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A Case Study of Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE Participants and Their Expectations for the Future

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A Case Study of Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE Participants
and Their Expectations for the Future

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of how Eastern Arkansas youth with disabilities and their parents describe their expectations for the future, after participating in the Arkansas PROMISE program. The study sought an understanding of how participants viewed themselves and their expectations for the future, for employment, for participation in higher education, for independent living, and for future financial support. The research used a case study approach, interviewing five students and five parent participants. Participants were asked a series of questions to get an understanding of their experiences, their expectations for the future, and their understanding of the program's impact on their lives. Thematic analysis of the interviews, case management records, and other major documents, yielded five major findings that addressed the central research question guiding this study, which is how did Arkansas PROMISE participants in Eastern Arkansas describe their expectations for the future? Participants had an expectation of success for the future, especially as it relates to employment, while expectations for higher education, independent living and future financial support were low or mixed. Overall, participants viewed the Arkansas PROMISE program as having had an impact on their lives.

The findings suggested Arkansas PROMISE supported the development of self-determination in participants, through its use of learning through experience and interaction with the world. Findings suggested the multiple components offered in Arkansas PROMISE, along with the coordination of services, supported the development of an expectancy for success, especially as it relates to employment. The findings also suggested participation in early employment opportunities for the Eastern Arkansas participants impacted their expectations in employment. Sustained employment impacted participants' expectations for independent living

and future financial success. Findings suggested adult influences supported the development, or nondevelopment, of expectations for success in education, independent living, and future financial support. Further study on the impact of adult mentoring or coaching, and the use of integrated resource teams in the provision of transition supports for students and youth with disabilities, was also suggested.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Most teens would say high school is a season of highs and lows. Relationships form as these young adults make plans for the future. They explore college prospects, or perhaps they get their first job. The pressures of school become a little more challenging as teens begin deciding what's next for their lives. The high school years become a time when students begin to dream big, make plans, and take chances, without truly comprehending the obstacles that lay ahead. However, through support and encouragement from families and friends, many teens find the tools and resources they need to achieve their goals. They take on challenging coursework and imagine the day they will move out on their own. Expectations of success fill the future, with the promise of attainment a guiding motivator.

Is this excitement and expectation somehow disrupted when that same teen has a disability, or comes from a low-income family? Disabilities such as emotional and behavioral disorders are known to amplify the difficulties of transitioning into adulthood. Disabilities may serve as barriers to a youth's socialization. For other youth with disabilities, a lack of support networks hinders the ability to fully participate in society. Youth with disabilities need these supports in order to graduate high school or prepare for college, employment, or independent living. What happens if that same youth lives in the rural Eastern Arkansas, a part of the Delta known for its rows of cotton, rich musical heritage, and deep, unrelenting poverty? Low economic conditions, coupled with the paucity of resources, amplify barriers to the successful transition of youth with disabilities. This is the reality faced by youth with disabilities and their families in the resource poor area known as Eastern Arkansas (Papay & Bambara, 2014; Mamun et al., 2019a; Arkansas Delta, 2021).

PROMISE (Promoting Readiness of Minors in SSI) Model Demonstration Project (MDP) was developed to help 14-to-16 year-old youth with disabilities and their low-income families be successful during their transformative adolescent years (University of Arkansas, 2019). The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) designed and funded PROMISE nationwide in 11 states, creating a program that offered interventions benefitting low-income youth with disabilities and their families (University of Arkansas, 2019), including families in rural Eastern Arkansas. DOE implemented PROMISE using a model demonstration project approach, which integrated evidence or research-based programs and practices to improve child outcomes (Shaver & Wagner, 2013). PROMISE's three primary objectives included the following,

1) Developing and implementing interventions for youth ages 14-16 years on SSI and their families,

2) Developing and establishing formal partnership agreements with state and local agencies that provide supports to youth on SSI and their families,

3) Ensuring youth and their families, as well as partner agencies; participated fully in the evaluation of the program (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

PROMISE was a collaborative effort, with the U.S. Department of Education, Social Security Administration, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Labor participating as national partners (Mamun et al., 2019a), a never-before-seen opportunity to leverage significant federal, state, and local resources for the advancement of transition-age youth (Honeycutt & Livermore, 2018). In Arkansas, the project was administered by the University of Arkansas College of Education and Health Professions, which coordinated local and statewide partnerships, participant recruitment, and service delivery for the $35.7

million grant. The five-year award served 25 Arkansas counties and was the largest grant the University had received at that time (Honeycutt et al., 2018; University of Arkansas, 2019).

This introduction provides the background and context of the Arkansas PROMISE program and includes a description of services offered in the program. The problem statement, a description of the purpose of this research, and the central research questions guiding the study follows. A brief overview of the interpretive framework, research design, rationale and significance are included. This is followed by definitions of key terminology, the researcher's perspectives and assumptions, an overview of limitations and delimitations, and the chapter summary.

Background and Context

PROMISE addressed a critical need to increase employment and educational opportunities among youth with disabilities who were receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), while focusing on collaboration among agencies providing services to those same financially disadvantaged families. Nationwide, a lack of policies mandating coordination of services among state, local and national organizations serving low-income, transition-age youth impacted the achievement of successful outcomes among this target population, particularly in employment (Moreno et al., 2013).

PROMISE also addressed a major challenge facing families of youth with disabilities – the sharing of data among the social service, government, and educational institutions whose programs included supporting the development of transition-age youth. For that population, eligibility for support from one agency, such as the receipt of special education services in local schools, did not guarantee youth were eligible for support from another agency, such as supplemental security income (SSI) or Medicaid. Further, eligibility for help differed based on

how agencies defined disability. State vocational rehabilitation defined disability as either a physical and mental impairment that interfered with an individual's ability to work and which required the individual to have additional assistance from state VR programs to find and sustain employment. Comparably, Social Security Administration's defined disability as either a mental or physical impairment that prevented an individual from working at a "substantial gainful level" (Honeycutt & Livermore, 2018, p. 9), that had lasted or was expected to last more than 12 months, resulting in death. Other rules defining eligibility for disability assistance changed as youth crossed the threshold into adulthood at age 18, a transition that meant youth would no longer be eligible to receive supplemental security income (Honeycutt & Livermore, 2018), a vital source of income for poverty-stricken families. The reassurance of PROMISE was this: youth and their families would have consistent access to all the services of PROMISE and its program partners, regardless of each program partner's conflicting eligibility guidelines. Interagency collaboration and the sharing of data assured this access.

While a nationwide network of vocational rehabilitation programs, workforce development, education, and supplemental training programs offered services ranging from employment and education to supports for transition-age youth, the educational and employment attainment of youth with disabilities seriously lagged behind those of youth without disabilities. Consider the following evidence:

- Most severely disabled special education students have not participated in paid work experiences, contrary to evidence associating its impact with future work activity (Honeycutt & Livermore, 2018).

- In 2012, only 13% of youth receiving special education services participated in school-sponsored work activities (Liu et al., 2018).

- The proportion of youth with an individualized education program (IEP) who participated in work activities outside school dropped from 27% in 2003 to 19% in 2012 (Liu et al., 2018).

- The August 2014, employment rate of youth ages 16 to 19 years-old with a disability was 17% compared to 30% of youth with no disability (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018).

- Sixty-five percent (65%) of parents of youth with an IEP reported their child received some type of supportive service at school, such as tutoring or interpreter service. However, the proportion of parents reporting they provided weekly homework help declined seven percentage points to 55% from 2003 to 2012 (Liu et al., 2018).

The 2015 US Census Bureau report showed 15% of rural Americans had a disability of any kind (Hodapp & Fidler, 2017). According to the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disabilities for Youth (2009), youth with disabilities were three times more likely to live in poverty as adults and were disproportionally impacted by barriers that made it difficult to achieve personal and career goals. They were less likely to enroll in postsecondary education, and for those who did, had lower completion rates (Newman et al., 2011). For those living in rural areas, they faced economic hardships that led to increased stress, had poorer nutrition choices, and were at increased risk of substance abuse and depression. They lacked access to safe, affordable housing, were rarely able to find quality behavioral health, and lived in areas where formal supports and infrastructure that may positively support development, were in short supply (Hodapp & Fidler, 2017). Federal legislation mandated secondary schools provide a range of services and support preparing youth with disabilities for post-secondary success. However,

once a student graduated, the burden of advocating for similar services was the responsibility of the youth, further hindering the completion of their higher education goal (Newman et al., 2011).

Nationally, the Department of Education funded six PROMISE programs covering 11 states, serving more than 13,000 youth with disabilities and their families receiving SSI (Nye-Lengerman et al., 2019). Services focused on increasing the educational attainment of youth, increasing the employment and wage-earning opportunities of youth and families, increasing household income, and reducing the number of individuals who relied on Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Arkansas PROMISE provided its program to 2,000 youth with disabilities from 25 of Arkansas' 75 counties. Table 1 shows the total number of participants enrolled per region (University of Arkansas, 2019; Honeycutt et al., 2018).

Table 1
Arkansas PROMISE by the Numbers

Regions	Counties Served	Total Number of Participants
Central	Garland, Saline, White, Lonoke, Faulkner	188
Eastern	Greene, Craighead, Poinsett, Mississippi, Crittenden, Saint Frances, Phillips	245
Northwest	Benton, Washington, Crawford, Sebastian	158
Pulaski	Pulaski	170
Southern	Jefferson, Desha, Chicot, Drew, Ouachita, Columbia, Union, Miller	179
5 Regions	25 Counties	940 Participants

PROMISE was both a model demonstration project and a research project. It collected data comparing both services and outcomes among youth and their families who were assigned to a control group to services and outcomes among participants who were assigned to a treatment group. The random assignment of youth and their families to either a control or a treatment

group occurred immediately after enrollment into the program (Fraker et al., 2014). Control

group participants received services that were usually available in the community while

treatment group participants received a range of services and supports only available through

PROMISE. The program enrolled 940 treatment group participants, who received services that

supported their education and career goals (University of Arkansas, 2019; Honeycutt et al.,

2018). Arkansas PROMISE was also distinct in its provision of coordinated case management

services and paid work opportunities. Other interventions offered included individualized public

benefits counseling, financial education, educational summer camps, vocational evaluations,

career readiness training, monthly youth and family engagement trainings, and discretionary case

management funding for participants (Honeycutt et al., 2018).

Recruitment

Arkansas PROMISE drew from a Social Security Administration list of 9,943 eligible

Arkansas youth to recruit participants. Recruitment staff conducted direct outreach to those

youth and their families. Potential participants mailed enrollment packets, with recruitment staff

providing follow-up phone calls. Recruitment staff also conducted outreach events, coordinated

recruitment with other agencies, and conducted targeted outreach in geographic areas where

larger numbers of eligible youth resided. Ultimately, 20% of those eligible for social security

were recruited into the program (Honeycutt et al., 2018). Mathematica, a national research and

policy agency contracted to provide research and evaluation of PROMISE, created a web-based

system to aid staff with the random assignment of youth into a control or treatment group. After

recruiting a participant, Arkansas PROMISE staff accessed the Random Assignment System

(RAS) and inputted personal information for each youth and their families. The system validated

the information, then, based on customized algorithms, randomly assigned each youth and their

family to a control or treatment group. The program then generated a letter, which notified the

participant of their selection and designation (Honeycutt et al., 2018). Of the 2,000 enrolled,

1,805 were assigned to Mathematica's research sample, which included all evaluation enrollees

assigned to a treatment or control group. Of that number, 904 were assigned to the treatment

group and 901 were assigned to the control group. Research staff classified the remaining 195

students as non-research participants due to their siblings' enrollment in the program. However,

122 of those non-research youth were included in the same treatment group as their siblings,

while the other 72 non-research youth were included in the control group. Arkansas PROMISE

staff also requested the inclusion of one additional non-research youth in the treatment group.

This brought the total number of Arkansas PROMISE treatment research and non-research youth

to 1,027. Among the treatment group, 940 were considered program participants, or those youth,

parents, or guardians who had at least one substantive in-person meeting with staff or who

attended a monthly training after enrolling. Non-research youth were not included in

Mathematica's impact analysis discussed later in this chapter. Youth with disabilities in the

control group were not disclosed or accessible to PROMISE staff and were unable to receive

interventions offered to treatment group participants. Control group participants also received a

letter along with a list of readily available resources in the community (Honeycutt et al., 2018,

Mamun et al., 2019a).

Staffing

Through the provision of a coordinated, integrated systems of interventions, Arkansas

PROMISE's intent was to create favorable conditions for ensuring positive educational,

employment and financial outcomes for low-income youth and their families, whose lives had

been distinctively impacted by poverty and disability. Those favorable conditions included hiring

50 case managers (called connectors) to support participants' transition through high school and into adulthood. The connectors facilitated monthly trainings for youth, their parents, and siblings. They served as an advocate for the youth and their families by attending school and community meetings, participated on an integrated resource team, and ensured program engagement through regular, in-person contact with the youth and their families. Arkansas PROMISE connectors served as the primary point of contact for PROMISE participants, with each staff member having a caseload of no more than 20 participants (Honeycutt et al., 2018).

Connectors identified barriers to student and family participation and engagement in Arkansas PROMISE. Those barriers included lack of transportation, lack of resources or instability in the home, incarceration, and family disengagement. To boost engagement and to track youth who had become disengaged, the program implemented a new tracking system. This system defined engaged youth as those who met in person with staff, and attended a monthly training, or started a work experience within the previous two months. The system defined partially engaged youth as those who met with staff within the last two months, or had attended a monthly training, or started a work experience within the last two months. The system defined not engaged youth as those who attended no in-person meetings, did not start any work experience, or did not attend any monthly trainings in the last two months. By August 2017, 27% of youth were engaged; 38% were partially engaged and 35% were not engaged. In the Eastern Region, 22% of youth were considered engaged and 44.5% were partially engaged. Engagement of youth in other areas was 23.4% in Central, 27.4% in Southern, 30% in Pulaski, and 27.4% in Southern (Honeycutt et al., 2018).

After reaching recruitment goals, PROMISE repurposed the positions of the recruitment manager and the four recruitment specialists to support youth retention in the program. Each

retention specialist served in the primary role of ensuring youth and their families maintained active engagement levels in the program. They also administered an incentive program to encourage active engagement. In 2017, more staff were hired to provide technical assistance to connectors, transition specialists, job coaches, and employers (Honeycutt et al. 2018).

Summer Work Experience

Additionally, Arkansas PROMISE contracted with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) to provide 10 transition specialists, whose primary job was to ensure a work-based learning experience for each PROMISE youth. Each transition specialist, whose caseload averaged 82 participants, was responsible for evaluating the youth's job readiness and interests through career exploration exercises. Through vocational assessments, staff identified employment opportunities and job supports the participants would need in the development of soft skills for on-the-job success. The program's goal was for each youth participant to have two paid summer work experiences, with participants earning competitive wages while working at least 200 hours in a job that related to their particular career interest. For each youth who participated in summer work, staff members assessed their need for on-the-job support. That support came in the form of job coaches, who provided on-the-job instruction, encouragement, and problem solving for working youth, and whose support faded over time as the youth's work progressed. ARS funds were used to pay PROMISE participants' wages during their summer work experiences (Honeycutt et al., 2018).

By August of 2017, participants in the Eastern Region had the lowest number of youth (60.8%) who achieved a summer work experience. The numbers were significantly lower (21.2%) for those who achieved two or more summer work experiences. In other areas, 77.8% of

Northwest, 72.9% of Central, 69.8% of Southern, and 64.7% of Pulaski region youth achieved at least one summer work experience (Honeycutt et al., 2018).

Summer Camp

The program also offered a five-night residential summer camps, held on the campuses of the University of Central Arkansas at Conway in 2016 and the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith in 2017 and 2018. Summer camp offered academic success training, socialization activities, and education classes around employment and independent living (University of Arkansas, 2019; Honeycutt et al., 2018).

Benefits Counseling, Case Management, and Referrals

PROMISE also provided individualized public benefits counseling and financial education, and supported each youth's high school graduation goals, providing access to resources supporting postsecondary education. The program used one-on-one and family-centered approaches to case management and supplemental training. The focus on service provision to both youth and families had as its goal the improvement of participants' expectations, advocacy, and long-term outcomes. Each family could access up to $400 annually in discretionary case management funds, which offset emergencies, including such things as transportation, utility bills or school supplies. The program also provided supplemental funding for graduation expenses for high school seniors. In the Eastern Region, by August of 2017, 55.9% of participants received case management funds, averaging $483.70 per participant. Comparatively, 71.8% of Central region participants received case management funds averaging $650; 77.8% of Northwest region participants received case management funds, averaging $639.60; 51.2% of Pulaski region participants received case management funds, averaging $471; 40.8% of Southern region participants received case management funds, averaging $398.40.

Needs outside the scope of the PROMISE program were referred to one of four resources:

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas Department

of Human Services, higher education, job services such as Workforce Investment or Job Corps,

or a referral source generically grouped as other. The most frequently used referral was to ARS.

The percentage of youth referred there was 33.5% in the Central region, 62.4% in the Eastern

Region, 70.9% in Northwest, 55.9% in Pulaski, and 61.5% in Southern (Honeycutt et al., 2018).

Monthly Trainings

Monthly trainings provided opportunities for youth to connect with their peers and staff

mentors, participate in activities related to resources, benefits, career, and educational interests,

be recognized for their accomplishments, and receive incentives for their participation. Monthly

trainings covered such things as self-advocacy and independent living. Arkansas PROMISE had

a goal of youth attending 75% of monthly trainings. By August 2017, only 13% of all youth had

achieved this target. By August 2017, at least 31% of all youth had attended half of the monthly

trainings. In the Eastern Region, 24% of youth attended monthly trainings, compared to 21.1% in

Central, 27.9% in Northwest, 23.8% in Southern, and 14.9% in Pulaski. The percentage of

Eastern Region youth attending benefits counseling monthly training was 56.3%, compared to

66.5% in the Northwest, 60.3% in Southern, 54.3% in Central, and 37.6% in Pulaski. The

percentage of Eastern Region youth attending financial management planning was 49.8%,

compared to 48.9% in the Central region, 44.9% in Northwest, 43.6% in Southern, and 41.2% in

Pulaski. To increase attendance in trainings, PROMISE added an incentive program. Participants

could also win prizes when they attended the monthly trainings. (Honeycutt & Livermore, 2018;

Honeycutt et al., 2018).

Arc Self-Determination Scale

Upon enrollment in the program and two additional times throughout the life of the program, each youth had the opportunity to complete The Arc's Self-Determination Scale. Michael Wehmeyer and Kathy Kelchner developed the scale for The Arc of the United States, a national policy and advocacy organization for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Honeycutt et al., 2018). The Arc Scale is a youth's self-reported measure of their self-determination. Four broad categories of autonomy, self-regulation, psychological empowerment, and self-realization determine a student's self-determination score (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). The Scale is based on a framework proposed by Wehmeyer, which defined self-determination as "acting as the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence or interference" (Wehmeyer, 1995, p.7)

Wehmeyer's four key indicators of self-determination included whether the individual behaved autonomously, whether the person self-regulated their conduct; whether the individual acted in response to events in a psychologically empowered manner, and whether the youth behaved in a way that indicated self-realization. The four key indicators of self-determined behavior showed up in youth in several ways, but was most recognized as choice-making, self-advocacy, independent living, and risk taking, decision-making, problem-solving, goal setting, task performance, self-observation and evaluation, internal locus of control, positive attributions of efficacy and outcome expectancy, self-awareness, self-understanding and knowledge and self-instruction (Wehmeyer, 1995). Wehmeyer's framework of self-determination is explored in Chapter 2.

With 72 questions, the Arc Scale helped PROMISE staff assess youth participants to determine their self-beliefs. The tool was to be used in cooperation with educators and mentors to determine a youth's gifts and areas for improvement and used to evaluate their long-term development needs for self-determination. The Scale has been field tested and validated and requires a 4th grade reading ability to complete. The Arc Scale has been considered a useful tool for understanding the curriculum, instruction and learning environments that improve the development of self-determination in youth with disabilities (Wehmeyer, 1995).

PROMISE Plans

Sixty-two percent (62%) of Arkansas PROMISE youth completed the Arc Scale at least once. Connectors used results from each youth's Arc Scale, along with an assessment of each youth's strengths, needs and resource networks, to complete a PROMISE plan, a living document that captured each youth's employment and educational goals, and a strategy for achieving those goals. Most youth (90%) in the treatment group completed a PROMISE plan, identifying goals related to their career and educational interests. By August 2017, among participants in the Eastern Region, 79.6% had completed the PROMISE plan. Parents could also complete a PROMISE plan. The percentage of parents or guardians who completed the plan in the Eastern Region was 76.3%; compared to 91.5% in Central, 93.7% in Northwest, 95.9% in Pulaski, and 83.8% in Southern (Honeycutt et al., 2018).

