Community-Based Instruction and Vocational Learning in Special Education

A Meta-synthesis

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Abstract

This meta-synthesis on community-based instruction and vocational learning in special education explores the training and skills individuals with disabilities require need to survive and thrive in employment and post-school activities designed to improve self-reliance, personal responsibility, and increase exposure to the community and all of the activities and opportunities that exist there. Substantial barriers must be addressed for all individuals with disabilities, but particularly for those individuals with moderate to more severe disabilities. Through proper trainings, and the utilization of the necessary tools and equipment, individuals with disabilities will continue to increasingly transition into meaningful employment and community-based programs intended to build self-sufficiency.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Community and vocational-based learning is vital to students in transitional special education. Community work experiences give students opportunities to be exposed to social situations and natural contingencies that are not available in schools (Wehman, 1990). The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1990 was legislation that mandated public school development of a statement of needed transition services for students with individual education plans (IEPs) age sixteen or older. The IDEA of 1990 described transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a student, with a disability, that:

> (A) is designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (B) is based on the student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests; and (C) includes instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. [section 602]

The Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, states that transition services are now defined as "a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability" that includes instruction, related services, community experiences,

the development of employment and other post-school objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation."[section 602]. In addition, section 614 of IDEA of 2004 further mandated "appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills." [section 604].

Though recent legislation has been promising in guaranteeing transition will include community and vocational based learning, IEP teams, community members, and various agencies need to continue to work hard to advocate for individuals with disabilities so that they can have meaningful places in our communities.

1.2. Authors beliefs and experiences

In the fall of 2009, I began working in the Transitions Program at Thunder Mountain High School in Juneau, Alaska as a para-educator. Since 1996, I had worked in various programs as a para-educator and a classroom social studies teacher. Though most of my experiences were in secondary education, I had not worked in a transitions program with students aged 16 to 22. I learned quickly that one of the main goals of transition education is to ready young adults with disabilities for the world of work if at all possible. Students in transition gain vocational and job skill training through a network of agencies in Juneau and the support of local businesses.

I have always believed that individuals with disabilities have diverse talents and the ability to find a meaningful and enjoyable job or career field. Since I started working at the Transitions Program, I have had the pleasure of working with our program's young adults and assist and support their job quests. As our nation has recently slumped into

recession and higher unemployment rates, I have become concerned that increased job competition could make it tough for individuals with disabilities competing in the job market. More than ever, it has become evident to me that job skills training and vocational rehabilitation workshops are critical in assisting individuals with disabilities to gain employment.

Often times, students who are placed in a work environment, continue to require training, particularly with life skills and appropriate social behaviors in order to retain their position. The Juneau Transitions Program, along with REACH, the Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the local business community are working with individuals with disabilities to find the right career fit and provide assistance when problems at work arise. My position at work allows me to work with students that are currently employed and students looking for employment. It is my belief that employment empowers people and can be a factor in creating independent living situations, particularly for individuals with disabilities.

Before starting work with the Transitions Program, I suffered through the longest stretch of unemployment in my life. A lot of negative feelings of self-doubt and hopelessness filled my daily existence. Still, I had some tools and experiences that were able to help me end my unemployment eventually and get me back to work in the school system. For folks who have never had a job, it can be down right scary and intimidating. For individuals with disabilities, sometimes these barriers can seem quite daunting. By utilizing positive support groups and job preparation workshops, we are working together to create an environment that is exciting and empowering in transitions programming.

My work in assisting in the development of opportunities for Transition Special Education students to attain meaningful employment, has led me to ask several key questions:

1. What rights do young adults with disabilities have in trying to secure employment?

2. How can young adults with moderate to severe disabilities be active in community and vocational-based learning and training?

3. How can young adults positively advocate for themselves to be competitive in today's job market?

4. How can employment empower a young adult with disabilities to gain independence?

5. How can society be a better place due to the employment and community participation of young adults with disabilities?

6. What accommodations can be legally made for individuals with disabilities seeking employment?

7. How can employment enhance or improve a person's life with disabilities?

1.3. The purpose of this meta-synthesis

This meta-synthesis had several purposes. One purpose was to demonstrate how community-based instruction and vocational learning is having a positive impact on special education students (ages 16-22) enrolled in transition program, and on the communities where these students learn and work. A second purpose was to shed light on exciting programs, services, and learning tools that are empowering and are helping to create independence and positive advocacy for transition-aged special education students as they begin to navigate the waters of independent living and community participation.

While discussing several age-tested and newer facets of community and vocational based learning, the reader will be able to discern what works and what doesn't work, and will understand and hopefully appreciate how the community in whole will benefit. A final purpose of this meta-synthesis is to strengthen my own knowledge and application of community-based instruction and vocational learning, and to lead me to new and exciting teacher lesson planning strategies for secondary students (ages 16-22) with disabilities who participate in the Transitions Program at Thunder Mountain High School.

