WORK-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

Jessy Logan Richard

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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2024

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Abstract

The purpose of this embedded single-case study was to understand how participation in work-based learning experiences (WBLE) prepares students with intellectual disabilities (ID) for successful post-school competitive employment. The theory guiding this study was Kolb's experiential learning theory, as it systematically explains the four stages of learning that learners go through during WBLE. This embedded single-case study investigated the experience of 12 work site supervisors supervising students with an ID while participating in WBLE at a restaurant and a hotel and one student who participated in the WBLE. Data were collected using individual interviews, document analysis, and focus groups. The data analysis methods included spreadsheet software, in-vivo coding, and the development of themes. The themes discovered in this study were: Connect the Pieces for Mutual Gain, Student Willingness to Participate Outweighs their Disabilities, Teamwork in a Controlled and Supportive Environment, and Students Deal Confidently with Undesirable Situations and Tasks. The themes suggest that implementing WBLE for students with ID must include profound collaboration. Students with disabilities (SWD) are incredibly complex, as are the work environments in which they participate. SWDs have medical conditions that require attention, learning differences that necessitate accommodation, and limitations that demand consideration. In prioritizing the students' vocational benefits and employability growth when implementing WBLE, all stakeholders profit from these extraordinary experiences.

Keywords: work-based learning, intellectual disabilities, post-school, competitive employment

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Dedication

This study is for my God to my brother.

Acknowledgments

Writing a dissertation requires years of work and perseverance. As a Junior High student, when my teachers or guidance counselor would talk about different careers, the discussion would include a brief description of the job duties for that particular career, the salary, and how many years of college that career required. I would often nod my head at the job description and salary but immediately dismiss a career requiring more than four years of college. Here I am now, finishing my 12th year of higher education. Completing this endeavor is due to my beloved family, my Savior, and my Lord. In addition, I would also like to extend a special word of gratitude to my chair, Dr. Farrell, for her continued words of wisdom and encouragement throughout this long, arduous project: thank you.

I am forever grateful to my *parents*, who allowed me to get into a car at 18 years old and drive 26 hours away to pursue my first degree and helped pay for that degree. My mother encouraged me to continue my education after my Bachelor's, then my Master's, then a Specialist's, and then this terminal Doctoral degree, though she and my dad stopped fitting the bill after the first degree. My dad has always had high expectations in all my endeavors because he understood what I could accomplish, even when I may not have understood.

My *brother* was my inspiration and my motivation to finish this study. Not because he encouraged me to do it or to keep on doing it but because of his experiences in special education programs. My brother hated school; I remember him hiding in the back of our vehicle in elementary school and crying when my mom found him because he did not want to attend school anymore. However, I remember my brother's eyes lighting up whenever he described an academic accomplishment. Most of these academic accomplishments occurred

outside the four walls of the classroom but instead happened in a work experience set up by his school. Now that my brother has found meaningful work as an adult, he loves to share his latest work activity with me, and I know that those early work experiences prepared him for his success in maintaining employment as a person with an intellectual disability.

My *wife* and *children* have patiently waited as I have been "almost done" too many times. My wife, Erica, listened to me with utmost interest (at least I perceived it as such) as I explained the perfect learning theory, the thoughts of the seminal authors on my topic, and the other mundane details of my study. Erica has extended me grace as I missed family dinners, get-togethers, birthdays, and many other events to complete this project; I love you. To Harvey, 4, Daphne, 3, and Quincy, 1, I wanted to finish this while you were young so I could cheer you on from the stands at every dance, game, and competition, though I did miss other events in the meantime; I love you all.

My *Lord* has sustained me throughout this process in a multiplicity of ways. Just when it appeared I hit a dead end, the Lord would make a path for me to push forward. There were times in this study when I did not think I would complete it for various circumstantial reasons, but God saw me through. His faithfulness to equip and sustain is steadfast for finishing a dissertation, a life of faithful service, and persevering to the grave. Lord, thank you for bringing everlasting life to these dry bones and equipping me to complete this light, momentary work.

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List of Abbreviations

Applied Studies Diploma (ASD)

Employment Organization Service (EOS)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Intellectual Disabilities (ID)

Practical Assessment Exploration System (PAES)

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

Students with Disabilities (SWD)

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)

Work-based Learning Experiences (WBLE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

People with intellectual disabilities (ID) face higher rates of victimization, sexual abuse, bullying, incarceration, and unemployment than those who do not have ID (Byrne, 2018; Codina et al., 2020; Griffin et al., 2019; Tipton-Fisler et al., 2018). Yet, policymakers and government officials attempt to change these horrific realities year after year through policy and legislation with no success. These concerns are significant and serious, but this study aims to address the last item on that list, unemployment, not through policy or laws but through a proven classroom intervention: work-based learning experiences (WBLE).

When students with ID participate in WBLE, their employment outcomes are more favorable than when they do not (Cahill, 2016; OSERS, 2020; Oswald et al., 2017; Test et al., 2009). Therefore, in this qualitative study, I seek to understand how participation in work-based learning experiences prepares students with intellectual disabilities for successful post-school competitive employment. Furthermore, in this chapter, I describe the historical, social, and theoretical context of WBLE for students with ID. In addition, I provide pertinent background information for this study, the problem and purpose statements, and the research questions.

Background

Education, employment, and value are tightly related. To educate a person is to attribute intrinsic value to that person. If someone is deemed unworthy of education, they are not valued. In addition, a lack of educational attainment leads to a lack of employment (Thompson, 2017). The unemployment experienced due to a lack of educational attainment seems to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The persons that educators undervalue do not continue attaining education and, therefore, do not obtain employment, thus pointing to their lack of value as contributing

members of society. This phenomenon starts with the person not being valued in the first place. The world has undervalued people with disabilities for millennia. Throughout history, this population has been marginalized, sterilized, and victimized (Barton-Hanson, 2015; Codina et al., 2020; Ndlovu, 2016).

Devaluing of people with ID has resulted in many societal woes, but one of the greatest is this population's unemployment rate. To track this data, the United States government requires every school to report annually on the post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. One outcome is the competitive employment rate (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Unfortunately, many schools do not meet the standard set by the federal government for the percentage of students with disabilities who are employed, as measured by Indicator 14: Post-School Outcomes (National Post-school Outcomes Center, 2020). SWD consistently have poor postschool employment rates compared to their peers without disabilities (Prince et al., 2018; Sannicandro et al., 2018; Theobald et al., 2019).

The 2017 aggregated national data from Indicator 14 revealed that only 37 states met their target percentage for students either competitively employed or attending higher education (Office of Special Education Programs, 2019). For a specific state example, Virginia's 2020-2021 report on Indicator 14 showed that out of the 109 school divisions that reported on Indicator 14, only 62 attained greater than 65.5% of students with disabilities who were either employed or attended higher education one year after high school (Office of Instructional Services, 2022). Taking the number of school divisions that met the minimum mark (62) and dividing by the total number (109) of participating school divisions equates to a little over 50% of school divisions that met the minimum mark set by the state.

Students with disabilities exiting high schools in Virginia and across the United States are attaining employment at unacceptably low marks. The unemployment problem that students with disabilities, including ID, face points to this population's miseducation and overall devaluing. In this case study, I seek to find key elements that elevate WBLE over other pedagogical strategies to increase the employability of people with ID, which ultimately attributes intrinsic value to them.

Historical Context

People with disabilities have been mistreated in the United States and worldwide. The eugenics movement in the 19th century displays this devaluation of people with disabilities. The philosophy behind the eugenic movement was that specific populations diluted the gene pool and required elimination from the gene pool. Unfortunately, this "necessary elimination" resulted in forced sterilizations and genocide (Nourse, 2016). The eugenic movement remains infamously associated with how the Nazis utilized this practice in their genocidal efforts during World War II. However, the United States employed eugenics before the Nazis (Grodin et al., 2018). At first, the United States attempted to control the spread of "defective" genes by putting "feeble-minded" people into asylums. In 1923, nearly 43,000 such institutions existed across the United States (Frost, 2017). Like any institution that houses, feeds, and cares for people, the operation is expensive.

Therefore, states began to explore other avenues of controlling "defective genes": forced sterilization (Laughlin, 1926). In 1927, the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Commonwealth of Virginia's efforts to sterilize people with ID (*Buck v. Bell*, 1927). This case centered on a young woman, Carrie Buck. Buck's foster mother's nephew raped her at age 17. Following the subsequent pregnancy and birth of a child, Buck began a period of being

institutionalized at the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-Minded (Frost, 2017). The colony's superintendent, Dr. Albert Priddy, deemed Carrie Buck, her foster mother, and her daughter mentally deficient and sought to end “three generations of imbeciles” (*Buck v. Bell,* 1927, p. 207) through litigation and ultimately forced sterilization. In *Buck v. Bell* (1927), the Supreme Court ruled in favor of coerced sterilization in an eight-to-one decision.

Nearly 100 years later, Virginia launched a compensation program for individuals to apply for if they or a family member were affected by the Virginia Eugenical Sterilization Act (Eugenics Sterilization Compensation Program, 2017). However, it was not until 1975 that the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed (Guillermo et al., 2021). In 2004, this legislation became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) through a renaming and revamping campaign (IDEA, 2004). Before 1975, there was no guarantee that students with disabilities had access to free and appropriate public education. Within IDEA, when students with an IEP reach 16, they must have transition services written into their plan (IDEA, 2004). These transition services aim to foster success for SWD after high school graduation.

Transition services are critical to postsecondary success because they prepare SWD to move into the workforce after high school. In addition, transition services are necessary because SWD participate in the workforce at a percentage much lower than those who do not have a disability (Abidi & Sharma, 2014; Sannicandro et al., 2018). For example, according to Cornell University’s disability statistics website (2022), since 2008, the employment rate of people aged 21-64 who received only a high school diploma and had a cognitive disability had an average employment rate of 24.1% for the 12 years from 2008 to 2019. Since the middle of the 20th century, people with disabilities have gained more access to free public education, but their

participation in the workforce has not increased as one would anticipate with this increase in educational opportunities.

Social Context

Students with disabilities may ultimately shift from students to adults who are part of the workforce, but their disability does not disappear. The employment rate for workers with disabilities stays at a much lower rate than for those who do not have a disability (Sannicandro et al., 2018). This phenomenon exists for a variety of reasons. The most obvious is that people with disabilities have limitations and weaknesses that people without disabilities do not possess. Therefore, people without disabilities can do more jobs than those with disabilities.

Moreover, students with ID achieve employment at much lower rates than students with other disabilities (Domin et al., 2020; Rooney-Kron & Dymond, 2021; Sannicandro et al., 2018). To be eligible for specially designed instruction for an intellectual disability under IDEA, a student must have an IQ significantly lower than average and display adaptive behavior deficits (IDEA, 2004); this eligibility standard sets ID apart from any other disability categories. Significantly below-average IQ, adaptive behavior skills, and executive functioning result in lower unemployment (Tomaszewski et al., 2018). Students with ID, by definition, experience the first two deficits, and deficits in executive functioning are also prevalent in students with ID (McClain et al., 2022).

Moreover, people with disabilities, especially those with an ID, are ill-prepared to enter the workforce and be successful due to their lack of on-the-job training in the form of WBLE (Beyer et al., 2016). Likewise, only 17.9% of people with a disability were employed in 2020, representing an untapped workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Therefore, a substantial percentage of American citizens who are not working could be working if they were

better prepared during their high school career to enter the workforce upon graduation (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Theoretical Context

The literature explores the problem of employment outcomes for people with ID in several ways. First, critical disability theory is prevalent. This theory stems from the Marxist idea that socially constructed human power imbalances exist based on specific characteristics (Bailey & Mobley, 2019; Gillies, 2012; Matereke, 2020). These power imbalances ultimately lead to the majority oppressing the minority group to maintain their power (van de Weele, 2022). Critical theory identifies these systemic power imbalances and calls for them to be abolished and transformed by any means necessary (Crewe, 2021). In critical disability studies, the innate characteristic that creates a power imbalance is the person's disability. This unchangeable characteristic invites society to marginalize, discriminate, and justify less equitable outcomes for people with disabilities (Shakespeare, 2018). Critical disability theory effectively identifies problems found in society, but the solutions this theory provides are policy changes at the highest levels through angry activism (Shakespeare, 2108; van der Weele, 2022). These policy changes attempt, often to no avail, to overthrow power imbalances to create more equitable outcomes, including increasing employment for people with disabilities (Barnes, 2005).

Other theoretical ideas promote changes in minor units of society, and in this study, I will adopt that model for promoting employment for people with disabilities. Experiential learning theory, as synthesized by Kolb (1984), explains experiential learning theory as "a holistic, integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior" (p. 21). Kolb (1984) builds on the work of Piaget, Dewey, and Lewin in developing this comprehensive learning model (Atkinson & Murrell, 1988).

Kolb built upon the groundwork that Dewey started in recognizing experience's role in the learning process. Dewey's heavy influence is Charles Darwin's theory of evolution (Perricone, 2006; Popp, 2007). Dewey's definition of experience stems from adaptation and survival. Additionally, in Dewey's theory, survival depends on interactions with one's natural environment (Miettinen, 2000). When a problem arises in the natural environment, one must adapt and overcome the difficulties to survive. In this process of adapting and overcoming, learning occurs. If the animal, Dewey includes humans in this category, in these experiences, does not learn to overcome the problems, they do not survive. Therefore, in Dewey's view, a species that does not learn from its experiences does not survive. (Miettinen, 2000; Popp, 2007). Dewey was not known for espousing evolutionary beliefs, but his widely known educational philosophies come from an evolutionary standpoint. These evolutionary underpinnings carry over to Kolb's learning theory. Kolb believed that humans were the species that survived by learning and thus learned to survive (Kolb, 2014). Therefore, it is ironic that this theory underpins this study because people with ID are often deemed unteachable and the least likely to survive from an evolutionary standpoint.

Lewin had a broader scope in his studies and research; he conducted studies on group dynamics, created action research, and established training groups or t-groups (Seaman et al., 2017). Lewin's most outstanding contribution to Kolb's experiential learning theory is the learner's role in learning. Lewin argues that the subjective viewpoint of the learner heavily influences the learning process (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). The learner's subjective viewpoint phenomenon also countered the behaviorist thought of the day that the participant is exclusively subject to environmental factors.

Behaviorists see the participants acting like computers whose outputs depend solely on the inputs. Lewin's seminal contribution to Kolb's experiential learning theory is the idea of the autonomous learner who has preferences and experiences that influence the learning process. Kolb (2014) explains Lewin's primary influence on the theory to be the subjective experience each human brings to an experience. Furthermore, Kolb (2014) points out that in these experiences, Lewin likened feelings and thoughts to facts for consideration and observation.

Jean Piaget is the third theorist who laid the groundwork for Kolb's theory. Piaget most famously studied child development (Halpenny & Pettersen, 2014). He theorized that children go through different stages of development. The first stage, sensorimotor, is categorized by a shift from a neonatal state of reacting to the environment to interacting with the environment in a basic sensory-motor fashion. The second stage, preparation for and organization of concrete operations fits into two substages: preoperational and concrete operations.

Kolb's theory encourages learning, growth, and ultimately change at the minor level of society: the classroom. Kolb built upon the philosophical foundations of the educational pragmatists of the 20th century in developing his theory of learning (Kolb, 1984). Kolb's experiential learning theory is the guiding theory for this study.

Problem Statement

The problem is that students with ID are unemployed at higher rates than their peers with other disabilities (Domin et al., 2020; Mazzotti et al., 2021; Rooney-Kron & Dymond, 2021; Sannicandro et al., 2018). Under IDEA (2004), students with ID have an intelligence quotient (IQ) two standard deviations below the mean score of 100 and concurrently display deficits in adaptive behaviors that affect educational performance. Based on this definition, this population of students is susceptible to a whole host of adverse outcomes: victimization, unemployment,

bullying, and incarceration (Griffin et al., 2019; Tipton-Fisler et al., 2018). Therefore, this study explicitly considers the relatively low unemployment rate of students with ID compared to their peers with other disability types and how participation in WBLE affects employment outcomes for students with ID (Ineland et al., 2021; Kaya, 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this embedded single-case study is to understand how participation in WBLE prepares students with ID for post-school competitive employment. At this stage in the research, participation in WBLE will be generally defined as a learning experience in an actual or simulated work environment (Federal Partners in Transition, 2015).

Significance of the Study

For students with an ID, experience can be the difference between success in completing a task or failure. The task that faces every student upon graduating from high school is finding meaningful, competitive employment. Students with an ID face an uphill battle in gaining competitive employment compared to other SWD (Rooney-Kron & Dymond, 2021). Therefore, the theory most fitting to guide this study is experiential learning theory, as synthesized by Kolb (2014). In this theory, the educator is more of a guide to provide the right environment and experiences for students to learn autonomously.

In this study, educators organized and facilitated a WBLE site for students to attend, but students participated in the WBLE independently, other than those who needed support from an aide. Thus, the students owned the experience and their learning. These WBLE allowed the students to cement these learning experiences into the schema of their brain by going through all four steps of the learning cycle (Kolb, 2014). In this study, I will investigate, observe, and report

on these critical adventures that students with ID undertake for further insight into their unique experiences.

Schools nationwide are now encouraged and mandated to implement WBLE opportunities into the curriculum for all students (ESSA, 2015). However, when the highest levels of government legislate educational programs nationwide, the implementation can be shaky at best. Dubious implementation of government-pushed programs results because there is little to no rationale for *why* the initiative or program works. This case study aims to learn more about WBLE implementation in the educational programs of students with ID and how these programs affect overall employability. In addition, investigating and observing the implementation of this case of WBLE will help optimize other such programs for students with ID.

Furthermore, WBLE is increasingly popular throughout education, especially in higher education. However, Leary and Sherlock (2020) point out that this increase in popularity has come with a shift in traditional teaching roles. Instead of the teacher being at the center of the learning, the student is at the center (Leary & Sherlock, 2020). Student-centered learning is a crucial tenet of experiential learning theory. Kolb's experiential learning theory is one of the foundational theories for implementing internships and other forms of WBLE (Silva et al., 2018). Kolb's Theory has been implemented worldwide in WBLE for first-year medical students, undergraduate nursing experiences, pre-service teacher programs, and others (Fewster-Thuente & Batteson, 2018; Leary & Sherlock, 2020; Li et al., 2022; Sevimli-Celik, 2021). However, this study is significant because it seeks to build on and extend Kolb's experiential learning theory by observing the case of people with ID participating in WBLE.

In the literature on WBLE and SWD, many researchers have utilized qualitative methods to investigate WBLE and individuals with ID empirically. For example, Bonati and Dymond (2019) conducted a case study on SWD who participated in a service-learning experience at a food bank. Another phenomenological study by Oswald et al. (2017) sought to understand undergraduate students' experience in job-shadowing placements. The researchers utilized Kolb's experiential learning theory as one of the guiding theories for the study. In an additional case study, Meacham et al. (2017) observed the experiences of two individuals with ID in their workplace. Finally, Yin (2018) points out that case study research stands apart as the premier research method to understand complex people (individuals with ID) and programs (WBLE). Nevertheless, this case study is significant because it seeks to understand, in the words of the participants, how WBLE prepares individuals with ID for employment.

This study is significant for youth with disabilities because it aims to showcase their intrinsic value and experience in WBLE. The devaluing of people with disabilities is evident in the literature, and the struggle to obtain and maintain employment is apparent in labor participation data. For example, the most recent annual unemployment data from 2021 indicates that youth aged 20-24 with a disability have an unemployment rate double that of the same demographic without a disability (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). Therefore, this embedded single-case study will highlight the experiences of people with ID participating in WBLE and how it prepares them for postsecondary employment.

So, it is a proven intervention to increase employment outcomes for students with disabilities (Cahill, 2016; OSERS, 2020; Test et al., 2009). In addition to literature support, the United States government is also getting behind WBLE. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mentions three times that WBLE is a best practice for all students, not just students with

disabilities (ESSA, 2015). In addition, another piece of legislation, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2014), sought to invest funds into creating workforce activities for individuals with ID. Therefore, this study is significant because it will support the implementation of WBLE and increase the overall efficaciousness of the intervention for all involved.

Since passing these legislations, states have budgeted for work-based learning coordinators to facilitate staff professional development and regionally implement WBLE programs. For example, the Commonwealth of Virginia recently proposed doubling its budget for work-based learning coordinators, increasing from $1.1 million in 2019 to a suggested amount of $2.4 million for 2022 (VDOE, 2021). Many schools and divisions seek to implement these programs, but receiving insights into the experiences of stakeholders and students who directly participate in WBLE will elevate the programs and practices. Therefore, this study is significant because it will help to highlight and illuminate the key elements that help prepare individuals with ID to be successful in post-school competitive employment opportunities through the use of WBLE during high school.

Research Questions

This embedded single-case study aimed to understand how participation in WBLE prepares students with ID for post-school competitive employment. Yin (2018) points out that while reviewing the literature on a topic, one should not look for answers; instead, questions should arise from the literature. Therefore, upon review of the literature on individuals with ID and WBLE, the following central research question and sub-questions arose:

Central Research Question

How does participation in work-based learning experiences prepare students with intellectual disabilities for post-school employment?

Sub-Question One

How do employers and employment organization services that host students with intellectual disabilities for work-based learning experiences affect the work outcomes of the student participants?

Sub-Question Two

How do case managers affect the work-based learning experience for students with intellectual disabilities?

Sub-Question Three

How do students with intellectual disabilities progress through the experiential learning cycle when participating in work-based learning experiences?

Definitions

1. *Alternative diploma types or certificates* – A diploma or certificate that a student with an IEP receives upon exiting high school other than a standard diploma type or GED (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2020).
2. *Case manager* – The special education teacher who oversees a student's IEP, including the writing, implementing, and monitoring of that IEP (Bray & Russell, 2018).
3. *Competitive employment* – When a person maintains employment for at least 90 days, works at least 20 hours per week, and earns at least minimum wage (Wehman et al., 2015).
4. *Experiential learning theory* – A theory of learning that suggests learners go through a four-stage cycle of learning: concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation (Fewster-Thuente & Batteson, 2018).

5. *Indicator 14*: *Post-school outcomes* – A federal indicator that reports annually on the activities of SWD 1-year after their high school graduation (Vitelli, 2013).
6. *Individualized education program (IEP)* – This is an agreed-upon legal document that lays out a student's specialized education program that aligns with IDEA (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2020).
7. *Intellectual disability (ID)* – A disability manifested in significant deficits in cognitive processing and adaptive behaviors (Matson & Matson, 2015).
8. *Students with disabilities (SWD)* – Youths qualified to access special education services provided by a local education agency (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).
9. *Transition services* – Legal services required for all SWD age 16 and older that are results-oriented, focused on improving achievement, based on individual needs, strengths, preferences, and interests, and include instruction, related services, community experiences, and the development of postschool adult living objectives (Talapatra et al., 2019).
10. *Work-based learning experiences (WBLE)* – Experiences that connect classroom content to broader work and career environments (Federal Partners in Transition, 2015).

