

St. John's University

St. John's Scholar

Theses and Dissertations

2021

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE ON AUGMENTING WORK EXPERIENCES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Liza A. Laurino-Siegel

Saint John's University, Jamaica New York

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.stjohns.edu/theses_dissertations



Part of the [Secondary Education Commons](#), [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#), and the [Vocational Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Laurino-Siegel, Liza A., "EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE ON AUGMENTING WORK EXPERIENCES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES" (2021). *Theses and Dissertations*. 275.

https://scholar.stjohns.edu/theses_dissertations/275

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by St. John's Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of St. John's Scholar. For more information, please contact fazzinol@stjohns.edu.

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE ON AUGMENTING WORK
EXPERIENCES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
to the faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP
of
THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
at
ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY
New York
by
Liza A. Laurino-Siegel

Submitted Date: May 7, 2021

Approved Date: May 19, 2021

Liza A. Laurino-Siegel

Dr. Rene Parmar

©Copyright by Liza A. Laurino-Siegel 2021

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE ON AUGMENTING WORK EXPERIENCES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Liza A. Laurino-Siegel

The purpose of this study was to investigate employer perspective on augmenting work experiences for individuals with disabilities in the workplace through a qualitative case study approach. This study utilized two specific workplaces that are structured, have core values, are mission-driven and support individuals with differing abilities. The goal was to develop an understanding on how these workplaces continue to help individuals gain meaningful employment while supporting their differences and unique learning approaches in the workplace. Data collection included employer interviews, employee insight, an employer focus group, observations of employees at the work sites, artifacts, photos and the researcher's journals. Information from national and state guidelines, theoretical perspectives regarding transition and employment for individuals with disabilities, and themes emerging from the data were used for interpretation of the results.

Concluding results from the data are high retention rates in employment in mission driven environments as well as a high sense of purpose in a majority of the employees work ethic. There is also data to support personal feelings and connections to employers initiating the business model as well as use of unique interview processes that involve more task orientated practices. In the business environments analyzed in this

study, there were more frequent positive interview experiences for individuals with disabilities. The data also supported similar challenges in businesses with social missions, including the need for more soft skill attainment for all individuals when in their school-ages years. The understanding of social context presented difficulties at times for individuals with disabilities when at work, as well as managing hours and work schedules for adults working and receiving state benefits. In New York, individuals receiving special benefits may only be paid a certain number of hours, differing for all individuals. Even if the employee is able and willing to work more hours which is often the case in these environments, there are restrictions for the number of hours employees can pay the individuals.

Future studies should include more qualitative research with other businesses with similar business models, practices and social missions. Further qualitative research should include businesses in and outside of the New York area to compare similar practices and help promote new practices in businesses augmenting work experiences for individuals with disabilities in an effort to help improve future employment rates for individuals with differing abilities.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my beautiful twins Mason and Giuliana. You are my whole heart. Your love has motivated me to strive towards my goals. I hope that this research helps bring change to the culture of the workplace, including all individuals seeking employment. Thank you for your patience as I studied hard, stayed up late and always had a computer tied to me. I hope my work serves as an example for you to always work hard, never give up, persevere and follow your dreams.

To my better half Jason, thank you for your support, patience and motivation as I navigated this research and studied my hardest. I hope you know that I could not have done this without you. Thank you for believing in me, listening to me and for adapting with me. I am so grateful for all your love.

To my family, thank you for instilling and modeling the ethics of hard work and perusing a career and family. Thank you to my family, friends and coworkers for always supporting me in more ways than you can imagine, and for those who took care of the twins often so that I could study, write and have quiet time to complete my research; your love and support means the world to me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study	3
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework	4
Conceptual Framework	9
Significance of the Study	11
Connection with Social Justice and/or Vincentian Mission in Education	12
Research Questions	13
Definition of Terms	14
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH	15
Relationship Between Prior Research and Present Study	24
CHAPTER 3 METHODS AND PROCEDURES	26
Research Questions	26
Setting, Sample and Population	26
Sample	30
Data Collection Procedures	31
Instruments	31
Case Study Design and Methodology	33
Limitations	34
Research Ethics	35
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS	38
Setting	38
Research Question 1	50
Research Question 2	53
Research Question 3	62
Research Question 4	66
Research Question 5	72
Research Question 6	75
Conclusion	78
CHAPTER 5 INTERPRETING THE DATA AND CULMINATING SUMMARY	79

Relationship to Prior Research	79
Relationship to Theory	81
Limitations and Directions for Future Research.....	82
Recommendations for Future Practice.....	83
Sense of Purpose and Lifelong Learning.....	83
Benefits of Employing Individuals with Disabilities.....	84
Business Education on Inclusion in the Workplace	85
Use of Modifications in the Workplace.....	85
Changes in State Policy Regarding Benefits for Individuals with Disabilities	86
Recommendations for Future Research.....	87
Conclusion.....	87
APPENDIX A IRB APPROVAL MEMO.....	91
APPENDIX B IRB INSTRUMENTS, QUESTIONNAIRES AND OTHER MATERIALS.....	92
REFERENCES	102

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Employment Rate Between Individuals with Disabilities and Individuals Without.....	2
Table 2 Observation #1 Spectrum Designs™: Job Descriptions.....	41
Table 3 Observation #2 John’s Crazy Socks™.....	47
Table 4 Research Findings and Themes.....	83

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences.....	6
Figure 2 Conceptual Framework.....	10
Figure 3 Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities.....	16
Figure 4 Coding Chart.....	34
Figure 5 The Nicholas Center/ Spectrum Designs™ Core Values (2020).....	38
Figure 6 Artifact #1 Spectrum Designs: Picture of St. John’s University shirts that were printed and completed.....	39
Figure 7 Artifact #2 Spectrum Designs: Picture of 5 Core Values from Staff Lounge Social Area.....	40
Figure 8 Artifact #3 John’s Crazy Socks: Original Socks on Sock Wall by John’s Crazy Socks.....	45
Figure 9 Artifact #4 John’s Crazy Socks: Front entrance sign and business motto “Spreading Happiness,” with John.....	46
Figure 10 Artifact #5 John’s Crazy Socks: John’s letter sample in customer orders....	65
Figure 11 Artifact #6 John’s Crazy Socks: Employee Avatar Completion Sticker.....	65
Figure 12 Artifact #7 Collaborative Project between Spectrum Designs™, John’s Crazy Socks and other businesses with social missions.....	69
Figure 13 Artifact #8 Spectrum Designs: Apparel Picture NY Touch Masks.....	70
Figure 14 New York State 2017-2018 Performance in Meeting SPP Targets: Presented to New York Council of Administrators of Special Education, July 24, 2019.....	88

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Among the many initiatives for education reform in New York State in the years since the passage of the revised Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) has been *transition* planning and programming for all school-aged students for individuals in post-secondary programs. Prior to the IDEA revisions of 2004, there was not much direction to enforce strong transition planning in New York State. In addition, the number of individuals with Autism and other developmental disorders are on the rise. According to Center for Disease Control (CDC), 1 in 54 school age children are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders alone (CDC, 2021). These changes in our society increases the need in our state and region to develop appropriate work-based practices.

New York State updated its Blueprint aligned with state indicators (Figure 14) to initiate important changes needed in schools, the workforce (e.g., businesses), and college preparation to increase employability for all individuals, specially targeting individuals with disabilities (NY State Blueprint, 2015). The necessary change in preparation for participation in the workforce is part of the responsibility of our school systems to prepare our students for real-life, employability and maintaining a productive life in society. In August 2018, the New York State Education Department published guidance, literature and free material that incorporates practices of Social Emotional Learning in schools (NYSED, 2018). The emphasis was on educating “the whole child,” aligned with preparing individuals while in school for the job market in our education system, representing the “interrelationships among all areas of development” (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Ultimately, the guidelines culminated in the establishment of the Career

Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) credential as a means to obtain a high school diploma for individuals who needed an alternative to the traditional academic program. The new initiatives will require more acute training and time spent on transition planning, self-advocacy and self-efficacy skill development. More opportunities for work-related experiences are needed to educate our exceptional students on the evolving and ever-changing cultures of the current work environment (NYSED CDOS Credential, 2019).

The goals of these initiatives are to help individuals with disabilities become employable. The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) reported the difference between individuals with and without disabilities by age group employed in 2015 (Table 1).

Table 1

Employment Rate Between Individuals with Disabilities and Individuals Without

Age Range	With Disability	Without Disability	Difference
25-34 Years Old	35%	78%	43%
35-44 Years Old	29%	81%	52%
45-54 Years Old	28%	81%	53%
55-64 Years Old	24%	69%	45%

(National Center for Education Statistics, Employment Percentage of 25-64 Years Old with and without Disabilities, 2017).

In 2019, The United States Department of Labor reported that only 19.3% of citizens with a disability were employed, as compared with 66.3% of non-disabled individuals, acknowledging that the statistics may be underreported due to individuals not

filing for employment. The report indicated that more research was needed to understand the barriers to providing better employment opportunities.

These results indicate a high need for new approaches in the “world of work” to better prepare individuals with disabilities for paid employment. These results also underscore the need for employers to develop and establish new approaches for supporting employment for all individuals. For individuals with disabilities, navigating the world of transition can be challenging. This transitional time can be more difficult to navigate than typical developing individuals. Often individuals who need more specialized support to navigate transition into adulthood require more guidance on how to successfully find a way to pursue meaningful employment and sustain a pleasant independent life.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to get to know and understand employers’ perspectives on hiring, maintaining and augmenting work experiences for individuals with disabilities in the workplace. This research endeavor will include reports on their experiences, as well as interviews and observations of the workplace culture. This study will also identify the challenges (e.g., curriculum, Work Based Learning experiences, self-advocacy preparations in high school, community engagement/outreach, education for community businesses, etc.) for students while in school, and best practices to promote opportunities to build efficacy in developing employability specifically in individuals with disabilities.

The study will identify the characteristics of unique work environments that successfully implement practices that work well to create successful outcomes for

individuals with disabilities as well as profit for the business(s) and employers overall.

The research will help potential employers provide an appropriate climate for integration of individuals with disabilities. It will also assist transition planners in schools and post-secondary environments to develop appropriate programs for students who will graduate to the workforce.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

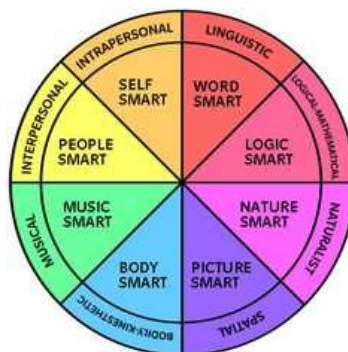
Howard Gardner Theory of Multiple Intelligences

The most significant theoretical influence in this exploration is related to Howard Gardner and his Multiple Intelligence Theory, initially described in the 1983 publication of *Frames of Mind*. During his studies, Gardner worked under and was mentored by Erik Erikson, a famous psychoanalyst, and Jerome Bruner, a cognitive psychologist. The theory of Multiple Intelligences proposes that, while traditional school curricula has prioritized Linguistic-Verbal and Logical-Mathematical modes of learning, there are a wide range of other abilities that relate to individual success in the world outside of school. Among these are Visual-Spatial, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Musical, Bodily-Kinesthetic, and Naturalistic intelligences. In his work with individuals with severe Autism, Gardner noted that it is possible to excel in the non-traditional forms of intelligence and move towards success in work and personal life.

Gardner was committed to helping teachers teach successfully through the stages of development for the purpose of the “whole child,” as well as their understandings, personal experiences and values (Gardner & Mansilla, 1994). Building on the work of Bruner, Gardner believed that the methods of learning are affected by experiences.

According to Gardner, bodily/kinesthetic are important parts of development, learning and processing information.

Gardner was further influenced by Jean Piaget's cognitive theories concentrated on "*environmental experiences*." Gardner's philosophy focused on the educator's function of creating conditions and shaping experiences to promote growth/success in learning. Piaget's process of "*assimilation*" integrates processing new experiences into existing ones, as could be applied to job training experiences, self-advocacy curriculum and experiences, etc., (Ornstein & Hunkins, pg. 106). Further, the process of "*accommodation*" refers to an individual's ability to adjust to the environment around them as well as make accommodations in the environment. While Piaget's theory of learning and development focused on verbal and mathematical understandings for older children, Gardner believed that spatial and kinesthetic understandings continued to be of importance throughout a person's life. His theories also suggest that IQ tests can be extended to measure many aspects of intelligence not reflected on many current assessments. For example, an individual with a low Verbal IQ on a standardized exam can draw and paint intelligently. There are students who cannot communicate verbally well, but can perform an array of mathematical concepts, applications, and algorithms. Howard Gardner is a proponent of the process of learning about oneself, understanding strengths, weaknesses and average skills in specific areas.

Figure 1*Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences*

(Howard Gardner Intelligence Schema Helps Teaching Children with ADHD, 2014)

Photo credit from www.northeastbookspublishing.net

Transition preparation in schools is connected to the notion of multiple intelligences because it seeks to teach about oneself, including abilities, likes, interests and strategies to explore high interest areas. Once an individual leaves the school environment, they may go into a workplace where the verbal and logical-mathematical skills emphasized in school are not as salient to job success and satisfaction. Strengths that a person may have in other areas of learning, as well as social skills can be assets that ameliorate lower academic performance. Educators who work in transition planning for students with disabilities must identify and develop various strengths that can be part of a comprehensive plan for successful careers.

In addition to working in career development, professionals must also connect with potential employers to discuss diverse, but nontraditional, strengths of individuals with disabilities. One example related to individuals with disabilities is that there is a high rate of individuals that do not get past the initial interview process. Some of the individuals are observed having difficulty communicating and overall lack an

understanding of social context and social cues. A new type of interview process such as a team-building tasks or completion of a functional assessment can be other options investigated to help individuals show their true skills and obtain more opportunities for employment. Google and Microsoft have developed specific systems for task orientated interview processes where individuals can show what they know rather than speak to what they know. Google and Microsoft have been extremely open through media of these processes as well as the successes of these approaches and hiring exceptional individuals for employment. These processes that some employers are establishing connect to Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences by providing interview opportunities for all learning styles and individuals to show what they know in an appropriate manner and humanistic approach (Lay-Flurrie, 2019).

Fredrick Herzberg's Theory of Workplace Satisfaction

Another theoretical influence of the culture of workplaces, job satisfaction was derived by Fredrick Herzberg. His research was prompted by the action of workers to perform in a desired manner while on the job. His two-factor qualitative approach sought out to answer 3 questions:

1. How can one specify the attitude of any individual towards his or her job?
2. What causes these attitudes?
3. What are the consequences of these attitudes?

As an outcome of Herzberg's qualitative investigation related to the attitudes of employees, he developed two sets of factors known as "two distinct of factors" (Herzburg, 1959, as cited in Tietjen & Myers, 1998):

Set one, happy feelings or good attitudes within the worker task related (motivators):

- Recognition
- Achievement
- Possibility of growth
- Advancement
- Responsibility
- Work itself

Set two, feelings of unhappiness or bad attitudes with tasks related to the conditions that surrounded the job (hygiene factors):

- Salary
- Interpersonal relations-supervisor
- Interpersonal relations-subordinates
- Interpersonal relations-peers
- Supervision-technical
- Company policy and administration
- Working conditions
- Factors of personal life status
- Job security

(Herzberg, 1959, as cited in Tietjen & Myers, 1998).