PROMISE Evaluations

Research suggests programs that included the following educational and career development activities will lead to successful outcomes for youth with disabilities:

- High-quality standards-based education,
- Knowledge of career opportunities and participation in work-based learning,

- Development of social, civic and leadership skills,

- Supportive relationships with adults,

- Ability to safely connect with peers,

- Having goals for career development,

- Resources to support the transition into adulthood, including reliable transportation

(National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, 2009; Shogren et al., 2015).

Social Security Administration, which served as the lead agency for the national PROMISE evaluation, contracted with Mathematica, a national policy and research organization, to conduct a nine-year evaluation of short and long-term impacts of PROMISE. The evaluation design included three components:

1. A process analysis, which documented and analyzed program activities and the extent of implementation measures. The analysis also examined the relationship among partner organizations, assessed how interventions were delivered, identified which interventions offered in the program may have influenced participants and offered lessons learned (Fraker et al., 2014; Mamun et al., 2019a).

2. An impact analysis, which examined the extent to which the program achieved its intended short-term and long-term impacts. The impact analysis, which was based on the random assignment design, compared whether youth and families in the treatment group received more and better services and achieved better outcomes than the participants in the control group. The impact evaluation assessed outcomes in receipt of transition services, education and training, employment and earnings, self-determination and expectancy, health, and health insurance, use of Medicaid and economic well-being (Fraker et al., 2014; Mamun et al., 2019a).

3. A cost-benefit analysis, which determined whether outcomes and benefits of the program were significant enough to justify program expenditures (Fraker et al., 2014; Mamun et al., 2019a).

Problem Statement

The purpose of the Mathematica interim impact study was to evaluate PROMISE'S success in meeting its goals. Specifically, the central research questions of the interim impact study asked:

1. Did PROMISE participants receive more and better services than participants in the control group?

2. Did PROMISE achieve its intended outcomes in educational attainment, employment credentials, employment, SSI payments, other public benefits, and total household income?

3. Were PROMISE program interventions more effective for some youth than for others?

4. Which program features were associated with the achievement of goals of the PROMISE program?

5. Were the benefits of PROMISE large enough to justify its expense?

The impact study analyzed data from two surveys, administered separately to both youth and parents. For youth, the survey measured impacts in seven areas: receipt of transition services, education and training, employment and earnings, self-determination and expectancy, health, and health insurance, use of Medicaid, and economic well-being. The parent survey measured impacts in four areas: family member receipt of services, parent education and training, parent employment and earnings, and family economic well-being (Mamun et al.,

2019b). The study reviewed administrative records from the Social Security Administration, the state vocational rehabilitation agency and Medicaid, which provided information on social security payments, household earnings, participation, and receipt of services in the state's vocational rehabilitation program, and Medicaid enrollment and expenditures (Mamun et al., 2019a; Mamun et al., 2019b; Fraker et al., 2014; CyBulski et al., 2014).

For youth, a composite self-determination score was determined from responses to 20 of the 72 questions found in Wehmeyer's Arc Self-Determination Scale. Those questions were derived from three of the four indicators on the scale's framework for self-determination: if youth acted autonomously, if youth responded to events in a "psychologically empowered" manner, and if youth acted in a self-realizing manner. Youth had to answer five of the seven questions on autonomy, four of the six questions on psychological empowerment, and five of the seven questions on self-realization to receive a score. The composite scale did not conform to the validated measure of self-determination, which include four essential characteristics: 1) autonomous functioning, 2) self-regulation, 3) psychological empowerment, and 4) self-realization. The Mathematica survey only included three measures of self-determination: 1) autonomous functioning, 3) psychological empowerment, and 4) self-realization, excluding 2) self-regulation (Mamun et al., 2019b).

The survey asked youth a series of binary questions regarding their expectations:

- Whether they expected to receive a high school diploma or GED.
- Whether they expected to achieve an education greater than a high school diploma or GED.
- Whether they expected to live independently or with a partner by the age of 25.

- Whether they expected to be able to support themselves without help from their families or from government benefits by the age of 25.

- Whether they expected to be employed in a paid job by the age of 25.

The survey asked youth to choose reasons for expecting non-employment at the age of 25, including:

- Disability or health

- Undependable transportation

- Unable to find a job

- Enrollment in school or training

- Workplace not accessible

- Risk of losing benefits

- Not wanting to work

- Others not believing they could work

- Other reasons

The survey asked parents a series of binary questions regarding their expectations of their youth at the time of the survey:

- Whether they expected youth to continue schooling beyond high school.

- Whether they expected youth to live on their own or with a partner by the age of 25.

- Whether they expected youth by the age of 25 to be able to support themselves without family help or government benefits.

- Whether they expected youth by the age of 25 to be employed in a paid job.

- Whether they believed it important for youth to live independently, be financially independent or to be employed in a paid job.

- Whether they expected youth to complete chores, including preparing breakfast or lunch, completing laundry, cleaning rooms, or buying items at a store (Mamun et al., 2019b).

The study examined the impact of PROMISE on eligible youth and their families, comparing outcomes in the treatment group to outcomes in the control group. Impacts were estimated using ordinary least-squares regression models for continuous outcomes, logistic regression models for binary outcomes and multinomial logit models for categorical outcomes (Mamun et al., 2019a).

The study found Arkansas PROMISE had no impact on youth's self-determination, with youth in the treatment and control groups both averaging the same score on the composite self-determination scale. Data analysis found the program had no impact on youth's expectations regarding post-secondary education, financial independence, the likelihood of living independently or having a paid job at the age of 25. The quantitative analysis of the parent survey responses revealed Arkansas PROMISE had no impact on the parent's expectations of youth living independently at the age of 25 or whether parents believed it was important that youth eventually live independently (Mamun et al., 2019a).

Research indicates a youth's attitude or perception of themselves, and the expectations of parents, are both critical factors in the youth's successful transition to early adulthood, including achieving employment or other post-school outcomes (Blustein et al., 2016; Carter et al., 2013; Carter & Lunsford, 2005; Papay & Bambara, 2014; Test et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2007). It is unclear whether the findings from the Mathematica study indicated a failed intervention or whether the manifestation of self-determination and expectancy required more time for development. Enrollment in PROMISE began in April 2014 and concluded in April 2016. The

survey fielding began April 2016 and concluded March 2018 (CyBulski, et al., 2014; Honeycutt et al., 2018; Mamun, et al., 2019a; Mamun et al., 2019b).

Wehmeyer (1995) warns against drawing conclusions from low self-determination scores based solely on Arc Scale results, without also understanding the perspectives of the students and their reasons for the scores. He described the scale as a tool designed to give youth with disabilities a voice and an opportunity to have further conversations about interventions that encouraged the development of self-determination. Further, aggregating scores across large groups tended to minimize individual performance and did not take into consideration one's circumstances, such as malaise or apathy, which may have influenced responses (Wehmeyer, 1995).

No qualitative data were collected regarding the program's outcomes. Therefore, no research has illuminated the stories that participants and parents would tell about their experiences in Arkansas PROMISE. These stories could provide context and insights about the program that a quantitative survey could not capture. This qualitative research is both timely and appropriate, presenting an opportunity to gather the personal perspectives of Arkansas PROMISE youth in Eastern Arkansas, after interventions in the program have concluded. This study intends to provide a rich understanding of contextual experiences of Arkansas PROMISE participants and the program's impact.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop an in-depth understanding of how youth with disabilities and their parents in the Eastern Region of the Arkansas PROMISE program described their expectations for the future, after participating in Arkansas PROMISE. The study seeks an understanding of how participants viewed themselves and their expectations for the future, for

employment, for participation in higher education, independent living, and future financial support.

A quantitative evaluation, conducted 18 months after the participants in the five counties enrolled in the program, found no positive impact on participants' sense of self-determination, expectancy, autonomy, psychological empowerment, or self-realization (Mamun et al., 2019a). These findings were significant considering the investment of resources and program activities Arkansas PROMISE aimed at increasing participants' self-determination and expectancy. They also raise questions about what the program contributed to youth with disabilities and their families. This study explored how program participants in Eastern Arkansas described their experiences in the Arkansas PROMISE program. Specifically, the study examined participant's experiences, expectations for the future, and their understanding of the program's impact on their lives.

Research Questions

The central research question guiding this study is: How do Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE program participants describe their expectations for the future, after participating in the Arkansas PROMISE program?

The following are research sub questions for students:

- R.Q.Y.1. How do participants describe their expectations about Arkansas PROMISE?

- R.Q.Y.2. How do participants describe their expectations about employment?

- R.Q Y.3. How do participants describe their expectations about higher education?

- R.Q.Y.4. How do participants describe their expectations about independent living?

- R.Q.Y.5. How do participants describe their expectations about future financial support?

The following are research sub questions for parent/guardian participants:

- R.Q.P.1. How do parents describe their expectations about Arkansas PROMISE?

- R.Q.P.2. How do parents describe their expectations about employment?

- R.Q P.3. How parents describe their expectation about higher education?

- R.Q.P.4. How parents describe their expectations about independent living?

- R.Q.P.5. How do parents describe their expectations about future financial support?

Interpretive Framework

Social Constructivist Theory enabled this study to fully explore the lived experiences of high school students with disabilities transitioning from secondary education and provided an understanding of the cognitive and psychosocial developmental skills participants described as having to achieve their goals. The Social Constructivist framework, combined with a case study methodology, helps researchers develop a deep understanding of the complexity of views and perspectives of study participants, and the meaning they derive from their experiences. This study explored participants' subjective experiences with Arkansas PROMISE, given their unique social experiences, and the passage of time and cultural norms they had experienced since participating in the program (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Design

Case studies are a form of qualitative research that provide detailed information about a particular program, individual or group. Use of this research methodology can be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive in nature and is valuable for generating an in-depth understanding of the world around us or explaining why a particular event or situation occurred. With its use of multiple sources of data and thick, rich descriptions, case studies allow for a holistic interpretation of real-life, contemporary situations. This research approach was also useful for

drawing comparisons among the diverse lived experiences of individuals who all experienced the same phenomenon. Case study provides knowledge utilization, giving an understanding how and why something occurred (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Colorado State University, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 1981).

This study sought to develop an understanding of the expectations Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE participants had about various aspects of their lives and their futures after participating in the program. Research was bounded by the participation of the Arkansas PROMISE model demonstration project from 2013-2018. Using a multiple-case design, this research sought to develop an understanding based on perspectives of participants in the Eastern Region of Arkansas PROMISE.

The study used purposive sampling to choose participants, targeting participants who completed PROMISE plans, participated in summer employment, monthly trainings, and other resources provided by the program. Participants were contacted by phone and email requesting their participation in the study (Ishak & Abu Baker, 2014). Each participant comprised a case. As cases were completed and new data and concepts emerged from other cases, data was compared, reinterpreted, and incorporated with previously discovered data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Yin, 1981).

This study's primary research method consisted of one-on-one interviews with program participants. The study interviewed both youth and parents. Questions were piloted with non-research participants in central and Southern Arkansas. Secondary source data from program reports, participant evaluations, case management records, and educational data were also accessed to provide further information about the research question. Information from these

sources were used to develop within-case themes, followed by a thematic cross-case analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser, 2008).

This study sought to understand how participants described their expectations for the future, an understanding generated from the perspectives of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using a qualitative research design gave a holistic view of the participants' lived experiences in PROMISE and encouraged a deep appreciation for the complex social arrangements that framed the program (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles et al., 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Rationale and Significance

This study fills a gap in practice identified in the problem statement by providing first-hand accounts from program participants their perspectives of the interventions that lead to an expectancy for success post-high school. The previous Mathematica study provided a limited view of participant's perceptions of expectations for success. The study used an incomplete Arc Scale of Determination assessment, which formed the foundation of the study, and which did not fully address the four essential characteristics of self-determination. However, this research developed a detailed, in-depth understanding of participant's perception of the value of Arkansas PROMISE as it relates to the individual development of expectations and self-determination and draws completely from the experiences and perspectives of the youth and their parents.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 mandated high academic standards and individualized education plans for youth with disabilities, yet access to and completion of higher education among this population lags behind youth in the general population (Carter, et al., 2010). Legislation puts the responsibility of the adolescent's education, employment, and independence on the student. Research supports promotion of self-

determination in youth with disabilities as a means of empowering youth to make stronger life choices related to their careers and lives after high school (Izzo & Lamb, 2002); therefore, the need for self-determination, expectancy, self-advocacy, and skill development is critical for transition-age youth. The lack of skills in these areas is a barrier to their post high school success.

This study identified effective practices that lead to an expectancy of success in employment, education, and independent living of youth with disabilities, especially among youth who live in particularly economically depressed, resource-strapped areas of Arkansas. The results of the study may provide significant information regarding the development of curriculum and training that can assist educators in identifying areas of instructional emphasis that may support youth with disabilities to successfully transition into employment and participate in post-secondary education, despite social and economic conditions hindering success.

This study may contribute to the professional development of instructors of transition-age youth by providing first-hand accounts from parents and youth with disabilities conditions that lead to empowerment of transition-age youth. This study may strengthen pre-service and in-service teacher preparation at the secondary level, promote curriculum application and may provide guidance to vocational rehabilitation transition specialists, parents and workforce development and community resource providers. This study may also benefit the University of Arkansas College of Education and Health Professions in its ongoing efforts to extend the current knowledge surrounding promising practices that improve the postsecondary outcomes of transition-age youth. This study may also contribute to the historical understanding of Arkansas PROMISE.

The PROMISE MDP provided a framework for developing and improving collaboration among statewide public, private and nonprofit organizations, which may have led to improved vocational rehabilitation outcomes for youth, families, and communities. Findings from this report can also be useful in supporting the development of policies and procedures affecting federal and state service delivery of transition services.

Definition of Key Terminology

The following terms and their definitions assist in the understanding of this study:

- Self-determination is the power or will to make conscious choices, motivating individuals to overcome barriers to the achievement of their goals (Wehmeyer et al., 2007).

- Expectancy is a belief a person has about how well they will perform on an immediate or longer-term task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

- Causal Agency is purposeful or intentional action and behavior a person engages in the achievement of their goals (Wehmeyer, 2004).

Shogren et al. (2018) defined self-determination as a "dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the causal agent in one's life. Self-determined people (i.e., causal agents) act in service to freely chosen goals" (p. 166). The development of self-determination is influenced by cognitive ability, personality, environment, access to resources and opportunities, and instructional strategies that include self-advocacy, goal attainment, self-awareness, problem solving and decision making, along with the opportunity to be involved in educational and transition planning (Lee et al., 2012).

Wigfield and Eccles (2000) expectancy-value theory of achievement (Shapiro & Ulrich, 2002) defined expectancies as a youth's belief about how well they will perform on an

immediate task or a task in the long-term future. Albert Bandura defined the psychological concept of self-efficacy as "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior to produce a given outcome" (Lee et al., 2012, p. 154) which formed the foundational understanding of expectancy, when an individual trusts that a particular conduct or activity will lead to a desired outcome (Lee et al., 2012). Expectations for the future included perspectives of youth regarding their future adult roles and their academic, employment, and independent living aspirations (Wagner et al., 2007). Wright (2017) specifically defined expectations to include the parent's depiction of their adolescent's goals in employment, independent living, and postsecondary education.

Causal agency suggested a person engaged in intentional actions and behaviors to achieve an expected end, which supported the achievement of the person becoming self-determined (Wehmeyer, 2004). Persons who are causal agents act with the specific intent of accomplishing a particular goal, creating change, and having an effect (Shogren et al., 2015). Individuals who are causal agents are intrinsically motivated rather than motivated by extrinsic sources. Causal agency theory includes any event, behavior or action that may cause a person to become more self-determined. It is not limited to a particular set of behavioral events, but instead may include any function that causes the individual to achieve their goals and become self-determined (Wehmeyer, 2004).

The Researcher

The researcher has prior experience working on the PROMISE Model Demonstration Project from November 2016 through September 2019. During that time, the researcher served as Director of the University of Arkansas Center for the Utilization of Rehabilitation Resources in Education, Networking, Training and Service (UA CURRENTS). CURRENTS PROMISE

training staff provided training to PROMISE staff and participants, developed the curriculum and instruction for monthly trainings for youth and provided ongoing webinars and professional development for staff. For PROMISE, the researchers' primary role was administrator and supervisor of those staff who were directly involved in PROMISE, as well as providing on-site support, technical assistance and expertise during monthly trainings, summer camps and professional development. Some of those on-site support visits occurred in the Eastern Arkansas region. While CURRENTS did not have a formal signed agreement with the UA College of Education and Health Professions, the unit was a sub-grantee on the program. UA CURRENTS served a major role in provision of the summer camps, providing general coordination and operational support, event coordinator, and group logistics for PROMISE staff. UA CURRENTS staff served on the leadership team of Arkansas PROMISE.

From the researcher's lens, all of these were positive, uplifting experiences, which included opportunities to connect with youth, parents, and staff who participated in PROMISE. While doing this study, the researcher acknowledged her position of power, privilege, and influence. Given her role in curriculum and instruction, she understood this may have influenced the responses of research participants. To counter this, the researcher used a critically reflective process to consider how her personal biases may have influenced her understanding of the responses of each research participant. Former staff from the Arkansas PROMISE program served as peer reviewers, evaluated preliminary findings, and provided feedback on the development of theoretical constructs. The researcher also used a journal to record personal reactions to interviews, to capture reflections on research findings, and to record her train of thought when engaging in coding. Reviewing these helped limit the impact of personal bias.

Professionally, the researcher serves as the Director of the University of Arkansas CURRENTS, a role that comprises administration, supervision, and management of sub-grantee projects, as well as trainer, consultant and conference and event planner. The researcher's primary customers are vocational rehabilitation professionals in public, private and higher education institutions. The researcher may at times work alongside other researchers, consultants, and government employees who served on other nationally funded PROMISE projects.

As an employee, alumnus, and a student at the University of Arkansas, the researcher acknowledges her role and subliminal influence Arkansas PROMISE has on her perspective in shaping her research question and the desire to demonstrate the success of the program. To aid in the reflective process and to acknowledge the part she played in the research process, she kept a research journal to help deepen her awareness around critical issues that may have impacted the development of ideas and perspectives and to examine personal biases and assumptions.

Researcher Assumptions

Activities with PROMISE youth ended in 2018. While it is assumed youth shared only their experiences and the activities they participated in while in PROMISE, the length of time since they last participated in activities may have caused participants to have trouble recalling specifics of the program or the order in which they occurred. It is assumed the reality of each participant is independent of one another and socially constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and will be different from the reality of other participants.

One-on-one interviews were conducted virtually using the Zoom platform. During each interview. Ample time in the interviews were allowed for participants to feel comfortable sharing their stories. As a researcher and former PROMISE staff who may have experienced interaction

with some research participants, it is assumed youth provided answers to questions they feel were beneficial to the study.

Limitations

This study's use of case study methodology constrains its ability to generalize results to the larger population in the same way a statistical analysis may be generalizable. The study collects perspectives of participants from the Eastern Region of the program. Because of their unique perspectives, results from the case study may be difficult to generalize.

Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to understand how Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE program participants described their expectations for the future, after participating in the Arkansas PROMISE program. This study sought to understand participant perspectives as it related to their expectations for the future, for employment, for participation in higher education, and for independent living. The study's intent was to understand how participants viewed themselves and their futures after participating in the program. The study was not directly designed to understand the program's impact, if any. This study did not capture data from all eleven national PROMISE programs and did not provide a review all 940 Arkansas PROMISE youth participants. However, this does not infringe upon the ability of the study to develop the necessary conclusions, nor does it render those conclusions invalid.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the challenges faced by youth with disabilities and the difficulty of obtaining successful outcomes in education, independent living, and employment. This chapter provided an overview of the purpose and rationale of the PROMISE Model Demonstration Project and the range of services and activities designed to improve

successful outcomes among this target population. This chapter presented evidence justifying the

need for the study. The following chapter will present a review of literature related to transition-

age youth, self-determination, and expectancy, along with the interpretive framework for the

study.

CHAPTER 2

Background Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of how youth with disabilities and their parents described their expectations for the future, after participating in the Arkansas PROMISE program. The study pursued an understanding of how participants viewed themselves and their expectations for the future, expectations for employment, expectations for participation in higher education, expectations for independent living, and expectations for future financial success.

This chapter's literature review presents an overview of the construct of self-determination, its history and its relevance to transition-age youth, an introduction to Wehmeyer's framework for self-determination, and a brief overview of each of the component elements that comprise the functional model of self-determination. The chapter includes a review of literature related to causal agency and expectancy and their roles in influencing self-determination. An examination of the theoretical frameworks guiding the study follows, concluding with the summary.

