TRANSITIONING SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS 

AFTER HIGH SCHOOL 

by 

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A Master’s Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment 
of the requirement for the degree

Master of Arts 

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to gather perceptions of special education practitioners in the education field to rank courses that they believed would best assist the special education student’s transition process to adulthood. The special education practitioners were also asked to list other activities that they felt were meaningful to the process of special education student’s transitioning from high school to postsecondary education, vocational training or the world of work. This purpose was accomplished by investigating current literature and analyzing results from a survey of (24) current, Directors of Special Education within the State of Arizona. It was important to get the Directors’ perspectives in how they felt about specific courses and activities which enhances the special education student’s transition process toward postsecondary education, vocational training or the world of work.

Investigating current literature suggested that successful transitioning should be a developmental process to be integrated in the student’s day-to-day learning, as opposed to a one-shot lesson.

The transitional survey results reveal valuable data. Directors provided their perceptions of the effectiveness of certain courses and activities assisting special education students transitioning to postsecondary education, vocational training, and the world of work.

The directors felt that for Postsecondary Education, Reading was the most important. Math was second, Language Arts and Computers tied for third.

For Vocational Training, Reading was felt to be most important. Computers and Math tied for second. Industrial Arts was third.
For World of Work, Reading again was rated number one. Computers and Work Experience tied for second.

Directors also agreed that student-led IEP's were essential in the transitional process. This survey result supported the literature that students benefit by learning self-determination skills that enabled them for success.
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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Special Education students, in order to become a contributing member of society, are well served if they receive appropriate skills that allow them to transition from high school to a meaningful, practical, applied process that they will meet in real life situations. This study explores various models used by educators to transition special education students to postsecondary education for real life vocational situations and surveys practitioners in the field to determine whether there may be improvements made among the various models or techniques already in place.

Completing high school is the beginning of new challenges. Public education ends, and exiting students and their families have to deal with choices and decisions regarding the student’s future. After high school, the most common choices are continuing academic education, pursuing vocational training, the military, and the world of work.

For students with disabilities, transition from the school environment is not a simple process. The decision becomes more complex and requires a great deal of exploration and strategizing.

By law, transition planning for special education students is required once a student reaches 14 years of age. The transition process should be included in the
student’s Individual Education Program (I.E.P.), and even though I.E.P.’s are documented on paper, often students with disabilities are not prepared for postsecondary experiences.

Transition services are defined as the movement of adolescents with disabilities from school into their next environment as young adults, which may be postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, independent employment, and independent living (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, P.L. 101-476, Section 300.18). It is important to look at different models of transitions currently in place to make sure they provide appropriate training and assistance to special education student’s who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary education, vocational training, or the world of work.

In this study this researcher identifies key components of the transition process that will enable a special education student for success in adult life.

Development of the Problem

The problem is the transitional process is not clearly defined as to how to effectively transition a special education student through high school towards a more meaningful education, better opportunities for economic sufficiency, and to be a responsible, productive adult. High schools servicing special education students are sometimes inconsistent in the way special education students are transitioned into postsecondary education, vocational training, and the world of work. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act P.L. 105-17 (as cited in Chadsey & Rusch, 1998), transition is defined as services. This means a coordinated set of activities for a
student with a disability that is designed within an outcome oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities. Postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation, are based on the individual student's needs. One must take into account the student's preferences and interests which includes: (1) instruction (2) related services (3) community experiences (4) the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, (5) if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. Transitions services for students with disabilities in special education are provided a specially designed instruction or related services. If required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1995) noted, "For today's adolescents, particularly those who do not intend to go beyond high school, there is much less chance to earn a decent living wage, support a family, and participate actively in the life of the community and nation than there was a few decades ago" (pg. 10).

According to Nesbit, Covet, and Schuh (1992), and Rosenkoetter, Hains, & Fowler, (1994) special education students have not been taught self-determination skills, so, therefore, they are unable to efficiently participate in the decision making process for exiting from high school. Their research suggested that by using a family-centered approach that empowers students with disabilities to be a part of the decision making process regarding services makes that a viable transition team member (p.559).

Historically, the postsecondary transition process was ingrained in the cooperative work/study programs of the 1960s and career education initiative of the 1970s. In the
1980s, postsecondary transition began to emerge into its own field with Will's (1983) seminal position paper on transitions and the 1983 Amendments to the Education of the Handicapped Act (Halpern, 1992; Rusch, Chadsey-Rusch, & Szymanski, 1992). Transition related objectives from this amendment were funded by the demonstration projects by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). Since 1984, 266 demonstration programs have been funded, affecting more than 25,000 people with disabilities, 7,000 parents, 5,881 teachers, 3,076 agency personnel, 1,678 business and industry personnel, and 1,545 postsecondary faculty (Rusch et al., 1992). Along with the demonstration project several other models emerged and were refined in the 1980s. Most models include (a) family, agency, and school involvement, (b) formalized planning and implementation of services, (c) future planning for post-school outcomes (d) linkage with post-school services (Clark & Kolstoe, 1990).