Summary

Despite concerted efforts through legislation and classroom interventions, people with ID maintain a much lower employment rate than any other disability category (Domin et al., 2020; Rooney-Kron & Dymond, 2021; Sannicandro et al., 2018). One intervention that has shown promise in predicting competitive postsecondary employment for individuals with ID is WBLE (Cahill, 2016; OSERS, 2020; Test et al., 2009). However, there is insufficient research on *why* WBLE prepares students with ID for competitive postsecondary employment. Therefore, the

purpose of this embedded single-case study is to understand how participation in WBLE prepares students with ID for post-school competitive employment. Understanding this case will help all stakeholders coordinating these WBLE to prioritize key aspects and deprioritize those that are not as essential. Ultimately, this study will help stakeholders create better WBLE and prepare students with ID to enter the workforce and attain competitive employment.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Many studies address work-based learning experiences (WBLE) and investigate students with intellectual disabilities (ID). However, hardly any studies examine students with ID who participate in WBLE. Therefore, this literature review overviews the recent literature on students with ID participating in WBLE. In addition, in this chapter, I analyze and situate Kolb's experiential learning theory as the guiding theoretical framework for this study (Kolb, 1984). First, the literature review will detail students with various disabilities, not just ID, and their employment outcomes. Then, the chapter investigates WBLE, competitive employment, and the perceptions of stakeholders involved in WBLE. Finally, this literature review will help guide this study by overviewing current literature about people with ID and WBLE.

Theoretical Framework

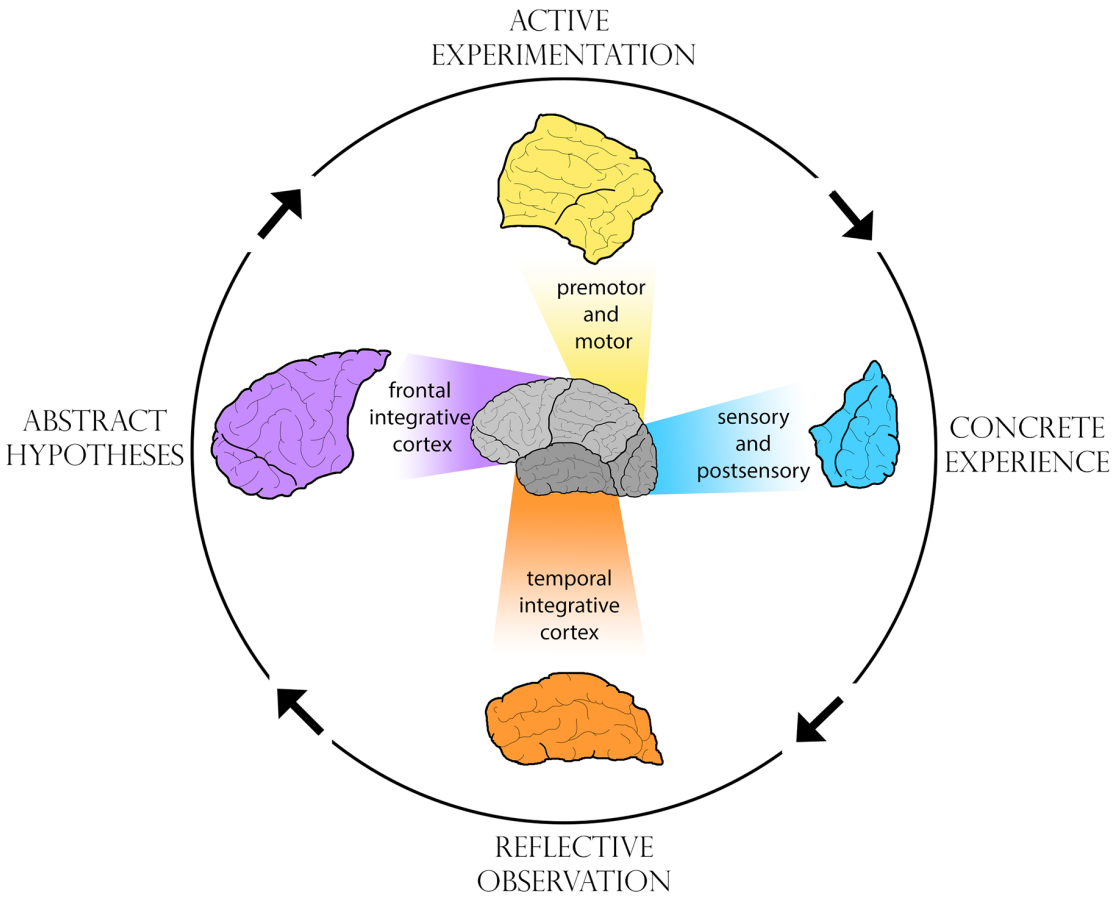
The theory that guides this study is experiential learning theory, as Kolb (1984) synthesized. Kolb explains experiential learning theory as a holistic approach to learning that centers on a person's unique life experiences (2014). This theory is a perfect framework to guide this study because it has been very influential in developing adult education programs and WBLE (White, 2005). All the cases analyzed in this study are adult learners working towards an alternative diploma type known in Virginia as the Applied Studies Diploma. Students with disabilities (SWD) working towards alternative diploma types can receive free, appropriate public education through the age of 22 (VDOE, 2016). Extended access to public education allows students to participate in programs that specifically address their transition from school to the world of work.

In addition to the prominence of experiential learning theory in the literature on WBLE, Zeivots (2016) points out the positive emotional highs are produced in people when they participate in experiential learning. When positive emotion connects to learning experiences, learning increases. When Kolb's experiential learning theory applies to the learning process, learners often feel a positive change and positive feelings and are more connected to their learning experiences. Therefore, the ideal framework to guide and support this study is Kolb's experiential learning theory because of its prominence in WBLE literature and its impact on the emotions of those participating.

Kolb incorporated ideas from Dewey, Piaget, and Lewin to formulate his experiential learning theory. In this theory, experience is a valuable learning tool. Kolb theorizes that experiential learning has four stages: active experimentation, concrete experiences, reflective observation, and abstract conceptualization (Moseley et al., 2020). For optimal learning to occur, one must proceed through all four learning cycle stages. In the first stage, the learner engages a new concept. In the second stage, the learner experiences this new concept concretely. Then, the learner reflects on the concrete experience with a peer or individually. Finally, the learner generalizes the newly learned concept to a novel, similar situation (Lantu et al., 2022).

Figure 1.

Four Stages of the Learning Cycle and the Four Brain Cortices



Adapted from *The Art of Changing the Brain: Enriching the Practice of Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning* by James E. Zull (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC) with permission of the publisher, Copyright © 2002, Stylus Publishing, LLC (Appendix F).

Zull (2002) connected the four learning cycle stages to the brain's four cortices. The sensory cortex is the center for concrete experiences. Thus, the concrete experiences that Kolb describes students undergoing start in the sensory cortex and move to the integrative cortex for the next step in the cycle. After this, the learner formulates reflections in the integrative cortex, where concrete experiences are reflected upon to continue the learning cycle. Shifting around the

profile of the brain clockwise, the learner conceptualizes the abstract in the frontal integrative cortex (Zull, 2002). In this stage of the learning process, the learner begins to take the learned concept, generalize it to other settings, and apply it to different situations. The cycle ends and starts again in the active experimentation center, the premotor and motor cortex of the brain. The learners test their new hypothesis formulated in the previous cortex through physical action (Kolb, 2014; Zull, 2002). The four stages of the learning cycle and the four brain cortices are connected. Each cortex synchronizes with a step in the learning cycle.

One example of Kolb's experiential learning theory implemented in a professional setting was in a study by Li et al. (2022). In this study, the researchers had undergraduate nursing students complete Kolb's experiential learning styles inventory before completing their internship. The nursing instructors then considered where students were on the experiential learning continuum and sought to provide individualized teaching strategies to accommodate where students were. At the end of the internship, students completed the learning styles inventory again to see where they grew or changed in their learning styles. Kolb's theory of learning applies to clinical and vocational settings that employ experiential learning experiences.

SWD, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), legislation granting special education for people with disabilities, are entitled to transition services, including experiential learning opportunities, starting at age 16 and ending when they are 22 (Riesen & Oertle, 2019). These transition services are a relatively new phenomenon that began in 1990 (Education of the Handicapped Act, 1990). The recent focus on providing SWD transition services has stemmed from SWD's poor competitive employment outcomes (Stapleton & Burkhauser, 2003). Therefore, the emphasis shifted to preparing this population of students to perform better in the workplace upon exiting school. One intervention that has proven successful

in this effort is WBLE, which finds its roots in Kolb's experiential learning theory (Carter et al., 2012; Dutta et al., 2008; Test et al., 2009). In addition to the support from the literature, many schools, universities, and training programs utilize internships and other forms of experiential learning to train and prepare students for competitive employment (Leary & Sherlock, 2020; Riesen & Oertle, 2019). Therefore, I intend to implement principles from Kolb's experiential learning theory and extend Kolb's experiential learning theory by observing and reporting on the experiences of individuals with disabilities who are engaged in WBLE.

Related Literature

Students with disabilities (SWD) comprise a large section of the education literature because they face learning difficulties that most students do not. These learning difficulties lead researchers and educator professionals to study best practices to implement with SWD to improve long-term outcomes through research-based interventions. Thus, this section will detail SWD and employment, WBLE, competitive employment, other predictors, perceptions of different stakeholders, and the impact of COVID-19 on WBLE and SWD.

Students with Disabilities and Employment Outcomes

Students with disabilities (SWD) who are found eligible for services under IDEA could fall under 13 different categories of disability: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Each category indicates a disability for which a student can be tested and found eligible. If a student is eligible, they can receive specially designed instruction to support their disability. These services do not provide an unfair advantage to these students; instead, they offer

appropriate modifications and accommodations to level the playing field with their non-disabled peers.

There is a wide disparity in employment outcomes between students with disabilities and those without disabilities. For example, students eligible to receive specially designed instruction for one of the 13 disability categories attain postschool-employment at lower rates than their non-disabled peers (Prince et al., 2018). Though there have been concerted efforts through federal and state policy initiatives, this trend does not seem to be getting better. In February 2023, the labor participation rate for people with a disability aged 16 to age 64 was 40.2%. The labor participation rate for same-aged people without a disability was 77.3% (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2023). These outcomes are even worse for students receiving services for an ID compared to any other disability category (Prince et al., 2018). In 2019, the employment rate for non-institutionalized people with a cognitive disability aged 21 to 64 was 30.5%, but the same-aged people with any disability type earned an employment rate of 39.2% (Institute on Employment and Disability, 2022). People with disabilities attain employment at lower rates than their non-disabled peers, and there are also disparities in employment rates between different disability categories.

Despite this stark reality of poor employment outcomes, some interventions are helping to increase the employability of SWD. The most efficacious interventions occur in K-12 schools: vocational education and specialized transition programs (Haber et al. 2016). In addition, since the best interventions occur during school, the time SWD spends in the public school system is critical in preparing them for post-school employment. In sum, despite the well-documented challenges SWD faces in gaining employment, there are interventions that educators can

implement to increase employability and promote overall postsecondary success for this exceptional group of students.

Intellectual Disability

Despite efforts to increase outcomes for SWD, disability categories widely vary in postsecondary outcomes. Students eligible for different disabilities have very different postsecondary employment outcomes. For example, persons with an ID are most likely to be unengaged in every significant post-school outcome (Grigal et al., 2011; Prince et al.,2018). Not only is this sub-group the least engaged, but they also earn less money when employed than any other disability category (Institute on Disability and Employment, 2022). Students eligible for the most severe disability category of ID consistently produce the worst employment outcomes of any disability type by a wide margin.

Work-based Learning Experiences

While there is research in the literature to suggest that postsecondary education, among other interventions, can increase employment for students with ID, the literature overwhelmingly and consistently points to WBLE as one of the best indicators of competitive postsecondary employment (Carter et al., 2012; Dutta et al., 2008; Rooney-Kron & Dymond, 2023; Test et al., 2009). Participation in WBLE builds work-related resilience, confidence, and maturity in the participants (Esters & Retallick, 2013; Kranzler et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2013). WBLE are experiences sponsored by local education agencies to expose students to work and connect curriculum from the classroom to work environments. Many types of WBLE are often already informally incorporated into classroom instruction (Federal Partners in Transition, 2015). However, each of the following WBLE takes effort and coordination from many stakeholders to be successful.

Service-learning

Service-learning is a WBLE where students provide a service or product to a community group to master academic content. Effective service-learning helps students better understand learning objectives associated with the content area (Lavery et al., 2017). Service-learning implementation follows a linear progression through four to five stages: investigation, preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration/evaluation (Chien, 2017; Kaye, 2010; Lavery et al., 2017). Devlin and Warner (2017) point out that service-learning honors the sanctity and value of each human life through serving others. Implementing service-learning in the classroom demonstrates the distinctly Christian value of service, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (*New American Standard Bible*, 1971/1995, Mark 10:45).

Serving is an incredibly potent intervention with SWD because they are most likely the party served at school and in the community. SWD are not only the service recipients but are federally mandated to receive service time as outlined in their IEP (IDEA, 2004). Therefore, a paradigm-shifting opportunity occurs when SWD participates in service-learning opportunities (Groves Scott, 2006). Instead of exclusively being served, SWD can assist other people in their community by providing a welcomed and needed contribution. Furthermore, Bonati and Dymond (2019) investigated the challenges in implementing an adequate service-learning opportunity for SWD. These researchers conducted a case study on three students with severe disabilities who participated in service-learning at a local food pantry. The researchers suggested barriers to addressing curricular goals in service-learning opportunities. These barriers included a lack of shared understanding about the learning goals for every student, a lack of support to communicate with students, and the shallowness of the reflection activities utilized.

Service-learning exists on a continuum with two extremes: service and learning (Furco, 1996). On one end of the spectrum, service is merely a volunteer experience where students are not made aware of learning outcomes; they simply serve to serve. The other extreme, learning, the opportunity looks more like vocational training where students are working on mastering a specific set of skills. Effective service-learning is situated between those two extremes, joyfully serving while cognizant of targeted learning objectives to master.

Community-based Instruction

Community-based instruction (CBI) is very similar to a field trip, except in the context of WBLE, the trips highlight different community environments intending to learn valuable community-related skills (Flanagan & Kutscher, 2021; Sacks, 2009). CBI does not require a partnership with a local business because an instructor could take students to a public community environment and provide instruction to students there. For example, CBI can occur at a public street crosswalk. Students can receive explicit instruction on properly looking both ways before crossing a public street. The assessment of learned skills occurs right on a public street corner, in a grocery store, or in other community environments. The skills taught during CBI align with a student's IEP goals that support independent living and employment success post-school.

Students with severe disabilities often display weakness in generalizing skills they learn in the classroom to a real-world setting (Hopkins and Dymond, 2020). Therefore, CBI allows students to learn how to shop for groceries, purchase a concert ticket, or eat at a restaurant in a safe, learner-friendly environment. Teachers often implement CBI because it is a normal part of the school's life skills program. Another reason teachers utilize CBI with students is that CBI explicitly instructs students on independent living and employment skills they will need upon exiting high school.

The literature describes situations where students with the most severe disabilities do not learn community-related skills when participating in CBI. However, to neglect students with the most severe disabilities, the opportunity to participate in CBI could violate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990). This subgroup of students may not learn community-related skills at the same rate as their peers with less severe disabilities, but participating in CBI does help to develop social skills from person-to-person interactions during CBI (Barczak, 2019). However, like all WBLE, a student's annual IEP and transition goals should drive the instruction while attending CBI and if attending CBI is appropriate. Hopkins and Dymond (2020) note, "educational achievement of priority goals is important for all students, regardless of the supports required to promote learning" (p. 444). Therefore, the severity of a student's disability and required support level should not exclude them from receiving instruction in WBLE, including CBI.

School-based Enterprises

School-based enterprises often go together with the CBI. For example, supplies are necessary to provide services, businesses, or manufacturing to the school and larger community. Therefore, teachers often supply school-based enterprises with trips to the grocery store or other discount stores to restock supplies. These trips to the grocery store and planned instruction to support IEP goals make for a superb CBI (Flanagan & Kutscher, 2021).

School-based enterprises are effective WBLE applications to mitigate the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19 because they occur inside school buildings (National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, 2022). School-based enterprises are services, businesses, or manufacturing conducted within the school building. Staying within the school building decreases students' exposure to people outside their daily schedule. Additionally,

school-based enterprises provide quality actual or simulated work environment experiences for SWD. The more comprehensive school community benefits from the products and services that the students provide in their efforts (Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, 2020). Like all other WBLE, IEP goals must drive the school-based enterprises' instruction and experiences.

A specific example of a school-based enterprise is named “The Café.” Special education teachers at a rural high school created a coffee joint within the school. The Café utilized an online system to place orders and interact with customers. Also, the teachers used visual support to help students successfully perform their jobs in this coffee enterprise. As a result, the students successfully provided their school with a service (refreshments) while learning the vocational skills necessary to gain employment after high school that aligned with their IEP goals (Fields and Demchak, 2019).

School-based enterprises provide an incredible opportunity for SWD to hone crucial skills to gain competitive employment after high school while mitigating COVID-19. For SWD, WBLE, including school-based enterprises, is the perfect intervention to implement into a student’s IEP to help prepare them to transition to post-school life (OSERS, 2020). In addition, school-based enterprises are often the most time-effective WBLE to implement because there are a limited number of community stakeholders to coordinate with, and students are not transported to a different location to participate (Fields and Demchak, 2019).

Job-shadowing

Job-shadowing is a unique WBLE because students can participate virtually, synchronously, or asynchronously. According to Smith and Fanning (2017), job-shadowing has the same goal as interviewing someone, but instead, the interviewer becomes a first-hand

observer of the interviewee's daily workflow. Likewise, the job-shadower becomes the employee's shadow for the day or longer. Like a shadow, the job-shadowing individual observes the employee's every move during the workday to understand better the duties and responsibilities required to perform that job well.

In a job-shadowing scenario, the student does not engage in the job's actual work but observes and reflects on the job's duties (Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, 2020). Job-shadowing is very valuable because it encourages people to enter that profession. When people experience a job firsthand, they are more likely to join that profession. Additionally, people often have misconceptions about a job. However, when they participate in job-shadowing, they develop a field experience-based definition of that job, negating false assumptions. Finally, job-shadowing produces an appreciation for the time management of the person they shadowed and the application of related course material they learned in the classroom (Oswald et al., 2017). The value of job-shadowing experiences applies to people without disabilities and implementations of job-shadowing experiences for SWD.

Internships

Internships are a form of WBLE that colleges, universities, and businesses have been implementing for years. Internships allow people to perform tasks and duties within a business or company. The primary purpose of internships is to, through experience, increase the interns' overall ability to gain employment in the future (Stewart et al., 2021). Furthermore, internships allow students to experience, firsthand, a specific company, career, or job for a set amount of time. These internships can be paid or unpaid, but in K-12 education, both arrangements require a partnership between the local education agency and employers.

Effective communication between school staff and local businesses is vital to a successful internship for students with disabilities (Severance & Starr, 2011). Additionally, internship organizers should provide all necessary accommodations to the students at the internship site. Also, the internship site may require some information about a student's disability to feel more comfortable with hosting an SWD. Finally, SWD can prepare to participate in an internship by role-playing and conducting mock interviews.

Despite the hard work required to implement a beneficial internship for SWD, these opportunities are invaluable for students. Students who engage in internships report meaningful experiences (Romualdez et al., 2020). Internships also help SWD develop and grow professionally by giving them opportunities they would not have otherwise experienced. In addition, an internship provides a support network for the student to succeed. This network of people helps students to learn from their mistakes, successes, and everything in between. Finally, upon completion of the internship experience, students begin to ambitiously plan for their future because they are not afraid of working a job (Romualdez et al., 2020). Internships are challenging, and students must know there are challenges to overcome, but a network of trained professionals supports them through these meaningful experiences.

Barriers to Competitive Employment

Another piece to this embedded case study is competitive employment for SWD. Competitive employment for individuals with disabilities is when they work at least 20 hours a week with nondisabled peers and make at or above minimum wage for 90 days (Southward & Kyzar, 2017). Competitive employment is a part of the indicator 14 data that must be collected annually as an accountability measure to mitigate the employment gap between individuals with disabilities and those without disabilities (IDEA, 2004). Despite these concerted efforts and

accountability measures, states consistently do not meet the minimum percentage set by the federal government on this measure (Office of Special Education Programs, 2019). However, this measure and the efforts to increase it are vitally important for people with disabilities.

Prejudice

There is a relationship between the employment rate of people with disabilities and disability prejudice in the United States (Friedman, 2020). Project Implicit collects prejudice data through volunteers who test their implicit bias using the Disability Attitudes Implicit Association Test (DA-IAT). This data collection tool measures prejudice against people with disabilities. In addition, this tool helps to quantify, compare, and predict prejudice against other variables. The United States state DA-IAT data and corresponding employment rate suggest that the higher a state's disability prejudice score, the lower the disability employment rate will be (Friedman, 2020; Kraus et al., 2018). This relationship between disability prejudice and disability employment rate proposes that prejudice does contribute to the employment rate of people with disabilities. Prejudice is another barrier SWD may face in their efforts to attain competitive employment.

Negative Attitudes

Negative attitudes toward people with disabilities affect their ability to gain employment at the same rate as those without disabilities (Ameri et al., 2018). For example, when employers choose between a candidate whose resume disclosed a disability and those who did not, employers are more likely to give more attention to the resume that did not disclose a disability. This phenomenon occurs when career counselors, agency recruiters, and human resource managers help to ensure that the resumes appear qualified and legitimate for the open positions (Ameri et al., 2018). As a result, some employers prefer individuals who do not reveal a

disability when applying for employment, which indicates negative attitudes, at a minimum, towards people with disabilities in the hiring process.

Like the rest of the world, Europe has a gap in employment between people with disabilities and the non-disabled (Vornholt et al., 2018). Moreover, in Europe and many other parts of the world, the working age is declining and is expected to continue decreasing in the coming years, which means fewer people are capable of working (Economic Research Service, 2022). Therefore, increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities will be vital to mitigate this decline in eligible workers. Contributing to this reality are negative attitudes co-workers, supervisors, employers, and customers harbor toward people with disabilities (Vornholt et al., 2018). In addition, employers hesitate to employ people with disabilities because of the accommodations and training some disabilities require (Bialik and Mhiri, 2022; Vornholt et al., 2018). Despite the growing need for people with disabilities to gain employment, they still face negative attitudes in their attempt to attain jobs.