Self-determination

Self-determination is considered an important educational outcome for all students, both those with and without disabilities. Research has shown a positive correlation between self-determination and desirable community outcomes, including achieving integrated employment, living independently, achieving higher education goals, and living a more satisfying adult life. Researchers and educators agree promotion of self-determination in the classroom is a best

practice (Browder et al., 2001; Carter et al., 2013; Wehmeyer, 2015; Wehmeyer, 2007; Shogren et al., 2018).

Researchers' view self-determination as a multifaceted disposition used to predict or explain a person's behavior. The behaviors that make-up self-determination include a combination of interrelated components, such as knowledge and skills, a belief in the ability to achieve one's goals, choice and decision making, self-regulation and internal locus of control (Chou, et al., 2017; Wehmeyer, 1997; Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Wehmeyer, 2007). Self-determined individuals have autonomy, have a sense of confidence in their activities, and have a sense of social connectedness to the activity (Dutta et al., 2019). Other research indicates three distinguishing features comprise self-determined behavior: 1) volitional action, which includes setting goals and making choices based on personal preferences; 2) agentic action, which includes acting with the intent of achieving one's goals, and 3) action-control belief, which includes the belief that one has the skills to achieve one's goals. Researchers agree self-determination is a construct best determined by documenting proxy actions and behaviors; it cannot be directly observed (Shogren et al., 2018; Wehmeyer, 2007).

Researchers vary in their descriptions of the essential, interrelated components of self-determination, the distinguishing characteristics that define the self-determined student. Table 2 provides researcher findings of the various component elements of self-determination.

Table 2

Component Elements of Self-Determination

Martin & Huber Marshall, 1995	Wehmeyer, 1995	Loman et al., 2010	Carter et al., 2013
	Choice Making	Choice / Decision Making	Choice Making
Decision Making	Decision Making		Decision Making
	Goal Setting	Goal Setting	Goal Setting
	Problem Solving	Problem Solving	Problem Solving
Self-Advocacy	Self-advocacy and leadership	Self-advocacy / leadership	Self-Advocacy & Leadership
Self-Awareness	Self-Awareness		Self-Awareness & Self-Knowledge
Self-evaluation	Self-observation, evaluation, and reinforcement	Self-monitoring, self- instruction, self-evaluation	Self-Management & Self-Regulation
Adjustment	Self-instruction		
Self-Efficacy	Positive attributions of efficacy and outcome expectancy	Self-delivered reinforcement	
	Self-knowledge		
Independent Performance	Independence, Risk Taking and Safety	Dignity of Risk	
	Internal Locus of Control		
		Social Capital	
		Social Inclusion	
		Enriched Environment	

Because components of self-determined behavior are interrelated, research shows instructional

methods focusing on only one aspect of self-determination, such as programs that commonly

address self-advocacy, leadership, or goal setting, are not enough. Instructional interventions

using a multi-layered component leads to the best achievement of self-determined behavior
(Chou, et al., 2017; Wehmeyer, et al., 2012).

Historical Understanding of Self-Determination

Self-determination is a construct associated with political, philosophical, and
psychological disciplines (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer, 1999). In the political realm, self-
determination refers to the right of a nation to govern itself. In reference to psychological well-
being, self-determination refers to theories of personality and the intrinsic sources of energy that
contribute to a person's motivational drive. The psychological concept of self-determination is
rooted in the philosophical doctrine of determinism, which states all behavior is the effect of a
preceding cause. Researchers Ryan and Deci (2000) introduced self-determination theory (SDT)
to distinguish between those intrinsic and extrinsic forces that motivate individuals to pursue
their goals. Their research found an individual's need for relatedness, autonomy, and competence
were basic drivers of self-motivation and engagement. Intrinsic motivation is central to SDT,
which states a person who is self-determined has both the capacity and the need to pursue their
desires (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer, 1997; Wehmeyer, 1999; Wehmeyer, 2007; Ryan &
Deci, 2000).

As an educational outcome, self-determination builds on the psychological construct and
refers to an individual's voluntary action – their internally motivated awareness and pursuit of
personal goals. It includes the ability to communicate those goals and to evaluate steps or actions
taken in pursuit of those goals, followed by the ability to adjust and redirect one's path as
experiences and new information dictate (Wehmeyer, 1997; Wehmeyer, 2007). Self-
determination is a state of readiness in the cognitive, psychological, and physiological domains,
leading to the individual's ability to act independently, free from undue influence in relation to

their life choices and decisions. Taking into consideration cross-cultural differences is also essential to defining a person as self-determined. Certain components, such as being assertive, may not be culturally valued (Wehmeyer, 1999).

Wehmeyer's Framework of Self-Determination

The self-determined person is a causal agent, with the ability to choose what may happen regarding the quality of his or her life. This includes relinquishing control - giving another individual the power to make choices for oneself or choosing to make no decision. (Wehmeyer, 1997; Wehmeyer, 2007; Carter, et al., 2015).

Wehmeyer's (2007) functional model of self-determination (Figure 1) in students with disabilities stressed the importance of self-determination being well defined. It distinguished self-determined behaviors by the function or purpose it served for the student. Wehmeyer's theoretical framework referred to a self-determined individual engaging in volitional actions, causing him or her to be the causal agent in his or her life (Wehmeyer, 2007). Four distinguishable characteristics define these volitional actions: the individual acted autonomously, the actions were self-regulated, the individual initiated and responded to events in a psychologically empowered manner, and the individual acted in a manner that demonstrated self-realization. These essential, distinguishable characteristics of self-determined behavior are explained later.

As an individual develops the interrelated component elements at the intervention and treatment level, self-determination develops. According to Wehmeyer, a self-determined person must display, to some degree, a portion of each of the essential characteristics, while taking into consideration age, culture, opportunity, and capacity. As an individual therefore consistently exhibits all four of those essential, distinguishable characteristics, the individual becomes self-

determined. The individual organizes their cognitive, physiological, and psychological elements

so behavior reliably displays self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1997; Wehmeyer, 1999;

Wehmeyer, 2007; Carter, et al., 2015).
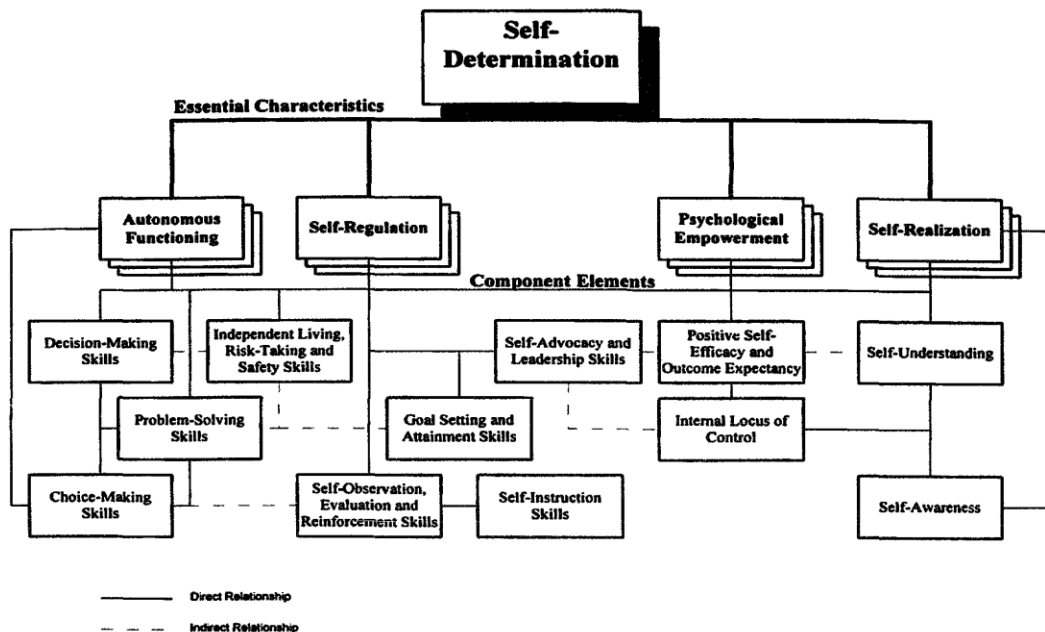
Figure 1
Wehmeyer's Self-Determination Framework (Wehmeyer, 1997)

Wehmeyer's Essential Characteristics of Self-Determination

Autonomous Functioning

Autonomous functioning refers to a person acting according to his or her preferences or

interests, free from excessive external control or influence. Behavioral autonomy originates in

the personality construct of individuation, which refers to self-care and guidance and relates to

the formation of a person's individual identity and independence (Wehmeyer, 1997; Wehmeyer,

1999). Family plays an important role in the development of autonomy. Doren et al. (2012)

described autonomous functioning as the reciprocal interaction of connection between parents

and the youth's individuation. Parent expectations both encourage and inhibit the development of

autonomy.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation occurs when an individual continuously assesses their current situation to determine the right behavioral response. The individual then changes their behavior to act accordingly. Persons who are self-regulated are constantly assessing and re-assessing their environments and adjusting their behaviors to achieve the most desirable outcomes. Some behaviors that are associated with self-regulation include self-evaluation, self-monitoring, self-reinforcement, problem-solving, goal setting and attainment, and observational learning (Wehmeyer, 1995; Wehmeyer, 1997).

Psychological Empowerment

Persons who are psychologically empowered act on the belief that they have control over important circumstances, have the knowledge and skills to achieve a desired outcome, and believe that if they apply that knowledge and skill, they will achieve their desired outcome (Wehmeyer, 1997).

Self-realization

Self-realization relates to the ability of an individual having a "reasonably accurate" understanding of oneself, including knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses, and the ability to use that knowledge for one's own benefit. This type of self-realization comes from experience, interaction with the environment, and reinforcement from others (Wehmeyer, 1997).

Component Elements of Self-Determination

Component elements of self-determination are a range of instructional concepts taught to youth with disabilities and are necessary for the development of the four essential elements of self-determination. Component elements have a specific developmental course and require focused educational interventions to acquire. Intervention and instruction to develop component

elements of self-determination should be intentional for self-determination to develop. Students acquire component elements of self-determination as early as the elementary level, the same time students begin learning new skills. Although not exhaustive, Wehmeyer's taxonomy (see Table 2) includes components that are essential to the development of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1997; Chou et al., 2017; Wehmeyer, 2007).

Choice Making

Considered a basic human right, choice making is associated with the principles of quality of life, normalization, self-determination, and a system of supports. In the classroom, choice is critical to reducing problem behavior, optimizing learning, and achieving individual development. When educators provide structured opportunities for students to make decisions based on their preferences and interests, choice making develops. Three levels comprise choice making:

- As an indication of preference.

- As a decision-making process.

- As an expression of autonomy.

Choice is both the act of choosing from among two or more selections and an indication of preference that points to the selection of a favored outcome. Students can learn choice when given real-life scenarios, the opportunity to decide when, why, and how they learn, and clearly told the limitations of their choice. Choice making should begin early in a student's career (Wehmeyer, 2007; Wehmeyer, 1997; Wood et al., 2004).

Decision-making and Problem Solving

Decision-making is a complex and broad set of skills that encompasses problem solving and choice making. In decision-making, a student engages in the following components:

- Assesses a situation.

- Sets goals and standards.

- Lists possible courses of action.

- Considers past solutions.

- Identifies and evaluates potential consequences and outcomes for actions and alternatives.

- Ranks by importance each consequence.

- Chooses the best course of action, ultimately coming to a decision.

Decision-making includes a certain amount of risk and uncertainty. Decision-making should begin at the secondary level and should be included in life skills training (Martin & Huber Marshall, 1995; Wehmeyer, 1997; Wood et al., 2004).

When a student uses information to identify and design a resolution when a solution is not immediately known, problem solving occurs. This component includes two contextual domains - impersonal and interpersonal or social problem solving. While impersonal focuses on solving problems that usually have only one right answer, social problem solving is complex, has numerous solutions and is essential to the development of self-determination. Students who use adjustment skills take into consideration feedback to tweak personal goals, strategies, standards, plans, and support needed to obtain a desirable outcome. To teach students problem-solving skills, emphasis is placed on identifying and clarifying the issue, analyzing solutions, and presenting a resolution. For students with disabilities to succeed at decision-making and problem solving, educators must use explicit instructions regarding how to use critical thinking in these areas. Educators are encouraged to do this through a demonstration of both decision-making and

problem-solving techniques (Martin & Huber Marshall, 1995; Wehmeyer, 2007; Wehmeyer, 1997; Wood et al., 2004).

Goal Setting and Attainment

Goal setting is a central function of self-regulation, built upon the belief that goals determine action (Wehmeyer, 2007; Wehmeyer, 1997). Goal planning, setting, and attainment provide key indicators to an individual becoming a causal agent in his or her life. Goal setting and attainment relates to successful task attainment (Wehmeyer, 1997). Instructional activities focused on goal setting and attainment include helping students identify and write out clear and specific goals, setting a deadline for accomplishing the goal, and including measurable outcomes broken into smaller activities. Research also suggests the engagement of students in a deep approach to learning while encouraging students to have a sincere desire and interest in learning, supports goal setting and attainment. Goals should also be attainable, positive, and future-oriented. Promotion of goal setting from the elementary to the secondary level includes identifying strategies and resources for achieving a goal, determining how much time and effort will be dedicated to the process, and tracking (both internally and externally) progress towards the goal (Dutta et al., 2020; Wehmeyer, 2007; Wehmeyer, 1997).

Independence, Risk Taking and Safety Skills

For an individual with a disability, independence includes having access to the same opportunities as a non-disabled person and having the capacity to participate in those activities. Independent individuals use self-management techniques to follow through, perform, and complete tasks. Instruction to support independence and risk taking includes assessing levels of risk and weighing the consequence of actions. Health and safety promotion include first aid, job

safety, nutrition, diet and medication facts, and abuse prevention (Martin & Huber Marshall, 1995; Wehmeyer, 1997).

Self-observation, Self-evaluation, and Self-reinforcement

Self-observation includes monitoring one's environment and behavior for task completion and accuracy and progress towards a goal. In self-evaluation, students track their progress towards the achievement of an educational goal or activity, comparing their behavior to a performance standard while using some type of aid to record their progress and behavior. Individuals also assess the efficacy of their self-management activities. Self-reinforcement is the ability to administer positive or negative consequences in response to a particular behavior (Martin & Huber Marshall, 1995; Wehmeyer, 1997; Wood et al., 2004).

Self-instruction

Self-instruction is grouped in the category of self-regulating behaviors, which are best described as actions a person takes when evaluating their environment and then determining the appropriate behavioral response to take to manage that environment. Self-instruction makes the student responsible for his or her learning experience. Described as a teaching method, self-instruction includes a variety of methods, such as self-talk, printed instructions, or other instructional materials. Students use self-instruction to plan and execute his or her educational experience on an untrained task. Examples include giving a student an academic or social problem to solve, following a recipe, or watching a video and following along in order to learn how to change the oil in a car. Use of self-instruction reduces the students' reliance on the teacher for oversight and support (Doll et al., 1996; Smith et al., 2016; Wehmeyer, 1997).

Self-advocacy and Leadership

Self-advocacy includes boldly speaking up for and advocating for oneself, learning how and what to advocate for, and determining and pursuing the supports needed (Martin & Huber Marshall, 1995; Wehmeyer 1997). Self-advocacy has roots in social activism, including movements that encourage people with disabilities to take leadership roles in achieving civil rights. Research has shown instructional strategies using role-play, group, and one-on-one instruction are effective for teaching self-advocacy. However, understanding the cultural beliefs of the student, parent and teacher are also important when teaching self-advocacy. For transition-age youth, the following are areas of instructional emphasis for self-advocacy:

- Understanding how to be assertive, including how to express and elaborate upon one's opinion,

- Learning how to communicate and listen effectively,

- learning how to navigate small and large group interactions,

- Understanding nonverbal cues,

- Applying negotiation skills,

- Using persuasive speech,

- Improving listening skills, and

- Navigating formal administrative systems (Wehmeyer, 2007; Wehmeyer, 1997).

Leadership includes guiding, influencing, or directing the behavior of others and can take many forms. Component elements of leadership development are goal setting, conflict resolution, assertiveness, team building, communication, meeting facilitation, and engaging participants (Wehmeyer, 2007).

Internal Locus of Control

When one believes he or she possess the chance to choose, make decisions and to act upon those decisions, one has internal locus of control. A person therefore believes his or her actions will determine the outcome of his or her life. Students who feel in control of their lives perform better than those who feel controlled by external forces. People with disabilities tend to feel more external locus of control than internal. Instructional strategies linked to an internal locus of control include problem solving, choice and decision-making, goal setting and attainment, and student-directed learning activities (Chou, et al., 2017; Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Wehmeyer, 1997).

Positive Attributions of Self-efficacy and Outcome Expectancy

Self-efficacy relates to an individual's confidence in his or her ability to complete a particular task or to accomplish a particular goal. An individual with outcome expectancy believes he or she can successfully perform a behavior and after performing the behavior, will achieve the desired goal. Learning environments that provide opportunities for choice and decision-making and reinforce development of internal locus of control also contribute to development of self-efficacy and expectancy (Dutta et al., 2019; Martin & Huber Marshall, 1995; Wehmeyer, 1997).

Self-awareness and Self-knowledge

A person who has self-awareness and self-knowledge has reasonable knowledge of his or her needs and interests, strengths, weaknesses, and limitations. That individual possesses the ability to apply his or her strengths to the improvement of their lives and aligns their actions to their needs and values. For educators, instruction that promotes self-awareness and self-

knowledge should focus on application of strengths and interests (Martin & Huber Marshall, 1995; Wehmeyer, 1997; Wood et al., 2004).

Causal Agency

Self-determined people are the causal agents of their lives. They exhibit actions and behaviors caused by self (autonomous determinism), rather than others (heteronomous determinism) and are free to act upon their own will, take actions towards their future, and make decisions that will lead to the achievement of their personal goals (Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Wehmeyer, 1995; Wehmeyer, 2004). A person's basic need for competence, autonomy and relatedness causes the individual to act "as the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence or interference" (Wehmeyer, 2004, p. 351). Causal agency distinguishes just how a person becomes self-determined, delineating the activities and values necessary for autonomous action (Shogren et al., 2015). The theory is rooted in Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's 1985 research (Wehmeyer et al., 2007) emphasizing the power intrinsic motivation has on causing an individual to make things happen in his or her life. Self-determined individuals are the progenitors of change in their own lives, have a high sense of purpose, and regulate and modify their behavior with the intent of achieving an expected end (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer, 2004).

Causal behaviors are those actions a person takes with the specific intent, plan, or purpose of achieving a particular goal. Causal agency theory is a class of behavioral events that explain how and why individuals behave in such a way as to become self-determined. The class of behavioral events that may lead to a person becoming a causal agent is not restrictive and may include causal events, causal behaviors, or causal actions. These all function as a means for the

individual to achieve their goals and to exert control over their lives (Wehmeyer, 1995; Wehmeyer, 2004).

Causal agency theorizes individuals have the mental and physical capability to perform a particular task, as well as the capacity to respond to challenges hindering achievement of self-determination. Capabilities important to the achievement of causal agency include causal capability and agentic capability (Wehmeyer, 2004). Causal capability refers to the mental or physical capacity of an individual to direct action to a preferred end. This includes causal capacity, or the knowledge, skills, and abilities to achieve one's goal, which in self-determination relates to goal setting, problem solving, and decision-making. Causal capability also includes causal perceptions, the belief that one can achieve that goal if one chooses to act. In self-determination, causal capability is related to psychological empowerment (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer, 2004).

Agentic capacity and agentic perception comprise agentic capability, which is the mental or physical capacity to focus one's behavior to an expected goal. To have agentic capacity not only means the person has the knowledge, skills, and talent to guide causal action, but they also monitor their behavior for the achievement of their goals. A person with agentic perception possesses a belief in self and in his or her circumstance and feels empowered to act and to continue that action over time.

Wehmeyer (2004) proposed a person is spurred into causal behavior when he or she faces one of three types of challenges or barriers to achieving their goals: opportunities, threats, and casual affect. Opportunity is found or created by the individual and causes the person to act based upon his or her desire for a specific outcome. If the individual is unable to take advantage of the situation due to a limitation to his or her causal capability, this results in a missed

opportunity. Threats occur when a situation or condition impedes the individual's self-determination or causes the individual to change his or her course of action. Causal affect are those emotions, such as anger, anxiety, joy, or excitement, which serve to limit or enhance the individual's ability to respond to and overcome challenges (Wehmeyer, 2004).

