for lunch. Like Lori, Megan’s students make multiple choices about their day. For example, choosing where to go on CBI, or choosing to stay in the classroom and then deciding what task to work on.

Self-advocacy leads into the next predictor, self-care/independent living skills, which are defined as

skills necessary for management of one’s personal self-care and daily independent living, including the personal management skills needed to interact with others, daily living skills, financial management skills, and the self-management of health care/wellness needs, (Rowe et al., 2015, p. 121).

Both Megan and Lori’s classrooms include an emphasis on self-care, particularly cooking. In Megan’s classroom students can choose what to bring for lunch, and are encouraged to be as independent as possible, which could include making sandwiches or heating up a cup of soup. Once Lori’s students have decided what they are going to make, everyone is able to participate in preparing the meal; she explained that one student may be working on a budget and would take a calculator to the store to shop for items needed, while another student may be learning to chop the hot dogs with the butter knife.

Another important aspect of self-care is having and using appropriate social skills, which Rowe et al. (2015) defined as “behaviors and attitudes that facilitate communication and cooperation,” (p. 122). According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association’s description, an individual with an Intellectual Disability can have deficits within the social domain, which includes language and communication skills, and social skills (ASHA, n.d.).

Deficits in language and communication skills include, “more concrete and less complex spoken language, compared with peers, limited vocabulary and grammatical skills, receptive language that may be limited to comprehension of simple speech and gestures, and communication that may occur through non-spoken means only,” (ASHA, n.d.). Deficits in social skills can look like, “immature social judgment and decision-making, difficulty understanding peer social cues and social rules, and emotional and behavioral regulation difficulties that may adversely affect social interactions,” (ASHA, n.d.). Having established that instruction begins with determining what a student can do, both Megan and Lori are aware of their students’ communicative abilities and social needs, and both find opportunities to practice those skills in the classroom.

Megan provided an example, stating, “certain situations come up, or you see a certain student is struggling in a certain area, even if it's just social communication and . . . I just kind of try to be self-aware and keen to what's going on around me, so I can develop the lessons accordingly.” Lori provided a similar example, noting that if “[a student comes in] with a drama issue, and that's our lesson right then today. Somebody's posting something on Facebook and they're spreading this rumor. Okay, so what do we talk about rumors today?” The examples provided cover a range of skills levels, which demonstrate the individualized nature of special education, and these CBT classrooms in particular.

The last predictor present in Megan and Lori's classrooms is parental involvement, which "means parents/families/guardians are active and knowledgeable participants in all aspects of transition planning (e.g., decision-making, providing support, attending meetings, and advocating for their child)," (Rowe et al., 2015, 122). Parental involvement is important to both Megan and Lori, within the IEP process and beyond. Megan shared that when writing IEP goals, she starts "with an interview with the parents to see where [the student] is kind of lacking or what areas in the home they could be helping with." When sharing about the girls lessons she leads, Lori stated that, "we try and have a collaboration because even the parents will come in."

While they did not express any familiarity with the evidence-based post-school success predictors, Megan and Lori did provide evidence of using those predictors within their classrooms, and using those predictors as factors when making instructional decisions.

Overall, Megan and Lori's responses are not consistent with the literature regarding making instructional decisions for students in CBT programs, and any alignment seems coincidental, as neither teacher expressed awareness of the extant literature on transition practices and competencies. Much research has been done on instructional practices relating to transition services and teacher competencies, but it has not reached Megan and Lori, and this could be true for other CBT teachers as well.

### **Research Question 3. In what ways do teachers of community-based transition programs design and implement instruction?**

The student population at the center of this study, students who have moderate to severe intellectual disabilities and are 18-21 years old, and who attend a CBT program run by their local school district or county office of education, is a very small, specific group that is not well-represented in literature. However, many studies have been conducted regarding instruction for



and of students with intellectual disabilities, particularly Bouck's work on secondary students with intellectual disabilities and curriculum receipt.

