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College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Walden University
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Abstract

Public Policy Impact on Transitional Services as Indicated by Experiences of College
Students With High-Incidence Disabilities

by

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MEd, Xavier University, 2007

BS, The Ohio State University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
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Abstract

Education for individuals with disabilities is complicated by a lack of access to educational services, partly due to the gaps created by different policies meant to provide equal access to services in high school and college. The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to explore the perceptions of college students with disabilities as they transition from receiving services primarily under IDEA in high school to ADA in college. Benet's polarities of democracy theory served as the theoretical framework for this study. The research question explored the perceptions of college students with high-incidence disabilities about their transitional services as they transition from receiving IDEA-based services in high school to ADA-mandated services in college. Data were collected through document analysis and participant interviews and analyzed using thematic coding with constant comparison of participants' final high school IEP or 504 plan and interview transcripts. The study found that transitional services for these students needed to be addressed through the use of public policy addressing services received, advocacy, and procedural matters. Further, the research suggested that implementation at all educational levels of programs and curriculums that provide skills and knowledge needed during their transition along with stronger partnerships between stakeholders may provide a solution that can be implemented in daily practice. Pursuing the recommendations and implications of this research could lead to positive social change through greater access to postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities, creating more equitable access to higher education and future employment and participation in society for these individuals throughout their lives.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my loving and supportive wife, Jima Gansler. Your constant encouragement and sacrifice to make sure that I could complete this journey that took so much of my time and energy while the needs of our family, my work, and our life were still consistently throwing challenges at us is the only reason I was able to complete this work. I also want to dedicate this to my children, my former teachers throughout my life, and all of the students whom I have ever taught. Each of you have given me knowledge and insight that made me see the need for this research, the importance of social change, and the ability of people to make a difference in society. Thank you all.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Individuals with disabilities face many barriers in society. One set of barriers that are frequently addressed in the literature are those that limit access to postsecondary education. As shown in the review of the literature in this study, students with disabilities enter and complete postsecondary education at a much lower rate than their peers without disabilities (Prince et al., 2020a; Trainor et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2005). This social injustice must be addressed to bring about positive social change that creates equitable opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Despite the importance of access to postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities and the challenges they face in the transition from high school to postsecondary education, limited research has been done to address how the adaptation of current or creation of new public policy might be able to provide a way to address these challenges involved with transition for this population. This study explores the social problem of the challenges faced by students with disabilities as they transition from high school to college due to changing public policies that mandate their support and accommodation through a public policy perspective to attempt to provide new insight that might guide positive social change.

In this chapter, I provide a background of the social problem. I will then provide a problem statement that demonstrates a need to address a gap in the current literature and grounds the study in the field of public policy and administration. I will discuss the purpose of the study and present the research question. Next, I will discuss the theoretical framework for the study. I next describe the nature of the study and provide a discussion

of the methodology and then provide definitions that are needed for the reader to understand the topic. The assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations being used in and impacting the study will be described. I close with a discussion of the significance of the topic in terms of contribution to the field of public policy and administration and the implications for social change before providing a summary of the chapter.

Background

Literature in the fields of public administration, education, disability services, psychology, vocational rehabilitation, and law have addressed the challenges faced by students with disabilities throughout their time in high school and postsecondary education. Research has identified numerous reasons why individuals with disabilities struggle to rise to the same level of success as their peers without disabilities in high school and postsecondary education. A significant amount of this literature looks at the transitional planning, processes, and services that are meant to help a student experience a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education. The difficulties students face in their transition can start early in their education with issues related to lower expectations from teachers and school staff (Doyle et al., 2017; Francis et al., 2018; Ressa, 2022), lack of access to essential skills instruction (Alverson et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2018; Morningstar et al., 2017; Scruggs et al., 2021), and lack of access to college-preparation curriculum (Monahan et al., 2020; Morningstar et al., 2017; Trainor et al., 2016). These students continue to experience difficulties as they move into the transition planning process.

Difficulties with the transition planning process happen for a variety of reasons. Many of these reasons may be linked back to the lack of clarity in public policy related to transitional planning mandates for students preparing to transition out of high school (Francis et al., 2018; Prince et al., 2020a). Among these barriers are issues related to parental involvement being limited or perfunctory in the transition planning process and the student being unlikely to receive the services they need (Francis et al., 2019, 2020; Mello et al., 2021). The sometimes-perfunctory nature of parent involvement in the transition planning process is particularly concerning when one considers the research shows that significant parental involvement in the transition planning process can result in better outcomes for the student (Alverson et al., 2019; Doyle et al., 2017; Flowers et al., 2018) and is mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). However, parent involvement is not the only collaboration that can have a substantial impact on the outcomes of the transition planning process. Individual representatives from outside agencies that will work with the student following their graduation from high school also can have an impact on these students.

Interagency collaboration has been identified as a critical area in transition planning for students with disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Failure to involve the appropriate professionals, based on the needs of the student, leaves the individual with a lack of knowledge on what assistance they could receive when they graduate from high school (Flowers et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2019; Pillay et al., 2021). Further, for those students preparing to enter postsecondary education, the lack

of involvement of a representative that can explain the transition process and requirements to the student and their family puts the student at a disadvantage as they try to navigate an unfamiliar system at a critical time (Alverson et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2019; Trainor et al., 2016). Lacking this collaboration can result in a failure to establish clear and personally valued goals involving postsecondary education (Alverson et al., 2019; Balestreri et al., 2014; Ressa, 2022). These issues (lack of access to college preparation curriculum, lack of significant parent involvement in transition planning, and inefficient collaboration between school professionals involved in the planning process and outside agencies that will serve the student after graduation) together present challenges in the transition planning process that need to be addressed through updated or new public policy. Such policies would address the service gap that occurs between IDEA and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) along with other factors that can have a negative impact on the transition from high school to college for a student with a high-incidence disability.

Other factors addressed in the literature that can create barriers to transitioning from high school to postsecondary education for students with high-incidence disabilities include instructor perceptions in high school and postsecondary education (Doyle et al., 2017; Francis et al., 2018; Ressa, 2022) and a lack of focus on functional skills curriculum (Alverson et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2018; Morningstar et al., 2017; Scruggs et al., 2021). These factors can prevent students with disabilities from obtaining the accommodations they need to have access to the curriculum in the postsecondary

education setting. Given that the identified barriers to transition from high school to postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities occur throughout high school, during the transition planning process, and into postsecondary education, a broader solution is required to address the problem and ensure that students with disabilities have access to their basic human right to an education. Despite this need, a public policy solution has seldom been addressed in the current literature.

Despite the many fields of study that have examined the low participation and graduation rates from postsecondary education for students with disabilities, seldom has the problem been examined within the field of public policy and administration. When one considers the decades of legislation and policy that have attempted to address equity for individuals with disabilities, one would expect further focus in the literature on a public policy solution to the current challenges with transition from high school to postsecondary education. As such, it is surprising that the problem related to a lack of adequate connection between IDEA and ADA for students with high-incidence disabilities transitioning from high school to postsecondary education has been addressed so little in the public policy field. In addition, no literature exists that presents the lack of information about the experiences of students with disabilities transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and the challenges faced by these individuals during this transitional period through the theoretical framework of the polarities of democracy theory. This research provides evidence that conceptualizing the problem as needing to be addressed with polarity thinking provides an effective way to develop possible answers to the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities as they transition from

receiving their services under IDEA in high school to ADA in postsecondary education. The lack of these two specific focal points, addressing the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities during the transition from high school to postsecondary education through a public policy perspective and using the theoretical lens of polarities of democracy, creates a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed.

Problem Statement

The situation or issue that prompted me to search the literature is the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities as they transition from high school to college. Although researchers have investigated this issue, the topic has not been explored in this way; no previous researchers have examined the way in which understanding the experiences of college students with high-incidence disabilities can provide possible policy solutions through new policies or changes to bridge the gaps between IDEA and ADA. Students with high-incidence disabilities include those who experience learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and autism (Joshi & Bouck, 2017; Mello et al, 2021; Murray et al., 2021; Trainor et al., 2016). In addition, no one has explored this issue through the lens of the polarities of democracy theoretical framework. The specific research problem is that not enough is known about how the experiences of students with high-incidence disabilities transitioning from high school to college. Studying this phenomenon through the lens of the polarities of democracy theoretical framework might provide possible policy solutions to bridge the gaps between IDEA and ADA.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to explore the perceptions of college students with high-incidence disabilities as they transition from receiving services primarily under IDEA in high school to ADA in college. This study provides insight into ways that barriers faced by students with disabilities during this transition may be addressed from the view of public policy and administration and through the lens of the polarities of democracy theoretical framework.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of college students with high-incidence disabilities about their transitional services as they transition from receiving IDEA-based services in high school to ADA-mandated services in college?

Theoretical Foundation

The theory that grounds this study is Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy theory. The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of my study include that the polarities of democracy theory address the polarities that must be managed in problems that do not have a direct solution. These five polarity pairs as identified by Benet (2021) are diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, participation and representation, freedom and authority, and justice and due process. The goal of managing the polarities is to maximize the advantages of each pole while minimizing the disadvantages. Managing polarities in this manner to address problems was first described by Johnson (2014) in his research on polarity thinking. In using polarity management, problems are addressed as requiring solutions that focus on

what Johnson calls both/and thinking instead of the more common either/or thinking used in problem solving (Johnson, 2014). Given that barriers to education for individuals with disabilities oppress these individuals and keep them from having the same economic and social potential as those individuals without disabilities, the focus of the five polarity pairs as a means for addressing oppression and realizing the promises of democracy creates a connection between the polarities of democracy framework and this research. When adapting or creating public policy to address the transition of students with high-incidence disabilities from high school to college, all the polarities must be leveraged effectively. Within the five sets of polarity pairs, this study focused on all polarities of democracy, with an emphasis on diversity and equality, individual needs and communal obligations, and participation and representation. Effectively leveraging the five polarity pairs may help find answers in new or adapted public policies that allow for students with disabilities to be prepared for the change from receiving services under IDEA to services under ADA and Section 504 while still providing the support required to help them make the transition.