For employers in the United States, opting not to hire a person with a disability because they do not want to accommodate their needs is considered illegal under the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). Employers also fear that the presence of an employee with a disability may stir up negative perceptions of the company among customers (Vornholt et al., 2018). Co-workers of people with disabilities feel that their disabled colleagues perform at a lower efficiency level and are less capable of accomplishing daily tasks. In addition, companies that utilize a hiring quota system to increase minority populations often see people with disabilities as hindrances. Negative perceptions and attitudes toward people with disabilities are barriers SWD must overcome in obtaining competitive employment.

Diversity and Technology Initiatives

Diversity and technology initiatives in hiring practices aim to aid people in overcoming systemic barriers to gaining employment. For example, a large retail organization in Australia intended to recruit and employ more individuals with disabilities, but their efforts produced the opposite result (Moore et al., 2018). To recruit more persons with disabilities, the retail company implemented web-based recruiting platforms to support people with disabilities in completing the application. However, the company found that people with ID struggled to navigate this new platform properly. Therefore, ironically, the company employed fewer people with ID.

Additionally, the company began employing technologies that automated tasks suitable for people with ID. These newly created machines replaced people with ID in the workplace because, thanks to these machines, the job required fewer workers. Like many other businesses, this big retail business began to emphasize workplace diversity within the company, but other diverse groups were deemed more efficient and gained priority over people with ID. The human resource trend of hiring diverse groups indicates a pessimistic future for competitive employment for people with ID. As company diversity initiatives increase, other minority subgroups attain employment over individuals with disabilities for efficiency purposes (Moore et al., 2018). Furthermore, innovations in automated technologies are another reason people with ID gain jobs at a lower rate than those without ID. In conclusion, technological innovations and diversity initiatives are two more barriers students with disabilities face in attaining competitive employment after high school.

Benefits of Competitive Employment

Competitive employment is challenging for people with intellectual disabilities to obtain and sustain (Helena et al., 2022). Moreover, internal forces and exterior barriers contribute to the

problem of obtaining and maintaining competitive employment for people with intellectual disabilities, but the benefits of work are worth overcoming all obstacles. God designed labor to bring purpose to all of humanity. Regardless of the job, work produces fulfillment and purpose for all participants. In addition, when people with intellectual disabilities engage in employment, mental health, physical health, happiness, and overall quality of life are more favorable than those who are not employed (Dean et al., 2018; Helliwell et al., 2022).

Employment Breeds Purpose

Employment is not just a benefit for economies; human productivity is sacred and helps bring purpose and pleasure to people with and without disabilities. The idea of calling and work is inherently moral with a fundamental level of spirituality. Martin Luther hinted at this idea in his work, arguing that there is no distinction between ordinary and spiritual life. Martin Luther observed in his era that priests, popes, monks, and bishops lived as if their "spiritual work" was elevated above every other vocation. Martin Luther vehemently denied this paradigm, pointing to the significance of every discipline.

Martin Luther argued from scripture that no distinction exists between the sacredness of a pastor's or priest's work and every layman's work. Each career is a sacred calling, not a secular endeavor (Jacobs et al., 1970). Martin Luther came to this conclusion from reading God's inspired word through the writings of Paul, Peter, and John (I Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 2, and Revelation 5). The idea of all work being sacred is not a natural conclusion surmised by wise men but instead an idea God ordained from the beginning of time. Therefore, everyday employment is a calling from God for those with a disability and those without a disability.

Furthermore, productivity and labor are gifts given to humankind by God to bring Him glory. Starting in Genesis chapter one, God engages in labor. In the opening chapter of the Bible,

God is working by creating everything that has ever existed, and this work necessitates a resting period of one day. Within a short time after God created Adam, the first human, God assigned Adam a task with the expectation to complete it: name the other created beasts. Since the opening chapters of the Bible and throughout the rest of the book, labor continues to be a mechanism for bringing God glory and being proper for humans to undertake.

God's Word never describes labor as something to be avoided or omitted from one's life. In fact, throughout this holy book, labor brings humans great purpose, which is lost when people neglect to participate in labor (Piper, 2003). Therefore, when anyone, especially those with intellectual disabilities, disengages from competitive employment, God-given purpose in life is lost. A loss of aim results from a deep-seated calling given by God to labor and produce. Competitive employment for people with intellectual disabilities creates a sense of purpose and usefulness (Voermans et al., 2021). In conclusion, purposelessness can result in depression, loss of confidence, and a lack of motivation to obtain employment in the future. Hence, the disparity in employment between people with a disability and people without a disability is not just a secular problem but also a sacred one teeming with purpose.

Employment Improves Quality of Life

People with intellectual disabilities face objective factors that promote satisfactory to unsatisfactory quality of life (Randall, 2022). Objective quality of life measures include physical, material, social, productive, emotional, and civic well-being. The physical domain consists of the individual's overall health, including morbidities. Liao et al. (2021) point out that people with ID face high morbidity rates in addition to their cognitive deficits. For instance, people with ID often live with severe health conditions and health problems such as sensory disorders, epilepsy,

chronic constipation, and metabolic and nutritional disorders. These physical factors contribute to a relatively low objective quality of life score.

Material well-being includes income, housing, and possessions. People with ID worldwide participate in the workforce at some of the lowest rates of any demographic. Therefore, they often accept lower wages for the same work that people without disabilities perform because of the lack of employment opportunities (Bialik & Mhiri, 2022). These lower wages result in lower yearly incomes for people with ID than those with normative cognitive ability. In addition to low income, people with ID are more likely to face homelessness than those without an ID (McKenzie et al., 2019). When a person lives in homelessness, they cannot accrue or maintain personal possessions like a person with a home would be able to. These objective material factors impact the low quality of life scores people with ID experience.

One's material possessions and physical health do not exclusively measure one's quality of life; a person's social life can also contribute to the quality of life. For people with ID, social skill deficits in receptive and expressive communication skills cause the social domain of quality of life to suffer (Jacob et al., 2022; Rose et al., 2021). The social quality of life domain suffers because friendships suffer. Acquiring friendships is a task that requires average to above-average social skills, and most people with ID lack the crucial social skills necessary to foster meaningful friendships. People with disabilities often self-report having friends, but many do not report having a best friend. When two people with an ID report being best friends, they also rate that friendship lower than when they report being best friends with a person without an ID (McCausland et al., 2021). Therefore, people with ID often lack not only the ability to garner meaningful friendships, but this demographic also struggles to be good friends to the friends that

they do have due to the deficits that they possess, which translates to a lower objective quality of life score.

Productivity is another contributing factor to a person's quality of life. Productivity is defined in the literature mainly by the amount of work an individual completes in a given period (Mcduff et al., 2019). Yet, when discussing people with ID, the literature often broadens this to include any contribution to society during a period (King et al., 2022). Researchers, mainly in the occupational therapist community, argue for a broader definition of productivity because people with ID perform poorly in the traditional definition of productivity. In addition, as people with ID age and more health problems develop, their relatively low productivity rate decreases (Schepens et al., 2019). The productivity rate is an objective measure to gauge a person's overall quality of life, and people with ID consistently score low in traditional definitions of productivity.

Despite the lower objective quality of life scores in almost every domain for people with ID, one intervention increases the subjective quality of life for this subgroup: competitive employment. Subjective well-being or quality of life is the person's self-reported satisfaction with their life (Randall et al., 2022). Thus, people with ID working with their non-disabled peers, earning at least minimum wage, report better quality of life scores than their peers who are not working or in other employment arrangements. Therefore, when people with ID are competitively employed, they maintain objectively low quality of life characteristics but enjoy a higher quality of life because they are more satisfied when competitively employed.

Other Predictors

The literature does not point to one single predictor of competitive postsecondary employment. However, there are many predictors found in the literature. For example,

attendance at a regular high school predicts competitive employment. The more students attend school, the more likely they will be employed after graduation (Wehman et al., 2015). Students who engaged in employment experiences in high school reported higher employment rates after graduation. After graduating from high school, students who attended a vocational or four-year university attained competitive employment at higher rates than those who did not. In addition to these other predictors, students with no arrest record achieved higher employment rates than those arrested. Finally, students with positive parental expectations for gaining employment after graduation reported higher employment rates than those with parents with negative or no parental expectations for working after graduation (Wehman et al., 2015). Of these five predictors, parental expectations for employment after high school and employment while in high school were the two most significant for post-school work. The parental expectation for employment after high school is a factor that is hard to control, but it can be encouraged. In contrast, schools can implement the controllable factor of employment experiences into students' academic programming.

Mazzotti et al. (2016) point to several factors that predict competitive employment for SWD in their analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study – 2 (NLTS2). The authors pointed to eight predictors (career awareness, high school diploma status, inclusion in general education, paid employment/work experience, self-care/independent living skills, social skills, vocational education, and work-study). In addition, parent expectations, youth autonomy, decision-making, and travel skills emerged as three new predictors. However, on top of these positive predictors, negative relationships between predictors and post-school outcomes exist (Chiang et al., 2013; Mazzotti et al., 2016). The literature on post-school outcomes covers both predictors of post-school employment and negatively correlated predictors of post-school

employment. Therefore, I will investigate both predictors and non-predictors of employment for SWD in this section.

Adaptive Skills

The adaptive skills of students with disabilities predict competitive postsecondary employment (Dell'Armo & Tassé, 2018). Increasing the adaptive abilities of students with an ID leads to competitive employment and participation in independent living and postsecondary education attendance. Adaptive skill instruction is included in a student's individualized education program (IEP) as deemed appropriate by the IEP team (IDEA, 2004). So, not only does increasing adaptive skills while students are in high school predict postsecondary employment, but employed people with disabilities display higher adaptive behavior scores than those not employed. Employed people with ID exhibit the highest adaptive behavior scores. In contrast, unemployed people with ID have the lowest adaptive behavior scores (Curtin et al., 2022). This phenomenon further indicates that the higher the adaptive skill level of students with ID, the more likely they are to be employed.

Self-Determination

Self-determination is the idea that individuals can make their own choices (Tomaszewski et al., 2022). Unfortunately, self-determination often does not come naturally to SWD because parents, special education teachers, and therapists make decisions for the student through necessity. In addition to these environmental factors, people with ID have significant deficits in executive functions, a frontal lobe function of the brain related to planning, decision making, organization, sustained attention, metacognition, and working memory, that result in them relying on others for decision-making (Faith et al., 2022; McGilchrist, 2019; Wright et al., 2022). Moreover, people with intellectual disabilities often rely on someone else to help them

communicate (Skarsaune & Hanisch, 2023). Communication difficulties also correlate to decreased autonomy and self-determination for SWD (Tomaszewski & Pugliese, 2022). This ongoing and consistent support to complete daily tasks and communicate can prevent individuals from making decisions. Though this may be a reality, one of the best ways to increase self-determination for people with disabilities is among the best predictors of many positive outcomes, especially employment (Ipsen et al., 2019; Mazzotti et al., 2021; Shogren & Shaw, 2017).

Students with disabilities who participate in self-determination activities display significantly better employment outcomes than those who do not engage in such activities (Ipsen et al., 2019). Self-determination is a proven predictor of SWD attaining employment after high school. Increasing self-determination of SWD is suggested to be the best predictor of positive postsecondary outcomes (Shogren et al., 2015). Self-determination predicts future employment, but it also indicates increased self-determination in the future. Therefore, self-determination positively correlates with post-school employment and often predicts employment for students with ID.

Participation in Career and Technical Education Courses

Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses teach students about a specific trade, field, or industry (Custable & Farmer, 2020). In addition, CTE courses teach students hard skills and essential soft skills that students can apply to various jobs (Tyson, 2020). When students with varying disability types participate in CTE courses, they are more likely to be employed after high school (Theobald et al., 2019). There is a positive correlation between the number of CTE courses students with disabilities took during their high school career and post-school

outcomes like employment. The more CTE courses SWD participate in, the more likely they will attain positive post-school results.

Furthermore, participation in CTE courses increases the chance that a student with a disability will graduate on time. In a 2018 study, Dougherty et al. concluded that SWD's opportunity to graduate is unaffected when participating in CTE courses in high school. However, students with disabilities who participate in CTE courses in high school are more likely to graduate on time. In addition, students participating in CTE courses are more likely to be employed when they graduate on time and display other positive postsecondary outcomes. Therefore, CTE course participation for students with ID predicts a better chance of gaining competitive employment after graduation and on-time graduation.

Socioeconomic Status

A student's socioeconomic status (SES) is an environmental factor that students cannot control. The SES of the student's guardian determines the SES of the student. However, despite this factor being out of the student's control, the student's socioeconomic status can predict competitive postsecondary employment. For example, Wagner et al. (2014) suggest that SWD with the lowest socioeconomic status are strongly and negatively associated with finding competitive employment after high school. SWDs with the lowest SES struggle to attain competitive employment after high school. This reality exists even when SWD experiencing poverty participate in vocational rehabilitative services to try and support their efforts to gain employment (Reims & Tophoven, 2021). Poverty and SES are factors that students cannot control, but these factors do affect employment outcomes for SWD.

However, two other factors could positively make up for a student's socioeconomic status and predict competitive employment: earning a high school diploma and working during

high school (Wagner et al., 2014). Therefore, high schools can implement other interventions into a student's academic programming to mediate the effects of low socioeconomic status on attaining employment after graduation. Namely, encouraging work experience during high school and ensuring that students graduate. Graduation and work experience during high school are two factors that can mitigate the effects of being born into poverty on the employment rate for SWD.

Grade Point Average: a Non-factor

A grade point average (GPA) is a cumulative score of a student's performance in their coursework. GPA is one of the baseline factors colleges and universities utilize as an objective measure to gain admittance to the institution, though there are better measures to predict college success (Wittman, 2022). For students with disabilities, there seems to be little to no correlation between a high GPA and future employment (McConnell et al., 2015). When SWD academically struggles in their classes, this can be evidence of an inappropriate placement; SWD is successful in courses where they are appropriately placed (IDEA, 2004). Therefore, this means that SWD should be successful in their classes, thus resulting in higher GPAs. So even though SWD complete modified coursework and assignments compared to their peers, they may have a higher GPA. Therefore, the above factors contribute to the non-relationship between GPA and future employment outcomes for SWD.

Postsecondary Education

Sannicandro et al. (2018) suggest that people with an ID who participate in post-secondary education are more likely to be employed than those who do not participate in postsecondary education. Furthermore, students with an ID who participate in postsecondary education earn more income than those who do not. In addition, postsecondary education is a

powerful predictor for decreasing SSI payments for people with ID. Overall, participation in postsecondary education should be a goal that students with ID strive for in their postsecondary endeavors to improve their outcomes after exiting high school.

Perceptions

Studying stakeholders' perceptions involved in WBLE arrangements to discover more insights into successful experiences for all involved is not new to the literature. In this section, I analyze the literature on the perceptions of teachers, employers, and transition experts. Teachers are critical stakeholders in WBLE because they organize, actively teach, chaperone, often provide transportation, and help ensure a good student experience (Rooney-Kron & Dymond, 2021). The partner employers play a massive role in WBLE as well. The partner employers must be willing to host the students and provide a safe and productive work experience environment for the students. The partnership between the school and the employers can make or break a WBLE for students (Riesen & Oertle, 2019). Finally, I will show that transition experts help to make WBLE an excellent tool for students with ID to enter the workforce prepared to succeed (Kittelman et al., 2020).

Teacher

Rooney-Kron and Dymond (2021) investigated teachers' perceptions of WBLE. They found that there are several barriers to providing quality WBLE: resources, opportunities, time, stakeholder support, and support for students. The researchers discovered these five themes applied to WBLE in the community and the school. A resource barrier for community WBLE was transportation. At the same time, staff availability was a resource barrier in the school and business partner community. Opportunity barriers in school manifested as a lack of CTE course offerings and school policies limited the number of WBLE placements for students in the

community. Stakeholder support barriers were the lack of businesses willing and able to participate in WBLE programs. Companies felt as though they were unable to host and properly support SWD.

In addition to these barriers, there were other barriers discovered. Some parents struggled to see value in WBLE participation for their students. The time it takes to plan and transport students to these worksites creates obstacles to successfully implementing such experiences. Finally, supporting students with significant physical or cognitive impairments was a barrier to providing WBLE. The teachers felt they could not adequately support students with severe needs while providing a quality learning experience. The researchers wanted to identify the barriers to delivering WBLE for SWD to help minimize or eliminate future impediments to positive WBLE.

A similar study in Saudi Arabia investigated teacher perceptions of a specific type of WBLE: community-based vocational instruction (CBVI). Almalky (2018) utilized surveys to collect and analyze special education teachers' thoughts on CBVI. First, special education teachers find CBVI to be a more profitable experience when a team develops the student's IEP together. Therefore, stakeholder buy-in and cooperation are vital in making WBLE successful. Next, special education teachers felt the most significant benefit of CBVI was that students who participated would maintain a job after exiting high school. Students exposed to work experience are more prepared to obtain and sustain competitive employment.

Almalky (2018) points to similar barriers to employment for people with disabilities. However, the greatest obstacle identified in this study was the lack of support from the administration. When educators do not feel supported by their leaders, any teacher-driven intervention will have trouble thriving. Administrator support can make or break a teacher's success in the classroom. This phenomenon often appears in the literature under other names,

such as a lack of stakeholder support. Overall, CBVI, a type of WBLE, is a crucial intervention to include in the educational programs of SWD, even though there are many barriers to a successful implementation.

Employers

Employers who agree to host SWD for WBLE take a risk by participating in this partnership. Often, these experiences are unpaid. So, there is not a substantial financial risk. However, SWD usually has medical concerns that can crop up at work. These medical concerns and reasonable and needed work accommodations can make the level of risk too high for businesses to partner with schools in providing a work-based learning environment. Therefore, it is a significant investment when any employer agrees to host SWD for WBLE because of the risk factors involved in hosting.

Just because businesses sign on to host an SWD for WBLE does not mean they run the program perfectly. Riesen and Oertle (2019) discovered that some workers at a partner site expressed a lack of understanding of the program's genesis. The site partner employees were unaware if a job coach, a parent, or someone else had set up the arrangement. Planning and communication are crucial to providing a successful experience for students. In addition, when discussing the benefits of having SWD as employees, one employer noted that he believed tax credits were associated with employing people with disabilities. There are both positive and negative misconceptions associated with hosting SWD.

However, some partner employers felt that these experiences helped SWD be more prepared for work (Riesen & Oertle, 2019). Some employers believe that hosting SWD for WBLE benefits business employees and students. It helps prepare the students to enter the workforce, and it helps build empathy and compassion within the employees. On the other hand,

employers express concern about the safety risks and work potential of the students who participate in these work experiences. In addition, SWD often requires more accommodations and is more likely to have significant medical needs; these realities can scare employers enough not to participate in such partnerships. Therefore, it is a substantial investment in the students' future when local businesses agree to host WBLE at their sites.

Transition Experts

Transition experts are another stakeholder group involved in WBLE. Transition personnel help students transition from high school to life after high school (Kittleman et al., 2020). Transition experts can include the following stakeholders: transition specialists, special education teachers, program supervisors or administrators, transition coordinators, job coaches, related service providers, career technical education teachers, and teaching assistants. Kittleman et al. (2020) asked transition experts to identify and report problem behaviors students display while at a WBLE. In addition, the transition personnel reported which instructional strategies addressed the common behavioral problems and identified necessary skills to support students during WBLE.

In conclusion, these perception studies all investigated the perspectives of different individuals involved in WBLE. Therefore, each stakeholder group agrees that WBLE is a successful intervention to increase SWD's competitive employment. However, an adequate investigation of student perceptions of WBLE does not appear in the literature. Therefore, research into student perceptions would be a worthwhile study to undergo.

COVID-19

When schools went on a two-week hiatus in March 2020 to flatten the curve, parents, students, and educators were oblivious that it would take nearly two years to return to normalcy

(Amidon et al., 2021; Gavin, 2020; Thunström et al., 2020). In those two years, all stakeholders in education embraced a new way of living life and a new way of doing education. Before March 2020, higher education institutions regularly utilized online or distance education practices. However, primary and secondary schools worldwide, before March 2020, predominantly used in-person instructional methods to teach students (Patston et al., 2021). During an uncertain and fearful time, learners, educators, parents, and guardians worldwide had to adopt a new way of learning: remote learning (Butnaru et al., 2021; Dindar et al., 2021). As a result, much of the world sacrificed education; many programs, including WBLE, were shut down, and parents became more concerned about their children's futures.

Education Sacrificed

Pandemic lockdowns are an extreme measure to mitigate an infectious disease's detrimental and exponential spread. Therefore, in an attempt to save lives, society made sacrifices worldwide. One of those sacrifices was the education of SWD (Capurso & Roy Boco, 2021; Sakarneh, 2021). Capurso and Roy Boco (2021) suggest that during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020, special education teachers in Italy relied heavily on parents/guardians to perform many essential student learning tasks. The authors point out that this was problematic for several reasons. One, parents are not equipped to educate their SWD appropriately. Two, parents felt unsupported by the school system in their efforts to educate their children during these shutdowns. (Capurso & Roy Boco, 2021).

Sakarneh (2021) also investigated the impact lockdowns had on families of SWD in Jordan. This author looked at five main areas of at-home learning these families experienced. Two of these areas specifically looked at elements related to the education of students: learning outcomes and quality of instruction. Included in these two areas were several concerning themes

communicated by parents. A few of the most concerning themes were that the participants felt the online learning platform was ineffective, that their children's schoolwork was incomplete, that content adaptations to their child's needs were lacking, and that their child was not learning from the instruction provided. Due to lockdowns, SWD relied heavily on their unequipped parents for their education. In addition, the materials and content delivered to the students seemed challenging to access, unadapted to student needs, and not presented ineffectively. All of this resulted in significant learning loss for SWD.

WBLE Shutdown

Not only was the online education provided to SWD during COVID-19 lockdowns a step down from their education before the lockdowns, but a proven evidenced-based practice was no longer possible: WBLE. Stewart et al. (2021) pointed out that internships worldwide shut down during the early stages of the 2020 lockdowns and continued for months to the detriment of the former participants. Students could no longer gain the experience they needed from being on a work site. In addition, the pandemic eliminated the social learning and interaction students enjoyed prior. WBLE provides many educational benefits to students, and when they could no longer attend, all stakeholders recognized how detrimental this was to the SWD who previously participated. Furthermore, during these shutdowns, parents, teachers, students, and other educational stakeholders began to feel the adverse effects on students and worry about the future of SWDs.

Parental Concern

During COVID-19, parents were concerned for their children in many ways. Asbury et al. (2021) studied how COVID lockdowns affected them and their children with disabilities. Many themes came to light through this study: anxiety, fear, stress, being overwhelmed, and confusion.

The study discussed other themes, but these five indicate parental concern for SWD. A prominent sub-theme in the study was the parental concern for their child's future. Parents voiced concern that neglect of social, educational, and emotional opportunities would negatively affect their children in the future. These experience losses impacted neurotypical students, but this phenomenon exaggeratedly affects SWD.

