PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS' PERSONAL DISABILITY AWARENESS IMPACTING TRANSITIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Joshua Stephen Crandell

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2023

PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS' PERSONAL DISABILITY AWARENESS IMPACTING TRANSITIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Joshua Stephen Crandell

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

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA
Graduation Year

APPROVED BY:

Ellen Ziegler, Ed.D., Committee Chair
Rebecca Dilling, Ed.D., Committee Member

Abstract

Students with disabilities (SWD) struggle with achieving positive postsecondary outcomes in training or schooling, employment, and independence. SWD's transition plans should prepare them for these subsequent phases, but SWD are not finding that success. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school. The central research question for this study was: What are the lived experiences of postsecondary students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school? The study used a transcendental phenomenological approach through interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts to better understand the experiences of students with a personal disability awareness, and it followed the phenomenological analysis steps as outlined by Moustakas (1994). The study included 10 students with disabilities who had transitioned out of high school and were between the ages of 18 and 24. Data analysis revealed six themes: personal disability awareness influences emotions about disability, personal disability awareness increases understanding of self and needs, personal disability awareness eases transition, self-determined actions support independence in transition, desire for personal disability awareness earlier in life, and engagement with people increases personal disability awareness. Findings revealed that personal disability awareness helps SWD act in more self-determined ways and improves their likelihood of pursuing success. Further research should be conducted to better understand the development of a personal disability awareness earlier for SWD. The implications from this study could benefit special education teachers in supporting SWD become more self-determined individuals.

Keywords: students with disabilities, transitions, transition outcomes, self-determination, disability self-awareness

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God. His love and grace have led me to salvation and given me the ability to follow Him in all things.

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, who encouraged me throughout my courses and research. Thank you for your love and support.

I dedicate this dissertation to my children. Thank you for understanding when I had to work.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge the work and commitment of my dissertation chair, Dr. Ellen Ziegler. She continually offered guidance and support throughout the whole process. Without her direction, I would not have been able to complete this study. I also want to acknowledge my committee member, Dr. Rebecca Dilling. She worked tirelessly, helping me refine and improve my work.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

Causal Agency Theory	(CAT)
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	(IDEA)
Individualized Education Program	(IEP)
Least Restrictive Environment	(LRE)
Student(s) with Disabilities	(SWD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school. Chapter one articulates the background for the study and includes how the study situates itself with students with disabilities (SWD). Next, the problem behind the study, the purpose of the study, and the significance behind the study are explained. Finally, the chapter will frame the research questions and explain important definitions of the study.

Background

Studying the influence of a personal disability awareness on transitions has a historical, social, and theoretical situated context. Historically, transition plans were first introduced into special education as a part of a student's Individualized Education Programs (IEP) with the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (IDEA, 2004). IDEA mandated transition plans in an IEP, but transitions had been a historical focus of the special education world since Farrell's ungraded classrooms at the beginning of the 20th century (Kode & Council, 2002). Farrell's focus in her classes became a call for action when Madeleine Will started discussing the issue in 1984 (Will, 1984). The social context of this study looks into relevant research showing that consistent poor outcomes for SWD leave many of them overly dependent on parents or family members for guidance and support throughout their adult lives (Francis et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2018). Finally, the theoretical context looks to improve transitions for these students through finding and utilizing predictors of success for SWD in their transitions, including the development of self-determination (Rowe et al., 2021).

Historical Context

The ideals that first began to motivate the education of SWD and to improve postschool outcomes started in the early 1900s with the encouragement and understanding of Farrell (Kauffman et al., 2017). Even then, Farrell had the “firm conviction that public education could be improved to the benefit of students who, due to whatever deficiencies, were likely to be left behind” (p. 7). Farrell’s educational philosophy stemmed from a desire to encourage and educate those typically left out of education in her time period (Kode & Council, 2002). Farrell believed that struggling learners and SWD could learn in an educational setting that provided an engaging curriculum for their needs. Farrell’s ultimate purpose was transitional in mind; she wanted to educate and engage these learners to get them off the streets and improve their ability to find meaningful employment after leaving school (Kode & Council, 2002). Improving education for SWD started with a teacher caring enough to see potential in her students and making efforts to encourage growth and life improvements.

Many other educators and policymakers did not always regard Farrell’s views and practices for SWD in schools as important. As a result, most SWD in the United States, from the 1800s to the 1960s, spent their educational lives in institutions specifically for them (Osgood, 2008). The institutions may have provided education and some social interactions, but they did not prepare students for life on their own nor for transitioning out of the institution. The 1960s saw increased awareness and advocacy for the rights of people with disabilities, which included figuring out how to include SWD in education. The increased pressure led to the federal government’s involvement with the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (IDEA, 2004). The act mandated that schools include and teach children with disabilities. It addressed an essential need for helping SWD become successful adults by actually making it possible for them to gain proper access to education.

Access to school helped SWD become successful during school, but many students continued to struggle after graduation (Crockett et al., 2019). Madeleine Will understood the problem of postschool outcomes for SWD. She urged the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services to articulate a plan to help these students improve their outcomes (Will, 1983). Will argued that SWD needed more training and practice in finding and maintaining employment. Employment provides people with support, power, and independence, most often needed for a successful, contributing life in society. For SWD to find successful employment, they need the education to prepare them in all aspects of working and understanding their roles (Will, 1983). Will was not alone in seeing the problems of transitions and postschool life for SWD as parents and caring educators wanted more for their SWD (Osgood, 2008). Lawmakers listened to educators' and parental concerns and reauthorized the Education for All Handicapped Children Act—now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—to include a transition plan guiding SWD into postsecondary settings (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services [OSERS], 2010).

A transition plan, or transition, works to prepare SWD for life after high school, whether they go to a university, find employment, or seek to live on their own. "Transition is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and the opportunities and risks of adult life" (Will, 1983, p. 2). Discussion and research into this bridge actively began in the late 1980s but escalated drastically after 2008 (Chen, 2019). The research likely increased because SWD continued to fall behind their non-disabled peers in transition outcomes (Kauffman et al., 2017). The research shows that SWD are 11% less likely to finish postsecondary schooling, 14% less likely to live independently, and 45% less likely to be gainfully employed (Crockett et al., 2019). Despite their acceptance into most primary and secondary school systems, poor transition outcomes continue to plague SWD after graduation.

Social Context

Transition plans have shown success in the many years since their implementation in IDEA (OSERS, 2010). Some SWD have found successful employment graduated from college, and lived and thrived independently, but the improvements do not align with the number of non-disabled students and do not completely reach all SWD (Kauffman et al., 2017). The continued shortcomings of transitions and transition planning have left a significant number of students and their families struggling to maintain fulfilling lives. Mazzotti (2018) explains that poor outcomes reflect on poor or limited supports during secondary school. The unsuccessful outcomes not only impact the SWD but also negatively impact the families of the SWD.

SWD greatly depend on their families while in high school and in many postsecondary settings (Francis et al., 2019). Because of the importance and contribution of families, families should be an intricate part of transition planning for SWD, yet too often, families do not fully understand transition plans—their purpose or their entirety—and are only passively involved in transition planning (Hirano et al., 2018). To this extent, the negative outcomes from transition plans have impacted SWD and their families by not properly preparing them for employment, postsecondary training, or independence. Additionally, SWD do not find gainful employment or complete postsecondary education and heavily rely on governmental support to stay financially stable (Dutta et al., 2016). The number of postsecondary people with disabilities needing financial support will continue to rise as positive transition outcomes stay low.

Theoretical Context

The need to improve transition plans and outcomes has led researchers and educators to consistently search for practices that promote successful transitioning and then build the practices into educational programs (Crockett et al., 2019). Several key predictors for postsecondary success have come from this research. Inclusive settings—including SWD in the general education classes and social settings—have been shown to increase enrollment in universities (Joshi & Bouck, 2017) and increase opportunities for employment with higher wages (Qian et al., 2018). Actively engaging students in the transition planning process and building a strong, supportive transition team around them leads to improved outcomes in all areas of a transition (Hatfield et al., 2018; Wehmeyer & Patton, 2017). In discussing and encouraging transition improvements, researchers have repeatedly used the self-determination theory, the social model of disability theory, and the casual-agency theory (Bekken, 2022; Burke et al., 2020; Shogren et al., 2015).

Self-determination theory, pioneered by Deci and Ryan (1985), is the idea that students should understand their strengths and needs, find and develop choices for those strengths and needs, and then make decisions based on their knowledge and desires. Self-determination helps SWD develop goals and plans for attaining those goals (Mazzotti, 2018). Self-determination allows students to focus on their strengths, reducing stress in unknown situations (Hatfield et al., 2018). Developed self-determination prepares SWD for advocating for themselves in postsecondary settings, improving their chances of achieving success (Kauffman et al., 2017). Self-determination is the center point of the theoretical concept needed to improve postsecondary outcomes for SWD.

The social model of disability theory considers disabilities regarding barriers created by society (Oliver, 2013). Barriers in society, whether physical or mental, prevent people with differences in needs from experiencing and achieving the same level of success as those that function normally within societal standards. In transitions and transition planning, barriers present themselves in education, employment, and independence that SWD do not have the ability or understanding to navigate (Oliver, 2013). Research has shown that postsecondary education settings need to find these barriers and work to remove them, and this will likely help remove the barriers present in employment settings (Erten, 2011). The social model of disability embodies the notion that SWD need direct teaching in navigating all aspects of barriers in society in order to develop positive transition outcomes (Bekken, 2022). Since ultimate goal of transition planning is to increase rates of independence in education, working, and living for SWD, the social model of disability has provided effective insight into understanding the need to improve transitions.

The causal agency theory (CAT) came about in an effort to clarify the self-determination theory as applying more specifically to people with disabilities (Wehmeyer, 2004). Wehmeyer (2004) explains that where the self-determination theory focuses on the internal motivation for SWD, the CAT acts as a functional model of self-determination, looking at how people become self-determined and act as the causal agent in their lives. Researchers utilize the CAT to examine the driving function of actions as SWD express and develop volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs (Shogren et al., 2015). These main characteristics of self-determined actions build SWD causal agency and support the growth of positive transition outcomes.

Problem Statement

The problem is that SWD are still not experiencing successful outcomes in their postsecondary settings at the same rate as their non-disabled peers (Mazzotti, 2018). Bekken’s (2022) research shows that SWD face transition setbacks when leaving high school without proper support. Francis et al. (2018) found that SWD struggle with transitioning from high school to postsecondary education settings even with actively involved parents and with receiving benefits while in high school. Even when students do well with education outcomes, they can still struggle with employment outcomes (Haber et al., 2016). The problem persists even with a historical focus on building self-determination and self-determination acting as a predictor for positive outcomes (Hatfield et al., 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2016). The specific problem is that in building self-determination to improve transitions, SWD are still not receiving enough education on developing a personal disability awareness (Mueller, 2019).

Self-advocacy and self-awareness are key components of self-determination (Crockett et al., 2019; Kauffman et al., 2017; Mazzotti, 2018). For SWD, self-awareness coincides with developing an understanding of their disability because their disability intricately connects to their identity, or at least social identity (Mueller, 2019). “[SWD] knowledge, awareness, acceptance or denial, and behavior in reaction to their disability label is fundamental to the process of special education” (p. 265). Not only does disability awareness play a role in special education, but SWD must also self-identify with their disability at the university level to receive accommodations and support (Santos et al., 2019). In light of this, it would seem important to teach SWD a personal disability awareness as part of self-determination training.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school. A personal disability awareness is generally defined as an SWD understanding the nature of their disability, and their needs from their disability. Transition outcomes are defined as students achieving increased positive gains in education, employment, and/or independence.

Significance of the Study

Transition plans support SWD as they prepare to leave high school and enroll in higher education, find a job, or live independently. Since their inception as an intricate piece of the IEP in 1990 (OSERS, 2010), transition plans have aided SWD in obtaining improved success in these areas (Kauffman et al., 2017). This study contributes to transition outcome knowledge and is theoretically, empirically, and practically significant for SWD and those responsible for their education and care.

Theoretical Significance

This study adds to the theoretical significance of self-determination research by better understanding the relationship a personal disability awareness has on self-determination in the transition process. Burke et al. (2020) point out that researchers need to focus on how personal factors influence self-determination development. Information on the influence of personal disability awareness provides greater insight into the complexities of developing self-determination (Shogren et al., 2017b). Additionally, individual groups of SWD need coordinated and specific interventions and goals designed for their transition outcomes (Alverson et al., 2019). This study adds to the body of knowledge on self-determination by exploring the influence a personal disability awareness has on self-determination and how they interact together through transitions for SWD.

Empirical Significance

The field of special education needs more insight into how students view and understand their disabilities and transitions (Alverson & Yamamoto, 2019). This study looks into the perspectives of SWD on transition plans and self-determination skills associated with self-awareness. It provides examples of how students integrate or fail to integrate these skills into their actual transition process (Burke et al., 2021). Because SWD need disability self-awareness, this study also speaks to the relevance of the literature in this area (Johnson et al., 2020). Cavendish et al. (2020) point out the need to incorporate student perspectives into transition services to understand the viewpoints of SWD on self-awareness.

Practical Significance

Practically, findings from this study benefit the general population of SWD, their families, and the schools that serve them. SWD need to know their disability and its impact before they can develop more positive outcomes (Holzberg et al., 2019). Looking into what they see as working or not working with transitions and self-determination helps educators know and develop those skills before SWD graduate from secondary school (McGahee et al., 2021). This benefits the students by finding ways to better support them during school and their families by helping SWD better understand how to support themselves after graduation. Understanding how to improve self-determination and transitions also provides leaders with a look into those areas in which special educators need more training (Southward & Davis, 2020). Overall, the significance of this study seeks to utilize the perspectives of high-school graduates with disabilities on their transitions in order to benefit future graduating SWD.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study center on developing an understanding of the perspectives of SWD on self-determination and a personal disability awareness and how these concepts influence their transition outcomes. The questions come with the notion that individuals with disabilities have developed some level of disability self-awareness. The questions also expect some level of involvement in the transition process by the SWD.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of postsecondary students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school?

Sub-Question One

How does a personal disability awareness connect to self-determination?

Sub-Question Two

What influence does a personal disability awareness have over transitions?

Sub-Question Three

How does a personal disability awareness influence a student acting as a causal agent?

Definitions

1. *Causal agent* – a person who acts with authority to make or cause something to happen (Wehmeyer, 2004, p. 352).
2. *Disability* – any disabling factor (cognitive, physical, or psychological) that limits a student’s ability to independently complete certain tasks whether in school or after (Kauffman et al., 2017).
3. *Personable Disability Awareness* – an SWD understanding some aspect or nature of their disability (Lau et al., 2015).
4. *Self-determination* – a dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the causal agent in one’s life. Self-determined people (i.e., causal agents) act in service to freely chosen goals (Shogren et al., 2015, p. 258).
5. *Student with Disability (SWD)* – For this study, SWD refers to any postsecondary person with a disability that participated in a transition plan during their high school experience and is still in the transition phase of 18-24 years old (Smith et al., 2021).

6. *Transition outcomes* – students achieving positive or negative gains in education, employment, and/or independence (Joshi & Bouck, 2017).

Summary

SWD are graduating high school more now than ever in history, but they struggle with finding success in postsecondary settings of training, employment, and independence (Kauffman et al., 2017). This chapter explains the background of transition planning and how research and educators have worked diligently to improve transition outcomes for SWD. To help improve transitions, researchers have shown the importance of building self-determination in SWD before they graduate (Shogren et al., 2017b). Self-determination skills help students become more independent and advocate for their individual needs. Despite the effort and time on improving transitions and using self-determination, positive postsecondary outcomes still allude SWD (Crockett et al., 2019). The specific problem is that in building self-determination to improve transitions, SWD are not receiving enough education on developing a personal disability awareness (Mueller, 2019). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school. Overall, this chapter works to demonstrate the need for and importance of this study in benefitting SWD, their families, their communities, and their schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature explored the need to improve transition planning and the role students with disabilities (SWD) should play in developing and understanding their transitions. This chapter reviewed the current literature related to the topic of study. The first section discusses the theory of causal agency and how it relates to having students develop and understand their transitions. The second section synthesizes current literature on transition planning and outcomes and followed by a synthesis of literature showing how self-determination benefits and supports transitions. The literature discusses students with disabilities developing self-determination alongside students' perceptions of self-determination. In the end, the review explains how research connects self-determination to disability self-awareness and transitions.

Theoretical Framework

The causal agency theory (CAT), developed by Wehmeyer (2004) and reconceptualized by Shogren et al. (2015), forms the theoretical framework for this study. The CAT takes the self-determination theory, as developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), and shapes it into a functional theory for how students in education become self-determined people (Wehmeyer, 2004). Within the CAT, self-determination is a "dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the causal agent in one's life. Self-determined people act in service to freely chosen goals. Self-determined actions function to enable a person to be the causal agent in his or her life" (Shogren et al., 2015, p. 258). In depicting causal agents, the CAT directly relates to SWD developing a personal disability awareness to improve transitions and transition planning.

To fully understand CAT, it is beneficial to understand how self-determination theory started. Deci and Ryan (1985) first formulated self-determination theory under the umbrella of organismic theories to focus on intrinsic motivation. As part of the self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation comes from an individual seeing, understanding, and processing choices and then acting on that choice. “Self-determination is the capacity to choose and to have those choices, rather than reinforcement contingencies, drives, or any other forces or pressures, be the determinants of one’s actions” (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 38). People become more motivated and active in their environment when given access to choices and control. By removing control and choice, people lose self-determination and motivation because they do not need to enact for themselves in meaningful ways. Self-determination revolves around concepts and ideas that motivate people to learn, seek learning, and apply learning. The concept is that self-determined people will be more motivated to learn, make better decisions, and have more influence over life. Ryan and Deci (2020) depict it as students’ needs connecting to their desires and building motivation that improves their well-being.

In forming CAT, Wehmeyer (2004) wanted to focus less on the motivation for action and more on the how and why of people becoming self-determined. In this sense, control is not about controlling outcomes or events; instead, control focuses on how much the person acts in a self-causing way (Shogren et al., 2015). Wehmeyer (2004) explains this as “causal events, causal behavior, or causal actions [being] events, behaviors, or actions that function as a means for the person to achieve valued goals, to exert control in his or her life, and, ultimately, to become more self-determined” (p. 352). The CAT has three key characteristics for self-determined actions: volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs (Shogren et al., 2015). Volitional action refers to a person initiating action as a means of causing something to happen. With agentic action, a person makes decisions to achieve personal, chosen goals. Finally, action-control beliefs depict a person’s belief that choices have power in life and that making choices leads to developing self-determination. As developed for the field of special education, the CAT seeks to develop self-determined students with disabilities and to develop their opportunities for acting as causal agents (Wehmeyer, 2004). While not all SWD can act with untethered control, all SWD can act volitionally to influence their lives through personal choices (Wehmeyer et al., 2017).

Self-determination is an important factor in increasing positive transition outcomes for SWD (Chao et al., 2019; Shogren & Ward, 2018; Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2020). With improved self-determination, SWD better assess their needs and fulfill outcomes in employment and continuing education (Chao et al., 2019). A critical aspect of self-determination is the connection SWD make between themselves, their surroundings, and in developing self-awareness of their disability (Toste et al., 2021). The CAT informed this study by focusing on SWD's volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs through developing disability self-awareness. The interview questions encouraged responses highlighting each of the three characteristics of the CAT. The research questions connected self-determination, personal disability awareness, and transitioning out of high school. As SWD contributed their perspectives on a personal disability awareness, the information enhanced the CAT by providing further insight into self-awareness as it specifically applies to self-awareness of a personal disability.

Related Literature

The related literature review centers on the components of transition planning, self-determination, how self-determination supports transitions for students with disabilities, and current findings of SWD having a personal disability awareness. First, the review provides an overview of transitions by explaining current trends and problems with transitions and factors showing improvements. Second, the research discusses the connections between self-determination and transitions and how the former supports growth in students with disabilities. Lastly, the literature review looks at current discussions on personal disability awareness and provides the basic need for the current study.

Transition Plans for Students with Disabilities

Transitions were implemented into the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1990 and needed to be included on every student's IEP by age 16 (IDEA, 2004). The new IDEA intended for IEPs to build in supports, accommodations, services, and goals that improved transition outcomes for SWD. Transition plans, then, focus on training and preparing students for success after graduating high school when they lose services provided in that setting. In serving and supporting SWD during high school, their postschool outcomes measure the success of their special education services (Kauffman et al., 2017). Measuring students' success takes more than finding a transition setting, for they need accomplishment and enjoyment in their setting. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services [OSERS] (2010) sees success as maximizing the abilities of all people to become contributing citizens to the greatest extent possible.