Herzberg's theory set out to discuss motivation factors such as intrinsic experiences within the work itself and completion of tasks at work. In addition, discussions in the research also include extrinsic factors including relationships with co-workers and causes that don't relate directly to the actual job itself. The biggest differentiation between Herzberg's two factor job satisfaction theory is the essential

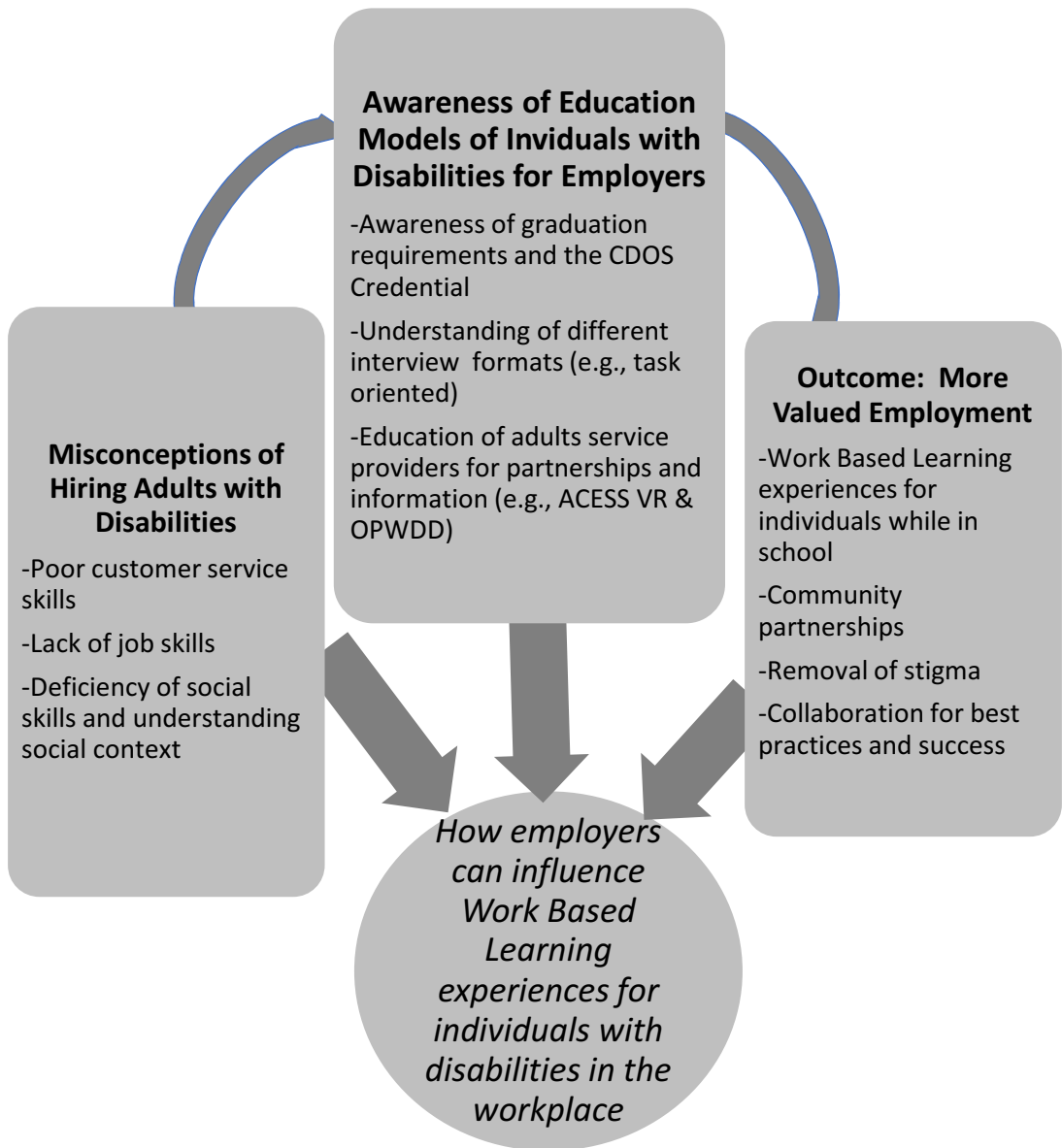
levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction within each factor. For example, if motivation incorporates items which promote action over time, then motivators are the influences that endorse “long-running attitudes and satisfaction.” According to Herzberg, motivators cause positive job attitudes because they satisfy the worker’s need for “self-actualization” (Herzberg, 1959, as cited in Tietjen & Myers, 1998).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework identifies three domains within exploring the influence of Work Based Learning experiences for individuals with disabilities in the workplace. Poor misconception beliefs of hiring disabled adults associated with increasing awareness for employers about school programs, state mandates, state credentials can help lead to better collaboration, understanding and partnerships to help all individuals gain employment. The Framework from Figure 2 establishes important aspects of employment for individuals with disabilities. Misconceptions, awareness of best practices and approaches, as well as outcomes, are essential components to guiding the data for this study.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework



Significance of the Study

The present study will address a significant gap in the research of transition and employability of individuals with disabilities. While New York State updated its Blueprint from the Office of Special Education in 2015, there is very little independent empirical research on the implementation. The Blueprint indicated various aspect of transition including self-advocacy, creating goals, providing specifically designed instruction for individuals with disabilities and instruction for students with disabilities in career and development and opportunities to participate in Work Based Learning Programs while in school (Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities, 2015). These updates are correlated with New York State Performance Plan Indicators 13, implementing a program for transition planning, and 14, reporting post-school outcomes, which focus on transition, and employment outcomes post-graduation. School districts are required to report on compliance with Indicators 13 and 14. However, other than reporting on percentages of students served, there are few details on specific successful programs. The present study will describe cases of successful post-school employment of individuals with disabilities, including considerations in transition planning, and perspectives of employers. The rich description will provide valuable insights into strategies for successful collaboration with potential employers and setting priorities for career preparation.

The research will be beneficial to potential future employers by addressing social issues, including stigmas associated with hiring individuals with disabilities. The research will also highlight the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities showing their areas of high skill and how employers may leverage these for high productivity.

The research will also report benefits that can reimburse employers for giving work opportunities to individuals with disabilities such as ACCES VR – Work Pay Programs, etc.

Lastly, the primary goal of the research endeavor is to assist state and regional policymakers in designing appropriate guidelines for transition programs, including assistance with curricula, assessment, and support with establishing connections with community agencies and businesses. Planning for success at every level will help ensure that individuals with disabilities have happy and successful lives after school ends as contributing members of society.

Connection with Social Justice and/or Vincentian Mission in Education

“St. John’s is a Vincentian University, inspired by St. Vincent de Paul’s compassion and zeal for service. We strive to provide excellent education for all people, especially those lacking economic, physical, or social advantages. Community service programs combine with reflective learning to enlarge the classroom experience. Wherever possible, we devote our intellectual and physical resources to search out the causes of poverty and social injustice and to encourage solutions that are adaptable, effective, and concrete. In the Vincentian tradition, we seek to foster a world view and to further efforts toward global harmony and development by creating an atmosphere in which all may imbibe and embody the spirit of compassionate concern for others so characteristic of Vincent. (St. John’s University, 2019, Mission Statement section, para. 3).”

The research endeavor connects to the Vincentian mission of combining opportunities for social advantages and building community. The participant group has

been marginalized in the area of preparation for career and community living.

Understanding the culture of unique work environments helps encourage solutions that are adaptable, effective and functional for all individuals involved. The research will increase compassion and concern for individuals in the workplace and workplace culture. While fostering environments where there is harmony, social missions and opportunities for growth and development for all.

Research Questions

The theoretical framework and prior research led to the development of the following research questions for the present study, which uses the qualitative data gathering methods of observation and interviews. Details on the methods used for this investigation are presented in Chapter 3.

1. How have changing dynamics within the workforce and population of adults with disabilities impacted businesses that employ these individuals?
2. What are considerations that businesses should have when hiring individuals with disabilities (interview process)?
3. How does the inclusion of employees with disabilities impact maintaining employment of both individuals with and without disabilities in business?
4. In what way does a social mission expressed by a business impact the financial mission?
5. How can school-based programs prepare individuals with disabilities for the workforce in a way that supports their long-term employment success?
6. How can New York State policies be designed to better prepare individuals with disabilities for the workforce?

Definition of Terms

Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehab (ACCES VR):

A state agency in New York State that assists individuals with documented disabilities to achieve and maintain employment and supports needed to maintain career development (New York State Education Department, 2019, para. 1).

Employer: A person(s) or organization that employs people in return for financial compensation (Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Cole, Sweden, Ditchman, & Owens, 2009).

Employment: The experience of having paid work (Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Cole, Sweden, Ditchman, & Owens, 2009).

Individuals with Disabilities: Refers to individuals that falls under one of the classifications: intellectual disability, hearing impairment (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impaired, or specific learning disabilities (IDEA, 2017).

Transition Services: Is referred to as a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is based on individual needs and aids in the development of community supports, related services, instruction in the area of employment development and post-secondary education (IDEA, 2017).

Work Based Learning: Is a strategy that provides school aged secondary students with real-life, true work experiences where they can develop their employment skills (Bennett & Dukes, 2018).

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

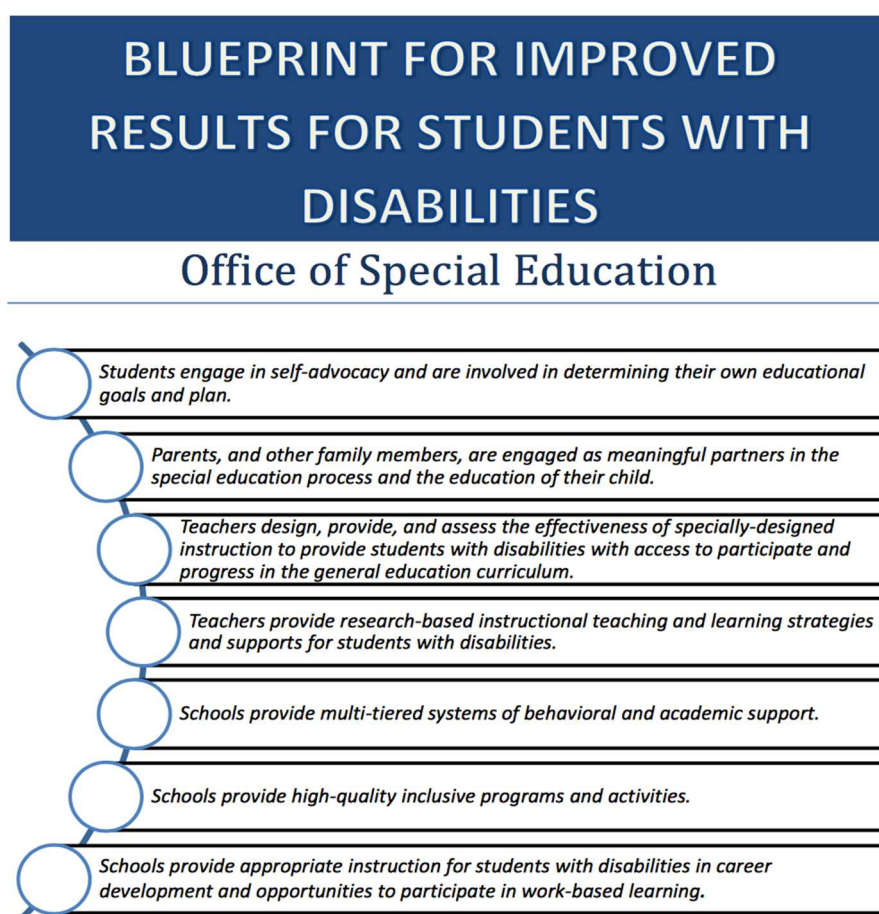
Employer perspective on post-high school employment for students with disabilities is an area that has not been studied by current educational researchers, as noted in the absence of relevant research articles since 2015. The information available on the topic is outdated and more research is needed. National reports continue to indicate high rates of unemployment and underemployment of individuals with disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019), despite many initiatives to prepare individuals and facilitate school-to-work transition. However, much of the writing on the initiatives for this important issue consists of program self-reports of successful implementation with no independent corroboration or empirical data. This chapter will review the few research studies related to the employment of individuals with disabilities in business settings. Research on transition for employment success, employer perspectives, and the notion of social enterprise business are summarized.

New York State, the site of the present research, needs to do better in providing instructional approaches as well as supports for the transition from high school to adulthood for the target population. In an article researching state differences in vocational rehabilitation services, Honeycutt, Thompkins, Bardos and Stern (2013) shared data from across the United States, dividing the map in quartiles. New York State falls in quartile 3 (second to lowest) in providing paid employment for individual with disabilities following vocational training. Other states such as New Jersey and Rhode Island fell in the same quartile. More research in this field will provide information to support better job outcomes, better workers and more positive experiences for individuals with disabilities as they integrate into the world of work.

Below is the Blueprint that New York State provided in 2015 that is associated with various state indicators. This Blueprint was intended to provide school districts and their leaders with a guide to help improve services, including transition services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities as they transition into adulthood and the world of work.

Figure 3

Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities



(Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities, 2015).

Every year, New York State Public Schools are assigned specific indicators they have to report on. These reports help the state know how schools are doing with all aspects of education. The data that helped initiate the need for the 2015 Blueprint was established using the results of schools and their progress towards the state indicators. Since the implementation of the 2015 Blueprint, there has certainly been an increase in awareness for schools to target the needed areas including Indicators 13 and 14 for reporting on Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reporting, which include transition services, instruction towards Work Based Learning experiences and post-graduation status for individuals with disabilities. Increasingly, it is being observed that businesses are opening their doors to work experiences for public school students as well as specifically hiring individuals with disabilities. The implementation of the 2015 Blueprint has set the stage to help improve results across many domains in special education. However, transition services and employment for individuals with disabilities is still an area of intervention for New York State.

Transition for Employment Success Employer Perspectives

Ditchman and Owens (2009) research included a survey of 135 chambers of commerce and other employer networks to examine their involvement with local school district vocational programs and Work Based Learning activities. The authors of the article looked to examine the following key domains: How networks have partnerships with local school programs, how involved are they, and how much involvement is reasonable and influences of the status of having a disability in general. Ditchman and Owens (2009) used descriptive statistics to summarize information and feedback with the use of an independent-sample t-test to compare survey results from employers of youth

with disabilities and youth without disabilities. Subareas examined were staff, number of employees, business sector represented and community size. The results indicated no significant differences between the employers of youth with and without disabilities regarding full time staff, part time staff, volunteer staff, number of employees, and number of different business sectors represented in their network. A Chi-square analysis discovered two groups that did not differ with regard to results with the business sectors, $\chi^2(1, N=134) = 4.203, p = .040$. There was no significance between the groups on the size of the communities in which they were located ($p = .252$). The results indicate that partnerships with schools and local business involvement in working with individuals with disabilities through schools for Work Based Learning experiences included similar proportions of large and small businesses and communities and were observed across many business sectors.

The purpose of a study by Hartwig (2008) was to investigate employer perspectives on High School diploma options for adolescents with disabilities. The researcher's qualitative approach investigated samples of employers through an interview process to seek information on willingness to hire individuals with certificates of attendance, credentials and/or diplomas. The interview process consisted of seven different questions. There were many themes that surfaced through the coding process such as preferred diploma type for hiring. The process also led to many accounts of businesses that hire young adults with disabilities where most were assign menial jobs. Conclusions of the data indicated employers were willing to look at the individuals' strengths and not their diploma status. Hartwig's (2008) study produced an important discovery regarding perspectives on hiring young adults connected to their diploma type.

Employers as a whole were most willing to hire individuals with an occupational diploma followed by GED. Employers also indicated readiness to hire an individual with an occupational diploma over a GED (unskilled labor position was verbalized consistently). However, some employers were open to asking why the individual decided to pursue a GED. Through the culminating parts of this study, it is evident across almost all interviews that individuals with attendance, completion or achievement certificates have less of a chance of getting a job over someone with an occupational diploma or GED. Employers also specified assigning more menial job tasks to individuals without a diploma, which also connects to evidence of stereotype and a stigma of employing individuals with disabilities.

While the above research sheds some light on employer perspectives, it does not provide an in-depth look at the actual employment practices, nor does it consider factors that may or may not support individual and business success. The present research study goes beyond surveys to take a concentrated look at agencies that actually employ individuals with disabilities with an aim to understanding how successful practices are implemented.