Another study by Kim et al. (2021) shows that parents of students with ID were concerned about their children's future. The authors of this study examined a group of children with ID in South Korea who could no longer attend a community center where they received many different services. The loss of this opportunity resulted in parents worrying about their children losing skills they were practicing at this center. This center offered invaluable vocational training to these people with ID, but that service halted due to COVID-19 lockdowns in South Korea. These WBLE shutdowns caused parents of people with disabilities to feel concerned about their children's future because the experiences were valuable to students in many ways. A relatively short time of not implementing WBLE showed how vital this one intervention is to the education of SWD. Therefore, it is even more critical to reimplement these WBLE for SWD to support a successful transition.

Summary

The literature suggests that students with ID do not attain competitive employment at the same rate as those with other disabilities (Grigal et al., 2011; Prince et al., 2018; Sannicandro et al., 2018). The literature also suggests that participation in WBLE often predicts successful competitive postsecondary employment (Cahill, 2016; OSERS, 2020; Oswald et al., 2017; Test et al., 2009). Researchers have studied the perceptions of many stakeholders involved in WBLE (Almalky, 2018; Asbury et al., 2021; Kittelman et al., 2020; Riesen and Oertle, 2019; Rooney-

Kron & Dymond, 2021). All stakeholders recognize the benefits of hosting SWD for WBLE but point to many barriers to having a successful WBLE for the employer and the SWD. Though stakeholder perceptions are covered extensively, the literature has not fully explored students with intellectual disabilities' perceptions of WBLE. These factors led to studying the perceptions of students with ID who participate in WBLE and how they believe it will affect their competitive employment after high school.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This embedded single-case study aims to understand how participation in work-based learning experiences (WBLE) prepares students with intellectual disabilities (ID) for post-school competitive employment. In this chapter, I detail the procedures for this study to ensure fidelity. In the subsections of this chapter, I detail the research design, the research questions, the site, and the participants. Finally, to close the chapter, I describe the measures utilized to ensure trustworthiness and ethical conduct throughout this study.

Research Design

The embedded single-case study approach is appropriate for this research study because it seeks to answer "how" and "why" questions about a particular program through the participants' experiences in the real world (Yin, 2018). Specifically, *embedded* single-case studies involve subunits of the original case. In this study, the original case was WBLE, and the subunits of analysis were two locations where WBLE occurs. Creswell and Poth (2018) point out that qualitative studies, embedded single-case studies fall under that designation, assist in hearing "silenced voices" (p. 48). Compared to quantitative research methods, case study research helps uplift the uniqueness and value of every human through their unique experiences.

Yin (2018) notes five different rationales for implementing a single-case study design, and I chose a critical rationale. In a critical rationale, the goal is to build upon an existing theory (Yin, 2018). Consequently, this study explored and extended the connection between WBLE and employment outcomes for students with ID through an embedded single-case study methodology and amplified the voices of people with ID through their lived experiences.

Furthermore, a single-case study approach seeks to contribute knowledge that confirms,

challenges, or extends a theory about a specific program or organization (Yin, 2018). This embedded single case showed how and why WBLE prepares individuals with ID for competitive employment. The embedded single case study design was perfect for this study as there is one overall case, WBLE, but there were also subunits of analysis within the original case. The two subunits of analysis were two different locations where this case occurs: a hotel and a restaurant in Central Virginia. In conducting this study, it was crucial to focus on the original case and not veer into surveying the subunits (Yin, 2018). Deviating from the original case when implementing an embedded model leads to a shallow survey of the subunits rather than a deep investigation of the original case.

Historically, case study research has been utilized in the social sciences (Creswell and Poth, (2018). Simons (2009) points out that case study research started in other fields outside of education, but it has become one of the best methods for studying and understanding educational practices and programs. However, as mentioned, this has not always been the case. Modern case study research finds its origins nearly 100 years ago at the University of Chicago. Studies by the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago in the early 20th century famously studied remote Indigenous people groups and their behaviors (Mills & Birks, 2014). These studies laid the foundation for modern case study research (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The researchers found that people groups had a complex and unique culture; the only appropriate study forms were interviews, observations, examination of artifacts, and focus groups. No other methodology provided a proper way to study such a unique setting and population at the time. From its inception, case study research seeks to understand complex peoples, programs, systems, organizations, cultures, and more. Furthermore, case study methodology is implemented today for the same created purposes. Therefore, an embedded single-case study research design

appropriately addresses this study.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

How does participation in work-based learning experiences prepare students with intellectual disabilities for post-school employment?

Sub-Question One

How do employers and employment organization services that host students with intellectual disabilities for work-based learning experiences affect the work outcomes of the student participants?

Sub-Question Two

How do case managers affect the work-based learning experience for students with intellectual disabilities?

Sub-Question Three

How do students with intellectual disabilities progress through the experiential learning cycle when participating in work-based learning experiences?

Setting and Participants

People with ID are a marginalized subset of the larger population (Campbell, 2021; Wiesel et al., 2022). People with ID are more likely to experience bullying, social isolation, abuse, and homelessness (Gil-Llario et al., 2019; Llauradó & Estévez, 2023; McKenzie et al., 2019; Strnadová & Walmsley, 2018). In addition to all these marginalizing factors, people with ID are underrepresented in the workforce (Bialik & Mhiri, 2022). Therefore, I investigated how participation in work-based learning experiences prepares students with intellectual disabilities for post-school employment. In this section, I describe the participants' selection process and

give some basic information about the participants. Additionally, I describe the settings where the case study took place.

Site

The case of WBLE for this study was at two separate sites in a suburban area in Central Virginia. The two host sites were school district-approved WBLE sites. The school district assesses and vets every potential WBLE setting to ensure students will benefit from the site and feel safe. In the vetting process, school district administrators work with third-party organizations specializing in vocational training to identify potential work sites. Once the school divisions identify the work sites, the school division evaluates the sites for fitness to host students with ID, which entails several elements: a safe physical work environment, the site follows all federal and state regulations, students receive equal opportunities despite gender, race, color, national origin, and disability, and the host guarantees that students do not work directly with persons on the sex offender registry (VDOE, 2022a).

Both sites chosen for this study passed this school district evaluation process without concerns. Therefore, the first site was a hotel belonging to a nationally recognized chain of hotels. The hotel was across the street from a regional airport near a major university in Central Virginia. At the hotel, the student participants performed various tasks: cleaning rooms, working the front desk, washing towels, folding towels, and completing some clerical duties. The hotel was a slow-paced job setting that required internal motivation to complete tasks. The hotel was a new partnership that the school division developed. Despite many efforts, the division could not establish a hotel experience until this year. This latest cooperation allowed students to experience another career sector.

Alternatively, the restaurant partnership has existed for many years; this collaboration has

been productive and enjoyable for all involved. The nation chain buffet restaurant seated nearly 200 people near the same university mentioned above and was consistently busy for lunch and dinner. Students performed janitorial duties at the restaurant, served customers at their tables, took orders, cooked in the kitchen, prepared food, and maintained food quality measures. The restaurant was a fast-paced job setting that required a constant work rate. Just like the hotel, students had a direct supervisor to whom they reported on their shifts. In conclusion, the continuity and longevity of the restaurant partnership made this site a perfect place to study the case of WBLE and students with ID.

The rural school division, which the student participants attended, had 7,787 pupils, and four high schools sent students to these two work sites for WBLE. One of the high schools, with 942 students, was approximately four miles from the hotel and restaurant. The second closest, with 789 students, was about 10 miles from both work sites. The other two combined schools included grades 6-12; one had a population of 411 students, and the other had 672 students, and both were approximately 20 miles from the work sites (VDOE, 2022b). In addition, the school division provided transportation to and from the student's specific job site on their scheduled workdays.

Participants

This embedded single-case study consisted of 12 participants who supervised students in the WBLE program. The research subdivided the 12 supervisors into three groups. Four were school employees who attended the program to support the students. One was a restaurant supervisor, and three were hotel supervisors who directly instructed students. In addition, the study included three job coaches from a transition-to-work program and the owner/director of that program who provided the program's framework. Finally, one student with a disability who

worked at each work site also participated. Therefore, this study had a total of 13 participants.

The study employed purposive selection methods to choose participants to examine the bounded system of WBLE at both a restaurant and a hotel. As a result, multiple participants showed different perspectives on the same complex program (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Therefore, selected participants met specific criteria for inclusion in this study. First, the work site supervisors who participated interacted with the students with ID at the work sites in a supervisory fashion. Second, the school employees supported the coordination and success of the WBLE for the students. Third, the student participants possessed a disability and participated in the WBLE program. Finally, the job coaches worked directly with the students and provided progress reports to the students on their performance at the WBLE.

Researcher Positionality

My compassion and passion for people with disabilities stemmed from my Christian faith and my brother. First, the Bible teaches that all human life is valuable (*New American Standard Bible*, 1971/1995, Psalm 139:1-18). Therefore, I uphold this principle by teaching students with disabilities (SWD), whom the world often deems unteachable. Furthermore, by researching SWD, I live out the sanctity of all human life. Secondly, my brother contracted viral meningitis at age three. Meningitis causes fluid to accumulate at the brain's base, resulting in oxygen loss to the brain. For my brother and many others contracting this disease, it resulted in significant learning difficulties that ultimately led to his eligibility for specially designed instruction under an ID identification. Finally, growing up and watching my brother’s experiences, I developed empathy and insight into SWD's struggles in school and their efforts to find meaningful, competitive employment after high school. Therefore, this study stems from my lived experience

and deeply held beliefs about the world.

Interpretive Framework

Though I am not a pragmatist, I employed a pragmatist framework for this study because a pragmatist framework focuses on the outcomes of the research rather than on the pre-conditions surrounding the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A pragmatic approach fits this study best because there was a concentrated focus on the problem of disparity in employment for people with ID. This interpretive framework focuses on the questions about the problem to find the best solution through various methods. Therefore, a pragmatic framework served the purpose of this study very well.

Philosophical Assumptions

Creswell and Poth (2018) point out that everyone has philosophical assumptions. However, everyone has ideas about reality (ontological), opinions on knowledge (epistemological), and thoughts about values (axiological). Therefore, I was honest with myself and transparent with the readers by laying out my assumptions in this study. Thus, this embedded single-case study addresses my ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions.

Ontological Assumption

As a Christian, I believe in one ultimate reality: God. Like all beliefs, I firmly trust, through faith, that God exists and that he is sovereignly in control of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Reality does not exist outside of him or apart from him. Walz and Gaunilo (2013) suggest, based on Anselm's ontological argument for God, that the very fact that we can conceive of an all-powerful Being points to the existence of God. Furthermore, there are eternal truths that he created and set in place from the beginning of time as we know it. I acknowledge that humans have different experiences, but human experiences do not change ultimate realities.

Therefore, in this study, the human experiences explored affirmed the supreme realities of the universe, and the ultimate realities pointed out the inconsistencies in the human experience.

Epistemological Assumption

In qualitative research, I must rely upon the subjective experiences of others to inform the findings of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). To gain knowledge from a subjective source seemingly contradicts the idea that there is one exclusive reality. However, humans' subjective experiences align or misalign with ultimate reality. Case study research aims to understand the case fully (Stake, 1995). Therefore, I gained rapport with participants by carefully observing and listening to their experiences to ensure quality data collection. I also collected data objectively and acknowledged the assumptions I brought to the study.

Axiological Assumption

Value transcends human beings. Therefore, value is not socially constructed based on one's feelings, preferences, or attitudes. MacIntyre (2007) named this modern ethical system emotivism. Whatever feels right to you in a given situation is the right action. This pervasive Western value system unhitches morality from the transcendent. Humans are the keepers of morality in this modern ethic. Instead, I believe that value exists outside humans and is God-ordained. Again, I agree with MacIntyre (2007) that ethics and values have an aim. The aim is to go from one's fallen decrepit state to a better one. This telos inherently points to something transcendent: God. All value originates in God and what He calls good.

Therefore, I value all human life, including people with disabilities. All persons have intrinsic value and worth. Educating people to succeed and training them to work agrees with the value given to them by God. Calvert (2021), from a strictly Jewish perspective, discussed how teaching is a holy act that helps man imitate God. Calvert also pointed to the intrinsic value one

attributes to a person when one teaches them from a Jewish perspective. Another value I brought out in this research study is the value of labor. Labor is a gift given by God. Labor's intended purpose is to bring many blessings to man (van Vuuren, 2017). Values existing outside of humans, the intrinsic value of humans, and labor as a gift from God are values that I hold, and my transparency in addressing them helps readers better understand my study and biases (Yin, 2018).

Researcher's Role

Creswell and Poth (2018) pointed out that the researcher is a crucial instrument in qualitative research because the researcher selects all the data collected. Furthermore, Yin (2018) places significant value on the case study researcher. According to Yin (2018), a case study researcher must be ethical, an acute listener, a sharp inquirer, and adaptable. I have participated in WBLE as the student, the case manager, and the direct supervisor. These experiences provided invaluable insight into WBLE and people with ID.

I worked within this school division, but I did not have any power or influence over these students, nor did I work at the two sites. Furthermore, I did not meet any participants before the study began other than to get preliminary information about the program. Additionally, at my previous employment, I won the Teacher of the Year Award primarily due to my creation and execution of a WBLE program for SWD. All this prior experience with WBLE is something that Yin points to as a benefit to me as a case study researcher (2018). My experiences with WBLE have all been positive, which was a bias that I brought to the study, but in my research, I ethically reported the findings even when they did not align with my previous experiences.

Procedures

After obtaining site and IRB permissions, I purposively selected employees, case

managers, and ID students participating in the WBLE at both locations. Next, I conducted interviews and focus group discussions and analyzed relevant progress reports. I analyzed the transcribed and coded data to determine themes that helped answer the research questions. Finally, I achieved triangulation using individual interviews, document analysis, and focus group interviews.

Permissions

First, to gauge this study's viability, I conducted viability conversations with professionals who completed their doctorates in the school division. I investigated to determine if this school division had students with ID who participated in WBLE, and they did. In addition, I also obtained written permission from the school division where this study took place. Also, I received written permission from both the restaurant and the hotel to conduct this study (See Appendix B and Appendix C for site approvals). Then, this study met the permission requirements from Liberty's IRB, the school division, and the host sites to begin collecting data and conducting the research study (See Appendix A for the IRB Approval letter). Upon receiving the IRB approval from Liberty, I shared this approval with the school division to ensure the study was proper and acceptable. Finally, I recruited all necessary stakeholders to conduct the study. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, the SWD and their parent completed a parental consent/student assent form (see Appendix F), and the case managers/employees completed a separate form (see Appendix G). In writing, both consent forms detailed the participants' rights, risks, and responsibilities.

Recruitment Plan

After receiving approval for this study, I emailed prospective case managers, students, and hotel and restaurant workers recruitment letters (see Appendix D & Appendix E). I used

purposive sampling methods to identify people who participated in WBLE by selecting based on participation in the WBLE program. Creswell and Poth (2018) pointed out that purposive sampling helps to gain insight into a specific phenomenon or case. The goal for the sample was a total of 17 supervisors from school employees, hotel employees, job coaches, and restaurant workers, but only 12 participated. For the student participants, the goal was six students with ID. However, only one student with a disability participated. This study achieved sample saturation with 13 participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Collection Plan

In case study research, there are two seminal works, Yin (2018) and Stake (1995). Stake (1995) puts forth three primary ways of gathering data: interviews, observations, and document reviews. Yin (2018) points to six data collection methods: archival records, direct observations, documentation, interviews, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Yin and Stake agree upon the three techniques utilized in my study: interviews, documentation, and focus groups. Both Stake (1995) and Yin (2018) point to interviews as the primary way of truly understanding a unique case. Therefore, I employed individual interviews as this study's primary data collection method.

Furthermore, I utilized documentation analysis as one of my data collection methods. I analyzed supervisor evaluations of each student's performance at their WBLE. I garnered access to these documents because of my employment in the school division that receives these evaluative documents from the employment services organization. However, document analysis is a complementary data collection method that cannot stand alone (Yin, 2018). Thus, in addition to document analysis, this study employed focus group interviews as the final data collection method to achieve triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Focus groups accomplish a deeper

level of data collection beyond individual interviews. The study gained much rich detail by selecting a small number of participants to participate in focus groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

I implemented the semi-structured, individual interview as the first data collection method. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) point out that interviewers must build rapport with the interviewee and be direct. Furthermore, interviewers must avoid evaluating or judging the responses to prevent influencing the interviewees (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I conducted live video interviews in a private location where participants were comfortable and free to speak without interruption. Only one interview occurred face-to-face at the request of the interviewee. The supervisors of the students with ID who participated in the WBLE were the ones who participated in the individual interviews. This subset included the school employees, workers from both work sites, the job coaches, and the owner of the employment organization service. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using Google technology. I used my computer and phone to record the interviews to ensure technological redundancy in case one device failed. Before the first interview, I allowed a colleague with a doctoral degree to review the questions to ensure efficaciousness. Following this review exercise, minor changes that did not change the meaning of the original question were made for ease of understanding and answering the questions. I utilized the questions below during the individual interview sessions:

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe what your responsibilities are at the WBLE site. (CRQ)
2. Describe the work environment at the WBLE site. (SQ1)
3. Describe the role that the case manager/paraprofessional plays in this WBLE. (SQ2)
4. Describe the role that the host supervisor plays in this WBLE. (SQ1)

5. Describe the challenges the student faces while participating in this WBLE. (CRQ)
6. Describe how the student has been able to overcome those challenges. (CRQ)
7. What role does the student's disability play in participating in this WBLE? (CRQ)
8. Describe how the students have grown since participating in this WBLE. (CRQ)
9. What areas does the student need to improve upon before completing this WBLE? (CRQ)
10. Describe the evaluation process of a student's work performance. (SQ3)
11. Describe how you all use reflection to help students learn and grow from their experience. (SQ3)
12. Describe what a successful workday looks like at this WBLE for the students. (CRQ)
13. Describe how WBLE prepares students with ID for the world of work. (CRQ)
14. What do the students gain from participating in this WBLE? (CRQ)
15. What are the most important elements of the WBLE for student success? (CRQ)
16. What else would you like to add to our discussion about your experiences at this WBLE site? (CRQ)

Questions one and two allowed the interviewees to be comfortable and confident for the rest of the interview. After these rapport-garnering questions, questions three and four investigated sub-questions one and two by examining the role of those attending the WBLE with the student. Next, questions five and six identified the challenges and how the students overcame those challenges at the WBLE. Finally, question seven inquired into how a student's disability affected them at work, which is a complex topic to approach. However, this question excavated rich insights about the unique experiences of students with disabilities at a WBLE.

Questions eight and nine showed where students grew and what areas were essential to continued growth. Experiential learning theory was the guiding force behind this study, and

questions ten and eleven investigated this theory's role in this case. Questions 12 and 13 are at the heart of the central research question. These questions extracted what it is about WBLE that prepares students for work after high school. In addition, questions 12 through 14 drew out the core elements of a WBLE from the perspective of the supervisor participants. These questions provided a broad and profound description of the experiences students with ID have when participating in WBLE from the standpoint of workplace supervisors.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The embedded single-case study method of inquiry intends to understand and evaluate a specific program or organization (Yin, 2018). Within this study, there were embedded units of analysis. Therefore, in this study, I examined WBLE on two levels of analysis. First, I implemented individual interviews with the workplace supervisors to suggest explanations. These interviews helped me understand each supervisor's unique lens of the WBLE. In addition, the supervisor interviews revealed the rationale for the WBLE events and explored students' experiences with ID while participating in WBLE. (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) notes that case study interviews are guided conversations that must follow the researcher’s thinking and be unbiased. Maintaining a conversational, non-threatening tone that follows a specific line of inquiry was difficult, but I conducted the interviews this way (Yin, 2018).

While conducting the interviews, the Google Meet technology simultaneously transcribed the interviews. After downloading the transcripts, I cleaned them up for readability and prepared them for coding using spreadsheet software. Then, I coded the data, identified patterns and repeated usage, and developed themes that answered the research questions. These elements contributed to a high-quality analysis (Yin, 2018). Moreover, I employed a two-cycle coding

method for analysis. For the first cycle, I utilized in vivo coding. Saldaña (2021) points out that in vivo coding takes verbatim what the interviewee said, pulls it out, and places it in quotation marks as a code. In addition, Saldaña (2021) indicates that in vivo coding elicits a more emotional response than descriptive coding. For the second cycle coding method, pattern coding provided inferential, meaningful meta-codes leading to major themes (Saldaña, 2021). Pattern coding involved taking several related first-cycle codes, grouping them, and creating a super code to encapsulate the idea. Researchers often use metaphors as the super code when pattern coding (Miles et al., 2020). However, I used in-vivo phrases that encapsulated several other codes as my super codes. I used spreadsheet software to code and securely store all data during coding. I developed themes that connected overarching pattern codes throughout the data collection process. Themes often appear as short phrases or sentences summarizing the super codes, but researchers can also surmise themes during data collection. The themes did not automatically or immediately rise to the surface, but instead, I constructed answers to the research questions from a deep data analysis. This process of creating themes continued until several meta-themes arose.

Document Analysis Data Collection Approach

After completing the individual interviews, I used a second data collection method: document analysis. Yin (2018) describes documentation analysis as a complementary data collection method. Therefore, document analysis cannot stand alone in a study. I paired document analysis with two other data collection methods. However, analyzing documentation is not second-rate; document review helps better understand the case, often better than observations (Stake, 1995).

Furthermore, Stake (1995) points out that the researcher must have an open mind when reviewing documents, allowing the opportunity to discover the unexpected. Moreover, the document's original author recorded events and data for a different purpose and wrote to a separate audience. Therefore, in analyzing documents, Yin (2018) points out that the researcher is an observer of the events in the document.

The documents I reviewed are quarterly performance reports for each student who participated in the WBLE. I garnered access to these documents because I was an employee of the school division that utilizes this program. Thus, no special permissions outside the participation agreements were necessary to review these documents—furthermore, these performance reports detailed students' performance in their first semester WBLE placements. The original audience of these performance reports was the students. Students received these performance reports to indicate their level of independence in performing tasks in their WBLE placements. These performance reports also indicated student progress toward attaining employment covering soft skills like professionalism, communication, and behavior. Therefore, I analyzed ten different progress documents, one for every student.

Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan

Furthermore, in document analysis, I investigated embedded units within the overall case (Yin, 2018). These subunits included the students with ID and the site supervisors. The performance reports only gave insights into the students, not supervisors. In document analysis, Grant (2019) points out that the document's content is only one factor to analyze. The researcher must also consider the document’s author and intended audience in addition to exploring the content. When considering these factors, I looked for author bias and reflected on the intended purpose of the document on the audience, whether to inform, persuade, or entertain.