2. Methods

1.1. Selection criteria

The journal articles cited in this meta-synthesis met the following criteria:

1. The articles covered issues involving transitional programs and community-based instruction.

2. The articles covered issues involving job training and special education.

3. The articles covered issues involving secondary-aged students.

2.2. Search procedures

I completed data-base searches and ancestral searches to find articles for this meta-synthesis.

2.2.1. Database searches

In the fall of 2010 the author conducted systematic searches of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC, EBSCOhost) database using the following search term combinations:

1. ("transition programs");

2. ("community based instruction");

3. ("community based instruction") AND ("disabilities");

4. ("job training") AND ("special education");

5. ("vocational special education")

These database searches yielded a total of 33 articles that met my selection criteria (Bates, Cuvo, Miner, & Korabek, 2001; Benz, Lindstrom, Unruh, & Waintrup, 2004; Bowman, 2007; Brooke, Revell, & Wehman, 2009; Bullock, Maddy-Bernstein, & Matias, 1994; Bucholz, & Brady, 2008; Burke, Andersen, Bowen, Howard, & Allen, 2010; Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Cole, Swedeen, Ditchman, & Owens, 2009; Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, Swedeen, & Owens 2009; Cavin, Alper, Sinclair, & Stington, 2001; Cihak, Alberto, & Fredrick, 2007; Cook, 2002; Curl, Hall, Chisholm, & Rule, 1992; DuBeau, Emenheiser, & Stortz, 2003; Eisenman, Tanverdi, Perrington, & Geiman, 2009; Greathouse, & Shaughnessy, 2010; Hutcherson, Langone, Ayres, & Clees, 2004; Jakobsson, Ekholm, Bergroth, & Ekholm, 2010; Kraska, Zinner, & Abebe, 2007; Kohler, DeStefano, Wermuth, Grayson, & McGinty, 1994; Laarhoven, Laarhoven-Myers, & Zurita, 2007; Madaus, Gerber, & Price, 2008; Malakpa, 2007; McDonnell, Hardman, Hightower, Keifer-O'Donnell, & Drew, 1993; Mechling, & Cronin, 2006; Ofoegbu, & Azarmsa, 2010; Phillips, Reid, Korabek, & Hursch, 1988; Powers, Geenan, & Powers, 2009; Rosenthal, 1989; Sulewski, Butterworth, & Gilmore, 2008; Walker, Uphold, Richter, & Test, 2010; Woolsey, & Katz-Leavy, 2008; Zirkle, 1998).

2.2.2. Ancestral searches

I conducted ancestral searches of the reference lists of the articles gathered through the data base searches. These ancestral searches retrieved two additional articles that met the selection criteria (Cimera, 2009; Hernandez, Keys, & Balcazar, 2000).

2.3. Coding procedures

I utilized a coding form to categorize the information presented in each of the 35 articles. This coding form was based on: (a) publication type; (b) research design; (c) participants; (d) data sources; (e) findings of the studies.

2.3.1. Publication type

Every article in this meta-synthesis was classified according to *publication type*. *Publication types* include research designs, theoretical works, descriptive articles, opinion pieces/position papers, guides, annotated bibliographies, and reviews of the literature. *Studies* utilize systematic methods to collect and/or analyze qualitative and/or quantitative data. *Theoretical works* utilize existing research literature to explain and expand upon theories. *Descriptive articles* describe personal experiences or phenomena, but do not gather or analyze data through systematic methods. *Opinion pieces/position papers* express the author's opinion and/or advocate for particular policy positions, personal philosophy, theoretical frameworks, and educational models. *Guides* recommend detailed strategies and/or explain how individuals would utilize programs, policies, and curricula. *Annotated bibliographies* are lists of books, articles, and documents regarding a topic with a citation of each item followed by a short description and/or a critical evaluation of it. *Reviews of the literature* are bodies of work that review critical points of current knowledge including substantive findings and theoretical and methodological contributions to a particular topic (Table 1).

2.3.2. Research design

Each empirical study I reviewed was classified by research design (i.e., quantitative research, qualitative research, mixed methods research). *Quantitative* researchers collect

and analyze numerical data. *Qualitative* researchers collect language-based data to describe individuals' experiences, and phenomena, and to tell stories. *Mixed* methods research combines quantitative and qualitative research methods in a single study (Duke & McCarthy, 2009; Duke & Ward, 2009) (Table 2).

2.3.4. Participants, data sources, and findings

I have identified the participants in all of the studies (e.g., individuals with disabilities, students, patients, teachers, transition employees at the local and state levels, vocational trainers and educators, and employee networks. Also, I have identified the data sources that were analyzed for each study (e.g., interviews, observations, focus groups, surveys, standardized tests). The findings of each study were summarized (Table 2).

2.4. Data analysis

I used a modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method previously employed by Duke (2011) and Duke and Ward (2009) to analyze the 35 articles included in this meta-synthesis. I first identified significant statements within each article. For the purpose of this meta-synthesis, I defined significant statements as statements that addressed issues related to community-based instruction and vocational learning. Next, I created a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping (verbatim) significant statements with (non-verbatim) formulated meanings. These formulated meanings represented my interpretation of each significant statement. Last, I grouped the formulated meanings from the 35 articles into theme clusters (or emergent themes). These emergent themes represented the essence (or content) of the entire body of literature (Table 3).