Students with disabilities exiting from high school are in need of receiving transitional services. Laws at the state level are mandated sometimes without proper funding to facilitate and implement transitional programs. Although Special Education students have Individual Education Programs, some do not receive transitional services that should be included in the academic curriculum. Students and their families are often unprepared for facing the overwhelming process of identifying and planning career choices after high school because they have not been introduced or have not developed transitional skills. The students have been in a sheltered school environment with teachers and staff members often planning and guiding most of their decisions. At the age of 14, the student is expected to take an active role in planning for his or her future
after high school, but may lack self-determination skills that may cause many special education students to leave school toward meaningless career paths.

**Need for the study**

Many students after graduating from high school are not finding meaningful or appropriate career paths. Outcome studies for special education students document that individuals with disabilities, in general, and individuals with learning disabilities more specifically are"(a) not employed, (b) not living on their own, (c) not integrated into their communities, and/or (d) not very satisfied with their lives" (Chadsey-Rusch, Rusch, & O'Reilly, 1991, p.3). This researcher, according to experience as a Special Education Case Manager, has observed outcomes and feels more curriculums are needed to further prepare special education students in self-advocacy skills.

In general, programs that provided a more comprehensive package of services over longer periods of time, with low staff ratios sufficient to meet the individuals needs of the special education student, were more effective in helping students acquire basic academic and vocational skills (Betsey, Hallister, & Papageorgiou, 1985; Hahn & Lerman, 1985).

Special education students sometimes fail to see the connection between what they learn and how it will apply when they leave the education program. Students fail because they see no relevancies in learning as a means to be successful.

Several studies have indicated that special education students leaving high school (i.e., either completing special education programs or leaving prior to completion) usually experience difficulty making the transition into adult life (National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1998; Rusch & Chadsey, 1998). These studies reported that only
16% of students with disabilities have access to postsecondary education or training compared to 56% of the general population. Other results showed high unemployment and poor community participation in individuals that were in special education.

In Arizona, a statewide survey of Directors of Special Education, found that 65% of schools reported that no school official was specifically responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities were transitioned to post school services (L. Love, personal communication, 2001). Fewer than 10% indicated that their districts had conducted needs assessments, follow-up, or follow-along surveys of their special education graduates.

Thus, the need for this study is to determine a means or several means to assist special education students more effectively as they transition into society, once secondary coursework is completed.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to gather perceptions of special education practitioners in the education field to rank courses that they believed would best assist the special education student’s transition process to adulthood. The special education practitioners were also asked to list other activities that they felt were meaningful to the process of special education student’s transitioning from high school to postsecondary education, vocational training or the world of work. This purpose was accomplished by investigating current literature and analyzing results from a survey of (24) current, Directors of Special Education within the State of Arizona. It was important to get the Directors’ perspectives in how they felt about specific courses and activities that
enhances the special education student’s transition process toward postsecondary education, vocational training or the world of work.

Research question

The research question to be answered was: What models are being used in public high schools to transition students for success in the adult world, in postsecondary education, vocational training, and the world of work?

Significance of the Study

This study provided suggestions to better serve transitioning special education students to postsecondary education, vocational training, and the world of work.
CHAPTER 2
THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

What can be done to improve the transitional process of special education students from high school? Without a precise plan in place, to ensure consistency and relevancy to transition, students will not receive the necessary services and appropriate skills for success.

The literature reviews covers the following topics: the law, appropriate training and assistance while in high school, and different models of the transition process.

The Law

The passage of the Education For All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) stipulated that as a nation, society would provide “a free and appropriate public education” to all handicapped children (children with disabilities). The Education of the Handicapped Act defines learning disabilities as:

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems, which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (Education For All Handicapped Children Act, 1975)
The Transition Initiative

In 1984 the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) Will (1984) identified transition as a major priority. Within this circle of transition for students with disabilities, students with learning disabilities have been identified as an appropriate target population (Okolo & Sitlington, 1986). OSERS focused on the transition from school to working life on the premise that “Qualification for employment is an implied promise of American education…[yet] 50 to 80 percent of working age adults who report a disability are jobless” (Will, 1984, p.1). Transition was defined as “an outcome-oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment” (Will, 1984, p.1).

People argued that the OSERS definition of transition focused solely on employment, was to narrow (e.g., Halpern, 1985). Halpern challenged the assumptions of the OSERS transition model that Will seemed to be implying that “the nonvocational dimensions of adult adjustment are significant and important only in so far as they contribute to the ultimate goal of employment” (Halpern, 1985, p.480).

Halpern’s broader concept of potential transition outcomes helped to shape policy for the United States with the 1990 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act.

Transition is a broad term that encompasses all of “the life changes, adjustments, and cumulative experiences that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from school environments to more independent living and work environments” (Wehman, 1995, p.5). This broadened idea of transition from school to adulthood is best expressed in the 1990 transition amendments to the P.L. 94-142, which is known as IDEA. IDEA defines transition services as:
A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 34 PL 105-17)

In a simple sense, transition represents a period of changes in roles, expectations, and environments. During this period of change, for the disabled, it can be devastating.