Nature of Study

To address the research question in this qualitative study, the specific research design consisted of a generic qualitative research design as described by Kostere and Kostere (2021). I conducted interviews with college students in a manner described by Rubin and Rubin (2012) and Kostere and Kostere and conducted document analysis of participants' Individual Education Plan or 504 Plan from their final year of high school in order to understand the perceptions of college students with disabilities as they transition

from receiving services under IDEA in high school to receiving services under ADA and Section 504 in college. The data were analyzed through an inductive thematic analysis with constant comparison (Kostere & Kostere, 2021).

Definitions

Due process – Due process is the legal procedure established by IDEA through which parents may contest the decisions of their local school district in matters related to the provision of special education services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

High-incidence disability – As defined throughout the literature, a high-incidence disability is one that occurs among a substantial proportion of the population of individuals with disabilities. For this study, these high-incidence disabilities typically include learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and autism (Joshi & Bouck, 2017; Mello et al, 2021; Trainor et al., 2016).

Assumptions

The following assumptions are aspects of the study that are taken to be true without the ability to provide scientific proof. Addressed are the areas of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. Scotland (2012) stated that while the philosophical assumptions can never be empirically proven, all forms of research must be aligned with these positions. Given this conjecture, it is important that a researcher identifies these assumptions from the start of their study.

Ontology

Ontology addresses one's view of reality and how reality is determined. For this study, I take the ontological stance that underlies the theoretical framework providing a lens for this study, polarities of democracy. In polarities of democracy, Benet (2022), stated that the meaning of human existence as a species is to promote the overall survival of humanity. From this initial assumption that the purpose of human existence is the continuance of the species, a focus on sustainability is needed for people and for the planet (Benet, 2022). If one accepts that sustainability is the ultimate meaning behind existence and reality, then it may be assumed that all people share a reality that is shaped by this need.

The need for sustainability that shapes humanity's shared reality can explain attempts to shape society in ways that allow different groups of people to have access to the resources they need to contribute to that sustainability. As such, if one accepts this goal of sustainability and wants each individual to be able to contribute to the species survival, one must recognize the importance of ensuring that all individuals, in this case individuals with disabilities, have access to those activities that will enable them to best contribute to the sustainability of the species. To do so, it is critical to understand and address the barriers that individuals face in accessing these activities. In the case of this research, understanding how to address the barriers experienced by individuals with disabilities as they transition from high school to college aids in promoting sustainability of the species. As society has traditionally addressed issues with accessibility through public policy (Americans with disabilities act, 2008; Individuals with disabilities

education act, 2004; Vocational rehabilitation act of 1973, 1973), researchers should be searching for a public policy solution to the difficulties faced by individuals with disabilities as they transition from high school to postsecondary education.

Epistemology

Epistemology addresses the question of how a subject knows what they presume to know. For this study, my epistemological view is that of two different paradigms from the social sciences. These paradigms are critical theory and subjectivism. I embrace the concepts of critical theory that there is a fixed reality and truth shared among the human species (Scotland, 2012). To promote the survival and advancement of the species, it is necessary to identify shared goals and problems through a single reality (Benet, 2022). However, when looking at the individual and their experiences, I believe that each person's individual reality is shaped through the interaction of individuals and their world (Scotland, 2012). Since these interactions are mediated by factors that are different for each individual, such as culture, history, and their place in society, each person has a subjective reality from which they function. In terms of this research, accepting that an individual's reality is shaped by their own experiences means that one must understand those experiences to understand the barriers that occur for students with disabilities transitioning from IDEA services in high school to ADA-mandated services in postsecondary education. To understand individuals, it is crucial to be aware of their subjective realities while simultaneously accepting the existence of a greater, common truth and reality that will lead to the continued existence of humanity.

Axiology

Axiology is used to identify what values are worthwhile or ethically necessary. In identifying the underlying axiology shaping my study, I agree with Benet (2022) that the 10 values identified in the polarities of democracy theory are both vital to democracy and a means to address social injustice. I further concur that the 10 values are grouped into five polarity pairs, that each has positive and negative aspects that must be managed, and that all are interconnected and are not sufficient on their own (Benet, 2022). I believe that a critical way to help achieve the values identified by polarities of democracy and the promise of democracy is through equitable education for all individuals in society. Given the importance of education, I believe that the need to educate every individual should be a highly valued aspect of society and that denying this access for any reason is a grave social injustice that must be addressed to achieve a true form of democracy and end oppression. This belief has been shaped by my role as a parent of children who have received services under IDEA, my experience as a former public-school special education teacher, and my work in disability services at a postsecondary institution. These are areas that could create a potential bias, but these biases are directly addressed later in this paper.

Methodological Assumptions

One component of oppression is that the voices of those being oppressed are silenced. When speaking about education being a tool of oppression, Giroux and Freire (2004) stated that in focusing the direction of education to that of a political ideal those in power have created a system in which marginalized individuals are unable to provide

accounts and have a voice in the dissemination of their culture, history, traditions, or experiences. When this happens, those with the least power are the first to be silenced. As such, qualitative research provides a way for those individuals to have a voice when studying the systems or circumstances that are oppressing them. For this reason, when studying the public policy around educational access for individuals with disabilities, it is important to understand the barriers faced from the perspectives of those who face them. A generic qualitative methodology is a way in which this research goal can be accomplished.

For my research, components of both critical methodology and interpretive methodology were needed. Critical methodology provided the means by which I looked at that overall unifying reality or truth that lends to the continued survival of the human species (Scotland, 2012). Interpretive methodology acknowledges and incorporates the individual reality formed by each person's specific experiences and encounters with society as a whole and the individuals with whom they interact (Scotland, 2012). By combining the critical and interpretive methodologies into a generic qualitative research design, I was able to understand the perceptions of my participants through the lens of polarities of democracy and simultaneously accept my assumptions that there is a common purpose of the survival of the species that shapes all individual's experiences while each individual has unique experiences, backgrounds, and knowledge that shapes their own reality. Furthermore, by accepting that the 10 polarities that are arranged into five pairs necessary to achieve democracy for all, I was able to analyze each participant's perceptions in a manner that allows me to emphasize how these perceptions align or do

not align with the need for society to ensure that everyone has access to a high-quality education and that denying any individual or group access to that education is a form of oppression and social injustice.

Scope and Delimitations

Exploring the perceptions of all individuals with high-incidence disabilities that are transitioning from high school to college would be impossible given the time and resource constraints of this study. As such, I have limited my examination to the perceptions of individuals with high-incidence disabilities from two universities in Kentucky whose disability falls into at least one of the categories of specific learning disability, other health impairment (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), emotional and behavioral disability, or autism, which are typically categorized as high-incidence disabilities (Joshi & Bouck, 2017; Mello et al, 2021; Trainor et al., 2016), to try to understand what these experiences can suggest about the effectiveness or needed changes in the public policies that are meant to address this transition. The perceptions of individuals with high-incidence disabilities may be significantly different from those with severe cognitive disabilities, and these two groups may be better understood when studied separately. As such, individuals with severe cognitive disabilities were not included as part of the study. Further, time and resource restrictions prohibited me from conducting this research with a more representative sample of individuals who fit in this population from various parts of the United States. These limitations impacted the potential transferability of my findings.

The intent of my research was not to generate data that is transferable to any further groups of individuals fitting the criteria included for participation in my study. While I strove to provide sufficient detail so that similar research could be conducted with other samples from different areas, I did not aim for significant transferability. Instead, my intent was to examine the perceptions of individual students with disabilities who have transitioned from high school to postsecondary education and are currently attending a postsecondary institution in one of two partner universities in Kentucky with which I worked for recruitment. Also, due to the desire to examine the public policies that impact transition for these students, my research is further delimited to individuals who had been provided special education services in high school through an individual education plan or 504 plan and continue to receive services while in postsecondary education. Students who attended private or parochial schools were excluded, as these schools do not have the same requirements set forth in IDEA. This requirement also excludes individuals who may have had disabilities but were not identified in high school as well as those who may have been identified in high school but were unable or did not desire to continue using these services in a postsecondary setting. While these issues may impact the transferability of research data, they do not make the knowledge gained any less important.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the general belief that generic qualitative research is not as rigorous as other forms of qualitative research such as case studies, narratives, phenomenology, and ethnography. Specifically, as defined by Kostere and Kostere

(2021), generic qualitative research is “a methodology that seeks to understand the human experience by taking a qualitative stance and using qualitative procedures” (p. 1). The wide range of methods included in this approach results in less guidance for the researcher in terms of required elements included in the research design. Another potential barrier when collecting primary data includes being able to access a sufficiently sized sample of college students with disabilities for my research from a university for which I do not work. Positionality addresses the connections between the researcher and the research being conducted to include elements such as race, identity, past experiences, and differential positions of power between the researcher and those with whom they are conducting the research (Corlett & Marvin, 2018). Holmes (2020) described positionality as a term that “both describes an individual’s world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context” (p. 1). Due to potential positionality concerns related to the possible perceived power differential between potential participants and myself, given my role in determining what accommodations are received by students at the university at which I am employed, I needed to recruit my sample from other universities. This requirement took additional coordination and time to complete my study. Likewise, additional consideration must be given to my connection to my topic.