Employment Training

Bennett and Dukes (2018) conducted a review of existing research to look deeply into employment instruction for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) on the secondary level. The meta-analysis included a total of 55 participants in twelve inclusion vocational studies (at least 2 out of 6 participants were diagnosed with Autism in each group). The study examined areas such as completion of employment tasks and behavior linked to employment (Bennett & Dukes, 2018, p. 70). The main finding was

that there is a significant gap in the literature pertaining to this topic. Another finding indicated that most of the literacy materials available to prepare individuals for employment was at a low reading level that may be too juvenile to use with 14- to 22-year-old students. Video modeling and instruction proved very effective in increasing career awareness for secondary students with Autism through the 12 studies that were evaluated for this review. Modeling (watching) the task performed was also effective in the previous studies conducted in the area of preparation for post-secondary skills for students with Autism. Data from national incidence studies suggest that there is expected to be a growth in individuals with Autism nationwide and therefore more focus should be placed on exploring methods and best practices for preparing individuals with disabilities for employment (Bennett & Dukes, 2018).

Future studies are recommended to utilize more variables that need analyzing aligned with this topic such as program development in schools for career training and exploration in functional ways to teach these skills to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The study of career training and exploration with individuals on the Autism Spectrum aligns with the proposed dissertation topic and the need to research the area of employability, Work Based Learning and obtaining employer perspectives to perfect preparations for employment.

Transition for College Success

Important information related to employment success can be gained from the limited research on transition to college for students with disabilities. Janiga and Costenbader (2016) investigated the process of transition from high school to the postsecondary educational world. The researchers' mixed method study sought to

compare 74 college/university professionals' perceptions working with all students in the first postsecondary years. This study considered the pressures placed on most typical high school graduates, including the pressure to achieve "academic excellence" in college and the important transition from high school to college. The study determined strengths and weaknesses of the transition process in general by computing a mean score for each statement using a Likert Scale approach (5 being the most satisfied, 1 the least).

The mean score was computed for each statement. Scores less than 3 were considered weak. Low scores were observed in: *Students with disabilities whom we serve were prepared in secondary school to advocate for themselves*, and *Students who benefit from our services do not seek our assistance (transition adult services)*. The areas demonstrating the highest scores in this study were: *Most students seeking services have had a current assessment within the past 3 years conducted by their high school prior to enrollment*. Another area of strength from the results: *Students with disabilities are enrolled in programs that they had a good chance of success*. A general consensus from almost all institutions (66.7%) in higher education indicated that most students who enter college are not prepared for self-advocacy (Janiga & Costenbader, 2016, p. 1). Other results of this study indicated that job-shadowing and school-to-work programs were perceived as displaying positive outcomes with young adults. The study highlighted the need to prepare individuals with disabilities for independence in environments where they may not get the same support in terms of advisement and advocacy.

Student Perspectives on Transition and Employment

Trainer, Carter, Sweden, Owens, Cole and Smith (2011) have examined the perspectives of students engaging in a summer employment opportunity and community

experience similar to state agency vocational programs for example, Adult Career and Continuing Education Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES VR). State run agencies are important as they have the potential to turn into real jobs, especially during transition for students exiting school. Using a qualitative approach, focus group methodology was used to explore if self-determination influences the employability of youths with disabilities. Data were collected through an 8-question interview in two schools with teenagers involved in the study. Focus groups were formed following the individual interviews. Findings from the data analysis indicated connections to participants expressing the need for a mentorship or other indirect support upon transitioning from school to work. There was a high correlation in participants' motivation by earning money in summer program experiences. There were also connections to individuals pursuing volunteer opportunities, specifically, if there were reasons to believe it could turn into a future job.

Self-determination is an important aspect of curriculum that all individuals need exposure to, especially individuals with disabilities. Self-determination curricula are positive evidence-based approaches that are effective with the proper community experiences. The researchers noted the theme for a need of having more opportunities for job experiences in the community while in school. More research is needed in this area and should also target research from middle to upper income backgrounds as well as ways to ascertain perspectives from more severely impaired individuals with disabilities.

In conclusion, all the evidence in the studies presented emphasize that more research is needed to fill the gap in the area of employer perspective and Work Based Learning for individuals with disabilities. Most studies show the need for better programs in schools in order to prepare individuals for their adult life, employment and

college. There is also a lack of understanding or awareness for businesses/employers of state diplomas regarding, skills and understanding of how to assess skills of individuals with disabilities during interview processes. There are also stereotypes unfolding (see conceptual frameworks Figure 2) through interview processes of individuals with disabilities, which could also be future measures of investigation to examine in this area (Harwig, 2008, p. 12-13).

Social Enterprise Business

Katz (2013) investigated profiles of two social enterprise businesses. The article described two different models of social enterprise businesses. Social enterprise business models have been on the rise where the system for supporting the employment of individuals with disabilities is planned and operated as a business. The aim of social enterprise business models is to achieve profitability and social impact as overseen by a nonprofit Board of Directors (Katz, 2013, p. 138). This business approach has been positive in creating opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Katz, 2013, p. 137). The researcher observed strategies for creating good jobs for people with disabilities at two businesses. Both business models were funded by Kessler Foundation, which supports employment for individuals with disabilities in “integrated” settings. The Hudson Community Enterprise in New Jersey City, New Jersey and The Center for Head Injury Services (CHIS), St Louis, MO were the businesses funded by the Kessler Foundation. The jobs created through the foundation filled employment positions that were aligned with earning current pay rates for individuals with disabilities.

The investigation of the article sought to answer the question, “Why operate a social enterprise business (Katz, 2013, p. 139)?” The researcher discussed the success of

mission-driven and profit driven business models. Mission-driven businesses can create job opportunities and development of a specific population for whom the business is dedicated to supporting. Businesses that have worked under a social-mission driven establishment can create “successful outcomes which have improved the lives of those affected” (Katz, 2013, p. 139). However, businesses that run a social mission require “significant” planning, resources, funding, training and staff that share the same and/or similar goals of the social mission. Social enterprises are often successful when the professionals all work as a team. The social enterprises funded by the Kessler Foundation managed expectations and reacted quickly to change, which added to their success in business and revenue as well.

Although it is a challenge to balance the “dual” financial and social mission, the successful businesses were standing on their own financially while remaining committed to hiring and keeping individuals working of their target population even if it accrued additional costs. For individuals who have been or feel underworked or have a lack of opportunity to obtain a job, social enterprises can provide “good-paying and meaningful jobs,” for individuals with disabilities in the workforce (Katz, 2013, p. 142).

Relationship Between Prior Research and Present Study

Overall, the current research indicates there is a great need for more involvement from businesses to partner with schools to help prepare individuals with disabilities for the work force. In addition, there is a need for employers to see the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. A majority of the research available in this area lacks a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach with businesses that have social missions and a high percent of individuals with disabilities working successfully will address gaps

in existing studies. This will provide more in-depth information and guidance as well as identify misconceptions of work ability for individuals with disabilities. Using direct observation, interviews, focus groups as well as looking at Multiple Intelligence as a theory and Herzberg's Theory of Workplace Satisfaction will strengthen the current research and build on the necessary research that is still needed for improved results.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The research design methodology of this investigation is intended to be a qualitative case study. Two business settings where individuals with disabilities are employed participated in this case study. A case study methodology was utilized because it encompasses all the foundations of a comprehensive review that emphasis perspective (Meyer, 2001) which was a central part of the study topic.

Research Questions

1. How have changing dynamics within the workforce and population of adults with disabilities impacted businesses that employ these individuals?
2. What are considerations that businesses should have when hiring individuals with disabilities (interview process)?
3. How does the inclusion of employees with disabilities impact maintaining employment of both individuals with and without disabilities in business?
4. In what way does a social mission expressed by a business impact the financial mission?
5. How can school-based programs prepare individuals with disabilities for the workforce in a way that supports their long-term employment success?
6. How can New York State policies be designed to better prepare individuals with disabilities for the workforce?

Setting, Sample and Population

The setting for the current study consists of two businesses that employed a high number of individuals with disabilities. The businesses are located in New York State. Both businesses were contacted and agreed to participate in the research. The business

founders agreed to the use of their actual names and allowed for photos to be taken throughout the data collection process. Any reference to employees uses coded information to ensure confidentiality.

The information below are descriptions from talking with the business owners, listening to them speak at conferences and/or on TV as well as information from their websites.

- **Business 1:** Spectrum Designs, Port Washington, NY
 - Retail apparel/baking/laundry business that hires a high number of individuals with disabilities. Patrick Bardsley, a young entrepreneur originally from the United Kingdom, started this business vision with his friend Stella Spanakos, the mother of Nicholas Spanakos a young man with Autism. Patrick worked with Stella's son one summer at a camp in NY and loved his job and trip to the United States. After years of coming back and working in the camp with Nicholas, he began to see how difficult transition was for individuals with Autism and together with Stella, Co-Founder of The Nicholas Center and Spectrum Designs, and Nicole Sugrue, Co-Founder/Executive Director of The Nicholas Center, started The Nicholas Center and Spectrum Designs, a t-shirt factory. This business has grown and has branched into two other businesses Spectrum Bakes and Spectrum Suds. The various Spectrum businesses are businesses with a social mission seeking to help develop job training and employment for individuals with disabilities. This establishment trains and hires a high number of individuals with disabilities as well as support

vocational training at the Nicholas Center which is aligned with this enterprise. Most recently, Spectrum Designs is also operating in a new second location in Pleasantville, NY.

Spectrum Designs™

Spectrum Designs™ is a business located in Port Washington, NY. They specialize in custom apparel printing, embroidering, as well as a baking business, Spectrum Bakes™, and a laundry business, Spectrum Suds™. The baking business specializes in baking granola and other treats to order for social events. The laundry service provides both bulk laundry and dry-cleaning services. Both the bakery and laundry are also job-training sites for individuals with Autism and other special needs.

When the researcher walked into the front door of Spectrum Designs™ she was immediately greeted by several staff members. This created a warm, cozy feeling for the visit. Spectrum Designs™ hires a high number of individuals with disabilities and has a social mission business model. At the time that the researcher collected data, there were 34 individuals with disabilities on the payroll working at Spectrum Designs™, which represented 68% of their workforce. This number has been impacted by the pandemic, however, six of the most current employees hired are for their very recently acquired second location in Pleasantville, NY.

Spectrum Designs'™ social mission and core values connect to their partnership with The Nichols Center. The Nicholas Center helps train and foster soft skill development of the necessary job skills needed in competitive employment for individuals with disabilities who would like to attain employment in the future but need

more development. In fact, some of the individuals that are on the payroll at Spectrum Designs, working successfully, started training at The Nicholas Center.

➤ **Business 2:** John's Crazy Socks, Melville, NY

- Retail apparel business that specializes in socks and hires a high number of individuals with disabilities. Mark Cronin and his son John established this business with a mission to spread happiness. This business hires a majority of individuals with disabilities, family/friends and part time jobs for many mothers of young children that are in school during the day. John's Crazy Socks donates 5% of their annual earnings to The Special Olympics. John Cronin, an individual with Down Syndrome, was a big participant in The Special Olympics while in school and sports was an important part of his life. This business is located in Melville, NY in a one-floor building that has a waiting area, offices, stockroom and main floor where socks are designed, created, gathered and shipped with high quality care and value.

John's Crazy Socks™

John's Crazy Socks™ is a business located in Melville, NY. John's Crazy Socks™ specializes in selling and creating custom socks (Figure 8). They hire a high number of individuals with disabilities. Approximately 72% of individuals working at the establishment have differing abilities. John's Crazy Socks™ is an inclusive working environment that has established a social mission to spread happiness. John's Crazy Socks™ focuses on spreading happiness (Figure 9 permission was granted for the photo) with each other and every order packaged. They strive to help others while donating 5%

of their annual earnings to The Special Olympics. Mark and John Cronin, father and son, started this business adventure with the focus and intent to start a meaningful business that was fun, functional and able to create jobs, as well as spread happiness.

Sample

Within the two businesses, both employers and employees were included in the study in different ways, as described below. The researcher was specific when choosing businesses to be a part of this research. The researcher made sure she chose businesses in New York state with social missions, that were successful in business and had a high number of individuals with disabilities working. The researcher also looked for businesses that used social media for advertisement of their business and mission.

Employers: Each of the two main business owners of the sites in the study participated in interviews that explored their business mission, personal goals, and experiences hiring and working with individuals with disabilities. The employers also participated in a focus group in order to explore social enterprise establishments further. The employers are described in more detail in Chapter 4 with regard to their background and experiences.

Employees with Disabilities: At each site, observations were conducted as individuals with disabilities engaged in work-related activities. The observations included their actual productivity as well as interactions with supervisors and work colleagues. During each observation session individuals working were observed who had granted permission to be observed.

Data Collection Procedures

The research methods incorporated the following data:

- Employer perspectives from two different businesses employing individuals with disabilities in unique learning environments (e.g., business owners, management, human resource personnel, etc.) obtained through individual and focus group interviews.
- One observation of the workplace in action (culture) within the two businesses at approximately 60-90 minutes at each business site.
- Observation of the employers' interactions with the individuals with special needs working in the two business environments.
- Artifacts and products from the workplaces that consist of training activities, performance evaluations, and other documentation related to the transition and maintenance of individuals with disabilities in the workplace.
- Journal entries from the researcher after each site observation served as a supplementary source of data in relation to the culture and climate of the business.
- Use of coding chart to see trends/themes of the workplace and culture (Figure 4).

Instruments

Interviews were conducted using Seidman's Three-Interview Series (Seidman, 2006, pg. 16-19) for the interview process. At least three interviews are recommended by Seidman's Interview Series:

1. Focused Life History.
2. Details of the Experiences.
3. Reflection on the Meaning.

Here are some of the questions that the researcher answered in this extensive research to businesses/employers with unique work environments:

Section 1. Background and History of Employing Individuals with Disabilities:

1. How have your general experiences been when training/observing individuals with disabilities in your workplace?
2. What positive employable traits/special skills have you experienced with hiring exceptional individuals?

Section 2. Specific experiences of Employing Individuals with Disabilities:

3. Do you have a connection(s) to individuals with exceptional needs?
4. How do employing young adults with disabilities augment culture in the workplace?
5. What unique programs and/or models do you offer in this environment that make it unique and functional for individuals with disabilities to be successful?
6. Can you describe your interview process(s)? Are your expectations different for hiring individuals with disabilities? Explain.
7. Do you have established common values and/or a mission for all that are employed in this environment? If so, how do you ensure its followed?

Section 3. Reflections on the practice of Hiring Individuals with Disabilities:

8. What are your recommendations for business owners working with adults with disabilities to increase positive outcomes for employment?

See Figure 4 for a coding chart that was followed to evaluate the data on the interviews and artifacts. These are the “themes” and “trends” which the researcher anticipates will be seen through the evaluation process. The researcher followed

Saldaña's (2013) unique qualitative coding process to use a comprehensive approach when coding the data. Through this process the researcher found trends and common themes seen in Figure 4.

Case Study Design and Methodology

The researcher chose a qualitative case study design for this research because the topic and research goals aligned with this methodology. This design allowed for the researcher to use a variety of data sources and artifacts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This case study approach helped the researcher to hone in on important how and why questions with the employers. Manipulation was not involved in this study. Contextual conditions that were relevant to the study and its environment were a part of the case study design as well (Yin, 2003).

When determining the case and unit of analysis, several programs including Spectrum Designs, and John's Crazy Socks, were utilized as a part of this study. The researcher analyzed each business separately, but also observed differences between the business establishments. Triangulating the data collected also helped to enhance the case study design. Organization for the data was critical from start to finish. Organization of data was also highly supported by Yin and Stake in case study practices. Case study research design have the possibility to observe and deal with "*simple to complex*" situations (Baxter, Jack, 2008). This research design elicited valuable information that was evaluated with care, delicacy and strong upholding to the case study design and methodology.

Figure 4*Coding Chart*

Employer Perspective	Positive Aspects	Challenges	Cultures	Community	Product/Production/Outcome
Perception on mission	Job security	Behavior/social context	Purpose	Networking	Work Product
Follow through with mission	Learn	Modifications	Feelings (Personal connection)	Partnerships	Work output
Feelings about mission outcome	Community	Funding	Relationships	Education on social mission	Customer Service/ Happy Customers
Importance of social mission connected to a business mission	Helping others (necessity)	Working with state agencies/state waivers	Belonging		
Retention is great	Soft Skills	Utilization of accommodations	Utilization of accommodations		

Limitations

Limitations of the study may be any biases associated with the researcher's knowledge and expertise of individuals with disabilities. The researcher has more than 17 years' experience in the field of working with individuals with disabilities in the classroom, outside of the classroom, as well as with their families/guardians. The researcher was careful to consider the impact of this experience in terms of use of "insider" language with participants, and a potentially positive bias.