In analyzing the document, I observed how the students progressed or digressed from one period to the next in the different areas of evaluation. I examined how the supervisor described the students' progress. Finally, I compared the findings from the document analysis with the data collected from the interviews and focus groups to confirm or contradict the conclusions previously discovered. These procedures ensured triangulation and thus provided a rich case analysis (Yin, 2018).

Focus Groups Data Collection Approach

The study employed a focus group discussion for the final data collection method to gain insights from a group setting that individual interviews could not (Stake, 1995). All participant subgroups participated in these focus group sessions, including the students, school staff, and hotel staff. These focus group sessions allowed data collection from all embedded units in the study. In the session, the group consisted of one student who attended the WBLE at the hotel and the restaurant, one case manager, one transition coordinator, the manager at the hotel, and the owner of the employment organization service. The focus group had five participants, which is considered small but allowed for a more robust conversation about the topics because each person had more space to talk (Morgan, 2019). All focus group sessions occurred over Google Meet and were audio recorded via a smartphone, like the individual interviews, to ensure technological redundancy. This focus group session followed after the individual interviews because questions were tweaked and finalized based on the individual interviews and for alignment with the research questions.

Focus Group Questions

1. What is the best thing about this WBLE partnership between the school and the work site? (CRQ)

2. Describe what you have learned from the WBLE. (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3)
3. When did you learn the most from the WBLE? (CRQ, SQ3).
4. How does participation in WBLE fulfill the company's goals, your personal goals, or the school's goals? (CRQ)
5. Describe the most rewarding element of the WBLE. (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
6. How does this WBLE prepare students for the world of work? (CRQ, SQ3)
7. There has been a good discussion about the value of WBLE for all involved. What else do you all want to add to our discussion about WBLE? (CRQ)

Question one intended to stimulate the participants' brains and focus the discussion on WBLE and the central research question. Question two sought to garner information about all sub-questions by having the participants describe what they learned from the experience. Question three investigated the experiential learning process that ties in with the study's theory and sub-question three. Question four helped identify the reason for each stakeholder participating in WBLE, which was vital to the study. Question five stimulated participants to discuss the individual results of the WBLE. Question six allowed the participants to discuss how this experience prepared students for employment. Finally, question seven enabled participants to provide additional information or extend the conversation about this WBLE.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

The focus group data analysis plan utilized the same methods outlined for the individual interviews. Like with the individual interviews, transcribing the focus group data, coding the data using a two-cycle method, identifying patterns, and ultimately developing themes for analysis ensured a thorough study (Yin, 2018). In line with the interviews, I used in vivo coding for the first cycle (Saldaña, 2021). Finally, I implemented pattern coding for the second cycle coding

method to provide inferential, meaningful meta-codes that ultimately lead to significant themes (Saldaña, 2021).

Data Synthesis

After holistically collecting all the data, I analyzed and synthesized the data. There are computer tools to assist in synthesizing data, and I employed software data analysis through spreadsheet software. I entered all interviews verbatim into the spreadsheet software. Yin (2018) mentions four main strategies for analyzing data: reliance on theoretical propositions, working from the "ground up," developing a case description, and examining plausible rival explanations. I employed the working from the "ground up" strategy because it helps to identify patterns within the data that suggest concepts that help describe or explain events, organizations, or educational practices (Yin, 2018).

Creswell and Poth (2018) encourage case study researchers to identify and point out patterns found in the case. Identifying patterns occurred through in vivo coding. In vivo coding is taking what a participant said verbatim, placing it in quotation marks, and using it as a code. In vivo, coding is particularly apt for the beginning researcher (Saldaña, 2021). It also highlights the words of the participants. I wanted to give voice to people with ID and those hosting people with ID for WBLE. Therefore, in vivo coding was the perfect coding method for this study. As I coded, I was keenly aware of phrases or words that struck me as significant. Saldaña (2021) encourages researchers to highlight, bold, or italicize such codes to stand out. To organize codes, I alphabetized the codes to make patterns more straightforward to identify, as suggested by Saldaña (2021).

Finally, the coding process helps the researcher aggregate data to formulate themes. Saldaña (2021) notes that themes should seek to answer the proposed research questions.

Therefore, by looking for patterns, coding, and aggregating the data into themes, I sought to answer the research questions in this study. In addition, this data synthesis process assisted in detailing the unique case of students with ID who participate in WBLE.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) are the seminal authors who created the idea of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out that trustworthiness in research is the ability to convince the audience of the study's findings. The authors indicated that qualitative researchers could establish trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Creswell and Poth (2018) utilize a different word to communicate similar confidence in the research: validation. However, I used the Lincoln and Guba (1985) model of trustworthiness to ensure a rigorous study.

Credibility

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest implementing credibility or validation strategies to provide an accurate and truthful study. This study gained credibility through triangulation through individual interviews, focus groups, and document analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation confirms data from at least three sources to richly describe a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The credibility-adding method used in this embedded single-case study was document analysis. Document analysis assisted me in understanding the whole case, reporting on it with integrity, and ultimately adding credibility to the study (Yin, 2018). Peer debriefing was the final method to garner credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I sat down with a disinterested peer to have them critique and explore every aspect of my study. This simple step of accountability did not allow nefarious happenings to transpire during the study, ultimately adding credibility to the study. In addition, this objective review of the study helped

point out things I did not consider during the study. The objective debriefer's new perspective adds to the richness and credibility of the study apart from the fog of emotions the researcher may have acquired through hours of study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

Like all research methods, case study research investigates a specific case among one or a few cases completed in one experiment. Therefore, the study can never generalize the findings but rather generalize theories (Yin, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) point to rich descriptions of the study's findings to ensure transferability. Yin (2018) uses generalizing rather than transferability, like Lincoln and Guba (1985), to describe a similar idea. However, both texts point to generalizing or transferring the findings from the research context to another setting. I cannot ensure transferability because that is up to the audience. Instead, I provided detailed descriptions of the results to support transferability (Yin, 2018).

Dependability

Transferability attempts to make a study generalizable to other contexts through detailed descriptions, but dependability is more concerned with the study's procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For a study to be dependable, it must clearly and effectively outline the methods adopted to complete the study. Therefore, I ensured that my procedures were transparent and reproducible. Another way to accomplish dependability is through a process known as an inquiry audit. The dissertation committee at Liberty University conducted the inquiry audit. Therefore, my dissertation committee scrutinized my study through these processes to ensure dependability.

Confirmability

Though I am interested in this topic, I remained vigilant to remain objectively neutral throughout the study. As a result, my findings were not motivated by bias, motivation, or

interest, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Furthermore, to ensure confirmability, I utilized triangulation in my data collection. My study has undergone an inquiry audit conducted by an objective auditor, and finally, I used reflexivity to make my biases known throughout my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I maintained a reflective mindset throughout my research by continually checking myself for bias and objectively observing, collecting, and analyzing the data from this study (Berger, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

Stake (1995) points to the researcher as another instrument in case studies. Hence, the researcher must operate ethically throughout the study. Therefore, I took the following ethical considerations very seriously. First, because one of the participants was an individual with an ID, I carefully ensured that I was not asserting power over them during the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Sensitive populations are particularly prone to power imbalances in research situations.

Secondly, through consent forms, I obtained permission and consent to conduct this study at both the hotel and the restaurant with these specific participants. These local businesses needed to be on board with us using their location as a research site, and it was just as essential and ethical that all participants knew what they were signing up to do. Equally important to note was that all participants volunteered to participate and knew they could drop out of the study at any time. Next, I utilized pseudonyms for both the host site of the WBLE and the participants to ensure confidentiality. Students with disabilities have certain protections under IDEA (2004), and privacy is one of those protections. Finally, Stake (1995) encourages all researchers to have a secure plan for data storage. Therefore, I stored all digital data in a safe, password-protected location to ensure participant confidentiality. Any paper copies were held in a locked filing cabinet in my private office to secure participants' privacy.

Summary

The purpose of this embedded single-case study is to understand how participation in WBLE prepares students with ID for post-school competitive employment. In this chapter, I explained the procedures, research design, and data analysis utilized to conduct this study. This study took place at a national chain restaurant and a hotel. I implemented purposive sampling to select the participants with intellectual disabilities in this study and their case managers, job coaches, and employment supervisors. Additionally, this study used interviews, document analysis, and focus groups to obtain data about the case.

Yin's (2018) design and methodology for collecting and analyzing data directed this research project from start to finish. I utilized Yin's suggested methods of collecting data, individual interviews, focus groups, and document analysis (2018). In addition, I implemented Yin's analysis strategy, where I worked with the collected data from the ground up to help answer the research questions (2018). Saldaña's (2021) method for analyzing data was also consulted as a primary text to inform the analysis and synthesis of the data. Additionally, I implemented Saldaña's in-vivo coding method and his method for developing themes for this study. Next, I described the study's trustworthiness by detailing its credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Finally, I explained the measures taken to ensure an ethical study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

In this chapter, I detail the findings of this embedded single-case study and the subsequent analysis to understand how participation in work-based learning experiences (WBLE) prepares students with intellectual disabilities (ID) for successful post-school competitive employment. Therefore, this chapter will introduce the study's participants and their roles at the work sites. I utilized individual interviews, document analysis, and a focus group to answer the research questions. The individual interviews, document analysis, and focus group discussions occurred over three months. The data was then coded in vivo and analyzed to identify themes. Chapter three details the methodology utilized to conduct this study in more depth. The study discovered four major themes through implementing the methods in chapter three.

Participants

This embedded case study included 13 participants. There are seven female participants and six male participants in this study. To participate in this study, each participant must have worked with a student ID who participated in a WBLE in the Spring of 2023 or been a student with an ID who participated. The different titles of the participants are as follows: (2) case managers, (1) paraprofessional, (1) program director, (2) site mentors, (2) site supervisors, (3) skills trainers, (1) student, and (1) transition coordinator. Each participant met the inclusion criteria to participate in the study. Table 1 elucidates the demographic data of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Participant	Gender	Title	Work Site
Ashley	Female	Case Manager	Hotel/Restaurant
Benjamin	Male	Paraprofessional	Restaurant
Betsy	Female	Site Supervisor	Restaurant
Curtis	Male	Skills Trainer	Restaurant
Jamey	Female	Program Director	Hotel/Restaurant
Jarrod	Male	Student	Hotel
Lincoln	Male	Case Manager	Hotel/Restaurant
Meredith	Female	Skills Trainer	Hotel
Norman	Male	Site Mentor	Hotel
Patricia	Female	Transition Coordinator	Hotel/Restaurant
Sydney	Female	Skills Trainer	Hotel/Restaurant
Travis	Male	Site Supervisor	Hotel
Valerie	Female	Site Mentor	Hotel

Ashley

Ashley is a 53-year-old special education teacher at one of the four high schools in the participating school district. Currently, she oversees a unique program for post-graduate students with disabilities. She has experience as a co-teacher, self-contained teacher, and department chair. Her highest degree earned is a Master's degree. She is licensed to teach Special Education K-12 and Elementary Education PreK-6.

In describing how WBLE equips students with intellectual disabilities, Ashley accentuated the benefit of confronting reality in these experiences:

> You're not going to be coddled. You're going to learn that you're going to grow and develop through this because when you leave here, the world is not necessarily a happy space. And we want you to be prepared for that. So I think these job experiences help them to see that.

Ashley detailed what students gain from these experiences, "It (WBLE) allows them (the students) the opportunity to learn skills, whether it's people skills, social skills, functional skills or the actual skills of the job that they can't necessarily learn within the classroom setting." In describing how students grew during the WBLE, Ashley noted, "They grew to enjoy things that they wouldn't normally enjoy, like, for instance, working outside."

Benjamin

Benjamin is a 62-year-old paraprofessional who works at the same high school as Ashley. His primary duties include supporting and supervising students with severe disabilities in a self-contained environment. His responsibilities at the work site involve helping students with disabilities perform their tasks.

Benjamin described how he would incorporate reflection in the student's experience at the work site:

> At the end of the day, we would all meet in the back, and we would talk about who was assigned which job, and they (the students) would talk about their job. Whether they liked it, whether they didn't like it, or they wanted to do it again, would they look forward to doing it again?

When asked about the essential elements that contribute to a successful WBLE for students, he mentioned two, "The actual places that we went were willing to give us a chance to show them that we could do these tasks, and the kids' enthusiasm to want to go out and do it."

Betsy

Betsy is the median-aged branch manager of the restaurant where students attended for a WBLE. Betsy has worked at this restaurant for over a decade and worked her way up into management. This restaurant has partnered with the local employment organization service (EOS) in this study for over a decade. The partnership and program remain strong even through different leadership changes over the years. Betsy spoke of how hosting students with disabilities benefits her and her staff, "I feel like, in a way, their disability only helps us as trainers to teach, train, and coach because everybody learns differently. Betsy continued:

> I mean, honestly, I feel like these kids help my staff as well to show them these are kids willing to learn, and they might not be on the same page as most kids that come in here. But these are the ones that eventually are going to go places, you know, regardless of their learning disability or anything like that. They are going to pick something in life, and they're going to grow at it, and they're going to be great at it.

Betsy points out that students grow in one central area from the beginning of the WBLE to the end, “I think a lot of self-confidence. I think that's the main thing they get when they leave here is self-confidence because they're interacting with numerous people on a daily…it could be hundreds of people a day.”

Curtis

Curtis is a median-aged skills trainer with a physical disability who works for a local EOS. His primary duties at the work site include assisting students in performing the job tasks by prompting them to stay on task, ensuring that students remain safe, encouraging them, collecting data on their work performance, and reporting that data. Curtis and the other skills trainers also provided classroom instruction to the participating students. The classroom instruction centered on soft skills that apply to any work setting. Curtis exclusively supported students who attended the Restaurant work site. Another participant, Patricia, described Curtis’ impact on a student participant with a physical disability:

> We did have one student who had some physical limitations. For that particular student, when that student got around Curtis and saw how he was able to move and to maneuver around at the restaurant, that, in turn, provided that student with a motivation to do more.

In addition, Curtis points out a common problem students with disabilities face when engaged in WBLE, “People have misperceived conceptions about individuals with special needs and put limitations on them, and that's one of the things that I try to stress, too is let the students show us what they're capable of before we try to put restrictions on them.” Curtis believes students with disabilities are more capable than initially credited. Letting students attempt a task before judging their ability to complete it is crucial to Curtis.

Jamey

Jamey is the owner and operator of the local EOS. Her role in the WBLE is to contact and build relationships with businesses willing to host students with disabilities for work experiences. She meets with the business owners to understand how the students could benefit the company and how these work experiences could benefit the students in their development. In addition, Jamey evaluates vital pieces of the business to ensure that it is a proper fit to host students, “If we approach an employer about partnership and they're nervous or feel hesitant, well, then that's not a great match because we need an employer who's going to fully buy-in and that's really a key component of the program for sure.”

When Jamey describes the role a student’s disability plays in their participation in WBLE, she has a strong philosophy:

> My philosophy on students with disabilities or anyone with a disability working is that we can't focus on the barriers. We have to focus on the strengths. We just need to find a way to support them to have a meaningful career with what they're good at because everybody has something they're good at and something that they enjoy, and there's dignity in all work.

Dignity in all work is a belief that drives Jamey to provide the infrastructure to schools and community organizations for implementing WBLE for students with disabilities. Focusing on students' strengths helps Jamey to persevere in finding meaningful work for all students.

Jarrod

Jarrod is a 22-year-old student with a disability who has participated in WBLE for several years while enrolled in public education. Jarrod explains his experience with WBLE:

> I went out first…in the community. The first day was CBI (Community Based Instruction), but it was the [local mall], and the next day on, November the 16th, it was

> also the CBI but at the Target Center. Yeah, CBIs are for everyone. It's like Christmas shopping. We went to the Walmart Center and Five Guys for lunch.

Jarrod participated at both the hotel and the restaurant one day a week. His role in this WBLE was to attend, participate, and learn both on the job-site and in the classroom. In the focus group conversation, Jarrod describes how he felt when he first started at the hotel, "Oh when I first came to [the hotel]. I was real skeptical about this. I was also kind of excited, too." He continued by expressing his motivation for participating in the WBLE, "The rewarding [part] for me is to be successful by earning tokens and making money and bringing nothing but joy, and making my family and my friends proud." Jarrod has transitioned into a program for students who have exhausted their years of public education services and participates in another WBLE program for students with disabilities. He will seek employment in a couple of months once he finishes the program.

Lincoln

Lincoln is a 25-year-old who was a case manager during this WBLE. He has left the education field and works at a lumber yard in another state. But, during this study, he was a high school special education teacher who taught a self-contained class of students with disabilities. Lincoln's bachelor's degree certifies him to teach Special Education K-12 and Elementary Education PreK-6. His primary duties in this WBLE were to support the students' success with classroom instruction and report student progress to their guardians.

Lincoln describes a new paradigm the students had to learn and adapt to as they participated in this WBLE:

> I did make some IEP goals based on the fact that [the students] were transitioning from consumer to employee. I think that's something difficult for everybody: your whole life,

> you're a consumer until you get a job and then, 'What does it mean to be an employee? What's my role?'

Lincoln continues by sharing an anecdote of a student inappropriately interacting with a customer,

> There's an example of the kids putting chairs away once at the Hotel, and a customer walked by and [a student] said, "Hey, can you give us a hand?" (Asked the customer for help). So, just teaching them what their role is as an employee. The customers are not there to help them as they're the workers.

A typically developing person struggles to comprehend this paradigm shift from consumer/customer to worker/employee. Lincoln notes that students with disabilities require more training to learn this new concept.

Meredith

Meredith is an adult skills trainer with the EOS that the school division worked with to provide students with job training. She now works with a different EOS in northern Virginia. In this study, Meredith's primary duties at the work site include assisting students in performing the job tasks by prompting them to stay on task, ensuring that students remain safe, encouraging them, collecting data on their work performance, and reporting that data. Meredith also provided classroom instruction to the participating students. This classroom instruction centered on soft skills that apply to any work setting. She exclusively supported students at the Hotel.

Meredith described the student's first time working at the work site as a "culture shock." She explains this idea further:

> It really is a culture shock to them when they are given all these responsibilities, and it's not a school setting. In school, everybody knows this is a learning experience. In a

> workplace, there are guests that come in, and they don't know that this is a learning experience. They don't understand what we're doing. They're not there for the students. They're there because they are guests at a hotel.

Meredith continued to detail how the skills trainers would evaluate a student's work performance:

> We had to do case notes for every student that we worked with. We had a rating scale of one to five, and it was a lot of those core skills. We rated communication. We rated hygiene. We chose the specific tasks that they did each week, and we rated those. Our rating system was based on what are they able to do without any prompting without any support from us. We would score based on how many prompts they are getting from us so that we could ease back and fade our support away.

At the beginning and end of each day, the skills trainers would lead a "huddle." Meredith shares that her end-of-day huddles encouraged reflective conversation, "We talked about, 'What are ways that you used self-advocacy today?' I would give them each a note card and have them write 'What are things that I did well today?' and 'What are things that I need to improve?'" These reflective activities encouraged students to move through the steps of the learning process.

Norman

Norman is an older hotel employee who served as a site mentor. He has worked for the hotel for seven years. Norman's duties at the WBLE include showing students how to do tasks at the hotel, like vacuuming, cleaning, trash collection, and polishing surfaces. Additionally, Norman collaborates with the skills trainer to support the students on-site.

Norman shares that he participated in a similar WBLE program to help build his skills up and ultimately helped him land his job at the hotel:

> Somebody had to work with me, too. When I first started, because I wasn't in the hotel business. I didn't know nothing about working in the hotel. So I came in, and I had a lot of my job coaches from [the local EOS] come and work with me. People coming and helped me because it was like a new thing to me. You know, I never worked in the hotel before, but then I started picking it up.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Norman's job coach "passed from Covid." The same EOS working with the students in the WBLE program worked with Norman to gain employment, and now Norman is giving back by mentoring the next generation of students with disabilities who seek employment.

Patricia

Patricia is a 52-year-old transition specialist with the school division. She facilitates the whole WBLE program. Therefore, Patricia coordinates with the teachers to select the appropriate students to participate and works directly with the EOS to establish the work sites. In addition, she also reaches out to parents to see if they want their children to participate in the WBLE program. Finally, Patricia is the liaison between the EOS partners and the students' case manager, providing daily work performance updates. Patricia describes how the students have grown since participating in WBLE:

> I can say that they grow in confidence in their ability to do things. They also learned how to work better with one another how to take feedback because that's very hard for some students; constructive feedback is very hard for them to process. Especially those who are very rigid in their thinking and they want to do things a precise way…so them learning and adapting to constructive criticism or feedback. I saw some of those students able to deal with that better.

Patricia echoed the same sentiments in the focus group conversation: “I think the program helped to improve the students’ self-advocacy skills. They became more confident as they began to master their vocational skills at those particular work sites.” The growth of confidence Patricia highlighted was a theme many participants pointed out throughout the study.

Sydney

Sydney is a median-aged skills trainer who mainly worked at the restaurant but also spent some time at the hotel. Sydney’s duties at the work site include assisting students in performing the job tasks by prompting them to stay on task, ensuring that students remain safe, encouraging them, collecting data on their work performance, and reporting that data. Sydney also provided classroom instruction to the participating students. This classroom instruction centered on soft skills that could apply to any work setting.

Sydney shares that she enjoys seeing each student “learn different ways” and “being able to watch their light bulbs go off when somebody explains something a little bit differently versus something that I may have explained.” In addition, Sydney describes a successful work day for students as a day where “there's no arguing. There's no ‘I don't want to do that.’ There's no whining. There's no Self-deprecation.”

Sydney details how WBLE prepares students with intellectual disabilities to enter the workforce:

> Teaching them patience and teaching them focus. Focus is definitely one of the things that I would say individuals with intellectual disabilities struggle with. You watch them zone out, looking at a flower on a wall versus doing the task at hand, reminding them to come back to the here and now. At the end of the internship, they're not so much being told, ‘Hey, Come back to me.’ It's they're asking, ‘What can I do now?’

Sydney points out that students who enter this program for the first time have deficits and that instructing them on specific skills during the WBLE helps to prepare them for the workplace.

Travis

Travis is the median-aged manager of the hotel. He worked with Ashley, the director of the EOS, to get the work experience in place. Travis met with Ashley to detail some of the tasks the students could complete at the hotel. He also gave Ashley a tour to ensure the hotel would be suitable for hosting students with intellectual disabilities for a WBLE. When students were on-site, Travis mainly provided oversight to his employees who mentored the student workers. Before the students arrived, Travis would create a task list for the students to complete while they were on-site. Travis wanted the students to be rewarded for their work and for helping out his company. Therefore, he shares an anecdote about how he accomplished that,

> We tried to recognize [the students] when they were here with us. It's part of our process to try and buy lunch for the staff or do something nice for the staff on a somewhat regular basis to express appreciation. So, on the days where the kids happened to be here, they got to take advantage of what we were doing. So we had a pizza day one day.

