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## Examining the supportive employment practices used by Project SEARCH: A descriptive study

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EXAMINING THE SUPPORTIVE EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES USED BY  
PROJECT SEARCH: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

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Dr. Frank Kohler, Committee Chair

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May 2017

## ABSTRACT

Project SEARCH is a unique high school transition program from school-to-work for young adults with intellectual disabilities. This program teaches individuals with disabilities (interns) job skills in an inclusive work environment, such as a hospital. Therefore, the overall goal of this study was to examine Project SEARCH as a transition program that has data indicating positive outcomes regarding supportive employment for individuals with disabilities. Specifically, this study aimed to: (1) examine the ways in which Project SEARCH enacts its transition supported employment services for individuals with disabilities, and (2) examine the experiences and perceptions of Project SEARCH employees and coworkers toward working with individuals with special needs.

Qualitative research methods, including descriptive and interpretative analysis, were employed in this study. The data were collected via face-to-face group interviews. The researcher interviewed two groups separately: Project SEARCH employees and interns' coworkers. The interview questions were about practices implemented by Project SEARCH, teaching employment skills, coaching and support interns in the workforce, collaboration between Project SEARCH employees and coworkers, and experiences and perceptions of working alongside individuals with special needs.

The results of this study were divided into two sections: descriptive results and interpretative results. In the first section, Project SEARCH employees provided valuable information about how to select, prepare, coach, and support interns in the program. In the second section, the interpretative results, coworkers provided an inclusive work

environment to interns with disabilities through positive attitudes and support. Lastly, the results have important implications for research in the field of inclusive and supportive employment.

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May 2017

## DEDICATION

This dissertation research is dedicated to:

My late father... rest in peace,

My mother... the source of love and compassion, and the closest to my heart,

My brothers and sisters...my source of unwavering support.

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Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said: “he who does not thank people, does not thank Allah” (Al-Ali, 2010). Therefore, I would like to start my acknowledgments first by thanking Allah (God), the most compassionate, most merciful. Thank you Allah for giving me patience, strength, and blessings throughout my journey in this life in general, and as a graduate student in particular.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

Individuals with disabilities are part of society. They have the right to be included and to choose their life's direction whether this be schooling, careers, or community engagement. The vision of society toward people with special needs has changed over time. This is because the community understood that they have some obligations to provide opportunities for quality life for individuals with disabilities (Green, 2013). Thus, many laws and regulations have been issued to provide a meaningful life for all individuals with disabilities. Here are some examples of laws and legislations that have been passed to ensure equal opportunities, employment, and nondiscriminatory practices toward individuals with disabilities.

One of the earliest acts regarding people with special needs was issued in 1973. The U.S. Congress wanted to ensure that no discriminatory practices would be involved in providing services for people with disabilities. Therefore, the U.S. Congress passed an act called Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. This act prohibited those schools that receive federal funds from discriminating against individuals with special needs (Berry & Katsiyannis, 2012).

Another important act in the field of special education was issued in 1975. It is one of the most important acts that has been passed regarding giving more educational opportunities to individuals with disabilities and is called the Education for All

Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). This act is well-known today as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). IDEA required all schools to provide free and appropriate education to all students with special needs; services must be provided in the least restrictive environment; and all services must be provided based on students' individualized education programs (Dieterich, Snyder, & Villani, 2015).

Lately, the U.S. government also wanted to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunity as people without disabilities in terms of employment. Thus, the U.S. Congress passed the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. The purpose of this act is to treat people with and without disabilities equally in terms of employment opportunities and public accommodations (Vaughn, 2003). Thus, the fundamental goal of these acts and legislations is to protect the rights of all individuals with disabilities and ensure that agencies and people in America do not discriminate in their own practices toward people with disabilities.

### Background of the Study

It is extremely hard for individuals with disabilities to acquire a large range of important skills due to their significant disabilities. This has created what is called stigma, which is known as the hierarchy of preference toward disability (Gormley, 2014). Stigma makes people with special needs face other obstacles, such as finding a job and living independently. Thus, two offers in the U.S. to help individuals with disabilities are transition services and supportive employment.

Transition services are a variety of activities that help students with special needs to transfer smoothly from school to post-school life. These activities must be based on students' needs and interests. These activities should also be in the following areas: instruction, related services, developmental of employment, acquisition of daily living skills, and functional vocational evaluation (Luft, 2015). The fundamental purpose of transition services is to assist students with disabilities to have a smooth transition from school to adulthood. Specifically, transition services in school help students with special needs go to college, find appropriate employment in society, and have the necessary skills to be as independent as possible (Hoover, 2016). Providing appropriate transition services to students with disabilities in school will affect the remainder of their adult lives (Steere, Rose, & Cavaiuolo, 2007). Besides providing transition services, individuals with disabilities should also receive employment support.

Sometimes, it is not a problem for some individuals with disabilities to get employed. However, many of them quit working after a short period of time. This is because there is a lack of supportive employment for individuals with special needs in the workforce (Sears, Strauser, & Wong, 2014). Supportive employment is "an evidence-based practice to support adults with varying disabilities in acquiring, learning, and maintaining employment" (Schall et al., 2015, p. 3992). Thus, the goal of supported employment is to help people with disabilities, especially those with significant disabilities, to receive employment support services that are purposely designed to gain

and maintain a job. These employment support services can be provided by mentors, coworkers, employers, and others (Sears et al., 2014).

In short, transition services and supportive employment are two fundamental elements in any transition program in order for individuals with disabilities to acquire skills, find a job, and then live independently.

#### Statement of the Research Problem

Unfortunately, many individuals with special needs either do not graduate from school or they graduate, yet they are not prepared for adult life. For this reason, two researchers found that young adults with disabilities were less likely to be employed after graduating from high school than their peers without disabilities (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2015), only 17.5% of people with disabilities were employed. In contrast, the employment rate of people without disabilities was 65% in 2015. In the state of Missouri, for instance, only 20% of individuals with disabilities were employed in 2007 (Green, 2013). This statistic shows that employing people with special needs is a significant issue in the United States of America. This statistic also implies that there is a gap in the rate of unemployment between people with and without disabilities.

One of the ways to solve this problem and decrease the rate of unemployment for individuals with disabilities is by creating effective transition programs that help young adults with special needs to transfer smoothly from school to adulthood. Project SEARCH is considered to be one of the well-known transition programs that has positive

data on supportive employment (Daston, Riehle, & Rutkowski, 2012). Project SEARCH is an internationally known work-based program that provides training to adults with developmental disabilities (Project SEARCH calls them interns) to improve the job placement rate (Daston et al., 2012). This research study is unique for the following two reasons: (1) it explores the process used in Project SEARCH for transition services and supportive employment and (2) it explores and coordinates the different perspectives of two groups of workers involved in Project SEARCH. The results of this study are important for two reasons: (1) they show how people with special needs can be trained for independent and employable skills and (2) they give an opportunity for other transition programs to compare their practices to the practices of Project SEARCH, which may lead to a decline in the rate of high school dropout, or an increase in the people with special needs being employed.

#### Purpose of the Study

The overall goal of this study was to examine one transition program (Project SEARCH) that has data proving positive outcomes regarding supportive employment for young adults with intellectual disabilities. This study included two fundamental aspects. First, it examined the ways in which Project SEARCH enacts its transition and supported employment services for individuals with disabilities. Secondly, it examined the perceptions of Project SEARCH employees and interns' coworkers toward working with individuals with special needs.

### Research Questions

This research study sought to answer four fundamental questions:

1. What practices do Project SEARCH employees implement to prepare and support interns throughout the course of a nine-month program?
2. What are Project SEARCH employees' perceptions of these job preparation practices?
3. What is the nature of coworker involvement in the process of supportive employment?
4. What are coworkers' perceptions of supportive employment?

### Definition of Terms

#### Transition Services

Transition service include a variety of activities that help students with special needs to transfer smoothly from school to post-school life. These activities must be based on students' needs and interests, and these activities should be in the following areas: instruction, related services, developmental of employment, acquisition of daily living skills, and functional vocational evaluation (Luft, 2015).

#### Supportive Employment

Individuals with disabilities receive employment support services that are purposely designed to gain and maintain a job (Wehman, Revell, Kregel, & Act, 1997).

### Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH is a “high school transition program [which] is a business-led, 1-year, school-to-work programme that takes place entirely at the workplace. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration and relevant job-skills training through strategically designed internships” (Kaehne, 2015, p. 3).

### Project SEARCH employees

Each Project SEARCH site guides by an advisory board, which includes mainly a Project SEARCH teacher and two job coaches (Daston et al., 2012).

### Coworkers

Professional adults work beside individuals with disabilities in the same unit within the context of a formalized work environment (Gormley, 2014).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature related to supportive employment for individuals with disabilities in the United States of America. More specifically, the review of literature was organized into categories. First, it gave a brief history of the special education law in providing special education services for individuals with disabilities. Secondly, it discussed the concept of employment of individuals with special needs. Next, it discussed some challenges related to employment of individuals with special needs. Fourthly, in order to avoid these challenges, it discussed practices related to transition services and supported employment that need to be implemented to connect individuals with disabilities from school to adulthood. After that, it gave an overview of the methods of the evidence-based practices regarding teaching individuals with disabilities skills to be successful in the workforce. Then, it provided examples of evidence-based practices related to secondary transition and supported employment. Lastly, it presented Project SEARCH as one of the well-known transition programs in the United States.

#### The History of Special Education Law

The United States of America has issued many acts and regulations to improve services for individuals with disabilities. However, the history of disability law in America is not long. The real beginning of the legislations that have changed services for



people with disabilities in the United States of America was in 1975 by passing the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005). This somewhat brief history of law for individuals with disabilities suggests that as the U.S. develops laws, those laws fall into one of two areas. The first area focuses on quality education for school age. More specifically, schools are required to locate, identify, and evaluate all children with special needs from birth through age 21 (Grigorenko, 2008). The second area is not specific to education, but instead ensures that agencies and people in America do not discriminate their own practices toward individuals with disabilities, which covers the entire lives of individuals with disabilities. In the following section, the researcher gave a brief history of the acts and regulations that have been issued in the United States of America under the two previously stated areas.

#### Laws Related to Quality Education

The American government has issued some specific regulations for students with disabilities. The goal of these regulations is to ensure that all students with special needs receive appropriate special education services from birth through age 21 (Grigorenko, 2008). Here is a brief history of the acts and regulations that have been issued specifically for students with disabilities.

In the 1960s, the American government decided to issue the first federal legislation including special education. They decided to establish a Federal Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH) in the Office of Education (it is known now as the Office of Special Education Programs in the U.S. Department of Education). The goal of

establishing the BEH was to start providing special education services for children with disabilities. Therefore, the U.S. Department of Education through the BEH started to offer grants to states, colleges, and universities to establish special education agencies and resource centers offering special materials and consultation to schools. Furthermore, the BEH asked states, colleges, and universities to use federal grants to train teachers about teaching students with disabilities (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005).

In the early 1970s, the American government issued another regulation called Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973). The purpose of Section 504 was to prohibit schools that receive federal funds from any kind of discrimination against individuals with disabilities (Berry & Katsiyannis, 2012). Later on, however, it was found that many children with special needs were still not receiving special services of any kind, especially those with severe or profound disabilities. Other children with disabilities received services not tailored to their disabilities. Thus, parents of a child with a disability and other educational organizations were unhappy, and they protested against the poor special education services provided to children at that time. As a result, the EAHCA was passed by the U.S. Congress and by President Gerald Ford in 1975 (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005).

The EAHCA is considered to be one of the regulations that caused a revolution in providing services for children with disabilities. It was issued in 1975 because of the failure of the education system in America to meet the educational needs of children with special needs. Therefore, the 1975 law required all states who wanted to receive any

federal education funds to have a plan to offer special education to all children with disabilities, and most importantly to those with the most severe disabilities (Tucker, 1994). One important thing to mention here regarding EAHCA is that it was renamed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, and it was again renamed again the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) in 2004 (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a).

The IDEIA required states and schools to implement three important elements of special education. First, children with disabilities must receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Secondly, services for children with special needs must be provided in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Lastly, services must be provided based on an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Furthermore, in case parents are not satisfied with the special education services that are provided to their children with disabilities, the law gives the parents the right to sue schools and ask for a formal “due process hearing” under IDEIA (Dieterich et al., 2015).

In 2001, the U.S. Congress found that there was an issue with the implementation of the education law. In other words, there was a gap between rights and enforcement. As a result, the U.S. Congress updated the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (it is well known now as No Child Left Behind [NCLB]). This act requires schools to give more rights to students (Bogin & Nguyen-Hoang, 2014). After that, the U.S. Congress also updated IDEA to form IDEIA in 2004. IDEIA put an emphasis on giving more rights to students, measuring the academic performance of students with disabilities, enhancing

the performance for special education educators, and addressing the issues that impact the achievement of minority students (Grigorenko, 2008). Thus, IDEIA works with NCLB in helping students with disabilities obtain more of their rights in the field of education.

However, the pattern of providing appropriate services to individuals with disabilities in the United States goes beyond the field of education (birth to 21 years old). The American government found that issuing regulations only for students with disabilities is not enough to give all individuals with special needs their rights. Therefore, other regulations have been issued for all individuals with disabilities in order to provide appropriate services outside of the field of education.

#### Laws for All Individuals with Disabilities

The purpose of passing regulations that go beyond the field of education is to protect the rights of all individuals with disabilities for their whole lives regardless of other aspects, such as age. Here is a brief history of regulations that were made for all people with special needs.

In 1980, the U.S. Congress passed a legislation regarding individuals with disabilities. The legislation is called the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA). This legislation enables the Department of Justice to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities in state or local correctional facilities, such as public nursing homes, prisons and mental health facilities. More specifically, CRIPA allows the Department of Justice to investigate state or locally operated institutions to ensure that there is no practice of violations against individuals with disabilities in these institutions.

In addition, this law helps ensure the safety of those people with special needs who may feel uncomfortable reporting issues of abuse in federal institutions (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015).

Also in the 1980s, groups of activists started to lobby for a consolidation of different pieces of legislation under one broad civil rights statute, which was important in order to protect the rights of individuals with special needs (Fleischer, Zames, & Zames, 2012). After many years of campaigning and lobbying, the U.S. Congress passed the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. The goal of the act was to treat individuals with disabilities and individuals without disabilities equally in terms of employment opportunities and public accommodations. Moreover, the ADA intended to protect people with disabilities from discrimination on the basis of disability. By passing the ADA, the American government recognized the full participation, integration, and inclusion of individuals with special needs in all levels of society (Vaughn, 2003).