Success cannot be obtained through short-lived goals for SWD because these students need to thrive throughout their entire postsecondary life. A transition plan should prepare students with disabilities for the immediate transition and prepare them to handle all facets of a changing life (Kauffman et al., 2017). To accomplish long-term achievement, transitions must be a vital aspect of the IEP for students and should be a focus during their education process (Crocket et al., 2019). SWD need to graduate, but they must also move on to find continued success in postsecondary education, employment, and/or personal life. These students may not always have an advocate like a special education teacher, so they need preparation that extends beyond the school and helps them accomplish their goals. SWD have the potential to accomplish positive transition outcomes and contribute to their communities, and it is important that they have the opportunities to develop that potential fully (OSERS, 2010).

The importance of transitions for SWD has led many researchers to focus on studying transitions and finding ways to improve transition outcomes for SWD. In the last 60 years, hundreds of articles have explored many facets of transitions (Chen, 2019; Cushing et al., 2020). Studies have explored planning, assistive technology, interpersonal relationships, interagency collaboration, and many more specific topics (Cushing et al., 2020). However, a majority of the topics have fallen into seven main categories regarding transitions: curriculum, employment, legislation, accountability, teamwork, individual transition plans, and self-determination (Chen, 2019). While some topics lack enough backing in research, the emphasis on the available trends in transition has been on improving outcomes through implementing effective practices while also benefitting the students.

The available research on transitions surmises what leads toward better predictors and helps build positive postsecondary outcomes for SWD. Researchers and practitioners in special education need evidence-based practices that support transition development and lead to positive outcomes (Mazzotti et al., 2016). In identifying strong predictors, researchers must understand the effectual range of impact for practices to help transitions (Rowe et al., 2021). Additionally, Haber et al. (2016) explain that not all interventions work to improve every outcome, nor do they work for every population of SWD. Educators and leaders working with transition plans and SWD close to transition age need to know what works and does not work to improve postsecondary goal achievement. As a way of explanation, the current literature shows existing problems with transition plans and what factors show improvements for transitions.

Problems with Current Transitions

Even before mandating transition services, the special education community has emphasized improving transitions for students with disabilities. The numbers and data show that a greater percentage of students with disabilities do not achieve positive post-graduation outcomes compared to their non-disabled peers (Crocket et al., 2019). They attend postsecondary education institutes less often, live with guardians more often, and are drastically less likely to find meaningful employment (Crocket et al., 2019). In fact, most transition-focused research studies depict the miserable postsecondary outcomes of SWD as adults (Kauffman et al., 2017). Much of the negative outcomes and lack of success result from a lack of preparation for students and families and shortfalls in transition plans.

While the IDEA 1990 requires special educators and schools to write transition plans, the law does not guarantee the fidelity and strength of the plans. The law fails to ensure active student participation, and it neglects to specify the depth of involvement from the student (Johnson et al., 2020). Active participation from students in developing and understanding their IEPs and transition plan greatly improves the plan's credibility, but it requires extra effort, time, and work from the educators involved. These challenges often prevent teachers from actively connecting their students into the transition process (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015). As a result, students do not feel part of the process and fail to grasp the importance of the transition program. Additionally, failure to involve students also disconnect students and their parents from feeling they even receive transition services and supports (Mello et al., 2021).

Lack of Collaboration. Collaboration calls for transition planning to bring together SWD, teachers, family members, and outside agencies to design and implement the best plan for each student. The IDEA (2004) mandates collaboration and that school systems put forth diligent efforts in developing collaboration while removing barriers blocking proper collaboration. Despite legislative demands, families and outside agencies still play minimal roles in developing and implementing transition plans, with special education teachers operating almost independently (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015; Warner et al., 2015).

Parents and family caretakers feel slighted by the second-rate roles placed upon them in current practices of transition planning (Hirano et al., 2018). In their study, Hirano et al. (2018) discovered that parents might think schools and teachers do not want them deeply involved in the transition process. Parents feel unwelcome in the planning because they are often told how things should and will take place during meetings. Additionally, parents may feel intimidated by a lack of knowledge of special education and transition services, which keeps them from actively participating in meetings (Kauffman et al., 2017). Parents have called attention to their lack of involvement in transition planning and offered compelling ideas to increase their contribution (Francis et al., 2019; Molfenter et al., 2018). Nevertheless, parents are not fully included in the collaborative process of designing and executing transition plans for their children (Warren et al., 2015).

When school systems do not adequately include families in transition planning, they are likely to neglect collaboration with outside agencies. The work and effort required of special education teachers to find and invite willing agencies are daunting, and many teachers often find it too cumbersome to undertake (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015). Without the support of outside agencies, teachers utilize their abilities and knowledge in creating transition plans that go against the nature of seeking a range of knowledge in cooperating on a transition (Parker-Katz et al., 2018). By not connecting with outside agencies, teachers inadvertently neglect their roles and create barriers to collaboration (Saleh et al., 2019). Outside agencies bring expertise and connections not found in schools nor readily available to teachers. Lowered involvement from groups potentially contributing to specific needs and desires of individual students creates an indirect, negative impact on the SWD (Dutta et al., 2016). Plotner et al. (2020) consider this negative impact as contributing to a reduced understanding of transition roles—students, parents, and outside agencies—which leads to poorer transition outcomes.

Lack of Support. The lack of participation from students and parents often leads both groups to feel a lack of support after graduating. While high schools do not carry over supports for SWD into postsecondary education or employment, SWD should not feel abandoned and unable to receive needed support when attending colleges or universities (Bridges & Maxwell, 2015). Lindsay et al.'s (2018) systematic review exemplified SWD's feelings of abandonment by finding that many students do not know how to find supports or know if they even qualify for supports. SWD need self-advocacy and an understanding of and willingness to disclose their needs to receive postsecondary supports. Because transition plans and services do not properly teach students how to seek these supports, a large percentage of SWD do not ever approach disability services on campuses (Santos et al., 2019). SWD need explicit teaching in finding and using supports, but students often do not receive direct instruction in this area which leads to them not accessing available and needed supports (Newman et al., 2016).

Students entering employment immediately after graduation also lack necessary transition skills and have problems advocating for supports. Transition plans should be helping SWD develop employment skills and increase their employability, but many plans do not create opportunities or a process. Qian et al. (2018) recognize the problem as students not receiving direct instruction in work-based opportunities. Students are not getting direct experiences of seeking support in workplaces, so they are not practicing advocacy of supports for future jobs.

Even when students receive direct job-related teaching, the lessons and information do not necessarily engage them in activities that develop their understanding and ability to advocate for supports (Hatfield et al., 2018). Instead, they are given menial tasks with routine expectations and no opportunities or expectations to explore learning within the job, preventing them from seeking support and guidance. The lack of understanding and finding supports also impacts the employees because they do not always know what supports and accommodations SWD need in work fields (Riesen & Oertle, 2019). SWD need continued support when they find jobs, and their employers need to understand how to provide the best supports. The most approachable way of doing this is for transition services to teach SWD what supports work well and how to advocate for them with different employers (Choiseul-Praslin & McConnell, 2020). By not guiding students in asking for supports, transition plans are not successfully fulfilling a vital need for SWD.

Factors Improving Transitions

Transition outcomes have been consistently low for SWD, but research, practice, and laws have emphasized the need to improve them; this has led to the development of factors and strategies that have shown improvements in transition outcomes. Crockett et al. (2019) found 11 evidence-based factors, 47 research-based practices, and 70 other practices with strong potential to benefit outcomes for SWD. While these all point toward successful transitions, there is not enough evidence connecting all of them to successful post-graduation outcomes (Haber et al., 2016). Without proper evidence, researchers narrow down the practices that offer favorable predictability towards positive outcomes to 20 predictors of postschool success (Crockett et al., 2019). Of these 20 predictors, a few have consistently resurfaced in transition-based research and studies: inclusion in general education settings, parental involvement, and factors related to self-determination.

Inclusion practices take students with disabilities out of restricted classroom structures—classes with no non-disabled peers—and place them in homogenous general education classes. Multiple sources designate inclusion as a predictor of student success (Crockett et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2019; Joshi & Bouck, 2017; Mazzotti et al., 2016). Students participating in inclusion classes, especially content area classes, are five times more likely to enroll in a postsecondary education setting (Crockett et al., 2019). Mazzotti et al. (2016) designate inclusion as a moderate predictor of positive education and employment. The research also shows that parents perceive inclusion for their children with disabilities as leading to healthier outcomes and more positive social interactions (Francis et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2019). Joshi and Bouck (2017) discuss inclusion as a factor regarding postsecondary education participation, but they note that inclusion does not ensure that students complete their higher education goals. Inclusion helps students meet initial transition success—likely to lead toward increased long-term success—but it does not guarantee long-term success in secondary education.

Transitions also lead to higher positive outcomes when parental involvement increases. When parents become active contributors in IEPs and transition planning and then encourage their students in education, students are more likely to engage in postschool employment and education (Crockett et al., 2019). Mazzotti et al. (2016) only note parental involvement as having a small effect size, yet this could connect to the fact that not every student with a disability has active parents in their child’s education process. Parental involvement works in two directions: parents connecting with the school and educators communicating with the parents (Francis et al., 2019). Parents should take the time and put forth the effort to understand their child's needs regarding transitioning, and they should reach out to the school to ensure their student receives all available supports. When parents reach out, professionals need to partner with parents to improve the transition plans and not make them feel separated from the process. While parents are vital contributors toward student success in transitions, Francis et al. (2018) discuss family advocates other than just parents contributing to improved transition outcomes, and they explain the importance of including all involved family members in the discussion.

In supporting positive transitions, self-determination works as a multi-facet predictor comprising many levels of self-determination and related skills (Crockett et al., 2019). Whether taken together or separately, self-determination strongly impacts improving transitions (Mazzotti et al., 2016). As direct components of self-determination, autonomy and goal setting are rated with large effect sizes in increasing positive transitions (Mazzotti et al., 2016). In addition to direct components, Mazzotti et al. (2016) found two related aspects, self-care, and social skills, as having medium to high effect sizes on positive transitions. Additionally, motivation—a direct result of building self-determination—predicts positive transition outcomes (Hatfield et al., 2018). Parental perspective supports this research by highlighting the view that professionals need to help SWD engage in decision-making that promotes independence (Francis et al., 2018). All components of self-determination work to build students' abilities, understanding, and motivation toward achieving positive postschool outcomes.

Self-Determination Helping Students with Disabilities

Improving transition outcomes is an important component of teaching self-determination skills, but self-determination also supports growth in SWD across content subjects, different disabilities, multiple cultures, and with improving SWD's quality of life. When teachers actively teach self-determination development, they build students' academic, social, motivational, and emotional abilities that guide them towards success during and after school (Hofer et al., 2021). Academic achievement during secondary school increases SWD motivation to learn and apply their knowledge, and personal self-determination skills carry over into the classroom through goal attainment, content understanding, and gaining access to the curriculum (Shogren & Ward, 2018). As self-determination improves academia for SWD, the skills transcend language, and cultural barriers to target outcomes all SWD need as they become adults (Garrels & Palmer, 2020). In this same idea, Wehmeyer (2020a) considers self-determination an important contributor toward consistently developing the quality of life of people with disabilities throughout their lives. It is helpful to consider the impact of self-determination on varying aspects of SWD's lives in conjunction with the improvements in transitions.

Self-Determination in Academics

When taught directly, self-determination skills improve the educational process for SWD (Shogren & Ward, 2018). Garrels and Palmner (2020) explain that the interactions between students and the school environment that provide opportunities for developing and implementing self-determination improve academic achievement for SWD. Self-determination skills can work to improve academic needs as the same skills encourage students to actively apply themselves in learning and with seeking support in their learning. Yang et al. (2022) found that improving self-determination predicts greater school engagement for SWD. A student acting in a self-determined manner in school is able to create and maintain goals more readily because they engage in owning their learning and education (Garrels & Palmer, 2020). Students enjoy learning more when included and involved in the process, leading them to accomplish more in academic settings and with their transitions (Shogren et al., 2018b).

Self-determination skills also improve learning growth in specific content areas. Gilley et al. (2021) found that self-determination skills supported independence and content learning with mathematical problem solving for students with extensive support needs. In combining self-determination with math support, Gilley et al. (2021) showed that students develop their understanding of multiplication word problems by taking ownership and direction in learning the content. Didion et al. (2020) combined oral reading fluency instruction with aspects of self-determination to find that the combination helped improve the fluency of struggling readers. As fluency is foundational for reading, finding that self-determination leads to greater fluency is a positive connection between the two. Additionally, Didion et al. (2021) positively link components of self-determination with increased reading outcomes for struggling readers. Demonstrating how self-determination skills positively contribute to academic growth is an important step in helping SWD develop reading abilities that they will need throughout school and into adulthood.

While learning is a vital aspect of school, the academic setting involves more than interactions between students and teachers, where promoting self-determination can positively influence more than just learning for SWD. School life includes students making connections with other students, participating in non-learning activities, and making informed decisions on day-to-day actions. All of these facets have shown positive improvements for SWD when linked with building self-determination (Shogren & Ward, 2018). Self-determination skills attend to students' psychological needs and development that encourage progression in social and emotional aspects of school (Hofer et al., 2021). For example, Griffin et al. (2019) found preliminary evidence suggesting that exercising self-determined responses to bullying can increase resilience for bullying victims, and greater resilience can boost emotional stability of bullying victims. Furthermore, self-determination training leads to greater participation in the student’s IEP process contributing to academic, social, and postsecondary aspects of academic life (Flowers et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2020). The IEP guides and influences SWD school life, and their ownership of the IEP through self-determined decisions creates better outcomes for them both during and after high school.

Self-Determination and Quality of Life

Self-determination is considered a component and contributor to the quality of life of people with disabilities (Wehmeyer, 2020a). Quality of life refers to a subjective measurement of a SWD’s life that includes a number of social and emotional factors (Bakken & Obiakor, 2019). Social factors can include employment and financial stability, but it also considers social connections and available support systems for SWD. While quality of life consists of multiple factors with subjective and objective components, it is achieved when individuals feel their needs are met (Matson, 2019). In this definition, self-determination positively enhances SWD's quality of life.

Self-determined SWD act with the ability to make informed decisions about their life’s choices (Matson, 2019). Making choices about friends, work, marriage, and finances increases a SWD’s agency and fosters their quality of life. Students with a greater ability for self-care—a component of self-determination—increase their quality of life by engaging in employment, education, and independence (Crockett et al., 2019). Crockett et al. (2019) also explain that self-determination links to increased social competence allowing an SWD greater interaction with peers and connection to a higher quality of life. White et al. (2018) found that self-determination predicts an improved quality of life in students with autism spectrum disorder. They surmise that increased self-determined capabilities provide opportunities to influence their lives and improve their quality of life. Frielink et al. (2021) connected increased self-determination to greater motivation for seeking supports in SWD, which predicts increased well-being. Increasing the quality of life for SWD provides them with better options and experiences, and self-determination helps SWD achieve a greater quality of life (Burke et al., 2020).

Self-determination seeks to increase the abilities of SWD in making positive life choices which in turn contribute to improving their quality of life (Matson, 2019). Research and intuition back the connection between these two elements because SWD acting with greater control should feel like they are living better lives (Wehmeyer, 2020a). It is important to note that not all components of self-determination may influence the quality of life, but the teachability of self-determination as a determining factor of quality of life makes it invaluable when working with SWD (Matson, 2019).

Self-Determination Across Cultures

Self-determination is a human quality accepted as a basic human right (Matson, 2019). Because it emphasizes the human right of personal choice and ownership of decisions, the needs for self-determination transcend the boundaries of cultures and languages. Self-determination transcending boundaries does not mean that different cultures and languages do not impact the development of self-determination in SWD; in fact, Wehmeyer et al. (2017) explain that "one's personal culture as well as cultural norms and beliefs adopted by organizations, communities, and societies that a person exists in over time influences functioning, including the development and expression of self-determination" (p. 160). Instead, the idea of self-determination crossing cultural boundaries insinuates that SWD in varying cultures and languages benefit from learning self-determination skills (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2020). Therefore, the need for and importance of developing self-determination crosses language and culture boundaries and benefits all students.

Researchers across the world have looked into the development and impact of self-determination skills for SWD within different cultures. Korean special education services and researchers have created over a hundred studies looking into self-determination for Korean SWD (Lee et al., 2019). While Korean parents dictate greater influence over their children's educational decisions, Lee et al. (2019) found that increased self-determined actions help Korean SWD feel more connected and involved in their own lives. Developing self-determination in Hong Kong SWD encourages students to be engaged in school and actively participate in school-based decision-making (Yang et al., 2022). Garrels and Granlund (2018) recognized the need for improved self-determination among Norwegian SWD, so they adapted and validated a self-determination scale for assessing these skills for SWD in Norway. Along the same lines, Alsuhaibani et al. (2021) validated a modified self-determination scale for SWD in Saudi culture that could apply to multiple Middle Eastern cultures. In their study, Shogren et al. (2019b) found that the Self-Determination Inventory: Student Report had cross-cultural validity for SWD in America and Spain. Other studies have looked into the benefits of self-determination for SWD in The Netherlands, Canada, Taiwan, and Italy (Wehmeyer, 2020b). Even multi-cultural English learners with disabilities learning in US schools benefit from direct self-determination instruction (Newman et al., 2021). All of these studies help confirm the pervasiveness and importance of self-determination development and assessment among SWD from different cultures (Alsuhaibani et al., 2021).

SWD need self-determination skills that they can generalize within their personal culture as they interact with their environments (Matson, 2019). The idea of self-determined SWD making personal decisions as part of their cultural identity is not limited to one country or culture base as it applies to developing positive outcomes for SWD everywhere (Wehmeyer et al., 2017). While the specific skills and connections differ between cultures, research and education around the world see the overall need and value of building self-determined SWD.

Self-Determination Across Disabilities

Research on self-determination and different disabilities has revealed two key factors for developing self-determined SWD. First, low self-determination skills negatively impact students across disability categories (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2020). Unless directly taught, students in all disability categories—though those with more extensive needs tend to struggle more with self-determination—struggle with understanding and exhibiting self-determined behaviors (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2020). Second, SWD can learn and benefit from self-determination skills when provided with direct instruction and opportunities for applying the skills (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2020). Teaching self-determination skills to SWD greatly increases their likelihood of achieving better outcomes, and this beneficial impact of developing self-determined SWD is not limited to helping only some types of disabilities (Wehmeyer, 2019).

Multiple studies across disability categories depict the short-term and long-term benefits of having more self-determined students (Bakken & Obiakor, 2019). Wehmeyer (2020b) explains how students with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience greater psychological well-being and fewer problem behaviors when they are self-determined. While their systematic review of literature on self-determination in students with autism spectrum disorder revealed that these students are struggling with self-determination skills, Morán et al. (2020) found that students with autism spectrum disorder do benefit from self-determination instruction, for it has the potential to increase their self-determined abilities. Self-determined actions may appear differently for the varying levels of students with autism, or individuals may need more guidance and support for those on the more severe end of the spectrum. However, these students achieve more positive goal outcomes when applying greater levels of self-determination (Brock et al., 2020). Collins and Wolter (2018) explain the importance of speech-language pathologists being involved in the training of self-determination for students with language-based learning disabilities, as these skills are vital for these students' success. For deaf or hard of hearing students, increased self-determination has been shown to lead to two important life concepts. First, more self-determined students who are deaf or hard of hearing integrate into their universities more regularly by being engaged and involved (Cheng & Sin, 2018). Second, Millen et al. (2019) show that self-determined students who are deaf or hard of hearing develop more and higher quality friendships. Improved engagement and development of relationships continue after graduation and have potentially longer-term, positive impact for these students.

Despite a need for more focused research, Cmar (2019) saw evidence-based interventions for improving self-determination as beneficial for students with visual impairments. When interwoven in their teaching and learning, self-determination has the potential to increase postschool success for students with visual impairments (Cmar & Markoski, 2019). Enhancing the self-determination skills of students with emotional and behavioral disorders has the potential to limit problematic behaviors and develop a more positive trajectory in behavior outcomes (Zirkus & Morgan, 2020). In their study, Mansurnejad et al. (2019) connected increased self-determination skills with a decrease in aggressive and delinquent externalizing behaviors, leading to stronger postschool outcomes. No matter the disability category, improving self-determination for SWD results in greater empowerment and leads to a more satisfying life (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2020).