Travis notes two essential elements that made this WBLE a success for students: "We provided the environment for [students] to get that exposure, and we provided the tasks in a real work environment that they could accomplish. But it's absolutely a lot of [the local EOS] being there to stand them up for employability down the road." Travis believes that the work of the EOS and the supervision provided to the students are the keys to a successful WBLE program.

Valerie

Valerie is the older head housekeeper who was a site mentor at the hotel. She has worked at the hotel for several years and has enjoyed working there under different bosses. As head

housekeeper, Valerie's job was to ensure cleanliness in all guests' rooms. In addition to her regular duties, Valerie kindly helped train students to perform job-specific tasks. She also supervised one of the two groups of students while they were on-site to ensure safety and on-task behavior. Valerie spoke about what students gained from this WBLE,

> Interacting with people in a close environment, not like fast food, where there is a camera in between you or you're on a headset. Here you're right here, face-to-face, having to interact with people… Everything at the hotel is face-to-face interaction and being nice to people even if you're not in the best of moods.

Valerie alluded to the fact that students who do not have disabilities and those with disabilities struggle to interact with people professionally. Therefore, she felt that the hotel was superior to other work sites because face-to-face interactions occur frequently. In Valerie's estimation, these face-to-face interactions are invaluable for the students to be successful in the world of work.

Results

This embedded single-case study sought to understand how participation in WBLE prepares students with ID for successful post-school competitive employment. I used three data collection methods in this study to ensure triangulation (Yin, 2018). Rich details came from 12 individual interviews with work-site supervisors. The questions in the individual interviews correspond to the central research question and the sub-questions to answer this study's inquiries. The focus group discussion included four work-site supervisors and one additional participant, a student who had participated in the WBLE for several years—the questions in the focus group discussion attempted to answer the central research question and sub-questions. Each of the 13 participants met the qualifications to participate, and each agreed to participate in the study.

The individual interviews happened over Google Meet. Google Meet is a video conferencing software with a built-in transcription function. Therefore, all transcription came from Google's built-in transcription software. Due to the participants' different dialects, accents, and speech deficits, I manually transcribed small portions of the interviews. The 12 site supervisors worked for various organizations and companies and held different roles and responsibilities, but all participated in this WBLE program.

Similar to the individual interviews, the focus group discussions occurred over Google Meet using the same transcription feature to transcribe the conversation. Again, I manually transcribed small portions of the conversation for clarity due to participant accents, dialects, and speech deficits. This group consisted of four work-site supervisors who participated in the individual interviews and one new participant, a student with a disability who engages in the WBLE program.

The final piece of data used in this study was the document analysis. The documents analyzed in this study were quarterly progress reports that detailed the progress ten students made in their work performance while participating in this WBLE program. The EOS submitted 20 quarterly reports for this study. The reports were from the 2023 Spring semester, consisting of two 9-week quarters. Each student received two progress reports, one at the end of the first 9-weeks and one at the end of the second 9-weeks. These reports include the student's accommodations, natural supports, and other basic demographic information. In addition, the reports score each student one to five on their level of independence with a particular skill or task. A score of one means that the student could not perform the skill or task satisfactorily without assistance from the trainer—a score of five means that the student required no assistance or prompting of any kind. Anything between one and five warranted less prompting and

assistance as it nears a score of five. All students received scores on the following skills or tasks: attendance, communication, participation, work speed, problem-solving, initiative, personal hygiene, asking questions, beginning a familiar task, and cleaning.

The data ascertained from the three different sources were all utilized to formulate codes that morphed into overarching codes and, finally, into themes; four themes effervesced to the surface to answer the research questions (see their frequency in Table 2):

1. Connect the Pieces for Mutual Gain
2. Student Willingness to Participate Outweighs their Disabilities
3. Teamwork in a Controlled and Supportive Environment
4. Students Deal with Undesirable Situations and Tasks with Confidence

The study's central research question investigates how participation in work-based learning experiences prepares students with intellectual disabilities for post-school employment. The first sub-question considers how employers and employment organization services that host students with intellectual disabilities for work-based learning experiences affect the work outcomes of the student participants. The second sub-question explores how case managers affect the work-based learning experience for students with intellectual disabilities. The third and final sub-question examines how students with intellectual disabilities progress through the experiential learning cycle when participating in work-based learning experiences.

Table 2

Theme Development

Theme	Code	Occurrences
Connect the Pieces for Mutual Gain	Connect	17
	Communicate	18
	Gain	66
	Help	99
	Together	16
	Talk	63
	Enjoy	28
Student Willingness to Participate Outweighs Their Disabilities	Ability(ies)	15
	Disability(ies)	38
	Willing	23
	Participate	19
	Struggle	11
	Prepare(s,ed,ing)	14
	Ready	14
Teamwork in a Controlled and Supportive Environment	Teamwork	21
	Support	44
	Safe	14
	Environment	36
	Successful	19
	Employee	18
	Grow	20
Students Deal Confidently Undesirable Situations and Tasks	Real	25
	Confidence	27
	Tasks	36
	Build	37
	Prepare	9
	Experience	43
	Understand	33

Connect the Pieces for Mutual Gain

For WBLE, which includes students with ID, to succeed, many stakeholders must come together for a common purpose. Everyone who comes together to make a WBLE successful gains something from participating in the experience. The businesses improved their ability to train employees. Betsy expressed this sentiment: “I feel like in a way (the students') disability only helps us as trainers to teach and the training coach because everybody learns differently.” Betsy noted that having the students with ID participate at her restaurant allowed her training staff to become better trainers. Including the students in the WBLE helped the training staff build empathy for various learning differences.

Lincoln, a case manager for one of the four high schools, benefited from the students participating in the WBLE because it allowed him to create learning goals for the students he case-managed. The students benefited as well because they had individualized learning targets, “I got the report, but if I noticed a consistency in the report that I knew I was going to either really work on or was gonna add to the IEP, then we would have a conversation with [the students].” Lincoln’s comments also demonstrate how pieces connect to benefit all stakeholders because he received the reports he mentioned from the EOS staff who evaluate the students while they are on the work site. Therefore, because the EOS was present at the work site, wrote the reports, and then shared those reports, the case manager could create goals and instruction to support students' growth at the WBLE sites.

Though all parties do benefit from participating in WBLE, the stakeholders that gain the most are the students with disabilities (SWD). Ashley, a case manager for the students, notes, “It (WBLE) allows them the opportunity to learn skills, whether it's people skills, social skills, functional skills, or the actual skills of the job that they can't necessarily learn within the

classroom setting." Not only do people come together during WBLE, but students with ID experience and practice all the skills it takes to be gainfully employed.

Connect the Pieces

Seven stakeholders collaborated to ensure success in this WBLE: parents, students, school-level case managers, employment organization service personnel (EOS), school division-level specialists, and business personnel. Each party plays a critical role; coming together to provide an exceptional experience is vital to preparing students for the working world. Sydney, an EOS coach, expresses what made this particular WBLE successful, "The teamwork between the [EOS] coach and the employer; being able to connect the pieces together in a different way, setting up the framework for the students before we get to the internship site."

One of the employers, Travis, the hotel manager, noted this about the EOS during the focus group discussion, "I have had other opportunities where they will drop the students off…and that was problematic…If we needed direction, having that on-site coach as kind of the point of contact to direct it and maintain things was fantastic." Travis shared that he had other WBLE program experiences before this one, which did not function well because there was no EOS to help supervise the students. Therefore, the EOS pointed to the support the business provided, and the employer pointed to the support the EOS supplied as the main reason for the program's overall success for students.

Students also connected to other students while participating in the WBLE. Jarrod recalled this anecdote, "The most I learned was at (the restaurant). When I was there…a teacher was like showing me how to wrap the potatoes…I passed this on to [one student], and I passed my teaching skills onto [another student] about placing the bacon on the trays with the sheet." Jarrod continued, "We worked good as a team. We were there not to just help each other but to

help our neighbors. Teamwork makes the dream work, you know." Students like Jarrod were there to improve upon their personal work skills. However, as they learned new skills and developed their abilities, there was a contagious sense of teamwork. The students began training one another on new skills they had learned from their job coaches.

Mutual Gain

Each stakeholder in WBLE starts planning the experience with the student's preparation for the world of work in mind. However, it is clear that more than just the student benefits from programs by its conclusion. The businesses get hours of free work completed. The customers interact with people with disabilities, and the students interact with people without disabilities and gain valuable work experience. Lincoln, a case manager, notes the benefits he observed for the various stakeholders, "[WBLE] gives [students] that experience. It's important to give the community positive interactions with children with disabilities," and he notes, "It's low risk for the business and the students." The community observes SWD working hard in a public place, and the business receives free labor and a pool of potential future employees. The students obtain work experience without fearing being fired and losing their livelihood.

Norman, a hotel employee, trained the students while they were on-site at the hotel. He loved having the students work with him, "They helped me with a lot of things that I couldn't accomplish in a day. When they came on Thursday, they was a big help to me. They helped me outside clean up, and Some of them did the garbage." Norman felt that he could accomplish more when the students were present. Norman mentioned that he missed having the students around, "I feel like they did a wonderful job, and I miss them so much." Norman developed a strong bond with the students, as Jarrod, a student participant, mentioned Norman when he recounted his first experience at the hotel and how Norman showed him how to pick up twigs.

Student Willingness to Participate Outweighs Their Disabilities

Society often defines SWD by just that: their disability. However, a common theme throughout this study is that despite the students' disabilities, their abilities and willingness to participate helped them complete these experiences successfully and learn and grow from these WBLE. Curtis, a job coach with the EOS, explains, "I saw that some of the students were able to push themselves past their comfort zones. [The students] were willing to do any and everything that was asked." The students' willingness to participate contributed to their successful experiences. When listing the most critical elements of the WBLE program, Sydney, another EOS job coach, said, "The students' willingness to work at the site…Everyone has their own abilities, their own, I guess their own thoughts or opinions. And being able to come in with an open mind, open heart, and willing to learn means a lot."

The student participants were willing to try novel tasks they had never performed. Patricia recounted an anecdote from the program, "One student, this is their first time ever working, first time ever even holding a vacuum. They've never vacuumed they didn't even have chores at home." Patricia continued to speak on how the student improved, "He also, like I said, never had used a vacuum cleaner before, but now, at the end of his time at [the hotel], he was able to at least vacuum along the line straight and without prompting or assistance." For many of the tasks the job coaches trained the students to do, the students had never performed the tasks before, yet the students were willing to learn.

The students' disabilities surfaced several times throughout the study. Meredith, an EOS job coach, describes the students' disabilities, "Every student they come in with this lack of confidence in their abilities because they're used to life being hard because everything that they do throughout the day is difficult…daily life is more difficult for them because of their

disability." She continues, "Whether it's a physical disability or whether it's a intellectual disability and their brain just needs to work so much harder to do certain things throughout the day…and so I think that there's a lack of confidence." Meredith summarized what many of the other participants observed: the students lacked confidence because of their disability, but she also observed students grow in confidence as they continued participating in the program, "For somebody who has a disability, they often grow up feeling like 'I need to be taken care of,'" However as they continued participating in the program Meredith detected a change in mindset, "but there's something about when they realize…'I can grow the skill, and I can give back' that there's this confidence…in what they can do that comes from the experience." All students who participated possessed a disability, yet all students willingly participated, and their abilities shone and grew.

Varying Abilities of Students

A clear theme emerged from the data: the students' abilities. Each participant described how students could complete tasks and how students were learning and improving while participating in the WBLE. Every person has abilities; it is just a matter of discovering those capabilities, and WBLE is the catalyst for those discoveries. Jamey, the director of the EOS, describes what WBLE does for students with disabilities who participate, "We just need to find a way to support them to have a meaningful career…everybody has something they're good at and something that they enjoy…so how do we pull that out of the students?" Betsy, the restaurant owner, tried to identify each student's abilities, "We try to find their strengths and their weaknesses," and assigned students tasks based on their initial ability level, "Some of them might not be as verbal as other kids. So it all depends on their level."

Patricia, the transition specialist, noted, “There are different levels of students, and some of the students needed more support.” Ashley, the student’s case manager, echoed that sentiment, “In this program, we have so many kids at so many different varying levels…Some of them, the lower functioning they are harder to find specific tasks that they can really excel in.” Yet some students “are very easy to place because they can do pretty much anything and others, I think behavior tends to be a barrier, a lack of functional skills sometimes tends to be a barrier.” Students who participate in this experience come to the experience on a continuum of abilities ranging from non-verbal and unable to stand for extended amounts of time to bilingual and able to do many physical tasks. Betsy highlighted a student who had an ID but had the gift of being bilingual, “We had a girl…this last semester, and she was bilingual. So I put her in the bakery with my Hispanic ladies.” The bakery workers were able to “communicate with her, you know, where a lot of the other kids it's a little harder for them to communicate, and so I told them ‘use your strengths that will be a way to get you further in life.’” The students' varying abilities were legion, but the supervising staff at every level found ways to highlight students' strengths.

Disability

Schools, organizations, and EOSs invest concentrated efforts, copious amounts of time, and expensive resources in WBLE because students with disabilities need extra support to develop into productive workers. Both physical and cognitive disabilities play a role in what students can do at the workplace. Lincoln describes how disabilities affect students at the WBLE, “Some [students] physically were limited to doing some of the tasks; their fine motor skills weren’t as developed. I had some kids who are higher functioning that probably did every job and then some other kids who are probably only able to accomplish a few.” Some students

possessed physical disabilities in addition to cognitive disabilities, but all students possessed cognitive disabilities.

Curtis, an EOS job coach, described student disabilities, “Some of the students had dexterity issues…One student had issues with finger control. He was only able to use one hand, but he was able to…place the bacon, separate the bacon, and place it onto the trays…using his strong hand.” Other students had other challenges to overcome because of their disability, “One student, as long as it was a repetitive task, he could mimic it…but if it goes outside of that, it would have been a little bit of struggle.” Patricia listed several disabilities that student participants possessed, “Students who had a difficult time with reading who had a difficult time with math processing.” In addition to reading and math difficulties, Patricia also listed “physical issues, stamina issues, and behavioral concerns” as manifestations of the students’ disabilities. Disabilities were present in all students, but the students excelled at the WBLE because they were accommodated and supported.

Teamwork in a Controlled and Supportive Environment

Many players are involved in this WBLE, but a thread that emerged is how the different players came together and worked as a team to provide a supportive environment for the students. Four separate locations, a dozen people, buses, cafeteria workers, and many other factors were a part of this experience, but the WBLE ran effectively and efficiently to benefit the students. Meredith, a job coach with the EOS, explains how vital teamwork between the professionals is in these experiences, “…we as professionals are all working together…using our individual abilities to help the students. There are so many different pieces to this experience for the students…the partnership is vital to helping these students.” A team of diverse professionals came together to put on a successful WBLE program.

Jamey, the EOS owner, pointed out the level of support the hotel offered the students, “They threw a lot of resources at us, which, especially in this economy, we certainly recognize is a big ask to employers to take their time and resources and support students.” For WBLE programs to succeed, willing business partners must invest time and resources to support and develop SWD. In addition to the businesses allocating resources to support students, the schools also invest resources. Jamey points out the role that school-employed paraprofessionals play in supporting students, “Normally, our services are one-on-one. So if there's a student that has a higher need, we love the support of the IA…if one person has a medical need or…behavior support, then the IA really supports in that way.” Kelly continues to explain that the paraprofessionals know how to support the students very well because they are “connected with the class that [the students] are coming from. So they're familiar with [the students].” The school and the businesses have an investment in supporting students at the WBLE site.

The restaurant and the hotel offered opportunities for students to experience the responsibility of a real job but in an environment that was both supportive and controlled. Meredith describes how this looked at the hotel in a store front candy section. She tasked the students with taking inventory of all the candy, but Meredith told the hotel not to use the inventory sheet because the students were still learning the inventory process. Meredith explained the experience, “I wanted the students to feel the pressure of like we've got to do this, but at the same time, I wanted them to have space to learn and to make mistakes.” The WBLE program allowed students to try new skills with all the responsibility attached, but at the same time, students felt the latitude to make mistakes and grow from the mistakes. Lincoln, a case manager, explained, “They do need support of that job coach, showing them what is expected of them how to do it, giving them some time to learn.” Lincoln continues to explain that the WBLE

gives students “the space to learn the tasks, practice it, fail at the tasks and then continuing to give them more time to learn it until they were successful.” The WBLE simulates a first-job experience in a supportive and controlled environment strategically designed to see the participants grow in their employability.

Effectively Supported Student Work

The EOS supported students on-site at the hotel and the restaurant. Some students had additional support through a school paraprofessional. Travis, the hotel manager, describes the level of support students received, “…those kids got such a high level of supervision and interaction from somebody who was trying to propel them up to employability...[The EOS] folks were right there next to them, watching them, moving with them, and it was huge.” Sydney, a job coach, explained how she supported one student on-site, “[The student] would wipe the doors, and instead of wiping the doors, they would wipe too hard. So, like they would slam into the door to wipe it and then back away and then slam into the door and then wipe it.” Sydney pointed out that if anyone was inside of the room, it would frighten the guests. Therefore, she worked with this student to complete this task more quietly. At first, the students require a high level of support to be successful at the job site, but the goal is for students to grow in independence as the WBLE continues.

The evaluation reports analyzed in this study indicated that most students grew in their level of independence to complete the tasks assigned to them from one evaluation period to the next. The support is heaviest at the beginning of the experience, and as the experience continues, the support can slowly decrease. The second quarter evaluation reports indicated that the ten student participants received a score of five, 30 times. A five meant the student could complete a task independently with zero staff prompting or support. Of the 111 scores in the second quarter,

104 were three or higher. Anything below a three requires physical prompting and support to complete the task. The support provided to students proved effective, as evidenced by decreased prompting as the WBLE progressed.

Supportive Environment

Work-based learning experiences occur in locations outside of the classroom. Schools implement strategies and rules to provide a supportive environment within each classroom. However, a workplace is a workplace. Yet, the students participating in this exercise require support in the classroom and even more so in an unfamiliar environment with more demands. The goal for these students is to pull back the support and increase student independence, but a supportive environment is necessary in the learning and growing stage. Patricia describes the support provided to the students, “We have the support of families. We have the support of [the EOS] that provides job coaches…We have IEP case managers who will help reinforce the skills that they are learning on the job.” The student's families often came in to eat at the restaurant while their students were working to show their support. The EOS job coaches provided the hands-on physical and emotional support the students needed on site, and the case managers uniquely crafted instruction to support the student's success at work.

In addition, the businesses supported the students in many ways. Norman discussed how someone was always there to help the students, “They always had someone working with them all the time. Even so, [the job coach] was good like that. She was always there. If she wasn’t there, I was there. So everything worked out good.” Norman and Valerie worked with the students at the hotel to help them complete their tasks. Valerie reflected with students on their individual experiences. At the end of the shift, students received tokens from their job coaches for the work they completed, and Valerie would ask the students about the tokens, “What tokens

did you get today? Well, what did you learn today? What tokens did you earn today? Just things like that to conversate with them." Jamey points out the importance of partnering with a business with the capacity and willingness to support the students, "It has to be the right environment. It has to be the right fit…and WBLE and just employing people with disabilities in general, it has to be an employer who's willing to communicate and be supportive." Students who get to participate in a work experience that desires to support them and see them succeed wildly differ from a work experience that only intends to obtain labor from the worker. The WBLE program, in this case, willed students to thrive through the overabundance of support provided.

Students Deal Confidently with Undesirable Situations and Tasks

Respectively, every participant detailed challenges, situations, and tasks students faced while participating in the WBLE. However, students overcame the hurdles and came through the other side more confident in their abilities. Benjamin, a paraprofessional who supported a student on-site, recalls, "At first, they were really uncertain about their job, and then after their confidence grew, I mean, you could really tell these kids were gonna take off with it." Each of the students who participated has an IEP. This IEP formalizes specially designed instruction that includes accommodations and services that target the students' deficits from their disability. In some sense, implementing the IEP aims to decrease undesirable situations in the student's educational experience at school. For example, if the student has a writing deficit because of their disability, an accommodation may be that the student can utilize dictation software to write anything beyond two sentences. However, a theme unearthed from this study was that when students faced undesirable situations and tasks, they did not cower but became confident.

Growth of Confidence

From the start of the WBLE to its conclusion, each student grew in confidence, as reported by nearly every participant. The exponential growth in confidence that each participant reported seeing in each student may be because many students with disabilities possess low confidence. Meredith, an EOS job coach, explains, “Somebody who has a disability, they grow up feeling like, ‘I need to be taken care of.,’ but there's something when they realize, ‘I can give back.’ There's this confidence in what they can do that comes from the experience.” During this time, WBLE students moved from low confidence in their abilities to high confidence.

The analysis of the students' quarterly progress documents showed a growth in confidence because, as a collective group, the students increased their independence in four main areas: problem-solving skills, initiative, asking questions, and beginning a familiar task without prompting. As the WBLE progressed and the students spent more hours working, they displayed more independence. Independence is related to confidence. When students were unsure of their abilities, they looked to their job coach or on-site mentor to provide prompts or support. However, when the students became comfortable and confident in completing a task, they looked for less physical support or verbal affirmation.

Benjamin saw the students' confidence grow, as evidenced by how they interacted with customers over time: "They opened right up, and they treated strangers kind of like they did people that they actually knew, which was a great turning point for me.” Benjamin explained why this was a turning point, “Because a lot of them they walked down the halls and they don't speak to anybody and their confidence level in themselves kind of grew with [interacting with customers]." Benjamin is a paraprofessional to the students. Therefore, he had the unique perspective of seeing the students at the work site and school. His observation was that students

displayed signs of low-confidence at school before the WBLE, and after interacting with customers (an undesirable task), the students' confidence grew.

Reality

Reality explained is much different than reality experienced. While participating in WBLE, students experience the reality of work. Throughout the students' academic careers, teachers attempt to simulate and explain the facts of the working world, but nothing compares to standing in a bustling kitchen for four hours or interacting with an unhappy customer. Lincoln, a case manager, illustrates this paradigm-shifting experience, "They're transitioning from consumer to employee…The customers are not there to help them as they're the workers. They're expected to get the job done." Lincoln told an anecdote where a student asked a customer to help them stack chairs. Of course, for an employee to invite a customer to help stack chairs is inappropriate, but the student faced the reality that as an employee, the customer is not there to assist them; the student learned that as an employee, they are there to serve.

Case managers in the school division, like Ashley, took these WBLE students to the Practical Assessment Exploration System (PAES) lab once a week. At the PAES lab, students worked on simulated work tasks. The PAES lab assessed students' abilities to complete a task and measured the rate at which they finished it. Ashley points out the benefit of the PAES lab but notes that nothing compares to going to the WBLE sites, "If they were not involved [in the WBLE], they wouldn't get reality. We can do all sorts of simulations. We have the PAES lab. We love going to that. And that's great. It's learning different procedures, but it's not real life." The reality students encounter at the WBLE is a gift that cannot be simulated or faked; students must experience it firsthand. When reality is faced, student confidence increases.