This requirement by law must take into account the student’s preferences and interests; therefore, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education, developed regulations implementing, “all students, beginning no later that age 16 and at a younger age, if determined appropriate be invited to attend the Individualized Education Program (I.E.P. meeting at which a transition plan is to be developed” (34 C.F.R. 300.344[c]).

**Involving Students in the Planning Process**

The educational experience of most students, particularly ones with learning disabilities, can best be described as a one-way street. This approach means that teachers deliver knowledge and decisions and plans are made by parents, administrators, school board members, and state legislators. This researcher has found that most students feel they are not in control when they are in school. Sarason (1990) described the typical classroom as such:

Our usual imagery of the classroom contains an adult who is “in charge” and pupils who conform to the teacher’s rules, regulations and standards. If students think and act in conformity to the teacher’s wishes, they will learn what they are supposed to learn. (1990, p.78)
What is meant by student involvement? The term *involves* in this context means "to draw in as a participant" (*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 1978, p. 378). Student involvement can connect the student with his or her educational program and enable him or her to develop and acquire components of self-determination, such as choice and decision-making, goal setting, and self-awareness. The focal point of using these skills has been in the development of the IEP. The IEP meeting provides a powerful vehicle for teaching self-determination skills. Students must learn to evaluate their needs; set goals; communicate their wants, needs and goals; make decisions; and solve problems. This process gives the student more control over their education program. Schunk (1985) pointed out, that participation in goal setting can result in higher commitment to a goal and, consequently, increased performance. This based on research, Schunk (1985) found that children with learning disabilities who participated in setting goals related to mathematics activities showed greater improvement that did students who participated in the same instruction but either had goals selected for them or had no goals identified. Self-monitoring and self-recording procedures have been shown to improve the motivation and performance of students with disabilities. Malone and Mastropieri (1992) determined that, under a self-monitoring condition, middle school students with learning disabilities performed better on reading comprehension transfer tasks than peers who did not self-monitor. McCarl, Svobodny, and Beare (1991) found that teaching three students with mental retardation to record progress on classroom assignments improved on-task behavior for all students and showed an increase in productivity for two of the three students.
The use of self-instruction strategies has also proved to be beneficial for students with disabilities. Self-instruction refers to "verbalizations and individual emits to cue, direct or maintain his or her own behavior" (Agran, Fodor-Davis, & Moore, 1986, p. 273).

Self-evaluation or self-judgment, Schunk (1981) showed that students who verbalized cognitive strategies related to their study and work habits increased math achievement scores.

According to Lagomarcino and Rusch (1989) using self-reinforcement and self-monitoring procedures improved work performed of students with mental retardation. Other practical benefits of enabling students to direct their own learning gives teachers more time to teach other skills. Another great benefit of student-directed learning is the student may apply self-directed learning strategies in any situation. Students also are learning how to problem solve.

In summary, why involve students in education planning, decision-making, and instruction? All of these strategies become valuable strategies that enhance students' motivation to learn, which results in positive outcomes, and provides students with skills that they need to possess to succeed as adults.

Secondary Special Education Transition Planning Process

Transition to postsecondary, vocational training and the world of work are not the product of the goals included in students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) during the last year or two of secondary education. Successful transition must start on cumulative goal setting that has occurred throughout the IEP planning process. Goals must be set on long-term impact. Ideally the transition process should become
continuous, starting from the first IEP goal to the students’ graduation or aging out of special education.

The transition amendments to IDEA require in addition to the IEP there must include a statement of the needed transition services. This statement must show “how instruction, community experiences, and the development of employment or other post-school adult living objectives and, as appropriate, activities of daily living and functional vocational evaluation will be employed to develop positive outcomes for each student” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1990).

Most specifically these transition statements included in each IEP will have to document: a coordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment continuing adult services, independent living, or community participation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1990).

How are students better prepared for postsecondary education to meet the demands of the postsecondary environment?

a. Reviewing college catalogs with students,

b. Reviewing college level textbooks with students,

c. Reviewing college course outlines,

d. Bringing college students with learning disabilities to talk to secondary students,

e. Providing direct instruction to students about postsecondary support services,
f. Building transitional skill training into the secondary special education curriculum. ("Secondary to Postsecondary Education," 1995)

There are seven beliefs to promoting successful transition outcomes for students with disabilities.

1. Integration. Secondary education curriculum must provide the student with multiple opportunities for physical and social interactions with peers, neighbors, and community members.

2. Independence. Secondary education curriculum must help students develop skills for independence.

3. Participation. Secondary education curriculum must provide developing skills so students can take part in community, social, and recreational activities.

4. Productivity. Secondary education curriculum must assist students to develop skills to allow them to contribute to society.