Individuals who are causal agents employ causal and agentic capabilities in response to opportunities or threats to their self-determination. The resulting causal action enables individuals to focus their behavior or actions to achieve their desired goals. Causal agency (Figure 2) provides numerous occasions for instructional and environmental interventions to be employed to support an individual becoming more self-determined (Wehmeyer, 2004).

When educators provide support and intervention designed to spark causal action, students achieve self-directed learning (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). The causal agency model of instruction includes strategies encouraging self-directed activities (agentic action), intentional and self-initiated choice-making (volitional action), and an explicit process of goal generation (action-controlled beliefs). The resulting causal agency has a positive impact on the student's well-being (Shogren et al., 2015).
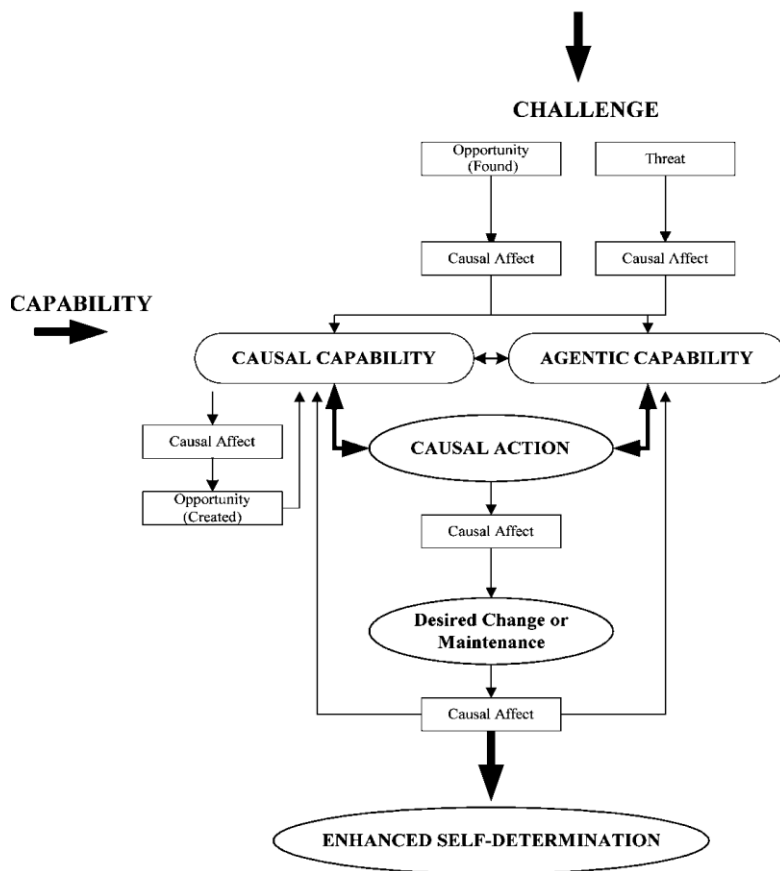
Figure 2
Causal Agency Theory Overview (Wehmeyer, 2004)

Expectancy or Expectations

A youth's attitude or perception of themselves is an important factor in their successful transition to early adulthood (Wagner et al., 2007), with the final years of high school an opportune time to prepare youth with the skills, mindset, and resources necessary to live independently (Carter, et al., 2013). Youth who hold high expectations for the future are more likely to be academically successful, more engaged in school, and have parents who hold high expectations for their success (Wagner et al., 2007). The expectations of parents stand as one of the strongest indicators of a youth's success at gaining employment or achieving post-school outcomes (Blustein et al., 2016; Papay & Bambara, 2014; Test, et al., 2013). In a 2007 special

report on perceptions and expectations of youth with disabilities, the National Longitudinal

Transition Study (NLTS) (Wagner et al., 2007) found almost 85% of youth with disabilities

reported they expected to graduate from high school, while 52% reported they definitely will

pursue a postsecondary education. Most participants in the study (81%) expected to get a driver's

license and 95% expected to get a paying job. Nearly two-thirds of participants expected those

paying jobs would be sufficient to live independently (Wagner et al., 2007).

Research indicates expectations among domains of independence, education attainment,

and economic well-being are all related. When transition-age youth have high expectations for

success in one area, such as education, this correlates to having high expectations for success in

other areas, such as independence or economic well-being (Wagner et al., 2007).

Expectancy-Value Model of Achievement

The expectancy-value model of achievement performance and choice described by

Wigfield and Eccles (2000) includes a youth's belief about how well they will do on an activity.

The model encapsulates how students perceive the activity's impact on their performance, their

level of persistence and effort, and on activity-related choices the student pursues in relation to

his or her goals (Doren et al., 2012). Figure 3 captures the model. Concepts from the model

highlighted are shown in the expectancies and subjective task boxes and the goals and self-

schemata boxes.

The expectation of success and subjective task value, or the belief a person holds about

the value of doing a task, influence achievement-related choices. Expectation influences

performance, energy invested in the task, and determination. The expectation of success and

subjective task value are both influenced by the individuals' perception of task demand or rigor,

the individual's concept of his or herself, the ability to perform the task, the individual's personal

goals, and memories or experiences with similar situations. Those previous achievement-related

experiences coupled with social influences further impact the individual's perceptions and their

interpretations of the experiences (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).
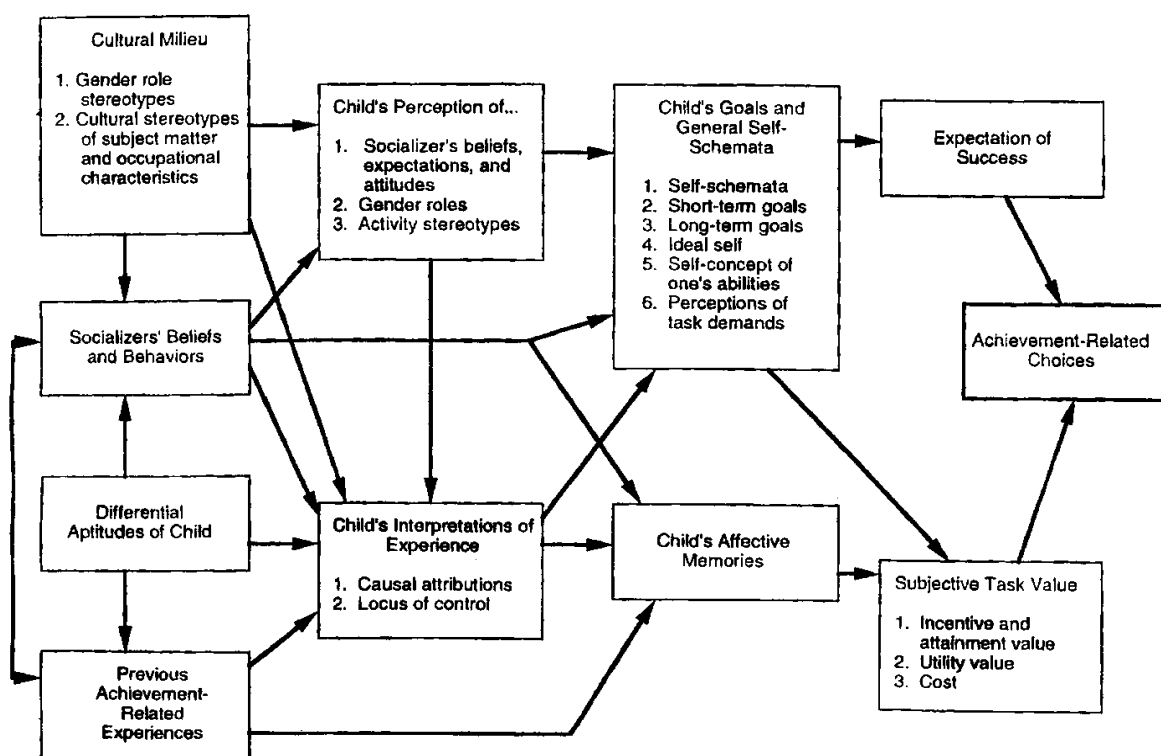
Figure 3
Expectancy-Value Model of Achievement and Motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000)

Expectancies for success are defined and measured as how well an individual believes he

or she will perform a task now and in the future. It is distinguished from ability beliefs, which is

an individual's perception of his or her competence for an activity, a key component of

motivation theories. Conceptual ability focuses only on present ability. Expectancies focus on the

future.

Psychologist Albert Bandura's definition of self-efficacy as "the conviction that one can

successfully execute the behavior to produce a given outcome" (Lee et al., 2012, p. 154) formed

the foundational understanding of expectancy. Bandura categorized expectancy as comprising two components: self-efficacy expectancy, one's belief of whether he or she can accomplish a task, and outcome expectancy, one's belief that an action will lead to the desired outcome. The expectancy-value model embraced the perspective that self-efficacy expectations are more closely related to performance, persistence, and choice (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Components of the achievement value of the model include the importance of doing well (attainment value), personal satisfaction from task completion (intrinsic value), usefulness of the task to plans (utility value) and the level of sacrifice or personal commitment to achieve the end goal (cost). Wigfield and Eccles' (2000) empirical research suggests youth expectations about themselves impact their persistence, their level of performance and achievement of their personal goals, making it a critical component of the successful transition to adulthood (Kirby et al., 2019).

Parent Expectations

Characterized as the realistic belief's parents have of their youth's future achievement, parental expectations develop when parents assess their youth's academic performance and resources available for achievement (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Principally a psychological attribute, parental expectations encompass broad goals. To demonstrate the impact of parental expectations on youth outcomes in employment, education, and independent living, findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 on Family Involvement (Newman, 2005) are presented.

National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 on Family Involvement

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) (Newman, 2005) provides an information rich picture of the impact of family involvement on the educational development of

transition age youth. The ten-year study of youth who were between 13-to-16 years of age in 2000 and receiving special education services, gathered information from the youth, their parents, and from school staff. The study collected data over five times during the research. The research focused on the level of at home and at school family involvement, understanding the association between student and family attributes and family involvement, and expectations families have of their youth's education and independence. The study also sought to understand how levels of family involvement and expectations related to levels of educational attainment, independence, and school and social engagement (Newman, 2005).

The study used telephone interviews and mailed surveys with parents during the spring and summer of 2001. The resulting descriptive findings were weighted to represent the national population of students receiving special education services. The report only listed differences among groups that reached a level of statistical significance of at least .05 (Newman, 2005).

The study found parent expectations play a role in the educational and independent living success of students with disabilities, but expectations varied by demographics. Descriptive findings showed parents of youth with disabilities from low-income households held significantly lower educational expectations of their youth than parents from higher income backgrounds. More specifically, the study found,

- Most parents of youth with disabilities definitely (53%) or probably (32%) expected their child to graduate high school. When considering disability, 60% of parents of students with learning disabilities and two-thirds of parents of students with speech/language, hearing, or visual impairments had higher expectations of their youth graduating high school than parents of students in other disability categories. Parents of youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities, autism, and multiple

disabilities, held significantly lower expectations, stating they were 36%, 48% and 52% respectively, definitely, or probably not expecting their child to graduate from high school with a regular diploma (Newman, 2005).

- One-fourth (25%) of parents definitely expected their child to attend a postsecondary school and one-third (37%) probably expected their child to attend a postsecondary school. Comparatively, 92% of parents of non-disabled youth expected their child to obtain a postsecondary education (Newman, 2005).

- When taking into consideration income, only 41% of households with incomes $25,000 or less definitely expected their child to graduate high school. Only 20% of those same households definitely expected their child to attend a postsecondary school. Compared to households with incomes of more than $50,000, 63% definitely expected their child to graduate high school and 30% definitely expected their child to attend postsecondary school (Newman, 2005).

- In consideration of independent living, 54.5% of parents of youth with disabilities definitely expected their child to live independently without supervision. Only 46% of parents definitely expected their children to support themselves financially, without family or public benefits. Most parents (86%) expected their child with a disability to get paid employment the future. When considering disability category, the majority of students with speech impairments (87%) and learning disabilities (92%) were definitely expected to find paid employment. Most parents of youth with intellectual or development disabilities, autism, multiple disabilities, and deaf-blindness stated they definitely did not believe, or probably did not believe, their children would be

financially self-supporting or live independently with or without supervision (Newman, 2005).

- When considering income, expectations for independence were lower for all disability categories. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of students from households making $50,000 or more were definitely expected to live independently; in families making $25,000 or less, only 38% definitely expected their child to live independently without supervision (Newman, 2005).

Newman (2005) also performed a multivariate analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), to determine the relationship between family expectations and family involvement. The study found youth whose parents who had higher levels of expectations for their child's postsecondary education were more engaged in class, obtained better grades, tested closer to their grade level in reading and math, were more likely to participate in school groups, were less likely to experience disciplinary actions, and had higher rates of employment (Newman, 2005).

Papay & Bambara (2014) further analyzed NLTS2 survey data from Wave 4 regarding students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (n=490), using logistic analysis to determine whether best practices in transition programs were predictive of post school outcomes. Their study confirmed Newman's (2005) findings that parent expectations are strong predictors of youth's success in obtaining post school employment and postsecondary education. Youth whose parents expected they would be employed after high school were 58 times more likely to have employment up to two years out of high school. They were 28 times more likely to have enrolled in postsecondary education up to two years after high school. They were 50 times more likely to be employed between two and four years out of high school (Papay & Bambara, 2014).

An analysis of the NLTS2 data (Kirby et al., 2019), examining parent and youth expectations across disability categories at wave two (n=1,940) of the study, found both youth and parent expectations helped shape the achievements of youth, irrespective of disability category. The study revealed youth expectations played a stronger, more predictive role in achieving postsecondary education and independent living, and parent expectations had a stronger, more predictive role in achieving employment and financial independence (Kirby et al., 2019).

In addition to data from NLTS2, research further demonstrated parental expectations' impact on the youth's post-secondary educational achievement, graduation, and employment. Parsons et al. (1982) and Carter et al. (2012) concluded parental expectations played an important role in youth with disabilities' participation in early employment opportunities and had a profound impact on a youth's belief about his or her sense of self and their perception of their ability to complete tasks. The expectations of parents, which are both learned and internalized by youth, serve as a critical measure of a child's performance (Parsons et al., 1982).

A 2014 study (Holwerda et al., 2015) of 341 transition age youth (ages 17-20 years) who also had intellectual disabilities and who were defined by Social Security Administration as having an ability to work, was conducted to determine expectations of young adults regarding future work, expectations of parents regarding future work, and expectations of teachers regarding future work. In the study, teachers were responsible for determining the ability of the young adult to engage in work. Teachers were asked to determine the ability of their student to engage in regular employment, supported employment, sheltered employment, day program, or voluntary/no ability to work. Results of the quantitative showed the schoolteachers' expectations of ability of the young adults to work were the only perspectives that were statistically

significant in relation to the young adult actually entering paid, competitive work. When educators expected the young adult to be successful in competitive employment, the participant was three times more likely to be engaged in competitive employment (Holwerda et al., 2015).

When examining the summer employment and community participation experiences of 136 youth with severe disabilities across 29 high schools in a Midwestern state, Carter et al. (2010) found an educators' expectation for employment of youth was a positive predictor of summer employment. The study included a compilation of responses educators provided from a questionnaire, which asked whether teachers expected students to work in the upcoming summer months. The study found the odds of youth getting and having a paid work experience was 15.25 times more likely when teachers expected the youth to be engaged in paid work. When teachers said they were unsure about a student's summer work plans, the student was 81% more likely to be unemployed (Carter et al., 2010).

Cultural values and norms around expectations of success in work, higher education, and independent living also play a significant role in transition success (Izzo & Lamb, 2002). How youth report their expectations for their future is positively associated with self-representations of their individual abilities and with their personal relationships. Understanding how those meanings play out in different cultures and for different genders is important when gauging student success. Research shows exposure to family and teacher supportive behavior, which includes emotional warmth and academic validation, is associated with positive expectations in youth. Exposing transition-aged youth to high expectations for academic and career success leads to higher high school completion rates and higher rates of school attendance, which supports postsecondary school accomplishment (Izzo & Lamb, 2002; Wagner et al., 2007).

Theoretical Framework

The functional model of self-determination (Wehmeyer, 2007), causal agency theory, (Shogren et al., 2015), and social constructivist theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018) form this study's theoretical framework. Self-determined individuals use volitional action to act as the primary causal agents in their own lives (Wehmeyer, et al., 2012). Wehmeyer's (2007) functional model of self-determination in students with disabilities refers to a self-determined individual engaging in volitional actions, causing him or her to be the causal agent in his or her life. Four distinguishable characteristics make up volitional action: the individual acted autonomously, the actions are self-regulated, the individual initiated and responded to events in a psychologically empowered manner, and the individual acted in a manner that demonstrated self-realization.

Self-determined actions or behaviors are not confined to a particular list of skills, actions, or behaviors. Activities or behaviors an individual takes to achieve his or her goals varies. No two people will take the same path. Self-determined behavior is defined by the function or purpose it serves for the individual (Shogren et al., 2018; Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer, 2007).

Causal agency theory is an extension of the functional model of self-determination, further defining how a person becomes self-determined. It proposes individuals are also agentic agents, or originators of their actions. Those individuals engage drive and grit when facing opposition to their goals and aspirations. Characteristics of agentic agents include being self-directed and self-motivated, having a high sense of self-empowerment and well-being, persevering through failure, and engaging in intentional, self-regulated behavior to achieve their aspirations. As with the functional model of self-determination, causal agency theory does not define a specific set of behaviors that lead to self-determination, but identifies behaviors based

on the function that behavior serves for the individual. They are how a person, who serves as the causal agent of their lives, can achieve their goals, have control over their life, and can become self-determined (Wehmeyer, 2004; Shogren et al., 2015).

Social constructivism challenges the scientific pragmatist supposition that reality can be reduced to its component parts. Learning occurs socially through experience and interaction with the world. Knowledge is the product of one's cognitive acts, with language, dialogue and cultural and social influences playing a pivotal role in meaning making and knowledge construction (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Bozkurt, 2017; Pardjono, 2002).

Developed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky, social constructivist theory postulates learners actively construct, decipher and restructure knowledge individually. Vygotsky believed learning to be a social experience and a collaborative process, where integration into the knowledge community was of importance. His zone of proximal development referred to the difference between what individual learners can achieve on their own and what they can achieve with assistance or support from an adult or peer. It is the location of a child's susceptibility to influence. Vygotsky proposed the use of scaffolding, or structured activities given in the zone of proximity, to help a child develop the skills necessary to perform an activity independently. A constructivist learning environment encourages this through reflection, problem solving, inquiry, discussions, and expression. Educators using these tools, along with scaffolding and coaching, can help students become actively engaged in recreating activities according to their own understanding, thereby developing the intrinsic motivation and knowledge transfer necessary to perform an activity independently (Theriault & Jones, 2018; University College Dublin, 2020; Pardjono, 2002).

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the functional model of self-determination and its component parts, followed by a review of causal agency and expectancy in youth and adults, all of which contributes to the successful transition of youth with disabilities. The interpretive framework of the study was also examined.

Chapter 3 explores the methodology for this case study research. The chapter includes a review of the study's design rationale for using case study, an overview of the research population, including demographics of the Arkansas PROMISE participants, a discussion of the research setting and data sources, and a review of the study's data collection and analysis methods. The chapter addresses issues of trustworthiness, limitations, and delimitation.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Research Approach

Introduction and Overview

This study aims to develop an in-depth understanding of how youth with disabilities and their parents in the Eastern Region of the Arkansas PROMISE program described their expectations for the future, after participating in Arkansas PROMISE. The research examined how participants viewed themselves and their future expectations in the following areas: independent living, higher education, employment, and financial support.

This chapter covers the rationale for the research design, the background and selection of the research setting, and a description and justification of the research population. This chapter describes the data collection, method of analysis, trustworthiness, limitations, delimitations, and conclusion.

The Rationale for Research Design

This qualitative research design utilized a case study approach, a methodology appropriate for understanding a phenomenon within its context that draws upon multiple data sources to provide a holistic view of that phenomenon. Use of the case study approach provided opportunities for participants in Arkansas PROMISE to tell their stories, offered an understanding of their experiences, and provided perspectives of their realities after participating in the five-year national demonstration project (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 1981). In 2019, researchers determined the Arkansas PROMISE program had no impact on the youth participants' development of self-determination and expectancy. This study explored the participants' unique perspectives through the use of in-depth interviews. A case study approach was an appropriate methodology as it aimed to understand Arkansas PROMISE

participants' expectations. Knowledge of those expectations was unknown before the study. The insight from this process helped contribute to the practical understanding of factors related to developing successful outcomes in youth with disabilities transitioning into adulthood (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Research Setting

Research is bounded by the unique participation in the Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE model demonstration project from 2013-2018. Participants who experienced five years of similar activities and interventions provided the focal point of this study. Arkansas PROMISE was launched in 2013, with funding from the U.S. Department of Education. The program provided support and resources to help youth with disabilities, and their families remove barriers to employment (Bernet, 2015). The five-year, $36 million research and intervention program, managed by the University of Arkansas College of Education and Health Professions, provided training, case management, and a summer work experience for participants in the treatment group (Lockwood, 2019).