Outlier Data and Findings

One of the semester performance reports analyzed in the document analysis revealed an outlier. Of all the performance reports analyzed, one student did not increase independence in the categories listed. However, this resulted from several factors. His evaluator from the first semester changed the second semester. So, there may have been a lack of observable knowledge about the students' ability levels in the first semester compared to the second semester.

Additionally, this WBLE was this student's first work experience. He was younger than all the other participants and was not as mature. Therefore, the student would increase his independence and employability with continued involvement in WBLE. This outlier suggests that continued participation in WBLE increases work independence and employability because all other student progress reports indicated involvement with WBLE for at least two semesters.

Research Question Responses

There is a direct line from the research question to the appropriate methodology (Hammond, 2023). The answers to the research questions emerge after collecting the data using the proper methods. This section answers the central research question guiding this study: How does participation in work-based learning experiences prepare students with intellectual disabilities for post-school employment? The three data sources, individual interviews, a focus group discussion, and the document analysis, help to answer all the research questions. This three-pronged approach ensures reliability through triangulation (Yin, 2018).

Central Research Question

How does participation in work-based learning experiences prepare students with intellectual disabilities for post-school employment? The participants agree that work-based WBLE equips students with ID for employment after high school by giving them a taste of

reality. Students get to know what it is like to work a real job, what it is like to interact with a boss, what it is like to fail, and what it is like to be rewarded for their work. Lincoln elaborates, "What does it mean to have somebody telling me what to do all day, and I can't complain and share my frustrations because that's my boss." Lincoln continues, "For a good portion of the day [the students] are with other students with intellectual disabilities, and then all of a sudden they're in a job site…interacting with not even peers or aides but other adults, adults without disabilities."

Sub-Question One

How do employers and employment organization services that host students with intellectual disabilities for work-based learning experiences affect the work outcomes of the student participants? The employers and EOS help train and prepare the students for the world of work. In some cases, in past iterations of this WBLE, these experiences prepped the students so well that the employer offered them a job at the end of the semester. Curtis talks about students who gained employment after the WBLE: "Some of the students were able to gain employment through some of the sites. The staff of those sites sees that they are capable. People have misperceived conceptions about individuals with special needs and put limitations on them."

Sub-Question Two

How do case managers affect the work-based learning experience for students with intellectual disabilities? The case managers wear many hats in these programs. They are the boots on the ground who execute all the logistics: getting students on buses, getting paperwork signed, solving daily problems that arise, and communicating with many stakeholders while the students are away. In addition to executing logistics, the case manager must connect with the job coaches and site hosts to address skills students need to improve in classroom instruction. Also,

the case managers must receive progress reports, synthesize them, and communicate them to the school, parents/guardians, and other stakeholders. Finally, the case managers lead students through a time of reflection on their experiences at the work sites to learn and grow from their mistakes and celebrate and congratulate them on their achievements. Patricia explains the case manager's role, “They would use [the progress reports] and let the parents know what was going on via those progress notes. If there were issues…they could…go to the actual work site to…work on those problem areas back in the classroom.”

Sub-Question Three

How do students with intellectual disabilities progress through the experiential learning cycle when participating in work-based learning experiences? An important discovery from this study was the use of “huddles.” The job coaches gather all the students into a group and lead a time of reflection. These daily huddles would last anywhere from 15 to 20 minutes. Before beginning the day and after a day of learning on the job (experiencing the concrete), students enter into a reflective exercise to pinpoint specific skills to concentrate on that day and after, what went well that day, and what they could do better next time. In the classroom, the case managers would role-play scenarios students may have encountered and practice skills they need to improve (abstract hypothesis). Then, after a week, the students would return to the work site, implementing the skills and ideas they practiced in the classroom (active experimentation). Jamey describes the huddles that the job coaches utilized, “We do things called huddles at the beginning and end of each [day]. At the beginning, we talk about a skill. At the end of the day, we say what went well, what things can we work on.” Jamey continues, “Constant communication about areas to improve is helpful and just making that relatable and relational because we all have areas we can improve on.”

Summary

The triangulation of results utilizing the individual interviews, focus group discussion, and document analysis revealed four major themes: Connect the Pieces for Mutual Gain, Student Willingness to Participate Outweighs their Disabilities, Teamwork in a Controlled and Supportive Environment, and Students Deal Confidently with Undesirable Situations and Tasks. This study revealed the large number of professional personnel it takes to provide a simulated work environment conducive to student success and growth. This study's WBLE was not a tiny, unorganized operation. It was a large operation; between the different schools, the businesses, the bus drivers, the students, the parents, the job coaches, supervisors, and directors, this program includes upwards of 20-30 people to ensure that it runs smoothly and effectively. Despite the large size, the program ran efficiently and effectively with very few setbacks and produced the results everyone wanted to create: employment for students with disabilities.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This embedded single-case study aims to understand how participation in work-based learning experiences (WBLE) prepares students with intellectual disabilities (ID) for post-school competitive employment. In this chapter, I address the interpretation of findings from the study and the implications for policy or practice. In addition, I discuss the study's theoretical and empirical implications, limitations, and delimitations. I conclude the chapter by addressing recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The embedded single case study research design enabled the researcher to discover critical insights on how participating in WBLE prepares students with intellectual disabilities for employment. Thirteen people who were actively engaged in WBLE participated in the study. Twelve participants sat for an individual interview. Four participants participated in the individual interviews and a focus group discussion, which included the last participant, a student with a disability (SWD). The employment organization services (EOS) that participated in the study provided quarterly progress reports for analysis. These methods of data collection produced a rich description of the case. The first cycle coding, in-vivo coding, revealed a little over a thousand initial codes. The researcher grouped the in-vivo codes using pattern coding in the second cycle, and eight meta-codes or sub-themes emerged. The researcher aggregated the sub-themes into four major themes that answered the research questions: Connect the Pieces for Mutual Gain, Student Willingness to Participate Outweighs their Disabilities, Teamwork in a Controlled and Supportive Environment, and Students Deal Confidently with Undesirable Situations and Tasks. In this chapter, I provide an interpretation of these findings that correlates

to policy and practice and how future research may improve upon these findings. Additionally, I include the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Summary of Thematic Findings

All the themes discovered from the data detail the preparatory effects WBLE has on students in their efforts to gain employment, the role the different stakeholders play in the experience, and the importance of metacognition throughout the WBLE process. The themes of this study are in vivo from the participants. In addition, the researcher combined in vivo meta-codes or phrases to create the overarching themes to highlight the participants' voices in this study.

Connect the Pieces for Mutual Gain

As mentioned in Chapter Two, WBLE requires many stakeholders to be successful. Rooney-Kron and Dymond (2021) suggested several barriers to properly implementing WBLE and each of them revolved around the logistical and personnel 'pieces,' the resources, time, stakeholders, and opportunities. However, this study of WBLE pointed to connecting all of those pieces as a primary reason for its effectiveness. As a job coach, Meredith pointed out, "It's important that we as professionals are all working together well and using our individual abilities to help the students. It's just so vital that we as professionals are reaching out to each other for help." Each stakeholder in the experience has a different role to play because of their differing relationship with the student and differing expertise.

"Connecting the Pieces" is evident through a description of a student's day. The case manager at each of the four schools ensures that all students are prepared to work on the WBLE day. They check the student over to make sure they are in proper work attire and get them on the bus to begin their journey to the work experience. The bus drivers transport the students to the

division's technical center, where they get onto a different bus that drops them off at work. Upon arriving at the work site, the students connect with their job coach from the EOS, who has already met with the site host to review the student's daily tasks. After a brief morning huddle, the students begin to work with their site mentor. After a four-hour shift of interacting with other employees, bosses, and customers, students return on the bus for the first leg of their trip back to school. While the students ride two buses back to their schools, the job coaches send messages to the transition specialists, case managers, and often parents, including notes regarding the students' work performance that day. Then, the students conclude their day by returning to their schools and discussing their experiences with their case manager before leaving for home. Before any student steps down on any work site, hours of collaboration and communication have already taken place between the transition specialist, the director of the EOS, and the site host supervisors to plan for the student's experiences.

The other sense in which this theme played out in this study was that as students put the pieces of employability together, the soft skills, the hard skills, the commitment, and perseverance, all stakeholders mutually benefited. Betsy, the manager of the restaurant, explained how she and her staff benefited, "In a way, [the students'] disability only helps us as trainers to teach and train and coach because everybody learns differently…[hosting] these kids helps my staff." Norman, a site mentor, describes his experience with the students, "I helped them, they helped me, and they helped me with a lot of things that I couldn't accomplish in a day." Travis, the hotel manager, says the students help meet the hotel's goals, "I would say that our company above property loves to see us engage with the community, and due to our business, it's difficult to do that…having these guys on site seeing us engage with them. They love that." The director of the EOS, Jamey, points out that implementing these experiences while

the students are in school will help out the EOS when they become adults, “Our data supports that people who experience workplace experiences in school do better once they graduate in getting better jobs and keeping jobs. I know on the back end that helps us as we work with adults in paid positions.” Finally, Jarrod, a student participant, notes how he benefited from the WBLE, “I am getting more and more confident every day.”

Student Willingness to Participate Outweighs their Disabilities

Each student participating in this WBLE has a disability. As noted in the literature, students with disabilities attain post-school employment at lower rates than those who do have disabilities (Prince et al., 2018). Therefore, their willingness to participate is vital. Some students had cognitive deficits, others physical. Students’ disabilities did play a role in their participation in this experience. Several site supervisors pointed out different manifestations of students’ disabilities on the job. Lincoln pointed out, “Some of the fine motor skills weren’t as developed in some of the kids.” Ashley added, “Behavior tends to be a barrier, lack of functional skills sometimes tends to be a barrier, and social skills.” Benjamin mentioned a “lack of physical strength.” Curtis noticed “dexterity issues.” Patricia identified students who had a “difficult time with reading, who had a difficult time with math processing.” Each participant pointed out displays of students’ disabilities throughout the WBLE.

However, in the same conversations surrounding the students’ disabilities, a common thread consistently surfaced: the students’ abilities and willing spirits. A significant component that made this WBLE program successful was the student’s willingness to participate in the experience. The document analysis revealed a negative example of this phenomenon. One of the students evaluated by the EOS did not increase his independence in all areas but regressed in four major areas. The summary statement in the quarterly report notes that the student “expresses

continued disinterest in learning any work skills or any further continuation in any work-related activities" and " he doesn't wish to return to work program." The student improved upon the skills he was learning on the job, but his overall independence, which students get rated on, decreased. The student's unwillingness to participate in the experience most likely led to this regression of independence.

Yet, the study did reveal many positive examples of how students' abilities and willingness to participate outweighed their disabilities. When Sydney discussed the essential elements of the WBLE, she listed "the students' willingness to work at the site" as one of the chief factors for the program's success. Betsy, the branch manager of the restaurant, put it this way:

> These are kids willing to learn, and they might not be on the same page as most kids that come in here. But these are the ones that eventually are going to go places regardless of their learning disability or anything like that. They are going to pick something in life, and they're going to grow at it, and they're going to be great at it.

So, despite having deficits and disabilities, the students were willing to try and participate. Curtis notes, "Once they got to the job site, [the students] shine; they were willing to do any and everything." Lincoln also noticed "Another [student] who was very low, and although he was, he was always a very hard worker, always willing to try." In describing the students' weaknesses and disabilities, most participants tended to caveat the conversation with the idea that students were willing to try. Therefore, students must be eager to participate in the WBLE, or the employability gains will not be significant, and student work independence will not improve.

In addition to willingness, the participants highlighted student abilities; instead of focusing on what students *could not* do, the participants highlighted what students *could* do.

Lincoln recalls a student with cerebral palsy who struggled to wrap silverware and lay out bacon at the restaurant, but the student "at the hotel could still wipe down things…[at the restaurant] he was pretty much able to wipe down the tables." In the twenty student evaluative reports, evaluators did not describe any activity or task the students could not perform. Evaluators did not use the word 'unable' in their reports but referenced 'able' 27 times. Betsy recalls working with a student who had an intellectual disability but who was also bilingual. Betsy told the student that the student had an ability that she did not possess: the ability to speak Spanish. Betsy feels her role in the WBLE is " to find what the kids are good at." Identifying and highlighting the abilities the students possess rather than focusing on the students' disabilities is a significant contributor to the success of the program and, ultimately, the overall employability of the students.

Teamwork in a Controlled and Supportive Environment

All stakeholders must collaborate to ensure students are in a controlled and supportive environment during the WBLE. The literature noted that some employers who host students with disabilities for WBLE are unsure of how the program started and how they were supposed to help run it (Riesen & Oertle, 2019). However, the EOS personnel helped to bridge the gap between the business and the school. Meredith, one of the EOS personnel, describes an example of collaboration to create a supportive environment for students:

> [The school division transition specialist] would make meetings happen. She would get us connected. She was the only school person who got me connected with a behavior specialist. That was, honestly, one of the biggest reasons we could see improvement in [the students] was because we had that partnership, and we had all of the people coming together in their specific fields.

Without direct consultation from a behavior specialist, students may not have been as supported in the work environments. Students with more severe physical disabilities or adverse behavioral manifestations went to the work site with a school paraprofessional. The paraprofessional was there to support the student's needs. Ashley describes the paraprofessional's role in addressing adverse behaviors, “Behavior wise…if there's an issue, they typically would be the ones to pull them aside and discuss, have a discussion with them about whatever the behavior is.” Benjamin, a paraprofessional, talks about how he supported students on-site, “I was with the whole group. I probably walked a couple miles inside of the restaurant every Wednesday…[I] had written down all the jobs that we were gonna do.” The paraprofessional was utilized with some of the students based on the group size to divide the students up with the job coach or based on the level of need associated with the student’s disabilities. If students had a physical disability that limited their mobility or dexterity, the paraprofessional would support the student to help them perform the task given to them by modifying the task. The paraprofessionals support the students with severe cognitive limitations by breaking down the task or tasks into manageable parts and modeling the task.

The stakeholders who made the environment controlled and supportive pointed to other stakeholders as the reason for the program’s success and the partnership between the people involved as an essential element of the WBLE program. The hotel manager, Travis, says, “The supervision that [the EOS] provides, it's crucial to the whole thing.” Jamey, the EOS director, credits the employers who are willing to participate in the program for the supportive environment, “It has to be an employer who's willing to communicate and be supportive… having somebody that can support and be understanding and for us to be able to advocate for, and then be responsive is a big part of it.” Lincoln, a case manager, pointed to the EOS job

coaches as providing the support students needed, “They do need support. That job coach, showing them what is expected, how to do it, giving them some time to learn.” Patricia, the transition specialist, describes how the case manager supported students as well, “As far as the case managers, they looked at the progress notes to get an idea to see what they needed to work on in the classroom with the students.” The case managers would support the weaknesses and deficits students displayed at the work site with exercises and activities in the classroom. Norman, a job-site mentor and employee at the hotel, talks about how all of the hotel staff supported the students:

> Me trying to help them out, and there's the head housekeeper lady. She would help them out sometimes, and the people around, people at the desk, they would help them, give them advice. All of us gave them good advice on how to do things, not only me, not only [the manager], all of the workers here gave them good advice.

All stakeholders ensured the students were supported and successful in their efforts and learning while participating in this WBLE.

The environment was not only supportive but also controlled. Certain limitations and parameters were placed on the students while they participated. Valerie, a hotel worker, describes a practical limit, “On a liability aspect on our part with having non-employees handle chemicals and stuff like that…we weren’t allowed to let them do [that].” Betsy, the restaurant manager, also indicated that students could perform many jobs but could not execute others because of liability restrictions, “[The students could do] anything that didn't involve them actually having to touch the oven or, you know, a knife, because they're not allowed to do that.” Students could not perform tasks deemed unsafe for them as non-employees by the partner

employers. Meredith, a job coach, describes an exercise conducted on the job site that practiced a vital skill but had no consequence for the business:

> We would take inventory of the candy section in the market section, and we would really slow down the process. I went to the front desk, and I would ask for the inventory sheet, and I told them in the beginning. I stood separately from the students and had a private conversation with the employee. I was like, “Don't use this inventory sheet for your actual inventory, but I'm not going to tell the students it is. I wanted the students to feel the pressure of ‘we've got to do this,’ but at the same time, I wanted them to have space to learn and to make mistakes.

The businesses allowing such exercises to take place empowered students to learn and grow in an authentic work environment that was supportive and controlled at the same time.

Students Deal Confidently with Undesirable Situations and Tasks

An idea repeatedly emerged from the dataset: reality. The reality of employment is that it is full of undesirable situations and tasks. WBLE exposed students to this paradigm so that they can navigate these challenges confidently in future employment opportunities. Ashley, a case manager, describes how students dealt with undesirable situations and tasks while participating in the WBLE:

> They grew to enjoy things that they wouldn't normally enjoy—for instance, working outside. They did a lot of grounds clean up, and one of my students he was not an outdoorsy kind of guy. And, of course, in the winter, it was a little chillier, and he didn't care much for it. But as the spring hit and things started to warm up. He actually enjoyed going out each day because he said he was able to get fresh air.

Students learned that there will be tasks for them to do in their jobs that they do not like to do, but they still must do them. Without the WBLE, the students would face this reality in their first employment experience and become discouraged. WBLE allows students to struggle through early work pains and build maturity, resilience, and confidence (Esters & Retallick, 2013; Kranzler et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2013). Ashley says, “We saw a big improvement in their maturity level. They're going to a job. They were learning the concept of how to navigate through different things.”

One result of facing undesirable situations and tasks was that students improved their ability to solve problems independently. The literature indicated parents were concerned about their children with disabilities coming out of COVID-19 (Asbury et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021). Parents were worried for their children’s future and their ability to gain the skills necessary to be successful later in life. However, this WBLE program showed that students who participated gained confidence from the beginning of the experience to the end and thus grew their overall employability. For example, the document analysis aggregated the ten student reports on their level of independence on significant skills. The difference between the first and second-quarter scores resulted in a positive or negative number, indicating growth or regression in the student’s independence. The skill with the most significant improvement was “problem-solving.” The students combined for a score of four, two points higher than the next highest category. As students participate in WBLE and face undesirable situations and tasks, they grow in problem-solving, and as a result, they increase in confidence.

Every participant in this study pointed to the growth students experienced in their confidence after participating in WBLE. The student participant Jarrod talks about how he grew from participating in WBLE: "[I am] feeling pretty confident, and I wasn’t before. Now, I am

getting more and more confident every day. I am learning new every day." Betsy echoes Jarrod, "The main thing they get when they leave here is self-confidence." Patricia adds, "[The students] grow in confidence in their ability to do things." Benjamin says, "[Before participating] they walked down the halls and they don't speak to anybody, and their confidence level in themselves kind of grew with [participating]. Jamey sees growing confidence in all students, "I think almost with every student we see a growth in confidence, and that is such a big aspect to being successful at work." Meredith contributes to this idea, "They gain confidence when they participate in the program, and they realize what they are able to do. They find things that they are good at; they find things that they can contribute to a community." Sydney shares her thoughts on watching students from the beginning of the program to the end, "Starting in the very beginning of an internship…they'll come in, and they'll be very hesitant…whereas towards the end of the internship, they are more confident in what they're doing." The critical implication is that SWD who participate in WBLE face undesirable situations and tasks to their benefit. At first, these experiences produce hesitancy and discomfort, but by the conclusion, the students improve their independence, problem-solving skills, and ultimately, their confidence.

Interpretation of Findings

The theme entitled "Connect the Pieces for Mutual Gain" contains a double meaning in this study. The logistical and personnel pieces must connect to ensure a successful experience; in that process, all parties gain from the experience. Secondly, the students connect all the pieces of the employment puzzle and all involved benefit in the process. Theme two, "Student Willingness to Participate Outweighs their Disabilities," emerged through participants discussing challenges students face while participating because of their disability. However, they would also point out that the students possessed the abilities and willingness to succeed in these experiences and

beyond. The third theme, “Teamwork in a Controlled and Supportive Environment,” took the words of two different participants and emerged as a significant theme. The WBLE environment consists of various stakeholders and remains supportive regardless of the personnel working with the students. The last theme, “Students Deal Confidently with Undesirable Situations and Tasks,” may have the most meaning of any theme because it directly answers the central research question. Each participant pointed out a challenge, barrier, or hurdle students faced when participating in WBLE. However, the overwhelming consensus from the participants was that each student exponentially grew in confidence by the end of the experience because they persevered through those undesirable situations and tasks and learned from them.

Employment Organization Services Critical to Successful Work-based Learning Experiences

Each stakeholder is essential in developing and implementing a successful WBLE. The school division prepares and selects students to enter into a WBLE placement. Parents consent to the plan for their students to participate in WBLE. Special education case managers utilize career clusters, educational assessments, and other transition-related activities to help the student select the correct work site to attend. The partner work sites open their businesses to a relatively unknown population. Students must have a desire to participate and learn. However, the EOS provides the infrastructure and framework for the entire program.

WBLE programs emulated a real-life jigsaw puzzle with different pieces throughout this study. All stakeholders must be connected for everyone to see the complete, crisp picture of a WBLE program. Sticking with the puzzle analogy, the EOS are the edge pieces of the puzzle. The EOS orients, frames, and guides the WBLE. Implementing a WBLE program can be done without an EOS, but the program would lack direction, clarity, a starting point, a network of

businesses, the infrastructure, staff, supervision, experience, and the curriculum to implement the program successfully.

The EOS has access to a vast network of businesses willing to host students with disabilities. A network of companies that both want to help students and need the help of more workers is an invaluable asset to running a sustainable and prosperous WBLE. The EOS in this study utilized a well-developed curriculum that concentrated on transferable soft skills. Soft skills are typically a deficit for SWD and transfer well to every job setting, unlike hard skills specific to a job. Therefore, the EOS aims to improve soft skills in their curriculum.

School divisions limit the amount of staff that any one school employs. By partnering with an EOS, schools have additional staff to attend the WBLE with the students, provide instruction, assess students' abilities, and measure growth. Informal work experiences benefit SWD, but the next level of effectiveness is formal WBLE, where a seasoned professional can collaborate with a school to train students while on the job and provide real-time feedback. EOS has the experience necessary to provide direction and guidance to schools and students in implementing WBLE. WBLE is often started with good intentions but lacks the framework and expertise that EOS possesses. EOS is essential to successfully implementing WBLE for SWD.

Experiential Learning Theory Marries Well with Work-based Learning Experiences

When students think about the learning process they are experiencing, their understanding and learning outcomes improve (Huda et al., 2021). Moreover, the case of WBLE studied in this project naturally followed the experiential learning process. Real-life work site experiences introduce students to novel, concrete experiences. At this work site, they had responsibilities and duties that depended on them to complete. The dishes needed cleaning, the cookies required cooking, and the shelves needed stocking. These duties and tasks were concrete

experiences that confronted students. Some of these experiences were enjoyable, but many were undesirable.