In 1996, the American government passed another regulation called the Telecommunications Act. The purpose of this act was to require all manufacturers of telecommunications equipment and providers of telecommunications services to ensure that all of their equipment and services were accessible and usable by individuals with disabilities. This means every person with a disability must have access to a broad range of products and services, such as operator services and telephones. Thus, adjusting inaccessible places to users with disabilities is required by law (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009).

Based on the brief history of the special education law stated above, one can realize that regulations in the United States have seriously tried to improve services for individuals with special needs for decades. The U.S. government has focused on two main elements: free and appropriate education for all individuals with disabilities and nondiscriminatory practices toward people with disabilities. In order to achieve the two previous goals, however, there should be a connection between school and adulthood for individuals with disabilities. In other words, there should be a connection between school, inclusive employment and then independent living during the early adult years. This connection can occur by applying practices in order to facilitate the transition from school to employment. In the next section, the researcher will talk about employing individuals with disabilities.

#### Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

Working is considered to be such an important element in many cultures, especially in the Western societies. People in Western societies highly value work and consider it as a socially integrating force. They place a particular emphasis on work as a source of meaning and respect (Koch, Rumill, Conyers, & Ahrens, 2003). Like individuals without disabilities, many individuals with disabilities would like to feel that they work in an inclusive work environment and have a regular paid employment in order to contribute in society, and, therefore, feel meaningful and respected. Thus, working in an inclusive environment and getting a paid job are important elements for all individuals

with disabilities (Papay & Bambara, 2014). According to Paul Wehman (2012), inclusive employment (or supportive employment) was found to mean:

(i) competitive employment in an integrated setting with ongoing support services for individuals with the most severe disabilities — (a) for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred or for whom competitive employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a severe disability; and (b) who, because of the nature and severity of their disabilities, need intensive supported employment services from the designated State unit and extended services after transition in order to perform this work; or (ii) transitional employment for individuals with the most severe disabilities due to mental illness. (p. 139)

Many authors have talked about the advantages of inclusive employment of people with special needs. For instance, Ellenkamp, Brouwers, Embregts, Joosen, and Weeghel (2016) mentioned some advantages of inclusive employment: (1) helping individuals with special needs to increase the social interaction with people, (2) improving the self-confidence of individuals with disabilities, (3) helping them to learn new skills and achieve financial autonomy, and (4) helping people with special needs to have better health and a greater sense of control over one's life. Another study found other health advantages of employment of persons with special needs (Koch et al., 2003). This study found unemployed patients who reached a competitive employment tended to have less symptoms and better overall functioning. They also showed higher self-confidence and higher satisfaction with finances. In addition, work helped these patients facilitate recovery by providing the opportunity for social connections and reducing reliance on public welfare and family members (Koch et al., 2003). However, there are

some barriers that individuals with disabilities face that prevent them from getting a paid job.

The biggest barrier people with special needs face, for example, is stigma (Gormley, 2014). Stigma “results in widespread social disapproval and devaluation of individuals who possess an attribute that others consider to be negative, unfavorable or unacceptable” (Werner, 2015, p. 958). Regarding disability, stigma exists when labelling, stereotyping, status loss and discrimination happen together in the context of a power imbalance (Blundell, Das, Potts & Scior, 2016). Unfortunately, some employers do not hire individuals with disabilities because of their disability (Gormley, 2014). According to a report in 2007 by the Interagency Committee on Disability Research, only 26% of employers had hired an individual with a disability, and 20% of employers mentioned that the biggest barrier was “their own discrimination, prejudice or reluctance” (Interagency Committee on Disability Research Report, 2007, p. 31).

Beside stigma as a barrier, many individuals with disabilities have faced other challenges in getting what they need to have quality life outcomes, such as independent living and inclusive employment (Luft, 2015). In the next section, the researcher will present two main challenges that face most people with disabilities.

### Challenges Related to Employment

Giving individuals with disabilities their rights of care, support, and inclusive employment is not an easy task. The American government has issued some acts, such as the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, to give individuals with special needs



their rights of care, support, and inclusive employment. However, there are still some challenges that prevent people with disabilities from getting all of their rights. Here are two main challenges that face many individuals with disabilities.

First, teaching individuals with disabilities should be based on teaching important skills, such as vocational skills. This means supporting individuals with disabilities goes beyond teaching skills like reading and writing. Teaching children with special needs how to read and write is necessary, and many schools have done phenomenal work in terms of improving the reading and writing skills of children with disabilities. However, improving the basic skills of children with special needs is not enough because one day these children will get older, graduate from school and face other challenges of life, such as finding a job and living independently (Katz, Rangel-Eudave, Allen-Leigh & Lazcano-Ponce, 2008). Therefore, supporting children with disabilities should go beyond teaching the basic skills in school to teaching them other important skills, such as vocational skills. These kind of skills will help students with disabilities to find a job in an inclusive environment, to live independently, and then to have quality life outcomes (Petcu, Chezan, & Van Horn, 2015).

The second challenge is that individuals with severe disabilities face more difficulties than individuals with mild disabilities in having a better quality of life due to their significant disabilities. These individuals with severe disabilities often face many challenges with other aspects of their lives, such as independent living. Thus, it is hard for them to find a job. On the other hand, individuals with mild disabilities do not face

many challenges to have a high-quality life. In fact, many people with mild disabilities receive quality services and the support they need like people without disabilities (Cook, 2001). Therefore, the less severe the disability, the higher the chance of getting high quality life outcomes, and the more severe the disability, the lesser the chance of getting high quality life outcomes for individuals with disabilities (Solvoll, Hall, & Brinchmann, 2015).

In order to prevent individuals with disabilities from facing the two previous challenges, there should be a connection between school, independent living and employment during the early adult years. This connection can occur by applying practices related to: (1) transition services from school-to-work, and (2) supportive employment. In the next two sections, the researcher will explain how transition services from school-to-work and supportive employment can be used to connect school to adulthood for individuals with special needs.

#### Transition Services from School-to-Work

Working is a primary concept in the structure of life for all people around the world. For individuals with disabilities, the concept of working alongside people without disabilities in an inclusive work environment has been radically altered in the past half-century. Career development, inclusive employment, and vocational behavior of individuals with special needs has become the primary focus of the field of special education (Sears et al., 2014). The reason why there is a lot of focus on providing transition services from school-to-work for students with disabilities is because the

impact of providing transition services in school will affect the remainder of their adult lives (Steere et al., 2007).

The importance of transition services began in the 1970s to 1980s when the importance of providing transition services for individuals with disabilities was studied. However, the law at that time did not require providing transition services for individuals with disabilities. After that, the U.S. Congress found the outcomes of students with special needs who exited American schools were poor. These poor outcomes included: (1) high unemployment rates, (2) underemployment (for example, paying less than one's earning power), (3) low rates of participation in postsecondary education and poor graduation rates, and (4) less extensive social support networks. As a result, the U.S. Congress decided to add transition services to the IDEA in 1990 by focusing on postsecondary education, community participation, community living and recreation and leisure. The act mentioned that transition services must be identified in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) by age 16 or younger if deemed necessary (Steere et al., 2007).

The definition of transition services has changed over the past two decades. The most recent definition of transition services was added to the IDEIA in 2004. According to the Office of Special Education Programs in the U.S Department of Education (2007b), IDEIA defined transition services as: "a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that":

- is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including

supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

- is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and
- includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (n.p.)

Therefore, the definition from the IDEIA focused on three main elements:

facilitating children's transition from school-to-work by focusing on some aspects, such as vocational education; designing a transition plan based on the child's needs; and including related services, such as a speech therapist, in the plan, which supports the transition to the next phase.

Furthermore, IDEIA required schools to include transition services in IEPs no later than when the child turns 16 because the earlier the specialists design the transition plans, the better the child will be prepared for post-school life. Therefore, transition services help bridge the gap after children with special needs leave school and start in the workforce where they will not find the same support and services available. Thus, transition services are designed to prepare children with functional skills and knowledge needed to enter the workforce and live as independently as possible (Cook, Tankersley, Cook & Landrum, 2015).

In addition to the IDEIA, the policymakers in the U.S. issued another legislation called the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2001), the School-to-Work program operates through a partnership between the Departments of Education and Labor. The purpose of this program is to

“integrate academic and vocational education, link secondary and postsecondary education, provide learning opportunities at the work site, and fully engage the private sector in the process” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, n.p.).

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act gave states and localities freedom to design their own systems. However, each system must include three core components. The first component is school-based learning. Schools must tie academic and vocational instruction to occupational skills standards and challenging academic standards (at least two years of secondary education and one year of postsecondary education). The second component is work-based learning. Students must be provided with workplace mentoring and a planned program of work experience linked to schooling. The last component is connecting activities. This helps to ensure there is a coordination between school and work-based learning components via many things, such as involving employers and providing technical assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

In the previous section, one can realize how transition services are such an important element to connect school to adulthood for individuals with special needs. The second important element to connect school to adulthood for individuals with disabilities is supportive employment.

#### Supportive Employment

Some researchers pointed out that individuals with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities, do not get much benefit when it comes to social relationships, employment, and quality of life (Schall et al., 2015; Gormley, 2014).

Moreover, other authors found that many persons with special needs have poor community-based competitive employment rates after they graduate from high school. This is why the rate of unemployment for individuals with disabilities is much higher than those without disabilities (Gormley, 2014). In addition, other authors found that those with disabilities who have a paid job make less money than those without disabilities (Schall et al., 2015). As a result, the U.S. Congress decided to add “supported employment programs” to the Rehabilitation Act of 1986 (Rusch & Braddock, 2004).

In their article, Van Niekerk, Coetzee, Engelbrecht, Hajwani, and Terreblanche (2015) mentioned supported employment was defined under the federal regulations as:

supported employment is a return-to-work strategy promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in competitive employment environments, i.e. those not necessarily earmarked for such individuals. (p. 826)

Based on the definition of supportive employment, one can realize that the goal of supportive employment is to help individuals with special needs to receive employment support services in inclusive employment environments that are purposely designed to gain and maintain a job. Moreover, supportive employment in an inclusive environment could be provided through mentors, coworkers, employment specialists and employers (Wehman et al., 1997), and they are usually referred to as an employment specialist and a job coach (Sears et al., 2014). For instance, a job coach can use one of the approaches of breaking a task down into stimulus response chains and using reinforcement to teach the task. The coach also should teach the job systematically, collect data to assess learning, and then provide instructional assistance during work. This approach is helpful because it

is based on providing employment support services in an inclusive environment while an individual with a disability in work “place, then train” (Sears et al., 2014). Thus, a major key to providing successful vocational services is by providing supportive employment in an inclusive environment (Hagner & Dileo, 1993).

There are advantages of providing supporting employment services for individuals with disabilities during work in an inclusive work environment. Supportive employment services help persons with special needs in gaining and maintaining competitive employment, and receiving support for need, thus, earning a livable wage and living independently (Sears et al., 2014). It is also an opportunity for individuals with disabilities to integrate with people without disabilities in the workforce and the community, which will increase their self-confidence (Waghorn, Shield, & Hielscher, 2015). Furthermore, supportive employment services enhance self-determination for individuals with disabilities, as well as increase job satisfaction for people with disabilities and employers (Petcu et al., 2015).

In conclusion, transition services from school-to-work and supportive employment are two primary practices that connect school to adulthood for individuals with disabilities. However, these practices should be used when they are supported by science. In other words, in order to close the gap between school and adulthood for people with disabilities, practitioners should implement evidence-based practices related to secondary transition and supportive employment. In the next section, the researcher is

going to discuss the importance of evidence-based practices, as well as provide examples of evidence-based practices related to secondary transition and supportive employment.

### Evidence-Based Practices

Prior to 1990, there was no use of the term “evidence-based” at all. The term was used lightly after 1990 and got more popular after 1995 (Perry & Weiss, 2007). The term evidence-based is well-known now in the field of special education because it helps practitioners collect data and make decisions regarding the progress of individuals with special needs (Alexander, Ayres, & Smith, 2015). The importance of evidence-based practices comes from the necessary need for interventions that must be supported by science. In other words, implementing an intervention or a teaching strategy in the classroom for students with disabilities must be based on evidence-based research. This is because research applies direct observation and measurement, and it provides ongoing demonstration of the outcomes to support the reliability of a strategy. Therefore, the goal of evidence-based practices is to use a teaching method or an intervention strategy that is supported by research and avoid the other teaching and intervention strategies that are supported by non-comparative data, subjective evidence, speculation, and indirect measures (Marder & Fraser, 2012).

Lately, there has been a central focus in the field of special education on using evidence-based practices in order to enhance the outcomes of students with disabilities (Plotner, Mazzotti, Rose, & Carlson-Britting, 2016). There are two primary points of emphasis regarding evidence-based practices. First, there is legislation and policy toward



defining and supporting teachers' use of evidence-based practices. The U.S. Congress required schools and teachers to use instructional programs or practices grounded in scientifically based research (Test et al., 2009). The first time the scientifically based research was defined was in NCLB. NCLB defined scientifically based research as "research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs" (NCLB, 20 U.S.C 7801 § 9101[37]). IDEA (2004) also required that in a student's IEP, all of the services that are included under sections like special education, related services, supplementary aids, and services outlined must be based on peer-reviewed reports to the "extent practicable" (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.). Thus, educators and schools are required by the law to use evidence-based practices.

Regarding the previous point, Marder and Fraser (2012) defined evidence-based practice as "an instructional strategy, intervention, or teaching program that has resulted in consistent positive results when experimentally tested" (Marder & Fraser, 2012, n.p.). Evidence-based practices come from two different methodologies; (1) single-subject design and (2) quasi-experimental; control group and treatment group (Odom et al., 2005). Single-subject design is an experimental methodology that aims to document a functional relationship between dependent and independent variables. This approach helps practitioners collect data before using an intervention (baseline phase) and during the use of an intervention (intervention phase) in order to observe and compare the effectiveness of the intervention on a particular child's progress in a specific area (Horner

et al., 2005). The second well known methodology in the field of special education is quasi-experimental. Quasi-experimental design relies on using an intervention with one of two groups in order to observe the difference between the two groups in the indicators of interest (White & Sabarwal, 2014). Thus, the purpose of this research methodology is to “test descriptive causal hypotheses about manipulable causes” (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002, p. 14). Therefore, teachers should use evidence-based practices that come from the two previous research methodologies to teach individuals with disabilities a variety of skills, such as skills associated with daily living, employment, independence, communication, and workplace behavior (Shogren, Garnier Villarreal, Dowsett, & Little, 2016).