Arkansas PROMISE's goal was the recruitment of 2,000 youth into the program. Of the 2,000 enrolled, 1,805 were assigned to a research sample, including all evaluation enrollees assigned to a treatment or control group. Of that number, 904 were assigned to the treatment group and 901 were assigned to the control group. Control group participants received services generally found in the community. When recruiting participants, Arkansas PROMISE staff used the web-based computer system, Random Assignment System (RAS), developed by Mathematica, which randomly assigned youth and their families to a control or treatment study group immediately after enrollment. Research staff classified the remaining 195 students as non-research participants due to their siblings' previous enrollment in the program. According to

Mathematica, the 195 non-research youths were not included in their research sample but were counted as program participants. Of the non-research youth, 122 were included in the same treatment group as their siblings, while the other 72 non-research youth were included in the control group. Arkansas PROMISE staff also requested the inclusion of one other non-research youth in the treatment group. It brought the total number of Arkansas PROMISE treatment research and non-research youth to 1,027. For the treatment group, 940 were considered program participants, individuals who had at least one substantive in-person meeting with staff or attended a monthly training after enrollment (Honeycutt et al., 2018; Mamun et al., 2019a).

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Program (OSEP), PROMISE had three primary objectives, including:

1. Developing and implementing interventions for youth ages 14-16 years on Supplementing Security Income (SSI) and their families. Interventions were designed to improve educational attainment, grow, and sustain employment opportunities, improve earnings attainment for youth and their parents, increase total household income, and reduce long-term reliance on SSI. Activities designed to improve educational outcomes included youth development interventions focusing on self-determination, life skills, independent living, self-advocacy conflict resolution, leadership development, and mentorship, among other services and supports.

2. Developing and establishing formal partnership agreements with state and local agencies that provided support services to youth on SSI and their families.

3. Ensuring youth, their families, and partner agencies participated fully in the evaluation of the program (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

PROMISE sought to reduce the number of youths who relied financially on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) while increasing their opportunities for gaining and maintaining long-term employment. An 18-month interim report by the Mathematica Policy Research found the program's youth development activities successfully increased youth earnings and increased the number of employed youths, with 56% of participants holding paying jobs compared to 20% in the control group. Treatment group participants reported earnings of $1,960 during that period, compared to $747 in the control group (Lockwood, 2019). However, the same Mathematica report found Arkansas PROMISE had no impact on youths' self-determination, nor did it positively affect youths' expectations regarding participation in post-secondary education, having financial independence, or having a paid job at the age of 25. The research found the program had no impact on the youths' or parents' expectations of youth living independently at the age of 25 (Mamun et al., 2019a). While early reports indicated PROMISE supported successful outcomes in employment, qualitative evidence of the participants' experiences and their perspectives about their futures after participating in the program from 2013-2018 had not been investigated.

Research Population, Sample, and Data Sources

This study focused on youth and parent or guardian participants in the Eastern Region of the Arkansas PROMISE program. Participants were selected to provide a good understanding of the research question: How do participants describe their expectations for the future after participating in the Arkansas PROMISE program? Yin (1981) recommends using up to four cases for a multiple case study design, while Creswell & Creswell (2018) recommend five. The final number of participants was determined when saturation occurred or when interviews began

to produce only small amounts of new information (Merriam, 1988). Saturation occurred after interviewing five youth and five adult participants.

This research study used purposive sampling, a non-probabilistic sampling strategy shown in research to be best for discovering or gaining insight into a particular problem (Merriam, 1988). For this study, criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling, was used to choose participants who met certain criteria. Criterion sampling helped the researcher with understanding how the Arkansas PROMISE program operated among participants in normal circumstances. The selection of participants included the following:

1. Location (five youth and their parents/guardians in the Eastern Region of Arkansas PROMISE),

2. Active engagement in the program,

3. Completion of a PROMISE plan, setting at least one educational and one employment goal,

4. Completion of the ARC scale assessment,

5. Participation in at least one summer work experience,

6. Participation in monthly training, and

7. Completion of benefits counseling and financial education.

A subgroup of potential participants was identified from these criteria, which led to selecting five youth and five parents or guardians to be included in the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam, 1988). This approach supported a mix of perspectives and ensured representativeness in qualitative research.

Table 3 provides the demographic characteristics of the PROMISE treatment group at the time of

enrollment (Mamun et al., 2019b).

Table 3
Demographics of Treatment Group Youth at Enrollment

Baseline Characteristic	% of Total
Age	
14 years	37.8
15 years	26.8
16 years	35.4
Average age	15.4
Gender	
Female	33.2
Male	66.8
Ethnicity	
Non-Hispanic White	17.9
Non-Hispanic Black	48.8
Hispanic	6.3
Non-Hispanic Other or Mixed Race	7.6
American Indian	.7
Missing Information	18.7
Preferred language	
English preferred written language	97.7
Other preferred written languages	2.3
English preferred spoken language	97.6
Other preferred spoken languages	2.4
Youth primary impairment	
Intellectual or developmental disability	42.5
Other mental impairment	44.5
Physical disability	9.0
Speech, hearing, or visual impairment	1.0
Other or unknown disability	3.0
Youth living arrangement at SSI application	
In parent's household	85.6
Own household or alone	13.1
Another household and receiving support	1.3

All the participants in this study were between the ages of 20 and 22 years at the time of their interviews. All five participants identified as male. Two of the participants were non-Hispanic Black and three were non-Hispanic White. All student participants' preferred language was English. All lived in their parents' or guardians' households. Students' primary disabilities were developmental (autism), behavioral (Oppositional Defiant Disorder), neurodevelopmental (Tourette Syndrome), other health impaired (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), and physical.

The researcher's involvement with the case under study may have influenced participant behavior during interviews, resulting in participants feeling pressured to provide answers to questions they may have had no answers. Because the researcher had previous knowledge of the program, this may have resulted in incomplete information being provided to participants in the study, resulting in participants' inability to express themselves fully and may have limited their understanding of the interview process. Holding pre-interview sessions with participants helped build a framework of knowledge regarding the study. Those pre-interview sessions included an overview of the program and were designed to build rapport with participants. The researcher also remained attentive to the researcher-participant relationship (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam, 1988).

All participants were selected from the Eastern Region, including Greene, Craighead, Mississippi, Poinsett, Crittenden, Saint Francis, and Phillips Counties in Arkansas. The area encompasses the West Memphis labor shed, including Craighead, Cross, Crittenden, Mississippi, Poinsett, and St. Francis Counties. The 2020 median age in the area, which also includes DeSoto County in Mississippi and Shelby County in Tennessee, was 36.30 years. The total estimated population of the area in 2020 was 1,385,053 and was expected to continue growing by 1.87%

by 2025. The percentage of the civilian, non-institutionalized population considered working age

was estimated at 63.31%. The 2019 unemployment rate was 4.1%. The average annual wage in

2018 was $51,315 (City of West Memphis, 2020).

Table 4
Demographics, West Memphis Labor Shed

	2020 Median Age	2020 Average Household Income	Civilian Labor Force Percentage	Unemployment Rate (2019)
West Memphis Labor Shed	36.30	$77,792	63.31	4.1%
Arkansas	38.47	$69,573	57.66	7.0%

County	Average # of Reporting Units	Average Annual Employment	Total Wages	Average Annual Wage	Average Weekly Wage
Craighead County, AR	2,830	50,710	$1,993,725,019	$39,316	$756.08
Crittenden County, AR	1,196	16,000	$593,625,800	$37,101	$713.49
Cross County, AR	475	4,773	$160,005,213	$33,523	$644.67
DeSoto County, MS	3,027	62,140	$2,165,601,190	$38,455	$739.53
Mississippi County, AR	1,109	17,607	$900,689,352	$51,155	$983.75
Poinsett County, AR	502	5,190	$189,350,291	$36,484	$701.61
Shelby County, TN	22,347	486,515	$27,111,438,434	$57,265	$1,101.07
St. Francis County, AR	698	6,744	$223,689,451	$33,170	$637.89
Average	**4,023**	**649,679**	**$33,338,125,750**	**$51,315**	**$986.82**

Figure 4
2018 Wages, West Memphis Labor Shed (City of West Memphis, 2020)

The area included 47 institutions of higher education, all of which were located within 100 miles

of West Memphis, Arkansas. The area has a higher percentage of college graduates than the state

of Arkansas.

Table 5

2020 Education Attainment, West Memphis Labor Shed

	No High School	**High School Graduate**	**Some College, No Degree**	**Associate degree**	**Bachelor's Degree**
West Memphis Labor Shed	11.7%	30.0%	23.1%	7.5%	16.7%
Arkansas	13.3	34.1%	22.3%	7.0%	14.7%

Company	Industry	Employees
Schneider National Carriers	Logistics	1,100
Hino Motors	Automotive Manufacturing	800
West Memphis School District	Education	800
Southland Casino	Entertainment	700
Family Dollar Distribution	Distribution	500
City of West Memphis	Government	300
Robert Bosch Power Tool	Distribution	300
ASU Mid-South	Education	250
Awesome Products	Chemical Manufacturing	250
Federal Express Ground	Logistics	200

Figure 5

Top 10 Major Employers, West Memphis Labor Shed (City of West Memphis, 2020)

Businesses in the area employed over 600,000 individuals. The top employers in the area

included logistics, manufacturing, education, entertainment, and distribution (City of West

Memphis, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

For anonymity, the study did not identify participant names, phone numbers, and

addresses. However, this does not guarantee the complete anonymity of participants. After

interviews were completed, case study data was analyzed and compiled. After coding data, peer

review of data interpretation was sought to limit the exposure of any information that may be

considered private. Participants also maintained the right to decline the inclusion of any data collection that may have hindered anonymity.

Participant approval was sought before accessing personal records and other secondary data that may have contained confidential information. Birthdates, names and additional personally identifying data was not included. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier, to support confidentiality. Data collected from this study was maintained in a locked filing cabinet and in a password-protected computer, secured from unauthorized use to support confidentiality. Participants were informed that information from this study might be accessed by future researchers and used for additional research, and their consent would be sought (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam, 1988).

Chapter 1 provided the researcher's philosophical framework for this study. A memo book was maintained as data was collected and analyzed, which aided in understanding the researcher's orientation and decision-making process. The study sought an understanding of participant expectations after active inclusion in the Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE Model Demonstration Project. Oral and written explanations of the study's purpose were shared with participants before each interview. Participants provided their oral and written consent. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Collection Methods

Individual interviews were the primary data collection method for this study. Interviews are a social and a collaborative process, a conversation with a purpose, designed to help researchers develop new understandings of "the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 164). Research indicates interviews offer substantive information regarding the research problem. It

can get participant perspectives and allows the researcher to dig deeper into a particular area when interacting with interviewees. In-depth conversations with case study participants often yield a much deeper understanding of the research problem than document reviews alone, revealing one's innermost thoughts, intentions, and purpose (Merriam, 1988).

Interviewing offers the researcher the opportunity to probe participants for a deeper understanding of their particular case. The approach, commonly used in qualitative research, offers a glimpse into participants' lives, attitudes, and perceptions. When used with a case study approach, interviews help researchers understand how participants utilized the knowledge and made decisions that led them to a particular time and place in their lives. Taking time during the interview to develop rapport with case study participants also supported the focused exploration of knowledge (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019; Yin, 1981).

Contact information for Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE youth was obtained through the University of Arkansas' Management Information System (MIS) database. Secured access into the database was obtained from the university's information management department, which maintains access to the site. Potential participants were contacted. Many potential participants in the database had incorrect or out-of-date contact information. A total of five students and six parents were interviewed. Because contact information for the sixth student could not be obtained, the sixth parent interview was not included. Each participant was sent a consent form by mail and was asked to return it through the use of a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed a standardized, semi-structured, open-ended interview guide to explore the primary research question, "How do Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE program participants describe their expectations for the future after participating in the Arkansas

PROMISE program?" Open-ended questions framed the study, giving participants ample leeway to express their views, articulate their emotions, and communicate their perspectives. An open-ended structure allowed the researcher to respond to emerging thoughts and new ideas that developed during interviews. The use of a semi-structured interview protocol provided the opportunity to focus discussions on specific issues of participant expectations for the future (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

The interview questions were related to the primary research questions and were informed by the study's theoretical framework. For this study, youth, and their parents or guardians, were interviewed. Interviews were conducted one-on-one and virtually using the Zoom web conference platform and recorded to ensure trustworthy transcription. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). A list of interview questions for youth and their parents/guardians are included in Appendix A. Additionally, the participant consent form is included in Appendix B. This consent form was administered to all participants.

Creswell and Poth (2018) provided a ten-step process for conducting qualitative interviews, including ensuring questions have been developed before interviews commence and being specific (through purposive sampling) in determining the interviewees. The process also recommended understanding the research population to determine how much interaction would be needed to get the information required, being prepared with the right tools for recording and transcription, and minimizing distractions. Creswell and Poth (2018) also recommended establishing ground rules with participants, affirming consent, and sticking to a timely and efficient interview protocol.

To address these recommendations, background information on research participants was accessed in the MIS database system to ensure compliance with research criteria. The MIS system housed case records for participants. Basic information on the participants was obtained from the participants' case management records and used to document engagement levels and work experience. Once participants agreed to the interview, they were given additional information about the study, including an overview of the study, a description of ZOOM for the interview protocol, and the type of interview questions that would be asked. For ground rules, participants were advised that interviews would be recorded, their identities would remain anonymous, and that interviews would last approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Participants were provided all information in written and verbal form and given the option of declining the use of any information considered confidential. Participants received information regarding ethical considerations, including how their data would be protected and how the data would be reported. Payment considerations were also discussed. Both parents and youth received $30 Walmart gift cards for participating in the study. Participants agreed to all interview and study protocols (Merriam, 1988).

Before interviewing study participants, interview questions were piloted with two Arkansas PROMISE youth participants and one parent participant. These individuals were from the Central and Southern region of Arkansas PROMISE. During the pilot interviews, participants shared their personal stories of the program's impact on their lives. The practice interviews also provided an opportunity for the researcher to test the appropriateness of the interview questions. The piloting revealed the need to clarify meaning for questions and be prepared to paraphrase questions to help in understanding. Piloting also reinforced the need to build rapport with participants and provide ample time for participants to share their personal goals and activities.

Doing so helped put participants at ease and resulted in participants providing more detailed information. Piloting interviews helped the researcher refine strategies for interviewing participants.

Document Review

Interviews were recorded and transcribed using ZOOM and Otter. While interviewing each participant, personal perceptions were maintained in field notes. These field notes were kept in a private journal that was reviewed during the analysis process. Field notes were used to self-regulate the researcher's understanding of the information related to the research questions.

A document review of case records was conducted, providing a significant source of information for the study. Case records included enrollment forms, training and monthly attendance records, personal and community resource maps, individualized education plans, PROMISE career and educational goals, employability plans, high school transcripts, career and ARC Scale assessments, and case management records. Case records provided an extensive overview of the staff's interaction with the participants, their perceptions of their progress, concerns and needs, and engagement in the program. Each case file helped the researcher understand the participant's mindset at that particular time in the program, as well as their employment, educational, and social experiences. Each entry in the case management file was read. Notes highlighting progress towards the participants' academic and career goals were documented in field notes and synthesized with interview records to produce research themes.

Data Analysis Methods

This case study sought an in-depth description from participants regarding their future expectations after participating in the Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE program. Transcription of interviews was performed using ZOOM and Otter, both of which provided

audio transcripts of recorded meetings. Audio recording transcriptions were reviewed for clarity and to ensure information was captured verbatim. Thematic analysis of the transcripts was executed using the qualitative software Maxqda, which helps researchers organize and analyze unstructured data. Maxqda supports importation and data analysis from multiple sources, including video and audio recordings, text data, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, interviews, articles, email, social media, PDF, and notes from third-party applications such as Otter. The software helped the researcher find patterns in the qualitative data and enabled the researchers draw robust, unbiased conclusions from data (ZOOM, 2020; Maxqda, 2021).

Coding

Analysis of the data began by reviewing the research question of how participants in the Arkansas PROMISE program in Eastern Arkansas described their expectations for the future, their expectations for higher education, their expectations for future financial success, and their expectations for independent living. The research questions shaped the research proposal and reminded the researcher of the primary audience for whom the research was intended, including educators, researchers, and practitioners. Data from interviews and document reviews for each participant were gathered together and reviewed. While reading through the data several times, the researcher took notes and made comments to help identify significant ideas. Reading through and taking notes permitted the researcher to integrate and synthesize the data, which was initially categorized into a systemic outline. That outline helped the researcher see regular patterns of information, which was then transformed into thematic categories (Merriam, 1988).

Thematic categories were developed from interview transcripts, notes, and document reviews. For interview transcripts, phrases, words, and sentences were coded in the margins of the interview transcripts. For document reviews, phrases, words, and sentences were coded in the

researcher's journal. Reviewing the documents and the interview transcripts numerous times helped the researcher discover information from the data pertinent to the study. They provided a broad understanding of the framework of the participants' perspectives. The study's research questions informed the thematic categories. Each interview and document review was read and reviewed numerous times to determine how data converged into the themes of expectations for the future, expectations for the Arkansas PROMISE program, expectations for employment, expectations for higher education, expectations for independent living, and expectations for future financial success. After reviewing interview transcripts and documents several times, similar items were grouped (Merriam, 1988).

The thematic categories chosen followed recommendations found in research, which state categories should be based on the rate of recurrence, the importance to the audience, its distinctiveness, and its unique representation not found in other areas (Merriam, 1988). The categories were also reviewed to determine if they were plausible for the research, based on the data provided, and were clear. After developing the categories, the researcher reviewed texts three to five more times to determine if more units of information would be applicable. Information that built upon or reinforced previous categories, recognized new viewpoints, reinforced the theme, explained evidence, or refuted already known data, was included. Categories also reflected the purpose of the research and included all relevant items found in the interview records and the document reviews. The categories were independent, with the designation of data into one grouping not affecting the classification or group of other data (Merriam, 1988). Interview transcripts were captured verbatim into the computer software program Maxqda. The researcher coded data directly in the software, making notes in the margins as needed (Merriam, 1988).

After data was coded, the researcher made inferences about the data to develop recommendations related to educational practice. During this process, the researcher made speculations about how the information was linked together and deliberated on future activity.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research that is an explicit reconstruction of the participant's reality is said to have validity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019), while reliability refers to the extent to which the study's findings may be replicated (Merriam, 1988). The use of triangulation, or the use of multiple sources of data to verify conclusions, helped establish the trustworthiness of this qualitative study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Member checks were performed by sending a summary of the findings to participants for their review. To support credibility, the researcher searched interview transcripts and documents for variations in understanding that would challenge the researcher's interpretations or perspectives. Peer debriefings were also employed to support the credibility of the research. The research process was clearly documented through the use of triangulation of data source, and by maintaining an audit trail that noted how records were collected and analyzed. It, along with journaling, was employed to support the confirmability of the study. That data is available for review (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Stating the investigator's assumptions, biases, and positions related to the group being studied and the inclusion of the theory behind the study, as provided in Chapter 1 of this study, contributed to the study's credibility and reliability. The researcher has prior experience working on the PROMISE Model Demonstration Project from November 2016 through September 2019. During that time, the researcher served as Director of the University of Arkansas Center for the Utilization of Rehabilitation Resources in Education, Networking, Training, and Service (UA CURRENTS). CURRENTS training staff provided training to PROMISE staff, students, and

parents, developed the curriculum and instruction for monthly training for youth and provided ongoing webinars and professional development for staff. For PROMISE, the researchers' primary role was administrator and supervisor of those staff who were directly involved in PROMISE, and provided on-site support, technical assistance and expertise during monthly trainings, summer camps and professional development. Some of those on-site support visits occurred in the Eastern Arkansas region.

When conducting interviews, the researcher disclosed to participants her role in the Arkansas PROMISE program and the work she performed while engaged with the program. During the study, the researcher maintained a journal to document her understanding of the program and any shifts in her perspectives that may have occurred while conducting interviews. The researcher also reviewed her journal notes, interview transcripts, and case notes numerous times throughout the study to confirm and reassess her understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences while engaged with Arkansas PROMISE. The use of these protocols ensured this study was conducted ethically and established the trustworthiness of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

The study was approved by the University of Arkansas IRB Committee and was judged exempt. The IRB approval letter is in Appendix D. Study participants were provided an informed consent document prior to completing the interview. Participants agreed to all portions of the study prior to interviews being conducted.