5. Dignity. Secondary education curriculum must develop self-worth skills, so students will value themselves.

6. Variety. Secondary education curriculum must provide students with a variety of work, living, and social options.

7. Choice. Secondary education curriculum must develop self-determination skills to empower the student to choose activities, options, and services that best fit their needs. ("Secondary to Postsecondary Education," 1995)
Vocational Education

For students with learning disabilities to be fully prepared for the transition to employment and the community, they must actively be involved in the process of transition planning in all phases. Self-advocacy and self-determination skills must be possessed to enable the special education individual at the work site. Research tells that persons with learning disabilities tend to be unrealistic and random goal setters (Tollefson, Tracy, Johnson, Buenning, & Farmer, 1981), it also tells us that these same individuals are usually not satisfied with their eventual jobs (Faford & Haubrich, 1981).

To reconcile these last two findings, professionals must assist students in becoming active participates in the transition process. By doing this the individual will develop skills and experiences that will be more satisfying on the job, which will ultimately manifest in better job maintenance.

The teacher must help the student develop realistic vocational plans without being a dream crusher perhaps by providing learning about oneself through participation in the learning process called trial-and-error. Students may learn with dignity from their mistakes.

Some strategies for accomplishing this task:

1. Share testing results with the student carefully explaining the student’s learning disabilities.

2. Exploration of vocational interests. Have the student tell what career they would like to do. Help students identify their strengths and weaknesses within that chosen career. Arrange a job shadowing experience for the student having the student write about their experience.
3. Assist students in developing a 1 and a 5-year plan. Ask the student where they want to be in 1 or 5 years from now. Describe what type of job they want, how much money will they be earning, where will they be living, what kind of relationship will they be involved in, what will they by doing in their leisure time. (Phelps, Chaplin & Kelly, 1987)

Traditional vocational programs tend to focus mainly on the strengths of the individual, which is very important in choosing jobs. However this may keep the learning disabled individual locked into entry-level positions. This is very disturbing because these individuals are expected to work for 40 to 50 years. Remediation and compensatory strategy instruction in weak areas could be provided so that program participants can be empowered with skills to navigate past their weaknesses. A successful plan therefore is a delicate balance of the individual’s strengths and remediation of those weaknesses. With these empowerments the learning disabled individual will not constantly feel threatened by employers asking them to perform skills they are incapable of doing. This process prepares the individual for future job advancement by building their skill level and capacity to assume responsibility.

As a service provider to the disabled individual educators could find out the specifics of a job directly from the employer. In interviewing employers about a particular position, Stewart & Lillie, (1995) suggests that service providers should assist the employer in describing exactly:

1. What is to be done? Describe in action verbs.

2. To what or to whom it is done. Describe the object or person to which this action is done.
3. Provide any important qualifying information. Clarify the specifics of a job:

- How-Identify exactly how the task is to be accomplished
- Why-This only needs to be clarified for tasks with multiple purposes.
- Where or when
- How much or how often

World of Work

Drucker (1994) described the public, private, and social sectors as the three critical functions for the progress of our society. He claims that neither public nor private sector alone can provide the social capital necessary to bind together communities in modern times.

Drucker (1994) also discusses how U.S. society creates unprecedented wealth but also unprecedented failures. Public education must prepare youth to participate in all three sectors. Economist Jeremy Rifkin (1995) assures us that full employment will never occur; hence entrepreneurship must be encouraged but has severe limitation.

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994 (US Department of Education, 1994) will eventually be replaced by a new work-force development act that combines the activities of adult job training with activities of the public schools. No single school-to-work “model” is prescribed in the legislation, P.L. 103-239. (Benz & Kochhar, 1996) States are encouraged to use existing models and to build a school-to-work system that makes most sense for them.
STWOA provides a model that is divided into three components: work-based learning, school-based learning, and connecting activities. Together they provide a framework to help local school-to-work programs accomplish these goals:

1. Encourage all students to stay in school.
2. Integrate academic and occupational learning in applied setting the community.

Work-Based Learning

The component of work-based learning has generated the most excitement and has had the greatest impact in the field. Thousands of schools across the nation are offering a variety of internship and work-experience opportunities to their students. Internships and mentoring are at an all time high. More and more students are learning at the workplace, and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act has validated this movement. Job shadowing is highly accepted as an effective means of introducing youth to the world of work. Students are learning to apply academic and occupational knowledge and skills to their work based programs. They provide students with "real world" experiences to learn work related expertise. Work-based learning must provide different learning opportunities that build on local market conditions and are responsive to students’ interest, abilities, previous work histories, and future plans (Benz et al., impress; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1994; Rogers et al., 1995). An executive structure must be established to manage the work-based component, including: (a) establishing program goals that all partners can agree upon, (b) providing training and ongoing support to work-site and school staff, (c) coordinating implementation of the program and communication
between schools and work-sites and (d) evaluating and documenting the progress
individual students make in their placements and the overall program makes relative to its
goals (Bailey & Merritt, 1993; Goldberger et al., 1994; McNeil & Kulick, 1995; Pauly et
al., 1994 U.S. General Accounting Office, 1989). Finally training must be provided before
participation in a work-site, and ongoing support during participation.