Bouck has done several studies looking into secondary students, functional curriculum, and who receives functional versus academic curriculum. Using data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2), Bouck and Joshi (2014) determined that of the secondary students with Autism Spectrum Disorder who participated in the NLTS2, one-fourth reported receiving a functional curriculum as their primary curriculum, while the other three fourths received an academic, basic academics, or study skills curriculum (p. 1208). Again, using data from the NLTS2, Bouck (2013) looked at data for 874,432 secondary special education students across all eligibility categories and found that students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities most frequently received a functional curriculum.

In 2012 Bouck, again using NLTS2 data, looked into the kinds of instruction secondary students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities received. She found that 70% of the students received a functional curriculum, and almost 90% of students received life skills instruction in high school, with the majority doing so in a special education setting (p. 1181). Further findings include the majority of students receiving instruction in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, with most doing so in a special education setting, and over two thirds of students receiving art, music and drama (Bouck, 2012, p. 1181). Bouck (2012) also noted that 83% of the students received instruction in prevocational education and occupational/vocational education in a special education setting (p. 1181).

Overall, Bouck's work has found that students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities are likely to receive a functional curriculum in a special education setting, but

instruction can also include language arts, math, science, social studies, art, music, drama, prevocational education, and vocational education.

Shurr and Bouck (2013) reviewed literature written about instruction for students with severe intellectual disabilities and concluded that most of the articles published within the last fifteen years had a primary focus on functional skills, which makes sense, as several studies in special education are focused on the discussion of functional versus academic content. Studies from Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, & Sievers (2011), Bouck (2012), Courtade, Spooner, Browder, and Jimenez (2012), Dymond and Orelove (2001), and Saunders, Spooner, Browder, Wakeman, and Lee (2013) have examined the benefits of one type of instruction over another.

More instruction-specific practices can be found in texts, such as Browder and Spooner's *Teaching Language Arts, Math & Science to Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities*, Test's *Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies for Transition*, Ryndak and Alper's *Curriculum and Instruction for Students with Significant Disabilities in Inclusive Settings*, and Wehman and Kregel's *Functional Curriculum for Elementary and Secondary Students with Special Needs*.

Texts that deal specifically with transition include Test's *Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies for Transition*, Flexer, Baer, Luft, and Simmons' *Transition Planning for Secondary Students with Disabilities*, Steere, Rose, and Cavauiuolo's *Growing Up: Transition to Adult Life for Students with Disabilities*, McDonnell and Hardman's *Successful Transition Programs*, and Greene and Kochhar-Bryant's *Pathways to Successful Transition for Youth with Disabilities*. These academic texts could be resources to CBT teachers as they design and implement curriculum.

With regard to designing instruction, Megan and Lori report teaching life skills and functional academics, which is consistent with findings from the literature, particularly Bouck's

(2012, 2013) finding that students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities usually receive a functional curriculum, with many students also receiving instruction in academic content (math, language arts, social studies, and science). The instructional programs both teachers use, with the exception of materials from Teachers Pay Teachers, are from companies that have developed learning materials specifically for students with intellectual disabilities.

Both Megan and Lori report implementing instruction with a strong emphasis on individualization and an awareness of availability, which is consistent with a text from Flexer, Baer, Luft, and Simmons (2008).

In their text *Transition Planning for Secondary Students with Disabilities*, Flexer, Baer, Luft, and Simmons provide a chapter called “Instructional Planning for Transition Teaching,” which includes information on instructional variables and instructional environments (2008, p. 166-167). Instructional variables are displayed in Table 5 and feature variables that both Megan and Lori referenced when sharing how they provide instruction to their students. Megan spoke specifically about adjusting the learning environment so that her students weren’t consistently seated in desks, and both teachers talked about leading instruction in small groups. Also, Megan and Lori have access to print materials and resources, but also take advantage of non-print materials and resources, particularly when their students are engaging in CBI activities, or participating in the classroom microbusinesses.

Table 5

*Chart of Instructional Variables*

Instructional Environment	Instructional Groupings	Instructional Materials	Instructional Methods
Physical location	Whole-class	Print materials and resources	<i>Teacher directed</i>
Physical structure	Small group	Non-print materials and resources	<i>Teacher guided</i>
Emotional structure	Pairs or triads	Manipulatives and models	<i>Student guided</i>
Behavioral structure	Individualized	Technology resources	<i>Student directed</i>

Flexer, Baer, Luft, and Simmons also include a reference to instructional environments (see Table 6) containing items that are consistent with factors Megan and Lori take into consideration (2008, p. 167). Specifically, Flexer, Baer, Luft, and Simmons (2008) reference “time and scheduling,” as part of the instructional environment, and this was a large factor in how Megan and Lori provided and delivered instruction to their students.