Self-Determination in Transition Outcomes

Self-determination operates as a positive predictor of improved life outcomes among all students with disabilities. No matter their ability level, every person can operate with some level of self-determination designed to help them make decisions impacting their goals and desires (Shogren et al., 2018b). As it affects transitions, greater self-determination links to greater success in employment, independence, and community participation. Evidence-based, research-based, and promising practices have all related increased self-determination to positive influences on transition outcomes in education, employment, and independent living (Crockett et al., 2019). The last 30 years of research have emphasized the importance of teaching self-determination to promote positive transition outcomes for SWD (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2020; Wehmeyer et al., 2018). When SWD develop their self-determined abilities, they are more likely to develop and pursue more substantial postsecondary goals to improve their overall lives (Di Maggio et al., 2020). Burke et al. (2021) added that more self-determined students want to plan for multiple aspects of their future lives. The idea is that the essential characteristics of self-determination foster a longing for building a successful postsecondary life (Shogren et al., 2017b). Laws and best practices consistently push for increasing positive transition outcomes and promoting self-determination skills aims to fulfill that push (Shogren et al., 2017a).

Education Outcomes

Enrollment in and completion of postsecondary training or education is an important aspect of positive transition outcomes for SWD (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2020). The comprehensive education and knowledge gained from continued learning contribute to SWD's better financial security and decision-making skills. Self-determination development is vital in increasing SWD access to universities and extended learning opportunities (Wehmeyer, 2019). Shogren et al. (2017a) found that autonomy and psychological empowerment, two components of self-determination, predicted SWD enrollment in postsecondary education. Petcu et al. (2017) expanded on this information to find that increased self-realization, the third part of self-determination, helps predict the completion of postsecondary training programs for SWD.

Completing postsecondary education rests on the students' desires, understanding of needs, and ability to make informed decisions (Shogren et al., 2018b). To make informed decisions, SWD need to develop self-determination skills that help them advocate for needed supports and accommodations (Lindsay et al., 2018). Holzberg et al. (2019) pointed out that more self-determined students have a greater ability to request and discuss needed accommodations for learning. This process starts in high school, but the skills learned can carry over into SWD's time in postsecondary education settings (Lopez et al., 2020). Schillaci et al. (2021) explain that requesting accommodations involves making goals and working through obstacles towards those goals, which fall within an SWD's agentic action. For SWD to implement agentic action, they need practice, direction, and experience with self-determination skills which will positively influence postsecondary education goals (Southward & Davis, 2020).

Employment Outcomes

Finding and maintaining post-education employment and developing careers is an important goal of transition services for SWD. In supporting this goal, self-determined students achieve greater employment outcomes and have better abilities in career development (Shogren et al., 2018b). Shogren et al. (2017a) found that SWD more readily found employment after graduating with increased components of self-determination—autonomy, self-realization, and psychological empowerment. Not only can self-determined students find jobs, but those jobs also tend to have higher wages (Qian et al., 2018). Employment outcomes do not solely focus on wages, as developing long-term career options is a vital piece of employment. For career options, self-determined SWD need to adapt and change to circumstances in the job as well as those impacting the job from the outside (Wehmeyer et al., 2019). Self-determination skills help SWD develop personalized employment goals, build autonomy in obtaining those goals, and improve employment results (Bakken & Obiakor, 2019). Students with improved employment outcomes have higher wages, more benefits, and greater opportunities for career expansion (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2020).

Independence Outcomes

Improving continued education and employment outcomes are important, but transition plans also focus on improving postschool outcomes for students in independent living and community participation (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2020). When SWD receive self-determination training, they increase their independence, become more aware of community access, and better develop their independent living skills (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2020). Shogren and Ward (2018) found that exposure to self-determination training helps SWD develop networks and supports that help them better navigate their independence and community connections. When SWD think as self-determined individuals, they focus on their strengths, wishes, and needs to determine the best actions needed in determining their living and community engagement levels (Shogren et al., 2017b). Determining actions that suit their needs connects to SWD recognizing and developing complex life goals to improve life (Di Maggio et al., 2020). Wehmeyer et al. (2018) importantly note that as self-determination increases outcomes in independence and community involvement, there is a strong probability they will have an increase in SWD’s life satisfaction.

Interventions to Improve Self-Determination in Students with Disabilities

Educators, researchers, and specialists have worked to understand self-determination as a means to improve transition outcomes, and they focused on developing evidence-based practices and interventions to fill this need. An evidence-based practice focused on self-determination will show increased outcomes for SWD and continue to improve the practice (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2020). Self-determination interventions should help SWD build autonomy, increase causal action, and lead to greater fulfillment of psychological needs (Wehmeyer et al., 2017). Ongoing, direct self-determination interventions with problem-solving, goal-setting, and self-management aspects help students enhance self-determination during school and in postsecondary settings (Shogren et al., 2018b). SWD need improved self-determination, so intervention tools are critically important in increasing the self-determined actions of SWD (Shogren et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to understand the connection behind these interventions as part of SWD developing self-determination to improve transition outcomes.

Researchers have focused heavily on improving transition outcomes for SWD through the use of evidence and research-based practices. Using self-determination curricula that anticipates enhanced self-determination skills can lead to more developed transition skills (Raley et al., 2018). Evidence-based practices and research-based practices are essential for improving transition-related skills (Rowe et al., 2021). This is especially true when the practices directly involve SWD in the process of IEP and transition plan development. Burke et al.'s (2020) analysis highlights the increasing importance of self-determination training as more diverse SWD participate in intervention studies for building self-determination. While including diverse populations and focused practices in transition research, researchers should ensure the replicative abilities of their interventions, for replication is an important part of intervention research as it helps build validity and evidence of the strength of interventions (Luckner et al., 2020).

In each of their reviews, Burke et al. (2020), Raley et al. (2018), and Rowe et al. (2021) pointed to the benefits and use of the evidence-based practice called the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI). Raley et al. (2018) describe the SDLMI as a model of teaching designed to address multiple areas of self-determination needs, which makes it such a valuable intervention. As it supports student growth in self-determination skills, teachers use the SDLMI to provide multiple opportunities for getting students thinking and working towards goals (Burke et al., 2019). When evaluating the impact of the SDLMI on integrated employment, Shogren et al. (2018a) discovered that students with intellectual disabilities develop increased self-determination in setting and attaining goals. Additional findings from Shogren et al. (2019a) suggest that the SDLMI enables students to identify and pursue positive postsecondary outcomes. Raley et al. (2021) even explain that the SDLMI has benefits in inclusive settings with the potential of improving self-determination in students with and without disabilities. The comprehensive approach of the SDLMI, as it provides a multicomponent approach to teaching self-determination, sets it up as an impactful and beneficial intervention (Burke et al., 2020).

It is important to note that research on SDLMI does show differing perspectives from students and teachers on the perceived benefits of SDLMI on improving self-determination. Students feel that the SDLMI enhances their ability goal attainment through planning, while teachers see the SDLMI as actually helping students obtain their goals (Shogren et al., 2018a). Shogren et al. (2019a) found similar discrepancies in students' self-reports on self-determination versus teachers' reports on student self-determination. Teachers noticed and noted improvements in students' volitional and agentic actions, but students did not always find the same changes in themselves. Teachers understand self-determination more fluidly as a result of implementing SDLMI practices which causes them to notice changes more quickly than students (Shogren et al., 2019a). From students' perspectives, the SDLMI may provide them with their first real understanding of self-determination. This causes them to self-reflect on their self-determination skills during later self-reports (Raley et al., 2021). As shown, researchers show that the SDLMI does improve self-determined actions in SWD. Still, they also point to the need for implementing the SDLMI early and as an extended intervention to increase students' awareness and understanding of their self-determination abilities.

Perceptions of Self-Determination

As an indicator of increasing positive postsecondary outcomes, understanding the importance of self-determination plays a strong role in improving transitions for SWD (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2020). For self-determination to best improve transition outcomes, all stakeholders involved with SWD outcomes need to understand and appreciate the value of developing self-determination. Typically, SWD, families of SWD, and school professionals value the ability of self-determination, but they do not all fully agree on the scope of self-determination (Hagiwara et al., 2021). The differences in when and how to apply self-determined actions vary between students, parents, and educators. Overall, though, people involved in the transitions of SWD perceive increased self-determination skills as leading toward greater agentic actions in postsecondary settings (Wehmeyer et al., 2017).

Family Perspectives

Families of SWD play an important role in a student's life, and discussions have consistently explored their understanding of the impact of self-determination. The discussions have shown that attitudes toward self-determination vary with different family cultures, and the import placed on self-determination depends on the services and supports the SWD needs (Dean et al., 2021; Hagiwara et al., 2021; Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2020). Francis et al. (2018) explain that family members want their SWD to achieve as much independence as possible. However, part of the problem with instilling self-determination and independence is that family supporters do not always know how to balance self-determination skills with protecting their child (Shogren et al., 2018b). Dean et al. (2021) found that the severity of a student's disability can lower the families' perception of self-determination. Lower perceptions can lead to families not building certain aspects of self-determination (Hagiwara et al., 2021). Families also struggle with knowing who is best to instruct in self-determined behaviors. Many SWD receive in-home practice with building self-determination, but some families do not feel fully qualified to teach self-determination without the support of professionals (Hagiwara et al., 2021). A lack of understanding of self-determination points many families to see self-determination instruction as the schools' responsibility for their child (Dean et al., 2021). Families know that self-determination is important for their SWD, but they need more guidance and support in getting their child to become more self-determined.

Professional Perspectives

In building self-determination, school professionals—educators, administrators, and therapists—are mandated to instruct students in self-determination skills, but some educators do not feel adequately prepared in this area (Frazier et al., 2020). School professionals know the value of self-determination and can explain the benefits of self-determined decision-making (Hagiwara et al., 2021). However, professionals also connected their training in self-determination to their understanding and implementation of self-determination instruction. Trained teachers find the opportunity to teach self-determination and perceive their students as improving their self-determined capacities (Shogren et al., 2018b). Mumbardo-Adam et al. (2020) point out that professionals connect better resources and training to enhance their ability to train self-determination. Untrained professionals only informally teach self-determination with limited instructional time because they often see self-determination in its theoretical format and not in practical training application (Hagiwara et al., 2021; Mumbardo-Adam et al., 2020). From these findings, professionals' perspectives of self-determination increase when they have more knowledge on the topic.

School professionals also see fostering of self-determination as a dual responsibility between the family and the school (Hagiwara et al., 2021). Educators and special education supporters understand that multiple inputs on building self-determination have a greater chance of assisting the SWD with these skills (Frazier et al., 2020). Professionals assert that promoting children's self-determination becomes easier for the professional when families are actively involved (Mumbardo-Adam et al., 2020). The idea, then, is for everyone involved to encourage SWD to act in a self-determined manner.

However, professionals also see excessive family involvement as a deterrent to self-determination in SWD. As noted, some families struggle with encouraging self-determination in their child while keeping them safe (Shogren et al., 2018b). Professionals see the extreme negative end as taking away SWD's rights and not listening to the desires or goals of their child (Bekken, 2022). While some students with more complex disabilities benefit from supported decision-making, professionals find that families tend to move past support and advocate for guardianship of their child (Plotner & Walters, 2022). Guardianship essentially keeps the student from being able to act independently and exercising self-determined behaviors. To avoid the removal of self-determination capabilities and to promote the best family involvement, educators need more training in self-determination and incorporating families into the building of self-determination for SWD (Mumbardo-Adam et al., 2020).

Student Perspectives

Understanding self-determination is vital for people with disabilities, and multiple research studies have highlighted their perspectives on self-determination. In their meta-synthesis, Hagiwara et al. (2021) found 13 studies looking into the perceptions of SWD on self-determination. They found that SWD link self-determination to their school and postschool success. While many SWD recognize the importance of self-determination, a percentage still do not grasp the concept or know their need for self-determination (Lee et al., 2019). However, Vaucher et al. (2021) show that practicing self-determination increased SWD understanding. In evolved instances, SWD see self-determination as helping them know how to set and act towards those goals, all while developing their independence (Bekken, 2022). When understood, SWD know that self-determination is a “pragmatic, situational and interactional concept, which is anchored in daily life and their everyday relationships” (Vaucher et al., 2021, p. 127). Alverson and Yamamoto’s (2019) analysis of students’ messages revealed that self-determined students could reflect on their choices and accept responsibility for their decisions. Self-determined SWD develop a better perception of self-determination that helps them process and set goals. They have better perceptive abilities to achieve and refine their goals as needed (Hagiwara et al., 2019).

Person-Centered Planning Focused on Self-Determination

Person-centered planning is an IEP and transition planning practice that looks to the individual desires and goals of the SWD (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2020). As an approach to planning that empowers SWD, person-centered planning inherently focuses on building self-determination through building volitional and agentic actions while increasing personal action-control beliefs (Bason, 2020). When implemented as a practice, person-centered planning has increased SWD choice-making skills and shown a positive effect on building self-determination (Sanderson et al., 2020). The relationship between developing self-determination and person-centered planning arises as SWD think through goals that cause them to think introspectively about their unmet needs and act volitionally to address those needs (Matson, 2019). Zirkus and Morgan (2020) completed their study on the premise that person-centered planning increases positive outcomes and encourages agentic actions. They found that self-determination helps SWD move away from negative outcomes in behavior. Person-centered planning calls for SWD to actively participate in their planning which helps them build and apply self-determination skills as they act as a partner in their educational process (Shogren et al., 2017c). As it connects to self-determination, person-centered planning helps SWD become great causal agents.

Disability Self-Awareness as Part of Self-Determination

In defining and explaining self-determination, Shogren et al. (2015) see self-determined students as acting in a self-directed manner while feeling empowered to act. Empowerment connects to acting with self-awareness and self-knowledge and is an aspect of action control. For SWD, understanding their disability is an important component of self-awareness and self-knowledge. Morina and Biagiotti (2021) explain that increased self-awareness helps individuals become more aware of their disability and encourages them to face their disability with controlled actions. In this case, self-awareness for SWD includes disability self-awareness (Cantley & Martin, 2020) or personal disability awareness (Chambless et al., 2019).

In studying disability self-awareness, researchers have shown that students have varying levels of understanding about their own disability. Mueller’s (2019) discussion with four SWD revealed that all four students had some level of personal disability awareness. The students knew their disability labels and recognized the impact of the labels, yet they all discussed disability as negative. Negative attitudes toward a personal disability can prevent SWD from seeking supports to help them overcome disability-related challenges (Berg et al., 2017). Deakin et al. (2018) point out that negative attitudes can come from a lack of discussion on disabilities, even when students have personal disability awareness.

Discussing personal disabilities and disability self-awareness is an important way to help SWD move away from negative attitudes toward their disabilities as they clarify what the disability means and does not mean for their lives (Lindstrom et al., 2019; South & Sunderland, 2022). Cantley and Martin (2020) even show that some students value learning about their disability and discussing it. The students from their study related knowledge of the disability as giving them control and greater confidence. These findings reiterated that SWD diagnosed in postsecondary settings wished they had been taught more about their disabilities earlier (Accardo et al., 2019). As Toste et al. (2021) explain, "[disability] self-awareness is an essential step in students being able to advocate for themselves, both in and outside of school, which is central to self-determined actions, particularly experiencing action-control beliefs when pursuing goals" (p. 168-169).

Whether researchers call it disability self-awareness, personal disability awareness, or self-awareness of their disability, knowledge of a personal disability builds self-determination and prepares SWD for success after graduation (Lingo et al., 2018). In their study of using the ASPIRE model to teach self-determination, Chambless et al. (2019) discovered that building SWD understanding of their abilities and limits increased self-awareness and improved their decision-making skills. SWD recognize the importance of disability self-awareness as fundamental for their success in postsecondary education (Morina & Biagiotti, 2021). Kutscher and Tuckwiller (2019) also found that disability self-awareness facilitates students achieving success in postsecondary education settings. Self-aware SWD pursue supports and accommodations more readily as they recognize their personal needs and abilities. It is important to note that disabilities do not disappear for students after leaving high school, so SWD need the ability to navigate employment, independence, and education in light of their disability. Disability self-awareness through self-determination skills helps students advocate for their needs and explain their capabilities no matter their postschool setting (Mazzotti et al., 2018).

Summary

Students with disabilities have struggled to obtain positive postschool outcomes since being introduced into mainstream schooling. Research for the past 60 years has shown these poor outcomes and connected them to a number of factors both in and out of schools. The attention researchers and educators have given to transitions has sparked many to seek out evidence-based practices to help improve outcomes. One such practice involves instilling self-determination, building self-efficacy, and empowering students with disabilities. These three aspects help students gain control over certain parts of their lives, leading to better outcomes. Additionally, students recognize when they grow in their self-determination and often discuss its positive impacts.

While developing self-determination among students with disabilities has improved transitions, positive transition outcomes for these students are still significantly lower than their non-disabled peers. Some research has shown that developing disability self-awareness among students with disabilities has also improved self-determination, but a gap in the literature exists on this topic. By examining the perspectives of students with disabilities on their personal disability awareness during high school, educators can better understand the positive impact of improving students’ self-determination by focusing on personal disability awareness. Students with higher self-determination better fulfill the purpose of transition plans and improve their postsecondary outcomes.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school. First, this chapter explains the need for completing a qualitative research design by looking into the perspectives of participants with a personal disability awareness who have experienced a transition from high school. I then explain how my positionality as a special education teacher encourages the pursuit of the study but does not interfere with the credibility and trustworthiness of the work. By completing interviews, a focus group, and journal prompting, the research developed an analysis of the thoughts of SWD on the impact their personal disability awareness has on their transition from high school. Finally, this chapter explains the trustworthiness of the research.

Research Design

This study utilized the transcendental phenomenological method to delve into, understand, and interpret the perspectives of SWD on a personal disability awareness and examine its impact on transitions. The qualitative method provided the perfect approach to understanding the perspectives of SWD on their personal disability awareness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, a phenomenological study looks into the everyday experience and reflects on its import on the lives of the person (Van Manen, 2014). The primary focus of this study looked at how SWD experience their transition in light of the phenomena of disability self-awareness. Looking into the descriptions that SWD give to a personal disability awareness provided the research with a conscious understanding of its impact on the SWD’s world (Giorgi, 2012).

The nature of this study and the participants lend themselves to a transcendental phenomenology study. As a transcendental study, the SWD's perspectives are described as understanding and being aware of their own disability influencing their perceived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental approach pushes SWD to look back over their transition experience and better explain how disability self-awareness played a role. For SWD, disability is an inseparable component of their world, and disability self-awareness influences, directly or indirectly, how they live and operate (Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental phenomenological method helps SWD reflect on their experiences and seek to capture the essence of their perspectives.

Transcendental phenomenology arose as an approach to research under the direction of Edmund Husserl. Husserl understood human issues as invoking a level of perspective and reflection that connects to the type of reaction or response warranted from a person (Laverty, 2003). To understand the reaction or response fully, the person must reflect on and describe their lived experience as they understand it (Giorgi, 2012). This process is transcendental because it explores the reflection of experience on acts (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl wanted to develop knowledge from the lived experiences of people because the experience provides evidence that is seen, felt, and remembered (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study center on developing an understanding of the perspectives of SWD on self-determination and a personal disability awareness and how these two concepts influence transition outcomes. The questions come with the notion that the individual SWD has developed some level of disability awareness for their disability. The questions also insinuate involvement in the transition process by the SWD.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of postsecondary students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school?

Sub-Question One

How does a personal disability awareness connect to self-determination?

Sub-Question Two

What influence does a personal disability awareness have over transitions?

Sub-Question Three

How does a personal disability awareness influence a student acting as a causal agent?

Setting and Participants

The setting and participants of this study needed to provide a diverse selection of SWD and SWD in different stages of transitions. The population of SWD in any setting varies just as much as the non-disabled population, so the site needs to reflect that diversity. Additionally, transitions measure employment, education, and independence outcomes, so the site should exemplify participants' outcomes within the different areas.

Setting

The setting for this study takes place in a small, rural city in the southeast US with a population under 30,000. The setting was chosen for several important reasons. First, the city hosts a moderately sized university and a technical school that both enroll SWD. Second, a few large companies have home bases in the city, and the companies employ SWD after graduation. Third, a local school provides a work-based training program for SWD after finishing their usual years in high school. Overall, this location offered a great selection for finding participants involved in education or employment and exercising their ability to live independently.