School-Based Learning

The school-based learning component should give opportunities for all students to
prepare for work through their course selections. Special education has been moving to a
functional curriculum since 1975. The school-based component calls for programs and
career guidance and planning services that expose students to an assortment of career
possibilities. This component is the core of the educational re-building called for by the
STWOA, and it is fundamental in that it will change the structure so that school-to-work
programs will be successful. (Benz & Kochhar, 1996)

Students need to establish career majors. This decision will enable the special
education student to organize course work around career areas. This organization will
provide purpose and direction for school experiences and will result in the student
receiving his or her high school diploma. STWOA calls for students to make a career
major by the age of 16. (Benz & Kochhar, 1996)

STWOA calls for three elements of the school-based learning component for
enhancing career selection: (a) career awareness, exploration, and counseling beginning
by the 7th grade; (b) regular evaluation to assess academic and occupational strengths,
weaknesses; and (c) transition planning so students are able to attain additional training if
needed (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Students who had their instructional needs met through proper planning and activities experienced better outcomes.

**Connecting Activities**

The last component of the school-to-work program was the connecting the worlds of school and work to largely align with each other and this alignment does not happen naturally. The STWOA list several activities to accomplish this goal. Partnerships could be built among secondary schools, postsecondary education institutions, employers, and community agencies to insure that students do not become the only “thread” that connects schools with these other partners. (U.S. Department of Education, 1994)

Connecting activities should include (a) establishing school-site mentors to act as liaisons among students, employers, school staff and parents; (b) matching students with work-based learning opportunities; and (c) providing students with post-program assistance to secure employment, and to link them with other community services that may be necessary to assure them success. (U.S. Department of Education, 1994)

The school-to-work program is an opportunity to create curriculum and instructional opportunities that are relevant, tied to community, and academically challenging. This program has the potential of empowering all students to revitalize society through the engagement of their talents to become productive, self-sufficient members of society.
Essential Elements for Effective Transition

In order to make a smooth transition from school to adulthood, an individualized plan should be written to establish goals for life after high school. Objectives, timelines, and responsible participants are among the factors to be considered. (Wehman, 1995) Furthermore, there must be a multitude of postsecondary education, employment, and community living options for students and their families to choose.

The following elements lay the foundation for a comprehensive transition (Wehman, 1995):

- Plan involves input by student and parents for postsecondary education, vocational education, or the world of work.
- Parents should be well informed of their options.
- Plan is developed for the individual, which includes goals and steps to reach those goals; also the skills required to function appropriately on the job.
- Plan lists that are responsible for each process, including referrals to agencies, job placement, and on-the-job-training.
- Plan is developed 5 to 7 years before graduation.
- Plan is part of the IEP.
- Plan is easy to follow and to understand.

Wehman (1995) has outlined the roles of the school, the parent, and the community in the transition plan. The school program should:

- Help parents to plan optimistically for employment of their son or daughter.
• Educate parents regarding employment options that are available in the community.

• Facilitate families to community agencies.

• Educate parents on what they can be doing at home to promote employability of their children.

• Involve parents at all times.

Further factors for the school to consider:

• Vocational planning begins in the elementary level.

• Vocational curriculum reflects what skills local employers need.

• Training in community-based job sites includes instruction in job skills and interpersonal skills.

• Vocational rehabilitation service providers are involved long before students graduate.

• Formal, written plans identify meaningful job with teaching strategies before the student graduates.

• Inclusion helps students with disabilities learn, work, and play with their peers.

• Parents are involved with vocational planning.

• Identify agencies and individuals who provide follow-up training before graduation.

Parents should:

• At an early age make sure their child’s IEP provides vocational education.
• Support the teacher’s efforts for job training.

• Educate parents to determine what is available for their child throughout their school years.

• Make sure agencies are coordinating services and have assigned case managers before their child has graduated.

• Insist that transitional planning take place 3 to 5 years prior to graduation.

• Stay abreast about new employment programs that exist.

• Work with their child at home on appropriate behavior, grooming habits, handling of money; teach self-determination skills so their child will be as independent as possible.

Transition from school to adulthood will not be as effective if communities do not possess the following:

• Challenging types of jobs beyond food service worker.

• Competitive employment, job coaches, on-the-job-training, with follow-up services.

• Work enclaves in small groups, with and without nondisabled individuals.

• Options for transportation.

• Leisure options.
Writing Goals for the Individual Transition Plan

Goals should include employment, vocational, postsecondary, income needs, independent living, transportation, recreation, and self-advocacy. Section 300.18 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1990) makes reference to these types of activities to be planned for each student with disabilities. The challenge lies into coordinating different curriculum areas, such as science, social studies and math into functional adult living goals.

Summary

What educators and families must remember in transition planning is the major purpose of schooling is to help students become more competent and independent so they will become productive citizens.