Table 6

*Management of Instructional Environments*

Physical Location
School site
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic – indoor/outdoor</li> <li>• Classroom</li> <li>• Lab</li> <li>• Activity-based</li> <li>• Nonacademic – indoor/outdoor</li> <li>• Auditorium</li> <li>• Lab</li> <li>• Activity-based</li> </ul>
Community site – indoor/outdoor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daily living sites</li> <li>• Community resources</li> <li>• Occupational sites and resources</li> </ul>

(Table 6 Continued)

Physical Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space: walls, lighting, floor layout, storage</li> <li>• Instructional appearance and design: decoration, information</li> </ul>
Emotional Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom climate</li> <li>• Attitudes and acceptance</li> <li>• Roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>
Behavioral Structure Rules and resolutions Routines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic</li> <li>• Nonacademic</li> </ul> Time and scheduling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic</li> <li>• Instructional time</li> <li>• Transition time</li> <li>• Nonacademic</li> <li>• Noninstructional time</li> <li>• Transition time</li> </ul>

Neither teacher uses a lesson planner, but both use calendars to track their class and student schedules, as no two days look the same. Due to workability schedules, CBI trips, commitments regarding the microbusiness, and so on, both classrooms see varied daily schedules, with arrival, lunch, and dismissal times being the only constants. Megan and Lori, and their staff, teach when students are available, which means providing multiple learning opportunities throughout the day (such as workability, prepping for the microbusiness, or CBI), knowing what students are working on and towards, taking advantage of whatever instructional times present themselves. Essentially, Megan and Lori are providing instruction to small groups of students, at the most, versus their whole class.

Megan and Lori design and implement instruction in ways that are consistent with the literature. Both teachers use programs that are functional and teach functional academics and life skills. Also, both teachers talked about considering the physical layout of the classroom, whole class and small group instructional settings, and various types of instructional materials, which are represented in Flexer, Baer, Luft, and Simmons' 2012 text.

### **Conclusions**

**Conclusion #1: Teachers in community-based transition (CBT) programs make decisions with regard to curriculum and instruction based on what students can do, and what the teacher believes students will be able to do.**

For CBT program teachers, curricular decision-making processes begin with an understanding of the skills necessary for daily life determining a student's baseline for each of those skills. CBT program teachers understand that adults prepare their own meals, dress themselves, take care of grooming needs, and so on, and operate from a position that each of their students can perform these skills. Due to individual needs, independence may vary from task to task, but CBT program teachers expect their students to learn to meet their own needs.

CBT program teachers demonstrate an expectation that students are entering the program with skills and with a need for both increased independence with current skills, and the introduction of new skills. Thus, determining the baseline, allows the teacher to determine which skills need maintenance, which skills need to be worked on, and which skills need to be introduced.

With regard to the kind of skills being taught, life skills are of the utmost importance, but vocational skills are taught as well. Vocational skills include being able to follow single and multi-step directions, and to stay on task, but also include being able to find a job. The fact that

CBT program teachers place an emphasis on job-seeking skills implies a belief that students will be able to work. As a result, skills taught include knowing how to determine if an employer is hiring, how to apply for a job, and so on, in addition to learning specific job skills.

Curricular decision-making for CBT program teachers is informed by the belief that their students have learned, that they are still learning, and that they will continue to learn. Before instruction can begin, teachers need to know each student, know his/her needs and abilities, know how to teach to that student's strengths, and how to move that student's skills forward to independence.

**Conclusion #2: Teachers in CBT programs are unaware of current legal mandates and/or relevant literature, such as evidence-based practices.**

Under IDEA, there is a legal requirement that schools and educators use instructional programs or practices grounded in scientifically based research (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Instructional programs that meet this requirement can be provided to teachers, but the use of practices grounded in research falls largely to the teacher. Empirical evidence has produced evidence-based practices and evidence-based predictors for post-school success that meet the legal requirement. However, CBT program teachers may not know about the mandate or the practices available.