A document review was conducted, providing a significant source of information for the study. Administrative, staff, and participant files, including participant data, PROMISE plans, employment, educational aspirations, activities and outcomes, enrollment and attendance records, certificates of achievement, evaluations, reports, and media were accessed. Data from

the case files were triangulated with interview records, were organized chronologically, and were organized according to the participant being interviewed. Case management records were organized as a descriptive case study of each participant. This information was analyzed for thematic categories of information and linked together (Merriam, 1988).

A journal was made while reading case management records and while reading interview records. Journaling helped the research record personal notes, feelings, and reactions to the data as they were being analyzed. The journal reconstructed the researcher's inquiry process to produce the categories and demonstrated how conclusions were reached. This resulting audit trail described how and why data was collected, how codes were derived, and how and why conclusions were made, supporting the study's authenticity and replication. Examples of the coding process are in Appendix C (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam, 1988).

Integrating colleague examination of data interpretation supported credibility. Peer review was accomplished by conferring with the former Eastern Region Program Manager, two former Eastern Region PROMISE staff, and the Deputy Commissioner and Pre-Employment Transition Program Manager at Arkansas Rehabilitation Services. These participants reviewed data, provided peer review, and provided additional information regarding PROMISE activities (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam, 1988).

Limitations and Delimitations

The generalizability of this case study is limited, given the focus on understanding the experiences and expectations of a particular group of participants in the Arkansas PROMISE program. Attention to the study's approach, development, and data collection methods strengthens its credibility. The study also provides a brief description of each participant's experience in the program, a base of information to help the reader identify with and understand

the applicability of the findings. However, the aim of the study is not generalizability but the ability to understand this case in detail. Until other similar case studies are conducted among Arkansas PROMISE participants, allowing an opportunity to compare similarities and differences among the entire research group, the study is not generalizable (Merriam, 1988).

Most of the youth (90%) in the treatment group completed a PROMISE plan, which was used to identify goals related to their career and educational interests. By August 2017, among participants in the Eastern Region, 79.6% had completed the PROMISE plan. In this study, all five youth participants had completed a PROMISE plan. However, an interim Mathematica report indicated treatment youth did not have equal access to resources in all areas of the state to accomplish their educational and career interests (Honeycutt et al., 2018). For example, treatment youth in Eastern Arkansas, an area described as resource-poor, did not have access to the same type of jobs and community services and supports available to PROMISE youth in Northwest Arkansas, an area described as resource-rich. This issue may have impacted the participants' achievement of personal goals as well as their expectations.

This study relied on youth participants to recall activities and their impact from the previous five years of their lives. Given the timeframe and the age of participants at the time of the PROMISE intervention, this may have caused issues with the recollection of data. The inclusion of parents/guardians as participants in the study may limit that impact.

Summary

This chapter explored the methodology for this case study research, presenting a review of the study's design rationale, an overview of the study's research population, and data regarding the economic conditions of the West Memphis labor shed, the area where participants in this study resided. This chapter also presented an overview of the research setting and data

sources, data collection, a description of the coding process, and analysis methods. The chapter explored issues of trustworthiness, limitations, and delimitations. The next chapter presents the study's main findings.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction and Overview

This study aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of how participants in the Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE program described their expectations for the future, after participating in the program. The research examined how participants viewed themselves and their expectations for the future, and examined their expectations for employment, higher education, independent living, and future financial success. This chapter provides a summary of the findings.

Description of the Case

Ten interviews were conducted, five of which were with youth participants and five of which were with their parents or guardians. When arranging interviews, parents generally were interviewed first. As much as possible, to avoid bias or parents influencing the response of students, student participants were interviewed separately. The following provides a brief description of the participants in the study.

Student 1 and Parent 1

At the time of the study, Student 1 was 20 years old. He was a White male. He had been homeschooled and had worked two successful summer work experiences at Goodwill and Post Net. As noted in his case file, the student mainly was non-talkative during the interview and provided short, monosyllabic answers to most questions. Student 1 was adopted by his grandparents. His grandmother is listed as Parent 1. His grandmother described the student as not liking sudden change or crowds and spending a lot of time in his room. Parent 1 provided some prompting to the student to help him answer questions thoroughly. During his job experiences,

the grandmother stated he often needed information repeated back to him, which meant he had to have a job coach. She described the student as needing a job with lots of repetition. While his first job at Goodwill was considered a success, his second job at Post Net was difficult because the job duties changed daily. Student 1 attended summer camp, which they both described as a good experience; however, Student 1 referred to being bullied at the camp. His grandmother also stated he didn't know how to use the shower at camp and didn't take a bath the entire week, because in general, he does not like to ask people questions. At the time of the interview, the student was unemployed but helping his grandmother with their family's business of raising and breeding dogs. The grandmother expected the student to always need 24-hour supervision or care and described herself and her husband as overly protective of the student.

Student 2 and Parent 2

At the time of the interview, Student 2 was 21. He was a White male. Case records described Student 2 as being a shy talker. He attended three summer camps and was designated a junior counselor his third year. Student 2 stated he made several friends at camp and still maintained contact with them. Parent 2 stated that the student's PROMISE participation made him more confident and brought him out of his shell. The student had two successful summer work experiences at local public schools. Case records stated during the first summer work experience, the student rode his sisters' small bike to and from school, without complaint, during the summer. Arkansas PROMISE used case management funds to purchase a bike to fit his frame. The student had other jobs after PROMISE but was unemployed at the time of the interview. The parent stated her son's disability and his social anxiety often were often barriers to him getting and maintaining employment. Case records indicated he had an interest in welding and attending Arkansas Career Technical Institute (ACTI), which closed in 2019. In the

interview, the parent stated the son had not expressed interest in school. In case records, the

Connector described the student as having low self-esteem and needing motivation to get him

going. During the interview, the parent also communicated the student needed encouragement

and lacked confidence. The student stated his primary focus was on getting a job and saving

money.

Student 3 and Parent 3

At the time of the interview, Student 3 was 21 and living at home with his grandmother.

Student 3 was Black. Student 3 attended college for one semester. The experience was both good

and bad for him. In case records, the student never wavered in his goals of pursuing video game

design and animation and still spoke of it during the interview. The student believed he would

have to leave the state to get training in animation. Case records indicated the grandmother and

mother wanted the student to pursue more realistic career goals and that the family was reluctant

for him to go away to college. Staff in case records indicated his grandmother was dependent

upon the student. Staff stated the student had some difficulties in high school and needed

tutoring. Case notes also mentioned the student needed help identifying and assessing colleges.

In 2015, the student worked a summer job at Arkansas State University (ASU), which expressed

interest in hiring him. However, his family was concerned about him going to work. He also

worked at Pak Mail in 2017. At that job, the student worked out in the sun and was on his feet,

despite his disability. The student was also given one shirt to wear, which he washed nightly.

The student served as a junior counselor in PROMISE summer camp in 2018. He was later

connected with ARS for college tuition support. Student 3's grandmother had a stroke during her

time of engagement with PROMISE and had two knee surgeries, which limited her mobility and

participation. The student did not know how to drive, and the grandmother was unable to assist,

due to her disability. Student 3 also expressed feelings of responsibility to stay home and help his grandmother financially. At the time of the interview, Student 3 was working for a temporary employment agency.

Student 4 and Parent 4

Student 4 was 22 at the time of the interview. Student 4 was a White male. Case records were detailed in their descriptions of Student 4 as behaviorally difficult and argumentative. The Connector took extensive measures to build rapport and trust with the student. Parent 4 did say the student had some social anxiety and anger issues that made it difficult for him to interact with others. Student 4 had a desire to learn how to drive, but his anxiety often got in the way. During PROMISE, the student had two successful summer work experiences as a janitor in local schools. During the interview, the student expressed a need for more significant social skills and considered college a waste of time. However, case records indicated the student expressed interest in college in 2016. During high school, the student was enrolled shop, a class he did not attend because he didn't feel responsible enough to be in the industrial arts program. The student was selected to participate in the Project Search program in 2017. Still, the student and his family declined the position because of the location of the job in the hospital. The student's sister had recently passed away. The student was traumatized by the site. The student had several career goals, including working at GameStop, working with kids, and working as a janitor. The parent expected her student to live with his sister if he pursued independent living. During the interview, the student, who said he thought PROMISE would be a waste of his time when he signed up, said the program helped him learn the essential functions of life, including how to hold down jobs for a short while. At the end of PROMISE, the student was described in case records as being discouraged with not finding employment. He had two unsuccessful jobs at

Walmart and Anchor. Case records stated he was unmotivated to find a job but later said he wanted to work and be successful at employment. Both his mother and case records indicated his disability posed as a barrier to him finding work.

Student 5 and Parent 5

Student 5 was 20 at the time of the interview and was a Black male. Student 5 attended public school through 2017, at which time his mother homeschooled him. According to case records, the student had been suspended in 2016 as a result of an incident at school. As a result, the parent felt the school was targeting her son and decided homeschooling was a better option. Case notes stated the student said he preferred homeschooling because it was less drama. Case notes stated seven people lived in the home in 2016. Case management funds were used to purchase a mattress and box springs for the family, which had recently suffered a fire. The family only had one king-sized bed in the home. The Connector described Student 5 as non-talkative and non-trusting. The student did not attend any summer camp. For his first summer work experience, the student worked at ASU, a job the student stated in case files that he really enjoyed and wanted to return. His second job was at the public library. Case notes said he was disciplined for being in an unauthorized room at that site and less than a month later was documented as refusing to do assigned tasks. He was fired from the job. At the same time, he held a job at a daycare managed by his mother. The student is documented in 2018 as going to adult education and preparing to test for his GED. Case records also indicated he was preparing to take his GED in 2019.

West Memphis Labor Shed

The participants all resided in the Eastern Arkansas region, representing Craighead, Mississippi, and Greene counties. The area encompassed the West Memphis labor shed,

including Craighead, Cross, Crittenden, Mississippi, Poinsett, and St. Francis Counties in Arkansas, DeSoto County in Mississippi, and Shelby County in Tennessee. The 2020 median age in the area was 36.30 years. The total estimated population of the area in 2020 was 1,385,053 and was expected to continue growing by 1.87% by 2025. The percentage of the civilian, non-institutionalized population considered working age was estimated at 63.31%. The average annual wage of the labor shed in 2018 was $51,315 (City of West Memphis, 2020).

The area included 47 institutions of higher education, all of which were located within 100 miles of West Memphis, Arkansas. At 16.7%, the area had a higher percentage of individuals with bachelor's degrees than the state of Arkansas, which was at 14.7%. Businesses in the area employed over 600,000 individuals, with the top employers including logistics, manufacturing, education, entertainment, and distribution (City of West Memphis, 2020).

A different PROMISE Connector staffed each of the three counties represented in the research. Connectors described all five youth participants in case management records as being engaged in the program and having met the program's thresholds.

All the participants were anonymized and identified as Student 1, Student 2, Student 3, Student 4, Student 5, Parent 1, Parent 2, Parent 3, Parent 4, or Parent 5 when directly quoted or paraphrased. Case records were reviewed once interviews were completed. Case records included enrollment forms, monthly training records, intake forms, resource maps, IEP plans, PROMISE plan, employability plan, educational records, assessments, career and educational goals, and case notes.

Summary of Findings

Participants relayed a wide range of experiences while in Arkansas PROMISE, recounting participation in the program's summer camp and monthly trainings, work

experiences, friendships that developed, and some difficult moments. After transcribing and

analyzing all student and parent interviews, program documents, and field notes, five major

themes emerged. These provided information about the general research question, which was

How do Eastern Region Arkansas PROMISE program participants describe their expectations

for the future, after participating in the Arkansas PROMISE program? These themes are

described below.

Theme 1: Arkansas PROMISE Expectations

After participating in Arkansas PROMISE, participants had a high regard for the

program, describing it as having shown them what is possible for their lives. Participants

described the program as having a positive effect, offering both parents and students what was

possible for the students' lives. This is correlated with recent findings that PROMISE was a

positive influence on the students' attainment of education and employment (Emenheiser et al.,

2021). PROMISE targeted families at the intersection of poverty and disability and supported

participants in increasing household income and reducing long-term dependence on

Supplemental Security Income (Nye-Lengerman et al., 2019). Arkansas PROMISE parent

participants stated the program exceeded their expectations and empowered youth to have

ambition, set goals, and to be successful in employment. Parent 2 stated:

> I think it's really helped him as far as because before I feel like he had the attitude, well I can't do that, I can't do that, I can't do that, because of this. No! If anything, it's showed us you can do that with them. So, I really love the program and the people.

Youth participants spoke of the program empowering them to overcome life's obstacles. They

believed the program played a crucial role in providing support in school and in helping them to

stay out of trouble. Student 3 stated, "The program itself basically helped us prepare for when we

grew up and what jobs we wanted, or if we wanted to go to school."

Both parents and students stated that any of the initial uncertainty felt at enrollment was transformed into gratitude at the program's end, with participants expressing appreciation for the opportunity to gain new experiences and develop friendships. Participant interviews and document reviews associate much of the participant's experience and success in Arkansas PROMISE with the role of the Connector. Staff support and intervention were essential in helping youth and parent participants learn about and access resources and benefits and educational supports, and to gain access to financial help in emergencies or at critical times, such as at the beginning of the school year or at graduation. Through their monthly home visits, calls, and texts, PROMISE staff played a significant role in encouraging youth to develop and maintain a focus on their career and educational goals and stay motivated in pursuing personal and program goals. They also played a crucial role in supporting parents. Parent 2 stated:

> And you don't always feel confident about parenting, and they were great. Any questions I had they answered it. They would put my stress at ease. It was…I think it was one of the best experiences that he could have had in his life.

Case management notes provided a picture of the performance of the Connector. Their work extended beyond monthly home visits to include provision of youth career exploration opportunities, ensuring students took the free ACT, and helping parents navigate and resolve issues with Social Security Administration. Connectors supported youth with disability services, gain access to vital birth and IEP records, and offered driving test preparation courses. Connectors also facilitated monthly family trainings on topics like job interviewing, dress for success, budgeting, independent living, money management, preparation for college, and healthy relationships. Students and parents stated the budgeting classes and their participation in the reality fair contributed to their knowledge and practice of saving for the future.

Student 5 stated, "The coordinators I had were very full of energy, and I feel like that very much rubbed off on me in the long run." A document review of case management notes also demonstrated the measures staff often took to develop rapport and trust with students, who often during interviews described themselves as socially anxious, shy, or non-talkative when entering the program. This was further verified in case notes. Connectors spent time drawing students out of their shells, over the program's life, helping students define and re-define their goals and action plans for achievement. For students with behavior concerns, they often provided re-direction to conduct that was sometimes described as troublesome. At times they elevated concerns when the students demonstrated behavioral issues or had trouble at school or in the home. PROMISE staff often served as the students' primary cheerleaders through their interaction with parents, school officials, and employment providers.

Theme 2: Employment Expectations

Participants' expectations for employment was high, with most participants describing their participation in the summer work experience as having boosted their confidence. Arkansas PROMISE empowered participants to feel more confident in their ability to find and maintain employment. Because of their summer work experience during PROMISE, participants had an expectation for future employment. Students described their participation in PROMISE as bolstering their skills in interviewing, completing job applications, and finding and maintaining a job. Student 2 stated, "Before I don't really know how to like sign up or apply for a job . . . and after it helped me like figure out how to do certain things in school and how to apply for jobs."

Parents described being more confident in their students' ability to interact with people and to maintain employment. Parental expectations and the parent's associated engagement in activities supporting their students' pursuit and employment attainment, have been shown to be

strong predictors of a student's success in postsecondary school employment (Wehman et al.,

2014). Parent 1 stated, "More than the meetings, it was the job experiences that, that I think are

the most impactful to us."

In Table 6, students described their employment and career goals in 2016, 2017, and

2018. Information was taken from each of the participant's PROMISE plans, employability

plans, or case management records.

Table 6
Student Participants Career Goals

	2016 Career Goals	**2017 Career Goal**	**2018 Career Goal**	**Employed 2021 (Y/N)**
Student 1	Learn to speak Spanish	Game store/ bookstore/help family business of selling puppies	Help family business of selling puppies	N
Student 2	Obtain employment/ welding	Painting, welding, or working at GameStop	Get a job I love/GameStop, welding, or culinary	N
Student 3	Video game design	Something related to graphic design/ computers	Get a good job, continue to work on animations/ game design	Y
Student 4	Learn about different careers	Video game store manager	Get a job as a painter. Get a job as a janitor	N
Student 5	Become an architect	Childcare worker, medical aid, nurse	Employment as a childcare worker and go to college	Y

Student participants also described the summer work experience as helping them better

articulate their future employment goals. Participants also stated they had more realistic views of

their job expectations. Each of the students interviewed worked at least two summer work

experience jobs through PROMISE. Those jobs were located at Goodwill, Post Net, Pak Mail,

Arkansas State University, the Jonesboro public library, and local school districts. While overall,

all students expressed an expectation of getting and maintaining employment, only Students 3 and 5 were currently employed outside the home. Student 3 was employed by a temporary staffing agency and Student 5 provided home health services to a family member with a disability and worked part-time at a pizza restaurant. Student 1 helped with his family's at-home business of dog breeding. If assessments deemed necessary, PROMISE students were provided a job coach during their employment. Case records show that Students 1, 3, and 4 had a job coach during their summer work experience. Support from job coaches was crucial to the student's success. Job coaches worked alongside students, answered their questions, clarified instruction, and reinforced how to complete work tasks. Job coach support faded over time during the six-week summer work experience.

Parent 4 stated, "Well, both of these jobs were after school janitors at two different schools, and they weren't really any job openings for them in that field." Students 2, 3, 4, and 5 had other work experiences after participating in the program. Parent 4 expressed dissatisfaction with her students' work experience during Arkansas PROMISE and believed the program pigeon-holed her son in a particular field. The student confirmed an inability to find jobs that related to his work experience. The student's two after-PROMISE work experiences were unsuccessful, with both ending with him getting fired or quitting. Both Parent 4 and Student 4 felt the student's disability contributed to his unsuccessful work experiences. Among students who were currently unemployed, parents and students expressed concern about the ability to find jobs that satisfied their student's interest level and related to the student's previous work experience. While parents expressed hope regarding future expectations of their student's employment, Parents 1, 2, 4, and 5 discussed their child's disability as a barrier to their student getting and maintaining jobs outside the home. The participants seemed to need the support of a

job coach. For Student 5, who was fired from his summer work experience job, the parent

referred to the lack of disability awareness and disclosure as the primary barrier to her child's

success on the job. Parents 3, 4, and 5 also referenced local economic conditions as a barrier to

their child's future work, including lack of opportunity for students to explore their career

interests and the prevalence of factories in the area.

Theme 3: Higher Education Expectations

Participants' expectations for higher education were low, with lack of education support

and the individuals' disability as the primary barriers to college success. Overall, participants had

little to no expectation for future college enrollment, with only one student having enrolled in

college since high school, an experience he described as "extremely bad."

Student 3 stated:

> I enrolled for a little bit at ASUN. After enrolling there I did a few classes. I was passing
> for a little bit, but then soon it started to get real, real bad, specifically with the math
> portion. It was extremely bad. I was probably going to have to retake the course again,
> because of that. The computer class I did good with. There was a specific class that my
> mother had put me in that dealt with something like milling lathe. You had to like scope
> out like little objects and stuff. That also dealt with math. But most of the homework
> portions of the classwork I got right until we got to the math stuff as well. I dropped out. I
> was failing badly.

All participants described higher education as a low priority. Parents and students both

indicated the challenges of navigating traditional college campuses, understanding the

coursework, and managing their disability, dampened their desire to pursue or encourage college.

Student 3 described his one-semester impression of college:

> College is a very refreshing thing, I will admit that, compared to regular school. It is very
> refreshing. I didn't personally have a car to go back and forth when they gave you those
> little breaks when you stayed at school, but it's a very refreshing take compared to high
> school because it's more relaxed and freeform, but you still have to really, really, really
> pay attention and make some notes, especially when you go home, because it's nothing to
> play around with.

PROMISE records show only Student 3 had a definite goal of attending college after high school graduation. During interviews, Parents 3, 4, and 5 indicated their students were interested in college or a technical field, with Parents 4 and 5 expressing low expectations of their child attending traditional schools. Newman (2005) found only 25% of parents of students with disabilities expected their child to attend a postsecondary school. In Table 7, students described their educational goals in 2016, 2017, and 2018. Information was taken from each of the participant's PROMISE plans or case management records. None of the students were currently enrolled in higher education or a vocational school.