3. Results

3.1. Publication type

I gathered 35 articles that met my selection criteria. The publication type of each of the articles is listed in Table 1. Twenty-one of the 35 articles (60%) included in this meta-sythesis were research studies (Bates et al., 2001; Bullock et al., 1994; Burke, et al., 2010; Carter et al., 2009; Carter et al., 2009; Cihak, et al., 2007; Cimera, 2009; Cooke, 2002; Eisenman et al., 2009; Hutcherson et al., 2004; Jakobsson et al., 2010; Kohler et al., 1994; Kraska et al., 2007; Laarhoven et al., 2007; McDonnell et al., 1993; Mechling & Cronin, 2006; Ofoegbu & Azarmsa, 2010; Phillips et al., 1988; Powers et al., 2009; Sulewski et al., 2008; Zirkle, 1998). Six of the 35 articles (17.1%) were reviews of the literature (Bucholz & Brady, 2008; Cavin et al., 2001; Curl et al., 1992; Hernandez et al., 2000; Maudas et al., 2008; Walker et al., 2010). Four of the 35 articles (11.4%) were opinion pieces/position papers (Bowman, 2007; Malakpa, 2007; Rosenthal, 1989; Woolsey & Katz-Leavy, 2008). Four of the 35 articles (11.4%) were descriptive articles (Benz et al., 2004; Brooke et al., 2009; DuBeau et al., 2003; Greathouse et al., 2010)

Table 1

Author(s) & Year of Publication	Publication Type
Bates, Cuvo, Miner, & Korabek, 2001	Study
Benz, Lindstrom, Unruh, & Waintrup, 2004	Descriptive Article
Bowman, 2007	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Brooke, Revell, & Wehman, 2009	Descriptive Article
Bucholz, & Brady, 2008	A Review of the Literature
Bullock, Maddy-Bernstein, & Matias, 1994	Study
Burke, Andersen, Bowen, Howard, & Allen, 2010	Study
Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Cole, Swedeen, Ditchman, & Owens, 2009	Study
Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, Swedeen, & Owens 2009	Study
Cavin, Alper, Sinclair, & Stington, 2001	A Review of the Literature
Cihak, Alberto, & Fredrick, 2007	Study
Cimera, 2009	Study
Cooke, 2002	Study
Curl, Hall, Chisholm, & Rule, 1992	Review of the Literature
DuBeau, Emenheiser, & Stortz, 2003	Descriptive Article
Eisenman, Tanverdi, Perrington, & Geiman, 2009	Study
Greathouse, & Shaughnessy, 2010	Descriptive Article
Hernandez, Keyes, & Balcazar, 2000	Review of the Literature
Hutcherson, Langone, Ayres, & Clees, 2004	Study
Jakobsson, Ekholm, Bergroth, & Ekholm, 2010	Study
Kohler, DeStafano, Wermuth, Grayson, & McGinty, 1994	Study

Kraska, Zinner, & Abebe, 2007	Study
Laarhoven, Laarhoven-Myers, & Zurita, 2007	Study
Malakpa, 2007	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Maudas, Gerber, & Price, 2008	Review of the Literature
McDonnell, Hardman, Hightower, Keifer-O'Donnell, & Drew, 1993	Study
Mechling, & Cronin, 2006	Study
Ofoegbu, & Azarmsa, 2010	Study
Phillips, Reid, Korabek, & Hursch, 1988	Study
Powers, Geenan, & Powers, 2009	Study
Rosenthal, 1989	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Sulewski, Butterworth, & Gilmore, 2008	Study
Walker, Uphold, Richter, & Test, 2010	Review of the Literature
Woolsey, & Katz-Leavy, 2008	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Zirkle, 1998	Study

3.2. Research design, participants, data sources, and findings of the study

   I located 21 research studies that met my selection criteria (Bates et al., 2001; Bullock

et al., 1994; Burke, et al., 2010; Carter et al., 2009; Carter et al., 2009; Cihak, et al., 2007;

Cimera, 2009; Cooke, 2002; Eisenman et al., 2009; Hutcherson et al., 2004; Jakobsson et

al., 2010; Kohler et al., 1994; Kraska et al., 2007; Laarhoven et al., 2007; McDonnell et

al., 1993; Mechling & Cronin, 2006; Ofoegbu & Azarmsa, 2010; Phillips et al., 1988;

Powers et al., 2009; Sulewski et al., 2008; Zirkle, 1998). The research design,

participants, data sources, and findings of the studies are located below in Table 2.