The second primary point, as a result of the first primary point, is that educators are expected to be knowledgeable about the most effective evidence-based practices in the field of special education. Plotner et al. (2016) mentioned that teachers should learn the importance of evidence-based practices, and where to find them through teacher preparation programs. In other words, educators should have access to the sources of evidence-based practices, such as the National Center on Intensive Intervention, the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, and the Institute of Education Sciences (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016). Through teacher preparation programs, in addition, teachers need to know some examples of evidence-based practices for certain areas, as well as, how to implement them with high fidelity and effectiveness (Plotner et al., 2016). Therefore, being knowledgeable about evidence-based practices, having access to their

resources and implementing them effectively based on scientifically-based instruction will help educators to provide appropriate special education services to individuals with disabilities (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016).

### Evidence-Based Practices for Transition Services and Supportive Employment

#### Transition Services

There are multiple evidence-based practices that have been established for the area of transition services. In their meta-analysis, for example, Test et al. (2009) extensively studied all the evidence-based practices (32 practices) in secondary transition. Three of these evidence-based practices, for example, are: (1) self-determination, (2) life skills, and (3) social skills training. These three evidence-based practices will be discussed in this section.

One of the effective evidence-based practices that Test et al. (2009) identified is called “self-determination.” Self-determination is defined as “volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one’s life and to maintain or improve one’s quality of life” (Wehmeyer, 2005, p. 17). In other word, teaching self-determination skills, such as problem-solving skills, helps persons with special needs learn some skills in order to take charge of their own lives. As a result of teaching self-determination skills, individuals with disabilities will be able to achieve quality-of-life indicators, such as maintaining inclusive employment and living independently (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003). A practical example of teaching self-determination skills would be involving students with disabilities in IEP meetings in order for these students to

practice goal setting and teamwork, as well as to express their own needs and concerns (Test et al., 2009).

Test et al. (2009) identified another effective evidence-based practice called “life skills.” Life skills “are those skills needed to realize a productive daily life” (Ayres, Mechling & Sansosti, 2013, p. 260). A few examples of life skills could be teaching individuals with disabilities how to manage money, how to do grocery shopping, and how to use a toilet. Thus, teaching life skills to individuals with disabilities is such an important element to help them function independently within community based settings (Ayres et al., 2013).

The last example identified by Test et al. (2009) as an evidence-based practice in regard to secondary transition is called “social skills training.” Individuals with special needs, such as autism, exhibit obvious social skills deficits. For instance, persons with disabilities face some difficulties in social behavior, social relationships, and peer status. Using social skills training as an evidence-based practice will help individuals with disabilities achieve academic and vocational success. Therefore, social skills training has become a primary intervention activity for individuals with disabilities (Kavale & Mostert, 2004).

### Supportive Employment

There are also a number of evidence-based practices that have been identified by research methodology regarding supportive employment in an inclusive work environment. For instance, Bond (2004) extensively studied some evidence-based

practices related to supportive employment. Two examples of these evidence-based practices regarding supportive employment are: (1) time-unlimited and individualized support and (2) rapid job search. These two evidence-based practices will be discussed in the this section.

One of the strong evidence-based practices that Bond (2004) identified is called “time-unlimited and individualized support.” This evidence-based practice focuses on long term employment support “to assist the customer in the identification and provision of supports and extended services which maintain and enhance the person’s position as a valued member of the work force” (Brooke, Wehman, Inge, & Parent, 1997, p. 10). This long term support should also be individualized to accommodate the unique needs of each person with a disability. Long term support could be provided, for example, as co-worker support and assistive technology (Rusch & Braddock, 2004). The goal of long term customized supportive employment in an inclusive work environment is, for instance, to monitor work performance, simplify job changes and career movement, assess job satisfaction, and train in new skills (Bond, 2004).

Another strong evidence-based practice regarding supportive employment that was identified by Bond (2004) is called “rapid job search.” This approach assists individuals with disabilities obtaining jobs directly instead of providing preemployment evaluation, training, and counseling (Bond et al., 2001). Usually, specialists focus on training individuals with special needs before placing them, termed “train-place.” While the rapid job search approach focuses on placing clients first, then provide training,

termed “place-train.” The goal of this approach is to provide supportive employment, such as training, as much as needed after the person with a disability is on the job (Drake, Becker, Clark, & Mueser, 1999).

In conclusion, it is obvious that there are many evidence-based practices regarding secondary transition and supportive employment. There are also some resources, such as the National Center on Intensive Intervention, which was founded specifically to provide information about evidence-based practices and how practitioners can use them. However, there is not enough research on how successful programs implement these practices (Bond et al., 2001; Torrey et al., 2001). More specifically, there is not enough research about if programs implement these practices and include them in students’ plans, what challenges programs face when implementing these practices, what kind of training practitioners need to have in order to implement these practices, and what kind of support practitioners need to implement these practices effectively. Therefore, there is a necessary need for research to investigate how programs implement evidence-based practices related to secondary transition and supported employment in an inclusive work environment. One of the well-known transition programs is called Project SEARCH.

#### Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH is a unique high school transition program from school to adulthood for individuals with disabilities (Project SEARCH calls them interns). It was founded in the United States in 1996 by Erin Riehle and Susie Rutkowski at the

Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. Project SEARCH is a nine-month internship program for senior high school students (the age range of 18 to 21 years) with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities (Daston et al., 2012). What makes Project SEARCH such a unique transition program is that it focuses on teaching job skills in an inclusive work environment alongside people without disabilities. Finally, Project SEARCH works as a partnership between different partners: a local commercial business (host business, such as a hospital), the state vocational rehabilitation program, a local education agency, a local community rehabilitation program and others (Wehman et al., 2014). According to Project SEARCH data, they have over 300 Project SEARCH sites. Most of them are in the U.S., and some of them are in other countries, such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Interns go to work in these sites for the entire year instead of going to high school (Daston et al., 2012).

Project SEARCH was defined as a “high school transition program [which] is a business-led, 1-year, school-to-work programme that takes place entirely at the workplace. Total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and relevant job-skills training through strategically designed internships” (Kaehne, 2015, p. 3). The goal of Project SEARCH, therefore, is to teach interns real life skills that will help them to get employed in an inclusive work environment. Lastly, the main focus of Project SEARCH is competitive employment, thus, it is neither a work adjustment program nor an evaluation program (Daston et al., 2012). Competitive employment means hiring individuals with disabilities in a

competitive labor market in jobs that they prefer, earning no less than the customary wage and the same level of benefits as those who perform similar work (Ellenkamp et al., 2016).

Project SEARCH has a specific structure and every intern has to go through this structure as designed. The structure of Project SEARCH includes three primary phases: (1) first internship, which usually is from August through November, (2) second internship which is from December to February, and (3) third internship which is from March to May. Interns rotate through two or three different worksite internships throughout the year, and each phase lasts between 10 and 12 weeks. Interns start their day by a one-hour morning class (typically 8 a.m.- 9 a.m.), which helps interns participate in activities regarding enhancing employability and independent living skills, such as interviewing skills and social skills. After the morning class, the rest of the day (typically 9 a.m.- 2:00 p.m.) is designed to help interns learn specific, relevant, and transferable vocational skills in the workforce. Lastly, each Project SEARCH site has to have between 10 and 12 interns. Furthermore, each Project SEARCH site is guided by an advisory board, which includes mainly a Project SEARCH teacher and job coaches (usually two coaches). The advisory board includes other members, such as a special education administrator, employer representatives, a vocational rehabilitation counselor, and family members (Daston et al., 2012).

By looking at Project SEARCH data, this unique transition program has highly promising data regarding employment of individuals with intellectual disabilities and



developmental disabilities. In their book, for instance, Daston et al. (2012) pointed out that some interns get employed before the end of the one-year internship. Other interns get employed by the end of the internship, but usually interns find a paid job after three to six months after the completion of the program. According to the national Project SEARCH data, furthermore, the program helped 70% of interns find a paid job after graduation, especially those who traditionally go to sheltered workshops, adult activity centers, or sit at home (Daston et al., 2012). Another example was mentioned by Müller and VanGilder (2014). They studied the Project SEARCH site in Richmond, Virginia and found that it is a highly effective transition program that helped to increase the employment rates for young adults with autism. More specifically, 82% of interns with autism (27 of 33 Project SEARCH participants) in the Project SEARCH site in Richmond were placed in a permanent paid job over the course of a three-year period while not one of the control participants was placed in such a job. Lastly, Paul Wehman established Project SEARCH sites in Virginia. He focused on interns with autism in these Project SEARCH sites and found that 94% of interns with autism (25 individuals) were employed after three years. Thus, 25 individuals with autism are productive contributors to society (Wehman, 2006). Therefore, Project SEARCH has incredible promising data related to employment of individuals with disabilities.

In summary, there are three main elements regarding Project SEARCH. First, Project SEARCH is a well-known transition program because it has been around for a while, and it became an international transition program that can be found not only in the

United States, but also in other countries. Secondly, Project SEARCH has excellent structure, and its structure is consistent with evidence-based practices from research. For example, Project SEARCH teaches self-determination by involving interns in their IEP meetings. Furthermore, Project SEARCH individualizes support based on interns' needs and this individualized support is constant. Thirdly, Project SEARCH has promising data regarding the employment of individuals with disabilities. Along with these findings of Project SEARCH, however, there are some questions that have not been answered yet. In other words, in order to achieve high quality work with transition planning and employment support, there is a need to find answers regarding Project SEARCH as a well-known international transition program. For instance, it is uncertain how Project SEARCH implements evidence-based practices, how they support the employment of interns, how they select interns, and what the perspectives of Project SEARCH workers and interns' coworkers are. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation research is to conduct an in-depth examination of Project SEARCH in order to gain a better understanding of how they accomplish these positive outcomes. The group interview methodology will be used to address the research questions. In this dissertation research, Project SEARCH was used because it has a positive reputation and strong implementation of evidence-based practices.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### Introduction

The overall goal of this dissertation was to examine one transition program (Project SEARCH) that has positive outcomes data regarding supportive employment for individuals with disabilities. Thus, this chapter discussed the research methodology that the researcher used to achieve the goal of this dissertation. The following are the major areas that were discussed in this chapter. Firstly, general information of the program and site for this study was given. Secondly, the research used in this study was described. Thirdly, the population of this study was described. Fourthly, the method of collecting data was explained. Lastly, the data analysis process was explained.

#### Overview Information of the Research Program and Site

The study took place at a Project SEARCH site in the Midwest, United States. Project SEARCH is a transition program from school-to-work for young adults with disabilities. Project SEARCH is mostly located in hospitals, as well as other businesses such as banks. It has over 300 sites that are mostly in the United States, but others exist around the world in places such as Australia and Britain (Daston et al., 2012). Because there are many sites for Project SEARCH, the researcher decided to focus on one site as a sample of all Project SEARCH sites. This is because all Project SEARCH sites follow the same practices that are implemented by the administration of Project SEARCH in Cincinnati, Ohio. In the fall of 2016, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews

with Project SEARCH employees and coworkers from the hospital. The interviews were scheduled at times that were convenient for participants.

### Research Design

#### Type of Design

Qualitative research methods, including descriptive and interpretative analysis, were employed in this study. The data were collected via face-to-face group interviews. The researcher decided to go with this design for a few reasons. First, only a small amount of research has been published about Project SEARCH as a transition program, and this literature has described this transition program in general. However, this study went in depth to know more about Project SEARCH and asked questions never asked before, such as what curriculum they use throughout the program. Secondly, this design contained open-ended and close-ended questions, which was helpful to go in depth and collect more information about transition services practices, supportive employment practices, and attitudes about working alongside individuals with disabilities from Project SEARCH. However, the only way to let participants talk and provide more information for the purpose of this study was to ask open-ended questions. Thirdly, the qualitative design is a flexible design, and it allows for a multidimensional nature. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) mentioned that:

[qualitative research involves] an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studies' use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and

visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. (p. 3)

Thus, qualitative design allowed the researcher of this study to modify the questions and the focus of this research, if necessary.

In this study, the researcher employed thematic analysis to identify and examine themes within the data set, such as transcribed text from interviews. Gormley (2014) described thematic analysis as a procedure relying on identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns, such as themes, with the data set. In addition, analytic process focuses mainly on organizing and describing a data set in rich detail and interprets different aspects of the research topic (Gormley, 2014). Based on the previous definition of thematic analysis, the researcher generated themes in order to provide an in-depth description of the interview questions. Therefore, this study was not hypothesis driven; thus, the researcher did not attempt to make predictions.

### Group Interviews

Group interview was used as a qualitative technique to manage this study. Thomas, MacMillan, McColl, Hale, and Bond (1995) defined group interview as “a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population, this group being ‘focused’ on a given topic” (p. 206).

There are several advantages of using group interview as a research method. Rabiee (2004) pointed out some of these advantages. First, the methodology of group interview allows participants to express their feelings and provide more details about

certain issues. Secondly, it allows researchers to collect a larger amount of information or data in a short period of time compared to other methods, such as one-on-one interviews. Thirdly, the method of group interview allows researchers to present results in an easy way using lay terminology supported by quotations. Lastly, group interview helps researchers to probe and clarify participants' comments and could easily lead the researcher to coordinate, conduct, and analyze data in a short time (Edmunds, 1999).

#### Overall goal of the Group Interview

Since little is known about Project SEARCH as transition program, the use of group interview was indicated. Using group interview in this study sought to understand how Project SEARCH implements evidence-based practices, how they support the employment of interns, and the perspectives of Project SEARCH workers and interns' coworkers. Stewart and Shamdasani (2014) pointed out seven typical uses of group interview. Two of these typical uses are: acquiring general background information about a topic, and making impressions about a service or program. Thus, the aim of this study was to have a better understanding of Project SEARCH as secondary transition program, and then draw impressions of the services that Project SEARCH provides to individuals with disabilities.

#### Sample

##### Population

The two groups of individuals who participated in this study were employees from Project SEARCH and employees from Mercy Medical Center. All of the

participants in this study have direct experience preparing and supporting interns (young adults with disabilities) who work at Mercy Medical Center. More specifically, Project SEARCH employees work with interns daily. They are required to teach a class of interns in the morning from 8 a. m. to 9 a. m. After that, Project SEARCH employees take interns to work in different departments in the hospital from 9 a. m. to 2 p. m. While interns work in different departments in the hospital, Project SEARCH employees go back and forth to these departments to supervise interns (Daston et al., 2012). The second group of participants for this study included employees of Mercy Medical Center (interns' coworkers). These coworkers work alongside interns in the same unit, and they were chosen from different departments in the hospital.