I have chosen the topic of my research based on my personal experiences as a father of children with disabilities that have received services under IDEA, a former public-school special education teacher, and a staff member in the area of disability services at a local university. These connections to my topic create a potential issue of

positionality related to my history or biographical connection with the topic being studied (Corelett & Marvin, 2018). Kostere and Kostere (2021) stated that dissertation topics are often chosen based on what the researcher finds to be important. As such, it may be the case that there is both prior knowledge and preconceptions about the topic that could infuse bias into the research unless the researcher explicitly addresses this concern. As suggested by Kostere and Kostere, I reflected on each interview and throughout the data analysis process through field notes. Field notes provide a method by which the researcher can not only capture details that cannot be identified through a verbatim transcript, such as body language of the participant, but also address potential bias throughout the research project (Kostere & Kostere, 2021).

A final technical aspect that created a limitation in the study was the need to alter the original planned setting for the interviews. Due to scheduling conflicts and timing of the research, I needed to conduct my interviews through a virtual meeting format instead of in person. This format potentially limited my ability to notice nonverbal cues during interviews as well as to control the environment in which the interviews take place. This limitation was mitigated through extensive field notes immediately after each interview to ensure that any non-verbal elements that are deemed important were captured while they were still clear in my mind.

Significance

This study is significant in that it addresses a gap in the literature about the need for additional or updated public policy to address the gap in practice that occurs when a student with a high-incidence disability transitions from receiving their services under

IDEA or Section 504 in high school to receiving accommodations under ADA and Section 504 in a postsecondary educational setting. The results of this study may help identify where public policies mandating transitional services are currently lacking in preparing students with disabilities with the knowledge, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills needed to receive accommodations in a postsecondary education setting as these skills are not required to meet the legal obligations placed on schools by IDEA. Addressing these issues will require a better understanding of the perceptions of college students who have made this transition to identify gaps in the policies and determine what new or updated policies could address these deficiencies.

The knowledge gained from this study may assist different stakeholders in their mission to improve educational opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Public administrators of higher education institutes have a vested interest in this topic because it is possible that students with disabilities who come to the college adequately prepared for the transition will be more successful in college and have higher graduation rates, as will be discussed further in chapter two of this study. Public policymakers focused on disability rights and education can use the data to determine what adjustments need to be made to current public policy or what new policies are needed to bridge the transition between high school and postsecondary education. Finally, the research addresses a gap in the literature. A significant amount of literature addresses problems experienced in transition planning and implementation. However, the research does not address the issues created within the current public policies that are meant to assist a student with disabilities transitioning from receiving services under IDEA or Section 504 to receiving

services under ADA and Section 504. These public policies fail to transition between each other in a manner that prepares students to navigate receiving and using accommodations in a postsecondary setting and this problem needs to be studied. This gap in the literature needs to be addressed so that stakeholders can address the problem.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced my study to better understand how public policy impacts the experiences of college students with disabilities during their transition from high school to college. I provided information on the background of the problem, a problem statement, and the purpose of the study. In this chapter, I introduced the research question that will guide this study. A summary was given of the theoretical framework being used in the study. Further information was provided on the nature of the study, definitions needed to understand the topic, assumptions used to ground the study in the field of public policy and administration, scope and delimitations of the research, and potential limitations of the proposed study. I ended the chapter by discussing the significance of the proposed research and how it would address a need for social change.

In the next chapter, I will conduct a review of the current literature as it relates to this topic. I will start by introducing the topic and providing my literature search strategy used for this literature review. I will then discuss the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the research. Information related to key variables or concepts regarding public policy and other applicable areas, transition planning in high school, social justice issues related to race, poverty, and disability, and engaging in college services will be

provided in a review of the current literature. I will finish the chapter with my summary and conclusions based on the literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Life transitions can be challenging . One critical transition is the one from high school to college. This transition can be difficult even under the best of circumstances, as there is much adjusting and change to which one must acclimatize. For students with disabilities, this transition has additional challenges and barriers that create a situation that requires collaboration and planning between the student, the student's family, educational professionals, and service providers that will work with the student after they leave high school and begin their postsecondary education. Even in the best circumstances, there are many factors that must be considered and addressed. Unfortunately, for students with disabilities, the transition from high school to college is rarely a smooth process.

Established within current public policy are rights, mandates, and procedures to ensure that individuals with disabilities receive equal access to education at all levels. However, these policies often fall short of providing the necessary requirements to ensure an adequate level of equal access. Despite this, there is little research that looks at the problem of educational access and transition preparation for students with disabilities in terms of the gap that occurs between the services, accommodations, and protection provided by IDEA and those provided by ADA. Further, this shortcoming has generated little discussion within the field of public policy and administration, which may be needed to adequately fix these problems. Using a theoretical framework of the polarities of democracy, this is the specific area that was explored in this study. In this chapter, I

will review the research related to the transition for students with disabilities, specifically high-incidence disabilities, from high school to postsecondary educational settings. I will begin with an overview of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks for my research. Next, I will review the relevant public policy in which the provisions for special education services in high school and disability services in postsecondary settings are written. I will further examine transition planning in high school and social justice issues related to race, poverty, and disability in education. I will conclude with a discussion of the research that addresses factors related to students with disabilities engaging in postsecondary educational disability services.

Literature Search Strategy

To understand the barriers to transition faced by students with disabilities and the applicable legislation and public policy that provided supports, services, and accommodations to these students, an extensive search was conducted through the current literature. Searches were conducted through the Walden University library website using EBSCO Discovery Services in general and through the search by subject area public policy and administration. Additional searches were made using Google Scholar. Searches were initially limited to 2017 to present, from peer reviewed sources, and journal articles only. Search alerts were established for different combinations of key phrases or words to ensure that any new research was added to the literature review. Older critical and seminal research was found by using a chaining method from the articles obtained in the primary search. Specific legislation and policy were located either through EBSCO Discovery Services or government websites. Specific focus was given to

journal articles found within journals focusing on public policy and administration. Key words included various combinations of the terms *transition, disability, college, university, higher education, postsecondary education, disabilities, disabled, policy, policies, law, laws, legislation, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504, college and career ready, college and career readiness, special education students, special needs students, rehabilitation act, history, background, past, historical, amendments, accommodations, modifications, adaptations, school, education, learning, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act.*

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study is the polarities of democracy theory set forth by Benet (2022). Benet's work is built on the conceptual framework of Johnson's (1992) polarity management theory, which also served as the conceptual framework for this study. As such, in this section I will first explore polarity thinking by Johnson. After the discussion of Johnson's work, I will explore Benet's polarities of democracy as they relate to the current topic. Building upon these two theories provides the lens through which I examine the current social problem addressed in this research.

Polarity Management

The fundamental concept for the polarities of democracy is derived from Johnson's (1992) polarity management theory. A polarity is a pair of interdependent poles that cannot work effectively without the other (Johnson, 1992). Johnson explains that it is the way of addressing problems as always requiring a single solution that

prevents issues that are actually polarities to be managed from being properly addressed

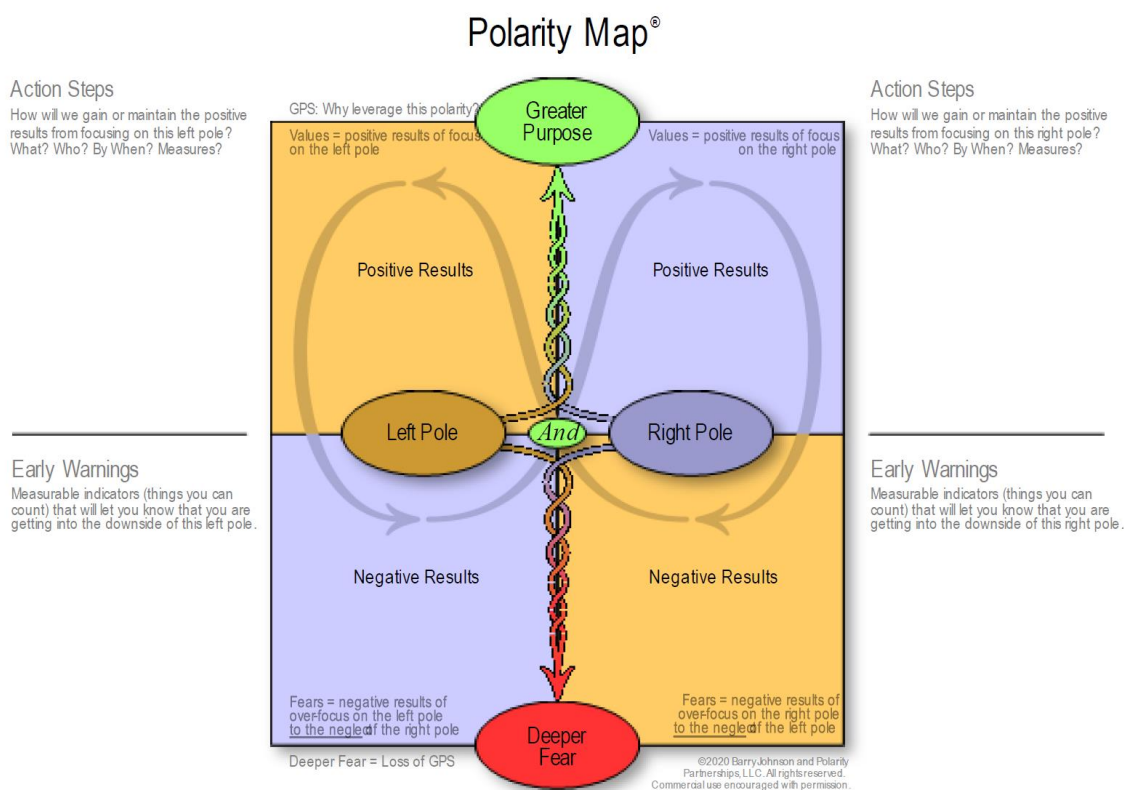
[Click or tap here to enter text.](#) When there is a polarity to be managed, one works to leverage the positive aspects of both poles while trying to minimize the downsides of the poles. However, the nature of some leaders may be to assume that all problems have a solution. This lack of awareness of the existence of polarities and the concept of polarity management may cause these leaders to look for an either/or solution when what is needed is a both/and management of polarities.