Table 2

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Bates, Cuvo, Miner, & Korabek, 2001	Quantitative	20 adolescents and young adults with mild mental retardation and 20 adolescents and young adults with moderate retardation.	Simulated assessments	Individuals with mild retardation performed better than did individuals with moderate retardation on simulated tasks and in the community.
Bullock, Maddy-Bernstein, & Matias, 1994	Quantitative	Transition personnel working with individuals with disabilities.	National survey	Of the 20 components identified, all received high ratings with academic and vocational education integration and staff development/training being the highest rated, and administrative leadership and budget information being the lowest.
Burke, Andersen, Bowen, Howard, & Allen, 2010	Quantitative	6 young adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.	Analysis of instruction methods and surveys based on a 5 point Likert Scale	5 of 6 young adults met the assessment goal only after the introduction of a cue system occurred, while one young adult succeeded with only behavioral skills testing.
Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Cole, Swedeen, Ditchman, & Owens, 2009	Quantitative	135 Chambers of Commerce and other employer networks.	Survey	By a rate of 50% or higher, several individuals responded that their organizations' missions somewhat included supporting or working with youth and sometimes working well with high schools.
Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, Swedeen, & Owens 2009	Qualitative	67 youth with severe disabilities	Telephone interviews	Youth in the intervention group were 3.5 times more likely to have community-based work experiences during the summer and worked more hours per

				week.
Cihak, Alberto, & Fredrick, 2007	Quantitative	4 students with moderate to severe disabilities	Observations	Findings indicated that self-operated auditory prompts worked as good or better than response-based intervention.
Cimera, 2009	Quantitative	246 supported employees who were enrolled in a transition program	Billing records to all funding sources (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Mental Health, etc.), IEPs, assessments, intake reports, case notes, work schedules, employee pay stubs	Supported employees, participating in community-based transition programs were viewed as more cost efficient by taxpayers then supported employees only receiving high school transition services or no services. Also, supported employees receiving transition services held their jobs longer than supported employees not receiving transition services.
Cooke, 2002	Mixed Methods	173 special education teachers	Questionnaires	Students with a behavioral disorder received lower ratings in social coping than did students with mild retardation.
Eisenman, Tanverdi, Perrington, & Geiman, 2009	Quantitative	45 young adults with significant disabilities	Semi-structured interviews	Increasing the social network of young adults with disabilities is beneficial.
Hutcherson, Langone, Ayres, & Clees, 2004	Quantitative	4 students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities	Observations	The percentage of questions answered correctly increased with all students.
Jakobsson, Ekholm, Bergroth, & Ekholm, 2010	Quantitative	51 patients with restricted work capacity and other work related issues	Database records (used to match "social twins" according to demographic characteristics), employment records; repeated-measures	A substantial amount of the enrolled patients secured employment over a 6 year period.

			analysis of variance and logistic regression were used to analyze the data	
Kohler, DeStafano, Wermuth, Grayson, & McGinty, 1994	Mixed Methods	State level department of education transitional – personnel in all 50 states, regional resource centers in special education, and clearing houses and informational networks	Mail and telephone surveys	Results point to several positive outcomes in the process of selecting exemplary programs.
Kraska, Zinner, & Abebe, 2007	Quantitative	71 young adults with various disabilities.	The test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)	Academic skills alone may not lead to employment and non- Caucasians with disabilities gain employment more than Caucasians with disabilities.
Laarhoven, Laarhoven-Myers, & Zurita, 2007	Quantitative	2 adolescents with mild and moderate cognitive impairments.	Series of questionnaires for selection process and task analyses of data	Through the utilization of video-based procedures, increases in independent responding were met.
McDonnell, Hardman, Hightower, Keifer-O'Donnell, & Drew, 1993	Quantitative	34 high school students with moderate to profound mental retardation.	Analysis of pre-post Scales of Independent Behavior, multiple regression analysis	I.Q., level of student mobility, and the presence of moderate to severe behavior problems could not predict the amount of community-based instruction provided to participating students.
Mechling, & Cronin, 2006	Quantitative	3 high school students with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities.	Observations, store manager interviews	Simulated work environments are successful for educational purposes when community-based environments for learning are limited.
Ofoegbu, & Azarmsa,	Quantitative	34 high school students with	Oral interview, questionnaire,	67% of students between 2004 and 2006 acquired

2010		moderate to profound mental retardation.	student job acquisition records	and retained employment, 57% of graduates in 2007 gained employment, and 53% of them retained their employment.
Phillips, Reid, Korabek, & Hursch, 1988	Quantitative	4 adolescents with profoundly mental retardation.	Observations, questionnaire survey	This was an effective strategy in teaching receptive identification.
Powers, Geenan, & Powers, 2009	Quantitative	1200 surveyed special education students between the ages of 16 and 22, and parents	Mail surveys	Parents value teacher support more than students, the students reported higher levels of self-esteem, barriers to transition, and interest in caretaker rolls. Parents and students agreed on the importance of finishing high school, health insurance and access to a good doctor.
Sulewski, Butterworth, & Gilmore, 2008	Quantitative	State intellectual disabilities/develop mental disabilities agency directors	Mail surveys	Community-based non-work supports is growing as a day service provider but is still loosely defined.
Zirkle, 1998	Mixed Methods	467 active members of the American Society of Training and Development; 454 vocational educators	Questionnaire	Vocational educators and training and development professionals have different opinions regarding responsibilities for skill development and evaluation of students in school-to-work programs.