#### Sample Type and Number

Three Project SEARCH employees (a coordinator of Project SEARCH and two job coaches) from Mercy Medical Center participated in group interview one for this study. The purpose of interviewing these participants was to collect information about Project SEARCH as a well-known transition program and its practices.

In group interview two, three employees from Mercy Medical Center (interns' coworkers) were chosen from different departments in the hospital. However, one coworker withdrew in the same interview day. The purpose of interviewing these coworkers was to collect information about the coaching and support that these individuals provide to the interns, as well as the coworkers' perspectives. Therefore, the total number of participants in both groups is five (Table 1). The researcher selected this

purposive sample based on some criteria, which will be explained in the next section. Purposive sampling is helpful because it allows researchers to select those who will provide the best information for the research questions (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014).

Table 1

*Sample Type and Number*

Participants	Project SEARCH	Coworkers	Total
Number	3	2	5

Inclusion Criteria

Before the coordinator of Project SEARCH selected interns' coworkers, some criteria were assigned to her in order to involve only qualified participants in this study. Therefore, each participant must have: (1) met individuals with disabilities when they came to their work unit as a Project SEARCH intern, (2) over three years of experience working alongside the interns, (3) routine contact with interns, and (4) indicated willingness to reflect on their experience.

Data Collection

Prior to Interviews

Prior to interviewing, the researcher sent an invitation email to the Executive Director of Project SEARCH and the Director of Human Resources at the hospital to obtain permission to interview Project SEARCH employees and coworkers from the hospital (Appendix A). After that, the researcher received the initial confirmation via



email. Shortly after that, the researcher also received two letters of cooperation from both parties allowing him to interview their employees. The next step was to complete the Institutional Review Board Form (IRB) from the University of Northern Iowa to conduct the research, which was completed.

### Group Interview Questions and Sessions

There were two group interview sessions. The first session included Project SEARCH employees, and the second session included coworkers. Both sessions took place in one of the meeting rooms at the hospital. The sessions were planned and scheduled based on the flexibility of the participants' schedules. Participants in group one were given the interview questions prior to the interview. This is because many questions were prepared for group one and the researcher wanted to give participants an opportunity to consider these questions ahead of time. Also, giving participants the interview questions ahead of time helped make the interview session more organized. On the other hand, participants in group two were not given the questions ahead of time because the number of questions was less and most of the questions were about their perceptions. Finally, participants were also asked to answer the questions with complete honesty and freedom, which was helpful for the goal of this study.

Session 1. This session involved three Project SEARCH employees. One of them was the coordinator of the program, and the other two were the job coaches. Participants in this session were mainly asked questions related to Project SEARCH as a transition program. These questions were divided into five sections: selections, skills to teach,

methods for teaching, coaching and support, and perceptions of preparations and coaching (see the list of specific questions in Appendix B). As indicated in Appendix B, each section starts with an open-ended question, followed by a series of specific or structured questions. At the end of each section, there was an invitation for participants to add additional information they wanted to provide about each section.

Session 2. In this session, the Director of Human Resources in the hospital gave the researcher a list of six participants to participate in the study. After that, the researcher selected three coworkers in a random fashion or first come basis (one of the coworkers withdrew during the interview day). The participants were asked questions related to coaching and supportive employment (Appendix C). Specifically, questions were related to practices, support, and perceptions.

#### Process of Conducting Interviews

Before the beginning of sessions. Before the participants walked into the room that the interview sessions took place in, the researcher prepared the sitting area by framing seats as a “U” letter. This helped participants see each other and participate in the dialog effectively. The researcher also sat the camera in an appropriate place to record interviews. In both group interview sessions, videotape was selected as a data collection method. The researcher thought that videotaping sessions would allow for a better understanding when analyzing data than using other methods, such as audio tape. Furthermore, the researcher decided to audio tape interviews as a backup plan in case of losing the videotape.

Beginning of sessions. At the beginning of each session, the researcher informed participants of the process that he planned to follow during the interview session. First, he explained the consent form (Appendix D) that had been approved by IRB, and then asked participants to sign it if they agreed with it (each participant received a copy of the signed form after the interview). Second, the researcher gave participants a copy of the recruitment script (Appendix E). Third, participants were asked to provide a pseudonym used for data analysis and reporting. Fourth, participants were told that the interview session would take between 90 and 120 minutes. There was a 10-minute break in the middle of the interview and snacks and beverages were provided during the break. Fifth, participants were asked to be involved in the conversation and elaborate on each other's responses. Sixth, the researcher handed out a copy of the interview questions (in case they did not bring their own copies), and asked them to add more information during the interview session even if it was not related to the interview questions. Lastly, the researcher started to ask interview questions.

During the interview sessions. While conducting interviews, the researcher paid attention to important elements in order to facilitate the flow of the conversation. First, the researcher reworded or rephrased some questions when he felt participants might need clarification of a question or an issue. Second, he summarized participants' responses on each question or category in order to ensure he understood their response well. This also helped the participants add comments in case they forgot to add something. Third, the researcher ensured that every participant was engaging and

contributing in the conversation. Lastly, participants were asked to add more thoughts and comments regarding interview questions or anything else.

### Protection of Human Participants

It is highly important for the researcher and his research team to protect the confidentiality of the participants. For this reason, the participants were asked to provide a pseudonym used for data analysis and reporting as noted above. The researcher also used pseudonyms in any reference made to participants included in this study or in any academic articles created for publication. The researcher put offer to prevent anyone outside of the study from connecting participants with their responses. Moreover, the researcher and his committee members agreed that some of the information would not be reported if it could affect any participant negatively.

### Data Analysis

#### Transcription

After conducting interviews, all of the information will be transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. The transcriber recorded everything that was said verbatim and in sequence. After transcribing all interview sessions, the transcriber played the videos again to ensure the accuracy of the data and make changes if there were errors.

#### Organization of Data

After transcribing data into word documents, the researcher started to highlight all the important words and phrases that were related to the research questions. The data

were analyzed by using two methods: (1) descriptive analysis and (2) interpretative analysis.

Descriptive analysis. Most of the data in this study were analyzed descriptively because the goal was to describe Project SEARCH as a well-known transition program since there is little known about it as a transition program for young adults with intellectual disabilities. The information or data in this section are straightforward because it explained the basic process that Project SEARCH follows as a transition program. This section was mostly related to close-ended interview questions. Therefore, the first part of analyzing data focused mainly on describing participants' responses regarding the research questions.

Interpretative analysis. The second part of analyzing data was analyzed qualitatively because emerging themes occurred during the analysis. Thus, this section was mostly based on interpreting both close-ended and open-ended interview questions. After transcribing data into word documents, the researcher highlighted all of the important words and phrases, organized them into categories, and then themes emerged from them. This qualitative method technique is well-known as "pawing." Pawing is a qualitative technique that has been used by researchers to label common themes throughout texts, "by marking up and colour coding the responses" (Schreuders, McGill, & Payne 2012, p. 61). The researcher spent two months analyzing data qualitatively after transcribing all of the interview videos. This gave him an opportunity to read data a number of times, think about data several times, and highlight the most common words

and phrases. Therefore, the second part of analyzing data focused mainly on interpreting participants' responses regarding the research questions.

In addition to pawing, the researcher used another qualitative method technique called "member check." After identifying the most important themes in the study, the data were given to two professors from the researcher's dissertation committee (Drs. Kohler and Cowley) to do member check. Member check is "primarily used in qualitative inquiry methodology and is defined as a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of what has been recorded during a research interview" (Harper & Cole, 2012, p. 1). Thus, both professors agreed that the themes that were identified by the researcher in this dissertation research were accurate, valid, and credible.

#### Guideline for Reporting Results

This section described the process for reporting or presenting the results of the data analyses collected with the two groups of research participants. The data were summarized for each group separately, first the Project SEARCH employees, and then the coworkers of the Project SEARCH interns. There were three guidelines that the researcher followed to report results for each group:

First guideline. Data were reported in accordance with the preset categories or data codes that were expected to emerge later, based on the interview questions. These included, for instance, intern selection, skills to teach, practices, methods for teaching, coaching and support, and perceptions of preparations and coaching (Appendices E and

F). For group one, however, the researcher combined the category of skills to teach and methods of teaching into one category because participants' comments on these two categories were related. In conclusion, results were reported in a logical sequence of categories or codes that emerged.

Second guideline. The second consideration entail presenting the results of the descriptive analysis first, followed by the interpretative analysis. For example, for the area of coaching and supporting, the researcher presented basic or straightforward results first, and then the results of the qualitative analysis, which were more interpretative (emerging codes, themes, etc.). The same process was followed in all of the codes.

Third guideline. For each category or code, the researcher provided a written narrative of results for the results section, followed by a visual illustration in order to show the correspondence between sections, codes, or themes. This procedure followed for both basic and interpretative analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the interview sessions involved two groups: Project SEARCH employees and interns' coworkers. Thus, the purpose of this chapter was to present the results of interviewing these two groups. The results section was divided into two sections: (1) descriptive results, and (2) interpretative results. In the section of descriptive results, the researcher summarized both Project SEARCH employees and coworkers' comments to the interview questions. Therefore, the section of descriptive results focused mainly on describing Project SEARCH as a well-known transition program and on the practices of Project SEARCH. In the section of interpretative analysis, the researcher analyzed data for both groups qualitatively because emerging themes occurred during the data analysis. The next section is the descriptive results section for groups 1 and 2.

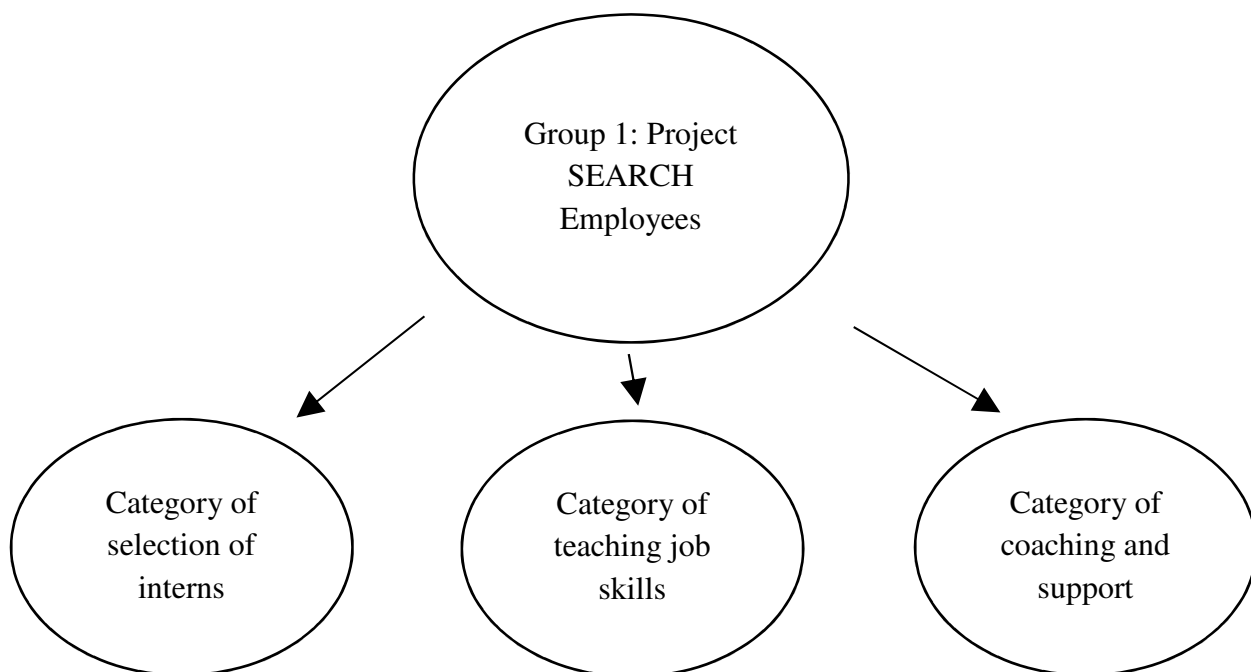
#### Section 1: Descriptive Results

The goal of the descriptive results section was to summarize Project SEARCH employees and coworkers' comments to the interview questions. This gives readers a better understanding of Project SEARCH as a transition program. It will also help readers understand the role of Project SEARCH employees and coworkers in this program. The following section started by describing Project SEARCH employees' comments in group 1, followed by coworkers' comments in group 2.



### Group 1: Project SEARCH Employees

The interview questions that were prepared for Project SEARCH employees were divided into five categories: (1) selection of interns, (2) skills to teach, (3) methods of teaching, (4) coaching and support, and (5) perceptions of preparation and coaching. However, the categories of skills to teach and methods of teaching were combined into one category (termed the category of teaching job skills) because participants' comments were related. Also, the category of perceptions of preparation and coaching was not included in this section because participants' comments fit in the section of interpretative analysis. Therefore, group 1 involved three categories: selection of interns, teaching job skills, and coaching and support (Figure 1).



*Figure 1-* Group 1 (Project SEARCH employees)

### Category of Selection of interns

While interviewing Project SEARCH employees, the researcher realized participants' comments regarding this category were mainly focused on three elements: the process of selecting interns, collaboration with others, and challenges of selecting interns.

Process of selecting interns. When asking Project SEARCH employees about what process they use to select interns, the comments were mainly focused on three steps to select interns: (1) teachers in schools nominate students, (2) a visit is scheduled for students on the hospital campus, and (3) applications are sent to be reviewed. The following section explains each step.

The first step included high school teachers selecting interns. Project SEARCH employees mentioned that teachers in schools recommend students to be enrolled in Project SEARCH; "they are getting used to kind of seeing which student would probably best fit the program," Nancy said.

After nominating students, in the second step, Project SEARCH schedules a visit with senior high school students and their parents to come to the hospital. This visit focuses on two main areas: (1) a tour around the hospital and a discussion of the program, and (2) filling out an application if these students are interested in Project SEARCH. The tour starts with visiting Project SEARCH's classroom in the hospital. During the classroom visit, Project SEARCH employees can have a face-to-face conversation with students and their parents about the program. It is also an opportunity for students and

their parents to ask questions. In addition, Project SEARCH employees show students and their parents videos about the program, look at picture books, and talk about what a typical day is like in the program. By the end of the tour, Project SEARCH employees have a good impression about who will be good candidates.

The last step of selecting interns is asking those who are interested in the program to fill out an application and submit it; Nancy said, “everybody fills out an application if they are interested.” Applications can be submitted to Project SEARCH or a service manager from North Iowa Vocational Center (NIVC). After, the advisory committee will meet to review applications and ensure “they meet the criteria for Project SEARCH, and then from there, there is a rubric we would go through, and then, score them on that,” Nancy said. The rubric (or criteria) is the following:

1. a senior or recent graduate from high school,
2. 18 years or older,
3. Compilation of high school credits necessary for graduation,
4. agreement to come to the program,
5. eligibility for funding; and
6. independent personal hygiene and grooming skills.