According to the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (2018) in Georgia, one year after graduating, approximately 53.7% of graduates were enrolled in a college or university, 19.4% were working, 6% had earned a certificate to work through a training program, and 7.7% were enrolled in a technical college. By using participants from the schools, work sites, or training programs, I have a population of participants typical of students in postsecondary settings (Shenton, 2004). For the university, I contacted their student accessibility services under the associate vice president of student affairs. The accessibility services department did not respond, so I had to find students through word-of-mouth. For the technical college, I contacted the accessibility services department to obtain permission to contact through the accessibility services coordinator. I obtained permission from the technical college for them to contact their students on my behalf. I did not need parental permission as my participants are independent and over 18. I used pseudonyms in place of the city, university, technical school, workplaces, and training program.

Participants

Participants for this study were 10 previous high school students with a disability. To ensure students had developed some level of disability self-awareness, they had to disclose and self-describe their disability (Berg et al., 2017). Additionally, the participants needed to explain and recognize where they are in the postsecondary transition phase (Hatfield et al., 2018). Finally, the participants needed to be at least 18 and have graduated from high school, but they were no older than 24 so as not to have forgotten their transition plan (Smith et al., 2021).

Researcher Positionality

My name is Joshua Crandell, and I have been working in special education since 2006. Even before beginning my career as a teacher, I volunteered—and still do—with Special

Olympics. From both aspects, I have come to understand SWD from differing perspectives, and I have seen their need for more self-productive lives after they graduate from high school. In my first- year teaching high school, 2011, I realized that transition plans prepare students for life after high school, but the plans do not guarantee success for the students. In linking these two pieces together, I wanted to develop a better understanding of what helps generate positive postsecondary outcomes for SWD.

Interpretive Framework

My study topic calls attention to the perspectives of SWD who have experienced the transition from high school to a postsecondary setting and understand their own disability. The basis for the study calls attention to the need to understand the phenomenon through the personal views of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, social constructivism provides the interpretive framework for this study. As the participants answered questions and discussed their disabilities, they created specific descriptions of their experiences that had similarities across all participants. Yet, their collection of experiences needed a strong interpretation to develop a comprehensive picture (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social constructivism allowed the impact of a personal disability awareness on transitions to come directly from SWD experiences, but it also allowed for an interpretation to come from my knowledge and understanding (Schwandt, 2000). Without changing the words of the participants or altering the underlining meaning, social constructivism allowed me to find connections in individual participant's perspectives that they may not have seen, and it allowed me to find connections between the different perspectives of the participants.

Philosophical Assumptions

Working with SWD and believing in the love and grace of Jesus Christ creates a specific philosophical guidance in my thinking and in the work on which I focus. My ontological assumptions about God and people directed my view for this study. Epistemological assumptions of personal experiences and varying individual disabilities directed how I viewed knowledge and the collection of knowledge. Finally, my personal axiological assumptions on the topic encouraged the spark that started the research from the beginning.

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumptions deal with the concept of reality or what is considered real (Matta, 2021). This assumption influences my study in two ways. First, I assume the overall reality of God creating the world and every person starting with Genesis 1 (NASB). Continuing in that truth, God created mankind in His image (NASB, Genesis 1:26), so every person is an image bearer of God. As image bearers of God, every person deserves to be given the best opportunities and chances to find success, and this includes SWD. In light of that, this study begins on the basis that every SWD should have an equal opportunity for success in God's world. The second ontological influence in this study is that of the individual reality of each participant. The participants' personal experiences direct their existence and influence their understanding of reality (Van Manen, 2014). I must consider both of these assumptions as I create and ask questions and as participants explain their experiences and perspectives.

Epistemological Assumption

Knowledge can be taught, explained, and given, but it cannot be known without experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Quantitative data can generate knowledge that SWD do not find enough success after graduation (Kauffman et al., 2017), but this knowledge cannot be known—fully understood—without assuming a need to infiltrate the lived experiences of SWD (Matta, 2021; Van Manen, 2014). This epistemological assumption dictates that the knowledge about transitions and disability awareness needs to come from the people involved, not the experts teaching it. As experts, we can think we have control and understand the importance of disability self-awareness for transitions, but we cannot bracket our own thinking from the situation without bringing information from sources with subjective experiences (Van Manen, 2014). These epistemological assumptions played a role in completing the research and viewing the analysis of the research from this study.

Axiological Assumption

When conducting research, researchers bring their values and biases into the study, which are considered axiological assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Essentially, the researcher's values contribute to the purpose of the study, but the researcher makes it known without interfering with the process. As a special education teacher, advocate for people with disabilities, and a friend to many people with disabilities, I am greatly attached to helping SWD find success after graduation. My axiological assumptions on the value of research aimed at helping SWD push me to want the research to successfully find ways to improve the lives of SWD (Matta, 2021). I want my research to help SWD achieve positive transition outcomes, but I do not want my assumptions and desires to interfere with the validity of the research (Van Manen, 2014). As such, any outcome of this study—personal disability awareness positively, negatively, or neutrally impacting transitions—ultimately benefits SWD as it potentially influences the practices of teaching SWD during their primary and secondary schooling. By positioning myself in this manner, I develop a personal understanding of my feelings toward the study and can appropriately locate and bracket those feelings as I review and analyze the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher's Role

I have been a long-term special education teacher and advocate for helping SWD find success in all aspects of life after graduating from high school. My experience could have created a bias in finding success in any research focused on improving transition outcomes. Using epoché, I set aside my personal biases to analyze the data coming from the participants (Moustakas, 1994). As the researcher, I did not have any authority over the subjects, current or past. As the human instrument, I guided participants through the interviews and focus group with probing questions, but I did not guide their answering (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As the participants were SWD, they needed encouragement, explanations, and/or examples during the interviews and focus group; however, each participant was able to answer questions independently in both settings.

Procedures

After receiving approval from Liberty's IRB, I looked for ways to contact candidates from the local university and the technical school at my location. With snowball sampling and personal connections, I gained approval from individual participants to include them. I did not need to use the local universities' IRB. For candidates in different employment settings, I sought personal approval from the candidates as the study did not interfere with their work or their work schedule.

Once I had participants for my study, I utilized interviews, a focus group, and journal prompts to collect data from their perspectives. The questions for the interviews, focus group, and journals were reviewed and approved by my committee and had application toward answering my research questions.

Permissions

Approval was obtained from Liberty's IRB to complete the study (see Appendix A).

Then, permission was obtained from the local postsecondary technical schools to contact qualifying students from their campuses (see Appendix B). Once I had an email or phone contact, I contacted potential candidates to gain permission and consent to conduct the research (see Appendix C). Because potential candidates were over 18 and maintained their own rights, no parental permissions were needed for this study.

Recruitment Plan

The participants for this study were students with a disability awareness within the 18-24 age range. This age range allowed participants to be in the transition phase from high school, experienced a personal disability awareness, and understand the phenomenon to some extent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A sample size of 10 participants allowed for saturation of the topic and offered meaning to the phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014). Saturation of a topic means that responses start to repeat with no new perceptions coming out of data collection, but there is no exact amount of data collection specified to reach saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Hennink et al. (2017) expand the idea of saturation in two distinct ways. The saturation of a topic can come when no new themes or codes occur during data analysis, called code saturation. They also explain meaning saturation as when researchers fully understand the topic with no new information arising. According to Hennink et al.’s (2017) research, code saturation was reached at nine interviews, while meaning saturation was reached between 16 to 24 interviews. Based on this, I started with a minimum of 10 participants to see where meaning and code saturation lied. To find participants, I used a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For purposeful sampling, each participant needed to meet the requirements above. For snowball sampling, participants and previous teachers of SWD shared the study’s needs with potential SWD to ask for participation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Each participant completed a pre-screening survey (see Appendix D) asking them to self-describe their disability and briefly explain their transition. Participants also signed an informed consent documenting their understanding of the study (see Appendix C).

Data Collection Plan

As a qualitative phenomenological study, this study aimed to understand the perspectives of SWD on how a personal disability awareness influenced their transitions. In order to accomplish this goal, I utilized three data collection methods for aggregating data on the impact of a personal disability awareness on transitions for SWD (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, the participants received three journal prompts to engage them in providing initial details on explaining their disability, their transition, and how they understood the interaction between the two. Second, each participant went through a semi-structured interview with me to clarify information from the prompts and to ask additional questions. Finally, four participants participated in a focus group to gain further insights and spur ideas from similar participants. Moustakas (1994) considers every question asked as having equal weight in explaining the phenomenon, and this order of data collection provided a way to expand upon the research questions from individual participants.

Throughout the data collection, analyses, and synthesis, I used epoché, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) describes epoché as “set[ting] aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (p. 85). With epoché, the researcher listens to the participants’ perspectives without claiming to have the answers and knowledge already in place. The experiences provide an understanding separate from the researcher’s judgment and notions of the topic. Additionally, the information from the participants carries equal weight and value in developing the full picture of the experience

(Moustakas, 1994). After epoché, phenomenological reduction was employed to describe what was shown by the participants in their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Through phenomenological reduction, the researcher repeatedly processes information from the data and then describes it as straightforwardly as possible. Finally, through imaginative variation, the descriptions allowed for the formation of structural themes (Moustakas, 1994). Using epoché, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation required practice and dedication, but this method allowed the researcher to reduce the likelihood of bringing in thoughts and ideas that could change the views developed from the participants' experiences.

Journal Prompts

While journal prompts fall under the interview umbrella for data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018), Merriam and Tisdell (2015) consider them to be researcher-generated documents. Journal prompts ask probing questions for participants to answer and provide them with thinking time to process, but they come from the researcher and are focused on the current state of the topic under study. As with other phenomenological approaches, journal prompts encourage individuals to explain their perspectives and provide individual knowledge of the topic. Still, it prompts allow participants to process differently than verbal conversations. As they write out answers, the participants can consistently rethink and review their answers in the form of inner dialoging (Van Manen, 2014). This is why I think journal prompts were a good data collection method and should have been the first method in this study. By preceding the other data collection, journal prompts spurred participants to begin thinking about the topics and provided the researcher with a starting point for the interviews. The prompts were emailed and consisted of three prompts for the participants to answer. These were the same for all participants.

Journal Prompt Questions

1. Please describe your cognitive personal disability in as much detail as possible. SQ1
2. Please describe your transition from high school to your current setting in as much detail as possible. SQ2
3. Please describe how you think your disability self-awareness influenced your transition from high school. SQ2, SQ3

The journal prompt questions were designed to gain an initial understanding of the participant's disability, personal disability awareness, and transition from high school. These questions gave the participant an opportunity to think critically and deeply about each aspect of the topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the answers prompted participants to develop thoughts that could have provided important information about the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan

The journal prompts were analyzed following the phenomenological analysis steps outlined by Moustakas (1994). Using Moustakas's (1994) epoché, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation, each journal prompt focused on the general research question, but the candidates' answers branched into giving information for all three sub-questions. With this in mind, the prompts were reviewed, coded, and designated to specific sub-questions as needed (Litosseliti, 2003). As the replies to the prompts came directly from the participants, I needed to interpret the meaning of the information and the intent within the structure and grammar used (Van Manen, 2014). With this in mind, I used narrative coding as I read the replies (Saldaña, 2013). Narrative coding worked here because the participants told part of their story by answering the questions. The responses lent themselves more to this coding than the interviews or focus group conversations. The prompts provided their own separate list of possible themes.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews provide a vital and viable method of gaining insight into the perspectives of participants for a study. Interviews explore the nuances provided by each participant as they reflect on the phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014). Without interview data, the phenomenon under study would not be fully explored or understood. When participants agree to and complete an interview, they provide researchers with pieces of themselves that help fill in the knowledge gap in the literature. This works best when the participant feels comfortable and is able to share in comfortable and personal ways (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). As such, the interview works as a question prompted conversation to help participants feel reassurance in sharing their true views and ideals on the topic. To understand perspectives of SWD on disability awareness, the interview process must be comfortable, open-ended, and semi-directed in order for the candidates to feel that their perspective matters and be fully incorporated into the research. This type of interview allows the participants to develop their thoughts throughout the interview and encourages verbal processing of the data with the researcher as a sounding board (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). The interviews provided certain levels of data for my research questions that were further exposed in the later focus group. I conducted the interviews using Microsoft Teams, so the participants could be in a comfortable setting and accommodate their schedules more easily. The interviews were video recorded to allow for data review of verbal and non-verbal cues. The interviews acted as the second data collection method because it provided individuals further insight into the study and helped create further questioning for the focus group.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your experience in [your postsecondary setting] since graduating from high school. CRQ
2. Please describe your individual disability. SQ1
3. Please describe a situation where being aware of your disability helped you. SQ1, SQ3
4. Please describe a situation where you wished you had known more about your disability. SQ1
5. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with knowing your disability that we have not discussed? SQ1
6. Please describe how your personal cognitive disability awareness influences where you are now in your transition. CRQ
7. What about knowing your disability helped you make the transition to [your setting]? SQ2
8. Please describe situations where you have used self-determination skills to advocate for your disability in [your setting]. SQ2, SQ3
9. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with your transition that we have not covered? SQ2
10. Please describe how knowing your disability influenced your actions and decision making. SQ3
11. Please describe how knowing your disability helped your feel empowered in acting and believing your actions influenced your goals. SQ3
12. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with learning about your disability that we haven’t discussed? SQ3

The individual interview questions were designed to gather details regarding the participant's personal disability awareness and how it influences their transitions from high school. Question 1 acted as a soft opener to the interview to help the participant feel comfortable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Questions 2 through 5 focused on the participant's disability. Questions six through nine covered the participant's transition regarding their disability awareness. Questions 10-12 focused on how the participants developed their disability self-awareness. All the questions were designed to help link personal disability awareness to transition practices and outcomes (Kauffman et al., 2017). The participants' answers increased their understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Analyzing the interviews followed the phenomenological analysis steps as outlined by Moustakas (1994). I recorded each interview for review and further analysis, and I also transcribe the interviews. This allowed me to analyze the transcripts alongside my interview notes and allocate which parts of the interviews align with certain sub-questions (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). I re-read each interview several times to find and describe commonalities among the participants' answers and code the information. In my first readings, I coded the data using structural coding (Saldaña, 2013). Structural coding allowed me to sort the information as it fit with the research questions. With further readings, I used descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013). Descriptive coding took the structural coding deeper and gave me the ability to examine the relationships among the different interviews (Saldaña, 2013). At this stage in the data collection, I did not develop full themes but took notes of possible themes emerging from the coding up to that point. As analyzing is a process of digging into and understanding connections from different perspectives, taking notes and listing possible themes from each data point helped discover and disclose important information (Moustakas, 1994). I did not correlate the different possible themes until all data was collected and synthesized.

Focus Groups

Focus groups act as a type of interview, but they bring together multiple participants with shared or similar connections to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With the focus group, participants interact as they discuss a topic relatable to each one of them. Discussing common experiences helps participants recall pieces of information they may have forgotten about and gives them a chance to reflect on their perspectives in light of others' perspectives (Van Manen, 2014). This is important for the SWD, as often they may not recognize events or situations pertaining to the topic until they see it applied by someone else. While a focus group may influence participants' responses, they can add critical information to the study unavailable in one-on-one circumstances (Litosseliti, 2003). Additionally, having the focus group as the last data collection helps prevent participants from basing their story on others in the group.

The focus group meeting took place over Microsoft Teams to allow for everyone to meet comfortably and in their own environment. I used one focus group using four participants from the interviews (Morgan, 1997). Morgan (1997) discusses having at least six participants for a focus group, but these participants were chosen as best fitting for further information and for convenience. The group conversation was recorded for repeated reviewing and analysis. As I conducted the group phase, I acted as an active listener to encourage conversation between the participants while trying not to influence the exploration of the topic (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). The focus group discussion provided additional depth to each of the research questions and provided layers to the perspectives of the participants (Litosseliti, 2003). I ensured that everyone in the group knew everyone has a disability, but we did not necessarily discuss specific disabilities unless individuals choose to do so for themselves. Focus group questions acted as a topic guide but participants were allowed to guide the conversation as they added information (Litosseliti, 2003).

Focus Group Guiding Questions

1. Do you think understanding your own disability is important? CRQ (This is not an open-ended question, but it allows for the participants to ease into the group experience with an easy-to-answer opening question (Litosseliti, 2003)
2. What does everyone know and think about self-determination? SQ1
3. Please explain ways in which understanding your own disability is important to building self-determination. SQ1
4. What does everyone think about being aware of your own disability? SQ1
5. Describe how your own disability awareness influenced your transition. SQ2
6. How have interactions with others (family, friends, teachers, and strangers) helped you understand your own disability? SQ3

The focus group questions acted as a topic guide for the discussion during the focus group. Litosseliti (2003) explains that a topic guide acts as a tool used by the moderator to link questions and discussion to the phenomenon. It was an adaptive format and allowed the participants to provide prompts and questions. Each focus group question was designed to act as a starting point in the guide and helped keep the participants from wandering away from their perspectives (Morgan, 1997). These questions allowed the participants to interact in their discussion and generated data not approachable in one-on-one interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Analyzing the focus groups was completed following the phenomenological analysis steps as outlined by Moustakas (1994). I recorded and transcribed the focus group to allow for multiple viewings of the discussion. I transcribed the data, read through the transcription multiple times, and coded general impressions (Litosseliti, 2003). As with the interviews, the focus group's answers and discussion were analyzed and allocated to the different sub-questions through structural coding (Saldaña, 2013). Structural coding helped me see trends in the conversation and notice patterns and directions the participants took the answers (Litosseliti, 2003). As I reviewed the focus group data further, I utilized descriptive coding and In vivo coding to concentrate on the words and ideas from the group (Saldaña, 2013). This helped me find commonalities in language among the different participants. With this data, I recorded possible themes designated separately from the interviews and prompts.

Data Synthesis

The texts for this study—interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts—all represented different angles for looking into the perspectives of SWD on disability self-awareness and transition (Van Manen, 2014). Analyzing and coding each piece separately generated ideas connected to the topic, but it did not complete the picture desired by the study. Instead, the data needed to be collectively synthesized to find repeating ideas among all three data sets (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Synthesizing the data followed Van Manen's (2014) method of finding meaning in each level of the story and seeing it as a whole.

The utilization of epoché helped synthesize the data without developing preconceived ideas or conceptions about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This method led the researcher to use phenomenological reduction to focus on the participants' words and experiences, not the researcher's perception of the experience. As I synthesized the data, I focused on the participants' words and explanations, and phenomenological reduction allowed direct words to convey meaning. In looking at the words, I then employed imaginative variation to look for plausible meanings (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation describes the fundamental components of the phenomenon where the researcher allows for any possibility connected to meanings from the experience (Moustakas, 1994). In my use of imaginative variation, I found underlying themes from the experiences that helped describe the phenomenon as it pertains to the participants.

Each set of possible themes was analyzed and coded to find a mutual group of themes spanning all the data. This process followed Moustakas's (1994) analysis process and culminated in cohesive themes focused on the phenomenon. The process drew together all the data to create an ideal statement representative of the total picture generated by the participants' perspectives on the phenomenon. For this, I used axial coding (Saldaña, 2013). Through axial coding, I could remove redundant information, find the most meaningful information, and form categories and subcategories from all the information gathered. The possible themes were cross-analyzed to ensure individual placement in each piece of data to ensure themes were rooted in all aspects of the study (Van Manen, 2014). The triangulation of data to generate linked themes kept the data-focused and applicable to the participants' experiences and the interpretation presented.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the information comes from the perspectives of participants, but then the information goes through an interpretative process by the researcher. Researchers need to ensure that the information presented is trustworthy and not distorted through the interpretation (Willliams & Morrow, 2009). To convey trustworthiness in research, qualitative studies follow credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability constructs (Shenton, 2004).

Credibility

The credibility of a study examines that the findings from the interpretation and study validate what the participants' perceptions intended (Shenton, 2004). To achieve credibility, I utilized three aspects: triangulation, peer debriefing, and member-checking. Combining interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts triangulated the themes as presented and understood across all three data methods (Shenton, 2004). I also had peers and experts debrief the data to confirm themes (Willliams & Morrow, 2009). Finally, I gave participants the ability to check the developed themes and data to confirm that the interpretation did not extend past their intention (Shenton, 2004; Willliams & Morrow, 2009).