3.2.1. Research design

Seventeen of the 21 studies (81%) utilized a quantitative research design (Bates et al., 2001; Bullock et al., 1994; Burke, et al., 2010; 2009; Carter et al., 2009; Cihak, et al., 2007; Cimera, 2009; Eisenman et al., 2009; Hutcherson et al., 2004; Jakobsson et al., 2010; Kraska et al., 2007; Laarhoven et al., 2007; McDonnell et al., 1993; Mechling & Cronin, 2006; Ofoegbu & Azarmsa, 2010; Phillips et al., 1988; Powers et al., 2009; Sulewski et al., 2008). Three of the 21 studies (14.3 %) utilized a mixed methods research design (Cooke, 2002; Kohler et al., 1994; Zirkle, 1998). One of the 21 studies (4.8 %) used a qualitative research design (Carter et al. 2009).

3.2.2. Participants and data sources

The 21 studies included in this meta-synthesis analyzed data collected from high school students or transition school students with disabilities, adolescents and young adults with disabilities, young adults with disabilities, transition personnel working with individuals with disabilities, chambers of commerce members, special education teachers, patients, state level department of education transition department personnel, state disability directors, and vocational trainers and educators. Eight of the studies (38.1%) analyzed data collected from high school or transition school students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2009; Cihak et al., 2007; Hutcherson et al., 2004; Laarhoven et al., 2007; McDonnell et al., 1993; Mechling & Cronin, 2006; Ofoegbu & Azarmza, 2010; Phillips et al., 1988). Three of the studies (14.3%) analyzed data collected from young adults with disabilities (Burke et al., 2010; Eisenman et al., 2009; Kraska et al., 2007). Two of the studies (9.5%) analyzed data collected from adolescents and young adults with disabilities (Bates et al., 2001; Powers et al., 2009). Two of the studies (9.5%) analyzed

data collected from transition personnel working with individuals with disabilities (Bullock et al., 1994; Cimera, 2009). One of the studies (4.8%) analyzed data collected from chamber of commerce members (Carter et al., 2009). One of the studies (4.8%) analyzed data collected from special education teachers (Cooke, 2002). One of the studies (4.8%) analyzed data collected from patients (Jakobsson et al., 2010). One of the studies (4.8%) analyzed data collected from state level department of education transition department personnel (Kohler et al., 1994). One of the studies (4.8%) analyzed data collected from state disability directors (Sulewski et al., 2008) .One of the studies (4.8%) analyzed data collected from vocational trainers and educators (Zirkle, 1998).

Most of the studies reviewed for this meta-synthesis used scale based instruments to collect data from the participants. Seven of the 21 studies (33.3%) reviewed for this meta-synthesis utilized scale based instruments to collect data (Bates et al., 2001; Burke et al., 2010; Cihak et al., 2007; Hutcherson et al., 2004; et al., 2010; Jakobsson et al., 2010; Kraska et al., 2007; McDonnell et al., 1993;). Five of the 21 studies (23.8%) reviewed surveys to collect data (Bullock et al., 1994; Carter et al., 2009; Kohler et al., 1994; Powers et al., 2009; Sulewski et al., 2008). Five of the 21 studies (23.8%) reviewed interviews to collect data (Carter et al., 2009; Cooke et al., 2002; Eisenman et al., 2009; Mechling & Cronin, 2006; Ofoegbu & Azarmsa, 2010). In addition to scale-based assessments, surveys, and interviews, other sources of data were used to collect data for one or more of the 21 studies. These other sources of data include billing records to all funding sources (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Mental Health, etc.), IEPs, assessments, intake reports, case notes, work schedules, employee pay stubs, observations, and questionnaires.

3.2.3. Findings of the studies

The findings of the 21 studies included in this meta-synthesis can be summarized as follows:

1. Students and young adults with disabilities required additional trainings and interventions to be successful in gaining and retaining employment.

2. Increasing the social networks of individuals with disabilities is beneficial socially and financially. Furthermore, individuals with mild retardation cope better socially than do those individuals who have behavioral disorders.

3. Academic skills are not a guarantee in gaining employment for students with disabilities. Additionally, non-Caucasians appear to be employed at higher rates than do Caucasians.

4. Students, parents, vocational educators, training and development professionals, and tax payers responded diversely in their assertions of successful transition programming, and as it pertains to teacher supports, barriers to transition, care giving rolls, self-esteem, skill development, evaluation of students in school-to-work programs, and employability of supported employees in a young adult transition program versus supported employees not enrolled in an adult transition program.

3.3. Emergent themes

Seven themes emerged from my close analysis of the 35 articles included in this meta-synthesis. These emergent themes" (or theme clusters) include: (a) employment of individuals with disabilities; (b) community-based training and instruction for individuals with disabilities; (c) career development and vocational programming for individuals with and without disabilities; (d) students and youth with disabilities in school and

transition programs; (e) effective educational practices and transition programming for

individuals with disabilities; (f) effective curriculum, skills, and trainings for individuals

with disabilities transitioning to employment; and (g) assistive technology for individuals

with disabilities in transition. These seven theme clusters and associated formulated

meanings are represented in Table 3.