Collaboration. The second element in this category is collaboration. Interview results indicated that collaboration with other parties is a fundamental element in Project SEARCH as a transition program. Project SEARCH employees mentioned they collaborate with others when they select interns. This collaboration occurred through

what it is called “the advisory committee.” Nicole and Nancy mentioned that the committee involves NIVC services (Project SEARCH employees hired by NIVC), the school district, vocational rehabilitation, and Mercy Medical Center. Thus, the collaboration is “kind of from any of stakeholders, like anybody who has some sort of hand in Project SEARCH,” Nancy said. The advisory committee meets quarterly and in “April or May, we start to [prepare and] make sure we have all of our students lined up for that next year,” Nicole said. Lastly, after selecting interns for the new class for next year, the committee collaborates and creates a boot camp in summer, which “involves a lot of team building and an introduction to project search and what it is going to involve,” Nancy said.

Challenges. The last element in the category of selection is challenges. Data suggested that Project SEARCH employees face three challenges when selecting interns.

First, Project SEARCH struggled finding enough applications. Nancy said “we have problems with them even hearing about it [Project SEARCH] or knowing about it, just trying to get enough applications to where we could have a selection.” Having enough applications would be helpful for Project SEARCH to select those who would be the best fit in the program. Nicole also said, “it is going to be awesome to have twenty-five applications out on the table and be like okay we can really select these now.” The reason why Project SEARCH does not get enough applications is related to senior high school students not wanting to leave school environment; “I think the challenge is more of, I am a student, I am going to be in my senior year, do I want to leave my senior year

of high school to come to Project SEARCH? I will not see my friends anymore,” Nicole said.

The second challenge that Project SEARCH employees face in the category of selection is not having enough information about interns when they enroll in the program. Nicole mentioned that “you get what you get in the application.” Thus, Project SEARCH employees think having more information about the candidates from the case manager’s background information would be helpful in order to know their interns’ past experiences.

The last challenge Project SEARCH employees struggled with was adapting to the other transits. Rebecca reported that “we have a bunch of different communities we have brought [Project SEARCH] to, we may get students and they have never been with these other students before so it is kind of meeting new friends and coming together.”

In conclusion, the category of selection uses specific processes and criterion when selecting interns. In addition, there is a collaboration and communication between the Project SEARCH site and other parties, such as NIVC, school districts, vocational rehabilitation, and others, when it comes to selecting interns. Despite the collaboration, Project SEARCH faced challenges when selecting interns. For example, not enough applications each year, as well as, not enough information about new interns were still difficult challenges they faced.

### Category of Teaching Job Skills

The interview data showed that Project SEARCH employees' comments on the second category "skills to teach" and the third category "methods of teaching" were connected. For this reason, the researcher combined these two categories under one category and named it the "category of teaching job skills." This category included four elements: job skills, methods of teaching, collaboration with coworkers, and strengths and weaknesses of teaching job skills.

Job skills. Participants in the first group were asked questions regarding what job skills Project SEARCH's curricula involve. The data showed that Project SEARCH does not have specific curricula to teach job skills. Instead, they use two methods to teach interns job skills.

First, Project SEARCH teaches job skills in the classroom. There are job skills that every intern must learn in the classroom. The administration of Project SEARCH gives the site general ideas to be taught in the classroom, and based on that, Project SEARCH employees create lesson plans. Nicole said "we are replicating Project SEARCH so they gave us the material that they started out with, and it gave us some general ideas." In addition, Project SEARCH employees mentioned that they collaborate with the Area Education Agency (AEA) and schools in order to meet the course standards. Nicole said:

we also collaborate with the AEA and the schools because sometimes there are course standards that we have to meet there, so from. Each year we have improved our curriculum so it is just kind of pulling things from the AEA has this unit or this curriculum that is going to meet soft skills or you know.

Some examples of job skills Project SEARCH teaches in the classroom are resume writing, interview skills, and social skills; “in order to get the standard of resume writing, starting in April to May, we are going to do a whole unit and focus the class on resume writing, interview skills,” Nicole said. Another interesting example of teaching job skills in the classroom is bringing a human resource employee from the hospital in to interview interns. This helps interns to gain skills and “go out and be successful,” Nicole said. Lastly, Project SEARCH also focuses on teaching some skills in the classroom related to the workforce, such as teaching some skills related to teambuilding.

The second method of teaching job skills in Project SEARCH is teaching job skills in the workforce. There are other skills that interns learn depending on what department they work in in the hospital. Before the beginning of the program, Project SEARCH specifies three departments that each intern will work in during the program. These three departments specified mostly based on the interest of the interns. There are many different departments within the hospital, such as nutrition services, histology, linen, housekeeping, birth center, and supply chain. Working in any of these departments helps the interns learn some specific vocational skills related to the department itself. In the department of client services, interns usually learn some vocational skills, such as scanning, operating a computer, getting signed into the computer, and getting the different hospital programs and learning how to operate them. Another example of teaching job skills is working in the department of nutrition. They teach interns, for

example, how to put on a hair net before passing a specific line, rolling silverware, putting away dishes, and wiping down tables.

Methods of teaching. The second element in the category of teaching job skills is methods of teaching. The data showed that they are two main methods that Project SEARCH prefers to use to teach job skills: one-on-one and group discussion.

Participants in group 2 reported that “one-on-one” method (one Project SEARCH employee teaches one intern) has helped them to teach all the necessary skills effectively either in the classroom or workforce. Nicole mentioned that they implemented this technique especially at the beginning of the program because it helped them to “learn their [interns’] strengths and weaknesses and if there is a struggle, then you still have that time to be able to figure out what you can implement to make them be successful and independent on the job.” In addition, Rebecca added that:

I think the hands on is a good thing. We work with them the first couple of days just the whole time it is one-on-one. It is the student and then one of us. We work with them the whole shift so we see kind of where they are going to struggle, where they are going to do good with so then those hands on things we are watching them and we can see kind of where they might need some more support with. [If] they are struggling with remembering this, I can offer the checklist, if not the checklist, picture tasks.

The second method of teaching job skills Project SEARCH employees preferred to use is group discussion. This method has been used mainly in the classroom. Project SEARCH preferred to use it “because a lot of them [interns] do have different experiences, whether they have worked before or not worked so it is nice for everybody



to give everyday life examples and then just hands on activities that maybe gets them a little bit more involved in learning,” Nancy said.

Collaboration with coworkers. The third element in this category is collaboration with coworkers. Some interview questions were about collaboration in teaching interns job skills. The data showed that it is completely Project SEARCH employees’ responsibility to teach job skills in the classroom. In the workforce, however, coworkers are involved in training and assisting the interns. Nancy mentioned that “it depends on the department. In some of the departments, they have more involvement with the coworkers assisting them in some of those things.” Nancy also added that at the beginning of each internship, it is mostly Project SEARCH employees’ responsibility to teach interns core job duties they receive in a list from each department. Coworkers are involved later on when they want interns to do more tasks. Lastly, Nancy mentioned an example for how coworkers are involved by “showing interns how to do it first [tasks] and have them [interns] kind of follow behind.”

Strengths and weaknesses of teaching job skills. This is the last element in the category of teaching job skills. The data showed there were strengths and weaknesses (challenges) in this category. The only strength the data showed is the method of teaching job skills, one-on-one. It is such an effective method to teach interns job skills. On the other hand, the data showed that Project SEARCH employees face some challenges regarding teaching job skills. These challenges are:

1. Lack of technology. If Project SEARCH employees need to use a computer, they must borrow it from the AEA. The only technology they have at the site are two iPads and one iPod provided by NIVC, which is not enough for 12 interns. Nancy said:

in the classroom, how awesome would it be if [we] had our own set that we could use and pull out different things instead of having to pre-plan. We do have a couple iPads, we have an iPod too but that is only three. When you have 12 students, if one student is having to use that for alarms and that sort of thing to make them independent, you cannot spread out three to all of them.

Nancy thought using technology will help her and the other two Project SEARCH employees to improve the method of teaching job skills. She said:

when we went to some of our conferences, it was amazing the different apps that they have for like, prompting and task lists and different things they could do on these apps. When you do not have enough of the technology, it would be hard to bring something and include that into our Project SEARCH just because of the limited technology.

2. Some interns do not implement what they learned in the classroom to the workplace. For instance, Nancy mentioned that they teach interns the skill of being on time in the classroom. However, some interns are late when they go to work in their departments.
3. Having limited access to classroom. The classroom is not a space owned by Project SEARCH. The administration of the hospital is also using the room for other purposes. This is a challenge for Project SEARCH employees because they cannot bring more tools to help interns learn skills effectively. Nancy said:

we are kind of limited to the classroom, as what we have for space. Sometimes, you could probably teach things better if you have more things you could bring in for hands on teaching.

4. Inconsistency between some tasks and interns' abilities. This inconsistency, unfortunately, has led more than once to "take an internship rotation off just because of the inconsistency," Rebecca said. Nicole gave an example of what an inconsistency means. She said:

in one department, homecare for medical equipment, equipment comes in from people's homes is so inconsistent. When we get in there to train initially, we might just focus on concentrators and bypap machines, and then all of a sudden they get all this other different equipment coming in.

In summary of the category of teaching job skills, Project SEARCH does not have specific curricula. The administration of Project SEARCH gives the sites general ideas, and based on that, Project SEARCH employees design lesson plans. In addition, there are some job skills that every intern must learn during the internship, such as social skills. On the other hand, there are specific job skills interns learn based on what department they work at in the hospital, such as operating a computer. Teaching job skills in the workforce led to some collaboration between Project SEARCH employees and coworkers. Lastly, Project SEARCH employees face some challenges, such as a lack of technology and limited access to the classroom.

#### Category of Coaching and Support

The goal of this category was to learn how Project SEARCH employees coach and support interns in the workforce. This category included three elements: coaching

and supporting interns in the workforce, measuring interns' progress, and assessing strengths and weaknesses of coaching and supporting interns.

Coaching and supporting interns in the workforce. Questions in this element were mainly focused on how Project SEARCH employees coach and support interns in the workforce, how often they support interns, and if they collaborate with coworkers to supporting interns.

The interview data showed coaching and supporting interns usually occurred extensively at the beginning of each internship, and it decreased by the end. It also depends on each intern. Some interns need a limited amount of support and others need longer support. The most helpful method of coaching and supporting is "one-on-one." Rebecca said, "in the beginning, maybe one person might need only a couple of days of one-on-one where others might need longer than two days."

An example of coaching and supporting interns in the workforce is checking on interns while they are working in their departments. Nancy reported:

a lot of times I am checking [on interns]. Making sure they are where they are supposed to be, making sure they are following their schedule, making sure they are following any of the rules in their department.

The interview data showed Project SEARCH employees are the main source of support for interns during the program. They support interns in the workforce at least once or twice a day for about ten minutes with each intern; "I would say not more than twice....probably at least ten minutes," Nancy said.

Beside the support that interns receive from Project SEARCH employees, coworkers in the hospital also support interns. The data showed that coworkers are not required to coach and support interns. However, they are “required to treat them just like they would any other employee” Nicole said. Some coworkers, especially those who have been working a while along interns, are kind enough to coach and support interns. Nancy said:

we have quite a few co-workers that have been with us for a while that like to take that on, and make [interns] part of the team. Showing them the different things, the housekeeping, [and] tips that we do not know.

Measuring interns’ progress. The second element is measuring interns’ progress in the program. Project SEARCH employees reported that they use “checklists” in order to evaluate and measure interns’ progress. Nancy mentioned:

I think the checklist was more for the interns to follow. What we have to collect data on is more of an evaluation of a whole list of different skills. Some of them have actual goals that they are working on. It might be they need a couple prompts for it. It might be they are doing it independently. So every day we are collecting data on that.

Nicole also added that NIVC services asks Project SEARCH employees to have plans for every intern. This plan includes goals, which require Project SEARCH employees to monitor interns’ progress in the program. She said:

NIVC services needs to have some sort of plan. So we have individual services plan for every person that goes through the program, vocational plans that they are trying to reach. We do monitor at least every internship where interns need to work on something else because they have exceeded this goal. They have met it consistently at 100%. They do not need any more prompting, then we will re-evaluate and figure out what other type of areas they might need to improve.

An example of some skills that interns have been evaluated on was communicating effectively, attendance, and getting along with coworkers. Project SEARCH employees monitored these kinds of skills and documented them in order to see the percentage of goals met, and if it was a positive or negative. Nicole said:

our overall goal is demonstrating the skills for competitive employment. We collect [data] every single day so we are documenting whether it is a [positive] or a negative. We report out at the end of the rotation. The high school students need to pass each rotation with a 70% or above in order to pass that internship rotation.

Strengths and weaknesses of coaching and supporting interns. This is the last element in the category of coaching and support. The data showed there are a couple strengths and one weakness in this category.

There are two main strengths of implementing coaching and supporting practices. First, Project SEARCH employees, in some situations, “can be there side by side with [interns].” Nancy said. Being there with them helped interns to be supported when they faced difficulties. Secondly, interns get coaching and support from coworkers. These coworkers have done phenomenal work as mentors for the interns.