The transitional plan is a blueprint for the future of students with disabilities. What needs to occur is that the student and family must ask, what is their vision for the future (IDEA, 1990). These ideas must be developed into a workable and viable transition plan.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to gather perceptions of special education practitioners in the education field to rank courses that they believed would best assist the special education student’s transition process to adulthood. The special education practitioners were also asked to list other activities that they felt were meaningful to the process of special education student’s transitioning from high school to postsecondary education, vocational training or the world of work. This purpose was accomplished by investigating current literature and analyzing results from a survey of (24) current, Directors of Special Education within the State of Arizona. It was important to get the Directors’ perspectives in how they felt about specific courses and activities which enhances the special education student’s transition process toward postsecondary education, vocational training or the world of work.

The findings of the survey will be made available to the participating Directors of Special Education in September. Directors will then have the opportunity to impact their programs with current findings.

Research Design

A participatory research methodology was used in this study. The main emphasis of this type of research is to solve a problem or effect change. Hall (1984) and others also have pointed out the unique purpose for participatory studies are to unmask the myth of
science and to validate the knowledge of people. Hall also points out that one of the strengths of this method is its immediate application. Through this process, the researcher is integrated into special education programs and seeks solutions to transitioning special education students to adulthood.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was 24 randomly chosen Directors of Special Education currently working for their particular school districts in the State of Arizona. The survey was administered at the beginning of June. Directors of Special Education completed a written survey (Appendix A), which allowed directors to provide their perceptions of the effectiveness of certain courses and activities offered and that are taken by special education students transitioning to postsecondary education, vocational training or the world of work. Accurate descriptive data would be collected from the Directors, in order to improve or make changes in how the special education students can more easily transition to adulthood. An advantage of this method was that it was an efficient way to gather authentic representation and reliable data. The disadvantage of this method was that the results could be applied directly to practice, but are not easily generalized to other situations (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

Procedure

The instructor at Ottawa University for Research and Methods approved the survey instrument. Upon approval (24) Directors of Special Education in Arizona, were randomly selected from the Directors guide were sent the Transitional Survey.
Instrumentation

The survey that the researcher designed is included in Appendix A. The first part of the survey asked Directors to rank in order of importance using #1=most important to #10=least important courses in a special education student’s transition process toward postsecondary education, vocational education and the world of work.

The second part of the survey was open-ended which asks for Special Education Directors to indicate any other activities, ideas, curricula, or skill-oriented activities, that they have found meaningful in the transition process of special education students to postsecondary education, vocational training, and the world of work.

Method of Analysis

A summary of the directors’ perceptions and findings were presented and analyzed upon collection of the surveys. Data collected to rank courses in special education helpful for transitioning special education students from high school were listed and ranking was determined using a point system. Those activities receiving number one ranking were assigned 10 points, continuing to activities receiving a number 10 ranking being assigned 1 point.

Table 1 (p.31) ranks activities according to total points received (total weighted points.) Table 2 (p.32) ranked activities according to the number of first place selections (first place rankings.) Table 3 (p. 33) showed open-ended responses to the quirky and lists additional activities.
CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Review of Process

A survey containing courses identified as beneficial to special education students as they transition from high school to postsecondary education, vocational training, and the world of work, was sent to 24 randomly selected Directors of Special Education in the state of Arizona. Fourteen of the questionnaires were returned, a 58% response rate. This percentage of return may be attributed to respondent interest and knowledge of survey material. Two questionnaires were omitted due to incomplete responses. The results of the study are based on the input of twelve Directors of Special Education from across the state of Arizona. The survey was composed of a list of 16 courses that may be offered in high school. The participants were asked to rank the top 10 courses they believed would best assist the special education student’s transition process. The participants ranked the courses according to options available to students after high school: Postsecondary Education, Vocational Training, and the World of Work in order of importance (“1” being most important to “10” being least important). The Directors of Special Education were given the opportunity to list any other activities, ideas, curricula, or skill-oriented activities they felt were important in the transition process. The Directors were asked to identify their district of employment.
Findings

In order to compute the results, the rank orders were weighted as found in Figure 1. By assigning weights to the rank orders, the importance of each subject area is more accurately defined.

**Figure 1**

**Weighted Rank Order**

(Points assigned/rank as determined by survey results from special education directors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Points Assigned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from the Transitional Survey were sorted and compiled as presented in Table 1. Table 1 represents a listing of the sixteen courses identified as potentially valuable skills to enhance the transition of special education students after high school, postsecondary education, vocational training, and the world of work.

Each category in Table 1 (postsecondary education, vocational training, and the world of work) contains two columns of numbers. The numbers on the left in each column represents the ranking of the course in order of importance according to returns from directors in the field, (Art was ranked 11th in the postsecondary category).
The number on the right, in parentheses, represents the total number of points received according to the point system demonstrated and explained in Figure 1 (e.g., rank 1 = 10 points; rank 2 = 9 points). Art received 12 points in the Postsecondary column.

Notice that Reading was ranked 1st in all 3 columns (postsecondary education, vocational training, and the world of work). Note also that there is a tie score for several of the courses (under postsecondary – there is a tie for third between computers and language arts), and consequently a tie in the rank for that specific column.