Table 3

Theme Clusters	Formulated Meanings
Employment of Individuals with Disabilities	• Individuals with disabilities enjoy increased levels of employment after being employed during high school. • Employers of larger companies report more positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities than do small companies. • Employment of people with learning disabilities is generally on a part-time basis for minimum wage and at entry level. • Consistency of job status with individuals with disabilities in comparison to co-workers is a critical measure of quality employment outcomes. • Positive job retention assists with situations of job loss or enhancement. • Positive job-negotiation between employers and new employees with disabilities is linked to positive outcomes. • More people are willing to shop at businesses that hire individuals with disabilities then business who don't hire individuals with disabilities. • The acquisition and retention of employment leads to economic freedom, which increases standards of living and socio-economic contributions for individuals with disabilities. • Individual with disabilities enjoy the monetary and non-monetary benefits of working when supported employment is cost-efficient. • Individuals with disabilities who enjoy high quality employment programs are involved in making choices regarding jobs and careers. • When youth with disabilities don't develop career and job experiences prior to exiting school, employment is less likely to occur. • A safe job environment must be free of the threat of injury and intimidation. • Individuals with severe vision impairment often have difficulties with job retention due to transportation, safety-issues, and acceptance by co-workers and customers. • Blind or visually impaired individuals suffer extremely high unemployment or underemployment. • Limitations in interpersonal, personal, and social skills are the most common reasons why individuals with disabilities lose jobs. • Though employers state that all individuals should have equal access to employment, they do not behave consistently with this view. • Proactive efforts must be implemented to overcome hidden and overt barriers to employment for individuals with a hidden

	handicap.
	• Though only 6% of Autistic individuals work full time, employers desire their attention to detail, reliability, punctuality, dependability, and ability to follow directions.
	• Males with disabilities face high discrimination in the workforce.
Community-Based Training and Instruction for Individuals with Disabilities	• Community-based training enhances the student's ability to function successfully through the development of generic adaptive behavior skills.
	• Individuals with mild to moderate mental retardation gain significant post community improvements when utilizing community-based instruction.
	• Youth with disabilities can utilize community resource mapping to identify and compile informal and formal resources.
	• Individuals, who receive community-based transition programming, are increasingly cost-efficient.
	• Mentally retarded persons can utilize receptive language skills in a public, community setting.
	• Utilizing self-management strategies will promote task completion for individuals with disabilities in community-based settings.
	• Due to the inability to generalize skills learned in the classroom, students with moderate to profound mental retardation require a need for community-based instruction.
	• Community-based training is often not provided for students with disabilities who are included in general education.
Career Development and Vocational Programming for Individuals with and without Disabilities	• Adults spend more time working than any other social role.
	• Community group activities with others should include both individuals with and without disabilities.
	• Training in natural settings is crucial to adult life as it enhances understanding of what is taught and reinforces the curriculum.
	• Career development and work experiences in high school, shapes youth outcomes in adulthood.
	• School connections with employers influence the capacity to deliver high quality career development experiences for youth with and without disabilities.
	• In order to be productive and self-sufficient, vocational programming assists individuals with performing their job-related tasks as independently as possible as a means to support themselves.
	• Due to the nature of the work world, career development is a lifetime process.
	• Internships serve as a formal entry into the work world for individuals as they observe, practice, and adjust to the demands of the workplace.
Students and Youth with	• Only 25% of youth with disabilities were in a community group after high school.

Disabilities in School and Transition Programs	• Vocational or on the job training is difficult for individual with disabilities. • Through school and work settings, the transition needs of students with disabilities can be met. • An emphasis on transition skills that benefit the strengths and limitations of students with disabilities is needed. • Individuals with disabilities drop out of high school at twice the normal rate. • Through both individual and group interventions, persons with learning disabilities develop improved self-concept. • Lower than adequate transition services are often provided for students with severe learning and behavioral challenges. • Students with disabilities are often affected by poverty. • Students with intellectual disabilities fail to acquire or maintain employment frequently due to inappropriate social behaviors. • During high school, substantial numbers of youth with disabilities have limited access to quality career development activities. • Students who have family involvement in transition programming are more successful on employment measures than students without family support. • 73% of SED students drop out of school and do not attend post-secondary institutions.
Effective Educational Practices and Transition Programming for Individuals with Disabilities	• Vocational educators believe that it is the schools' responsibility to teach the larger amount of occupational/technical skills. • Peer groups supporting social interactions with students with and without disabilities should be supported by schools. • High school transition programs that partner with chambers of commerce create a broader range and larger number of possible employers to individuals with disabilities. • High school inclusion supports post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. • Family focused transition planning addresses cultural factors that influence goal-setting and community integration. • School transition programs must include more research-based practices. • Transition programs must include more development and implementation of transition for students with behavior disorders. • Better prepared transition students incorporate search activities into daily living skills. • Interagency cooperation and collaboration, vocational skill training, paid work experience in high school, individual transition planning, and parental involvement are considered "best practices".
Effective Curriculum,	• Curriculum focused on employment, personal management, and leisure activities largely impact the organization and