Finding the solution to a problem is a typical way of addressing issues that may arise in all areas of life. This type of thinking may be taught from an early age and is identified by Johnson (1992) as either/or thinking. Johnson stated that what is required to effectively manage problems that lack a solution is both/and thinking. This search for a solution creates two groups of decision-makers, originally identified by Johnson as the crusaders and the tradition bearers. Crusaders seek a new solution to solve the problem. They only see the downsides of the current method of addressing the problem and the upsides of their desired solution. Tradition bearers suffer from a similar issue, but they seek to maintain the current methods being used and strive to avoid moving to the crusader's proposed solution. Both groups may be unaware that they should not be seeking a single solution, but instead should be trying to effectively manage polarities to maximize the positive aspects of both poles while minimizing the negative aspects. The result is what Johnson terms an infinity loop. The infinity loop keeps perpetuating the shift from the positive of one pole to the negative of that pole if attempted solutions cause too long of a time to be spent at one pole. Once one has experienced too much of the

downside of the current pole, there is a shift to the new pole, briefly experiencing the upsides of this pole as the pattern repeats itself infinitely. This infinite loop prevents the simultaneous experiencing of the positives of both poles at one time and can only be solved through polarity thinking in which one may leverage the positive aspects of both poles instead of seeking a solution (Johnson, 1992). See Figure 1 for a generic map of managing a polarity pair as described by Johnson (1992).

Figure 1

A Framework to Visualize Johnson’s (1992) Polarity Management and the Infinity Loop



Note: image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships and the Polarities of Democracy Institute.

Benet’s work in the polarities of democracy takes Johnson’s polarity thinking and specifically applies it to the polarity pairs identified as necessary for the achievement of

democracy. In doing so, Benet identifies specific polarity pairs needed to successfully implement democracy. To understand this premise, each of the polarity pairs must be examined as they relate to each other and the ability of a true democracy to address oppression and social injustice by effectively leveraging these polarity pairs.

Polarities of Democracy

The polarities of democracy theory build upon Johnson's (1992) polarity management to bring the concepts of leveraging five specific pairs of polarities to gain the maximum benefit while minimizing the downsides of each to the concept of achieving democracy and ending oppression. Polarities of democracy expands upon Johnson's theory by identifying 10 polarities arranged in five polarity pairs that are essential to achieve the promise of democracy (Benet, 2022). The theory is now used to address issues of oppression well beyond what Benet originally envisioned. According to Benet (2022), the solution to oppression can be found in democracy. However, despite the many governments around the world calling themselves democratic, true democracy has yet to be achieved. As Benet (2006) stated:

Based upon both my experience and the literature (for example, Hartmann, 2002; Kelly, 2001), I believe that the greatest failure to date in our attempts to establish societal democracy has been the exclusion of many from the promise of democracy, while bestowing the blessings derived from our efforts on an elite (p. 13).

It is the focus on eliminating the oppression that stems from society's failure to provide for all citizens that links polarities of democracy to the problems faced by

students with disabilities transitioning to college alongside their peers without disabilities. Addressing this problem requires applying polarity thinking to address the gaps that occur in the current public policy related to accommodations and services for individuals with disabilities in both the secondary and postsecondary settings. To effectively adapt or create public policies that address these issues, one can examine the problems faced by students with disabilities in their transition to postsecondary education through the polarity of democracy polarity pairs.

A critical element of polarities of democracy is that the polarity pairs are interconnected in a manner that makes it impossible to ignore some of the pairs while only addressing other pairs. According to Benet (2022), these pairs are freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation. Each polarity is best described in relation to identifying the positive and negative aspects of the problem under consideration. It is possible, however, to provide general descriptions of the positive and negative aspects of each pole.

As each of the poles in the polarity pairs is defined, one needs to consider both the positive and negative aspects (refer to Figure 1 above). It may be the inability or unwillingness of individuals to see the negative aspects of a pole they support or the positive aspects of a pole they oppose that leads to a failure to leverage the positive aspects of the polarity pair and effectively leverage the infinity loop which is represented by the path of the arrows in Figure 1 (Benet, 2022). More likely, these individuals are unaware of the existence of polarity pairs and may not consider both/and solutions. Many

times, this inability to see the negative aspects of a pole that one supports may be the result of seeing only a problem to be solved as an either/or solution. Examining each of the polarities, one can begin to see how they are interconnected.

Freedom considers the individual's rights to seek a life free from oppression but can be dangerous if taken to the extreme where one person's freedoms supersede another's basic needs. Benet (2006) referred to the work of Butts (1988) as an example of the upside of freedom when he discusses the need to model the value of freedom in schools to effectively teach the principles of freedom. Butts stated that some of the upsides of freedom include promoting human dignity, security, self fulfillment, justice, freedom, and equality for all. Authority can provide guidelines and ensure that each person receives their fair share to keep society functioning at maximum benefit for all those involved. History and recent news have shown, however, that authority taken to an extreme often results in oppression and suffering for those deemed to be out of the favored few.

While the concepts of justice and due process may not appear to function apart from each other, Benet (2006) explored the existence of this polarity as a functional pair that is needed for democracy. According to Benet, justice and due process serve as independent polarities in a polarity pair when the concept of a polarity is considered as not only opposites in meaning but also opposites of function. Benet explained that they are polarities of doing/being as "justice can be seen as the being or word concept, which functions as the idea that is desired. On the other hand, due process can be seen as the doing or deed concept, which functions as the process through which the idea is pursued"

(p. 137). Justice ensures that all are treated fairly in the eyes of the law, but justice that only favors a few select individuals or groups is harmful to the pursuit of democracy. Likewise, due process can ensure that by following an established procedure that everyone has the chance to be kept to the same standards of responsibility and requirements as others. The downside of due process is that it can often become a strategic game to be played successfully only by those with the resources and knowledge to do so at the expense of those that it is meant to protect, as shown later in the chapter as it relates to the IDEA-mandated due process procedures.

Diversity is a vital element of life. Society can benefit greatly from a diverse range of ideas and perspectives that enrich life whenever diversity is present and embraced. Too little diversity can result in stagnation of ideas and over-conformity (Benet, 2022). Benet (2006) stated that when we act within the upper quadrant of the diversity polarity, diversity can provide motivation for individuals to create, engage in hard work, perform their tasks with diligence and competence while being ultimately committed to excellence in the outcomes. These are all areas that can create a positive effect both for the individual and the organization. Diversity is a sensitive topic in today's culture to the point where it becomes difficult to think in terms of a downside to diversity. However, if thinking in terms of the vast economic diversity in the United States where there is such a tremendous gap between what is possessed by the wealthy and what is possessed by the middle and lower socioeconomic classes, then diversity can have a negative side that must be addressed.

Equality is another concept that has such a wide range of meaning that it can be difficult to discuss without taking a defensive stance when your ideas are challenged.

Equality is essential in that every person has a basic human right to have the same opportunities and critical resources to live their life without fear of going without daily necessities. When equality is thought of in these terms, it is difficult to see a downside.

However, Benet (2006) stated:

Rewarding people differentially, based on those who have the power to retain disproportionate shares of economic surplus, without regard to either their contribution to the creation of that surplus or to the impact of this inequality on the well-being of the population as a whole, generates incredible economic inequality (p. 189).

Hence, when thinking in terms of the diverse needs of individuals around the world, it can be seen that if everyone received the same resources without accounting for diverse needs or starting places in life, then equality does not provide the same advantage to all people. It is by embracing that part of the diversity pole of the polarity that decision makers can better provide equitable access to opportunities for all.

Human rights and communal obligations can be viewed as the individual and society. In discussing human rights, Benet (2006), among other things, refers to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Benet discusses how these essential rights allow for the autonomy each individual needs to live a self-determined life (Benet, 2006). Each person must be allowed to have the individual human rights that allows for individual freedom and choice. Human rights are often a rally cry for those fighting

against injustice, oppression, and tyranny. Further, Benet (2006) stated that organizations and governments should be aware of how ensuring basic human rights for their employees or citizens benefits the larger entity in terms of the productivity and participation of the average individual. However, in ensuring that each person has the ability to engage in their individual human rights, it cannot be forgotten that society must function as a whole unit. Individuals must recognize their communal obligation to their fellow citizens for there to be prosperity, safety, and security for any individual or group of people.