The COVID-19 Pandemic serves as a limitation to this study as businesses were closed for several months, and data collection had to be put on hold. The researcher had to modify research components including conducting interviews using conferencing software. However, the researcher found the respondents to be very open to communication. When the sites reopened, observations were continued using the social distancing guidelines mandated by state regulations.

Using Saldana's recommendations for trustworthiness, the researcher checked accounts with participants throughout the research, coded and transcribed interview data and maintained a journal throughout the research to reflect on interviews, experiences and observations (Saldana, 2013, pg. 59). Validity of the research and information was maintained through coding, definitions and categories to apply to interview transcripts. The researcher coded definitions as they came up in interviews and observations that aligned with vocabulary related to the research and topic area. Through triangulating from multiple perspectives (interviews, focus group, observations, artifacts, coding) of the data collected, the researcher did ensure that the development of themes was grounded in the data, new information was incorporated, and the reliability of the study overall was maintained (Saldana, 2013, pg. 152, 180 & 303).

Research Ethics

The researcher closely considered all areas of ethics while collecting data throughout the study. This includes the process of research, ethical questions raised and precedent stimulation of the work of the researcher (Shaw, 2003). The researcher spoke with the employers initially to ask for their interest and permission to be a part of the study. The employers signed written consent. Once the employers signed consent, the

researcher made sure that the employers understood the goal of the study and what was needed from them (e.g., interview, observations, etc.). Next the researcher discussed consent for the employees. The researcher made sure to educate the employer on what was needed from the employees if they chose to be a part of the study. All employees at both businesses were interested, individuals with disabilities and individuals nondisabled, and signed written consent with interest to participate in the study. Individuals who needed a modified letter of consent were able to use the modified form as well. A staff member from each business that handles human relations in the establishments worked on educating the employees about the study and helped to facilitate completion of the consent forms. The researcher felt it extremely important for there to be a modified consent form available, specifically for individuals with differing abilities that need modification for understanding.

The researcher took careful consideration into the research questions that are presented in this study taking into account the delicate population of individuals involved in the study. The researcher made sure to relate all the findings to the data collected. A coding chart (Figure 4) was also developed by the researcher that assisted in coding and analyzing the data presented in the study findings.

It is important to mention that all employers gave permission to use the actual names of their businesses and themselves in the data reporting, as well as publicly available photographs from their websites. Confidentiality was maintained for all other individuals. It is noted that during the time of the research several constraints were in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers were interviewed using online

conferencing software, and observations were conducted observing the state mandated protocols for social distancing and wearing protective covering.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to ascertain employers' perspectives on hiring, maintaining and augmenting work experiences for individuals with disabilities in the workplace. The research endeavor will include a brief description of each setting and photographed artifacts, and responses to the research questions based on individual and focus group interviews with the employers and observations of the workplace culture at Spectrum Designs™ and John's Crazy Socks™.

Setting

Patrick, the owner of Spectrum Designs™ shared the Five Core Values (see Figure 5), which are key to their social enterprise, mission and have influenced their social business ideals. In fact, every employee hired at Spectrum Designs™ sits with one of the co-founders and hears their story to know how this business developed and review the connection and understanding of the Core Values.

Figure 5

The Nicholas Center/ Spectrum Designs™ Core Values (2020)

Core Values

People

We believe in putting the needs of the people we serve first, everything flows from that belief. We believe our employees are our greatest asset in achieving our mission, and commit to their ongoing development, engagement and job satisfaction.

Professionalism

We believe workplace conduct directly impacts the people we serve, staff morale and donor confidence. We believe in assessment and evaluation of performance levels to ensure accountability toward all our core values.

Community

We believe in being woven into the fabric of the community and strive to be actively involved in partnerships that sustain that. We believe in showing appreciation, humility and respect to those who give freely of their time and resources.

Innovation

We believe in creative, inventive and fresh ideas that further or sustain our mission and purposes. We believe in reevaluation of current methods and have an open mind to consider all things in a flexible and responsible way.

Integrity

We believe in developing processes that uphold our fiduciary responsibilities as a public charity and human service entity. We believe in the recruitment of skilled and trained professionals and advisors that will maintain the quality of having strong moral principles and uprightness.

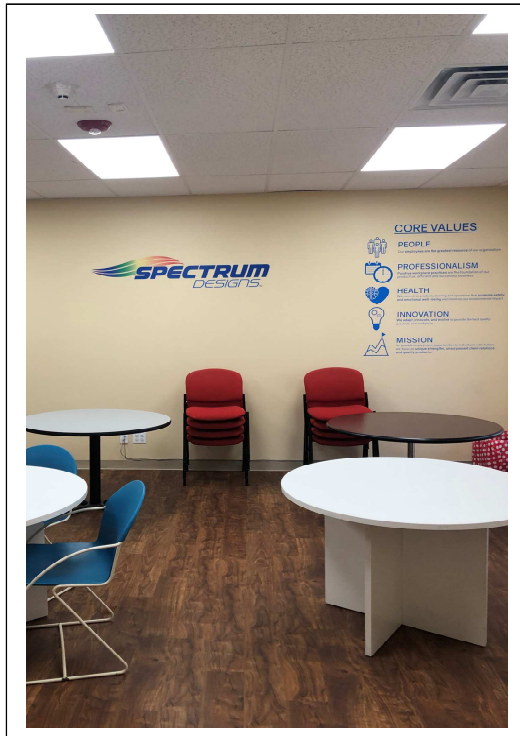
Figure 6

Artifact #1 Spectrum Designs: Picture of St. John's University shirts that were printed and completed



Figure 7

Artifact #2 Spectrum Designs: Picture of 5 Core Values from Staff Lounge Social Area



Overall, the researcher observed a social mission in action. Everyone is friendly, kind and greets you everywhere you go at Spectrum Designs™. The atmosphere is warm and welcoming, and staff are willing to share with excitement their jobs and job outcomes. Management and leaders stand out as they enforce the social business and make sure the day-to-day business operations occur as smoothly as possible. The researcher included a few photographs as artifacts. One is a picture of the staff lounge at Spectrum Designs™ (Figure 7). This is the social area and where you can eat lunch and have a break. On the wall are the core values in sight at all times in large bold print. It was really nice to see the display in the social area for all to view and be reminded. The researcher also noted how all products being made were being made with the creativity,

excellent production and accuracy (e.g., Figure 6). Everything, everyone, and all jobs seemed to all flow perfectly together. This observation indicates to the researcher that there is evidence of good communication, good management and excellent preparations.

The primary job functions at Spectrum Designs™ are:

Table 2

Observation #1 Spectrum Designs™: Job Descriptions

Departments/Job Roles/Duties	Researchers Observations/Comments
Greeter at The Door	When the researcher rang the main entrance doorbell, she was immediately answered and greeted at the door entrance.
Social Worker/Human Resource Worker	A social worker is dedicated to assisting all staff through any challenges or guidance they may need in the workplace.
Screen Production Department	The staff working in screen production area paint screens in order to create the image for the shirts they're working on.
Postproduction	This team packages and ships the products. Many individuals who are new to Spectrum or may have been training at The Nicholas Center work in this role. There were also two job coaches close by to some of the individuals, but they gave them space to work.
Design Team	This team is in charge of the designs for the apparel or product. They work with customers to create what they desire. They use computer programs such as Photoshop and Illustrator.
Embroidery	There are only 2 people that are trained to work in the Embroidery department and use the embroidery machines.
Postproduction/Embroidery	This team of 3-6 people work on getting embroidery products ready for shopping, tagging, steaming.
Development	The department works on marketing, sales, emails, social media.

Researcher's Journal Reflection from Spectrum Designs™ Visit:

When the researcher walked into the front door of Spectrum Designs,™ she was immediately greeted by several staff members. This created a warm, cozy feeling for the visit. While conducting the observations and walking around observing the different jobs and departments, communication was apparent and observable across all departments of the business. Everyone smiled, greeted anyone who walked in the room and everyone was just so nice. The researcher had a warm feeling just walking around to the different departments.

Staff and personnel were happy, friendly and supportive of one another. While the researcher greeted the employer Patrick Bardsley, she observed that he stopped and noticed an employee working at her desk. He must have sensed something was off and asked her if she was okay and that if she needed anything. The worker thanked him, indicated it was a hard day, but that she would be okay. That really touched the researcher, that the employer was willing to stop everything he was doing to support his employee and her needs. That said something very strong to the researcher about the morale, culture and social mission of Spectrum Designs™ and augmenting their work experiences.

When the researcher was on her way home, she was moved with a feeling of happiness and joy. She almost did not want to leave the business site. She felt she could have stayed there for hours just observing the culture and atmosphere that CEO Patrick and his team have put together. The researcher could tell just from this visit why retention is so high in this establishment.

Employer's Story: Patrick Bardsley of Spectrum Designs™

Patrick Bardsley is originally from the United Kingdom and grew up around businesses as a child. His business adventure began as a child from watching his mother work in an office from their home. She worked with many individuals including individuals with disabilities (e.g., hearing impairments, etc.). Patrick's mother focused around "office management." She worked on helping individuals obtain National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's) which helped them achieve the National Occupational Standard in the United Kingdom. Patrick watched as his mother helped others achieve higher standards and higher pay in roles such as nurses.

"My mom used to invite my friend and his brother over to watch the soccer games on TV." Patrick describes to the researcher how it didn't matter to him at a younger age that his friends' brother had Down Syndrome. He shares that it was a good introduction to disability, because he didn't notice a difference in his friends' brother when they spent time together watching the games.

When Patrick was eighteen years old, he wanted to go to business school in the United Kingdom. Prior to setting off on this journey, he worked at a summer camp in New York. It was all about "traveling, experience and meeting people," Patrick stated. He applied to several New York camps to work and explore while visiting for the summer before college. When applying to camps for a summer job, he remembered always checking the box "would be willing to work with individuals with special needs," when filling out the applications. He was eventually hired in a special needs camp. He was excited and very motivated and willing to put in the work. This camp experience

“changed the course and direction of his life.” He remembered thinking he “fell in love with the work.”

At this camp, Patrick met Stella Spanakos, mother of Nicholas, an individual diagnosed with Autism, and Nicole Sugrue, the mother of an individual diagnosed with Autism. Patrick worked with Nicholas specifically in this summer camp. This experience of working with Nicholas changed Patrick’s “psyche,” and trajectory of his career and outlook on life. He eventually changed his graduate studies from business to sociology, “which is ironic now,” stated Patrick as he now is the CEO and owner of Spectrum Designs™.

After years of coming back to New York to assist Nicholas at the camp, he connected with Stella, Nicholas’ mom. She saw the connection Patrick had with her son and she offered for Patrick to come and live in New York with her husband, her son Nicholas and herself while Patrick got his master’s degree in Special Education and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). In addition, they always discussed what happens after high school for individuals with needs like Nicholas. Soon after his arrival in the United States, Stella tragically lost her husband. This greatly affected Patrick as he had developed a connection with Nicholas and his family through the years of working together. Patrick and Stella established The Nicholas Center™ to help individuals like Nicholas be productive, be engaged, learn and feel valued. Patrick co-founded Spectrum Designs™/Nicholas Center™ with Stella in February 2011, initially in Stella’s backyard barn while going to graduate school locally in the evening. “What happens when the school bus stops coming,” Patrick describes was a common theme amongst parents he knew from the camp he and Nicholas attended. Together, the Nicholas Center and

Spectrum Designs™ works collaboratively to help produce great products, help individuals learn and be a part of true work and community engagement. They now have a center and several working businesses in Port Washington, NY, and just recently opened a new center in Pleasantville, NY.

Employer's Story: Mark and John Cronin John's Crazy Socks™

Owner Mark Cronin learned many skills about business through life experiences and also by being a part of The Mass Challenge Program in Boston with his son and business partner John Cronin. All individuals who work at John's Crazy Socks™ must be able to work on their own. However, they're open to unique interview processes, job tryouts and various other strategies and approaches to allow individuals with differing abilities the opportunity to work independently and successfully. This family-orientated social enterprise business model has not only created wonderful, fun socks, but continues to spread awareness about the benefits of hiring individuals with differing abilities as well as spread happiness to all.

Figure 8

Artifact #3 John's Crazy Socks: Original Socks on Sock Wall by John's Crazy Socks

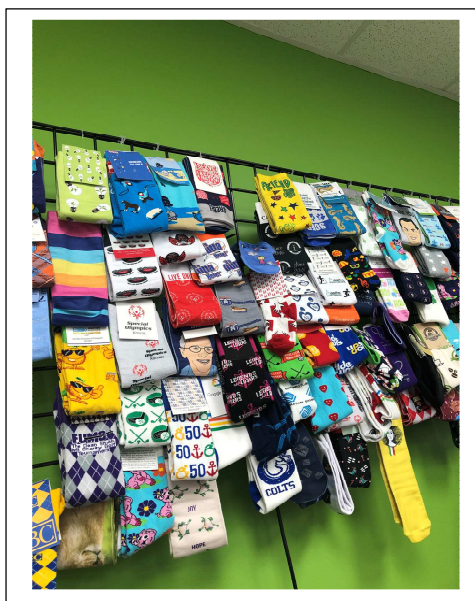
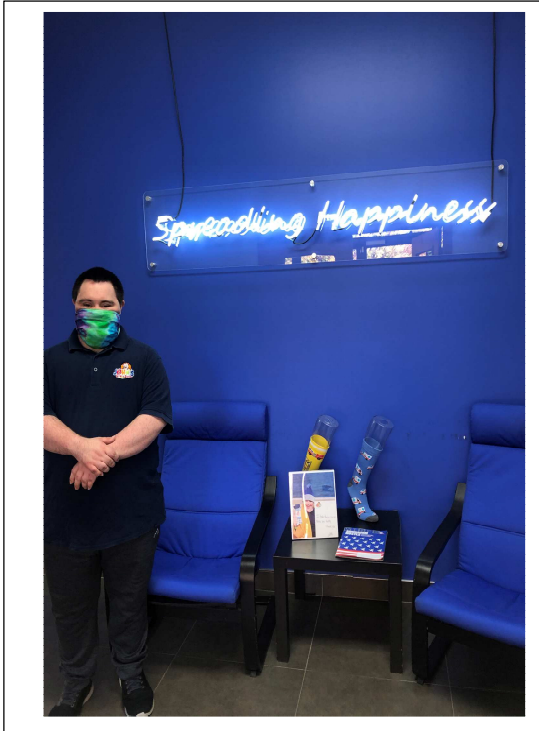


Figure 9

Artifact #4 John's Crazy Socks: Front entrance sign and business motto "Spreading Happiness," with John



Researcher's Journal from John's Crazy Socks™ Visit.

“When you arrive at John's Crazy Sock, ™ you from the moment you walk in the door you feel and see happiness right in front of your own eyes. In the main entrance you see a big light up sign (show in figure above) of “Spreading Happiness.” The researcher was immediately greeted by John. The research was also greeted by Mama Bear [John's mother].”

Following the initial greeting, John gave the researcher a thorough tour of the entire warehouse, office and work/packing area. Everyone you meet is warm, friendly and accommodating. The job roles are listed in Table 3.

Table 3*Observation #2 John's Crazy Socks™*

Departments/Job Roles/Duties	Researchers Observations/Comments
Sock Wrangler	The sock wrangler a high demand job at John's Crazy Socks is someone that picks the socks from the warehouse to complete an order. This is one of the entry-level jobs.
Packing	This job is packaging the specific order which includes checking, packaging, including a personal letter form John, Skittle® candy and is finished with a personal staff avatar sticker for completion. Last is labeling and shipping.
Sock Creation "Happiness Creator"	This role is for creating individualized socks for custom orders with use of computer software/programs.
Digital Lord	This role is for employees creating the website and any web-based connections to John's Crazy Socks.
Lord of Socks	This job role is part of fulfillment to order socks and pick out the socks that will be housed in the warehouse for sale.
Warehouse	This job involves receiving orders, shelving, using vendor numbers, reading and fulfilling invoices, connecting with the website for sock orders as well.
Mama Bear	Mama Bear is John's mothers and Mark's wife. She runs the day-to-day operations, supervising all job roles and making sure everything is running smoothly overall.
Chief Happiness Officers	Mark and John are the "Chief Happiness Officers." They oversee everything at the business, including marketing, scheduled events, interviews and social mission activities.