Skills, and Trainings for Individuals with Disabilities Transitioning to Employment	implementation of secondary programs for individuals with moderate to profound mental retardation. • To empower self-control and self-management, the curriculum of caring includes sharing decision making and variety of tasks. • To meet motivational and career needs of individuals with disabilities, experienced based education should be utilized. • Interpersonal skills taught in isolation have limited value to individuals with disabilities due to the inability to apply skills at the appropriate time and situation. • A prompts and cues system is a cost-effective alternative to behavioral skill training. • Social and interpersonal skills are perhaps the most important in transition. • Home taught skills may not always transfer over to the community. • Group activities utilize teamwork, collaboration, peer interaction, and support confidence building and networking. • Individuals, who can jointly develop their training expectations, outcomes, and responsibilities, create a focused, professional approach to training. • Simulated instruction appears to benefit mildly retarded students more than moderately retarded students.
Assistive Technology for Individuals with Disabilities in Transition	• Technology is providing an effective and efficient strategy to teach students with disabilities necessary functional skills. • Computer-based video instruction offers multiple teaching examples that replicate the varied environments in which the skills will be used. • Natural environments can be simulated through the use of computer software programs that incorporate animation, photos, and video. • Life skills can be taught to individuals with disabilities through video-technology. • Individuals with disabilities can utilize handheld devices to encourage time management, scheduling, and can reduce external prompting.

4. Discussion

In this section I summarized the major themes that emerged from my analysis of the 35 articles included in this meta-synthesis. Next, I compared and identified these emergent themes to my current job as a transition program para-educator and to my future work in becoming an effective special education teacher. These summaries are intended to shed some light into effective community-based instruction and vocational learning in special education.

4.1. Employment of individuals with disabilities

The employment of individuals with disabilities is often the main priority or goal of community-based transition programming. Research shows that even with prior job experience, individuals with disabilities must overcome substantial barriers in gaining and retaining successful employment. Barriers include lower wages, discrimination and non-acceptance by fellow employees, safe environments not free of the threat of injury or intimidation, and not being able to self-advocate for one's self for personal and professional gain and growth. It is critical that individuals with disabilities be involved in high quality programs that promote vocational learning experiences and include community-based learning outlets. Successfully employed individuals with disabilities enjoyed a higher standard of living in comparison to their unemployed peers.

In working at a transitions program as a para-educator, I have seen the effect that community-based learning has on individuals with disabilities. Several students who have trained at the vocational education center or have had meaningful job shadowing and work experiences, have gained and retained part-time employment. I believe another transition for them will be when they are no longer receiving public school services, and

may need to work full-time. I think that other students who are disabled and are having difficulty adapting to the working community may need to work with special education staff on personal communication and behavioral issues and be able to utilize new technologies.

4.2. Community- based training and instruction for individuals with disabilities

Community resource mapping and transitional programming that is community-based enhances a student's ability to develop adaptive behavioral skills. Bu utilizing self-management strategies, and receptive language skills, individuals with disabilities learn how to become well prepared and utilize expected professional behavior in employment situations. Community-based instruction can also be done in the classroom in simulations designed to prepare the student for real community experiences.

A few of our students in the transition program I work at recently wrapped up a job experience at a clothing store down town. The students had taken interest inventories at the Vocational Education Center and were placed in their preferred place of employment. I found this to be quite helpful and useful as individuals with disabilities should have a say in their employment and not be steered or directed to a prescribed position. I think this process could be enhanced with multiple job shadows in case pre-conceived expectations don't work out for the students.

4.3. Career development and vocational programming for individuals with and without disabilities

As adults spend more time working than in any other social role, career development and work experiences in high school often shape youth outcomes in adulthood. Vocational programming and training in natural settings promotes independence and

enhances what is taught in the classroom. Community group activities and school connections with employers should be available to individuals with and without disabilities and should reinforce the curriculum. Career development is a life-long process for all individuals that enter the workforce.

In my past work with SED youth, career development was often an obstacle for attaining a desired position of employment for the individual as there was either none available or they did not possess the discipline to follow through on attending workshops, vocational seminars, or other training facilities. None of these students were involved in a transition program, and often their best choice was to leave town to attend Job Corp. for career development where they could gain simultaneous educational credits. It would surely be nice to see some employers around the United States become more willing to provide training to individuals with and without disabilities as the results would definitely be a win-win for both the employee and employer.