The fourth column represents a complying of points of all three categories to give a separate “total” listing, from which a comparison may be made.

For Postsecondary Education, Reading was ranked as the most important. Math was ranked as second most important. Computers and Language Arts tied for third.

For Vocational Training, Reading was ranked as the most important. Computers tied with Math for second most important subject area. Industrial Arts was rated number three.

For World of Work, Reading was ranked as the most important. Computers were ranked as second most important. Work Experienced was rated number three.

Overall, the top three most important subject areas were: Reading, Computers, and Math. Table 1 illustrates the findings for all subject areas.
Table 1

Transitional Survey

Subject Area Ranking (Total Weighted Points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Postsecondary</th>
<th>Vocational Training</th>
<th>World of Work</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>11 (12)</td>
<td>12 (11)</td>
<td>15 (11)</td>
<td>14 (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>4 (69)</td>
<td>6 (58)</td>
<td>5 (68)</td>
<td>5 (195)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>3 (87)</td>
<td>2 (80)</td>
<td>2 (83)</td>
<td>2 (250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td>13 (2)</td>
<td>13 (5)</td>
<td>16 (4)</td>
<td>16 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culinary Arts</td>
<td>10 (15)</td>
<td>No response</td>
<td>13 (15)</td>
<td>15 (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>8 (31)</td>
<td>9 (21)</td>
<td>10 (28)</td>
<td>11 (80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>8 (31)</td>
<td>7 (34)</td>
<td>9 (39)</td>
<td>9 (104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td>12 (7)</td>
<td>11 (15)</td>
<td>14 (13)</td>
<td>13 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Arts</td>
<td>7 (41)</td>
<td>3 (69)</td>
<td>8 (46)</td>
<td>8 (156)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>3 (87)</td>
<td>5 (66)</td>
<td>7 (55)</td>
<td>4 (208)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Skills</td>
<td>6 (42)</td>
<td>5 (66)</td>
<td>4 (72)</td>
<td>7 (180)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>2 (98)</td>
<td>2 (80)</td>
<td>6 (63)</td>
<td>3 (241)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE/Adaptive PE</td>
<td>9 (16)</td>
<td>10 (17)</td>
<td>11 (24)</td>
<td>12 (57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>1 (105)</td>
<td>1 (94)</td>
<td>1 (85)</td>
<td>1 (284)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>5 (50)</td>
<td>8 (23)</td>
<td>12 (16)</td>
<td>10 (89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td>7 (41)</td>
<td>4 (68)</td>
<td>3 (82)</td>
<td>16 (191)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Respondents may have rated more than one subject area as most important.)

Table 1 was compiled from the results of a Transitional Survey which contained the following directions: From the following list, please rank in order of importance using #1=most important to #10=least important courses in a special education student’s transition process toward postsecondary education, vocational education, and world of work.
Results were also calculated according to number of times a director ranked a subject area as most important, as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2

First Place Rankings

In the postsecondary column, Reading received the most first place votes (8). Life Skills and Work Experience was second (3 votes each).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Postsecondary</th>
<th>Vocational Training</th>
<th>World of Work</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culinary Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Skills</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE/Adaptive PE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Respondents may have rated more than one subject area as most important.)

In the postsecondary column, Reading received the most first place votes (8). Life Skills and Work Experience was second (3 votes each). Reading was ranked most important across all the categories, followed by Life Skills and Work Experience tied for second, and Math was third.

Eight of the 12 Directors stated additional activities they felt were meaningful in the transition process. Table 3 lists these findings.
### Table 3

**Open-Ended Responses**

(Responses recorded as given.)

**Postsecondary Education:**
- Student-led IEP’s
- Writing process
- Computer Skills
- Work Experience
- Supports on the campuses
- Adult community OJT
- Student self-advocacy
- Self-directed student-led IEP’s

**Vocational Training:**
- Student-led IEP’s
- Hands on activities to see work completion
- Auto Shop
- Building & Maintenance (Construction)
- Apprenticeships
- Cadres
- Current state-of-the-art training
- Current job training/mentoring
- Student self-advocacy
- Personal/Social skills training
- Self-advocacy training
- Vocational testing
- Aptitude/interest inventories
- Closely job training on campus

**World of Work**
- Community work placement
- Vocational assessments
- Career prep work training courses (I & II)
- Self-directed /Student-led IEP’s
- Self-advocacy training
- Info on own specific disability training
- Transportation (Public)
- Hygiene
- Social Skills and Ongoing Counseling/Guidance in career
- Employment Skill training
- “Real” world life training within community settings
- Mentors & Support
- Auto Shop
- Building & Maintenance
- Student-led IEP’S
These open-ended responses were derived from the Transitional Survey which contained the following directions: Please indicate any other activities, ideas, curricula, or skill-oriented activities, if any, that you have found meaningful in the transition process of special education students to postsecondary, vocational training, and the world of work.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of the study was to gather perceptions of special education practitioners in the education field to rank courses that they believed would best assist the special education student’s transition process to adulthood. The special education practitioners were also asked to list other activities that they felt were meaningful to the process of special education student’s transitioning from high school to postsecondary education, vocational training or the world of work. This purpose was accomplished by investigating current literature and analyzing results from a survey of (24) current, Directors of Special Education within the State of Arizona. It was important to get the Directors’ perspectives in how they felt about specific courses and activities which enhances the special education student’s transition process toward postsecondary education, vocational training or the world of work.