Knowing about the mandate to use instructional programs and practices grounded in scientifically based research should lead teachers and administrators to Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition, the evidence-based predictors for post-school success developed by Test, Bartholomew, and Bethune (2015) and Mazzotti et al. (2016), or the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition's Effective Practices and Predictors Matrix and Practice

Descriptions and Lesson Plan Starters (2019). Each of these resources provides educators, including CBT program teachers, with instructional practices that are grounded in research.

CBT program teachers may be making decisions regarding instruction based on factors that would vary by teacher. The teachers in this study made decisions based upon what students needed to learn how to do, what students wanted to do, and then provided instruction that considered schedules and student availability, available programs and materials, and instruction that could happen without pre-boxed programs. Neither teacher referenced using evidence-based instructional practices for transitions or looking into literature on transitions.

Both of the participants credentialed more than ten years ago, and teacher preparation programs may have changed to include more transition-specific information. Thus, teachers who have completed more recent teacher-preparation programs may have received coursework that includes updated legal requirements and research-based practices.

**Conclusion #3: CBT program teachers incorporate both functional skills and academics into their instruction.**

Literature related to instructional practices for special education students with moderate to severe ID often addresses teaching academics or functional skills, and the benefits and history of each practice. Instruction in CBT programs, however, incorporates both functional skills and academics. The purpose of a CBT program is to prepare students for the workforce and adult life, with as much independence as possible. Given the individualized nature of the program, CBT teachers recognize that instruction can include both functional skills and academics to best meet a student's needs and goals.

Instruction in CBT programs is a blend of functional skills and academics, usually placing an academic skill within a functional context. For example, instead of practicing



addition with worksheets, students might count out one-dollar bills to make a purchase or tell time on a clock to determine what time a break begins and ends, or read instructions on box of cake mix. Functional skills can be determined by assessing what a student can and cannot do independently, and academic skills can then be incorporated into instruction.

Academic skills are typically dictated by state or Common Core standards, and act as lesson objectives. State or Common Core standards are used in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade settings, which means CBT programs don't have standards of academic instruction. As a result, the academic skills taught in a CBT program are chosen by the teacher to meet a student's need. By placing the academic skills alongside functional skills, CBT program teachers are able to provide well-rounded instruction to meet student needs.

#### **Conclusion #4: Instruction happens outside of a classroom.**

Classroom instruction typically occurs within the classroom. In addition to classrooms, some school campuses have music rooms, art rooms, weight rooms, dance studios, and libraries that also serve as places of instruction. And, teachers take learning outside of the classroom through field trips or just moving a lesson out of a classroom and onto the school campus. CBT program teachers and their students spend a large portion of their day outside of the classroom, meaning that instruction is happening beyond the classroom's four walls.

The instruction that occurs outside of the classroom is part of the services provided in a CBT program. For example, students in CBT programs may participate in a workability or vocational education program that places them on a job site within the community, usually at a local business. They may also participate in a microbusiness that places them within the community in a different context, such as working at a craft fair or manning a booth at a farmer's market. CBT program teachers usually use Community Based Instruction (CBI) as a way to

instruct their students within a daily-life context, such as crossing the street, making a purchase, or waiting in a line. CBI outings can be used to teach a variety of skills, and are used with small groups of students, or whole classes. For example, a whole class may take a CBI trip to a local mall and spend five hours or more shopping, eating, and practicing their skills. Or, a group of four students may take a CBI trip to the library to return books.

CBT program students typically start their school day in the classroom, perhaps with a breakfast, and then follow individual schedules, particularly if they are participating in some kind of workability or vocational education program. Within the course of a school day, a student in a CBT program may work on a job site for 60 minutes, come back to the classroom for a 45 minute lunch break, and then leave again for a CBI outing that could last one to two hours. While that student may be out of the classroom for most of the day, instruction is still happening.