4.4. Students and youth with disabilities in school and transition programs

School, work settings, and vocational centers assist in the transition needs for students with disabilities, though the training is difficult for many of them. Emphasizing transition skills that benefit the strengths and limitations is important as many individuals with disabilities in high school have limited access to quality career development activities. As only 25% of youth with disabilities are involved in a community group after high school, and more than twice as many disabled youth as non-disabled youth drop out of school (particularly SED youth), it is important to have high quality transition programs that include family involvement, group interventions that promote improved self-concept, and also recognizes and assists in situations of poverty.

Many of the students in a transition program are attempting to find a meaningful job during and after their time in a transition program. Often times the first thing that gets addressed in a transition program is organization. Being responsible for times, dates, and work locations is important for individuals with disabilities so organization is very important. At the transition program I work at, daily planners are passed out to all of the students, even if they are not thinking about employment yet. The day-planner helps organize students' schedule and helps them remember key details they often might forget like addresses, phone numbers, and contacts. More referrals need to be made for individuals with severely emotional disabilities. This population is receiving substantially less transition services then individuals with physical disabilities.

4.5. Effective educational practices and transition programming for individuals with disabilities

High school inclusion supports post-school outcomes for students with disabilities as the students learn real life skills that can be utilized out in the community. Better prepared transition students also utilize search activities and include more research-based practices. Family-focused transition planning addresses cultural factors that influence goal-setting and community integration. As vocational educators believe that the public schools should teach the larger amount of occupational and technical skills to individuals with disabilities, teaming up with other organizations like a local chamber of commerce can create a broader range and larger number of possible employers for these students.

Working in special education, I have found an increasing number of students utilizing the internet and the newspapers for important information regarding employment, transportation, scheduling, and leisure. I believe an effective transition program utilizes

these resources and others to create a culture of knowledge and to help create and foster important skills that help individuals with disabilities gain confidence, structure, resourcefulness, organization, and personal responsibility. Job interview simulations can be effectively utilized in the classroom to better prepare special education students for the real interview. Finally, I have found that special education students with mild to moderate cognitive impairment have really enjoyed their time spent with main stream students and members of the community in training and job shadowing experiences.

4.6. Effective curriculum, skills, and trainings for individuals with disabilities transitioning to employment

Effective curriculum skills and trainings for individuals with disabilities transitioning to employment are vital for being successful. Curriculum that focuses on employment, personal management, and leisure activities, self-control, and self-management largely impacts secondary programs and empowers individuals with disabilities. Experienced-based education and group activities helps individuals with disabilities meet motivational and career needs, utilize teamwork, collaborate, and interact with peers. Interpersonal skills taught in isolation and home skills may not always transfer over to the community and may not be able to apply skills at the appropriate time and situation.

I have found that workshops and trainings at vocational education centers and curriculum that supports such trainings are an effective way for individuals with disabilities to get support, feedback, and prepare those individuals more completely for the world of work. Curriculum and trainings that support vocational education are often more effective when groups of students work together and even complete job shadows or job experiences together. At the transition program that I work in here in Juneau, we

often will pair individuals up as a team. This technique recently worked very well as we paired two young ladies with disabilities together at a clothing store. After a week of training in simulated classroom sessions, the girls felt prepared enough to complete the job experience. The girls worked well in the team approach, as one of the girls was more vocal and was an effective communicator, while the other girl was physically active and utilized good manual work skills. As a team they were able to utilize the scenario and general workplace expectation skills they learned in class and at the vocational education center and had a very good experience at the clothing store. They also utilized public transportation skills and were able to get themselves to work on time.

4.7. Assistive technology for individuals with disabilities in transition

Technology provides effective and efficient strategies for teaching students with disabilities. Computer programs offer simulations that replicate environments and incorporate animation, photos, and video. Video technologies support teaching life skills to individuals with disabilities in transition. Individuals can benefit from hand held devices to encourage time management, scheduling, reducing external prompts, or for communicating effectively.

Video technology is an effective way of supporting individuals with disabilities who need training for vocational purposes or life skills. I have assisted in the creation of some Polly videos that film our students at work, at school, and utilizing the bus system and the appropriate ways to engage in each activity. Computers are a big aid as well as newspaper media in locating jobs, community activities and workshops, and college and vocational information. Recently our students in the transition program have been utilizing the computers at the Vocational Education Center to find possible job

experiences or shadows that they can participate in. For our students who are mute for one reason or another, IMAX computer programs and communication boxes like the Dynavox, that utilize animated icons and pre-spelled names or partial sentences to help the student effectively communicate.

5. Conclusion

Effective community-based instruction and vocational learning in special education is becoming more prevalent, particularly in transition-based programming. The employment of individuals with disabilities is often the goal of good transition programming, though substantial barriers must be overcome for success. Community-based training and instruction helps prepare and provide real-world experience for individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, career development and vocational programming is beneficial for individuals with and without disabilities, is making community-based learning critical for all. Emphasizing an individual's strengths in transition programming can lead to a successful employment situation and it is important that educational practices include inclusive settings and are family-focused. An effective curriculum should focus on employment, personal management, leisure activities, and self-control. Finally, to be effective in the 21st century workplace, individuals with disabilities must have access and training on assistive technologies that can enhance one's effectiveness during employment and training.

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