A vital question when discussing democracy that must be addressed is the question of how to incorporate participation and representation. This question becomes more critical as the size of the government increases that is attempting to engage in democracy. Participation seeks to ensure that all voices are heard. Benet (2013) stated that a problem in democratic nations is that:

For society as a whole, many have fallen into the trap of relying primarily on only one pole (representation), while vast numbers of people have abandoned their responsibility as citizens for the meaningful and deep participation required for democracy as suggested by the polarities of democracy model” (p. 34).

Each person has and must take their chance to make their desires known or have their vote counted. However, when looking at the federal government and the population of the country, it becomes obvious that nothing would be accomplished if every person were part of every conversation. A solution to this problem is representation. Representation combines the voices of the many into the decisions of the few. This method of democratic

functioning is more practical as a population grows. Using the Occupy Wallstreet movement as an example, Benet stated that utilizing the positive aspects of representation allows progress “without becoming bogged down in endless debate over noncritical issues” (Benet, 2013, p. 34). The danger with representation is when the representatives cease to represent the people for whom they are supposed to speak and instead promote the interests of the elite.

As recognized by both polarity management and polarities of democracy, a single solution or a balance of two opposite ideas is not enough to find an answer to an unsolvable problem. Instead, the goal is to effectively leverage each of the pairs, attaining the positive aspects of both poles while minimizing the negative aspects, to find a way to manage unsolvable problems in a manner that when each pair is managed separately, all the other pairs are impacted (Johnson, 1992; Benet, 2022). With this model, Benet’s polarities of democracy theory have been used by previous doctoral students as a framework through which to explore a variety of topics related to oppression and social justice.

A search of ProQuest for *polarities of democracy* resulted in 23 doctoral dissertations that use polarities of democracy as a theoretical framework. Polarities of democracy has been used to address a broad spectrum of social problems around the world. Of these 23, four address education in some manner. Among the dissertations by researchers using polarities of democracy as a theoretical framework that discuss problems related to education, areas included are using increased manpower and use of comprehensive student support services to assist minority students in urban schools

(Gates, 2022), adult education programs as a tool for rehabilitation in prisons (Hacker, 2021), exploring the perceptions of residents of a state that had rejected participation in common core standards (Greene, 2021), and determining if any correlation existed between educational inequality and associated factors (Carter, 2017). As I examine the issue of the difficulties faced by students with disabilities as they navigate the transition from high school to college, and therefore from IDEA to ADA, I demonstrate how leveraging the five polarity pairs may provide a way to find public policy answers to these problems.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

As discussed in the background section of Chapter 1, many factors complicate the transition from high school to college for students with disabilities. While in high school, these students are provided services and accommodations under IDEA and through Section 504. IDEA provides procedures that must be followed by school personnel to ensure that a student receives the educational services they need to be able to receive a free and appropriate public education. Further, IDEA mandates that students receive services and accommodations as determined by their individual needs and the responsibility for ensuring that these services and accommodations are provided rests on the school district in which the student resides. The protections and service guarantee of IDEA expire upon a student's graduation or when they age out of the public education system at age 22 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Accordingly, accommodations received by students with disabilities in postsecondary education follow a separate set of statutes and policies.

Once a student with a disability enters the postsecondary education setting, they are entitled to receive accommodations for their disabilities in accordance with ADA and Section 504. Students with disabilities may find this transition particularly challenging due to the different requirements, intensity of services, the need for self-advocacy that was not required in high school, and the narrower range of available accommodations in the postsecondary education setting. These students may find themselves unprepared for the significant differences between what they experienced in high school under IDEA and what their experiences are in college under ADA. Research has shown that students with disabilities experience lower rates of participation and completion of postsecondary education due to the barriers they encounter in receiving accommodations for their disabilities (Alverson et al., 2019; Banks, 2014; Krause & Ueno, 2021; Morningstar et al., 2017; Wagner et al., 2005). These concerning trends have been addressed in relation to skill deficits (Alverson et al., 2019; Morningstar et al., 2017; Ressa, 2022; Scruggs et al., 2021), courses of study that fail to prepare these students for college (Balestreri et al., 2014; Monahan et al., 2020; Wagner et al., 2005), or general issues related to transition planning and collaboration (Flowers et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2020; Prince et al., 2020a). Understanding what the current literature says about these key concepts will assist with a better understanding of any conclusions that may be drawn as a part of this study.

Public Policy Related to Transition and Other Applicable Areas

Public policy related to students with disabilities has a relatively brief history entrenched in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s. Although not directly

involving individuals with disabilities, the landmark case *Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education* in 1954 opened the doors to advocacy for laws protecting individuals with disabilities in the same manner as those that had been sought by minorities facing discrimination (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Kern et al., 2019). Individuals with disabilities sought equal access to education and the starting point for that access was provided with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Kern et al., 2019; Nagro et al., 2019; Yell & Bateman, 2017). This act would later be changed to the IDEA in 1990 and was the start of mandatory special education in public schools.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Originating as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1973, IDEA was signed in 1990 under the updated name and then revised again in 2004 (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Nagro et al., 2019; Wagner et al., 2005). The IDEA provides protections and the guarantee of services for individuals with disabilities to ensure that they can access public education. The core of IDEA is the concept of a free and appropriate public education which required that every child must be provided with an education with the necessary supports and services to access a level of education appropriate to their circumstances in the least restrictive environment possible (Prince et al., 2020; Prince et al., 2020a; Yell et al., 2020; Zirkel, 2018). This education is provided in accordance with a plan prepared for each student with a disability based on their specific needs, known as an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Cushing et al., 2019; Yell et al., 2020; Yell & Bateman, 2017; Zirkel, 2020). These plans must be updated annually in accordance with

current evaluation and performance data which shows growth the student has made in the past year and a complete re-evaluation of a child's functional and academic abilities that is conducted every three years (Wadlington et al., 2017; Zirkel, 2020). These plans provide the basis for a child's special education program and vary from state to state within the confines of IDEA regulations. While the IEP is the driving document of what is provided for a student with a disability, provision of a free appropriate public education is only the beginning of what a school district is required to provide to ensure that they are following IDEA.

Other critical elements of IDEA include the categories of disabilities and the criteria under which each disability must be evaluated to receive special education services. Children with disabilities must be identified with an intellectual disability, hearing disability, speech or language impairment, visual impairment, emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, or a learning disability (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). An element that exists in each of the disability categories is that the disability must impact the student's access to their education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). This requirement means that even those students who have a diagnosed disability may not be eligible for services if their disability does not impact their education.

Two other essential elements to consider from IDEA when looking at the problem related to students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college is the age of eligibility for IDEA services and mandated transition services in IDEA. Students with

disabilities are eligible for IDEA services from age 3 through 22 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). A student no longer receives services under IDEA once they have graduated from high school, completed a general education diploma, or reached the age of 22 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Because of these events terminating eligibility from special education services, an individual with a disability who has transitioned to college is no longer eligible for services under IDEA and must begin to receive their services under ADA and Section 504. For this reason, IDEA includes mandates to address transition planning.

Per IDEA, transition planning for a student must start by the IEP that will be active at the time a student with a disability reaches the age of 16 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). As part of the transition plan, schools are required to consider the transition needs of the student based upon their preferences following high school and parental input in areas of academic and functional skills (Elias & White, 2018; Francis et al., 2019; Prince et al., 2020a). These plans should be developed in accordance with evidence-based strategies that will prepare the student for success following high school (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Prince et al., 2020a; Trainor et al., 2016). Further, IEP planning teams are supposed to include the student, the parents or guardians, special education teacher, district representative, general education teacher, any school therapists or special service providers, and representatives from any organizations that will be working with the student following high school (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). For students with disabilities transitioning to college, it is this last

requirement that creates the greatest gap and inhibits the successful transition from services and accommodations under IDEA to those under ADA and Section 504.

Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act

While IDEA was legislators' response to concerns that a free and appropriate public education was not being provided to students with disabilities, it was not the first time that this concern was addressed. The Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 addressed job training, vocational rehabilitation, and access to education for individuals with disabilities (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). Within the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, access to public education services were deemed to be a right of individuals with disabilities (Parsons, 2020). Specifically, this area was addressed by Section 504.

Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 stated

(a) No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 7(20), shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service” (Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973).

Section 504 goes on to say that included in the agencies or institutions that must provide access to education is public schools, colleges, and universities (Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). Based on these requirements, Section 504 is used by public schools and postsecondary institutions as a basis for providing

accommodations to individuals with disabilities. However, the accompanying legislation that has provisions to provide more in-depth assistance is different between high school and college and does not contain provision for the transitional services needed to bridge the gap between the two policies.

In high school, a 504 plan may be provided to a student who may not be eligible for special education services, but still has a disability that requires some form of accommodation. These services differ significantly in that they require the provision of basic accommodations, but do not modify curriculum or change course requirements (Wadlington et al., 2017). More intensive modification in high school is provided under IDEA, but these intensive modifications are not mandated by public policy in postsecondary settings (Banks, 2014; Francis et al., 2019; Wadlington et al., 2017). This lack of more intensive supports can make the transition from high school to postsecondary education challenging for individuals with disabilities because many of the services and modifications they are used to in high school are no longer available in postsecondary education. For these students, some additional backing for the accommodations which they do receive are found in ADA.

Americans with Disabilities Act

Unlike IDEA, ADA is not directly focused on education. Instead, ADA focuses on ensuring that people with disabilities have access to opportunities that those without disabilities have free of discrimination (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Dillon, 2007; Krause & Ueno, 2021; Wadlington et al., 2017). ADA targets institutions that receive funds from the federal government (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2008). Because postsecondary

institutions receive federal funds in the form of federal student financial aid, they are bound by the requirements of ADA. Even with the protections of ADA, however, it was not until the passage of the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 that many people with disabilities found themselves included in that protection.