Table 7
Student Participants Educational Goals

	2016 Education Goals	**2017 Education Goals**	**2018 Education Goals**	**Enrolled 2021 (Y/N)**
Student 1	Earn 100% on all spelling tests	Learn about two other religions other than Christianity	Learn about two other religions other than Christianity	N
Student 2	Attend school and make good grades	Successfully graduate high school	Graduate high school	N
Student 3	Graduate with good grades	Go to college	Go to college	N
Student 4	Pass oral communications class and graduate high school	Learn to fill out job applications	Learn to fill out job applications	N
Student 5	Get a 4.0 GPA and graduate	Obtain GED when turn 18	Get a 4.0 GPA	N

According to case management records, after high school graduation, Student 3 received tuition support from Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) to attend Arkansas State University in Newport (ASUN). Case records indicated the student was excited about an opportunity to learn Computerized Numerical Control (CNC) machining. However, during the interview, the student described the program as requiring rigorous attention to detail, knowledge of computer

software, and precision in math. By semester's end, the student, whose career goals were animation and gaming, had failing grades. Records indicated ARS would no longer provide tuition support until the student improved his grades. Parent 3 stated, "Well, I don't remember very much about the college. He went and did his homework. But the only thing he used to talk about was that math. He couldn't get his math together." The student stated he was still pursuing his career goals of gaming and animation. Though the courses were not offered in Craighead County, he expected to attend college within the next few years. Student 3 stated, "I figured out currently that that wasn't for me, so I've just been trying to help my grandma with getting a good job."

In 2017, Parent 5 made the decision to homeschool her son, who had been suspended from school in 2016 and felt the school unfairly targeted the student. Case records indicated staff believed homeschooling was the "right choice for him emotionally." Records showed the student was preparing to obtain his GED in 2019 but stated he was not ready to commit to attending college. It is not clear if he was successful in getting his GED. The remaining students graduated high school. All five parents were hesitant about their student's attending college. While parents expressed a desire for the students to be successful in college, none discussed it as a goal they actively encouraged with their students. If their student talked about or openly discussed college, parents supported and advocated for attendance. However, none of the students actively pursued higher education or a vocational trade school, although Student 2 expressed interest in learning to weld. Among students, receiving support with social skills and with coursework were common reasons for delaying college pursuit. Student 2 stated:

> I think about college. I wouldn't mind going to it. I have a lot of problems with like certain [things]. Like, when it comes to classes, I usually have a lot of issues and problems with understanding a lot of stuff. So, I had a hard time comprehending certain things.

Theme 4: Independent Living Expectations

Participants' expectations for independent living were mixed. Parents and students did have a future expectation of independent living. However, that expectation was contingent upon the students receiving financial support by obtaining and maintaining employment. Four of the five PROMISE parents stated their students were capable of independent living but had not shown an active interest in moving out of the home. If any youth pursued independent living, Parents 1, 3, and 4 expected their students to need a family member, friend, or a live-in support person.

Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 showed 54% of parents expected youth to achieve independence, with one in seven believing that independence would be supervised (Newman 2005). Parent 1 stated:

> And you know I do think he will live…my goal is for him to be able to be independent, with the worker. I don't know if that makes sense, I know that's not complete independence, but you know, to have his own house that's paid for, to have somebody that could come in and stay with him, probably 24-7 because he gets scared at night and stuff. And then for him to go work a little job for a little bit during the day and get out and get some community involvement and just build a little life for himself.

Parent 1's son was a current participant on the Arkansas Medicaid waiver service and had a support worker teaching him independent living skills, such as laundry. The parent expected the student to continue to need the services of a support person in the future. For one other parent, independent living was an expectation she and her family had been actively considering. Parent 2 stated, "Well, I don't know if he wants to move out per se by himself and himself only. My daughter and her fiancé are saving up to get their own place and he wants to move in with them."

Students 2, 3, and 5 expected to live independently in the future, albeit with a friend or family member. Students stated trainings on budgeting and saving impacted their preparation for

independent living. Students 2 and 3 both referred to the need to find employment and having

financial stability as reasons for not actively pursuing independent living. Participants stated the

trainings received through Arkansas PROMISE, including knowing the difference between

wants and needs, were crucial in boosting their confidence to consider the prospect of moving

out of their parent's homes. Student 2 stated:

> Me and my friends that I worked with, we did talk about becoming roommates for a
> while. But that never happened. I don't know why. Like, we always talked about it, but it
> never became a thing. And then now it's probably the main focus is me trying to find a
> job and eventually being able to get the money to be able to do that kind of stuff.

Only one student stated he was actively pursuing independent living. Student 5 stated, "They did

help me on my budgeting expenses and it's funny you ask that because I am recently looking at

places with a friend to be roommates here in town."

Theme 5: Future Financial Support Expectations

Participants' expectations for future financial support were dependent upon their ability

to find and maintain a job. Parent 4 stated:

> He got on SSI when he was four years old. The state gave it to him because he was
> ADHD and some other stuff. And he didn't have any problems with it while he was on
> the program but apparently after the program ended and he got out of school, the
> government decided he didn't need it anymore, and took it away from him. But he still
> has the same problems he had when he was on it, so I don't understand their reasoning.

Two months before a youth with a disability turns 18 and transitions into adulthood, Social

Security Administration (SSA) conducts redetermination to determine if youth are still eligible

for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). During redetermination, the youth's medical condition,

income, resources, and residency are reviewed. Using adult disability standards, the evaluation

assesses the youth's level of functioning in past work and the ability for future work (Social

Security Administration, 2021). The students' participation in successful summer work

experiences would have been a factor considered during the SSI redetermination process and

may have contributed to students not being considered eligible for the benefit. Parents 2 and 4

described the process of redetermination as confusing. Only Student 1 continued to receive SSI.

During PROMISE, participants established an Arkansas ABLE specially designated savings

account for individuals with disabilities that allowed them to save for disability-related expenses.

PROMISE students were automatically eligible to participate in ABLE. Funds in the accounts

were not considered when determining a person's eligibility for federal benefits, such as SSI or

Medicaid (Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2021).

Parent 1 excitedly shared her son's involvement in Arkansas ABLE and stated she and

her husband made annual contributions to the fund in preparation for her son's financial future.

Parent 1 stated:

> Because like I said we're grandparents raising him and we're not going to be here forever. And, and I want him, you know, we had struggled with that, like, how do we put money aside for him, and not let him lose his Medicaid or affect his social security, you know. How are we going to do that? So probably that was the hugest thing of all from the Arkansas PROMISE program is explaining that program and helping us get started with it. I mean they actually, they gave us a gift, which I don't care about the gifts so much, but I can't remember -- it was like a couple hundred dollars or something like that they started it with. And then, and they gifted that to us, so that even the kids who weren't able to put anything in they all got a got an account open. And then, whatever they can put in it that's great, and they can save some money away. So that's really the biggest thing that that we're doing with his Social Security is, we're helping him save some money.

Arkansas PROMISE funds were used to establish ABLE accounts for PROMISE participants.

According to case management records, before establishing the account, the student and the

Connector met with representatives of the local workforce centers and with Arkansas

Rehabilitation Services. Meetings focused on career goals and resources.

Although participants established job-related connections during their participation in

Arkansas PROMISE, each of the parent participants referred to the difficulty of finding stable

employment for their student. Parent 4 related employment as being essential to her child's future financial success. Parent 4 stated, "And we talked about it, you know many times, but he just can't seem to find a job. Nobody wants to hire him or if they do, they don't keep him long enough." Parent expectations have a stronger, more predictive role in students achieving financial independence (Kirby et al., 2019).

The inability of Students 1, 2, and 4 to find employment may have contributed to parents being guarded about their expectations for future financial success. Students 2, 3, and 4 recounted how SSI was perceived as a type of income that supported the provision of their family's living expenses, like medicine or food. Student 2 stated, "I don't want to say it was easier or hard, but it pretty much was there to help us at times to be able to get stuff like medicines and things and being able to do stuff."

Student 3 was unfamiliar with the status of his SSI during PROMISE. Like all students, he referred to his parents for being responsible for managing the federal benefit. Student 5 recalled not being eligible for the benefit. Case records indicated his federal benefit ended in 2018. Once their federal SSI benefits ended, many of the students were enrolled in the Section 301 program, which qualified them for continued SSI payments while they participated in the PROMISE program. Students 2, 3, and 4 said Arkansas PROMISE prepared them to support their financial futures by training them on the importance of saving money. With that, Student 1 stated he was helping with his family's business of caring for and selling puppies to help support himself financially.

Summary

The findings demonstrated the enthusiasm and gratitude participants felt regarding Arkansas PROMISE, which they described as having a broad impact on their lives. Having

participated in the program and hearing the stories of success of participants, this finding was not surprising to the researcher. Although there were some barriers to getting current contact information for participants, once participants were contacted, they were happy to discuss their expectations and experiences from the program.

This chapter presented the five major findings of this case study research. The next chapter presents the study's conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this case study was to develop an in-depth understanding of how youth with disabilities and their parents in the Eastern Region of Arkansas PROMISE described their expectations for the future after participating in the program. This research question was explored using a case study approach. It provided an opportunity for the study's five parent and five student participants to tell their stories, gave a better understanding of their experiences, expectations for the future, and knowledge of the program's impact on their lives. Thematic analysis of the interviews, case management records, and other significant documents, yielded five major findings that addressed the central research question guiding this study.

Overall, participants believed Arkansas PROMISE program had an impact on their expectations. More specifically, participants had an anticipation for future success, especially as it related to employment. In contrast, expectations for higher education, independent living, and future financial support were low or mixed. The research and findings led the researcher to four conclusions about Arkansas PROMISE.

- Arkansas PROMISE supported the development of self-determination.

- The multiple components offered in Arkansas PROMISE and the coordination of services, supported the development of an expectancy for success.

- Participation in early employment opportunities impacted participants' expectations for employment. On-going sustained employment impacted participants' expectations for independent living and future financial success.

- Adult influences support the development, or nondevelopment, of expectations for success in education, independent living, and future financial support.

Conclusions from those findings are provided here, followed by recommendations for further research and a summary.

Conclusions

Arkansas PROMISE Supported Self-Determination

Arkansas PROMISE supported learning through experience and interaction with the world around the participants. Because participants experienced success while engaging in those socially constructed events, they developed an expectation that they could be successful in future similar experiences. The program shaped participants socially and emotionally and may have contributed to students acting in a manner that demonstrated the development of self-determination. For example, Students 3 and 5 both discussed decisions they had made regarding their interests. They adjusted their behavior and actions according to their surroundings, acted on a belief they had control over their circumstances, and understood their strengths and weaknesses. These are all indicators of self-determination. Other students expected future success, and during the interview expressed a desire to engage in those activities, although in some cases, they had been unsuccessful.

Arkansas PROMISE Contributed to an Expectancy of Success

Through its use of multiple interventions, Arkansas PROMISE had a positive impact on the lives of these participants. Participants often cited lessons learned from classes on budgeting and savings as concepts they still applied to their everyday lives. They were lessons learned and practiced while being employed. The curriculum, which also focused on self-advocacy, immersive summer camps, career exploration activities, and college tours, were cited as beneficial influences on participants. Through Arkansas PROMISE, participants developed social skills that prepared them for post-high school life in the workplace. Parents and students

often cited the opportunity to interact with other students who had disabilities as helping them develop a strong sense of confidence in their abilities to succeed in the workplace.

Coordination among federal and state programs supported the provision of employment services to Arkansas PROMISE youth. Participants' desires for employment were considered during the summer work experience planning phase, although the types of jobs provided often did not correlate with the students' employment goals. However, students had successful summer work experiences, which may have contributed to their high expectations for future employment. Throughout PROMISE, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) transition staff worked closely with PROMISE Connectors to provide employment-related assessments and job evaluations. A partnership with Sources, a disability employment and advocacy agency, ensured the provision of a job coach for the student and intervention by a benefits counselor when the students' SSI was at risk of being discontinued due to the student working a summer job. During the programs' final year, partnerships with Arkansas Department of Workforce Service, ARS, and the Arkansas Career Technical Institute (ACTI), were beneficial to students. Staff introduced students and their parents to a contact person from these organization to have the tools and resources necessary for future employment and training.

The coordination of services and the multiple components offered through Arkansas PROMISE did not contribute to participants' expectations of success in education or independent living. The program emphasized both concepts through its curriculum and instruction, through participation in summer camps, and its use of college tours and its reality day activities. However, unlike employment, students were not assessed to determine the need for one-on-one tutoring support, either during high school, while they pursued their GED, or for post-secondary school success. Students were not assessed to determine their needs for successful independent

living. Some students stated they would like to try college or a vocational trade school. All students participated in college tours, meeting representatives of different vocational training programs in welding or Computerized Numerical Control (CNC). Participants were provided information for enrollment. Those, along with the program's use of summer camps and monthly trainings dedicated to understanding the college experience, did not seem to be enough to motivate most students to pursue college as a goal. While participants expressed a desire to one day move out of their homes, instruction, and training alone through use of reality fairs and tours of stores did not provide the necessary motivation needed for participants to follow through on this as a goal.

Early Employment Impacts Future Expectancy

Ongoing, sustained employment impacted participants' expectations for independent living and future financial success. Among both parents and students, the opportunity to participate in the summer work experience increased their beliefs that the student could be successful in employment. That belief did not seem to exist before Arkansas PROMISE. The expectation persisted even as youth struggled to find suitable jobs. Both parents and youth expressed a stronger sense of confidence in the student's ability to interview and to work in a competitive, integrated work environment, albeit some with the support of a job coach. Arkansas PROMISE provided multiple opportunities for participants to explore their career interests, with participants re-evaluating their career interests at least once a year. The inclusion of the parent in the monthly trainings also reinforced the program's goal for each youth to have at least two summer work experiences. Participants described the work experience as having improved the students' socialization skills and helped them further define the types of jobs they would like to

explore. Having a job gave students a greater sense of purpose and opened the door to other possibilities for participants.

While successfully employed, participants would often discuss the possibility of moving out of their parents' home with friends or family. Continued employment impacted the participants' expectations for independent living and future economic success. When their employment ended, so did their considerations of independent living. Employment was also connected to their perceptions of future financial success. Student participants expressed a great desire for the development of a successful career or work. For unemployed students, employment contributed to their current sense of well-being. Students wanted to be employed because it made them feel like contributors to their family's financial well-being.

Adult Influences Impacts Expectations

The study supported other research findings that adults, or parental influences, a matter concerning the development of a students' expectations for the future (Newman, 2005). During Arkansas PROMISE, the role of the staff Connector was pivotal in students internalizing a belief about their ability to be successful in employment. They were critical in exposing students to new experiences, such as summer camps or college tours. Through their monthly home visits, staff developed a close connection with their families. The close relationship and continued engagement staff developed with families contributed to parents being more likely to attend monthly trainings or sending another family member to participate in their place. This supported the youth's continued active engagement in the program. Home visits were important for helping staff understand the students' home life conditions and to determine if additional supports were needed for the family.

Staff relationships with families seemed to be one of both support and motivation for both parents and students. For parents, staff provided an opportunity to receive emotional support, counseling, reminders, and encouragement. Staff often reached out to parents by text and phone to check on them or for updates. Arkansas PROMISE staff shared resources and opportunities related to the parents and the students' goals or needs. After attending information sessions on education or employment opportunities, staff would often check-in with parents to help them process the information. For students, staff often served as a coach, reminding students of their goals, checking graduation progress, encouraging students to try new experiences, and take advantage of opportunities, like monthly trainings or summer camp and summer work. Staff sometimes coaxed students into taking a chance, offering opportunities more than once to get students to participate. In the researcher's opinion, it is doubtful the participants would have had the same response to opportunities they would have received only through the mail or by email. The one-on-one support and emphasis added an extra layer of motivation that encouraged participants to pursue those opportunities.

This research confirms when parents have a low expectation of success for post-secondary education and independent living, the students also have low expectations in these areas. The parents' lack of active involvement, support, and encouragement played a significant role in the lack of development of the student's expectations for success in these two areas. Lack of parental expectations of college enrollment seemed to correlate to the students' their lack of participation in post-secondary educational pursuit. Most parents practiced a hands-off approach in relation to their youth's education and independent living, providing motivation and support only when and if their child expressed an interest. Parents 2 and 4 stated that while their students had mentioned college in passing, neither felt their students had a genuine desire to pursue

college. Parent 1 did not believe her son could succeed in a traditional college setting. Parent 3 expected her student to continue to live with her and considered it a form of independent living. Parent 5 did not expect her son to live independently, although her son expressed interest in pursuing it. The parents' lack of support and motivation in these two areas seemed to be a primary contributor to the low expectations of success for students.

Recommendations

This study conducted a qualitative case study of 10 Arkansas PROMISE participants in the Eastern Arkansas region. The study offers several suggestions regarding how it may be expanded in future studies, followed by recommendations for adult and lifelong learning educators.

Recommendations for Future Study

- This study may be expanded to include the five regions of Arkansas PROMISE and include a broader sample of program participants who could describe their expectations after participating in the program. How did parental expectations impact their expectations of success? What barriers have they encountered in the achievement of their goals?

- This study may be expanded by the region or by the program to examine employment expectations and experiences of Arkansas PROMISE participants. Of students who had a summer work experience, what were their experiences with SSI? What were their post-PROMISE work experiences? What led to successful work experiences? What were barriers to gaining and maintaining employment? What were parental expectations for jobs?

- Among Arkansas PROMISE youth who were enrolled in transition services with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, what were their experiences? What outcomes did they

achieve? Under what conditions were their cases closed? What type of support did the participants receive from the state agency?

- Further study on expectations for independent living among all Arkansas PROMISE youth should be conducted. Among the broader population, has independent living been achieved? If so, what barriers did they encounter? What contributed to their expectation of success? What obstacles did they face? How did parental expectations impact their expectations of success? What is the relationship between employment and independent living?

- Further study on expectations for higher education among all Arkansas PROMISE youth should be conducted. Have college or vocational trade school goals been achieved? How did parental expectations impact their achievement or non-achievement of post-secondary school success? What barriers did they encounter? What contributed to their expectation of success?

- Further study on expectations for future financial support among all Arkansas PROMISE youth should be conducted. Do Arkansas PROMISE participants still receive SSI? What are their expectations for future financial support? What barriers have they encountered? What is the relationship between employment and future economic success?

Recommendations for Educators in Adult and Lifelong Learning

In his 1958 poem titled Harlem, Langston Hughes asked, "What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore—And then run?" (Hughes, 1958, p. 123). Case findings unsurprisingly revealed the profound impact Arkansas PROMISE had on the participant's lives. Students and parents were provided a wealth of opportunities and resources while participating in PROMISE. The program was sorely missed among participants,

with some expressing a desire for the program to continue. However, the conversations with parents and students left the researcher feeling a certain level of sadness that the work had not been completed - a dream deferred.

Case records and interviews revealed a story of the participants graduating into new beginnings and experiencing success. At the same time, the program was winding down. The new staff took over as Connectors, with the primary role of ensuring participants met the thresholds of engaging with ARS, local workforce agencies, higher education, and starting an Arkansas ABLE account. Staff connections with program participants shifted, with less engagement and focus on trust, relationships, and support, to focusing on successful closures. According to ARS, after the program ended, participants were successfully enrolled in transition services. Yet none of the students had active, open cases at the time of the interview, indicating a successful employment outcome, or the student was no longer pursuing employment. It is unclear what services were provided to participants or why their cases were no longer open with ARS. Without the close connection of staff, it seemed student motivation ended.

PROMISE was created to fill a gap in services for low-income students with disabilities on SSI and their families. When the program ended, a vacuum returned. This led to the following recommendations for further research for educators in adult and lifelong learning.

Inclusion of Mentoring and Coaching in Multi-Faceted Transition Services to Students with Disabilities

Current Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) federal guidelines define individualized and group transition services to students and youth with disabilities to include activities that support the development of outcomes in postsecondary education or vocational training, employment or supported employment in integrated settings, adult education, adult

services, independent living, and community participation. Group transition services may include

tours of college and vocational training programs, participation in career fairs, or career

exploration. Along with a range of other services, individualized transition services may include,

but are not limited to, counseling and guidance to support students and youth in making an

informed choice (U.S. Department of Education 2020).