CBT program teachers use CBI, workability, microbusiness opportunities and so on to meet their students' instructional needs, which requires scheduling trips with specific purposes in mind, and with specific students in mind. Understanding that the whole class will not be in the classroom for the duration of the school day, instructional opportunities are designed for the classroom and the community.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for Practice.**

Community-Based Transition program teachers and especially special education administrators should know of the IDEA mandate to use programs and practices grounded in scientifically-based research, and should ensure this mandate is being met. Pre-service teacher programs can include this information within coursework. Special education administrators can share this mandate with CBT program teachers, and then provide support as needed for teachers

who need to purchase programs, or to learn about appropriate practices. It should be noted that this mandate is applicable to special education at large, and not a specific class or program.

Kohler's taxonomy for transition, the evidence-based predictors for post-school success identified by Test, Bartholomew, and Bethune (2015) and Mazzotti et al. (2016), the evidence-based practices and materials provided by the National Technical Assistance Center for Transition (2019), and the transition teacher competencies identified by Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, Hoffmann, and Kupferman (2014) are all examples of practices that have been developed through research. Kohler's (1996) taxonomy for transition was designed to assist with transition planning for various types of transitions. While it would be useful for CBT program teachers, it could be used throughout a student's educational career. It is a tool that should be available to special education teachers and administrators, particularly those working with students moving from elementary school to junior high school, and junior high school to high school.

The evidence-based predictors for post-school success that were developed by Test, Bartholomew, and Bethune (2015) and Mazzotti et al., (2016) were operationally defined by Rowe et al. (2015), which resulted in a list of 16 characteristics of secondary transitions programs (see Table 2). Rowe et al. (2015) provided a definition for each characteristic, along with examples of what that characteristic would look like in a transitions program. CBT program teachers and administrators could measure their program against the characteristics within this list to ensure their practices are research-based. This list could also be used by CBT program administrators when developing CBT programs.

The National Technical Assistance Center for Transition (2019) offers very specific supports for transition teachers, including a matrix of Effective Practices and Predictors,

Effective Practices in Secondary Transition: Operational Definitions, and Skills Taught with Effective Practices. Each practice has been evaluated and is identified with one of the following levels of evidence: an evidence-based practice, a research-based practice, a promising practice, or an unestablished practice (NTACT, 2019). The Effective Practices and Predictors matrix lists each practice, a link to a practice description, and the relevant outcome area, such as employment, education, or independent living (NTACT, 2019). This is a very useful resource for a CBT program teacher seeking specific practices or wanting to address a particular area.

The Effective Practices in Secondary Transition: Operational Definitions is based on updated work from Rowe, Alverson, Kwiatek, and Fowler (2019), and contains the operational definitions for effective transition practices. This is another resource for CBT program teachers and administrators, and could be used for high school students as well. The Skills and Practices sections provides a comprehensive list of skills for transitions students to learn and encourages teachers to “use this list to pair the skill to be learned with an effective practice,” (Skills and Practices, 2019, p. 1).

Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, Hoffmann, and Kupferman’s (2014) list of transition teacher competencies includes assessment and evaluation, transition planning, instructional planning, curriculum and instruction, communication and collaboration, and family involvement. (see Table 3). Each competency is followed by a list of features; for example, three features of instructional planning are identifying supports needed for young adults to be successful in work experiences and training opportunities, planning and developing educational experiences that correspond with IEP postsecondary goals and objectives, and selecting and/or developing appropriate job placements (Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, & Kupferman, 2014). Special

education administrators should be familiar with these competencies and can use them when hiring CBT program teachers. They should be provided to CBT program teachers, as well.

### **Recommendations for Policy.**

Community-Based Transition program teachers hold special education credentials, meaning they receive the same coursework as teachers who teach elementary, junior high, and high school, and teachers of specialized classes, such as those for students with Autism. As a result, CBT program teachers may not be receiving any kind of specialized training for their position, even though transition-specific practices and policies exist. Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, Hoffmann, and Kupferman (2014) identified essential transition teacher competencies (See Table 3), and these competencies should be provided to pre-service special education teachers, current CBT program teachers, and special education administrators.

Pre-service teacher programs should be examined as well to determine the kinds of transitions practices that are being taught. For example, there are practices grounded in empirical evidence, such as Kohler's transition taxonomy (1996) that can be used at all levels of transitions. Other examinations could include determining if transition practices are included in coursework for pre-service teachers, and if there any programs that offer specializations in transitions.