A problem with ADA in its original provisions was the ability it gave to institutions to define disability strictly, thereby denying accessibility and accommodations to those who had significant disabilities (Keenan et al., 2019; Wadlington et al., 2017) According to the ADA amendments of 2008, an individual with a disability is one who has “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; a record of such an impairment; or {C} being regarded as having such an impairment” (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2004, section 12102, paragraph 2). Further, ADA defines a major life activity as “caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, *learning, reading, concentrating, thinking,* communicating, and working” (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2004, section 12102, emphasis added). With the inclusion of the major life activities learning, reading, concentrating, and thinking, ADA is directly applicable to postsecondary institutions and makes these areas ones that must be accommodated. However, the accommodations that are provided under ADA and the procedures for obtaining them are vastly different than those under IDEA. These significant differences create a barrier for students who seek accommodations in the postsecondary setting.

Due to the difference in eligibility determination and requirements between IDEA and ADA, prior to the ADA amendments of 2008, it was commonplace for universities to require medical documentation or educational documentation in which standardized tests had been conducted in the last two to three years (Keenan et al., 2019; Wadlington et al., 2017; Zirkel, 2020) These requirements created a hardship on many students with disabilities as schools are permitted by IDEA to use prior testing if it is still applicable to the student's present level of functioning and performance and the IEP team determines that it is appropriate to do so (Dillon, 2007; Keenan et al., 2019; Wadlington et al., 2017). Diagnostic testing can be expensive and cost-prohibitive to many individuals. As such, these requirements closed off access to postsecondary education to some students with disabilities as they were unable to get the accommodations they needed.

With the changes made in ADA, the Association for Higher Education and Disability provided a set of recommendations to colleges in addressing accommodations. In line with the United States Department of Justice guidelines, these recommendations focused on acceptance of IEPs and other school documentation of disability and urged college officials to focus more on the needs of the individual to be successful than the documentation (Keenan et al., 2019; Wadlington et al., 2017) With the changes brought by the recent ADA revisions, a situation was in place that would be ideal for high schools and postsecondary institutions to better collaborate to ensure that students with disabilities are prepared for their transition. However, at this time, public policy has failed to go far enough to close that gap.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

In response to a struggling economy, Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. This legislation provided individuals who faced barriers to employment, including those with disabilities, access to training, education, and job support aligned with the needs of the present and anticipated future workforce (Cushing et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2018). Although most of the current literature on the Workforce Improvement and Opportunities Act for individuals with disabilities focuses on vocational rehabilitation for transition to work, there is applicability of the law to students with disabilities transitioning into postsecondary education. Of the four core programs authorized by the Workforce Improvement and Opportunities Act, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act programs and the Rehabilitation Act Title I vocational rehabilitation program are both administered by the Department of Education (Cushing et al., 2019). Along with job training programs and career counseling and development services, postsecondary education can be used as a tool by Vocational Rehabilitation programs under the Workforce Improvement and Opportunities Act to provide access to long-term employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Harvey et al., 2019). While further research is needed to see the full extent that the Workforce Improvement and Opportunities Act has been used to support students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college, it may be a tool in shaping policy to better bridge the gap between IDEA and ADA for transitioning students with disabilities.

Transition Planning in High School

IDEA requires that students with disabilities receive transition planning and services beginning with the IEP that will be active the year they turn 16 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Among these transition services are appropriate educational opportunities to meet an individual's postsecondary goals, connection to service and support agencies and organizations that will be assisting students following their graduation from high school, and a collaborative team effort to create a transition plan with a team that includes the student, the student's parents or guardians, school specialists, and representatives from outside agencies as appropriate (Alverson et al., 2019; Flowers et al., 2018; Ressa, 2022; Scruggs et al., 2021). Further, current federal and state policies regarding college and career readiness are supposed to increase the focus on transition planning for all students including students with disabilities (Balestreri et al., 2014; Cushing et al., 2019; Harvey et al., 2019). Unfortunately, despite current public policy and mandates, students with disabilities may find that their services fall short of the requirements set forth by the federal and state governments and remain unprepared for a transition to postsecondary education.

Like any service for students with disabilities, transition planning and accommodations are meant to be individualized to the need of the student. However, the vast difference between states, districts, and schools creates an issue where there is not an effective policy that ensures all students with disabilities are receiving the required services. Multiple researchers have found that the transition services are not well coordinated (Alverson et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2019), that many students do not

receive the appropriate transition information during high school (Francis et al., 2020; Scruggs et al., 2021), that services written into IEPs and transition plans were not followed (Francis et al., 2019, 2020; Ressa, 2022), and that students and parents were not adequately included in the planning process (Johnson et al., 2018; Ressa, 2022; Scruggs et al., 2021). With all these barriers to transition, students with disabilities may find themselves unprepared for the demands of postsecondary education or the requirements and reality of accommodations in college. Some of these problems are the result of schools not following the laws mandating special education services while others are the outcome of a school district maintaining what they believe to be basic compliance. In the latter cases, parents and students have often turned to the courts for resolution.

In IDEA a process is outlined that those individuals with a dispute regarding the special education decisions or services from a school must follow before they can turn to the courts for resolution. This process, officially called due process procedure, can be frustrating to many with complaints due to its complicated procedures and long duration before a resolution is reached (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Prince et al., 2020; Zirkel, 2020). However, even with the requirement to exhaust this process prior to bringing the case into the legal system, many parents and guardians have found the necessity to pursue legal action against school districts.

Disability services and accommodations have evolved not only in public policy, but through the courts as well. While many issues related to IDEA, Section 504, and special education have been brought to the courts, few cases go before the Supreme Court. One recent case, *Andrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1* demonstrates

the need for additional or changed policy to better address the transition to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. Prior to *Andrew F.*, the Supreme Court ruling in *Board of Education v. Rowley* in 1982 set a standard for special education services that schools must provide free appropriate public education, but only at a more than de minimis, or more than nothing, standard (Yell et al., 2020; Zirkel, 2020). However, in *Andrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1*, the court decided that the intent of Congress in writing IDEA was not to provide a bare minimum education for students with disabilities (Kern et al., 2019; Yell & Bateman, 2017; Zirkel, 2020). According to Chief Justice Roberts writing on the case, “when all is said and done, a student offered an educational program providing ‘merely more than de minimis’ progress from year to year can hardly be said to have been offered an education at all” (*Andrew F v Douglas County School District*, 2017, p. 14). With this new guidance on what is required to provide a free appropriate public education, a critical area that must be addressed by public policy is transition for students with disabilities to postsecondary education.

General Skills Needed for Transition

When conducting transition planning for students with disabilities, those involved need to take into consideration the unique needs and goals of each student. However, researchers have found that there are certain general skills that can improve the chance of a student with a high-incidence disability entering and succeeding in postsecondary education. As such, these skills should be a focus point for any transition team planning for a student who has a goal of completing postsecondary education. These general skills include self-advocacy and awareness of one’s disability (Alverson et al., 2019). These

skills are vital to the success of students with disabilities in postsecondary educational settings. However, these are skills that are often ignored or forgotten when planning for the high school to postsecondary education setting.

Perhaps one of the most critical skills students with disabilities need when transitioning to postsecondary education is self-advocacy skills. Self-advocacy skills can be taught under the framework of self-determination theory (Dillon, 2007; Flowers et al., 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Self-determination theory was originally proposed by Ryan and Deci (2021) as they examined how intrinsic motivation drives individuals. Through self-determination theory Ryan and Deci present three critical human needs that must be met for an individual to experience self-determination: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan et al., 2021). All three of these are needs that can be met as part of transition planning if addressed early in a student's education and can lead to a more successful experience in the postsecondary setting.

Fulfilment of these three needs can lead to a greater ability to engage in self-advocacy for students with disabilities. Autonomy addresses an individual's ownership of their actions and can be promoted through engagement in experiences that they find interesting and personally valuable (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Competence is the perception of mastery over skills, whether they be academic or daily living skills, and can be fostered through the provision of structured environments that provide the right degree of challenge and growth opportunities tied together with productive feedback (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Relatedness addresses an individual's sense of belonging and is vital for individuals with disabilities who may feel excluded from the general population (Ryan &

Deci, 2020). Schools can ensure that this is addressed by conveying respect and caring for the student as an individual (Ryan et al., 2021). These three needs areas align with research in which researchers suggest that self-determination is vital to a successful transition to postsecondary education and can be achieved through opportunities to learn and practice these skills with decreasing levels of support and greater independence (Alverson et al., 2019; Flowers et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2021). Self-advocacy skills are also enhanced with a greater understanding of one's own disability and its impact on academic and daily living tasks (Alverson et al., 2019; Mello et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2021; Trainor et al., 2016). Knowing the impacts of one's disabilities and being able to advocate for one's needs is a first step in the preparation for the transition from high school to postsecondary education. Another critical element that aligns with and lends to self-advocacy is self-efficacy.