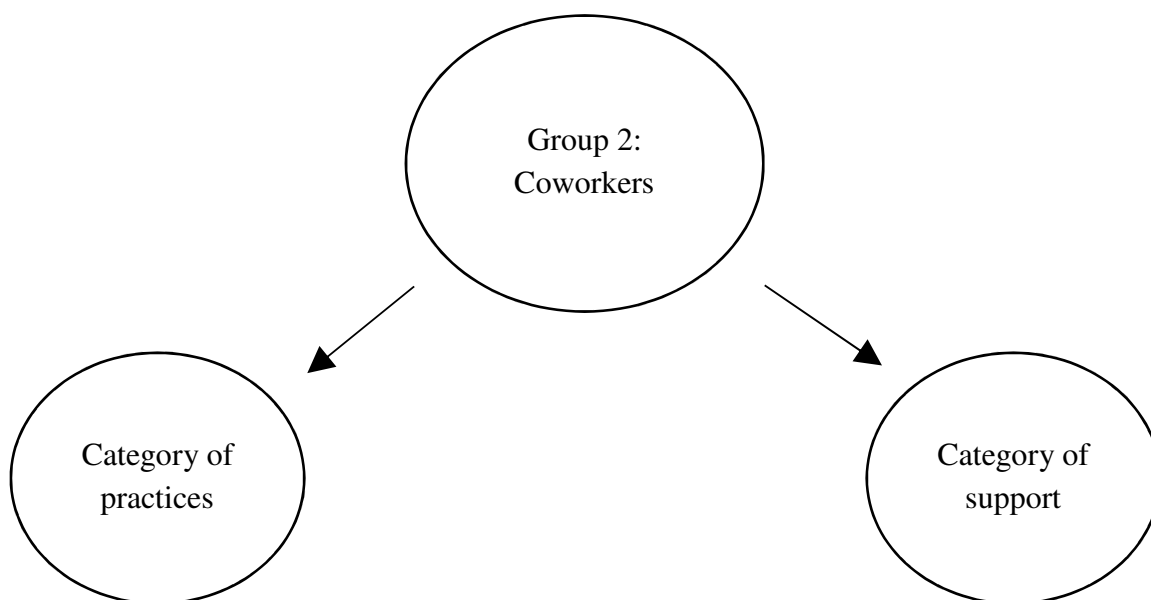
The major weakness Project SEARCH employees face in terms of coaching and supporting interns was not being side by side with interns in their department when they are most needed; “one of the biggest challenges is being there when you are most needed” Nancy said. In other words, some interns face some challenges, such as not communicating well with their coworkers, and they need immediate support. However,

they cannot find Project SEARCH employees because they are taking care of other interns in other departments. Thus, Project SEARCH employees wish that there is a way for them to be instantly notified.

In conclusion of the category of coaching and supporting, interns usually need more support at the beginning of each internship, and less support by the end. The main source of coaching and support interns is Project SEARCH employees. However, coworkers also participate in coaching and supporting interns even though they are not required to do so. Furthermore, measuring interns' progress is important, and Project SEARCH uses a 'checklist' to measure the achievement of goals. Lastly, the strength of coaching and supporting interns at Project SEARCH has an opportunity to ensure that interns are learning and doing their jobs effectively. However, Project SEARCH employees are unable to be available when they are most needed.

#### Group 2: Coworkers

The goal of the descriptive results for group 2 was to learn how coworkers support interns in the workforce, as well as what kind of support coworkers receive from Project SEARCH employees. Thus, the interview questions for coworkers were divided into three categories: (1) practices, (2) support, and (3) perceptions of coaching and support. However, the next section presented the descriptive results for: category of practices and category of support (Figure 2). The category of perceptions of coaching and support was included in the section of interpretative analysis.



*Figure 2- Group 2 (coworkers)*

### Category of Practices

The main interview question in this category was: are coworkers required to coach and support interns from Project SEARCH? If so, how do you support them, and how often? Therefore, this category has three elements: requirements of coaching and supporting interns, the method of coaching and supporting interns, and the frequency of support.

Requirement of coaching and supporting interns. The data showed that coworkers are not required to coach and support interns. Coworkers support interns when they want to, or when Project SEARCH employees ask them to. However, the interview data showed that coworkers prefer to coach and support interns because they are more familiar with the work in their departments than Project SEARCH employees. Becky said:



I think they asked us to [support interns] because we know the programming note instead of calling one of their coaches.... I do not know that we have to but we do a bit it [so it] does not frustrated them.... if the computer networking or the scan is not working.

Method of coaching and supporting interns. This is the second element in the category of practices. One of the methods that coworkers use to coach and support interns was “one-on-one.” It was the same method of teaching used by Project SEARCH employees. Samantha said “like the input trend that I worked directly with, her desk is right next to mine in my office, and I worked hand in hand with her.” Becky also mentioned there is always someone around the interns to help them. She said:

there is always someone around, so [interns] come to someone who is working and ask for help at they needed, the thing in mark paper or scan or there is something with their computer button.

Coworkers prefer to use the method “one-on-one” because each department has its own system, and it is difficult for interns from Project SEARCH to learn each department’s system. Thus, coworkers prefer to work with them side by side to ensure no mistakes would occur. Samantha reported:

every department has their own system so, the Project SEARCH girls just cannot know each specific system to work with in a whole so, each department [has] work people, work individually with this.

Frequency of support. The data showed that coworkers support interns daily.

Becky said:

every day wait for us kind of mail maybe once or twice a day. They know the time they do to lunch and they know the time they have to come back for us. We make sure they have the work that they need and their log in to the program they need to be logged into so that they complete that scanning.

In addition, Samantha pointed out that besides supporting interns every day, they also socialize with them; “we communicate throughout the day, we laugh and joke around and have fun all day long.”

In short of the category of practices, many coworkers support interns daily in the workforce even though they are not required to do that.

### Category of Support

The second category in group 2, coworkers, is the category of support. The interview questions in this category asked if coworkers receive support from Project SEARCH employees, and how often. The interview data showed that Project SEARCH employees support coworkers only when coworkers ask for help. Becky said, “if there is something specific that we need from them [Project SEARCH employees], we will request for it.” In addition, the conversation between coworkers and Project SEARCH employees usually occurs through emails as coworkers reported. Samantha said:

we get emails from [Project SEARCH employees] throughout the week. If something comes up, my intern is ill, one of them emails me and lets me know that she is not going to be there that day. I had a time for school years to their scheduled for Thanksgiving break, Christmas break, all the breaks that.

In short, Project SEARCH employees assist coworkers when they ask for help.

### Summary

The first section of Chapter 4 included the descriptive results, which described Project SEARCH as a transition program. It also described the practices of supportive employment used in the hospital. All the data for this section were collected by

interviewing Project SEARCH employees and coworkers. The results were described in three categories for Project SEARCH employees, and two categories for coworkers (Table 2).

Table 2

*Section 1: Descriptive Analysis*

<b>Group 1: Project SEARCH Employees</b>	
Category of selection	<i>Process of selecting interns Collaboration Challenges</i>
Category of teaching job skills	<i>Job skills Method of teaching Collaboration with coworkers Strengths and weakness</i>
Category of coaching and support	<i>Coaching and support in the workforce Measuring interns' progress Strengths and weaknesses</i>
<b>Group 2: Coworkers</b>	
Category of practices	<i>Requirement of coaching and supporting interns Method of coaching and supporting interns Frequency of support</i>
Category of support	

## Section 2: Interpretative Results

The goal of this section was to analyze data qualitatively for Project SEARCH employees and coworkers, and discuss emerging themes that occurred during the analysis. The interpretative analysis included all categories in both groups, especially those categories with open-ended questions. This next section, therefore, the researcher explained in detail four fundamental themes that were identified in this study (Table 2).

Table 3

### *Interpretative Results*

Themes	Sub-themes
Inclusive work environment	<i>Positive attitudes</i> <i>Support</i> <i>Relationships</i>
Effective collaboration and communication	
Success and growth by the end of the program	
Challenges	

### Inclusive Work Environment

From many positive comments participants in both groups provided regarding working with interns from Project SEARCH, the first theme that emerged was inclusive work environment. In general, inclusion is “the pathway to being genuinely integrated into and accepted as a part of society” (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005, p. 123). This is exactly the main idea of Project SEARCH to include people with disabilities in society. Specifically, Project SEARCH has helped interns with intellectual disabilities to be

included and integrated in an inclusive work environment similar to people without disabilities. Thus, Project SEARCH as a transition program has helped to change the old belief that the only place for people with special needs to work in is sheltered workshops. Instead, Project SEARCH has proved that people with intellectual disabilities can be trained and work in an inclusive environment alongside people without disabilities. From this theme, inclusive work environment, three sub-themes emerged: positive attitudes, support, and relationships.

Positive attitudes. The data indicated what helped Project SEARCH to be a successful transition program was coworkers' positive attitudes in the hospital. Coworkers were delighted with, and held positive attitudes toward working with interns with intellectual disabilities. These were representative comments:

- Samantha (coworker): "just because [they are disabled], does not mean they are incapable of doing."
- Becky (coworker): "the opportunity for these folks to come into a main employer of the community, to get that experience of work, and the experience of coworkers and just everything they have not been able to experience before- it is good."

Holding positive attitudes toward working with individuals with disabilities was the most important element to reach successful supportive employment. Without positive attitudes from coworkers, supportive employment would not be successful and effective because coworkers would not be willing to work beside interns with intellectual

disabilities. The above comments showed that coworkers believed in the interns, and that they should be given opportunities. This means coworkers focused on interns' abilities. In other words, coworkers focused on what interns with disabilities can do, not what interns cannot do. Therefore, these positive attitudes that coworkers held toward working alongside individuals with special needs led to supporting interns in the workforce.

However, all coworkers did not hold positive beliefs regarding working with interns with intellectual disabilities. There were a number of coworkers who held negative beliefs. The following is an example of negative attitudes toward working with interns with intellectual disabilities:

- Nicole (Project SEARCH employee): “[some coworkers are] very apprehensive about coming, because they feel it is going to be more work than a benefit for them.”

The previous comment indicates that some coworkers might not feel comfortable working with people with disabilities, and that is expected. However, this does not mean specialists and people should not encourage inclusive employment for people with disabilities. In fact, inclusive employment may help some coworkers change their negative attitudes toward individuals with special needs. Project SEARCH as a transition program helped to change negative attitudes to positive attitudes by showing coworkers what individuals with disabilities are capable of doing.

Support. Because of the positive attitudes, coworkers in the hospital believed that individuals with disabilities not only should be included in an inclusive work

environment, but also that they should be supported. Examples of responses included the following:

- Samantha (coworker): “like the input trend that I worked directly with, her desk is right next to mine in my office and I worked hand in hand with her.”
- Becky (coworker): “there is always someone around, so they come to someone who is working and asked for help as they needed, such as scan or something with their computer button.”

The previous statements showed that coworkers, first, accepted interns with disabilities to work with them in the same departments in the hospital, and then they started to support them. This is exactly the goal of inclusive employment. The goal is not only to include them in an inclusive work environment, but also to support their participation and make them feel like a part of the team.

Another interesting point was coworkers are not required and trained to support interns in the workforce. This means coworkers are volunteering to support interns naturally. When coworkers face difficulties in supporting interns in the workforce, they contact Project SEARCH employees to help them. In this case, providing coworkers with short courses might be helpful for them regarding how to support interns with disabilities in the workforce, which will assist interns to reach a full benefit of inclusive employment.

Relationships. Accepting to work beside interns with intellectual disabilities and support them led to positive relationships between coworkers and interns as well. These were representative statements:

- Becky (coworker): we usually like to have a potluck when someone leaves our department. We do this because we are “trying to send them off in a positive way, we just want to show that love.”
- Becky (coworker): “we will miss the girl that we have now.”

The previous positive comments showed how inclusive employment helped interns with disabilities to build strong relationships with coworkers in the hospital. Interns were seen as coworkers and also friends. It is important for interns to feel like there is a friendship between them and their coworkers. The fact that coworkers were caring, naturally supportive, and friends will help interns to be healthier psychologically, which will increase their well-being. All these benefits are because interns work side by side with coworkers for a nine-month internship program.

In summary of this theme, inclusion does not merely mean placing individuals with disabilities in an inclusive work environment alongside people without disabilities. Instead, it means placing people with disabilities in an inclusive work environment and giving them the right to participate and be effective (Jaeger & Bowman, 2005). This is what Project SEARCH has been doing. It place interns in different departments in the hospital, and then Project SEARCH employees and coworkers work together to coach,



support, and integrate interns in the workplace. Thus, interns with special needs feel they have an effective role in society.

#### Effective Collaboration and Communication

Questions were asked to know to what extent Project SEARCH employees and coworkers collaborate and communicate with each other to coach and support interns with intellectual disabilities. The data indicated there was some collaboration and communication between Project SEARCH employees and coworkers in departments within the hospital. However, this collaboration occurred mostly between Project SEARCH employees and only one coworker (an intern's supervisor) in each department in the hospital. This was an example of how they communicated:

- Samantha (coworker): “we get emails from [Project SEARCH employees] throughout the week or day if something comes up like if my intern is ill, one of them will email me and let me know that she is not going to be there that day.”

Therefore, the collaboration between Project SEARCH employees and coworkers is limited because it happens often between Project SEARCH employees and one supervisor in each department. However, this does not mean there are no other coworkers who like to help interns and support them. The question here is about collaboration between Project SEARCH and coworkers.

The fact that some coworkers communicate and collaborate with Project SEARCH employees in order to help interns is excellent because coworkers are not required to or trained to do so. However, this collaboration between Project SEARCH

employees and coworkers could be improved in order to help interns fully benefit from the program. This collaboration could be improved, for example, by building good relationships and communication with a broader range of coworkers in each department in the hospital. As a result of the broader collaboration, more coworkers in each department would be involved in coaching and support interns, which would help to reach the goal of inclusive employment, as well as help interns to learn and improve their skills.

In summary of this theme, there is only one coworker, the supervisor, who is assigned in each department to support interns. The other coworkers are not required to coach or support interns, which means there is limited collaboration and communication between Project SEARCH employees and the rest of the coworkers. Project SEARCH employees should think of a way to raise the collaboration between them and coworkers, which will benefit interns with intellectual disabilities to be supported and feel they are part of society.

#### Success and Growth by the End of the Program

Because of the inclusive work environment, interns could improve important skills, such as social skills, communication skills, and vocational skills. In other words, Project SEARCH as a transition program has a positive impact on the performance of interns with intellectual disabilities. Project SEARCH employees and coworkers have played an important role in terms of improving interns' skills. Representative comments included as the following:

- Samantha (coworker): “the intern I have currently, the first day she came in, she was real withdrawn and was shy and now through being with her as much as I am, she is talkative and outgoing with me. And through our growing friendship, she is just very blossomed and a very changed young lady so.”
- Nancy (Project SEARCH employee): “[the interns] have a huge growth that we always hear, and sometimes we do not even see it, but we will hear a lot from the parents; I cannot believe how much they have matured, how much they have grown, and I feel that is part of what this program is doing. It is helping them grow, not only putting them in a spot that they are with regular people, but they are doing what anybody else would do.”
- Becky (coworker): she does a great job ... She not only as far as I know does it accurately and correctly as far as this the current patient, but does it in a very quick way. She is fast so the amount of work she gets done is more of than others that we have had in the past. And so it is pretty good.”
- Nancy (Project SEARCH employee): “most of it is all positive, how much they have grown in the department. They develop those relationships with their co-workers and become part of that team, but a lot of the time it is not just about the work that they have been doing, it is also about that the relationship that they have made with them.”

The previous comments showed how much the practices of Project SEARCH and the support from coworkers helped interns to develop their skills and be successful in the

workforce. The comments were positive because Project SEARCH employees and coworkers observed the changes and improvements that interns have been through during the program. For instance, some interns were shy and withdrawn at the beginning of the program, and now they are talkative. This means the inclusive work environment in the hospital helped interns to improve their communication skills. Thus, Project SEARCH as a transition program assisted interns with disabilities to grow their skills during a nine-month period, which led interns to be successful in the workplace.