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research seeks to take the study and allow for replication in other settings while finding similar data (Shenton, 2004). To help transferability, I created rich descriptions of each SWD's postsecondary setting. The different settings could have influenced positive or negative outcomes, but the impact of a personal disability awareness transferred between the settings. Creating clear, understandable connections from the perspectives to the outcomes help demonstrated transferability in this study (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

Dependability

The dependability of a study depends on the ability of another researcher to replicate the work (Shenton, 2004). To accomplish this, I described my procedures, participants, and analysis in extreme detail. The data also supported the procedures and analysis, and the participants were chosen based on the need to fill the gap in the data. Finally, my committee thoroughly reviewed my information, descriptions, and process to validate the dependability of the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is confirming that the findings come from the participants, not the researcher (Shenton, 2004). I underwent three methods to reach confirmability: triangulation, auditing, and reflective commentary (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation was accomplished through the different methods explained above. I also created an audit trail of decisions and actions as I took them through the research process (Shenton, 2004). Finally, I practiced reflective commentary throughout the process. In reflection, I discussed my decisions and directions taken with the study and reflected on their strengths and weaknesses (Shenton, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

I took the following ethical considerations for this study. First, I obtained participant consent for data collection and use for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). They were informed of their ability to freely withdraw from the research and have their data removed and destroyed. No participants withdrew from the study. Interviews and journal prompts were kept confidential and not publicly shared. The data collected from the researcher for the focus group was also kept confidential. Still, the participants were informed that the conversations during the focus group may not be confidential because different participants may directly or inadvertently share. I did encourage all the participants not to share any information, but I could not guarantee it. To prevent unintentional harm to the participants and past school systems, I used pseudonyms for the participants and any school systems if needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All electronic data was stored on a password-locked computer within a password-locked file, and all hard copy data was stored in a locked cabinet within a locked room. Unneeded data will be destroyed after three years.

Summary

This chapter explains the method and design for the current study. Through a phenomenological, transcendental qualitative study, the research shows the experience of having a personal disability awareness on SWD transitioning into postsecondary settings. Using interviews, a focus group, and journal prompts to collect data provided me with a look into different aspects of the perspectives of the participants. Triangulating the data in this manner helped ensure the analyzed themes came from the SWD, not myself. Coding possible themes from each piece of data and then synthesizing all themes into a cohesive set helped bring the data together as one unit.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school. A phenomenological study looks into the lived experiences of individuals with a shared phenomenon, such as being aware of a personal disability throughout transitioning from high school (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study aimed to better understand the experiences of those with a disability self-awareness and its impact on their lives.

Chapter Four presents the results of the collected data by using participants' own words and descriptions to convey their voices. Each participant completed three journal prompts at the beginning of the data collection to spark their thinking and memory of the phenomenon. Next, participants participated in individual semi-structured interviews designed to prompt participants to discuss their own stories. Finally, four of the participants participated in a focus group to share and expound on their stories by relating to others with the shared phenomenon. I analyzed the data using phenomenological reduction to illustrate themes across all collection methods (Moustakas, 1994). The chapter briefly describes all participants, their disability, and their transition. Finally, the chapter concludes by describing themes, subthemes, and outliers developed from the participants' experiences with the phenomenon.

Participants

A selection of 10 high school graduates participated in this study. The participants were all in a transition phase of post-graduation and between the ages of 18 and 24. All participants have a disability, and each participant self-described their own disability. The majority of the participants were university students with others working full-time or part-time and some in job training programs. All participants consented to participation in the study, and no participant withdrew. Each participant completed the journal prompts and interview, and four of the participants participated in the focus group. Table 1 shows the demographics and transition stages of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographic and Transition Stage

Participant Name*	**Age**	**Gender**	**Self-Described Disability**	**Transition Stage**
Dorian	18	Male	Learning Disability	University Student
Christi	20	Female	ADHD & ADD	University Student
Gary	21	Male	ADHD & Auditory Processing Disorder	University Student
Whitney	20	Female	ADHD	University Student
Malcom	24	Male	Processing Problem & Speech Issues	Full-time Worker
Stella	19	Female	Dyslexia & ADHD	Full-time Worker
Andre	19	Male	Learning Disability	University Student
Clarissa	18	Female	Processing Issues & Speech Impediment	University Student
Austin	22	Male	Learning Disability	Part-time Worker
Sarah	22	Female	ADHD	Full-time Worker/Online University Student

*pseudonyms

I started my recruitment by emailing local universities to request support in contacting participants. I asked the universities' accessibility or disability services to email students enrolled for services. Unfortunately, only one university responded, and no students responded to the recruitment email. My recruitment process then turned to word-of-mouth and snowball sampling from people familiar with my topic and desired participants. The following is a description of each participant with their own information on disability and transition provided. Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' information and ensure confidentiality.

Dorian

Dorian is an 18-year-old university student. He self-described as having a learning disability. Dorian struggled with explaining his disability, but he said, “I catch on basically slower than other, average kids do.” When discussing his transition into college, Dorian explained it to be rocky at first but smooth overall. “Academic-wise, it took me a while to, like get a grasp on the class, but when I eventually did, it was real smooth and easy.” Dorian mentioned talking to his professors and friends to get help to make it easier for him.

Christi

Christi is a 20-year-old college student who self-described as having ADHD and ADD. She stated, “it is basically prominent in the aspect of I can't focus for a really long time.” She also explained that this causes her to have test anxiety, but she does receive extended time on tests and breaks as needed that help with the anxiety and with focusing on the test. Christi mentioned her social life is quite similar as it was in high school, but the academic aspect is completely different. “Just making sure I got that work done in a timely manner and nobody was there for accountability other than myself. So that was definitely a change.” Despite the change, Christi felt she is managing the transition well.

Gary

Gary is a 21-year-old college student. Gary described himself as having ADHD and an auditory processing disorder. For his auditory processing disorder, Gary said, “If I'm not completely engaged with someone that I'm having a conversation with, words will just go in one ear and out the other. Just, I will not process them at all.” As a result of his ADHD, Gary does not focus very well and always fidgets. For both, Gary felt he could control them to a degree by realizing what he is doing and changing it. When talking about his transition regarding academics, Gary explained, “My academic processes kind of had to have a good structure to them, and I stick to them." He felt that the structured nature of his small college met his desire for a structured learning environment.

Whitney

Whitney is a 20-year-old college student who described herself as having ADHD. She explained that she struggles to focus and constantly fidgets because of the hyperactive part of her ADHD. She also said, "procrastination is a big [problem] dealing with ADHD." Whitney has had to work diligently to overcome her procrastination since entering college. When asked about her transition into college, Whitney identified the open schedule as one of the best benefits of college compared to high school. "I don't have to sit in a desk for eight hours or six hours a day and learn stuff that I'm genuinely not interested in." The open schedule also helps Whitney plan in such a way as to work through her ADHD.

Malcolm

Malcolm is a 24-year-old working full-time for a dining hall and cafeteria. He described himself as struggling with understanding and with speaking. Malcolm stated, "My disability probably, like, stopped me from learning. I guess, like, learning how to understand stuff." Malcolm would also struggle with stuttering, that "made it seem like I didn't know what I was saying." When discussing his transition, Malcolm explained that he went through a job training program after high school that helped him learn about his disability and how to work through it. He said, "Doing the [transition program] helped me grow." Malcolm felt that his experience with the job training program helped him learn and transition better.

Stella

Stella is an 18-year-old working full-time for a grocery store. She described herself as having ADHD and dyslexia. Stella explained that her dyslexia impacts her ability to understand new or unfamiliar words, and her ADHD causes her to get distracted easily. She explained, “I do get distracted very easily, on just random things, and then I forget what I’m doing.” Stella said her transition to full-time work has been difficult, especially with her disabilities. She noted, “It’s really hard for me to understand basic things. Like someone telling me something to do, and I go to do it, and I forget sometimes. I do have to be told to do things multiple times to remember them.” Stella does have support at work from her managers, which has helped ease the transition.

Andre

Andre is a 19-year-old college student with a learning disability. Andre explained that he can get distracted when doing work and blank out on work. He stated, “My learning comprehension is not as best as everybody else.” He explained that he really has to focus and think when receiving instructions to understand them. When asked about his transition into college, Andre felt that his college experience has been fine overall, but he has had to adjust without the same support he received in high school. “Learning how to be on my own without others teachers is actually pretty hard. Besides that, I’ve been a little stressed and a little calm trying to ease my mind to be like I got this.” Andre felt that his stress level in college is not really any different than other first-year college students.

Clarissa

Clarissa is an 18-year-old college student who self-described as having processing and speech issues. When asked to describe her disability, Clarissa said, “I’m a bit of like a slower learner, and I have like a speech impediment.” Clarissa’s transition from high school to college has been difficult, but she has managed. She said, “It’s been a little difficult, just the transformation, just everything, I guess. I mean, it’s gotten easier, but it’s completely different from high school." Clarissa understands that she needs to seek help when she feels like she is struggling.

Austin

Austin is a 22-year-old working part-time with a vineyard in his area. He stated that he was diagnosed with delayed development. When asked to explain, Austin said, "I had trouble reading for comprehension, multi-step problem solving, and understanding and answering questions appropriately." Austin spoke very positively of his transition, explaining that his employer supports and understands Austin's needs. Austin felt pressure at the beginning of the transition to work, but he explained, "But as I began to work along with the crew and my owner, it became very quite simple, and very reassuring." Austin felt confident in his transition because his owner supported him and made him comfortable seeking help.

Sarah

Sarah is a 22-year-old working full time as a paraprofessional and attending online college classes. She explained that she has inattentive ADHD. She said, "I have attentive ADHD which is basically like being anywhere but where I'm at physically, so I could be anywhere in my head." When discussing her transition, Sarah related to both her work position and her being an online student. For work, Sarah stated, "I do what I need to do, like, and I stay on task way easier than I used to I think." For her online classes, she mentioned, "It's kind of hard because I can get sidetracked a lot, and then, especially with everything being online now, it's not as easy as when you're in an in-person class where you don't really have that many distractions." Sarah did explain that she felt her transition to both work and online classes has been "pretty easy."

Results

In order to understand the central and sub-research questions, all participants completed journal prompts and participated in an individual interview. After the interviews and based on availability, the participants were asked to participate in a focus group, and four participants participated in a single focus group. Participants were given time to process and create thoughtful responses to their journal prompts. The interviews consisted of 12 questions directly asked, but the participants could add additional information as they decided. The interviews required participants to answer spontaneously with little time to craft ideas. The focus group had six guiding questions the group discussed, but they were allowed to move the discussion in connected directions as they found necessary or helpful. All data sources were triangulated and synthesized to develop an understanding of the research questions. Table 2 depicts axial codes and resulting themes synthesized from the data.

Table 2

Axial Codes	**Resulting Themes**
Disability awareness is a gift Happy with disability Content with disability Frustrated with disability awareness but understand the benefits	Personal Disability Awareness Influences Emotions About Disability
Knowledge of disability leads to greater self-determination Knowledge of disability helps understand self and needs Knowledge of disability improves desire for getting support	Personal Disability Awareness Increases Understanding of Self and Needs
Beginning fear of transition Stress of transition but able to cope	Personal Disability Awareness Eases Transition
Knows what goals are manageable Can ask for and seek support Better at making choices Growing more independent	Self-Determined Actions Support Independence in Transition

Desire for disability knowledge earlier in life Not understanding reason for support in earlier grades	Desire for Personal Disability Awareness Earlier in Life
Support from parents help with transition Teachers encouraged finding support Increased support from professors	Engagement with People Increases Personal Disability Awareness

Personal Disability Awareness Influences Emotions About Disability

Throughout the data collection process, participants explained various emotions regarding their disabilities and their personal disability awareness. Participants described their emotions within their current phase of transition, and they connected their emotions to learning about or understanding their disability. When listening to their descriptions, an overall feeling of acceptance came from the participants. Christi said, “I think it's a content feeling for me or just yeah being accepting of it.” Dorian explained, “There is honestly nothing wrong with having a disability as long as you, like, can acknowledge it. You could face it head on.” Andre closed his interview with this statement: “I mean, I'm happy where I am with my disability.” Stella related to her feelings as, “Not really happy, happy, but like I'm accepting.” Clarissa’s emotion was focused on her growth; she said, “Well, I see that I improved throughout the year, so it makes me feel good about myself. How far I've gotten along.”

Disability as a Gift

In discussing their personal disability, some participants highly valued their disabilities to the point of even seeing them as a gift. Whitney repeatedly referred to her disability as a gift:

> But as I grew older, I realized that having ADHD was a gift, I found I was more creative and free-thinking than my siblings and peers, and that helped me figure out how to manage it, not deal with it; I would also say it empowers me to think differently. OK,

> well, you have this gift of thinking differently and more creatively and deeper; I am happy with it cause I have that weird like creativity part to me.

Malcolm stated, “They really helped me with my disability, make it more like a blessing in my life.” Elliot talked about loving his disability because “it makes me very spontaneous […]. I become hyper-focused on interesting and engaging stimuli.”

Frustrated yet Seeing the Benefits

Participants talked about the problems that they have or face with their disabilities, but they were able to appreciate that understanding their disabilities had greater benefits. Stella said, “Personally, I don’t really like it because I don’t like being a little bit different and needing help all the time. Even though I do need to ask and stuff, personally, I don’t like it.” When asked to clarify, she stated, “I don’t like being aware of it. Not the disability and all, but just knowing that I have it, and that’s the reason I’m struggling.” Gary said, “I’ve always known that I need to work harder to achieve the same goals as most people. Pushing twice the weight as someone else who doesn’t have a disability has become second nature, and I don’t think about it anymore.” Andre shared his perspective:

> It's like you don't understand that I just can't control it. It's kind of hard for me to learn from my mistakes. So, I’ll say I don’t really like it. Umm, like that, then. But I also do like showing other people that I'm in college, and so moving on from it. So, I think that's the positive part of it.

Personal Disability Awareness Increases Understanding of Self and Needs

The most prominent theme represented in the data was that personal disability awareness increased participants’ understanding of themselves and their needs. Their knowledge led many to acknowledge their weaknesses while finding ways to maximize their strengths. Whitney said, "I felt more comfortable learning at my own pace, therefore, capitalizing on my strengths when living with ADHD." Austin stated, "I like a routine and a set schedule, so I was able to communicate that to the Owner, and he keeps my work schedule, breaks, and lunch the same weekly." Christi said, "I have found effective ways to get my schoolwork done." Malcolm considered it as, "I basically kept working on myself. I kept trying, you know. I kept trying to understand how to say words right."

Knowledge of Needs versus Preferences

The personal disability awareness of many participants helped them differentiate their needs and their preferences. Whitney said:

> I would say it would help make more, not necessarily wiser decisions, but more decisions prone to like what I need to be doing versus what the general person does and transitioning to college. Though it's more classified and technical like my preferences.

Clarissa described being "conscious of my class times so that I did not put too much on myself all on the same day," and she said, "Well, I kind of like have to think about like my schedules and whatnot and see if I have enough time to study and to have time for tutoring or anything." Sarah connected knowing her disability to being better at talking herself through focusing; she revealed:

> Usually if I'm doing school work online, which is where I usually put my headphones in, which beforehand I could never do that and listen to music, because then I'd be like I don't wanna listen to this song. I wanna listen to this and listen and, you know, mess with that more than I would be doing my school work. But, since I've gotten to this point where I can kind of put them in, and I can just put on a playlist or whatever, and I know and tell myself you're not gonna change it.

Gary noted he changed his major because “I had to work harder than other people, and sometimes some classes are harder than I can keep up with, and at that time, I didn't have the discipline that I needed for that.” These comments show that participants could use the knowledge of their disability to weigh their needs and preferences to find what works best.

Asking for Help

Participants linked knowledge of their disability to being aware of their need to ask for help. Additionally, their awareness made them more confident in accepting their need for support. Austin explained it as, “In any hard time situations, if you felt as if you are vulnerable or in a hard time, there is no shame asking for help. No matter if it's related family or friends or somebody you once knew.” Whitney said:

> I would say knowing about that made me realize that I wasn't necessarily alone in this mindset of things, and there are a lot more people out there that were very interested in helping me than myself, so I didn't really have to do everything by myself.

Stella stated, “I think it's helpful cause, I mean, now that I know, I can ask. And that's pretty helpful to know.”

Personal Disability Awareness Eases Transition

In discussing their transition in light of having a personal disability awareness, participants consistently connected the two with a positive attitude. Dorian responded, “My transition, I would say, was really smooth. I was nervous, and it was kinda hard. But it also helped because I knew why I was struggling, and I faced it head-on so I could get better.” Andre felt, “I've been like little stressed and a little calm trying to ease my mind to be like I got this and all that. But college has actually been pretty fine right now.” Christi said, “It's helped me be a lot more vulnerable and less like I know what I'm dealing with, but no one else knows. But now that

I'm open about it, I have a lot more opportunity." Gary explained, "My transition to college was very easy for me because I've been dealing with these disabilities my whole life, and I know how I work. I'm very disciplined and need to be as much as possible." The overall connection was that personal disability awareness eased the stress of transitioning.

Self-Determined Actions Support Independence in Transition

As another prominent theme, participants' comments revealed that self-determined actions support growth of independence. Whitney expressed:

> Spending my whole life learning the ins-and-outs of my "disability" has made me more aware of different paths to life. With college, it is manageable to want to do things when you want to do them because of the freedom that comes with college. I have more room to work with the brain that I have been blessed with than I did in high school.

Christi said, "I understood that my disability could make or break my grades, especially in college. The freedoms you are granted in college can also be negative if you do not handle them the correct way." Clarissa conveyed, "It made it easier because I knew somewhat of what I was getting into and knew if I needed anything, I knew people that could make it easier."

Setting Goals

Setting goals is an important part of self-determination, and many participants felt they could better understand how to set goals because they recognized their disability. Christi said:

> Yes, definitely. It has helped me in the aspect of knowing what I wanna do as far as a profession goes. I know I can't do anything that requires me to, you know, sit behind a desk or, you know, working eight to five, typing all day long. So I need to do something very hands-on.

Andre asserted, “I kind of set my goals as reasonable for me. Like being a teacher. I know that's not reasonable for me because I would not be able to teach because of things from my disability I have.” Stella stated, “Knowing what I wanna do in the future, my goals, knowing that it's going to be hard helps me decide better to try to do more things to try to get that goal. Ask for more help and try to figure out things for myself.” Sarah explained that she knows to set mini-goals for herself; she mentioned:

> Whenever I sit down and do schoolwork, I kind of set, like, a little mini goal. I gotta get this stuff done and this done, and then I’m good for the day. I think whenever it comes to homework setting little goals like that kind of helps.

Getting Support

Self-determined actions revealed themselves in that participants knew they needed support, knew how to get support, and used the support to learn. Christi’s answer depicted deep thinking on getting support; she said:

> I think everyone wants to be successful and have a good life and do well in school and in their extra accolades, but I think it's helped me become more vulnerable in the aspect of not necessarily being OK to ask for help or like just doing it off a whim, but knowing that I should ask for help just to ensure that I'm taking the correct steps to move forward in life.

Clarissa explained, “Well, I kind of like know that if I need help, I need ask for it because I just don't really always pick up on things.” Austin summed it up well:

> It made me believe that no matter how hard the task is, if you don't understand, there's always going to be a chance for you to ask for help for understanding, and once you deal

> with the same situation as before, you can relapse to the moment where you've been told what is it about and then you will use that to help your situations.

Planning

Self-determined actions also helped the participants plan for various aspects of their lives. Whitney planned around her disability, and she explained:

> Yeah, I would definitely say I take my disability into account more than half the time in making decisions. I would ask myself like, Do I study now, or do I study later? Well, you're ADHD, so you might not actually do it tomorrow. You might be prevented further, so I do take it into account a lot, especially with academics.

Stella stated, “I know there's certain things that like I can do to make it better, and I won't be struggling so much. Like if I read more and stuff, it helps like understanding everything, the more I read.” Gary claimed, “It's very important for me to be successful in order to do that, I have to have a very disciplined lifestyle. There's gotta be structure to the day, and I have to know what's going on. I have to move forward appropriately.” The participants knew how to consider their disabilities when making plans.

Desire for Personal Disability Awareness Earlier in Life

In discussing their personal disability awareness, many participants expressed a longing to have understood or learned about their disability earlier in life. Dorian shared:

> Yeah, high school. I feel like in high school, and even now, if I asked more questions, actually get the courage to speak to certain people one-on-one and ask more questions, it could have helped me out, and then I could have like got more help with it.