Students who demonstrate self-efficacy take ownership of their own learning and pursue achievement of personal goals. This trait has also been referred to as self-determination or academic engagement (Flowers et al., 2018; Monahan et al., 2020; Morningstar et al., 2017; Trainor et al., 2016). These students have motivations intrinsic to their own self-image and use that motivation to develop the skills needed to be successful in postsecondary education (Dillon, 2007; Morningstar et al., 2017; Ryan et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020). These skills include the aforementioned executive functioning, planning, and organizational skills. These three skills have been found to be soft skills that need to be developed by all students for success after high school, but more so for students who face additional challenges because of a disability (Alverson et

al., 2019; Monahan et al., 2020; Smith, 2022). These skills, if not already addressed by the time of transition planning, can be built into a student's goals and may be an area of focus for any student with a high-incidence disability planning on attending postsecondary education. Although beneficial to all students, these skills are often not taught because they are not part of the tested curriculum set by government (Francis et al., 2019; Harvey et al., 2019; Ressa, 2022). In a comparable manner, social skills are a vital area that may require direct instruction for students with disabilities.

Many students with disabilities struggle with social skills. While social skills instruction is common with certain high-incidence disabilities, such as autism, it is not always given the attention it needs (Alverson et al., 2019; Ressa, 2022; Scruggs et al., 2021). Students with disabilities should be assisted in developing social skills and methods of reducing social anxiety (Alverson et al., 2019; Morningstar et al., 2017; Scruggs et al., 2021). Social and emotional learning are critical areas of focus for students with disabilities to avoid the additional anxiety and negative impact on school transition and performance that results from these students feeling overwhelmed in a setting full of new demands and requirements (Francis et al., 2020; Monahan et al., 2020; Ressa, 2022). While social skills may not be considered for students with high-incidence disabilities as opposed to their peers with more severe cognitive disabilities, being able to engage in the social structure of postsecondary education is important to student success. As with most areas in transition planning, these considerations should be made based on the concerns of the student. By engaging in student-directed planning, transition teams have a better

chance of meeting a student's needs by including them as a functional member of the transition planning team.

Student-Directed Planning

One of the polarities necessary for using democracy to overcome oppression and discrimination is participation and representation (Benet, 2022). When one looks at these polarities in terms of youth transitioning from high school to postsecondary education along with the policies that guide this transition, there is a clear example of the need to leverage participation and representation. Students lack the legal and technical knowledge of the system that would be required to have complete participation in their transition planning. This reason is why they need a team of education and community service experts to help represent their interests in the transition planning process. In addition, these students need their parents or guardians to represent their best interests as they may lack some of the insight that these individuals have into their lives. However, what is often seen in the case of transition planning in high school is that the participation of students is either perfunctory or non-existent (Alverson et al., 2019; Elias & White, 2018; Francis et al., 2019). This problem occurs despite policy that requires student participation and input to be included in the planning process.

The requirements set forth in IDEA for students transitioning from high school to postsecondary education are vague. As such, it has been left to the courts to periodically step in and ensure that these policies are followed. One example of this is *Gibson v Forest Hills Local School District Board of Education* in 2016. In this case, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals provided an unpublished decision in which they found the

school district in violation of the student's rights because they failed to meet the requirements not only to invite the students to the IEP meeting, but also to consider the student's preferences and interests and utilize age-appropriate transition assessments based on this student input (Zirkel, 2018). The decision of the judge in this case shows that there is awareness of the importance of students to some extent directing their transition planning.

Self-determination theory has been used to provide evidence that internal motivation is more effective and provides longer lasting results than external motivation (Ryan et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Considering this theory, it is important for students with disabilities to have the internal motivation to pursue postsecondary education for them to succeed in this endeavor. According to Balestreri et al. (2014), "to achieve postsecondary readiness and success, learners must raise their expectations of themselves, identify rigorous educational and career aspirations, and meet goals" (p. 8). Additional research supports this statement and strengthens the idea that for transition planning to be effectively connected to a student's strengths, interests, and needs, the student must have an active role in the planning process (Alverson et al., 2019; Balestreri et al., 2014; Flowers et al., 2018). Viewing this idea from the perspective of the polarities of democracy, when a student takes a more active role in their transition planning, they may learn how to better leverage the polarity pole of participation in the representation and participation polarity pair. Leveraging this part of the polarity pair may prepare a student for the more active role they will need to take when self-advocating for services in the postsecondary educational setting. Not only does student direction in the transition

planning process provide guidance for effective goals and strategies, but it also provides students with the essential chance to practice the self-advocacy skills they will need in postsecondary education.

As discussed previously, self-advocacy skills are essential for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to postsecondary education. One critical difference in IDEA and ADA is that under IDEA it is the school's responsibility to identify and provide services for a student while under ADA students are required to self-identify as an individual with a disability and seek services themselves. This skill can be practiced during transition planning through student-directed transitional planning and allows the schools to meet their mandated requirements of involving the student in the transition planning process, increases intrinsic motivation to succeed on their goals for the student, and allows the practice of vital skills for postsecondary education (Doyle et al., 2017; Francis et al., 2018; Pillay et al., 2021; Ressa, 2022; Scruggs et al., 2021). This is vital as some research has shown that some students feel they receive little to no information on transitioning to postsecondary education and what will be required from them in that setting (Alverson et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2018; Trainor et al., 2016). This resulting frustration may be felt not only by the students, but by the parents and guardians that work to advocate for them.

Parent Involvement in Transition Planning

In addition to the recognition in IDEA of the importance of student involvement in transition planning, parental involvement has been mandated for transition planning (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Researchers have continued to

demonstrate the importance of parental involvement in the transition planning process (Alverson et al., 2019; Doyle et al., 2017; Flowers et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2019). Parent involvement in the transition planning process has been shown to contribute to lower rates of gaps in services, less duplication of services by different providers, lower cost of services, greater academic results, attainment of goals, and development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills in students with disabilities (Alverson et al., 2019; Flowers et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2019). These benefits are recognized as vital to student success and are among the reasons that parental involvement in transition planning is mandated by IDEA.

Despite this mandate and the overwhelming research, many parents continue to perceive a lack of involvement or input in the planning process for their children (Francis et al., 2019, 2020; Mello et al., 2021). Francis et al. (2019) goes on to identify “five interconnected barriers to parent involvement and parent-professional collaboration during transition to adulthood: (a) parent exhaustion, (b) communication breakdowns, (c) disagreements, (d) disappointment, and (e) distrust” (p. 238). Further, the authors stated that “transition plans require a collaborative, student-and-family-centered, interdisciplinary approach to creating, enacting, and monitoring vocational, postsecondary education, independent living, and community participation goals for young adults with disabilities” (Francis et al., 2019, p. 235). Parental involvement in the planning and implementation of transition plans is therefore vital to the overall success of students but may be hindered by toxic interactions between parents and schools.

The problem of a lack of parental involvement can be exacerbated by cultural differences between parents and the school staff when students come from a culture that places a high value on parental involvement (Banks, 2014; Francis et al., 2020). This conflict highlights the polarities of freedom and authority as parents are supposed to be afforded the freedom to pursue what is best for their children while educational professionals are to represent the authority of the system. Often, one sees the negative effects of the authority pole as education professionals may use this authority to override parent desires for their child in the name of knowledge of the system. However, high school educational professionals must realize that they are not the only authority on transitioning students from high school to postsecondary education. Input from parents can significantly contribute to a successful transition. This misuse of authority inhibits not only parental involvement, but also the interagency collaboration that is supposed to occur during transition planning.

Interagency Collaboration

Once a student with a disability graduates or ages out of high school, they cease to be eligible for their services under IDEA. However, this ineligibility does not mean that these students no longer need services related to their disability. Following their exit from high school, students with disabilities receive their services from a variety of different service providers under ADA and Section 504. Because of this change, IDEA recognizes the need for continuity of care and requires that service providers who will be working with students after they exit high school be a part of the transition planning team

(Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). This requirement is necessary, but often lacking in its execution.

Planning transition for a student with a disability can involve a large number of different service providers depending on the needs of the student. For students who are transitioning to college those who frequently work with these students are college and university disability services personnel and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (Alverson et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2019; Trainor et al., 2016). The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation personnel have the necessary knowledge to help students with disabilities navigate the new set of regulations that govern their accommodations in the postsecondary setting. Early interaction with these professionals can ensure that a student is prepared to have access to their accommodations when they begin college (Francis et al., 2018; Trainor et al., 2016). The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation can provide a number of education and career-oriented services including evaluations, funding for training or college, and referrals to other agencies that may be effective in helping the student (Prince et al., 2020a; Trainor et al., 2016). While early and frequent utilization of these agencies and personnel has been found to foster better outcomes for students with disabilities, the requirement for schools to include these personnel on planning meetings is seldom met.

IDEA attempts to bridge the gap between the services provided in high school and those that will be received by students with disabilities once they enter postsecondary education. However, despite the requirement for outside agencies to be invited to participate in transition planning meetings, in many cases, this does not happen. The

involvement of outside agency personnel can create a more seamless transition for students with disabilities during an already stressful experience (Flowers et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2019, 2020; Pillay et al., 2021). According to Flowers et al. (2018), special education teachers typically fail to invite agencies other than vocational rehabilitation due to a lack of knowledge and negative prior experiences inviting even vocational rehabilitation counselors, who often fail to attend due to large caseloads and length of transition meetings. It could be inferred from this finding that the lack of appropriate knowledge and personnel can be a frequent barrier to interagency collaboration for students with disabilities preparing for postsecondary education. This shortage has led to missed opportunities for students and has ended up in due process proceedings as part of a failure of a school district to provide a free appropriate public education (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Prince et al., 2020; Zirkel, 2020).