Future researchers in adult and lifelong learning may consider studying the use of

mentoring and coaching to provide a multi-faceted approach to transition services. These two

promising instructional strategies are coordinated around the delivery of emotional,

informational, and social support to youth and their families. They may lead to more significant

outcomes in education, independent living, and employment. Research has shown using adults as

mentors of students with disabilities leads to their successful inclusion in STEM programs

(Sowers et al., 2017). Using adults as coaches of transition students may include such

instructional strategies as skills learning, self-management, problem-solving, and the provision

of individualized supports (King et al., 2006). In lessons learned from Wisconsin PROMISE,

Anderson et al. (2021) suggested the use of family empowerment specialists (FESs), a trauma-

informed, person and family-centered professional who keeps families engaged with transition

services. The FES establishes a trusting relationship with participants to ensure they are

empowered, motivated, and involved in pursuing their goals.

A multi-faceted approach to transition services has been widely shown to be an effective

transition strategy. Figure 6 illustrates commonly used transition approaches and instructional

strategies (King et al., 2006). Coaching and mentoring enhances a greater awareness of

community tools and resources and ensures a more supportive environment. This was the role of

Arkansas PROMISE staff and seemed to be the missing link for participants in this study post-

PROMISE. All of the students had been enrolled in vocational rehabilitation services after

PROMISE ended. Still all of them had closed cases at the time of the interviews, indicating

achievement of their goal, or a continued disinterest in their goal. Would outcomes have been

different had one-on-one support through mentoring or coaching been offered for these

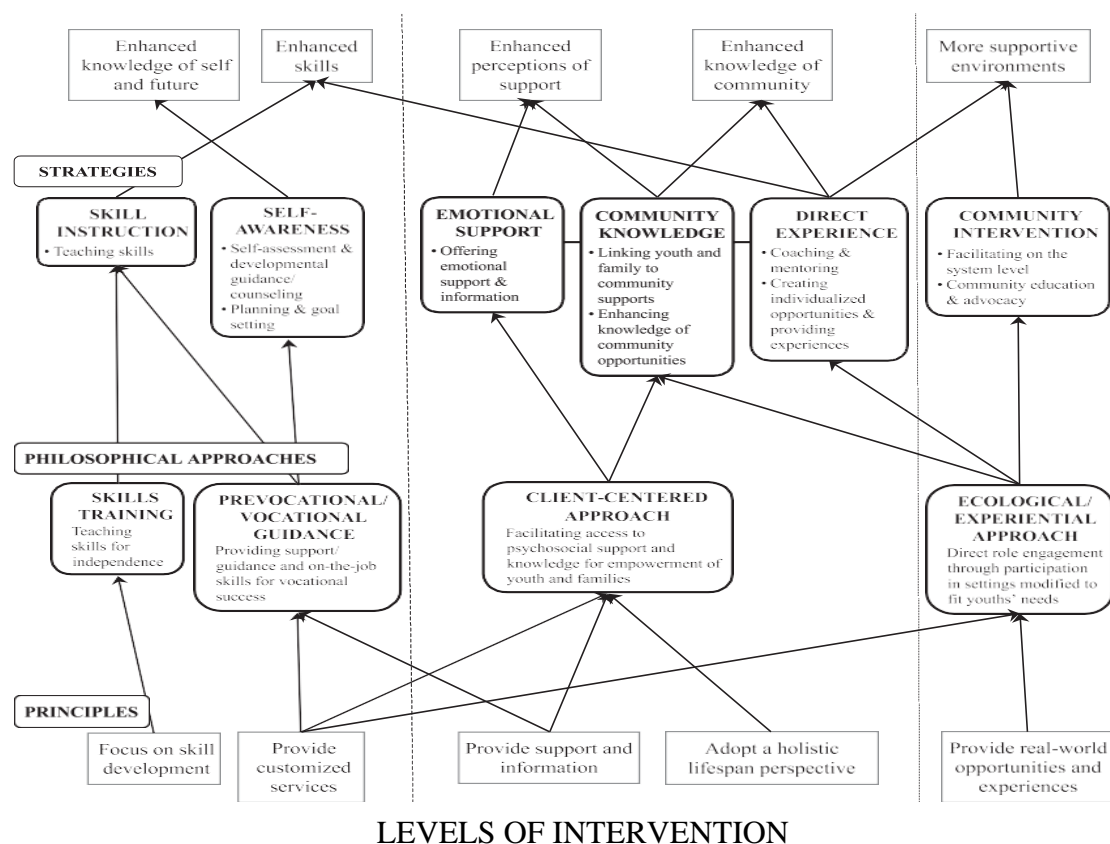participants?

LEVELS OF INTERVENTION

Figure 6
An Integrated Model of Transition Strategies (King et al., 2006)

Provision of Integrated Resource Teams for Students with Disabilities

In its 2020 transition guide, the U.S. Department of Education laid out a number of

services, opportunities, and programs available in the broader community to help with the

successful transition of students and youths with disabilities into adulthood. Those included

mentoring programs through independent living centers, YMCAs, and the Boys and Girls Clubs.

They had apprenticeships, Career Pathways, and paid employment, opportunities offered through

colleges, state VR programs, local businesses, workforce centers, social service agencies, and

local education agencies (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). It is a dizzying array of services

loosely connected in the community. Families are charged with navigating these

disparate, uncoordinated programs and strategies, which creates challenges with information and

awareness, eligibility, and access to services (Contreary & Honeycutt, 2021). Transition

guidelines are confusing and difficult for families to navigate. Youth should have access to better

coordination of services. Further research of integrated resource teams should be explored as one

method of ensuring that coordinated provision.

When youth with disabilities exit the school system, they face a confusing array of

services they must access and navigate to get the help they need for education, independent

living, and employment. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA)

encouraged collaboration at the federal, state, and local levels. As a result of WIOA, state

vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs have set aside 15% of their federal funds to support

transition services for youth with disabilities. Despite this, many potentially eligible students and

their families do not access services (Contreary & Honeycutt, 2021; Anderson et al., 2021).

Integrated resource teams (IRTs) are considered a new and promising practice and

support the intent of WIOA that participants can go through "no wrong door" when accessing

services in their community. IRTs connects key community partners in a participant-led meeting

centered on the participants' individual needs and circumstances. During the meeting, providers

of federal, state, and local services share support they've identified that encourages the

achievement of the participants' career interests. The concept could be expanded to include

education and independent living goals. The model provides for active resource collaboration

among providers and ensures continuous support and engagement for participants. Figure 7

depicts the flow of IRTs, the use of which is shown to increase the independence, education,

empowerment, and community engagement of participants.

CIL = Centers for Independent Living; MH/LTS = mental health/long term
services; SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; SSA = Social
Security Administration; SSI = Supplemental Security Income; VR = vocational
rehabilitation; WIOA=Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Figure 7
Integrated Resource Teams (Anderson et al., 2021)

Summary

The participants' enthusiasm and support of Arkansas PROMISE are evident from this research. Participants expressed enormous gratitude for the program, which instilled in them a sense of accomplishment and confidence in employment they maintained over program's life. Relationships among participants and with staff remained one of the participants' fondest memories. The program made an impact on the participants lives. Participants, though sometimes struggling to achieve their goals, maintained a mostly positive outlook on their lives. However, a gap in services exists for students and youths with disabilities who are not in high school and not connected to their state VR program.

This research addressed expectations of success among Arkansas PROMISE participants in the East Arkansas Region. This study offered suggestions for future research that supports how educators and practitioners can be better positioned to support the successful transition of youth and students with disabilities. Consideration of those strategies and their thoughtful provision in a coordinated stream of services can support educational institutions, state, federal, state, and local agencies in keeping our collective promise to students and youth with disabilities to support them in their successful obtainment of employment, post-secondary education, independent living, and future financial success.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Interview Questions – Youth Participants

Research Question 1: How do participants describe their expectations about Arkansas

PROMISE?

Interview Questions

- Describe your expectations about Arkansas PROMISE before you began your

  participation in the program.

a. What were your expectations about the program?

b. How did you expect the program would help you?

- Describe your expectations about Arkansas PROMISE after the program ended.

  a. Tell me how Arkansas PROMISE impacted your life.

  b. Comparing your before PROMISE and after PROMISE experience, what

    changed?

- Looking back, describe anything that you would change about your experience in the

  program.

- Tell me about your goals.

  a. In general, what does the future hold for you?

Research Question 2: How do participants describe their expectations about employment?

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your expectations about future employment.

   1. Describe any activities you have taken to reach your employment-related goal(s).

   2. Tell me what has had a positive impact on your employment goal(s).

      a. What barriers have you encountered?

      b. How did you address the barriers?

      c. How would you describe your experiences while employed?

      d. How did Arkansas PROMISE help you define your employment goal(s)?

      e. How did Arkansas PROMISE help you reach your employment goal(s)?

Research Question 3: How do participants describe their expectations about higher education?

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your expectation about higher education.

      a. Describe any activities you have taken to reach your educational goal(s).

      b. Tell me what has had a positive impact on your educational goal(s).

      c. What barriers have you encountered?

      d. How did you address the barriers?

      e. How would you describe your experiences while pursuing your education?

      f. How did Arkansas PROMISE help you define your educational goal(s)?

      g. How did Arkansas PROMISE help you reach your educational goal(s)?

Research Question 4: How do participants describe their expectations about independent living?

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your expectations about independent living.

      a. Describe any activities you have taken to reach your independent living related goal(s).

2. Tell me what has had a positive impact on your independent living goal(s).

      a. What barriers have you encountered?

      b. How did you address the barriers?

  c. How would you describe your experiences while pursuing independent living?

  d. How did Arkansas PROMISE help you define your independent living

   goal(s)?

  e. How did Arkansas PROMISE help you reach your independent living goal(s)?

Research Question 5: How do participants describe their expectations about future financial

support?

Interview Questions

 1. Please describe your expectations about future financial support.

  a. Describe any activities you have taken to decrease your dependence on public

   benefits, besides SSI.

 2. Tell me what has had a positive impact on this goal.

  a. What barriers have you encountered?

  b. How did you address the barriers?

  c. How would you describe your experience while on public benefits, including

   SSI? If you are no longer on public benefits, including SSI, how would you

   describe your experience?

  d. How did your participation in Arkansas PROMISE affect your perception of

   public benefits, including SSI?

  e. Tell me about activities you have taken to help support yourself financially.

Interview Questions - Parent/Guardian Participants

Research Question 1: How do participants describe their expectations about Arkansas PROMISE?

Interview Questions

1. Describe your expectations as a parent about Arkansas PROMISE before your child began participation in the program.

    a. What were your expectations about the program?

    b. Were your expectations met?

    c. How did you expect the program would help your family?

2. Describe your expectations and assessments of Arkansas PROMISE after the program ended.

    a. Tell me how Arkansas PROMISE affected your child's life and the family.

    b. Comparing your before PROMISE and after PROMISE experience, what changed?

3. Looking back, describe anything that you would change about your child's experience and your family's experience in the program.

4. Tell me about the goal(s) of your child and your family.

    a. In general, what does the future hold for your child?

Research Question 2: How do participants describe their expectations about employment?

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me how you as a parent describe your expectations about future employment of your child.

2. Describe any activities your child has taken to reach his or her employment related goal(s).

3. Tell me what has had a positive impact on your child's employment goal(s) after PROMISE ended.

   a. What barriers have been encountered?

   b. How did you address the barriers? If you were provided assistance in addressing the barriers, what assistance did you provide?

   c. Describe your child's experiences while employed.

   d. How did Arkansas PROMISE help your child define his or her employment goal(s)?

   e. Describe how Arkansas PROMISE help your child reach his or her employment goal(s).

Research Question 3: How do participants describe their expectations about higher education?

Interview Questions

1. Please describe the expectation you as a parent had about higher education for your child.

   a. Describe any activities your child has taken to reach their educational goal(s).

2. Tell me what has had a positive impact on their educational goal(s).

   a. What barriers have they encountered?

   b. How did your child address the barriers they encountered? If you provided assistance in addressing the barriers, what assistance did you provide?

   c. How would you describe your child's experiences while pursuing their education?

      d. How did Arkansas PROMISE help your child define their educational goal(s)?

      e. How did Arkansas PROMISE help your child reach their educational goal(s)?

Research Question 4: How do participants describe their expectations about independent living?

Interview Questions

1. Please describe the expectations you have about independent living for your child.

    a. Describe any activities they have taken to reach their independent living related goal(s).

2. Tell me what has had a positive impact on your child's independent living goal(s).

    a. What barriers have been encountered?

    b. How did your child address the barriers? If you provided assistance in addressing the barriers, what assistance was provided?

    c. How would you describe your child's experiences while pursuing independent living?

    d. Describe how Arkansas PROMISE help your child define his or her independent living goals.

    e. How did Arkansas PROMISE help your child reach his or her independent living goals?

Research Question 5: How do participants describe their expectations about future financial support?

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your expectations about future financial support for your child.

    a. Describe any activities you or your child have taken to decrease his or her dependence on federal or public benefits, including Supplementing Security Income (SSI).

2. Tell me what has had a positive impact on this goal.

    a. What barriers have been encountered?

    b. How did your child address the barriers? If you provided assistance in addressing the barriers, what assistance did you provide?

    c. How would you describe your family's life while on public benefits, including SSI? If you are no longer on public benefits, including SSI, how would you describe your life?

    d. How did your family's participation in Arkansas PROMISE affect your perception of public benefits, including SSI?

    e. Tell me about activities you have taken to help support your family's financial independence.

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

A Case Study of Arkansas PROMISE Participants

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Principal Researcher: Robin Freeman

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Kit Kacirek

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

You are invited to participate in a research study about Arkansas PROMISE. You are being asked to participate in this study because you were a participant in good standing in the program from 2013-2018..

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Who is the Principal Researcher?

Robin Freeman

Who is the Faculty Advisor?

Kit Kacirek, Ed.D.

What is the purpose of this research study?

The purpose of this study is This purpose of this case study is to develop an in-depth understanding of how youth with disabilities and their parents describe their expectations for the future, after participating in the Arkansas PROMISE program.

Who will participate in this study?

One youth participant in good standing from each of the five regions will be asked to participate. Their parents or guardians will also be asked to participate.

What am I being asked to do?

Your participation will require the following:

> Describe your experiences by participating in a 90 minute interview, which will be conducted by ZOOM. You must be willing to participate in a follow-up interview lasting no longer then 30 minutes, if the researcher has additional questions.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?

The risks to participation in this research include disclosing personal information related to your experiences in the Arkansas PROMISE program. There are no physical risks to you.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

Participants will receive a $30 Walmart gift card after participating in the initial interview, and an additional $30 for any follow-up interviews completed.

How long will the study last?

This is an interview lasting no longer than 90 mintues and will be conducted virtually over ZOOM. Follow up interviews will be no longer than 30 minutes and conducted over ZOOM.

Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this study?

Participants will receive a $30 Walmart gift card after participating in the initial interview, and an additional $30 for any follow-up interviews completed.

Will I have to pay for anything?

No, there will be no cost associated with your participation.

What are the options if I do not want to be in the study?

If you do not want to be in this study, you may refuse to participate. Also, you may refuse to participate at any time during the study. Your job, your grade, your relationship with the University, etc. will not be affected in any way if you refuse to participate.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law.

Your name and othe personal information will be anonymous. Records will be locked in a secura area that is only accessible to the researcher.

Will I know the results of the study?

At the conclusion of the study you will have the right to request feedback about the results. You may contact the faculty advisor, Kit Kacirek Kitk@uark.edu or Principal Researcher, Robin Freeman, rrfreeman@uark.edu . You will receive a copy of this form for your files.

What do I do if I have questions about the research study?

You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or Faculty Advisor as listed below for any concerns that you may have.

Robin Freeman, rrfreema@uark.edu

Kit Kacirek, Faculty Advisor; Kitk@uark.edu

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP

Institutional Review Board Coordinator

Research Compliance

University of Arkansas

109 MLKG Building

Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201

irb@uark.edu

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

_____

Participant Name: _____   Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____   Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Individual Examples with Brief Analysis

- Theme 1: After participating in Arkansas PROMISE, participants had high expectations

  regarding the program, describing it as having shown them what is possible for their lives.

  This theme is the basis of the research. Parents and students alike had low to no expectations

  of what PROMISE could do for them. They entered the program not knowing and left the

  program virtually blown away by the program's impact. It encapsulates their feelings of

  gratitude, the confidence they now have, their general expectations for the future.

  > Parent 1
  > I didn't really have a lot of you know it just seemed like a really cool program I was
  > under the impression from the beginning that they would help him get in the
  > workforce, and that was my, really, my only thing that I wanted to happen to get him
  > some work experience that I didn't really have an idea of what it was, other than that.

  > Parent 2
  > I like to call her my child's warrior besides myself moms are always going to be
  > written for their kids, but I feel it helps to have somebody else, not in the family that
  > knows what the family's going through to help root for that child and to also be Come
  > on, you got it, you know, like trying to get them up and get all excited. She's such a
  > big help he really loves her and she was such a big help I've always called her his
  > warrior because to me that's what she's been.

  > Student 2
  > Like the staff was always welcoming. They're always nice. And if you needed help,
  > they would help you out if you needed it. And I got to meet a lot of cool people from
  > summer camp or just being in the program. There was a lot of nice people. And if I
  > needed help, they would help me learn how to do it, or showed us how to do it. And
  > just now future friends are friends now the staff was able to be able to meet in the
  > summer him.

  > Student 5
  > I was very I was very thankful for the program at the end. Because I felt like I want to
  > push myself, you know, out of my own slump if it wasn't for them, you know I wasn't
  > worried about a job, I was you know living with my mom I was happy, I was content
  > and me, I didn't realize there was more I was capable of, is what I want to say.

Analysis: Parents and Student are reflecting on the impact of the Arkansas PROMISE program, and the staff's influence. They all agree their expectations for the future are high because of the program's impact on their lives, particularly the staff influence.

- Theme 4: Participants' expectation for independent living were mixed, with most participants expecting to live with another family member or a support person in the future. Some participants were enthusiastic about their expectations for moving out, while others were cautious. Participants had a desire for independent living, but based upon their knowledge of what it took, they were cautious about their expectations of living independently.

> Parent 3
> I think it made a little impact on him. But, I guess. I guess he don't want to the move out because living here with me just like live in his own because I give him choice to do around here. So, it's not. Well, it's some things different right. You got to learn how to pay his rent, put money over here for to buy groceries buy his body works and buy his detergent to wash and it's a lot of things to do.

> Student 2
> First, when I was younger first getting an ark so promised my goals and expectations of eventually moving out and either being on a sofa with a roommate, like, oh, it seemed easy at first. But now as I get older, I realized how harder it is and how probably it's probably a little bit more difficult nowadays, because just how places are now.

> Student 5
> Oh well, they did help me on my budget and expenses and it's funny you ask that because I am recently looking at places with a friend be roommates here in town okay.

> Parent 4
> I don't think Student 4 was ever going to be able to live on his own because he's gonna have to have somebody here to help them out I've taken him shopping and would try and go over the stuff that he's learned in the program, and he still wants to buy outside his means.

Student 5
Oh well, they did help me on my budget and expenses and it's funny you ask that because I am recently looking at places with a friend be roommates here in town okay.

Analysis: Participants are discussing the possibility of independent living. There are challenges for some, while one is definitely interested and pursuing this as a short-term goal. Expectations for independent living are mixed at best.

- Theme 3: Participants' expectation for higher education were low, with lack of education supports and the individuals' disability regarded as the primary barriers to college success.

  Overall, participants did not have an expectation for college, with some categorizing it as unnecessary. Disability, transportation, and educational supports were seen as barriers to college success.

Parent 1
So I'm just going to be straight up but I'm not trying to be negative, but Student 1 cannot go to college in the traditional sense of the word.

Parent 2
I don't know if he's too keen on going to college, because of the whole school setting anyway.

Student 2
I thought I think about college. I wouldn't mind going to it. I have a lot of problems with like certain. Like, when it comes to classes of I usually have a lot of issues and problems with understanding a lot of stuff. So I had a hard time comprehending certain things.

Student 4
No now I wasn't big on schooling so it was totally opposite of a goal to go to college.

Parent 5
I just, my expectation would be for them to just do their best thing and go for something they truly want to do okay

Student 3
I also wanted to go school for a little bit, but I figured out currently that that wasn't for me so I've just been trying to help my grandma will getting a good job.

Analysis: The range of answers point to higher education being a low priority for most participants. Some participants had at some point expressed interest in college but lacked support or direction on where to begin. Others were not interested in applying because of previous experiences in high school, or because of complications from their disability, or some other issue.

Appendix D

IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS.

To:	Robin R Freeman BELL 4188
From:	Douglas J Adams, Chair IRB Expedited Review
Date:	01/12/2021
Action:	**Expedited Approval**
Action Date:	01/12/2021
Protocol #:	2012302912
Study Title:	A Case Study of Arkansas PROMISE Participants and Their Expectations for the Future
Expiration Date:	12/17/2021
Last Approval Date:	

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Kit Kacirek, Investigator