Clarissa said, “I guess when I first went to high school. Just because, just like the transition through junior high to high school and things were much faster pace.” Andre described his desire:

> Like back in elementary, my teachers would like push me off to the side and take me to like a different, smaller room, and I feel like that's like a little abandonment. Same with my grandparents and my mom. When I was a little, they didn't really acknowledge me to have a disability just like ohh, he's fine. He's just a kid.

Whitney shared something similar:

> But like knowing all that I know now, I wish I would have known that when I first had it, and I wish my parents would have known it too, and like my teachers and whatnot. So, cause like I've heard multiple times that, you know, like kids with disabilities, back when we were younger, we kind of just got cast to the side and put in a separate room. Like they thought that would just help our learning process go smoother, but it probably made it worse, in fact, because it's just making you think that you can't learn in a classroom, learn what everybody else's learning

The participants’ information conveyed that they would have had greater success earlier on if they had known more about their disabilities.

Engagement with People Increases Personal Disability Awareness

Throughout the different data collection, participants constantly referenced other people’s involvement in their lives. Participants mentioned parents and teachers encouraging them to understand their disability better and seek support. They mentioned how speaking to professors helped them appreciate the support their disability afforded them. Participants also talked about positive and negative interactions with peers that enlightened their personal disability awareness.

Adult Encouragement

Interactions with adults play an important role in developing personal disability awareness. Participants recognized the benefits adults played in helping them begin to understand their disability and to act in ways to help themselves. In speaking of a teacher, Clarissa said, “She kind of helped me throughout high school and everything, and she pulled me out and made sure I knew more and knew what I was doing and all of this other stuff. So, she helped me throughout high school.” For his transition program teacher, Malcolm shared, “Mrs. Stenson helped me with that, you know, to make me outgoing. She helped me through a lot.” Referencing his boss, Austin explained, “I was able to be upfront with the Owner about my disability, and together we work through any issue.” Stella mentioned:

> I've told our manager and both backups. Then we have a produce [manager], he's like a head of District. He was also telling me that he has like two sisters that have disabilities and I just have to work through it and ask for help whenever I need it.

Whitney saw all the support her parents gave her, and said:

> At home, my parents were always paying really a lot of attention to my grades. Both had my power schools, they got emails, they knew my classes and then we had 504 plan meetings, a lot with Miss Anderson. So they knew what was going on and what homework I was needing to be doing. So they were very attentive and that I had to come here and not have any of this on my side. And I have to figure it out.

Peer Interactions

Participants’ responses highlighted how interactions with peers improved their personal disability awareness. Both Stella and Andre expressed how their peers’ recognition of their speaking improperly impacted their personal disability awareness. Stella said:

> Well, when I work sometimes, I read something, and I'll say something different, and someone mentions it. Sometimes they'll help me break down the word and help me realize, like, I need to slow down and look at things and, like, try to break them down.

Andre shared:

> One of my disabilities is speech impediment. And I always get pointed out about it. And so, I actually get a little annoyed from it. I'm like, yes, I know that I said this. I didn't mean it, and I don't hear it. And they always asked me these questions. If I hear it, and I'm like, no, I don't. And they were like, well, you need to slow down, and it's kind of like you don't understand that. I just can't control it.

When discussing her experience with similar peers to her, Whitney said:

> I guess knowing that I wasn't so different from a lot of other people. I guess in high school, you're a little bit sheltered as to what the world it looks like in the perspective of somebody with a mental disability or anything like that. So, you didn't really, I guess we didn't really talk about it. I mean, it was addressed, and I definitely knew that my friends and other people in my classes had ADHD or ADD or other mental illnesses or whatever. But you know, once you get to college, you actually realize how many people struggle with the same things and what they do to cope with it and stuff.

Christi and Whitney viewed the focus group as helping them because they connected with others in common with them. Christi mentioned, “As far as this discussion, I've really enjoyed it. Just because it's open conversation and we share a lot of the same experiences.” Whitney added, “I think definitely talking about it with other people with similar disabilities at this age, at a younger age, it definitely helps you understand that it's not a tricky process; it's just a process you have to go through to help yourself." When making these comments, the participants used them in reference to learning more about themselves from their peer interactions.

Speaking to Professors

Participants' descriptions how either speaking to professors about their needs or developing connections with their professors shows an influence on their awareness. Gary said:

> The reason that I came to [my college] is because it's a very small school, and I have that one-on-one time with my professors. I knew that I wouldn't thrive in a, in a study hall with 300 other students, and I wanna be able to talk with my professor.

Clarissa spoke about an advisor and said, "Well, I had to talk to my advisor about setting up the disability stuff for disability requirements. My advisor is pretty cool and like easy-going, I guess, and it's like easy to talk to her." Dorian explained, "I would be able to go to my professors and tell them, and they'll be able to get me more help, so I'll be able to like get my work done and be able to like not fall behind."

Christi also claimed:

> As far as like professors, you have to let them know what's, like going on to be able to get the like accessibility that you need. So, I do get like PowerPoints outside of the classroom because I will not understand it the first time I see it. […] So that does help me. Just being able to read things multiple times and gaining a relationship with my professors to be able to get extra time on the test and being understanding.

Outlier Data and Findings

During the data collection, many participants referenced the need to take medication as a result of their disability. Gary talked about taking medication nine different times between his journal prompts and interview. Whitney referred to her medication 14 times during her interview, journal prompt, and focus group. Christi discussed taking medication in her journal prompt and six additional times in the focus group. Sarah mention taking medication in her journal prompts and 10 times in her interview. While medications are part of everyday life and can be used to alleviate problems with certain disabilities, medication does not necessarily relate to personal disability awareness or transitions. This makes it an outlier in the data.

Positives and Negatives of Medication

The participants' comments varied from understanding the benefits of taking medication to hating having to take medicines. Gary stated:

> When I'm not medicated, yeah, I'm impulsive. But I'm also like, there's this whole different like side of Gary that comes out, you know. And that I feel like a lot more comfortable with that side, but that side is not academically ready to go into class and listen and ready to be ready to engage and everything.

Whitney explained it as, "I was aware that I had a condition and a disability that needed to be like, managed or whatnot. […]. I like being aware of it, but yeah, medication sucked all these years." Sarah explained that she has been off her medicine for personal reasons, and that she continues to learn to cope without them. However, she did say, "I feel like I can control it better with the medicine that I did without it." Christi's feelings were more severely negative than the others. Christi said, "I mean, it's my life, and it is what it is. Now, I don't like it in the aspect of like medication because I've been taking it for so long, and like just thinking about pills makes me sick." She even said:

> I think there is like a like negative stigmatism behind medication. I take a lot of medications, just like besides my disabilities, for like other health issues. And I have like this bag. It's like a bag like this {gestures with hands for size} and say I go to like a

> friend's house, or I'm at a competition for something. And I like pull out my bag. It's a humongous bag full of medications, and everyone's, like, well, are you crazy? Like, why do you take so many medications? And I'm like. It's just, it sounds so bad just looking at it, but I don't have to explain myself to anyone so, but I do. I do think that there's like a apprehensiveness to, you know, take care of yourself in front of public people or like people that don't really know you personally.

Overall, the participants that mentioned medications had negative feelings about taking medication but understood they needed the positive effects.

Research Question Responses

This study focused on one central research question and three sub-questions. Each data collection method contributed to developing a better understanding of the questions. Additionally, overlap between the themes links the findings throughout the data as influencing the answers. This section provides concise answers to the research questions.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of postsecondary students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school? Throughout the different data collection methods, participants expressed feelings and ideals akin to people without disabilities as they transitioned from high school. Participants felt stress and nerves, but they found ways to get through their anxiety. Participants knew success depended on their efforts and applying themselves. However, participants also understood that their disability created different barriers in their lives, but their personal disability awareness helped them find the benefits beyond barriers. When asked about knowing her disability, Christi explained:

> People are always afraid to say something about it, but I think from the outside looking in if you can see someone’s successes, but you didn't know that they had like hardships going on, I feel like it's that much more gratifying, I would say just because you've had to overcome more than the average person. I think it really has helped my success just knowing like I did it even with bumps along the way.

Overall, a personal disability awareness helped participants find greater success in their transition as they worked diligently to build their own success.

Sub-Question One

How does a personal disability awareness connect to self-determination? A personal disability awareness has a direct connection to self-determination. Participants used phrases such as *work harder*, *go the extra mile*, or *managing it* to describe how they were determined to be successful. The greater the participants’ personal disability awareness, the more expressive that participant was in acting in a self-determined manner. Andre stated:

> I will have to think about like is this the right decision for me? I like have to double, triple, quadruple-check. Make sure this is what I really want to do. Because sometimes, like I said about my comprehension, I won't comprehend the situation. So, I always like triple-check the decision I make to make sure that's what I want to do.

Andre even explained how self-determined actions gave him access to being in college. He said, “If it wasn't for [coach], I had to, like, go up to her for tryouts. If it wasn't for [coach], I wouldn’t be here at [college] because I speaked up to her about my learning disability, and she says she can help me with that. And I really needed it.”

Sub-Question Two

What influence does a personal disability awareness have over transitions? Transitioning from high school and the concurrent changes are stressful for every student. Students with a disability face these stresses with extra strain from dealing with the transition and their disability. The anxiety of transitioning is lessened and more manageable for those students with a personal disability awareness. Stella exemplified it with this story:

> Well, so I've been working in Starbucks lately because they needed to help. And there is one girl there that does know that I get like anxiety attacks and like I panic about things. She lets me go like, sit in the back room and like, chill out with like a cup of water. She was like I got it from here. You're like, good to go chill out. It kinda is a benefit if you think about it some more. Knowing that someone knows like what's happening right now with me. And it kinda helps more, so I don't feel like too alone at work, and I've just got to deal with it myself.

Sub-Question Three

How does a personal disability awareness influence a student acting as a causal agent? Causal agents act with intention and power over their lives to achieve a desired outcome. For students with a disability, knowledge of their disability directly connects to being able to act with intention and power. They need an awareness of the disability to intently work through it, and they lose power over their lives if they do not have a personal disability awareness. Whitney related, “I think it's important to know now that we're older and having to do all of this kind of on our own at this point. So, knowing what we have and how to manage it is super important to being successful, I believe.” A personal disability awareness pushes students to act as causal agents toward personal success.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the study’s purpose to understand the transition experiences of postsecondary students with a personal disability awareness. The data collection methods of journal prompts, interviews, and a focus group provided the information for developing and describing themes. The themes connecting to the research questions were as follows: personal disability awareness influences emotions about disability, personal disability awareness increases understanding of self and needs, personal disability awareness eases transition, self-determined actions support independence in transition, desire for personal disability awareness earlier in life, and engagement with people increases personal disability awareness. Succinct answers to the research question and sub-questions were provided with descriptions of the participants' experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school. This chapter summarizes the thematic findings and discusses the interpretations of the findings. Next, I discuss implications for policy and practice, and I explain the theoretical and empirical implications of the research. Finally, I detail the limitations and delimitations of the study and conclude with recommendations for future research.

Discussion

I conducted this phenomenological study to discover the lived experiences of 10 people with a personal disability awareness still in their transition phase from high school. I wanted to understand their perspectives and understanding of the influence their personal disability awareness plays in transition and life. I used a transcendental study to highlight and describe the participants' perspectives on understanding and being aware of their own disability influencing their perceived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The causal agency theory (CAT) sets the theoretical framework for this study, and the CAT focuses on people acting with purpose to influence or cause things in their lives (Shogren et al., 2015). Students with disabilities (SWD) act with more causal agency when they act in self-determined ways, and self-determined actions increase when SWD have personal disability awareness. A central research question and three sub-questions guided this study; through coding and analysis of the data, six themes emerged: personal disability awareness influences emotions about disability, personal disability awareness increases understanding of self and needs, personal disability awareness eases transition, self-determined actions support independence in transition, desire for personal disability awareness earlier in life, and engagement with people increases personal disability awareness.

Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school. Data was collected from the participants through the use of journal prompts, interviews, and a focus group. Data from all collection methods were coded and analyzed using phenomenological reduction to properly focus on the six themes. Four of the six themes had accompanying sub-themes. Personal disability awareness influences emotions about disability had sub-themes of seeing disability as a gift and being frustrated with personal disability awareness yet seeing its benefits. Personal disability awareness increases understanding of self and needs, included knowledge of needs versus preferences and asking for help as sub-themes. Self-determined actions support independence in transition had three sub-themes: setting goals, getting support, and planning. Finally, engagement with people increases personal disability awareness having sub-themes of adult encouragement, peer interactions, and speaking to professors.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Because of the participants' openness to discussing their disability and accompanying struggles, the research had rich descriptions and in-depth data for the phenomenon. While the varying themes supplied information for the central research question and sub-questions, certain themes aligned more closely with specific sub-questions. The ability of participants to discuss their disability helped bring out the theme of personal disability awareness influencing emotions about their disability. Each participant had varying feelings about their disability, but they accumulated in overall acceptance and understanding. Their general acceptance was facilitated by their personal disability awareness, and those with a deeper awareness even moved passed acceptance into seeing their disability as a gift and realizing the benefits of their personal disability awareness provided them. The sub-themes of disability as a gift and frustrated yet seeing the benefits came out of this. While not every participant talked about their disability awareness as a gift, they all referenced some sort of benefit derived from their knowledge. The second theme to come from the analysis was personal disability awareness increases understanding of self and needs. Participants realized their awareness gave them a level of practicality when processing their disability. They realized their weaknesses and could allow their strengths to assuage their weaknesses. This brought out the sub-themes where participants could differentiate between their needs and preferences, and they understood how to ask for help. These two themes provided a good deal of insight into the first sub-question of finding the connection between a personal disability awareness and self-determination.

The next two themes contributed strongly to the second sub-question, where participants showed the influence a personal disability awareness has over transitions. The theme of personal disability awareness easing transition was straightforward. Participants' responses continually showed them using their awareness to comfort or support them as they transitioned. The information rested on the idea that they could handle the transition because they knew their disabilities. The first two themes built on the idea that personal disability awareness links to acting in a self-determined manner, and the fourth theme showed that self-determined actions support independence in transitions. As participants considered their awareness, they would act in self-determined ways to become more independent in their transition setting. The sub-themes of setting goals, getting support, and planning all revealed different areas where participants made independent, self-determined decisions.

The third sub-question asked how personal disability awareness influenced participants acting as causal agents in their lives, and the fifth and sixth themes closely supported the answer. Current knowledge of their disability sparked participants to look back over their schooling years and desire personal disability awareness earlier in life. This is a type of causal agency because they knew what did not work for them or what they wish had been different, so they work diligently now for continued success. The sixth theme of engagement with people increases personal disability awareness and also supported growth in acting as a causal agent. Adults—parents, teachers, professors, and peers—encouraging the participants, interacting with peers in positive and negative situations, and speaking to professors about their needs all showed participants acting as causal agents. Additionally, the initial acts supported participants to grow as causal agents. The following interpretations were derived from the study.

Instruction on Personal Disability Awareness. Participants consistently talked about the benefits they felt from having a personal disability awareness. However, the participants also felt they could have benefited from learning about their disability earlier in life and with more certainty. Participants looked back on their elementary and middle school grades and wished they had understood the problems they faced. They felt that knowledge then would have made those schooling years easier and less stressful. Some participants also acknowledged that their parents could have benefited from learning more about their child’s disability. Instruction on developing a personal disability awareness speaks to the inner desire for participants to better understand themselves and for them to feel more empowered with that knowledge.

Practice and Encouragement to Act as Causal Agent. To act as causal agents, participants considered their past actions to process how they should or would make future or current decisions. These responses recognized the benefit of practicing and receiving encouragement as a causal agent. Participants highlighted that acting with control in their lives and over their disability helped them feel more successful and determined to achieve success. When the participants acted as causal agents in setting goals, getting support, or planning, they found it easier to continue acting as causal agents. As causal agents, the participants more willingly interacted and learned from people in direct relation to their personal disability awareness. The encouragement from people when the participants acted in self-determined ways boosted confidence and reassured participants of their decisions.

Disability Acceptance. Research participants agreed to the benefit of accepting their disability and learning to accomplish their goals with their disability. They accepted the need to work harder, plan around their weaknesses, and receive support when necessary. Their acceptance fed into their personal disability awareness and made them more self-determined. For them, success was not just going to happen. They knew they had to work for it, so they would enjoy their success all the more because of their perseverance. Participants found that this perspective gave them comfort with their disability and authority over their lives. Their acceptance took power away from the limiting factors of their disabilities and gave it to them through personal disability awareness.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This study calls attention to the need for changes in both policy and practice for helping SWD transitions and develop a personal disability awareness. Considering that SWD have lower positive transition outcomes than their non-disabled peers and transition outcomes measure the success of special education services from high school (Kauffman et al., 2017), changes in policy and practice should be directed at the secondary and elementary education levels. Changes should also reflect an emphasis on developing a personal disability awareness since personal disability awareness influences self-determination, and self-determination increases positive transition outcomes (Hofer et al., 2021).

Implications for Policy

This study underscores implications for changes in educational policy. SWD post-secondary success rates are continually threatened by poor transition outcomes. While IDEA requires all high school SWD to have a transition plan, the policy does not include a focus on building and sustaining self-determination or a personal disability awareness (IDEA, 2004). If policy were to emphasize the importance of personal disability awareness and, as a direct result, self-determination, SWD could have more successful transitions. Through participants' information, this study explains that emphasis on personal disability awareness should begin at the elementary level and continue through secondary education. Special education policy could reflect the needed emphasis by including self-determination training as part of transition planning and requiring different levels of self-determination actions from students at different levels of education. Additionally, special education teacher training programs could include self-determination courses as part of their programs.

Implications for Practice

This study provided practical implications for parents and special education teachers. The implications focus on improving transition outcomes for SWD by building their personal disability awareness. Students want to be successful after they graduate high school, and success for SWD depends, in part, on what they do in regard to their disability. For SWD to recognize their disability and work on supporting it, they need direct intervention and instruction from the people over their lives during elementary and secondary education.

The first practical implication is for special education teachers and professionals to encourage development of a personal disability awareness. Educators and school psychologists need to discuss students’ disabilities with them and their parents. This needs to be an in-depth discussion that goes beyond a simple explanation at an IEP meeting, and it needs to be reoccurring year after year to ensure development of personal disability awareness. The student and parent need to understand the implications of the disability as they are in school and after they graduate. The participants all had a personal disability awareness, but those that seemed to have a greater awareness were the ones most comfortable and in control of their transition. Therefore, it makes practical sense to directly teach personal disability awareness.

The second practical implication is for parents to take an active role in building their children’s self-determination skills in preparation for transitioning. Many participants talked about parents being actively involved during their high school years and that their involvement helped them gain services in college as well. Yet, other participants mentioned wishing their parents had known more about their disability or helped them understand how better to work with their disability. These responses speak to the need for parents to not only support their child getting services but also teach how to make self-determined decisions regarding their disability. With more guidance from parents—and less control—students are more likely to step forward to advocate for their disability needs.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This study contributed theoretical and empirical implications to the field. The research findings support Wehmeyer’s (2004) causal agency theory (CAT) and the importance of acting with causal agency. The findings also expand on the literature and research regarding transition outcomes for SWD and the importance of a personal disability awareness.

Theoretical Implications

Wehmeyer (2004) and Shogren et al. (2015) formed and expanded the CAT to determine how SWD become self-determined individuals. The CAT calls specific attention to SWD acting as causal agents in their lives, influencing and controlling actions to achieve their goals. In developing volitional actions, agentic actions, and action-control beliefs, SWD can be highly motivated in making their own choices.

The findings from this study support the importance of SWD acting as causal agents. Participants saw their actions and choices as their own, and they regarded their decisions as influencing their lives. By acting as causal agents in self-determined ways, the participants felt more at ease with their disability, and they felt they could handle their transitions more readily. Their continued causal agency led the participants to advocate more readily. It also sparked the participants to have an inner, positive dialogue guiding them toward decisions designed to increase goal attainment.

This study adds to the CAT by incorporating personal disability awareness as an important part of being a causal agent. Personal disability awareness increases volitional action because people act to prevent their disabilities from taking away their opportunities. Personal disability awareness increases agentic action because SWD have a better understanding of themselves and, therefore, their obtainable goals. Personal disability awareness increases action-control beliefs because SWD acting with awareness believe their actions and choices consider their disability and still lead them towards success.