### **Recommendations for Further Research.**

As this study is limited by the small number of participants, one recommendation for further research is to investigate how teachers of CBT programs understand and explain their curricular decision-making process on a larger scale.

The curricular decision-making process could be measured by the factors teachers consider when making decisions regarding instruction, such as those identified by Ruppar,

Gaffney, and Dymond (2015), contexts, beliefs about students, teaching, and learning, expectations, and self-efficacy. A larger scale study could survey many CBT program teachers and use a Likert-type survey to determine which factors teachers consider in their curricular decision-making process. Another option would be to conduct a phenomenological study examining the experience of curricular decision-making and lesson planning for students in a CBT program. Emerging research questions would be similar to those in this study, and include: in what ways do teachers of CBT programs understand and explain the experience of teaching students in a CBT program? What factors are involved in curricular decision-making?

Given that the two participants in this study were unaware of legal mandates related to programs and practices, and the evidence-based practices that are available, larger scale research should be done to determine if this is true for other teachers. CBT program teachers and administrators should be aware of the IDEA mandate to use programs and practices grounded in scientifically-based research. Awareness of this mandate should result in CBT program teachers' and administrators' awareness of Kohler's taxonomy for transition, the evidence-based predictors for post-school success identified by Test, Bartholomew, and Bethune (2015) and Mazzotti et al. (2016), and the evidence-based practices and materials provided by the National Technical Assistance Center for Transition (2019).

One approach would be interviewing CBT program teachers and administrators about whether these practices are present within classrooms and include a short-answer question asking about the best way to disseminate that information. Sample questions include: are you aware of the IDEA mandate to use programs and practices grounded in scientific research? Are you familiar with Kohler's taxonomy for transition? If so, do you use it as part of the transition planning process? Are you familiar with the evidence-based predictors for post-school success?

If so, do you incorporate these practices into your classroom? Are you aware of the National Technical Assistance Center for Transition? If so, do you use any of their resources when planning lessons? As these questions pertain to transition practices overall, these questions could be asked to secondary special education teachers and administrators.

Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, Hoffmann, and Kupferman's (2014) developed a list of six essential transition teacher competencies, and further research could be done to determine teacher if CBT program teachers feel competent in these areas. The competencies are assessment and evaluation, transition planning, instructional planning, curriculum and instruction, communication and collaboration, and family involvement (Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, Hoffman, & Kupferman, 2014).

A large-scale quantitative survey could be conducted to find out if CBT program teachers are aware of the transition teacher competencies. This could be a survey of Likert-style questions, and would result in yes/no data. Once a CBT program teacher is aware of the transition teacher competencies, the methods of narrative research could be used to explore how awareness of the transition teacher competencies influences curricular decision-making processes. Emerging research questions include: in what ways do CBT program teachers understand and apply transition teacher competencies? What factors play a role in implementing transition teacher competencies into a CBT classroom?

Post-secondary education programs (PSE) programs are post-high school programs for students with disabilities that are part of a school of higher education, such as a junior college or university. These programs are not part of a public school district or county office of education, and allow students with disabilities to attend a college program alongside their non-disabled peers. The Think College college search map display programs by state, and overall there are

282 college programs nationwide for young people with intellectual disabilities (Think College, 2019).

Further research into PSE programs could examine how PSE program teachers of students with disabilities make curricular decisions. One option would be similar to this study, and to use basic interpretive qualitative inquiry to address the following research questions: In what ways do teachers in PSE programs perceive and understand their curriculum decision-making processes? What factors play a role in curriculum decision-making for this population of students? In what ways do teachers of PSE programs design and implement instruction?

Participants would include PSE program teachers, perhaps at different programs. Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) methods of basic interpretive qualitative inquiry would result in new themes about the curricular decision-making process for teachers of students with intellectual disabilities who are 18 to 21 years old who attend a college or university versus a public school classroom.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter examined how findings from the study attempted to answer the research questions: how do teachers in community-based transition programs describe or explain their decision-making with regard to curriculum and instruction? What factors play a role in making instructional decisions for this population of students? In what ways do teachers of transition students design and implement curriculum?