John also discussed the social mission and how important it is to him. He describes how much he loves his job and what he does day-to-day. When it was time to leave, the researcher felt a sense of happiness and a feeling that she did not want to leave. Everyone made the researcher feel welcomed and the workers also gave great examples

and allowed for their job tasks to be observed. When you get a packaged order from Johns Crazy Socks, TM you get a handwritten note from John, Skittles© candy and an individualized avatar sticker showing who filled the order. These are important pieces of the social mission, the culture and a way to bring happiness their number one mission.

When it was time to leave, the researcher wished she could have stayed as she was enjoying her tour from John and the observations. It was obvious that everyone loves what they do, and the products are fantastic. The researcher could tell just from this visit why retention is so high in this establishment. The researcher had a feeling of happiness on her drive home as well.

Employers' Story: Mark and John Cronin of John's Crazy SocksTM

John Cronin is a young man with Down Syndrome, who loved school and was very involved in the Special Olympics. He was focused and motivated to enter the “world of work” as he neared his exit of his high school years. With his father, Mark, he established a business selling socks with different themes and designs. “We have been in business for 3 years. When we started it was just the two of us,” shared Mark.

In October 2016, Mark had already started an online corporation a year earlier which had shut down very suddenly. Mark was 58 years old and found himself with no income. John happened to be in his last week of school and was about to exit (age 21). John and his family had been thinking of ideas and where he could work when he exited school. He worked at a camp and his Dad's office for experience. “John was a natural entrepreneur,” Mark said of his son. “He sees ideas and does good things with them.” John's first business ideas was a “fun store,” and his next idea was to open a “food truck.” Then, John had an idea about socks. He wanted to sell “crazy socks, colorful and

fun,” John said. They did not have much money at the time, but they had their name, “John’s Crazy Socks™.” In December 2016, they started small with little money. Mark built a website and they invested in a small inventory. As far as marketing, they used a Facebook page. Mark would videotape John, talking about socks and showing socks, and they got many followers. “It’s not like everything went smoothly,” Mark explained. Their website crashed on their first day, Mark rushed and fixed it and by the end of the first week their small inventory was almost gone. In addition, they sent out candy initially with each order. They would send Hershey Kisses©, and everyone loved that special touch of candy and a handwritten note from John in each order. It personalized each order and they noticed it made customers very happy. Happiness and spreading it is John’s Crazy Socks™ main social mission.

“There was a moment we had that really galvanized us,” Mark shared. Both father and son were participating in a “Mass Challenge” program which is a business program out of Boston that consists of a 4-month international program. They provide learning, mentorship and opportunities and connections with corporate sponsors and partners. The program called up John and said to apply. John applied, even though the competition is aggressive, they only accept 7% of applicants. John was accepted! Independence was a high motivator for John during the time his business was shaping and evolving. One of the leaders of the Mass Challenge Program explained to Mark, “you have what it takes to succeed.” This conversation really helped crystalize the “urgency” of why both father and son created and maintain their current social enterprise business model at John’s Crazy Socks™.

As their small sock business grew, they knew we needed some help to maintain and continue to grow. At the time John was still in high school where he was studying retail at a local vocational training center. They reached out to two of John's classmates and asked them if they would like to work with him and they joined John's Crazy Socks™. Initial jobs included mailing, packaging, etc. "We started to realize right away how valuable this work was to the workers. We always share what we do through our social media. We started to see how others valued what they were doing." They started getting phone calls from all over to hire their children. They would also hear things from people on social media like, "I wish your business was near my home." Currently 72% of the workers at John's Crazy Socks™ are individuals with differing abilities, successfully working on their own earning a paycheck.

Mark ended his comment with this analogy:

"If you're playing basketball and the games winding down, there are only two types of players on the court; please don't pass me the ball or the other who says I want the ball to take the shot, and I guess I have always been the person to take the chance to take the shot, to go and do to try to make things happens even though you can fail. It's better to be in the muck."

Research Question 1

How have changing dynamics within the workforce and population of adults with disabilities impacted businesses that employ these individuals?

Data suggest that changes in the business environment and an increase of individuals with disabilities affects inclusive businesses in several ways. First, successful businesses need to employ individuals that have a desire and drive to work. Second,

there is a trend toward creating inclusive businesses that are mission driven. Mission driven models create worth, motivation and a desire to be successful for all individuals. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic still affect unemployment rates for all persons, including individuals with disabilities, necessitating smart growth plans for the future.

Necessity

Both businesses were born from an observation of the employment needs of individuals with differing abilities following school completion. Patrick says he was influenced by meeting Stella and Nicole, both of whom were mothers of children with Autism. They wanted to push to make jobs for their children which influenced Patrick starting this business. “What happens then when the school bus stops coming,” Patrick describes was a common theme amongst parents he knew from the camp he worked at with Nicholas.

Very early on in the creation of the business John’s Crazy Socks hired two of John’s classmates from high school whom both had Autism Spectrum Disorder. In January/February of 2017 they started to hire more of individuals with disabilities. People will say “I can’t find enough good workers,” John recalls hearing from other business owners. He shared that approximately 80% of individuals with disabilities are unemployed. “Tap into that resource and I am always pitching, inclusive settings are good businesses,” Mark shares.

Patrick goes on to describe the individuals work ethic overall: “Loyal, dedicated, hardworking, low turnover rate, these are employees that are happy and want to be there and really add value to the environment by adding to the culture of tolerance, acceptance and embracing difference.” Patrick shared that the retention rate is very high for

individual with disabilities. “We have to work hard at it, we’re constantly looking at our retention strategies to see what natural supports or trainings we can engage our staff in to understand the groups everyone is working alongside.”

When the COVID-19 Pandemic occurred, John’s Crazy Socks™ had to shut down like most business. However, they slowly brought back their employees and they were “so hungry and so excited to be back at work,” as described by Mark.

Mission-Driven

As evident in the life stories of the employers, the foundation of the businesses was a sense of mission. This informs the way in which they create a culture of positivity at the workplace, look for assets in their workforce, and create solutions to business problems for sustainability. Patrick explains that having individuals in the workforce creates worth and purpose. “I get up every morning and feel happy about what I am doing, we’re doing something more than just making t-shirts, than just making granola.”

John and Mark had their principles established of spreading happiness, customer focus, giving back, that evolved further once they hired individuals with differing abilities. “We saw the good work they did, the dignity, social and confidants that the job gave to the employees. We also saw the impact on others.”

Mark, who was a baseball fan, illustrated with a historical reference to the game. “It’s 1947 and the Brooklyn Dodgers integrate baseball by hiring Jackie Robinson. The Dodgers are the employer and Jackie is the employee. The first teams to integrate were the Brooklyn Dodgers, The Cleveland Indians and the New York Baseball Giants. Guess what? They became the best teams in baseball. Why, because they said they wanted the best possible workers and we’re not going to exclude people for irrational reasons.”

Research Question 2

What are considerations that businesses should have when hiring individuals with disabilities (interview process, etc.)?

The data suggest that there are many considerations that are essential when hiring individuals with disabilities and establishing a successful inclusive business model with a social mission. In order to realize the mission, there was the practical aspect of making modifications with the business as a whole or modification that are more individualized are necessary. Employers utilizing accommodation with individuals when needed for extra support were observed throughout the investigation.

Practical Aspects

Learning Through Observing Other Businesses. Patrick described an observation of another business that prompted a new way of thinking and organizing his business model. There was a small coffee shop not far from him in Port Washington. It was called the Sweet Comfort Bakery, associated with CMA. The bakery also had an inclusive model, but it unfortunately closed. “It was sad that it closed,” Patrick reflected. “It was right next to Starbucks® and Dunkin Donuts®. They were not in the best location, but their cakes and coffees were awesome,” Patrick recalls. He realized this business could not be competitive which is why it was failing. Patrick was fearful for their own business and hoping that it would grow and not meet the same fate as the bakery. Patrick describes that he learned early-on that when people hear non-profit or disability, they may automatically assume slower, not as efficient. Patrick said he, “did not want to operate like a charity.” He wanted to create a sustainable business, creating good products, price competitive, that could give people what they needed (apparel) with

great care. Price, quality and customer service were essential to maintain for a successful business. “We’re a social enterprise,” Patrick stated. “Without the enterprise there is no social mission. They go hand in hand.”

Patrick also emphasized the need to engage in innovative thinking. “What I can share is innovative or die, always be looking forward, don’t be afraid to look backwards a little if you want to create an establishment with a social mission and inclusive model.”

Recruitment. Many individuals who work at Spectrum Designs™ in the production department have gone through the vocational training center with The Nicholas Center. They have been training, learning and have been almost doing a try-out while training so they are already being observed. The art team does an art test with graphic designs to show their work. Individuals working in customer service may have to do an e-mail response assessment to see how they would interact with others. Depending on the department or job, may alter the interview process, assessment and questions. After the assessments, if the hiring team is interested in the individual working at Spectrum Designs™, they have a more formal sit down, discussion with maybe a few follow up questions. Patrick shares that at this point his team knows they’re probably going to hire the individual. At times they may allow support staff and/or a guardian attend if appropriate of the individual that is being hired, with consent of the individual.

Spectrum Designs™ has also engaged in the ACCES-VR Work Try-Out Program through New York State to recruit individuals. Some of the best and outstanding employees have come through Work Try-Out. Work Try-Out pays the individuals’ salary for 8-12 weeks and at the end the business can hire them if they choose. This is

also great for individuals who maybe have difficulty with the interview process, they get to try-out and show their skills.

At John's Crazy Socks™ all applicants are required to submit a resume, cover letter and a statement on why they want to work there. The next step is an online survey, followed by a phone interview. Then they bring people in to spend some time to see what it's like to work at John's Crazy Socks™. From there they screen, give a task and hire, based on the needs of the business.

Interviewing. “Adjusting an interview process is a great place to start when the goal is success. If you engage in practical based assessments as part of the hiring process, then you can see the skills application. I do not think this should be for just individuals with disabilities, this should be for everyone. This is a no-brainer place to start,” Patrick shares. Rather than have a verbal interview, businesses could incorporate skills-assessment, particularly for jobs where communicating with customers is not a major factor.

Challenges during the interview process was described as “brutal honesty,” at interviews for individuals with disabilities. Which is often due to the inability to understand social content and social etiquette across many individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and other language deficits. Being too honest was something that stood out to Patrick as a challenge. For example, he shared a time when he asked an individual why they wanted to work here and they said, “because I need the money.” This was an honest answer, but also indicated challenges individuals with differing abilities face with traditional forms of interview processes.

Patrick recalled a time when he was in the process of hiring a graphic designer. He describes that they were having difficulty hiring for this position, however one day they had two individuals who came to interview. The first person was an individual who did not have a disability and it was obvious he was organized; he showed a portfolio of designs and had the perfect answers to questions. The second person right away disclosed that he had a disability. His graphic work was excellent, but it was obvious that his organizational skills were in need of some work. He was late for the interview; he was too quirky for an interview and was honest that his organizational ability was not the best. “We find out quite early what the mission means to the person we’re interviewing,” said Patrick. At each interview they discuss the mission, review the mission and find out how the individuals feels they can connect to the mission which is a high priority when working at Spectrum Designs™. In the end they hired both individuals. Both were passionate, had great graphic skills and even though the individual with a disability had some difficulty, Patrick felt these were things over time that he could learn with some support and getting a system in place for him.

Mark and John want to make sure that people interested in working understand the mission and value their core values. In addition, they want to make sure that the person interested in the job is truly interested, for example that a parent, teacher or guardian is not pressing the individuals to come in and interview.

Initial Assessment. Spectrum Designs™ has two skills assessments for more entry level positions (production assessment or senior assessment). It is not pass/fail, but more of a rating system. The applicant gets an overall score that is department specific. The process is qualitative but also quantitative. For example, how many shirts an

individual can fold in a given amount of time (efficiency). Then they look at the prompt level or level of independence that the individual is observed to be at. The other side is the “soft skills” assessments, identifying of materials, people, understanding of core values, hygiene/dress, punctuality, etc. Someone does not necessarily “fail” and assessment. Rather the evaluator gives a number from 1-3 which indicates the prompt level (e.g., independence, needed prompting, needed assistance).

Many individuals who work at Spectrum Designs™ in the production department have gone through the vocational training center with The Nicholas Center. They have been training, learning and have been almost doing a try-out while training so they are already being observed. The art team does an art test with graphic designs to show their work. Individuals working in customer service, individuals may have to do an e-mail response assessment to see how they would interact with others. Depending on the department or job, may alter the interview process, assessment and questions. People hiring for the financial department may have more of a traditional interview process presented with questions. Sometimes Patrick mentions they may even have the individual look at some of Spectrum Designs™ numbers to get a sense of their experiences and understanding of the financial process.

There is a task assessment at John’s Crazy Socks™ known as the Sock Wrangler Test, that everyone must pass in order to work, which is part of interview/hiring process. The task is to pick 6 orders in 30 minutes or less. This is the minimal productivity requirement, most people pass, some with modification, and some can’t pass it. “You can’t have the job until you pass the test. You can come in and practice and take the test when you’re ready,” explained Mark. The employers cannot pay during the tryout period

but encourage the tryout to help land a job. Both John and Mark are open to allowing the candidates to come back and keep trying if they want too or need more time, but eventually want the individuals to engage in the task so that they can pass and start working. Employees must be able to work independently once hired.

He recalls a time when someone was working so hard, so long to pass the Sock Wrangler Test but just could not pass. However, one day they asked her to do the task and did not tell her it was the “test.” When she didn’t think she was being observed, she passed and was successful! She got the job.

Modifications. Some individuals employed at both businesses come regularly to work and do great work all the time, while other individuals at times need some more modification in order to be included successfully. On occasion Mark and John have had to intervene in order to help an employee with differing abilities learn and understand important skills for employment, being social and for safety.

Having job support or job coaches if needed, are provided at The Nicholas Center which is connected to Spectrum Designs™. Patrick describes how Stella, Nicole and himself wanted to have a sustainable business, but also train and monitor individuals who would like to eventually work in the facility. They could train and work in a 1:3, 1:2 or 1:1 ratio through the Nicholas Center. Rather than work with different agencies to bring in job coaches they dedicated to becoming a single partner agency model. This meant that they would not use other agencies to job train, but they would use their own hired staff through The Nicholas Center. “The key is in consistency of staff, quality of training,” Patrick explained. It was not sustainable to have other agency send their job coaches. Spectrum Designs also has natural support such as they have a full-time social

worker on staff tending to human resource duties as well as a support to all staff and personnel. “Our retention rate is about 99%,” Patrick shared. Most employees never leave unless they’re moving for some reason which is great. These individuals are loyal and dedicated to their jobs.

At John’s Crazy Socks™, the employers don’t refer to this as a challenge, but as a part of their mission to support paid employment for individuals with differing abilities. John’s employees provide training, a task-oriented interview process, a tour of the business place and guidance across all aspects of the day-to-day operations.

Another consideration is matching the individual’s strengths with the requirements of certain jobs. “Good management is needed in organizations. Practices that we use here I have developed in other places too, pay attention to people and put them in positions where they can succeed,” Mark shared.

“Don’t ask people to do what they can’t,” Mark explains of their unique systems in place. “John here can fill orders, but I don’t ask him to do the spreadsheets. Put people in positions where they can be successful. If someone needs a special chair, get them the chair, if someone needs a special software, get the software. Stay out of the way and let people do their jobs.” He often stays out of the way of his employees so that they can do their job and be independent.

Staff Training. Patrick mentioned that all staff are required to take an “Autism 101” training when they get hired. The training is for or all even those on the Autistic Spectrum. The employees with Autism often add to the training by giving real-life examples.