Empirical Implications

The shared experiences of the 10 participants confirmed research on self-determination and personal disability awareness, and they added new information to the research on personal disability awareness. Self-determination skills support SWD to become more independent after they graduate from high school (Hofer et al., 2021). Participants supported this by sharing their perspectives on becoming more independent as they made decisions guiding their lives. Additionally, Mazzotti et al.'s (2016) research were supported when participants explored how self-determination benefitted their transition and made it easier for them. The importance of self-determination should not be taken for granted, and this study demonstrated how SWD see and understand that self-determined actions guide them toward success.

This study also supported research on developing and utilizing a personal disability awareness. With increased understanding of disabilities and abilities, SWD make more informed decisions that adequately consider needed aspects (Chambless et al., 2019). Participants shared insight after insight that revealed their perception of making better decisions because they knew their disability. Furthermore, the participants with a higher perception of their personal disability awareness looked further ahead in making informed planning decisions, and this confirms Di Maggio et al.'s (2020) research. The connection between personal disability awareness and self-determination should not be ignored.

The analyzed data and findings contributed additional information to the research regarding personal disability awareness. As a revealed component of self-determination, personal disability awareness contributes to the quality of life for SWD (Wehmeyer, 2020a). With higher perceptions of personal disability awareness, participants could view life with the disability in a positive light. They did not devalue themselves because of their disability, but instead, they focused on their strengths and how their disability awareness helped them become more determined people. Even when their disability awareness caused frustration, no participant wished for their disability to disappear; their awareness increased their maturity in accepting the disability as part of their identity. As part of their identity, personal disability awareness became an intricate part of their work to become successful.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study investigated the influence of a personal disability awareness on transitions for SWD. Limitations, uncontrollable weaknesses, and delimitations, decisions to limit the study, were a part of the study. Limitations for this study include the number of participants, the higher number of participants in college and not working, and the problems with recruitment. The first limitation was the sample size of 10 participants. While the sample size consisted of equitable numbers of males and females, 10 is a small sample size. The sample size worked for this study and methodology, yet it offered a minimal take on the perspectives of SWD with a personal disability awareness. The higher number of participants in college versus those working also acted as a limitation. While SWD are less likely to obtain meaningful employment compared to their non-disabled peers, they are more likely to obtain meaningful employment than they are to enroll in and complete a college degree (Crocket et al., 2019). The fact that this study had a higher number of SWD in college and not just working was a limitation. The final limitation was problems with the recruitment process. Because the university's accessibility services department did not respond to emails and no student responded to the technical school's inquiry, I had to rely solely on snowball sampling and word-of-mouth. This limited the number of potential participants for the study.

Delimitations were set in place to confine the research within the necessary boundaries for the topic. In order to focus on SWD and their personal disability awareness, participants needed to have a disability and be able and willing to discuss it. Additionally, the disability could not have been a physical disability but needed to be cognitive in nature. The age range of 18-24 was a delimitation used to help ensure the participant still understood they were in the transition phase (Smith et al., 2021). These requirements worked to highlight personal disability awareness and remove people without disabilities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should look into better understanding and situating personal disability awareness within self-determination, the lives of SWD, and the impact on transitions. A phenomenological study into high school students' personal disability awareness would add important information to the validity of when personal disability awareness should be taught to SWD. Additionally, a study looking into the feelings high school SWD have toward their own disability is warranted. This could show the comfort level high school students have with their disability and the impact on developing a personal disability awareness.

This study's low number of participants and higher population of college students versus workers are limitations that recommend further research. Research conducted with a large variety of universities could bring in more SWD that recognize their personal disability awareness and expand on the current study. Expanded research to bring in more SWD not in college could highlight any disparities in personal disability awareness from post-secondary education students and those in employment.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of students with a personal disability awareness as they transition from high school. The study used 10 participants to unveil information on one central research question and three sub-questions. The 10 participants provided information through journal prompts, interviews, and a focus group. After analyzing the collected data, six themes were created: personal disability awareness influences emotions about disability, personal disability awareness increases understanding of self and needs, personal disability awareness eases transition, self-determined actions support independence in transition, desire for personal disability awareness earlier in life, and engagement with people increases personal disability awareness. The themes contributed to the implications of SWD valuing and benefiting from developing a personal disability awareness. The information also showed that a stronger personal disability awareness increases causal agency and improves the chances of positive transition outcomes for SWD. SWD need more opportunities for increasing positive transition outcomes, and developing a personal disability awareness as part of self-determination works to do just that. School systems and special education teachers could benefit from incorporating self-determination training into their transition plans and by having their SWD focus on developing their personal disability awareness.

References

Accardo, A. L., Bean, K., Cook, B., Gillies, A., Edgington, R., Kuder, S. J., & Bomgardner, E. M. (2019). College access, success and equity for students on the autism spectrum. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *49*(12), 4877-4890. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-04205-8

Alsuhaibani, A. S., Evmenova, A. S., Graff, H. J., & Duke, J. M. (2021). Arabic version of the arc's self-determination scale for Saudi female adolescents with intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, and multiple disabilities. *The Journal of International Special Needs Education*, *24*(1), 36. https://doi.org/10.9782/JISNE-D-19-00007

Alverson, C. Y., Lindstrom, L. E., & Hirano, K. A. (2019). High school to college: Transition experiences of young adults with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, *34*(1), 52–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088357615611880

Alverson, C. Y., & Yamamoto, S. H. (2019). Messages from former students and families: Analysis of statements from one state's post-school outcomes survey. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, *42*(4), 225–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143418814243

Bakken, J. P., & Obiakor, F. E. (Eds.). (2019). *Special education transition services for students with disabilities*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

Bason, L. (2020). The practice of person-centred planning within transition person-centred reviews for young people with SEND at post-16 transition: Gains, barriers and challenges. *Educational & Child Psychology*, *37*(2), 68–79.

Bekken, W. (2022). Negotiating embodied knowledge in the transition to adulthood: a social model of human rights. *Disability & Society*, *37*(2), 163–182. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1816902

Berg, L. A., Jirikowic, T., Haerling, K., & MacDonald, G. (2017). Navigating the hidden curriculum of higher education for postsecondary students with intellectual disabilities. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *71*(3), 7103100020p1-7103100020p9. https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2017.024703

Bridges, J. M., & Maxwell, G. M. (2015). Early college high schools: A proposed solution to secondary transition services. *Journal of Case Studies in Education*, *8*. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1110965&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Burke, K. M., Raley, S. K., Shogren, K. A., Hagiwara, M., Mumbardó-Adam, C., Uyanik, H., & Behrens, S. (2020). A meta-analysis of interventions to promote self-determination for students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, *41*(3), 176–188. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932518802274

Burke, K. M., Shogren, K. A., & Carlson, S. (2021). Examining types of goals set by transition-age students with intellectual disability. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, *44(*3), 135-147. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143420959055

Burke, K. M., Shogren, K. A., Raley, S. K., Wehmeyer, M. L., Antosh, A. A., & LaPlante, T. (2019). Implementing evidence-based practices to promote self-determination: Lessons learned from a state-wide implementation of the self-determined learning model of instruction. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, *54*(1), 18-29.

Cantley, P. L., & Martin, J. E. (2020). Teaching disability self-awareness and self-advocacy using the “Me! Lesson” materials. *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, *25*(1), 44–55.

Cavendish, W., Connor, D. J., Olander, L., & Hallaran, A. (2020). Preparing for their future: Perspectives of high school students with learning disabilities about transition planning. *Exceptionality: The Official Journal of the Division for Research of the Council for Exceptional Children*, *28*(5), 349-361. https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2019.1625777

Chambless, C. E., McCormick, S., Ipsen, C., Kurth, N., & Hall, J. (2019). Teaching self-determination to youth with disabilities: The ASPIRE model. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *51*(2), 199-210. https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-191038

Chao, P., Chou, Y., & Cheng, S. (2019). Self-determination and transition outcomes of youth with disabilities: Findings from the special needs education longitudinal study. *Advances in Neurodevelopmental Disorders*, *3*(2), 129-137. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41252-019-00105-1

Chen, L. J. (2019). Special education transition issues over the past 60 years: Social network analysis on web of science exploration. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *34*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1413805

Cheng, S., & Sin, K. F. (2018). Self-determination and integration among deaf or hard of hearing and hearing university students. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, *30*(6), 819-833. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-018-9622-0

Choiseul-Praslin, B., & McConnell, A. (2020). Increasing work skills for students with significant disabilities: A six-step model for transition worksite programs. *Career*

Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals, *43*(3), 180–186. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143419893363

Cmar, J. L. (2019). Effective self-determination practices for students with disabilities: Implications for students with visual impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, *113*(2), 114-128. https://doi.org/10.1177/0145482X19840454

Cmar, J. L., & Markoski, K. (2019). Promoting self-determination for students with visual impairments: A review of the literature. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness, 113(*2), 100–113. https://doi.org/10.1177/0145482X19839796

Collins, G., & Wolter, J. A. (2018). Facilitating postsecondary transition and promoting academic success through language/literacy-based self-determination strategies. *Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools*, *49*(2), 176-188. https://doi.org/10.1044/2017_LSHSS-17-0061

Creswell, J.W., & Poth, C.N., (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches.* (4th ed.). Sage.

Crockett, J. B., Billingsley, B., Boscardin, M. L., & Council for Exceptional Children. (2019). *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (Second Edition). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315226378

Cushing, L. S., Parker-Katz, M., Athamanah, L. S., Walte, S. A., & Pose, K. M. (2020). Transition trends associated with topic focus since 1990: A literature review. *Remedial and Special Education*, *41*(5), 271–283. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932519835926

Deakin, K., Moore, D. G., & Jahoda, A. (2018). Children and young people with down syndrome: Their awareness of down syndrome and developing self-perceptions. *Journal* *of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 31*(6), 1197-1208. https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12494

Dean, E. E., Kirby, A. V., Hagiwara, M., Shogren, K. A., Ersan, D. T., & Brown, S. (2021). Family role in the development of self-determination for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities: A scoping review. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 59*(4), 315-334. https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-59.4.315

Deci, E. L. & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. ProQuest Ebook Central. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu

Di Maggio, I., Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., & Nota, L. (2020). Self-determination and future goals in a sample of adults with intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 64*(1), 27-37. https://doi.org/10.1111/jir.12696

Didion, L., Toste, J. R., & Benz, S. A. (2020). Self-Determination to increase oral reading fluency performance: Pilot and replication single-case design studies. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 35*(4), 218-231. https://doi.org/10.1111/ldrp.12234

Didion, L., Toste, J. R., Benz, S. A., & Shogren, K. A. (2021). How are self-determination components taught to improve reading outcomes for elementary students with or at risk for learning disabilities? *Learning Disability Quarterly, 44*(4), 288-303. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948721989328

Dutta, A., Kundu, M. M., Johnson, E., Chan, F., Trainor, A., Blake, R., & Christy, R. (2016). Community conversations: Engaging stakeholders to improve employment-related transition services for youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 45*(1), 43-51. https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-160809

Erten, O. (2011). Facing challenges: Experiences of young women with disabilities attending a Canadian university. *Journal of Postsecondary Education & Disability*, *24*(2), 101–114. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=63618594&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Flowers, C., Test, D. W., Povenmire-Kirk, T. C., Diegelmann, K. M., Bunch-Crump, K. R., Kemp-Inman, A., & Goodnight, C. I. (2018). A demonstration model of interagency collaboration for students with disabilities: A multilevel approach. *The Journal of Special Education*, *51*(4), 211-221. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466917720764

Francis, G. L., Regester, A., & Reed, A. S. (2019). Barriers and supports to parent involvement and collaboration during transition to adulthood. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, *42*(4), 235–245. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143418813912

Francis, G. L., Stride, A., & Reed, S. (2018). Transition strategies and recommendations: Perspectives of parents of young adults with disabilities. *British Journal of Special Education*, *45*(3), 277–301. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/1467-8578.12232

Frazier, K. F., Perryman, K. L., & Kucharczyk, S. (2020). Transition services: Building successful collaborations among school professionals. *Journal of School-Based Counseling Policy and Evaluation*, *2*(2), 131–140.

Frielink, N., Schuengel, C., & Embregts, P. J. C. M. (2021). Evaluating the self-determination continuum towards seeking support among people with mild to borderline intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 65*(4), 348-360. https://doi.org/10.1111/jir.12819

Garrels, V., & Granlund, M. (2018). Measuring self-determination in Norwegian students: Adaptation and validation of the AIR self-determination scale. *European Journal of*

Special Needs Education, *33*(4), 466-480. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1342420

Garrels, V., & Palmer, S. B. (2020). Student-directed learning: A catalyst for academic achievement and self-determination for students with intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities, 24*(4), 459-473. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744629519840526

Gilley, D. P., Root, J. R., & Cox, S. K. (2021). Development of mathematics and self-determination skills for young adults with extensive support needs. *The Journal of Special Education*, *54*(4), 195-204. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466920902768

Giorgi, A. (2012). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 43*(1), 3-12. https://doi.org/10.1163/156916212X632934

Griffin, M. M., Fisher, M. H., Lane, L. A., & Morin, L. (2019). Responses to bullying among individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities: Support needs and self-determination. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 32*(6), 1514-1522. https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12646

Haber, M. G., Mazzotti, V. L., Mustian, A. L., Rowe, D. A., Bartholomew, A. L., Test, D. W., & Fowler, C. H. (2016). What works, when, for whom, and with whom: A meta-analytic review of predictors of postsecondary success for students with disabilities. *Review of Educational Research*, *86*(1), 123–162. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315583135

Hagiwara, M., Dean, E. E., & Shogren, K. A. (2019). The self-determined career design model: Supporting young people with developmental disabilities and their families in home and community settings. *Promoting social inclusion* (pp. 201-220). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-363620190000013016

Hagiwara, M., Shogren, K. A., & Turner, E. L. (2021). Examining perceptions toward self-determination of people with disabilities: A meta-synthesis. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-021-09823-8

Hatfield, M., Ciccarelli, M., Falkmer, T., & Falkmer, M. (2018). Factors related to successful transition planning for adolescents on the autism spectrum. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, *18*(1), 3–14. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/1471-3802.12388

Hennink, M. M., Kaiser, B. N., & Marconi, V. C. (2017). Code saturation versus meaning saturation: How many interviews are enough? *Qualitative Health Research*, *27*(4), 591–608. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316665344

Hirano, K.A., Rowe, D., Lindstrom, L., Chan, P. (2018). Systemic barriers to family involvement in transition planning for youth with disabilities: A qualitative metasynthesis. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 27*, 3440–3456. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1189-y

Hofer, G., Perry, N. E., Mykkanen, A., & Brenner, C. (2021). Youths' perceptions of how their self-determination was supported in alternative programs. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, *26*(1), 45-69. https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2020.1801440

Holzberg, D. G., Test, D. W., & Rusher, D. E. (2019). Self-advocacy instruction to teach high school seniors with mild disabilities to access accommodations in college. *Remedial and Special Education*, *40*(3), 166–176. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932517752059

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004). Public Law no. 108-446, 118 Stat. 2647 [Amending 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400 et seq.]

Johnson, D. R., Thurlow, M. L., Wu, Y.-C., LaVelle, J. M., & Davenport, E. C. (2020). IEP/Transition planning participation among students with the most significant cognitive disabilities: Findings from NLTS 2012. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, *43*(4), 226–239. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143420952050

Joshi, G. S., & Bouck, E. C. (2017). Examining postsecondary education predictors and participation for students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 50(*1), 3–13. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0022219415572894

Kauffman, J. M., Hallahan, D. P., & Pullen, P. C. (2017). *Handbook of special education* (Second edition.). Routledge.

Kode, K., & Council for Exceptional Children, A. V. (2002). *Elizabeth Farrell and the history of special education.* Council for Exceptional Children.

Kutscher, E. L., & Tuckwiller, E. D. (2019). Persistence in higher education for students with disabilities: A mixed systematic review. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *12*(2), 136-155. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000088

Lau, W. K., Ortega, K., & Sharkey, J. (2015). Disability awareness training with a group of adolescents with learning disabilities. *Contemporary School Psychology*, *19*(3), 145-156. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-014-0030-x

Laverty, S. M. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 2*(3), 21-35. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690300200303

Lee, S., Hong, J., Yeom, J., & Lee, J. (2019). Perceptions and experiences of self-determination of students and youth with intellectual disabilities in Korea. *Advances in Neurodevelopmental Disorders, 3*(2), 138-151. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41252-019-00099-w

Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., & Carafa, G. (2018). A systematic review of barriers and facilitators of disability disclosure and accommodations for youth in post-secondary education. *International Journal of Disability, Development & Education*, *65*(5), 526–556. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1080/1034912X.2018.1430352

Lindstrom, L., Hirano, K. A., Ingram, A., DeGarmo, D. S., & Post, C. (2019). "Learning to be myself": Paths 2 the future career development curriculum for young women with disabilities. *Journal of Career Development*, *46*(4), 469-483. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845318776795

Lingo, M. E., Williams-Diehm, K. L., Martin, J. E., & McConnell, A. E. (2018). Teaching transition self-determination knowledge and skills using the ME! Bell Ringers. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, *41*(3), 185–189. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143417753582

Litosseliti, L. (2003). *Using focus groups in research*. ProQuest Ebook Central https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu

Lopez, N. J., Uphold, N. M., Douglas, K. H., & Freeman-Green, S. (2020). Teaching high school students with disabilities to advocate for academic accommodations. *The Journal of Special Education*, *54(*3), 146–156. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466919892955

Luckner, J. L., Banerjee, R., Movahedazarhouligh, S., & Millen, K. (2020). A systematic review of replicative self-determination intervention studies. *The Journal of Special Education*, *54(*1), 29–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466919850188

Magnusson, E., & Marecek, J. (2015). Doing interview-based qualitative research: A learner's guide. *Cambridge University Press*. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107449893

Mansurnejad, Z., Malekpour, M., Ghamarani, A., & Yarmmohamadiyan, A. (2019). The effects of teaching self-determination skills on the externalizing behaviors of students with emotional behavioral disorders. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 24*(2), 196-203. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2019.1600247

Matson, J. L. (2019). *Handbook of intellectual disabilities: Integrating theory, research, and practice*. Springer.

Matta, C. (2021). Philosophical paradigms in qualitative research methods education: What is their pedagogical role? *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research.* https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2021.1958372

Mazzotti, V. L. (2018). What comes next? *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2018(160), 131-143. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20305

Mazzotti, V. L., Rowe, D. A., Sinclair, J., Poppen, M., Woods, W. E., & Shearer, M. L. (2016). Predictors of post-school success: A systematic review of NLTS2 secondary analyses. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals, 39*(4), 196–215. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143415588047

Mazzotti, V. L., Rowe, D. A., Wall, J. C., & Bradley, K. E. (2018). Increasing self-advocacy for secondary students with disabilities: Evaluating effects of ME. *Inclusion (Washington, D.C.), 6*(3), 194-207. https://doi.org/10.1352/2326-6988-6.3.194

McGahee, D. W., King-Sears, M. E., & Evmenova, A. S. (2021). High school students with learning disabilities: Requesting accommodations in Role-Play. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, *36*(2), 82-95. https://doi.org/10.1111/ldrp.12243

Mello, M. P., Burke, M. M., Taylor, J. L., Urbano, R., & Hodapp, R. M. (2021). Characteristics of students with disabilities who do and do not receive transition services. *The Journal of Special Education*, *54*(4), 251–259. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466920925437

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

Millen, K., Dorn, B., & Luckner, J. L. (2019). Friendships and self-determination among students who are deaf or hard of hearing. *American Annals of the Deaf (Washington, D.C. 1886)*, *163*(5), 576-595. https://doi.org/10.1353/aad.2019.0004

Molfenter, N., Hartman, E., Neugart, J., Swedeen, B., Webb, S., Roskowski, M., & Schlegelmilch, A. (2018). Harnessing the power of community conversations to improve transition outcomes for youth with IDD. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *28*(4), 216–228. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207317739406

Morán, M. L., Hagiwara, M., Raley, S. K., Alsaeed, A. H., Shogren, K. A., Qian, X., Gómez, L. E., & Alcedo, M. Á. (2020). Self-determination of students with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, *33*(6), 887-908. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-020-09779-1

Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (Second Edition). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412984287

Moriña, A., & Biagiotti, G. (2021). Academic success factors in university students with disabilities: A systematic review. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1940007

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412995658

Mueller, C. (2019). Adolescent understandings of disability labels and social stigma in school. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *32*(3), 263-281. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2019.1576940

Mumbardó-Adam, C., Vicente Sánchez, E., Simó-Pinatella, D., & Coma Roselló, T. (2020). Understanding practitioners' needs in supporting self-determination in people with intellectual disability. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, *51*(4), 341–351. https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000292

Newman, L. A., Garcia, E. B., Trainor, A. A., & Chong, M. (2021). National picture of the self-determination characteristics of secondary school English learners with disabilities. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals, 44*(4), 216-228. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143420982923

Newman, L. A., Madaus, J. W., & Javitz, H. S. (2016). Effect of transition planning on postsecondary support receipt by students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, *82*(4), 497-514. https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402915615884

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services [OSERS]. (2010). *Thirty-five years of progress in educating children with disabilities through IDEA.* U.S. Department of Education. http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/reports.html.