With regard to the first question, the participants' responses were consistent with findings from literature. Both Megan and Lori articulated that their students can learn and want to learn, which aligns with factors that are part of the decision-making process of special education teachers decisions regarding literacy instruction as explained by Ruppert, Gaffney, and Dymond



(2015). When examining which factors play a role in making instructional decisions for this population of students, Megan and Lori's responses were not consistent with the literature. While both teachers alluded to factors that are present within the literature, this seems to be coincidental, as neither teacher expressed awareness research-based transition practices and competencies. The ways in which Megan and Lori design and implement curriculum is consistent with literature, particularly the factors laid out in a text from Flexer, Baer, Luft, and Simmons (2012). The teachers have functional skills programs available, which can be modified for student need, and they consider when their students are available, due to participation in workability and classroom commitments, such as CBI outings and preparing for the classroom microbusiness. They also provide instructional opportunities beyond scheduled lessons, such as being able to practice life skills within a specific context.

This chapter also laid out conclusions from the study, which include Conclusion #1: teachers in community-based transition programs (CBTs) potentially making decisions with regard to curriculum and instruction based on what students can do, and what the teacher believes students will be able to do, and teachers in CBT programs potentially being unaware of current legal mandates and/or relevant literature, such as evidence-based practices. Recommendations for further research include examining similar research questions, but using quantitative methods, and gathering data from many more participants in order to examine which factors play a role in how CBT program teachers make instructional decisions, to examine CBT program teachers' familiarity with federal instructional requirements and research and evidence-based practices, and examining if, how, and when CBT program teachers seek to increase their own professional knowledge.

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## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

## Instructional Decision-Making in Community-Based Transition Programs for Students ages 18-

21

You are invited to participate in a research study which will involve the ways in which special education teachers design and develop instruction. My name is Rachel Knoepfle, and I am a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific, Benerd School of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your position as a teacher in a community-based transitions program in a public school district.

The purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which teachers of community-based transition programs make instructional decisions for their students. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey about your classroom/program, and also to participate in interviews. I would also like to visit your classroom and have access to your lesson plans, classroom materials, and other data that pertain to instruction. Your participation in this study will last approximately four weeks, which includes in person interviews.

There are some possible risks involved for participants. There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about instruction in the classroom in which you work to be sensitive, and you may be asked to recall experiences in the classroom that were stressful or frustrating. There are no benefits to your participation in this study. I hope to learn more about how instructional decisions are made in a classroom that does not have state standards to guide instruction.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at (209) 602-9194, or Dr. Linda Skrla at (209) 946-2580. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Research & Graduate Studies Office, University of the Pacific (209) 946-7716. In the event of a research-related injury, please advise us, and then contact your regular medical provider and bill through your normal insurance carrier.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to insure your confidentiality include the use of pseudonyms, and changing the names of school



districts and programs involved in the study. The records of this study will be kept private, and will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time with out penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

You will be offered a copy of this signed form to keep.

Signature

Date

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## APPENDIX B: INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviews with participants were semi-structured. This protocol served as a loose guide, and questions were added or removed depending on how the conversation moved.

1. Tell me about your classroom – students and staff
2. How do you design lessons for your students?
3. How do you deliver lessons to your students?
4. Tell me about instruction in your classroom
5. Can you tell me about some of your experiences giving lessons to your class?
6. Tell me about how you decide what subjects to teach
7. Tell me about how you decide what skills to teach
8. So, how do you teach those skills?
9. Tell me about a specific experience teaching those skills
10. What have you learned from teaching those skills?
11. Tell me about how you develop lesson plans
12. In what ways do you implement those plans?
13. What have you learned from implementing those lessons?
14. Tell me about the curriculum and instructional programs you use
15. Tell me how you decide which programs to use
16. Tell me about a specific experience of modifying those programs
17. Tell me how you determine instructional needs - what lessons need to be taught?
18. Tell me about students making choices for their instruction, specific examples or instances
19. Tell me about specific experiences writing IEP goals with students

20. Tell me about specific experiences with students when you're out in the community
21. Tell me about specific experiences with students in the microbusiness
22. Tell me about specific experiences with students on a workability job site