The retention rate is very high for individual with disabilities. “We have to work hard at it, we’re constantly looking at our retention strategies to see what natural supports or trainings we can engage our staff in to understand the groups everyone is working alongside.” Very few instances Spectrum Designs™ have had where they had difficulty on “what are we going to do here” with this employee. Things have been very positive. However, there are days where an individual with a disability may present with an outburst, where in a more typical setting that could have made them dismissed, however Spectrum Designs™ management and staff are all hyper compassionate and understanding in general. They take a close look at any situation that may arise although rare and decide if this is a manifestation of their disability.

Communication. Planning for a number of things requires “Effective communication and being able to modify communication,” as explained by Patrick. He spoke about the need to communicate with employees about their job performance as well as getting along in the workplace.

He discusses that if you always send out communications through email and you have someone that has difficulty processing written communication, you have to modify a bit. Or if you have staff meetings and everyone is talking, there may be someone who may have difficulty with processing verbal language that may need help to understand the communications. Some people even need visuals to process information in the workplace.

Communication can always be a challenge,” John explained, “We have to make sure we’re communicating well.” Mark and John shared that it is important to “Be aware and empathic of where people are coming from.”

On the other hand, communication also has to be honest, if the business is to be successful. For example, it is not always the case that every individual can be productive at a particular workplace. This can be a barrier to hiring them in the first place, as well as dealing with issues that may arise. “The fear is definitely heightened as a businessperson when you do hire an individual with a disability because there is always this fear that what if you had to fire them,” Patrick explains.

New Definitions of Success. Both businesses mentioned that they do not view success only in terms of monetary returns. “Our social mission and how we carry the mission out makes Spectrum Designs™ unique, Patrick describes. “We measure success by the number of hours of employment we can create. Of course, the business has to make money in order to run, but it’s not our only metric.”

At John’s Crazy Socks™ a measure of success is “the experience of John who keeps demonstrating more of what he can do,” as shared by Mark. They also focus on helping all of their employees grow in their skills and self-confidence.

Administrative Supports. Meeting the needs of employees involves some additional supports. As an example, Patrick mentioned a recent challenge due to the COVID 19 Pandemic when they closed for a while and had to essentially lay off workers for a time. This meant that these individuals were able to file for unemployment. Once things started to open up again and they slowly started asking the individuals to come back to work, they had to get out of unemployment, which Patrick describes can be a lot of paperwork and coordination between the individuals and communications to their families and/or guardians that help them. At times it can be more work, but he felt that the good work was aligned with their Core Values.

Patrick also shared that if someone can only work 20 hours a week due to Social Security restriction, and he needs someone 40 hours a week to get the job done, then he has to look for someone else to fill those extra hours. This is more than a traditional employer would do for individuals to make working possible, positive and successful.

Modifications may also be necessary related to production issues. Patrick stated, “At times, yes, someone with a disability does work slower, or maybe makes a mistake that could take a ripple effect, which may cause someone to work longer hours to correct, etc. This is part of the risk, but it’s a good risk we want to take.”

Research Question 3

How does the inclusion of employees with disabilities impact maintaining employment of both individuals with and without disabilities in business?

The data suggest that there are many common themes that help foster successful job experiences while employing individuals working in inclusive settings. Culture of tolerance, accepting differences and embracing skills were common themes observed. Other items that were mentioned by the employers were that communication (verbal, written, visual, etc.), morale boosting, productivity and retention were high with a social mission approach.

Culture of Tolerance and Accepting Differences

Patrick mentioned that culture certainly impacted the business. Culture starts with a “tolerance of difference, inclusion, tolerance for difference. Everyone has their moments, and we will be better off if we accept everyone as they are, this is the best part of our businesses.” He felt that he did not always have this insight. In the beginning, Spectrum did not modify or tier any processes. They were very busy starting up and

getting their systems in place. During employee interviews, Patrick noticed some of the struggles of individuals with disabilities: high nervousness, difficulty with pragmatic skills and communication skills. He noticed that typical verbal interviews were not always practical or a good assessment of the individual.

In the more recent years, Spectrum Designs™ has pushed to a more practical assessment which is a combination of more qualitative “in the moment” with some quantitative measures such as how many shirts someone can fold. Patrick works on these task assessments in partnership with the Nicholas Center in order to fairly and accurately assess someone skills during the interviewing/hiring process.

Culturally, embracing difference and diversity is key Patrick explains. He reflects that Temple Grandin, an accomplished author who is an individual with Autism, said, “the world needs all kinds of minds.” Patrick spoke about people at his workplace who may not have had experiences with working with individuals with disabilities. He is very happy when he sees his employees getting along well and enjoying their coworker roles together. It is so much more than “we make t-shirts,” Patrick describes.

Morale Boosting, Productivity, Retention

It was evident that the employers had deliberately put into place actions and procedures to support morale in the workplace, which they believed led to greater productivity and higher retention.

“Our numbers hover around 65-75% of individuals working at Spectrum Designs™ are individuals with disabilities,” Patrick shared. We have people that say, “I love working here, it’s cool and I could never work anywhere else. If you’re a typically functioning person that works at Spectrum Designs™, then you enjoy telling people

about what you do because you get to work around the most interesting and unique individuals in the world.”

One thing that Mark of John’s Crazy Socks™ talks about is saying “thank you” to his employees. He makes sure to thank his employees for doing a good job, he feels positive reinforcement is key.

To maximize productivity, it is essential for employers to be flexible with job assignments. Sometimes it’s “managing in the grey,” Patrick describes. “You can’t always have the same rules for everyone, because then that would create inequality. If someone does something wrong and it’s a manifestation of their disability, then the disciplinary action may be different than someone who does not have a disability. It might not be fair but sometimes it’s necessary.”

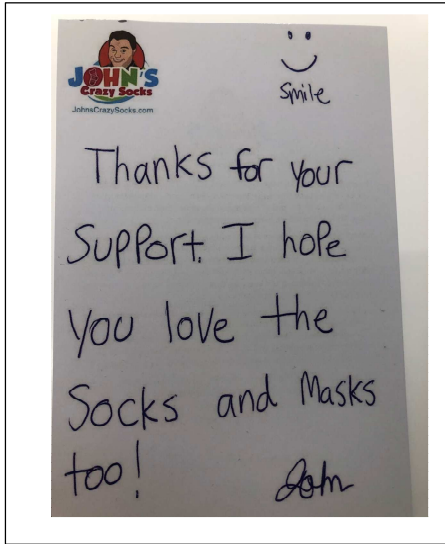
Once employees are working and John and Mark notice they have other skills, they provide other opportunities if they feel a different position is best.

“For us it comes down to four things to have a unified workplace, more diversified and more tolerant workplace,” Mark shared with the researcher. He believes that when morale is up, people are happy, productivity is up, retention improves, and it helps to recruit.

Customizing and personalizing orders as well as product output helps the customers and community feel the culture, happiness and enjoy the products and business experience (Figure 10), as demonstrated in the packaging at John’s Crazy Socks™ where each order is accompanied by a personalized note and “avatar” of the packer (Figure 11).

Figure 10

Artifact #5 John's Crazy Socks: John's letter sample in customer orders

**Figure 11**

Artifact #6 John's Crazy Socks: Employee Avatar Completion Sticker



Research Question 4

In what way does a social mission expressed by a business impact the financial mission?

The data suggest that there are many common themes associated when a social mission impacts the financial mission. Some of the themes the data suggests are a clear sense of purpose as employers, building confidants amongst individuals with and without disabilities, retention is high, and business is overall more successful. With a social mission, the data suggests that the social mission and business mission go hand in hand and work together like a marriage to make the business thrive as well as create employment for individuals.

Focus on High Quality Products

While the social mission of the businesses is a major component, “We don’t rest on that though,” Patrick explains. Spectrum Designs™ does not advertise to order from them because of their social mission, rather, they market their high-quality apparel, baked goods and laundry business because they do a great job. “It always makes it even better for customers when they learn they have Spectrum Designs™ has a social mission,” Patrick shares. “People tend to feel good and want to spend their money knowing there is a cause attached to it.” However, Patrick always wants to lead with the business and high-quality product and customer services. Sometimes the good quality work that gets them in the door for customers and sometimes it’s the mission.

Financial Model

The employers were able to make their businesses viable through establishing them as nonprofit entities. “I also think a nonprofit makes a difference, we don’t have shareholders or people taking money out of the business. Everything that is made goes

right back into the business. It provides the transparency” Patrick explains. Patrick and his cofounders are open about everyone’s salary and what the business takes in and pays out and this is explained in an annual report they put out to the public.

“We have to underline social enterprise, we have to make money, we have to keep the lights on,” Patrick explains, “Sometimes we have to be more aggressive with our pricing, if there are too many human errors. Without the economics the mission goes out the window.”

This business is described as being “very seasonal.” At times John’s Crazy Socks™ can be very busy, and at times they can be slower. For example, at the end of the business day on a June day, John’s Crazy Socks™ could have about 100 orders to go out. While on a day in November/December they could have up to 2,000 orders to fill. One of their requirements is to be able to work a shift at least three times a week so the employees can have continuity. Modification can benefit the individuals and the business in a positive fashion.

Giving a Sense of Purpose

The employers both believed that their social mission kept them going through difficult times, as well as served as an inspiration to continue to grow their businesses. “It gives you a sense of clear purpose, worth and purpose are right up there,” Patrick stated.

We saw the good work they did, the dignity, social and confidants that the job gave to the employees. We also saw the impact on others. It’s two parts: it’s hiring people with disabilities and showing what they can do,” Mark explained.”

“Day one we had a mission to spread happiness.” John’s Crazy Socks™ also had a mission to “give back.” They give 5% back on all sales to The Special Olympics, an organization that John has been dedicated to for years.

Product Uniqueness and Quality

Both employers spoke to the focus on the quality of their products as being very important. They also felt that their products offered something to consumers that reflected their values and mission. As Patrick illustrated, “One thing I love about Mark and John is that they turn around stuff like Amazon, but Amazon does not give candy (like Mark and John). We don’t expect people to pay more, or to have less of a customer service experience, but if you don’t grow, meet your margins and act like a business it all goes away. We put people first, that is one of our Core Values. People, process, product and the profit will come.”

Finding Business Collaborators

Economically, Patrick explains that they’re very big on making sure they’re a social enterprise.

“We have to underline social enterprise, we have to make money, we have to keep the lights on,” Patrick explains. Sometimes we have to be more aggressive with our pricing, if there are too many human errors. Without the economics the mission goes out the window.”

Spectrum Designs™ is hyper focused on their mission and following through with their mission. “It’s one of the largest contributing factors to our success,” Patrick explains. He shared that from his experiences and his understanding of past research,

years ago people would have gone with the company with the social mission if they were getting the “same thing.”

Together the Nicholas Center and Spectrum Designs™ work collaboratively to help produce great products, help individuals learn and be a part of true work and community engagement. They now have a center and several working businesses in Port Washington, NY, and just recently opened a new center in Pleasantville, NY. This success became possible as they collaborated with other businesses that had a similar social mission.

“If you want to succeed, you have to steal all the time,” Mark says laughing. John described a product he and Patrick did together as a collaborative venture called the “Stimulus Box,” which included socks, granola and apparel from both businesses (Figure 12).

Figure 12

Artifact #7 Collaborative Project between Spectrum Designs™, John’s Crazy Socks and other businesses with social missions

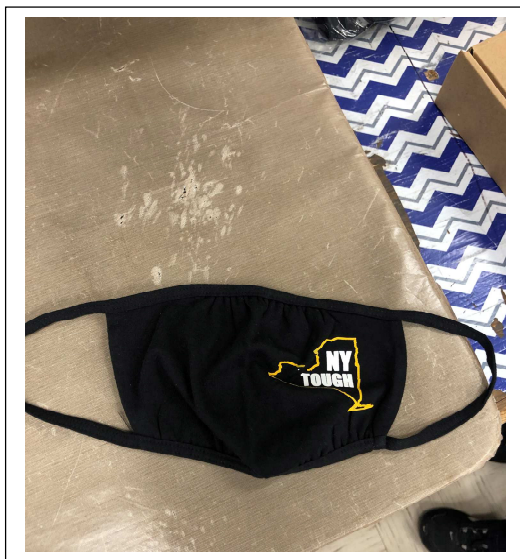


Partnerships with Organizations

The businesses have sought strategic partnerships that have both reflected their mission as well as contributed to success. For example, Spectrum Designs™ created face masks (Figure 13) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which responded to a social need as well as brought income during a critical time. Spectrum started to partner with hospitals, and medical facilities to bring new business to Spectrum Designs™. They've had to “pivot” their customer-audience since the pandemic a bit, which many businesses have had to adapt to new systems during this time.

Figure 13

Artifact #8 Spectrum Designs: Apparel Picture NY Touch Masks



“We’re really good at creating employment, we’re also good at retention and final we want to share what we have learned,” Patrick shares. “There is still so much more to be done,” Patrick explains. This is why he sits on the Autism Employer Round Table, which is a group of employers from Microsoft, Ford, other Fortune 500 companies

including Rising Tide Car Wash that has a social mission similar to Spectrum Designs. These businesses are hiring individuals with disabilities and meet quarterly to discuss, share, learn and take things to the next level for the “world of work” for hiring individuals with disabilities.

At John’s Crazy Socks™, collaborations with other organizations supported their success as well. John and Mark expressed how important helping others was to them from the start of their business model. By starting their business off and making donations to other organizations (e.g., The Special Olympics), this helped them make connections and untimely obtain more customers and more business in general.

“We were writing donation checks before we were making money. I had people telling me not to donate until we make more money. When in fact we made money because of the donations,” Mark shares. From day one John’s Crazy Socks™ pledged to donate 5% of their earnings to the Special Olympics and the National Down Syndrome society. These were natural connections for them, and they wanted to recognize the organizations. The social mission has also given the business more media attention.

Using Social Media

“Social enterprise makes a business more sustainable. This helps us connect to our community and be relevant,” Mark explains.

“We have a social mission and an e-commerce mission. These twin missions are indivisible. Our social mission helps our e-commerce efforts, and our e-commerce efforts supports our social mission. We believe it is not enough simply to sell things; we think it is important to have a mission and to give back. It becomes a natural flow for us to involve dance. John loves dance.” They share this on their social media. He has

danced in crowds and on TV. He holds an online dance party weekly on Tuesdays. The social mission connects them with their consumers and community. This helped the business become successful.

Mark and John get letters in the mail all the time from happy customers mentioning how much they love the socks and packaging, this is very meaningful to both Mark, John and their business.

Research Question 5

How can school-based programs prepare individuals with disabilities for the workforce in a way that supports their long-term employment success?

Data suggest that there are several themes associated with school-based programs preparing individuals with disabilities for the workforce. Successful employers like Patrick, Mark and John mentioned that schools need to focus on teaching soft skills. Soft skills are essential and are the foundation of proper preparation for training in the workforce for any job or task. The employers mentioned several times how they can tell by how individuals come in and perform initial job tasks which schools are emphasizing work-based learning skills as opposed to schools that are not, and starting training at a later age. Executive functioning skills are also needed in order to work successfully. Organization, grooming skills, daily living skills, problem solving, and social skill practice are also common areas that need to be addressed as much as possible in school and at home in order to be ready to work and maintain employment.

Early Job Training

“You know the districts that prioritize from an early age,” Patrick explains. Patrick says from experience he can tell the schools that start at an early age, around 16,

practicing these skills as opposed to schools that start closer to 21. For example, individuals being able to follow 2, 3 step commands, attending skills, grooming, etc. These are important initial skills. Schools sometimes see that students are not making progress, but he explains that “we” can tell the hard work district are doing.

“Executive functioning skills are so important as well, just as important as soft skills,” Patrick shared. Patrick feels that these are essential to work on in school in order to prepare for the workforce. Spectrum Designs™ is open to modification such as the use of lists, headphones, cell phones, and continued learning in order to help support long-term successful employment for their employees.

Patrick shared that he thinks some districts do more than others with helping the parents too. He noticed that some schools helped parents navigate the transition process to adulthood and some did not do as well. He learned this from conversations with parents and noticing when parents felt lost in obtaining the right services post-graduation from high school.

John and Mark recall, their own experiences of John in high school and thought it was great that schools give opportunities for learning and vocational training.