After these concrete experiences, but before the end of the work day, students would enter a “huddle” with their job coach. In this huddle, the students would engage in the next portion of the learning cycle, the reflective observation stage. During the huddles, the students discuss the situations and tasks they had experienced that day. Students were encouraged to discuss what they enjoyed and did not enjoy and the positives and negatives. This daily reflective session closed the work day for the students, and the job coaches recorded notes on the discussion.

The next stage of the learning cycle, abstract hypothesis, occurred in a variety of settings by a slew of different stakeholders (Kolb, 2014). Sometimes, the school-employed special education teachers would hypothesize with students about strategies to try next time when confronted with a challenge or undesirable, and some even incorporated these strategies into students' goals for their academic plan. Other times, the business partners hypothesized with the students about situations during the work day. The restaurant manager walked a student through a hypothetical situation in which she took the student's food away too soon and how that would make the student feel to try to help them empathize with customers. The abstract hypothesis was a critical element of the success of the WBLE program.

The last step in the ongoing experiential learning cycle is active experimentation (Kolb, 2014). Students went to the work site once a week for 18 weeks. Special education teachers would utilize the Practical Assessment Exploration System (PAES) lab between work site experiences. This system’s location is at one of the four high schools in the school division, serving two purposes. It allows students to assess their ability to complete everyday job tasks and

explore many career paths. Therefore, special education teachers would have students practice skills they needed to work on for the WBLE but in the comfortable learning setting of the PAES lab. Then, of course, when the students returned to work the following week, they would actively experiment and implement those hypotheses contemplated earlier in the week. Then, the learning cycle would begin again when faced with a novel or comparable concrete experience. Integrating elements of the experiential learning theory into a WBLE makes it successful for students with intellectual disabilities.

Student Participants Freely Fail

Students with disabilities (SWD) are found eligible for special education services primarily because of their continued failure to meet grade-level expectations due to a pervasive disability that impacts their academic progress. In other words, they failed. In many ways, failure characterizes SWD because of the many failed tests and homework assignments they encounter during school. Failure is often more instructive than success, though it does not always feel that way. An environment that fosters the freedom to fail is a fertile learning environment. The WBLE program in this study allowed students to fail and, in doing so, grow.

The hotel and the restaurant accomplished this learning culture in different ways. Leadership at the restaurant set the standard. Betsy, the restaurant manager, looked for strengths in the students. Students with ID have below-average intelligence but have many other abilities. One student Besty worked with was bilingual and could communicate fluently with Hispanic customers and staff, whereas the manager could not. The manager at the restaurant highlighted student strengths and accommodated and planned for student weaknesses. Exposure to uncomfortable tasks and situations, rather than shielding the students from them, helped reveal

their strengths and weaknesses. Experiences and opportunities to fail ultimately led to the students growing in confidence and comfort with the tasks.

The hotel fostered a supportive culture and controlled environment that allowed students to fail freely in two ways: first, through leading by example. The hotel employed Norman, who gained employment from the very EOS working with the students. Norman was the leading on-site trainer, and the students learned the job details from him. Norman shared his story with students, saying he also had to learn to do the job from a job coach like the students. He shared that he did not complete the tasks asked of him perfectly the first time or even the second time, but he eventually learned the ins and outs of the job and got hired by the hotel.

Secondly, the hotel manager, Travis, encouraged equity among his staff and the students. Students did not perform made-up tasks at the hotel but performed real-life functions that needed doing for the hotel to run effectively. Travis wanted students to feel like they were a part of the team by involving them in morale-building activities such as a pizza party that all employees and students enjoyed. Students felt the pressure to perform the tasks given to them but also felt the freedom to fail and grow from these experiences because of the hotel's supportive culture and controlled environment. Successful WBLE programs must partner with work sites that foster a culture where students feel free to fail and provide support through their failure for the aim of student growth and sustained employment.

Implications for Policy or Practice

This study on WBLE for students with ID broadened the evidence to implement such programs in schools. Such programs can be implemented through policy and practice changes by those in government, education, and employment services. The following section addresses those policy and practice implications.

Implications for Policy

On the local level, when suggesting school policy changes, local school boards often bring community needs to the fore. Therefore, school board officials should push to expand WBLE programs for all students because the workforce is declining (Sannicandro et al., 2018). This study suggests WBLE programs benefit students with ID, but all students would benefit from participating in these experiences. Communities need more students to graduate with the skills to enter the workforce and contribute successfully and immediately. School boards should pen policy changes that invest more resources in WBLE programs.

On the state level, Virginia is committed to preparing students for life after high school, as evidenced by the investment in WBLE (VDOE, 2021). However, Virginia should pass legislation that makes WBLE a graduation requirement regardless of diploma type. Currently, in addition to the student's course and testing requirements, students must also complete either an advanced placement (AP), international baccalaureate (IB), honors, dual enrollment, career and technical education credential or a work-based learning experience to meet the requirements for graduation (VDOE, 2022c). However, state officials should advocate for WBLE to be an exclusive graduation requirement for all students in Virginia. If all students in Virginia had to participate in WBLE, unemployment would decrease, and job retention rates would increase.

Implications for Practice

As a case manager who supported students who participated in WBLE, Lincoln notes, "I really hope that as the program continues to develop, they can offer more of it. My kids weren't getting nearly as much out of what I could teach them in the classroom as they were one day a week at the job site." The students in this study participated one day a week at a WBLE job site. Schools participating in this study should look to increase the number of days students attend

each week. Students should not go to the job site every day of the week because this study suggests the importance of supporting the WBLE with classroom instruction. However, increasing the number of days students attend to two or three days a week is recommended, as students would reap the benefits of participating on an exponential level.

In working with SWD, there is a temptation to avoid causing discomfort to the students by having them engage in undesirable work-related tasks. However, this study does not support that idea but suggests the exact opposite and agrees with the literature mentioned in chapter two: WBLE consistently prepares students with ID to enter the workforce successfully (Carter et al., 2012; Dutta et al., 2008; Test et al., 2009). Therefore, special education teachers and EOS should engage students in work experiences when appropriate. In addition, educators who work with SWD should also encourage engagement in undesirable educational tasks so that students can increase their confidence in their academic skills and abilities.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Experiential learning theory (ELT) states that learning includes four sequential yet ongoing stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract hypotheses, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2014). This case study on WBLE included these four learning stages. By bringing SWD to the work sites, students were engaging in concrete experiences. Students touched, felt, smelled, heard, and saw what it was like to be employed. Students encountered reflective observation with their peers and supervisors when engaging in the daily huddle and end-of-day share time with their case managers. These conversations led to abstract hypotheses about improving and cementing their learning from their previous concrete experiences. These hypotheses led to active experimentation upon the students' return to the work site the following week. ELT coincides nicely with WBLE, though the stakeholders involved in the program did

not intentionally implement this theory. All four stages of ELT appeared in the WBLE observed in this study and thus was the perfect application of the theory.

As noted in Chapter Two, the literature on WBLE indicates that participation in these experiences prepares students for the world of work. However, the literature was unclear on how to implement these programs best and how they prepare students for employment (Rooney-Kron & Dymond, 2023). This study suggests several essential elements for best implementing WBLE programs for students with ID. First, students must be willing to participate in the programs. Increasing the willingness of students to participate in WBLE may require advertisement and early exposure to the benefits of WBLE for students.

Second, the work environment where students attend the experience must be controlled and supportive. Initially, students require heavy support and cannot perform all job requirements. Students must know that it is okay to try and fail as they grow more independent in working the job. Third, in a controlled and supportive environment, students must be confronted with the realities of the working world. Gainful employment requires a person to engage in undesirable situations and tasks. The more students engage in these experiences, the more confident they become. Finally, once the pieces of the WBLE puzzle are in place, students are prepared to obtain and maintain employment because they practice soft skills that translate to any work environment. Students who participate in WBLE learn hard skills as a derivative of participating, but the soft skills (professionalism, problem-solving, communication, initiative, and asking questions) are the key to preparing students with ID for employment.

Limitations and Delimitations

In this study, I investigated two precise locations. Therefore, other settings cannot directly apply the findings of this study, but the principles derived from this study may apply to

or inform the practices of similar cases. Another limitation of this study is my bent toward the efficaciousness of WBLE. My brother has an ID and has participated in several WBLE to his benefit. In addition, I created a WBLE program for students with disabilities in my previous school division. Implementing this study at two specific locations and my bent towards WBLE may be limitations of the study because these factors contribute to my personal bias, but these experiences pushed me to start and finish this study.

I fostered some purposeful limitations on the study. I only wanted participants who were 18 or older because of the sensitive nature of disabilities. In addition, I selected the hotel and the restaurant to conduct this study because I knew they performed WBLE for students with ID at these two locations, and they were close in proximity to my home and place of work. I could have included additional participants to participate in the study but settled on work-site supervisors who assisted students in being successful on the job. Furthermore, I could have also included more student participants, but I sensed that the chosen student's perspective sufficed in helping to answer the research questions. Another factor in selecting the sole student participant was his ability to articulate his thoughts and words coherently, whereas other students did not have the same ability.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this study, I suggest that a student’s willingness to participate in WBLE correlates to the experience's efficaciousness. Therefore, future research should focus on what increases students' willingness to participate so practitioners can foster those elements. A longitudinal study that studies students who participate in WBLE in high school into their third year of exiting such programs to see how participation affected their life outcomes, including employment, would inform the literature on the long-term effects of WBLE participation. As

noted in the limitations section, case study research examines a particular case. Future research could center on students with ID who participated in any WBLE in their high school careers to see which elements of the WBLE prepared them best for employment. A key theme of this study was that all participants mutually benefited from WBLE; however, future research could explore if customers benefited from the experiences by garnering the perspectives of customers and the public who interacted with students who participated in WBLE to see their beliefs about such programs and if their beliefs about SWD changed.

Conclusion

This embedded single-case study aimed to understand how participation in WBLE prepares students with ID for post-school competitive employment. People with ID are unemployed at much higher rates than those without ID (Sannicandro et al., 2018). Therefore, it was vital to understand the essential elements of effective WBLE programs to increase the employability of people with ID. The study considered the perspectives of one student participant and twelve site supervisors who collaborated to ensure the effectiveness of the experience and make it worthwhile for the students.

The study found four major themes that contribute to preparing students to enter the working world: Connect the Pieces for Mutual Gain, Student Willingness to Participate Outweighs their Disabilities, Teamwork in a Controlled and Supportive Environment, and Students Deal Confidently with Undesirable Situations and Tasks. The most prominent crux of this study was that implementing WBLE must include profound collaboration. Students with disabilities (SWD) are incredibly complex, as are the work environments in which they participate. SWDs have medical conditions that require attention, learning differences that necessitate accommodation, and limitations that demand consideration. Businesses exist to make

money, but that effort includes unhappy customers, disgruntled employees, and other unpredictable factors. Therefore, to provide a genuine work experience for students, schools, families, businesses, and employment organization services must work together harmoniously for the students' benefit, which benefits all involved in the experience.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

[External] IRB-FY22-23-1612 - Initial: Initial - Exempt

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
Thu 7/20/2023 11:06 AM
To:Richard, Jessy <jrichard13@liberty.edu>;Farrell, Sharon E (Doctor of Education) <sfarrell4@liberty.edu>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 20, 2023

Jessy Richard
Sharon Farrell

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1612 Work-Based Learning Experiences and Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Dear Jessy Richard, Sharon Farrell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

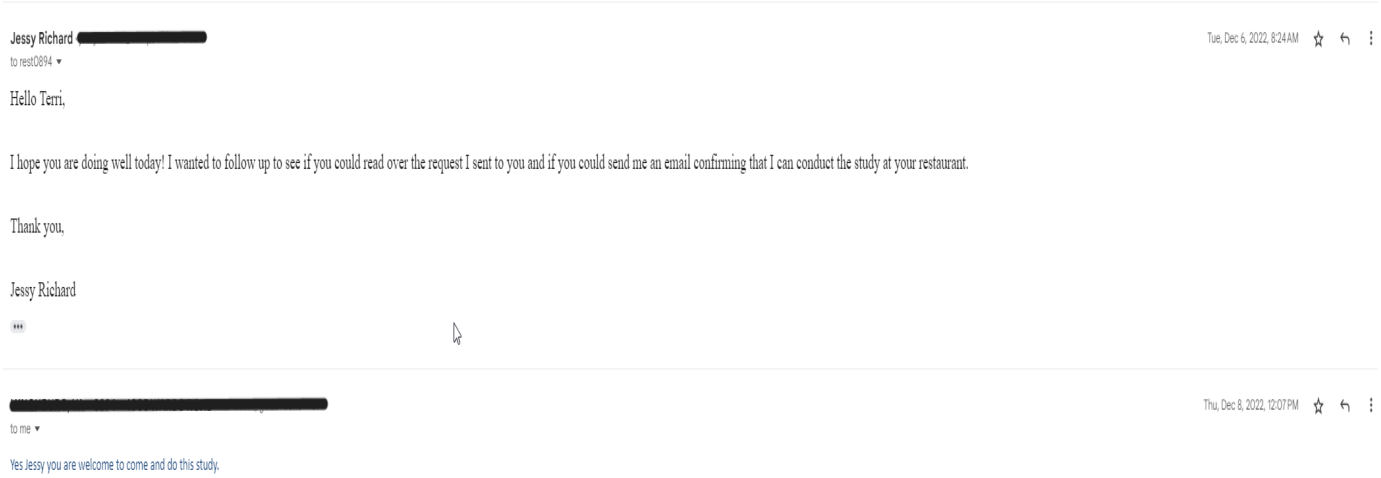
Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Site Approval Letter 1



Jessy Richard [redacted]
to rest0894 ▾
Tue, Dec 6, 2022, 8:24 AM

Hello Terri,

I hope you are doing well today! I wanted to follow up to see if you could read over the request I sent to you and if you could send me an email confirming that I can conduct the study at your restaurant.

Thank you,

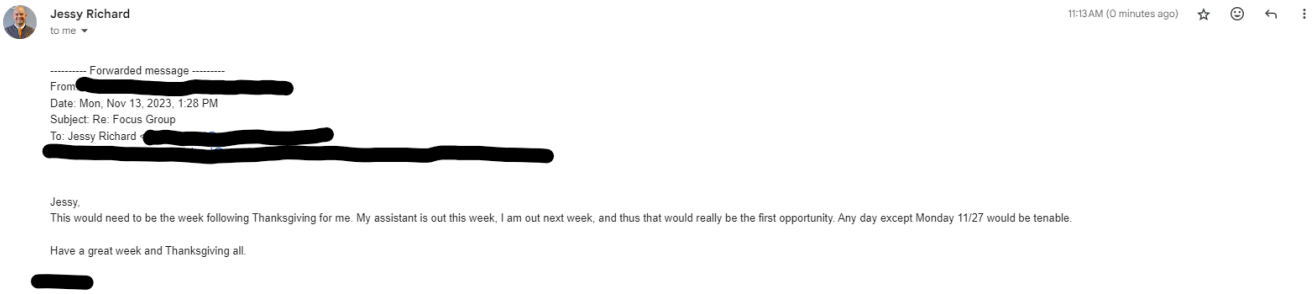
Jessy Richard

[redacted]
to me ▾
Thu, Dec 8, 2022, 12:07 PM

Yes Jessy you are welcome to come and do this study.

Appendix C

Site Approval Email 2



Jessy Richard
to me

11:13 AM (0 minutes ago)

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: [redacted]
Date: Mon, Nov 13, 2023, 1:28 PM
Subject: Re: Focus Group
To: Jessy Richard <[redacted]>

Jessy,
This would need to be the week following Thanksgiving for me. My assistant is out this week, I am out next week, and thus that would really be the first opportunity. Any day except Monday 11/27 would be tenable.

Have a great week and Thanksgiving all.

[redacted]

Appendix D

Dear Student and Parent,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in educational leadership. The purpose of this study is to understand how participation in work-based learning experiences prepares students with intellectual disabilities for post-school competitive employment. Therefore, I am writing to invite students with parental permission to participate in this study. Participants must participate in the restaurant and hotel's work-based learning program. If you do accept the invitation and participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview that can last up to one hour and a focus group discussion that could last an hour. All identifying information, such as names, will remain confidential. If you want to participate, please contact me via email for more details. Interviews will be scheduled at a time that works best for you. A parent consent/student assent form is attached to this email. This form details more information about the study. If you choose to participate, please sign the parent consent/student assent form and return it to me via email or in person.

Gratefully,

Jessy Richard

Appendix E

Dear employment supervisors,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in educational leadership. The purpose of this study is to understand how participation in work-based learning experiences prepares students with intellectual disabilities for post-school competitive employment. Therefore, I am writing to invite job coaches, employees of the worksites, managers, case managers, and transition specialists to participate in this study. Participants must participate in the restaurant and hotel's work-based learning program. If you do accept the invitation and participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview that can last up to one hour and a focus group discussion that could last an hour. All identifying information, such as names, will remain confidential. If you want to participate, please contact me by email for more details. Interviews will be scheduled at a time that works best for you. A consent form is attached to this email. This form details more information about the study. If you choose to participate, please sign the consent form and return it to me via email or in person.

Gratefully,

Jessy Richard

Appendix F
Parental Consent/Student Assent Form

Title of the Project: Work-based Learning Experiences & Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Principal Investigator: Jessy Richard, EdS, Liberty University, School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older. You must also be a person with a disability attending a work-based learning experience with a public education school.

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 this embedded single-case study is to understand how participation in WBLE prepares students with ID for post-school competitive employment.

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. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed about your experiences at the work-based learning experience you participate in through school. These conversations will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. This interview may take up to one hour.
2. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a focus group conversation about your experiences at the work-based learning experience you participate in. This group discussion will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. This focus group discussion may take up to one hour.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study. Benefits to society include a better understanding of how work-based learning experiences impact students with intellectual disabilities.

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, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms. Focus group sessions will be conducted in groups of six and 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 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.
- The researcher will attempt to minimize confidentiality breaches by practicing the abovementioned procedures.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher serves as a college and career advisor at [redacted] Schools. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, a research assistant will ensure that all data is stripped of identifiers before the researcher receives it. This disclosure is made so you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on their decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to 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 get in touch with the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Jessy Richard. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at (434) XXX-XXXX. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Sharon Farrell, at sfarrell4@liberty.edu.

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 Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that research on human subjects 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 agree 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.

Print_____ Parent Print_____

Sign_____ Parent Sign_____ Date_____

Signature of Researcher_____ Date_____

Appendix G

Supervisor Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: Work-based Learning Experiences & Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Principal Investigator: Jessy Richard, EdS, 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 years of age or older. You must also be the case manager, job coach, or employee at either work site who works directly with the student participants in this study.

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 this embedded single-case study is to understand how participation in WBLE prepares students with ID for post-school competitive employment.

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. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed about participating in the work-based learning experience program. These conversations will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. This interview may take up to one hour.
2. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a focus group conversation about your experiences at the work-based learning experience you participate in. This group discussion will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. This focus group discussion may take up to one hour.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study. Benefits to society include a better understanding of how work-based learning experiences impact students with intellectual disabilities.

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, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms. 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 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.
- The researcher will attempt to minimize confidentiality breaches by practicing the abovementioned procedures.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher serves as a college and career advisor at [redacted] Schools. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, a research assistant will ensure that all data is stripped of identifiers before the researcher receives it. This disclosure is made so you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to 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/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Jessy Richard. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at (434) XXX-XXXX. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sharon Farrell, at sfarrell4@liberty.edu.

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 Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that research on human subjects 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 agree 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.

Print_____ Sign_____ Date_____

Signature of Researcher_____ Date_____

Appendix H

Permission to Use Adapted Figure 1

From: Jane Leathem <jane.leathem@styluspub.com>
Sent: Tuesday, July 12, 2022 2:09 PM
To: Richard, Jessy <jrichard13@liberty.edu>
Subject: [External] FW: Request to Use Figure in Dissertation

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[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

Jessy,

Stylus President John von Knorring grants permission for your request provided that you include the following citation in your doctoral thesis:

Adapted from *The Art of Changing the Brain: Enriching the Practice of Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning* by James E. Zull (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC) with permission of the publisher, Copyright © 2002, Stylus Publishing, LLC.

I've included a jpg of the original figure from the book. [redacted]

Thank you for seeking permission,
Jane Leathem
Stylus Publishing

Jane Leathem
Stylus Publishing
Sales and Marketing Administrator
22883 Quicksilver Dr
Sterling, VA 20166-2019
www.styluspub.com

From: Richard, Jessy <jrichard13@liberty.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, July 12, 2022 1:12 PM
To: Jane Leathem <jane.leathem@styluspub.com>
Subject: Request to Use Figure in Dissertation

Hello Jane Leatham,

My name is Jessy Richard. I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I came across a figure that I would like to request permission to adapt for my study. Here are the details on the figure:

Book Title: *The Art of Changing the Brain: Enriching the Practice of Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning*

Author: Zull, James E.

Page #: 18

Attached is a preview of what my adaptation would like.

Thank you,

Jessy Richard

Appendix I

Interview Protocols

Interview Questions

1. Please describe what your responsibilities are at the WBLE site. (CRQ)
2. Describe the work environment at the WBLE site. (SQ2)
3. Describe the role that the case manager/paraprofessional plays in this WBLE. (SQ3)
4. Describe the role that the host supervisor plays in this WBLE. (SQ2)
5. Describe the challenges the student faces while participating in this WBLE. (SQ1)
6. Describe how the student has been able to overcome those challenges. (CRQ)
7. What role does the student's disability play in participating in this WBLE? (SQ1)
8. Describe how the students have grown since participating in this WBLE. (CRQ)
9. What areas does the student need to improve upon before completing this WBLE? (CRQ)
10. Describe the evaluation process of a student's work performance. (SQ3)
11. Describe how you all use reflection to help students learn and grow from their experience. (SQ3)
12. Describe what a successful workday looks like at this WBLE for the students. (CRQ)
13. Describe how WBLE prepares students with ID for the world of work. (CRQ)
14. What do the students gain from participating in this WBLE? (CRQ)
15. What are the most important elements of the WBLE for student success? (SQ1)
16. What else would you like to add to our discussion about your experiences at this WBLE site? (CRQ)

Appendix J

Focus Group Protocols

Focus Group Questions

1. What is the best thing about this WBLE partnership between the school and the work site?
2. Describe what you have learned from the WBLE.
3. When did you learn the most from the WBLE? (CRQ, SQ3).
4. How does participation in WBLE fulfill the company's goals, your personal goals, or the school's goals?
5. Describe the most rewarding element of the WBLE.
6. How does this WBLE prepare students for the world of work?
7. There has been a good discussion about the value of WBLE for all involved. What else do you all want to add to our discussion about WBLE? (CRQ)