Oliver, M. (2013). The social model of disability: Thirty years on. *Disability & Society*, *28*(7), 1024-1026. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2013.818773

Osgood, R. L. (2008). *The history of special education: A struggle for equality in American public schools.* Praeger.

Parker-Katz, M. B., Cushing, L. S., & Athamanah, L. (2018). Fostering collaboration as transition specialists through community conversations. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *28*(4), 244–254. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207317739407

Petcu, S. D., Van Horn, M. L., & Shogren, K. A. (2017). Self-determination and the enrollment in and completion of postsecondary education for students with disabilities. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, *40*(4), 225-234. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143416670135

Plotner, A. J., Mazzotti, V. L., Rose, C. A., & Teasley, K. (2020). Perceptions of interagency collaboration: Relationships between secondary transition roles, communication, and collaboration. *Remedial and Special Education*, *41*(1), 28–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932518778029

Plotner, A. J., & Walters, C. B. (2022). Perceptions of district- and school-level special education leaders on guardianship and adult decision-making support. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 32*(4), 290-300. https://doi.org/10.1177/10442073211006395

Povenmire-Kirk, T., Diegelmann, K., Crump, K., Schnorr, C., Test, D., Flowers, C., & Aspel, N. (2015). Implementing CIRCLES: A new model for interagency collaboration in transition planning. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 42*(1), 51-65. https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-140723

Qian, X., Johnson, D. R., Smith, F. A., & Papay, C. K. (2018). Predictors associated with paid employment status of community and technical college students with intellectual disability. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 123*(4), 329-343. https://doi.org/10.1352/1944-7558-123.4.329

Raley, S. K., Mumbardó-Adam, C., Shogren, K. A., Simó-Pinatella, D., & Giné, C. (2018). Curricula to teach skills associated with self-determination: A review of existing research. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 53*(4), 353-362.

Raley, S. K., Shogren, K. A., Rifenbark, G. G., Lane, K. L., & Pace, J. R. (2021). The impact of the self-determined learning model of instruction on student self-determination in inclusive, secondary classrooms. *Remedial and Special Education, 42*(6), 363-373. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932520984842

Riesen, T., & Oertle, K. M. (2019). Developing work-based learning experiences for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities: A preliminary study of employers' perspectives. *Journal of Rehabilitation, 85*(2), 27-36. http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fdeveloping-work-based-learning-experiences%2Fdocview%2F2260410025%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085

Rowe, D. A., Mazzotti, V. L., Fowler, C. H., Test, D. W., Mitchell, V. J., Clark, K. A., Holzberg, D., Owens, T. L., Rusher, D., Seaman-Tullis, R. L., Gushanas, C. M., Castle, H., Chang, W.-H., Voggt, A., Kwiatek, S., & Dean, C. (2021). Updating the secondary transition research base: Evidence- and research-based practices in functional skills. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals, 44*(1), 28–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143420958674

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 61*, N.PAG. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (Second ed.). SAGE.

Saleh, M. C., Shaw, L., Malzer, V., & Podolec, M. (2019). Interagency collaboration in transition to adulthood: A mixed methods approach to identifying promising practices and processes in the NYS PROMISE project. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *51*(2), 183-198. https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-191037

Sanderson, K. A., Bumble, J. L., & Kuntz, E. M. (2020). Meeting the daily needs of adults with IDD: The importance of informal supports. In R. M. Hodapp & D. J. Fidler (Eds.), *International review of research in developmental disabilities.* (Vol. 58, pp. 51–105). Elsevier Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.irrdd.2020.07.002

Santos, Stephanie Bain De Los, Kupczynski, L., & Mundy, M. (2019). Determining academic success in students with disabilities in higher education. *International Journal of Higher Education*, *8*(2), 16. https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v8n2p16

Schillaci, R. S., Parker, C. E., Grigal, M., & Paiewonsky, M. (2021). College-based transition services' impact on self-determination for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 59*(4), 269-282. https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-59.4.269

Schwandt, T. A. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2 ed., pp. 189-213). SAGE Publishing.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, *22*(2), 63-75. https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201

Shogren, K. A., Burke, K. M., Anderson, M. H., Antosh, A. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., LaPlante, T., & Shaw, L. A. (2018a). Evaluating the differential impact of interventions to promote self-determination and goal attainment for transition-age youth with intellectual disability. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 43*(3), 165-180. https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796918779775

Shogren, K. A., Burke, K. M., Antosh, A., Wehmeyer, M. L., LaPlante, T., Shaw, L. A., & Raley, S. (2019a). Impact of the self-determined learning model of instruction on self-determination and goal attainment in adolescents with intellectual disability. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *30(*1), 22–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207318792178

Shogren, K. A., Lee, J., & Panko, P. (2017a). An examination of the relationship between postschool outcomes and autonomy, psychological empowerment, and self-realization. *The Journal of Special Education, 51*(2), 115-124. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466916683171

Shogren, K. A., Rifenbark, G. G., & Hagiwara, M. (2021). Self-determination assessment in adults with and without intellectual disability. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 59*(1), 55-69. https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-59.1.55

Shogren, K. A., Shaw, L. A., & Mumbardó-Adam, C. (2019b). The assessment of self-determination in Spanish and American adolescents: The self-determination inventory: Student report. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 57*(4), 274-288. https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-57.4.274

Shogren, K. A., Villarreal, M. G., Lang, K. M., & Seo, H. (2017b). Mediating role of self-determination constructs in explaining the relationship between school factors and postschool outcomes. *Exceptional Children, 83*(2), 165-180. https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402916660089

Shogren, K. A., & Ward, M. J. (2018). Promoting and enhancing self-determination to improve the post-school outcomes of people with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *48*(2), 187-196. https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-180935

Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., Martinis, J., & Blanck, P. D. (2018b). *Supported decision-making: Theory, research, and practice to enhance self-determination and quality of life*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108633314

Shogren, K. A., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2020). *Handbook of adolescent transition education for youth with disabilities, 2nd ed* (K. A. Shogren & M. L. Wehmeyer (Eds.)). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429198342

Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., Palmer, S. B., Forber-Pratt, A. J., Little, T. J., & Lopez, S. (2015). Causal agency theory: Reconceptualizing a functional model of self-determination. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 50*(3), 251-263.

Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., & Thompson, J. R. (2017c). Person-centered and student-directed planning. In M. L. Wehmeyer & K. A. Shogren (Eds.), *Handbook of research-based practices for educating students with intellectual disability.* (pp. 167–182). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

South, G., & Sunderland, N. (2022). Finding their place in the world: What can we learn from successful autists' accounts of their own lives? *Disability & Society*, *37*(2), 254-270. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1816903

Southward, J. D., & Davis, M. T. (2020). Summary of performance: Bridging the transition from high school to post-secondary education for students with SLD. *Preventing School Failure*, *64*(4), 316-325. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2020.1769012

Smith, M. J., Sherwood, K., Blajeski, S., Ross, B., Smith, J. D., Jordan, N., Dawalt, L., Bishop, L., & Atkins, M. S. (2021). Job interview and vocational outcomes among transition-age youth receiving special education pre-employment transition services. *Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities*, *59*(5), 405–421. https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-59.5.405

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement. (2018). Retrieved May 2, 2022, from https://gosa.georgia.gov/dashboards-data-report-card/data-dashboards/hs-grad-outcomes

Toste, J. R., Raley, S. K., Gross Toews, S., Shogren, K. A., & Coelho, G. (2021). "Eye opening and chaotic": Resilience and self-determination of secondary students with disabilities amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, *26*(2), 157-183. https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2021.1906248

Van Manen, M. (2014). Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4324/9781315422657

Vaucher, C., Cudré-Mauroux, A., & Piérart, G. (2021). Perceptions and understandings of self-determination in the context of relationships between people with intellectual disabilities and social care professionals. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, *67*(2), 121-130. https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2019.1623595

Warner, K., Hull, K., & Laughlin, M. (2015). The role of community in special education: A relational approach. *Interdisciplinary connections to special education: Important* *aspects to consider* (pp. 151-166). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0270-40132015000030A008

Wehmeyer, M. L. (2004). Beyond self-determination: Causal agency theory. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, *16*(4), 337-359. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-004-0691-x

Wehmeyer, M. L. (2020a). The importance of self-determination to the quality of life of people with intellectual disability: A perspective. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(19), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17197121

Wehmeyer, M. L. (2020b). Self-determination in adolescents and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, *33*(2), 81-85. https://doi.org/10.1097/YCO.0000000000000576

Wehmeyer, M. L. (2019). *Strengths-based approaches to educating all learners with disabilities: Beyond special education*. Teachers College Press.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Nota, L., Soresi, S., Shogren, K. A., Morningstar, M. E., Ferrari, L., Sgaramella, T. M., & DiMaggio, I. (2019). A crisis in career development: Life designing and implications for transition. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, *42*(3), 179-187. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143417750092

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Patton, J. R. (2017). *The praeger international handbook of special education.* Praeger, An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Shogren, K. A. (2020). Self-determination and autonomous motivation: Implications for students with intellectual, developmental, and specific learning disabilities. In A. J. Martin, R. A. Sperling, & K. J. Newton (Eds.), *Handbook of* *educational psychology and students with special needs.* (pp. 262–291). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Wehmeyer, M. L., Shogren, K. A., Little, T. D., & Lopez, S. J. (2017). *Development of self-determination through the life-course* (M. L. Wehmeyer, K. A. Shogren, T. D. Little, & S. J. Lopez (Eds.)). Springer Science + Business Media. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1042-6

Wehmeyer, M. L., Shogren, K. A., & Thompson, J. R. (2018). Self-Determination and adult transitions and supports. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 2018*(160), 53-62. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20299

Will, M. (1984). *OSERS programming for the transition of youth with disabilities: Bridges from school to working life*. Washington, DC, U. S. Department of Education.

Williams, E. N., & Morrow, S. L. (2009). Achieving trustworthiness in qualitative research: A pan-paradigmatic perspective. *Psychotherapy Research*, *19*(4-5), 576-582. https://doi.org/10.1080/10503300802702113

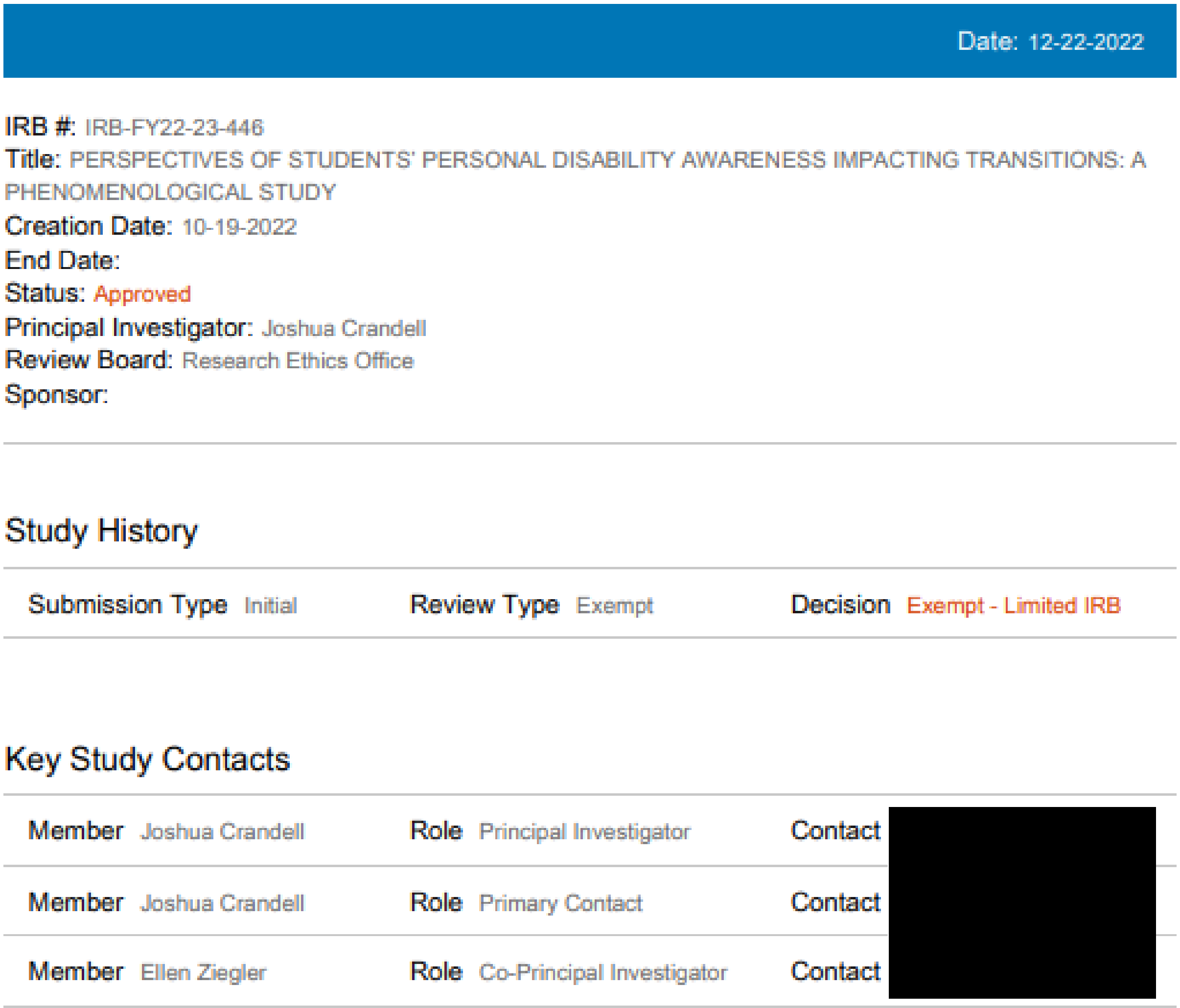
White, K., Flanagan, T. D., & Nadig, A. (2018). Examining the relationship between self-determination and quality of life in young adults with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities, 30*(6), 735-754. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-018-9616-y

Yang, L., Chiu, H., Sin, K., & Lui, M. (2022). The effects of school support on school engagement with self-determination as a mediator in students with special needs. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education, 69*(2), 399-414. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2020.1719046

Zirkus, K. J., & Morgan, J. J. (2020). Enhancing self-determination skills for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 55*(4), 238-244. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451219855743

Appendix A

IRB Approval



Date: 12-22-2022

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-446
Title: PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS' PERSONAL DISABILITY AWARENESS IMPACTING TRANSITIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
Creation Date: 10-19-2022
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Joshua Crandell
Review Board: Research Ethics Office
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial
Review Type Exempt
Decision Exempt - Limited IRB

Key Study Contacts

Member	Joshua Crandell	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	[redacted]
Member	Joshua Crandell	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	[redacted]
Member	Ellen Ziegler	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	[redacted]

Appendix B

Institution Permission Request

September 10, 2022

West Georgia Technical College
401 Adamson Square
Carrollton, GA 30117

Dear Tangie Key,

As a graduate student in the Department of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is "Perspectives of Students' Personal Disability Awareness Impacting Transitions: A Phenomenological Study," and the purpose of my research is to describe the lived experiences of students with an awareness of their cognitive disabilities as they transition from high school.

I am writing to request your permission either to contact students at your college who are receiving accommodations through your accessibility services to invite them to participate in my research study, or that you might forward my attached recruitment letter on my behalf to your students who are receiving accommodations, seeking their permission to be included in my research.

Participants will be asked to complete the attached screening survey to determine eligibility, complete three journal prompts, take part in a 1-on-1 interview, and potentially participate in a focus group. The focus group will need 6-10 participants, so participation in the focus group will depend on the availability of participant and need. Participants will be presented with consent information prior to participating. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to [redacted] indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Joshua S Crandell
Doctoral Student at Liberty University

Institution Permission Response

Permission Response

January 4, 2023

Joshua Crandell
Doctoral Student
Liberty University
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Dear Joshua Crandell:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled "Perspectives of Students' Personal Disability Awareness Impacting Transitions: A Phenomenological Study," we have decided to grant you permission to contact our students and invite them to participate in your study

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

☒ We will not provide potential participant information to Joshua Crandell, but we agree to send his study information to students with accommodations description of potential participants on his behalf.

☒ We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Tangie Key
Accessibility Services Coordinator
West Georgia Technical College

Appendix C

Participant Consent and Recruitment Letter

Participant Consent

Title of the Project: Perspectives of Students’ Personal Disability Awareness Impacting Transitions: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Joshua Crandell, Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18-24, have graduated high school, and have a cognitive disability. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand how one’s awareness of a personal disability impacts transitions from high school. The study will look closely at your awareness of your disability and how it has influenced your transition.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Answer three journal prompts of about 15 minutes each.
2. Participate in a 1-hour, recorded interview with the researcher. The researcher will ask you questions about your awareness of your disability during your transition period.
3. Participate in a 1-hour focus group with other participants to discuss self-awareness in transitional periods. This will be recorded too.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are better understandings of their personal disability.

Benefits to society include encouraging educators to work closely with students in special education in understanding (physical/cognitive?) disabilities. This will help students advocate for themselves.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms—different names. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Joshua Crandell. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [redacted] or [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ellen Ziegler, at [redacted].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

____
Printed Subject Name

____
Signature & Date

Recruitment Email

Dear Student:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of students with an awareness of their (physical/cognitive?) disabilities as they transition from high school, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18-24, have graduated high school, have a cognitive disability, and be able to briefly explain the disability. Participants, if willing, will be asked to answer three journal prompts, participate in a 1-hour, recorded interview with the researcher, and potentially in a 1-hour focus group with other participants to discuss their self-awareness in transitional periods. The focus group will need 6-10 participants, so participation in the focus group will depend on the availability of participant and need Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please complete the attached screening survey (see below) and email it to me at [redacted]. Once it is completed, I will contact you to schedule an interview. Please provide a good contact email and/or phone number in the screening survey. Your information will remain confidential.

A consent document will be given to you at the time of your interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document beforehand.

Sincerely,

Joshua S Crandell
Doctoral Student at Liberty University
[redacted]

Appendix D

Screening Survey

Please provide your full name:

Please provide a good email or phone number for contacting you to schedule an interview:

Have you obtained your legal rights, and can legally consent to participate in this research?

Please briefly describe your disability.

Please briefly explain your transition from high school.

Appendix E

Journal Prompts

1. Please describe your cognitive personal disability in as much detail as possible. SQ1
2. Please describe your transition from high school to your current setting in as much detail as possible. SQ2
3. Please describe how you think your disability self-awareness influenced your transition from high school. SQ2, SQ3

Appendix F

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your experience in [your postsecondary setting] since graduating from high school. CRQ
2. Please describe your individual disability. SQ1
3. Please describe a situation where being aware of your disability helped you. SQ1, SQ3
4. Please describe a situation where you wished you had known more about your disability. SQ1
5. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with knowing your disability that we have not discussed? SQ1
6. Please describe how your personal cognitive disability awareness influences where you are now in your transition. CRQ
7. What about knowing your disability helped you make the transition to [your setting]? SQ2
8. Please describe situations where you have used self-determination skills to advocate for your disability in [your setting]. SQ2, SQ3
9. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with your transition that we have not covered? SQ2
10. Please describe how knowing your disability influenced your actions and decision making. SQ3
11. Please describe how knowing your disability helped you feel empowered in acting and believing your actions influenced your goals. SQ3
12. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with learning about your disability that we haven’t discussed? SQ3

Appendix G

Focus Group Guiding Questions

1. Do you think understanding your own disability is important? CRQ (This is not an open-ended question, but it allows for the participants to ease into the group experience with an easy-to-answer opening question (Litosseliti, 2003)
2. What does everyone know and think about self-determination? SQ1
3. Please explain ways in which understanding your own disability is important to building self-determination. SQ1
4. What does everyone think about being aware of your own disability? SQ1
5. Describe how your own disability awareness influenced your transition. SQ2
6. How have interactions with others (family, friends, teachers, and strangers) helped you understand your own disability? SQ3