Mark suggests these three points for schools and agencies:

1. Prepare their people in schools in connection with agencies to get individuals working as independently as possible.
2. Teach meaningful life skills, travel training, how to make lunch, how to dress for work, how to fill out a form and dress properly for work.

3. Develop ways to educate employers on how to incorporate individuals with disabilities in the workplace as well as if there is incentive or tax breaks to help incorporate individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

“On a collegial level, I am an advocate for the liberal arts, but I think schools needs to teach individuals how to problem solve, approach a problem and communicate. Students needs to have an idea of the “world” around them,” Mark shared. On the high school level, it’s important to work as a team with school teams and the families. Working together is key. Promoting independence is the goal. Life skills based around true life experience is what is needed. Schools need to help individuals learn life skills, how to take directions, work as a team, take criticism, etc. Schools can make sure individuals know how to get a job and carry themselves for a job. Independence is essential across all developmental areas,” Mark and John described to the researcher.

Realistic Aspirations

Managing expectations is needed by schools and agencies in order to help individuals get the right job. Patrick described that he has employees that say they want to be movie stars or artists, and being honest, and assessing the individual’s skills for proper placement is essential in order to not delay the process of paid employment. Patrick also talks about “exposure” to different job experiences and task which is essential to help find meaningful paid work experiences.

Partnerships Between Schools and Employers

Unfortunately, some schools find it difficult to partner with employers in the region who could provide internships and work experiences. “Many school programs that do arrange to have individuals with disabilities have work training during the school

age years, but don't necessarily have commitments from the job internship sites for employment after high school. It's good experience, but if there is no opportunity it is a shame that this is happening," Patrick explained to the researcher.

Mark suggested three specific ways in which schools could think about school-to-work transition planning:

1. Prepare their people in schools in connection with agencies to get individuals working as independently as possible.
2. Teach meaningful life skills, travel training, how to make lunch, how to dress for work, how to fill out a form and dress properly for work.
3. Develop ways to educate employers on how to incorporate individuals with disabilities in the workplace as well as if there is incentive or tax breaks to help incorporate individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

Research Question 6

How can New York State policies be designed to better prepare individuals with disabilities for the workforce?

The data gathered from the employers suggests that there are many challenges for individuals with disabilities to be able to work as successfully as possible when it connects to policy and procedures with New York State laws and guidelines. First, it is essential for employers to become informed about effective practices. Second, businesses must incorporate employee government benefits (Medicaid and Social Security) into their planning and scheduling.

Educating Parents and Guardians

Someone from the state needs to educate the family and help them get started. Patrick shared that he had experienced parents truly needing a high level of support and education on how to properly access the things they need to help set their child up, for example, for Social Security. Patrick mentions that New York State does have some good programs already, but individuals and their families may need help accessing these programs. “From top to bottom,” Patrick thinks, “there is so much more we, as a state can do, as well as the media that could help in this area of spreading news of employment opportunities.” Patrick also suggested that the state follow individuals or survey graduates, to see what happened after high school and see where they ended up or what their success was to help all in the future.

Educating Employers

There is a need to educate employers across the state on a larger scale. Most employers running businesses may not have the information or education needed to understand an individual with a disability while considering them for a job. For example, they may give a traditional verbal interview and notice a lack of social skills, which could deter them from offering a position. However, if employers gave a task as a try out, they may see a different side of an individual and want to hire them based on their capabilities. Modification and utilization of accommodations is not always automatic. They may need to be taught through some type of training through New York State and/or New York State Labor Department so that potential employers can assess their businesses and incorporate the needed changes.

“I think the first place to start on the state level is to set a benchmarks or targets that can help set good goals. Once you have set targets then you start implementing policies for change. New York should want to do this to increase employment because it’s good for New York state and in the end our tax bill is less, and people will spend more money in NY communities if they’re employed,” Patrick shared.

Three main areas identified by Mark and John were:

1. Prepare their people in schools in connection with agencies to get individuals working as independently as possible.
2. Teach meaningful life skills, travel training, how to make lunch, how to dress for work, how to fill out a form and dress properly for work.
3. Develop ways to educate employers on how to incorporate individuals with disabilities in the workplace as well as if there is incentive or tax breaks to help incorporate individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

Social Security and Medicaid Information

A particular area of concern for employers is the number of hours an individual can work while receiving state benefits. For example, many individuals with a disability rely on and may receive special benefits such as Medicaid. If this is the case, the individual may only work on the payroll for a specific number of hours which limits their ability to work for longer durations of time without losing benefits. In New York, Medicaid covers more than private insurance. “Individuals can’t afford to lose the Medicaid, so people have to choose between their Medicaid and their job. Individuals can only work a certain number of hours if they want to keep their benefits. This seems to be a bad choice. We have workers who can work many more hours a week and want

to, but they can't be due to Medicaid restrictions. I think you should be able to get the Medicaid no matter your employer status," John expressed.

Social Security is also a challenge because the terms of an individuals' employment once hired, may affect income employees are entitled to from the state. Spectrum Designs™ has had to work towards communicating with families and individuals on these benefits so that nothing will interfere with their work and essential benefits they receive. They have had to have someone on staff become an expert and be in charges of this important piece. Their chief of staff who is also the social worker handles these aspects behind the screens to make sure everyone has what they need in this area. Having a social worker on staff who can support anyone working is also what Patrick describes makes Spectrum Designs unique.

Conclusion

The individual interviews, observations and focus group interviews with employers at the two sites gave considerable insight into the thinking and planning that went into operating businesses with a social mission. The data provide guidance for future implementation as well. In chapter 5, the findings are discussed in light of the existing literature on career transition and employment of individuals with differing needs.

CHAPTER 5 INTERPRETING THE DATA AND CULMINATING SUMMARY

There is a great need to look closely into workplace practices at businesses that have strong missions to create social enterprises in New York State. Data suggest that social enterprise business models help employ large numbers of individuals with disabilities with very high retention rates and excellent business turnover. It is also essential for the State to help foster new business models to help improve unemployment rates and help create jobs for individuals with differing abilities. This would require programs and materials to educate business employers and leaders in businesses ventures regarding social mission-oriented businesses. This will help them understand how making accommodations and modifications in their business systems could enable them to hire great workers and increase retention, business turnover and increase employment rates for all.

Relationship to Prior Research

In 2015, New York State published the Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities, 2015 (Figure 3, Chapter 2) that indicated core areas that New York State needs to improve on for individuals with disabilities. One of the major areas of needed improvement indicated by this blueprint was that “Schools provide appropriate instruction for students with disabilities in career development and opportunities to participate in Work-Based Learning.” In the recent years, New York state took further steps of creating other pathways towards graduation including a career pathway for students who were not participating in more traditional programs leading to a Regents high school diploma. The state has also had in place a CDOS credential which is a career credential that any student can work towards in addition to a high school diploma.

Preparation of students with disabilities for future employment is mandated by IDEA legislation, and part of the state special education report for Indicators 13, secondary transition, and 14, tracking post-school outcomes. Responses from the two employers interviewed for the present study indicated that they felt that there needed to be more connection between schools and businesses to facilitate training and employment for individuals with disabilities. The employers emphasized the need for individuals to be prepared in “soft skills” of appropriate workplace behavior.

While many school-based training programs have been developed and transition services implemented, little is yet known about the perspectives of employers of individuals with disabilities and their considerations when running their businesses. The limited prior research on employers indicated that while businesses of all kinds and sizes were found to employ individuals with disabilities (Ditchman & Owens, 2009), individuals with disabilities are often assigned menial tasks within businesses, and that employers prefer to hire individuals with occupational diplomas or GEDs, rather than those who complete school with only attendance certificates (Hartwig, 2008).

Over the preceding year, a qualitative study was conducted to explore culture in true work experiences for individuals with disabilities. The goal was to investigate how these work experiences are augmented and aligned to fit the needs of all individuals. Another goal was to look at the culture and systems to see how business models can meet the needs of diverse learners. These sought-after experiences were very important as the researcher wanted to have good evidence to help communities, schools, school leaders, businesses, state leaders and state agencies know and understand best practices to implement. This approach would lead to greater and more satisfactory employment of

individuals with disabilities. By adapting to new practices that are evident in this study, businesses in New York State can successfully employ higher numbers of talented individuals with disabilities in their settings while maintaining excellent retention rates.

Relationship to Theory

Howard Gardner's theory of *Multiple Intelligences* (1994) highlights that intelligence is not just a one size fits all construct. Intelligence comes in many forms such as spatial, musical, linguistic, interpersonal, etc. Individuals with differing abilities often show their intelligence in different forms. Gardner was an advocate for teaching "the whole child." He was committed to teaching teachers how to teach all learners, despite their differences. Fredrick Herzburg (1959) and his theory of Workplace Satisfaction connects to motivation and positive job attitudes. This connects to work fulfilment, social mission and the drive to work and be successful.

According to various studies conducted on this topic and the data collected from this study it is evident that even more in-depth qualitative research in the field on this subject targeting topics such as work strategies and transition should be investigated in future studies, as indicated by Ditchman and Owens (2009).

The researcher believe that intelligence is seen in many forms similar to the theorists involved in this study (e.g., Gardner, Herzburg). The researcher has taught individuals that require special services for many years and has seen intelligence up front and close in the classroom and in work environments in many forms. Some individuals are extremely gifted or have a savant skill or trait that is extremely unique and intelligent. The researcher has seen amazing work skills from individuals with disabilities. Employers should want to hire these individuals to get the job done.

Motivation is also important for all individuals that work. Setting standards that allows for motivation like businesses with social missions is a great way to target motivation for all workers. When workers are motivated, the job gets done right, while business and retention is high.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The COVID-19 Pandemic served as a limitation to this study as businesses were disrupted, closed for several months, and data collection had to be put on hold. For the near future, the COVID-19 Pandemic may still play a role in research limitations related to opportunities for on-site observations. Businesses will have continued social distance guidelines as well as mandated regulations according to New York State regarding occupancy. Business employers may have constraints on who they partner with. Safety regulations would have to be incorporated into research, observation, interviews and close observation of artifacts and business culture. Future research may have to modify any study that would incorporate in person attendance and consider using remote devices in order to conduct some aspects of the research.

Limitations of the study may be any biases associated with the researcher's knowledge and expertise of individuals with disabilities. The researcher has more than 17 years of experience in the field of working with individuals with disabilities in the classroom, outside of the classroom, as well as with their families/guardians. The researcher was careful to consider the impact of this experience in terms of use of "insider" language with participants, and a potentially positive bias.

Recommendations for Future Practice

In conducting my research, I ascertained there are five composite themes represented in the data (Table 4).

Table 4

Research Findings and Themes

Composite Theme	Research Finding
Sense of Purpose and Lifelong Learning	Necessity, Mission Driven, Practical Aspects, New Definitions of Success.
Benefits of Employing Individuals with Disabilities	Sense of Purpose, Product Uniqueness and Quality, Productivity, Retention, Focus on High Quality Products.
Business Education on Inclusion in the Workplace	Early Job Training, Realistic Aspirations, Partnerships Between Schools and Employers, Educating Parents and Guardians, Administration Support, Culture of Tolerance and Accepting Differences, Morale Boosting, Financial Model, giving a Finding Business Collaborators, Partnerships with Organizations, Using Social Media.
Use of Modification in the Workplace	Recruitment, Interviewing, Initial Assessments, Modifications, Staff Training, Communications.
Changes in State Policy Regarding Benefits for Individuals with Disabilities	Educating Employers, Social Security and Medicaid Information.

Sense of Purpose and Lifelong Learning

There should be an awareness and understanding that all individuals, especially those that require special services, want to and have the right to continued learning throughout their lives. Often continued learning is part of the job and responsibilities that come along with the job (e.g., working, learning, hygiene, dressing, advancing on the job is applicable, etc.). Through the research, businesses involved connected to a strong “sense of purpose” when starting up their business and mission. Although each

employer's connection to "sense of purpose" was different and personal to them, all employers involved in the study had a clear, true, sense of extended purpose within the business establishment in general. For example, in both businesses, it's not just about creating jobs and having good business turnover; rather it is about positively effecting others. A sense of purpose is also connected to the community, which they have found often leads to great business turnover, greater job retention rates, which results in increased job opportunities, the primary goal of businesses with social missions.

Benefits of Employing Individuals with Disabilities

Businesses that employ a high number of individuals with disabilities attain many benefits such as high retention rates and excellent business turnover as a result. In addition, both employers that were involved in this study attested to the fact that individuals with disabilities have unique-beneficial skills such as excellent attention to detail, being on time and prompt, never missing a day of work unless ill or a family obligation. In addition, individuals with disabilities who work in these establishments are happy, care for their job and therefore it shows within their work output overall.

The research indicates that augmenting work-based experiences for individuals with disabilities in businesses should focus on increasing awareness for business owners on the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. There tends to be misconceptions on augmenting work experiences for individuals with differing abilities which are not necessarily valid. These misconceptions on their work ethic and skills often leads to false information about individuals with differing abilities which leads to not getting employed and effects employment rates overall.

Business Education on Inclusion in the Workplace

Businesses across our state should be made aware in some way about the many benefits of hiring individuals with differing abilities. This could be conducted through free or required trainings with the Department of Labor or other state agencies. ACCESS-VR staff would also be instrumental in this training process if allotted this type of time and training mandate. Other education that should be included are trainings on the many forms of interview processes (e.g., task orientated ways to interview, etc.), as well as the benefits that hiring individuals with disabilities has not just on the employee, but on the employer and the community. Business owners should also be made aware of state programs that offer job “try-out” opportunities that can reimburse the employer for up to 3 months of pay to see if the job is a good fit or not for the individual(s).

Business owners should look to adopt mission driven practices or try inclusive approaches when hiring new employees. This would allow for better business outcomes and create new cultures allowing fair opportunities for all and more manageable ways for individuals with disabilities to be fairly assessed on a job interview.

Use of Modifications in the Workplace

There should be a big push to allow for more use of modifications in the workplace for all individuals including individuals with differing abilities. Most individuals with disabilities are given modifications from birth through their graduation in school. Although this is not required in workplaces, it would certainly help enhance all individuals working and in need of support systems. The employers in this study use modification all the time. For example, use of a check list, use of task lists on cell phone, use of different forms of communication, use of extra training and strong communication

across the board was essential. General business establishments may not know or understand the use of modifications/accommodations in the workplace when it comes to hiring individuals with disabilities. However, the research shows that with low-moderate systems in place, it enhances the business turnout overall and creates inclusive settings for all. Training in this area would also be needed to successfully create inclusive work environments for individuals that need a level of modification and accommodations to be successfully employed.

Changes in State Policy Regarding Benefits for Individuals with Disabilities

There should be a push by the state to help educate all business owners in some fashion on how to modify business practices. This would help to meet the needs of hiring individuals with disabilities successfully with more task orientated interview process as well as practices such as adopting social missions for all. There should also be more attention by state and local leaders on allotting the resources needed including funding and access to the best research-based evidence practices for schools. This would allow for students to have more in depth learning experiences on career readiness and soft skill training while in school. This would also give more opportunities for students to link more successfully to careers, post-secondary schools and employment opportunities.

State agencies need to make the benefit process more functional for individuals with disabilities. Creating a more systematic approach that will allow for continuation of benefits as well as the ability to work more hours without fear of losing their needed aids. A local leader and member of a non-profit organization that advocates for employment for individuals with disabilities shared that in New York State, employment is not given enough attention especially for individuals who require special services. There is no

flexibility for individuals with disabilities receiving benefits and who want to work. Current systems with Social Security and Medicaid need updating in order to help increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Agencies need to work together in this area to make things clearer and more practical for the individual, their families, and employers.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research in the area of augmenting work-based experiences for individuals with disabilities should focus on more in-depth qualitative research in this area with more employers with unique social missions such as employers who sit on the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable. Spectrum Designs™ and John's Crazy Socks™ also sit on this committee along with other businesses from around the United States.

Other areas for further investigation may include direct observations of unique interview processes, interviews with employees with and without disabilities working together. Surveying business entrepreneurs who are interested in starting a business with a social mission would also be a valuable area to explore to get perspective on the startup process and setting the mission. Other areas for investigation may include interviews with state and local leaders as well as school leadership on how augmentation of soft skills and career readiness needs to be addressed and supported in schools and in our communities. These analyses could help guide the much-needed improvement in the “world of work” for all students before they exit school.