### Challenges

This is the final theme that emerged in this study. The interview data presented that coworkers face a few challenges in terms of coaching and supporting interns. For instance, some interns had communication issues, which made it hard for coworkers to communicate with them. This is a representative comment:

- Becky (coworker): “there is a little bit, but as far as having a conversation, it just does not happen.”

It was expected that coworkers would face challenges regarding working alongside interns with intellectual disabilities. However, the point here was to help coworkers as much as possible to avoid any kind of challenges they may face with interns with disabilities. This would help to make supportive employment more effective because supportive employment depends mainly on coworkers in the hospital. Thus, coworkers must feel comfortable working with interns, in order to assist to achieve the big goal of Project SEARCH, which is inclusive employment.

Project SEARCH employees also faced a few challenges in the program. These challenges related to the curricula of Project SEARCH and represented Project SEARCH in the community. These are representative comments:

- Nicole (Project SEARCH employee): “it would be ideal if we were presented something, [for example] on October 27<sup>th</sup>, you are going to do this, and this is what you are going to teach and this is how you are going to teach it and these are the materials you will need. That would be awesome.”
- Nancy (Project SEARCH employee): “one of the weaknesses was just that nobody knew about it [Project SEARCH].”

The previous challenges might limit the effectiveness of Project SEARCH as a transition program. All parties in the ‘advisory committee’ should work on solving any kinds of challenges that Project SEARCH employees may have throughout the program. According to Project SEARCH employees, it is better if they can have specific curricula or lesson plans to show them what exactly they should teach interns in the classroom. It appears that giving Project SEARCH employees general ideas about what to teach is not enough. There should be specific lesson plans and guidelines for what skills to teach, and how to teach them. Thus, Project SEARCH employees will have a better understanding of what to teach and how to teach it during the program.

Moreover, the other challenge that face Project SEARCH employees is not having enough applications every year because the program is not well-known in their town. This means this specific Project SEARCH site needs to be advertised and marketed in

this specific community. Marketing Project SEARCH as a transition program will assist the site having more candidates, as well as more families who have a child with an intellectual disability know about it.

In short of this them, challenges, the goal of Project SEARCH as a transition program is to include individuals with disabilities in an inclusive work environment, increase their participation, and take an effective role in society. However, the stated issues may prevent Project SEARCH employees and coworkers from helping interns effectively, which requires all parties related to Project SEARCH to take action and limit the number of challenges.

### Summary

The interpretative results section is the second section of the results chapter. This section focused on presenting themes that emerged during analyzing data for participants, Project SEARCH employees and coworkers. Four themes emerged in the interpretative results section. These themes were: inclusive work environment, success and growth by the end of the program, effective collaboration and communication, and challenges.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to summarize and discuss the most fundamental components and findings of this study. Therefore, the structure of this chapter was organized in the following. First, it summarized the purpose and research problem of this study. Second, it presented the research questions and research method of the study. Third, it summarized the most important results of this study. Fourth, it discussed the findings. Fifth, it wrote conclusions and final comments. Last, it listed implications of the study, future research ideas, and limitations of the study.

#### Research Problem and Purpose

Numbers of studies pointed out that the rate of unemployment for people with disabilities is high in the United States. The Department of Labor (2015) mentioned that only 17.5% of individuals with disabilities were employed. For this reason, the researcher chose to study Project SEARCH as an example of a successful transition program from school-to-work that has helped young adults with intellectual disabilities to be employed (Daston et al., 2012). Specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine what practices have been implemented by Project SEARCH in order to prepare and support interns with disabilities for employment positions. This study also aimed to examine the perceptions of Project SEARCH employees and interns' coworkers toward working with individuals with intellectual disabilities.

### Research Questions and Research Methods

This dissertation research aimed to answer four fundamental questions:

1. What practices do Project SEARCH employees implement to prepare and support interns throughout the course of a nine-month program?
2. What are Project SEARCH employees' perceptions of these job preparation practices?
3. What is the nature of coworker involvement in the process of supportive employment?
4. What are coworkers' perceptions of supportive employment?

In order to answer the research questions, qualitative research methods of, descriptive and interpretative analysis, were employed in this study. The researcher interviewed three Project SEARCH employees and two coworkers (face-to-face), and asked them specific questions that were written before the interviews. After collecting data, the data were analyzed into two sections: descriptive analysis and interpretative analysis.

### Summary of Results

Like analyzing data, the results chapter of this study was also divided into two sections: descriptive results and interpretative results. In the section of descriptive results, the findings were described in three categories: (1) category of selection, (2) category of teaching job skills, and (3) category of coaching and support. In these categories, the researcher described the process of selecting interns in Project SEARCH, what job skills



Project SEARCH teaches interns and the method of teaching these job skills, and how Project SEARCH employees and coworkers coach and support interns in the hospital. Thus, the overall result of the descriptive part was that Project SEARCH employees provided valuable information about how to select, prepare, coach, and support interns in the program.

In the section of interpretative results, four themes emerged during the analysis. These themes were: (1) inclusive work environment, (2) effective collaboration and communication, (3) success and growth by the end of the program, and (4) challenges. The overall finding of the interpretative data was that coworkers provided an inclusive work environment to interns with disabilities through positive attitudes and support. Such a climate allowed interns to improve important skills, such as social skills, communication skills, and employment skills.

### Discussion

The main goal of choosing Project SEARCH as a topic for this dissertation study was because the researcher wants to replicate this program in his own country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the discussion of the findings was connected to how the results of this study will help the researcher to replicate Project SEARCH in Saudi Arabia. In this section, the researcher followed the same formats he followed in chapter four of this study. In other words, the researcher divided the discussion section into two sections: descriptive results and interpretative results. Then, the researcher

discussed findings followed by an explanation of how this is possible to be replicated in the Kingdom.

### Descriptive Results

The overall conclusion of the descriptive results was that Project SEARCH employees provided valuable information about how to select, prepare, coach, and support interns in the program. Thus, the researcher found three essential components in the descriptive results (Table 4).

Table 4

#### *Three Essential Components in the Descriptive Results*

Descriptive Results
Project SEARCH is a collaboration program
The implementation of Project SEARCH
Challenges

Project SEARCH is a collaboration program. During the interview with Project SEARCH employees, the researcher found out that there must be collaboration and communication between different parties in order to start and operate a Project SEARCH site. Project SEARCH employees pointed out that they have what it is called an “advisory committee.” This committee contains the Project SEARCH, school district, vocational rehabilitation, vocational center, business, and others. All these parties meet quarterly to discuss many elements, such as creating a plan for the next year. Thus, collaboration

between different partners is an essential component in Project SEARCH as a transition program.

The collaborative nature of Project SEARCH related to the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) that was described in Chapter 2. This act operates through a partnership between the Departments of Education and Labor. The purpose of this program is to “integrate academic and vocational education, link secondary and postsecondary education, provide learning opportunities at the work site, and fully engage the private sector in the process” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, n.p.). This is what Project SEARCH has been doing since 1996. They partner with other community agencies to link secondary and postsecondary education by providing vocational learning opportunities in an inclusive work environment for senior high school students with intellectual disabilities.

The description that “Project SEARCH is a collaboration program” made the researcher think of how to replicate Project SEARCH in Saudi Arabia, and what parties should be involved in the “advisory committee.” Since there is no such program in Saudi Arabia, the first step the researcher should do is to convince the Department of Education in Saudi Arabia of the positive effectiveness of Project SEARCH on transition services. The reason why the Department of Education specifically is because Project SEARCH is mostly for senior high school students. Asking high school students to leave public schools and work for an entire academic year in hospitals will not be acceptable unless there is approval from the Department of Education.

The current practices in Saudi Arabia is that high school students with intellectual disabilities go to work in sheltered workshops or adult activity centers once or twice a week (only two or three hours a week). However, the researcher needs to convince the Department of Education that Project SEARCH as a program will help to improve transition services a step ahead in the Kingdom a step ahead for two reasons. First, Project SEARCH helps high school students with intellectual disabilities go through an extensive transition program for the entire academic year, not only twice a week. Secondly, this internship also helps students be involved in an inclusive work environment, such as hospitals, and not sheltered workshops. Therefore, convincing the Department of Education in Saudi Arabia of the idea of Project SEARCH will be the first step for the researcher to improve transition services for individuals with disabilities in the Kingdom.

After convincing the Department of Education in Saudi Arabia of the idea of Project SEARCH, the question then becomes who are the parties that should be involved to replicate Project SEARCH in Saudi Arabia. From the researcher's perspective, the advisory committee should contain a representative of Project SEARCH, school district, vocational center, vocational rehabilitation, host business, and others. Regarding the administration of Project SEARCH, the researcher contacted the founder of the program, Ms. Erin Riehle, and she welcomed the idea of starting Project SEARCH in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the role of the researcher is to bring all of the previous parties together and

help them to collaborate and communicate to reach the big goal, which is improving transition services for individuals with disabilities in the Kingdom.

Lastly, the researcher has an experience about how to establish a Project SEARCH site. He had an opportunity to join some meetings involving different parties regarding starting a Project SEARCH site in the Midwest. This gave him some experience regarding how to manage meetings and what elements to discuss in meetings.

The implementation of Project SEARCH. The second essential component in the descriptive results is the implementation of Project SEARCH. The descriptive part of this study helped the researcher to learn valuable information about the implementation of Project SEARCH. For example, the researcher learned the process of selecting interns, job skills needed to teach interns, methods of teaching skills, and coaching and support. This kind of data is the most needed because in the review of literature, Bond et al., (2001) and Torrey et al., (2001) pointed out that there is a necessary need for research to investigate how program implement practices related to secondary transition and supportive employment in an inclusive work environment. Thus, the descriptive section of this study provided necessary and valuable data regarding implementing secondary transition and supported employment practices in an inclusive work environment.

It is highly important for the researcher to learn how Project SEARCH operates the program for two reasons. First, it will help the researcher to know how to operate a Project SEARCH site in Saudi Arabia in future. Secondly, it will help the researcher to transfer the knowledge to Saudis who will be involved in operating Project SEARCH

sites in the Kingdom. The researcher had an opportunity to visit other Project SEARCH sites in the Midwest. This helped him to meet with Project SEARCH employees, talk about their roles in the program, and observe how they teach interns in the classroom. This also helped the researcher to observe interns while they were working in different departments in the hospital. This experience gave valuable information, which assisted the researcher to have a better understanding of how they operate the program.

Lastly, the descriptive part of implementing Project SEARCH is not only valuable for the researcher, but it is also valuable to the field of transition services in general. Experts in the field now have more important information in terms of advocating for better programs of supportive employment and better outcomes.

Challenges. The descriptive part of this study contained important information regarding challenges Project SEARCH employees face in the program. For instance, they do not receive enough applications every year because the program is not well known in their area. Another example was that there was not a lot of collaboration and communication between Project SEARCH employees and coworkers. Thus, these kinds of issues might affect the program negatively and hold the performance of the program back.

From the researcher's perspective, no program can be operated without facing some issues and challenges. However, the point here is to solve problems and avoid challenges as much as possible, which will help interns to get the full benefit from the program. While replicating Project SEARCH in Saudi Arabia, the researcher will pay

attention to avoid challenges that the site in the U.S. is currently having. For example, the researcher will ensure there is enough marketing for the program, especially at the beginning. He will use different methods of communication to reach, for instance, experts in the field of special education, teachers, college students, families with children with intellectual disabilities, policy makers, and others. This will help to distribute the idea of Project SEARCH, thus having enough candidates every year.

### Interpretative Results

The final result of the interpretative section was that because of the experiences of inclusive work opportunities, interns were able to receive direct support provided in a natural way from coworkers, as well as coworkers had positive attitudes toward working alongside individuals with intellectual disabilities. Thus, interns were able to achieve growth and success in areas, such as social development, communication skills, and job skills.

The interview with coworkers was somewhat different from the interview with Project SEARCH employees. This is because the interview questions for Project SEARCH employees focused mostly on what they do in the program. However, the interview questions for coworkers focused mostly on their perceptions and experiences. Therefore, the researcher found two interesting components throughout the conversation with coworkers.

Supportive environment. The first interesting component was that coworkers provided supportive environment for interns. The idea of Project SEARCH as a transition

program is to include interns in an inclusive work environment and help them to participate and be effective in the workforce. However, this cannot be done without providing a supportive environment for interns. In other words, one might be able to include individuals with disabilities in an inclusive work environment, but one cannot force coworkers to support them if they do not want to. The interview data showed that coworkers in the hospital not only accepted interns to work beside them, but they also supported them in the workforce. This result is an agreement with what Sears et al. (2014) suggested. The author suggested what is called “place, then train,” which means placing individuals with disabilities in an inclusive work environment, then coworkers training and supporting them. Therefore, ensuring individuals with special needs work in a supportive environment is important to reach the goal of inclusion.

Since providing a supportive environment for interns is a main element for successful inclusion, the researcher will ensure finding this environment before starting a Project SEARCH site in Saudi Arabia. This can be done, for instance, by mailing a survey to authorities and workers in a business and asking them questions regarding their perceptions of working alongside people with special needs. This will help the researcher to have an overview of whether this work environment will be supportive for interns.

Positive attitudes and relationship building. The interview data showed that coworkers hold positive attitudes and good relationships with interns from Project SEARCH. For instance, Becky (coworker) said: “we will miss the girl that we have



now.” This positivity certainly helped interns a lot to achieve the goal of inclusive employment.

However, this does not mean all coworkers in this hospital held positive views regarding working with interns from Project SEARCH. The researcher interviewed only two coworkers. The questions remain about the rest of coworkers in the hospital. It is still unknown if the other coworkers held positive attitudes toward working with interns from Project SEARCH. In fact, Nicole (Project SEARCH employee) mentioned in Chapter 4 that a number of coworkers held negative attitudes regarding working with intern with intellectual disabilities; she said her colleagues are “very apprehensive about coming, because they feel it is going to be more work than a benefit for them.” This means there is a need for more studies regarding whether the rest of coworkers held positive attitudes toward working with interns with special needs in the hospital.

From this point, the researcher learned that positive attitudes and relationship building are two important elements in any inclusive work environment for individuals with disabilities. Without positive attitudes toward interns, coworkers will not provide welcoming and supportive employment for interns, which is the main goal of inclusion. Therefore, it is important for the researcher in the future to know the attitudes of a large percentage of coworkers before starting a Project SEARCH site. If the survey indicates that workers in a particular business do not hold positive attitudes toward working with people with disabilities, this means the researcher should find another business in which to start a Project SEARCH site.