Investigating current literature and analyzing results from a survey of current Directors of Special Education in Arizona accomplished this. Successful transitioning is a developmental process to be integrated in the student’s day-to-day learning.

The transitional survey results reveal valuable data. Tables 1, 2, and 3, in chapter 4, illustrate special education directors’ responses to the survey. Directors provided their
perceptions of the effectiveness of certain courses and activities assisting special education students transitioning to Postsecondary Education, Vocational Training, and the World of Work.

The directors felt that for Postsecondary Education, Reading was the most important, Math was second, Language Arts and Computers tied for third.

For Vocational Training, Reading was felt to be most important, Computers and Math tied for second, Industrial Arts was third.

For World of Work, Reading again was rated number one, Computers and Work Experience tied for second.

Directors also agreed that student-led IEP’s were important in the transitional process. This survey result supported the literature, which states that students benefit by learning self-determination skills, enabling them for success.

**Conclusion**

The research question to be answered was as follows: What models are being used in public high schools to transition students for success in the adult world? Current literature shows the need for students to be involved in their IEP’s. This planning process allows students to develop and acquire self-determination skills, such as choice and decision-making, goal setting and self-awareness. These strategies become valuable in the motivation to learn.

This researcher can conclude from the results of the survey that Special Education Directors in Arizona believe Reading is essential in high school. Reading was marked #1 in all three areas of the survey. This was evidenced in Table 1. Also noted were Student-
led IEP’s, which were listed #1 in both postsecondary education and vocational training. In order for the student to lead his or her IEP meeting he or she must possess self-determination skills. These skills were also noted in the literature reviews for enabling a special education student to transition to adulthood more successfully. This was evidenced in the comments and suggestions from the open-ended question in Table 3.

Student-led IEP’s and student self-advocacy skills were represented in all three categories. Vocational testing/assessment was mentioned in both vocational training and the world of work. Work experience, apprenticeships, current job training/mentoring and employment skill training were listed in all three categories. All other suggestions appeared to be specific to the categories.

Recommendations

There is a strong need at all levels of special education for basic skills. Meaningful curriculum that strengthens academic skills while developing life skills is essential. In addition, emphasis on self-advocacy facilitates learning, and at the same time prepares a student for life beyond high school.

The following suggestions can be extrapolated from the results of the survey:

1. A comprehensive reading program should be included in all special education curricula.

2. Self-Determination skills should be taught at all levels (K-12).

3. Vocational testing and assessment should be started in high school.

4. Job mentoring and training is needed to support students while they are new to the work force.

5. Work experience and apprenticeship programs are needed in high school and postsecondary training.
6. Applied Math should be an integral part of special education curriculum.

7. Computer technology should be blended into as many facets of the special education curriculum as possible.

8. Writing skills should be included in all phases of learning.
REFERENCE LIST


Stillington, P.L. (1996). Transition assessment—Where have we been and where should we be going? *CDEI, 19*(2), 159-168.


May 11, 2001

Dear Colleagues:

My name is Kathy Caretto and I work for the Glendale Union High School District as a Special Education Teacher. I am in the process of writing a thesis as part of my Master of Arts Degree in Education at Ottawa University. My advisor is Dr. Mansour. The purpose of the thesis is to develop a guide to try to enhance transition of special education students from high school to the world of work.

I am asking you please to assist me by completing the enclosed questionnaire and return it to Kathy Caretto, 1002 West Butler Drive, Phx, AZ 850221, by May 31, 1999. The general format of the questionnaire presents a checklist of existing programs and asks that you use your expertise by taking 10 to 15 minutes to rank their importance according to choices ranging from strongly agree to #1=most important to #10=least important.

I realize this is a very busy time of year, and thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I am excited about the potential outcome that may result from your input to assist our students. I will share the results of my findings with you in September. I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope, and would be grateful if you could return the questionnaire by May 31, 1999.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Kathy Caretto
**Transitional Survey**

From the following list, please rank in order of importance using #1=most important to #10=least important courses in a special education student's transition process toward postsecondary education, vocational education, and world of work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Postsecondary</th>
<th>Vocational Education</th>
<th>World of Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Art</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
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<td>Crafts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culinary Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please indicate any other activities, ideas, curricula, or skill-oriented activities, if any, that you have found meaningful in the transition process of special education students to postsecondary, vocational training, and the World of Work.

1. __________________________________________

2. __________________________________________

3. __________________________________________

Please return to:
Kathy Careto
1002 W. Butler Dr.
Phoenix, AZ 85021