Conclusion

There is an urgency to improve employment for all individuals in New York State. There is also a crucial demand to create better practices, connections and

generalizations amongst the business community on the importance of true inclusive work environments. Understanding the benefits as well as systems that work in inclusive businesses would take practice and dedication to help increase employment rates by allowing individuals with disabilities inclusive work environments. Future inclusive business environments will excel best if systems acknowledge modification, accommodation and strong communication to make the mission and business turn out benefit all.

Figure 14

New York State 2017-2018 Performance in Meeting SPP Targets: Presented to New York Council of Administrators of Special Education, July 24, 2019



(New York State SPP Targets, Office of Special Education, 2019)

In July of 2019 New York State Office of Special Education presented the New York Council of Special Education Administrators on progress of IDEA Indicators. Out

of 17 state indicators, New York State only had compliance in Indicator 2 Drop Out Rates and Indicator 17 State Systematic Improvement Plan (see figure 11). New York State is a state in high need of system changes that are necessary in an array of areas according to the indicator performances including the area of secondary transition and post-school outcomes. Although regional partnerships are provided to school districts across the state to help make better progress in the area of transition and Work Based Learning; we need New York State leaders to not only recognize the need for change, but to identify best practices including evidence-based research to help align better work-based practices and educate business across the state on the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. Businesses need education on how to augment work-based practices for individuals with differing abilities. Businesses need to be given opportunities to develop an increase in awareness of how hiring individuals with disabilities can be beneficial for all community stakeholders.

Now more than ever when businesses are restructuring, reopening and trying to reinvent their missions due to COVID-19; new business enterprises are on the rise to meet the demands of the pandemic. Innovation is occurring all around us in the world of work and ways to augment work practices is the new culture. Businesses, schools, state agencies and leadership are needed to support and improve employment by devising plans to help schools to obtain the resources needed to put more of an emphasis in preparing all individuals for the “world of work.” There needs to be additional developed systems for all businesses to have information and training on how to create more inclusive settings. This would allow for more attainable opportunities for individuals

with differing abilities to have more accommodated practices to be fairly evaluated for employment opportunities (e.g., task-oriented job interviews, etc.).

Properly augmenting work-based experiences will set the stage for a new culture of how work experiences are oriented in the workplace for all. Mission driven places of employment have shown the successes that can be achieved for all areas of the business when practices are aligned. It is essential that state leaders help make changes from the top working with all agencies and stakeholders to not just check the box on our state indicators, but to help bring more inclusive opportunities to individuals who have the ability to work, be efficient, be trained and challenged. It's time we augment new practices across our state and region to unite and provide fair employment for all individuals especially those with differing abilities. This is just the beginning of important work that is needed to further employment for all, improve retention and create inclusive opportunities for individuals with disabilities to work, be happy, use their unique skills and lead successful lives.

APPENDIX A IRB APPROVAL MEMO

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Oct 2, 2020 12:15 PM EDT

PI: Liza Laurino-Siegel
Dept: Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership

Re: Modification - IRB-FY2020-353 Employer Perspective On Augmenting Work Experiences for Individuals with Disabilities

Dear Liza Laurino-Siegel:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for Employer Perspective On Augmenting Work Experiences for Individuals with Disabilities.

Decision: Approved

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.
IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B IRB INSTRUMENTS, QUESTIONNAIRES AND OTHER MATERIALS

Example of Researchers Observation Notes Form

1

Qualitative Research Notes

Observation Place: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____



Work Environment (Setting):	
Atmosphere (culture observed):	
Number of Workers:	
Number of Supervisors:	
Duration:	
What is the work/product?	
Planned Agendas for Work Tasks:	
Notes:	
Pictures:	
Artifacts:	
Videos:	
Questions:	
Follow up:	
Theme Observed:	



Employer Consent Form



Employer Informed Consent Form

The purpose of this study is to investigate employer perspectives on hiring and maintaining employment for individuals with disabilities. The goal is to explore how work experiences are augmented for individuals with disabilities while maintaining a conducive work environment and business model.

The potential benefits of participating in this study for your business include:

- 1) Introducing functional practices that work in business models that allow for more individuals with disabilities to be employed successfully.
- 2) Assisting schools and post secondary practices on work models that are successful as well as being an example for Work Based Learning experiences on the secondary level for individuals with disabilities.
- 3) Helping to increase the research in this area so that more positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities as well as knowledge to business who employ individuals with disabilities are more congruent.

The potential risks of participating in the study for your business include:

- 1) Scheduling time for implementing the study^[1]_{SEP}
- 2) Allowing observations of employees working
- 3) The employees/guardians of the employees comfort with observations for research based practices

If you decide to participate in the study, your business will be asked to do the following:

Employer Consent Form Continued

1. Arrange a time and location for implementing the study. The study involves 3 core interviews with the employee (about 1 hour duration) as well as 3 observations following the interviews involving observing different aspects of the work environment (observing individuals with and without disabilities/without disabilities working)
2. Collaborate with the researcher on any follow up questions that may arise as the research is being assessed and coded (e.g., conference calls, e-mails, additional brief interviews if needed)
3. Help the researcher to distribute and collect consent forms from employees/guardians of employees that will be observed
4. Allow for photos of the work environment and/or workers working in action as well as some artifacts for coding purposes

This study will keep all research records and pictures that identify employees/employers confidential to the extent allowed by law.

Specifically:

1) All data and materials of the study will be kept under lock and storage. Data will be accessible only by the researcher. After completion of the study, all data will be completely disposed. The results of the study may be published at some point; however, employee names and other identifiable information will remain private.

Employees' participation in this study is strictly voluntary – employees may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. Employers also have the right to skip or refuse to answer any question within the study.

Employer Consent Form Continued

For more questions about this study, student participation, or to report a research related problem, please contact the researcher Liza Laurino-Siegel directly at 516 315 2587 or liza.laurinosiegel7@my.stjohns.edu or contact the faculty sponsor Dr. Rene Parmar, St. John's University at 718 990 1303 or parmarr@stjohns.edu

For questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the Human Subjects Review Board, St. John's University, at 718 990 1440

If you permit this study to be conducted in your business, please complete the form below, sign and return to the researcher.

Permission for Business to Participate

Name of Employer/Business

Signature

Date

x _____

Name of Business

Employee Consent Form



Employee/Guardian Consent Form

You/your child have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about employer perspectives on augmenting work experiences for individuals with disabilities. This study will be conducted by Liza Laurino-Siegel, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University as part of her doctoral dissertation. Her faculty sponsor is Dr. Rene Parmar of the Department of Education, St. John's University.

If you give permission to participate in this study, you/your child will be asked to do the following:

1. Allow for observations in the work environment while working (3-4 30 minute observations)
2. Allow for pictures/artifacts of products produced for data collection and coding purposes

Participation in the study will involve approximately 3-4 observations in the work environment, which may or may not always involve you/your child.

There are no known risks associated with your child's participation in this research beyond those of everyday life.

Federal regulations require that all subjects be informed of the availability of medical treatment or financial compensation in the event of physical injury resulting from participation in research. St. John's University cannot provide either medical treatment or financial compensation for any physical injury resulting from your participation in this research project.

Inquiries regarding this policy may be made to the principal

Employee Consent Form Continued

investigator or, alternatively, the Human Subjects Review Board at 718 990 1440.

Although you/your child will receive no direct benefits, this research may help us understand the thought processes that lead to augmenting work experiences and employment for individuals with disabilities.

Confidentiality of you/your child's research records will be strictly maintained. The researcher will only use the pictures/artifacts for coding information in the study.

You/your child's names and pictures will not be used/mentioned directly in the study. Direct (names/photos) information from the observations will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others.

Participation in the study is voluntary. You/your child may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. You/your child has the right to skip any picture or observation he/she prefers.

Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect you/your child's employment in anyway.

If there is anything about the study or you/your child's participation that is unclear or you do not understand, if you have any questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Liza Laurino-Siegel 516 315 2587 or liza.laurinosiegel7@my.stjohns.edu or contact the faculty sponsor Dr. Rene Parmar, St. John's University at 718 990 1303 or parmarr@stjohns.edu.

For questions about you/your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair at

Employee Consent Form Continued

718 990 1955, or digiuser@stjohns.edu, or Marie Nitpoi, IRB Coordinator at 718 990 1440.

You have received one copy of this permission/parental permission form to keep, and one to sign and return if you choose to allow your self/your child to participate.

(Liza Laurino-Siegel – Researcher)

Thank you,

Permission to Participate

Name of Employee

Date

Signature of Employee

Parental Permission (if appropriate for guardianship)

Modified Employee Consent Form



Consent for individuals with disabilities (To be read aloud to the employees for clarification of the study in addition to signed employee/guardian consent form)

My name is Liza Laurino-Siegel. I work with parents and children, but I am also a student. Right now, I am trying to learn more about how employers conduct work experiences for individuals with disabilities.

You may be helping us understand the process of augmenting work culture as well as how your employer provides work experiences that are successful and meaningful. If you give permission for your participation in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Be observed working
2. Allow for occasional pictures to be taken while you're working
3. Allow for the researcher to obtain artifacts such as work products that you have produced for research purposes

If you agree to help us, you should know that your employer and supervisors wouldn't do anything different at work related to your work tasks requirements. You should also know that if you decide not to help us or if you decide to say "no," your choice will not affect your employment.

Please talk this over with your parents before you decide if you want to be in our study or not. I will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to be in this study if you're not your own

Modified Employee Consent Form Continued

guardian. Even if your guardian say "yes," you can still say "no" and decide not to be in this study.

If you don't want to be in my study, you do not have to be in it. Remember, being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don't want to be in the study or if you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too. Also, remember that no one else, not even your guardian/parents, will know what I have observed you doing at work.

You can ask any questions you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can call me or ask your parents/guardians, or employer to call me at 516 315 2587.

Would you like to be in my study?

Participant's Name

Date

Coding Chart

Employer Perspective	Positive Aspects	Challenges	Cultures	Community	Product/Production/Outcome
Perception on mission	Job security	Behavior/social context	Purpose	Networking	Work Product
Follow through with mission	Learn	Modifications	Feelings (Personal connection)	Partnerships	Work output
Feelings about mission outcome	Community	Funding	Relationships	Education on social mission	Customer Service/ Happy Customers
Importance of social mission connected to a business mission	Helping others (necessity)	Working with state agencies/state waivers	Belonging		
Retention is great	Soft Skills	Utilization of accommodations	Utilization of accommodations		

REFERENCES

- ACCES VR New York State Education Department (2019, October,1). Retrieved from <http://www.acces.nysed.gov/vr>
- Baxter, P. & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(1) 544-559.
- Bennett, K & Dukes, C. (2018). Employment instruction for secondary students with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 48(1), 67-75.
- Carter, E. Trainor, A. Cakiroglu, O. Cole, O. Sweden, B. Ditchman, N. Owens, L. (2009). Exploring school employer partnerships to expand career development and early work experiences for youth with disabilities. *Journal of Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 32(3), 145-159.
- Center for Disease Control (2021). *Data and Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>
- Cherry, K. (2017, November 29). *Howard Gardner Biography*. Retrieved from <https://www.verywellmind.com/howard-gardner-biography-2795511>
- Conway, J. (2009) Virginia commonwealth university. Workplace discrimination and learning disability: *The National EEOC ADA Research Project*, 1-27.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Channa, C. (2018). Educating the whole child: Improving school climate to support student success. *Learning Policy Institute Document*, Washington, DC.
- Gardner, H. (2011). *The Theory of Multiple Intelligence: As Psychology, As Education, As Social Science Howard Gardner*. Jose Cela University, Madrid, Spain.
- Gardner, H. & Mansilla, V. (1994). Teaching for understanding within and across the disciplines. *Journal of Educational Leadership*, 5(51), 14-18.
- Grandin, T (2018). *Have High, But Reasonable Expectations*. Retrieved from <https://www.templegrandin.com>
- Hartwig, R & Sitlington, P. (2008). Employer perspectives on high school diploma options for adolescents with disabilities. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 19(1), 5-14.

- Herzberg, F., Mausner, B. and Snyderman, B. (1959). *The Motivation to Work*. John Wiley and sons, Inc.
- Honey, T., Thompkins, A, Bardos, M, & Stern, S. (2015). State differences in the vocational rehabilitation experiences of transition-age youth with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* 42(1), 17-30.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act IDEA (2017). *Transition Services*. Retrieved from: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.43> & <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-i/1401>
- Janiga, S. & Costenbader, V. (2016). The transition from high school to postsecondary education for students with learning disabilities: A survey to college service coordinators. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 35(5), 463-470.
- Katz, E. Elaine (2013). Social enterprise businesses: A strategy for creating good jobs for people with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* 40, 137-142.
- Lay-Flurrie, J. (2019, October). *Accessibility at Microsoft*. Presentation presented at the 2019 DCDT Roadmap to Inclusivity International Conference, Seattle, WA.
- Learning Theories (2018). *Explore over 100+ Learning Theories*. Retrieved from: <https://www.learning-theories.com>
- Meyer, Christine, B. (2001). A case in case study methodology. *Field Methods*. 13(4) 329-352.
- MI Oasis (2018). *MI Intelligence*. Retrieved from <https://www.multipleintelligencesoasis.org/>
- NCES (2017). *Disabilities Rates and Employment Status by Educational Attainment*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_tad.asp.
- New York State Education Department (2015). *New York State Department of Education Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities*. Retrieved from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/2015-memos/documents/blueprint-students-disabilities-special-education.pdf>
- New York State Education Department (2018, August). *Social Emotional Learning: Essentials for learning, essentials for life*. New York, NYSED Guidance.
- North East Books & Publishing (2014). *Howard Gardner Intelligence Schema Helps Teaching Children with ADHD*. Retrieved from www.northeastbookspublishing.net

- NYSED (2019). *New York State Gradation Pathways*. Retrieved from <http://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/cdos-pathway-regents-or-local-diploma>.
- Ornstein, A. & Hunkins, F. (2017). *Curriculum: Foundations, Principles, and Issues*. Pearson Education.
- Shaw, I. (2003). Ethics in qualitative research and evaluation. *Journal of Social Work* 3(1) 9-29.
- Suriano, C. (2019, July, 24). *Office of Special Education*. [New York State presents areas of needed improvement]. Priority Focus Areas and Projects, New York.
- Saldana, J. (2013). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. SAGE Publications.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research 3rd Edition*. Teachers College Press.
- Spectrum Bakes, (2021, January 23). *Spectrum Bakes, A Recipe for Success*. Stimulus Package. <https://www.spectrumbakes.org/stimulus-package>
- St. John's University. (2019). Vincentian Mission in Education. In 2019-2020 *St. John's University catalog*. Retrieved from <https://www.stjohns.edu/about/history-and-facts/our-mission>
- Sweden, B. Carter, E. & Molfenter, N. (2010). Getting everyone involved: Identifying transition opportunities for youth with severe disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 43(2), 38-39.
- The Nicholas Center (2020). *Core Values*. Retrieved from <https://tncnewyork.org/about>
- Tietjen, M. & Myers, R. (1998). Motivation and job satisfaction. *Journal of Management Decisions*, 36(4), 226-231.
- Trainer, A. Carter, E. Sweden, B. Owens, L. Cole, O. Smith (2011). Perspectives of adolescents with disabilities on summer employment and community experiences. *Journal of Special Education*, 45(3), 157-170.
- United States Department of Labor (2016). *Unemployment rate of people with a disability*. https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2017/unemployment-rate-of-people-with-a-disability-10-point-5-percent-in-2016.htm?view_full
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Vita

Name	Liza A. Laurino-Siegel
Baccalaureate Degree	Bachelor of Science, Long Island University, Greenvale, NY Major: Childhood Education Concentration: Political Science
Date Graduated	May, 2004
Master's Degree	Master of Science, Long Island University, Greenvale, NY Major: Special Education
Date Graduated	May, 2006
Other Degrees and Certificates	Teacher Certification Extensions, Touro College, Bayshore, NY
Date Completed	May, 2011