### Conclusion

Interviewing both groups, Project SEARCH employees and coworkers, assisted the researcher in collecting valuable data regarding Project SEARCH as a transition program and its supportive employment practices in the hospital. One essential component of the success of Project SEARCH is the structure of the program. This program is structured and operated nicely, which has helped interns improve their skills. Another essential component of the success of this program is coworkers. Coworkers provided a supportive environment for individuals with disabilities. They also held positive attitudes toward working alongside individuals with special needs.

### Implications

The implications of this study were connected to three important areas: policy, research, and practice.

Policy. As indicated in Chapter 2, since the mid-1970s, there are a host of policies that have been developed and have been made law for individuals with disabilities regarding transition services and supportive employment. For instance, the U.S. Congress decided to add “supported employment programs” to the Rehabilitation Act of 1986 (Rusch & Braddock, 2004). Another example is the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. This act gives individuals with special needs their rights of care, support, and inclusive employment (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). These policies are based purely on the values on what experts in the field want to happen. These policies are also supported by research.

The current study added to a growing number of studies that have supported the viability and the importance of the laws. It does that by providing evidence from the Project SEARCH employees and coworkers that individuals with intellectual disabilities can be successful. They not only can be successful in the job, but they can be successful in other things, such as being independent and developing relationships with others. Therefore, the U.S. Federal Government should continue being involved in and supporting these kinds of programs.

Research. There are evidence-based practices regarding transition services and supportive employment for individuals with disabilities. For example, “time-unlimited and employment support” focuses on long term employment support “to assist the customer in the identification and provision of supports and extended services which maintain and enhance the person’s position as a valued member of the work force” (Brooke et al., 1997, p. 10). There are also quite a few studies conducted regarding supportive employment. In general, all of these studies seem to indicate that supportive employment: (1) helps individuals with special needs to increase social interaction with people, (2) improves the self-confidence of individuals with disabilities, and (3) helps people with special needs learn new skills (Ellenkamp et al., 2016).

The results of the current study support and extend this literature by confirming and supporting what other researchers said, as well as adding new information. For instance, there are a limited number of studies that have interviewed coworkers regarding practices implemented by Project SEARCH. The current study interviewed coworkers

and Project SEARCH employees and added new information, such as challenges facing Project SEARCH employees and coworkers.

Practice. Project SEARCH is a well-known program because they have over 300 sites. Most of these sites are in the U.S. and some are located in other countries (Daston et al., 2012). However, one of the challenges they face in the program was that not enough applications are submitted each year. Even though they have positive data outcomes, and multiple sites, but they still do not get a lot of applications. Therefore, there is a need for an expansion and growth for this program in terms of making more people aware of it. This particular Project SEARCH site used in this study needs to continue to gain more public awareness among high schools, and individuals and families with a child with an intellectual disability to know about a program like this.

The results of the current study indicated that the two coworkers who were interviewed held positive attitudes toward working with people with disabilities. However, Project SEARCH employees mentioned that some coworkers held negative attitudes toward individuals with special needs. This is in agreement with what Gormley (2014) found in her study. She mentioned that the biggest barrier people with disabilities face is stigma, which made people have negative attitudes toward individuals with special needs. Thus, an initial activity, such as a short course, with coworkers would not only assist with their attitudes, but would also give them some information about working with people with special needs so they can have positive attitudes.

### Limitations and Future Research

The first limitation of this study was the limited amount of data. The researcher interviewed a small sample size; three Project SEARCH employees and two coworkers (five participants). This small sample size helped the researcher to collect some valuable information regarding supportive employment practices used by Project SEARCH. However, it did not allow the researcher to collect a lot of information regarding supportive employment. In addition to the small sample size, the current study interviewed participants only once, which did not allow the collection a lot of data. Therefore, future studies might interview more Project SEARCH employees and coworkers. Future studies also might do multiple interviews with these participants. Those kinds of studies will provide rich information and give a better basis for making a better conclusion about supportive employment practices used by Project SEARCH.

The second limitation was that the sample of this study did not include interns with intellectual disabilities. The focus was only on Project SEARCH employees and coworkers. Additional inquiry is needed regarding interns from Project SEARCH in the hospital by using different research methods. For instance, taking field notes about how interns interact with coworkers, and the effectiveness of supportive employment practices on interns' performances are additional ways to research. Another example is by observing interns in the workforce at the beginning of the program, then observing them again at the end of the program (pre-post studies). This will assist in providing rich comparative data and contribute to the literature.

The last limitation was that this study included only one Project SEARCH site. However, there are over 300 sites-most of them in the U.S. and some in other countries. Thus, additional studies are required to include more Project SEARCH sites. These kinds of studies will help to give a better understanding of, for example, supportive employment practices implemented by Project SEARCH, challenges faced by Project SEARCH employees and coworkers, and how to make supportive employment practices work effectively for individuals with disabilities in an inclusive work environment.

Finally, there are some barriers for the idea of inclusive employment for individuals with disabilities. Here are examples of these barriers. Some parents who have children with disabilities do not hold high expectations of inclusive employment on people with disabilities. These parents do not know the advantages of inclusive employment on their children's performance. Similarly, some people who are in charge of schools only for students with significant disabilities do not believe in inclusive employment for individuals with significant disabilities. They believe this kind of schools is the best place for individuals with significant disabilities because they are incapable of doing things. Another barrier that prevents inclusive employment for all individuals with disabilities is policy makers. Some policy makers do not believe people with disabilities can be worked in an inclusive work environment alongside people without disabilities and be effective. Because of all the previous barriers, there is a need for further studies regarding inclusive employment for individuals with disabilities. These studies will help to understand and reduce the barriers.

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## APPENDIX A

## EMAIL INVITATION

Email Subject Line: Invitation to Participate in a Dissertation Study

Dear,

You are invited to participate in a study titled: “Examining Supportive Employment Practices Used by Project SEARCH: A Descriptive Study” conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. Project SEARCH program at Mercy Health Center has been selected as one of a few transition services programs for senior high school students with developmental disabilities in Iowa.

Being a part of this study is an opportunity for you to explain how Project SEARCH works and, in particular, to describe the services and interventions provided to students with special needs. Information shared in interviews will be confidential and participation is voluntary.

If you are interested, please call or email me to discuss the study expectations so that you can make an informed decision about participation of Project SEARCH at Mercy Health Center. Please note that at this time, we are only seeking to confirm general interest in the study. After we review and have time for questions, your program may be involved in this study and during the study participants will also be able to choose to participate once the study is underway.

Best wishes,

Saeed Alamlki

University of Northern Iowa

[Almalkis@uni.edu](mailto:Almalkis@uni.edu)

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: PROJECT SEARCH EMPLOYEES

<b>Selections</b>	<b>Skills to Teach</b>	<b>Methods for Teaching (Classroom &amp; workplace)</b>
<p>Give me a general overview of selecting interns?</p> <p>1. What process do you use to select interns? Give me an example for how to do it? What specific criteria are you looking for when you select interns?</p> <p>2. How do you collaborate with others (i.e. vocational rehabilitation) when you select interns?</p> <p>3. What are some challenges you have faced when selecting interns? How can you improve the process of selecting interns?</p> <p>Is there anything else would like to tell me about selection?</p>	<p>Give me a general overview of the skills that you teach in P-S either in the curricula &amp; workforce?</p> <p>1. What job skills does the curriculum of Project SEARCH involve?</p> <p>2. What job skills interns will learn in the workforce?</p> <p>Is there anything else would like to tell me about the skills you teach?</p>	<p>Give me a general overview of the methods of teaching skills?</p> <p>1. Does curriculum provide some guidelines for the sequence &amp; the method of teaching the skills in the classroom? Explain.</p> <p>2. What are your methods of teaching job skills in the workforce?</p> <p>3. What are the strengths and weakness of these methods?</p> <p>4. Do you teach interns different skills based on their learning characteristics? In other words, are these skills standards or individualized?</p> <p>5. How you collaborate with others in teaching job skills?</p> <p>6. What are some challenges you face when teaching these job skills or when you monitoring interns' progress?</p> <p>Is there anything else would like to tell me about the methods of teaching job skills?</p>

<b>Coaching &amp; support (Workplace)</b>	<b>Perceptions of preparation &amp; coaching</b>
<p>Give me an overview of the process you use as a staff member in this program in teaching and supporting interns?</p> <p>1. What kind of coaching &amp; support do interns get during the program? &amp; how often interns get coaching &amp; support? Who provide this coaching?</p> <p>2. How do you collaborate with coworkers regarding supportive employment? Are they able to implement coaching &amp; support practices?</p> <p>3. Do P-S collect any data about interns' progress in the workplace?</p> <p>4. What are strengths and weakness (challenges) of coaching &amp; support practices you implemented?</p>	<p>1. What are the strengths and weakness of P-S as a program (i.e. curriculum...)?</p> <p>2. Do you believe coaching &amp; supportive employment practices are effective? Explain.</p> <p>3. Do these practices impact interns' job skills and employment? How this process can be improved?</p> <p>4. Do you think coworkers hold positive beliefs about interns? Explain</p> <p>Is there anything else would like to tell me about preparation, coaching or anything else?</p>

## APPENDIX C

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: INTERN'S COWORKERS

**Coaching and Supporting**

- **Overview:**
  1. Give me a general overview about what do you do? and how do you support interns?
  
- **Practices:**
  1. Are you required to coach and support interns from Project SEARCH? If so, how often?
  
- **Support:**
  3. Does Project SEARCH provide you with support in this role of coaching and supporting interns during the program? If so, how does Project SEARCH support you, and how often?
  
- **Perceptions of coaching and support:**
  4. How has your support positively impacted the performance of interns?  
Can you tell me about a positive experience with an intern?
  5. Do you believe the current coaching and support are enough for interns to learn how to do their job effectively? Explain.
  6. What challenges have you faced while coaching and supporting interns?  
Can you give me an example of a difficult experience?
  7. What other recommendations do you have of how to improve the process of supporting interns?
  8. Is there anything else would like to tell me about Project SEARCH, supportive employment or anything else?



## APPENDIX D

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Informed Consent for A Study to Examine Supportive Employment Practices Used by Project SEARCH**

**Invitation to participate:** I am asking you to participate in a research study that I am conducting as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree from the University of Northern Iowa, Department of Special Education.

**Nature and Purpose:** This descriptive study focuses on transition services and supportive employment practices that have been used by Project SEARCH employees and employees from Mercy Medical Center in the context of the Project SEARCH school-to-work transition program. The study involves your participation in a group interview for approximately 90 minutes face-to-face. The interview will be recorded.

**Risks/Discomforts:** During the interview, I will ask you to share your perceptions and overall experience working with Project SEARCH as a transition program, and working beside interns from Project SEARCH. Although considered a minimal risk, you may consider these feelings to be personal or sensitive. You have a right to refuse to answer any of the questions during the interview and still remain in the study.

**Benefits:** While there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, the researcher is expected that participants will have an opportunity to discuss some of the supportive employment practices they have been using and learn if there is a possibility to improve these practices. The indirect benefits include knowing that information gained through this research may provide insights into employment of individuals with disabilities.

**Confidentiality:** The information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher, although I cannot guarantee that others in the group will keep responses confidential. Individuals involved in typing or reviewing your responses (transcriber and Dr. Frank Kohler) will be asked to keep all the information and responses in this study confidential.

You are asked to provide a different name (i.e., pseudonym) for any quotes that might be included in the final research project. The use of pseudonyms will help to protect your personal confidentiality and anonymity as well as the confidentiality and anonymity of your organization, and the individuals you discuss in your interviews so that readers will not be able to infer any linkages to your identity, the individuals you discuss, or your organization. You will have the opportunity to review the typed notes of your responses and make corrections, additions or subtractions.

All the research materials and any documentation related to this study will be kept in a secure file cabinet and available only to me as the investigator. I will destroy the files five years after the completion of the study. The results of this research may be presented in the future at conferences or published in academic journals, books, or papers. It may also be used in future, related research.

**Participation/Withdrawal:** This study is voluntary and there is no obligation to participate. There is no financial remuneration for participating in this study. You may request a copy of the study's summary by indicating your interest on this form. You may withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences. Should you withdraw, your data will be destroyed and eliminated from the study.

**Questions:** If you have questions at any time, you may contact me by phone at (319) 883-2245 or by email at [almalkis@uni.edu](mailto:almalkis@uni.edu). You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Frank Kohler, at 319-273-7484, [frank.kohler@uni.edu](mailto:frank.kohler@uni.edu). In addition, if you have any questions about Human Participants Review policies or procedures, please call them at (319)273-3217 or [anita@uni.edu](mailto:anita@uni.edu).

**Agreement:**

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

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Name of Participant (please print)

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Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

Participants will be provided a copy of this consent.

## APPENDIX E

## SCRIPT FOR RECRUITING STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Saeed Almalki is seeking your consent to participate in one group interview over the course of the fall semester. The group interview will take approximately 90 minutes (face-to-face) and pertain to specific experiences that you have during working with Project SEARCH as a transition program, and working alongside with interns from Project SEARCH.

The interview will be audio/video recorded, but we will ensure that the tapes are not accessible to anyone other than Saeed Almalki and his research team. When sharing the results, we will focus on group summaries or fictitious individuals and never identify any of you. This means that we will never use your name in our presentations nor will we disclose any other information that could lead to your identification (such as your birthday, initials, etc.). We will not make any reference to the position that you are working in, but may use quotations (without identifying individual participants of course). Although there are no significant risks associated with your participation, we will terminate the interviews if someone becomes uncomfortable during the process. A possible benefit is that your description of working with Project SEARCH as a transition program and working alongside with interns from Project SEARCH may enable you to maximize your learning and growth from this experience. In addition, your description of supportive employment practices that Project SEARCH have used will provide the potential benefit of helping other transition programs to improve their programs.

While your participation would provide us with valuable information, you are under no obligation to consent to participate in these interviews and your refusal will not impact your evaluations in any way. You may also provide your consent now and then withdraw it at any future time. If you have any questions about this project or your involvement/consent I can answer them at this time. You may contact me by phone at (319) 883-2245 or by email at [almalkis@uni.edu](mailto:almalkis@uni.edu). You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Frank Kohler, at 319-273-7484, [frank.kohler@uni.edu](mailto:frank.kohler@uni.edu). In addition, if you have any questions about Human Participants Review policies or procedures, please call them at (319)273-3217 or [anita@uni.edu](mailto:anita@uni.edu).

Participants will be provided a copy of this recruitment script.