One area of a school district's requirement to provide a free appropriate public education that has been addressed through due process proceedings and court intervention is the need for the school district to invite representatives from outside agencies that are relevant to the student's transition to the planning meeting. Failure to provide proof of this action has been cause for school districts losing court cases for denial of a free appropriate public education (Prince et al., 2020; Prince et al., 2020a; Yell et al., 2020). Further, while it is not directly required by IDEA for a district to collaborate with a representative from a postsecondary education institution, guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education in 2017 stated that formal and informal coordination and connection between high schools and postsecondary educational

institutions represent a missed opportunity to properly serve a student with a disability in their transition from high school (Prince et al., 2020a). The early establishment of these connections is vital as researchers have shown that the majority of postsecondary educational institutions do not contact a student's high school when planning disability services (Wadlington et al., 2017). As discussed later in this study, if these partnerships are established in advance, students may be ready to provide the information they need to receive accommodations in postsecondary settings and can also be knowledgeable of the differences in expectations and services provided after a student leaves high school and enters postsecondary education.

Step Down of Services to Prepare for Transition

In acknowledging the vast difference between accommodation planning in high school and in postsecondary education, the responsibility to advocate for and seek out those services becomes entirely the responsibility of the student. From the lens of polarities of democracy (Benet, 2022), transition planning in high school requires the leveraging of participation on the part of the student and representation from those who have knowledge and experience which the student lacks. As a student with a high-incidence disability progresses to college, the start of the process depends more on the student's actions than those of a representative. This change can be a difficult one to which students need to adapt. Therefore, a consideration of school officials when engaging in the leveraging of participation and representation in the transition planning process should be the roles that the student will have to take on in the postsecondary education setting. There may be an appropriate time to shift away from some of the

representation to preparing the student to be a participant (Scruggs et al., 2021). In this case, another polarity pair, human rights and communal obligations becomes a focus for schools, students, and families.

Little research has been done on the topic of step-down of supports for high school students with disabilities that are transitioning into college. The research that has been done, has typically been in favor of the idea (Dillon, 2007; Doyle et al., 2017; Keenan et al., 2019; Scruggs et al., 2021; Wadlington et al., 2017). In this use, the term step-down of supports refers to decreasing the amount of direct support a student receives in preparation for the services they will have access to in the postsecondary setting. While this type of scaffolding takes place throughout primary and secondary school, it becomes more important during this transitional period (Doyle et al., 2017). If the same level of support is provided throughout primary and secondary school without consideration for this transition of responsibility, students may find that the services they receive in high school are counterproductive and that they are dependent on those services (Dillon, 2007; Wadlington et al., 2017). When services are reduced, however, they need to be done with consideration for what the student still needs to successfully complete high school and what the school is required by IDEA to provide. It is at this point that the leveraging of human rights and communal obligations be considered.

Governments exist in part to ensure that individuals can access their basic human rights. According to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (2015b), these rights include the right to self-determination and the right to education. Self-determination leads to self-advocacy (Ryan et al., 2021), an important skill when talking

about students in postsecondary education securing the accommodations they need (Alverson et al., 2019; Morningstar et al., 2017; Trainor et al., 2016). Therefore, when school personnel assist a student in developing the self-advocacy skills needed for success in the postsecondary educational setting, they may be leveraging the positive aspects of the human rights pole of the polarity pair. However, there are still requirements set by public policy that regulate what a school must do to be considered in compliance. There is also a need to ensure that a student with a disability, like any other student, can be as productive a member of society as possible when they graduate from college. These two areas represent the communal obligations of a school regarding transition planning.

The requirements of a school in meeting their communal obligations may be at odds with the need to promote an individual's human rights if the school does not properly engage in the transition planning process to prepare the student for postsecondary education. A student with a disability may find themselves facing a wide variety of situations when accessing accommodations in high school and the postsecondary educational setting (Doyle et al., 2017; Scruggs et al., 2021). Although prior research has not discussed addressing these varying situations through the lens of polarities of democracy or polarity management, leveraging the positive aspects of both poles in the polarity human rights and communal obligations may address the vastly different situations in which the adequate leveraging of this polarity pair could result in a successful transition that allows the student to be prepared to self-advocate in college while still providing the required level of services in high school.

Social justice issues related to race, poverty, and disability

Education is a crucial component to equity and opportunity for all people. It is of such vital importance that the United Nations acknowledges it within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2015b). Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (United Nations, 2015, Article 26).

In acknowledging the importance of education in this statement, the United Nations has stated that not only should all people have access to an education, but that education should be a tool for developing one's personality and not just a focus on rote academics. Further, the United Nations acknowledges the importance of parental involvement in their child's education. While not directly addressed in this section of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one could interpret this statement to mean that

parental involvement in the planning of educational programming and services for students with disabilities is a vital part of providing an equitable education to all. In addition, education is addressed in the United Nations' sustainability and development goals.

Education is addressed both as a goal by the United Nations in their sustainability and development goals as well as playing a role in many of the other goals. Among the commitments of the United Nations, the goals of universal literacy and the ability to access all levels of education that are of a high quality are both explicitly mentioned (United Nations, 2015a). Further, in the report *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*, the leaders of the United Nations state that:

We commit to providing inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels – early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational training. All people, irrespective of sex, age, race or ethnicity, and persons with disabilities, migrants, Indigenous peoples, children and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations, should have access to life-long learning opportunities that help them to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to exploit opportunities and to participate fully in society. We will strive to provide children and youth with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities, helping our countries to reap the demographic dividend, including through safe schools and cohesive communities and families (United Nations, 2015a, p. 7).

This focus on education is further solidified in the United Nations' sustainability and development goal number four which is stated as “Ensure inclusive and equitable

quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2015a, p. 14). Clearly, the United Nations has a significant interest in education. The focus on providing education for all is critical to many of the United Nations’ economic and social development goals. Given the focus of the United Nations on lifting those up who are currently facing the most oppression and the least opportunities, giving attention to students with disabilities and the difficulties they face accessing a quality education is critical to these goals. These problems faced by individuals with disabilities are exacerbated in some cases by the intersectionality of disability, race, and coming from poverty. The oppression caused by problems faced by those in multiple areas of disadvantage must be acknowledged to achieve positive social change and seek an end to oppression for a significantly vulnerable population.

Race

While successful transition from high school to postsecondary education is already difficult for any student with a disability, those from minority groups are further hindered by the combination of racism and ableism. Research on postsecondary educational enrollment shows that African American students with disabilities participate in postsecondary education at a significantly lower rate than European Americans with disabilities (Banks, 2014). The negative impact faced by minority students with disabilities starts early in their educational career. These students can be denied adequate and basic services for a number of reasons including culturally-biased assessments (Marsico et al., 2021; Strassfeld, 2017), overidentification in certain special education categories that result in segregation (Fisher et al., 2021; Hines et al., 2018; Strassfeld,

2017), under identification in other special education categories (Joshi & Bouck, 2017), and educational staff lacking cultural understanding when working with minority students with disabilities (Brown & Mortier, 2020; Ju et al., 2018; McLeod, 2022). These problems result in lower quality services and may explain some of the disparity in participation in postsecondary education between minority students with disabilities and their white counterparts.

Cultural bias in assessments can frequently be an issue when minority students with disabilities are assessed for eligibility and services under IDEA. Formal assessments may be biased in ways that result in misidentification of minority students with disabilities (Banks, 2014). This misalignment between factors being measured in diagnostic tests and the cultural needs of minority students combined with a lack of cultural understanding and racism may explain why minority students are typically identified in areas that are more subjective in their criteria. These areas include emotional/behavioral disturbance and intellectual disabilities (Gumas, 2017; Marsico et al., 2021). Misunderstanding on the part of the educators performing these assessments may reflect their lack of knowledge and not evidence of a specific disability in minority students.

These practices can be detrimental because they serve as a new way to segregate minority students long after school segregation was deemed unconstitutional (Kramarczuk Voulgarides & Tefera, 2017; Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2021; Marsico et al., 2021). In addition, for those minority students who are identified, the dual nature of their race and their perceived disability can lead to teachers identifying behaviors as

problematic more often than they do for white students with or without disabilities (Gumas, 2017; Kramarczuk Voulgarides et al., 2021; Marsico et al., 2021). Given that this identification of behaviors warranting separation and identification are subjective, it is clear that racism and hidden bias impact the view teachers have of minority students with disabilities. The resulting segregation may have a negative impact on both the child's overall education and their chances of progressing through postsecondary transition. This cultural misunderstanding can also result in misdiagnosis as educational professionals misinterpret the needs and difficulties that a minority student with a disability is experiencing. However, just as the interaction of race, culture, and disability cannot be separated when trying to identify and serve a child with a disability, it is likewise difficult to separate the impact of poverty on these existing concerns.

Poverty

Concurrent difficulties with race and poverty are frequently addressed together. It is possible that this occurs because many minorities reside in areas of higher poverty. However, disadvantages that arise from poverty and race are not always the same, so it is useful to address poverty separately. The socioeconomic inequalities that these children face impact all children but have a more significant impact on children with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are twice as likely to come from homes suffering from poverty than those without disabilities (Gumas, 2017; Koseki, 2017; Ressa, 2022). Two critical factors directly related to students with disabilities who are in poverty are lower-funded schools and the cost associated with due process complaints and procedures when they occur.

School funding is a topic on its own. Needless to say, schools in higher income areas have more resources to provide a higher quality education than those in lower income areas (Bonuck & Hill, 2020; Gumas, 2017; Raj, 2022). The schools in low-income communities have trouble attracting high-quality teachers and finding funding for the provision of a quality education while being asked to continue to meet rising federal and state standards of performance for their students, including those with disabilities (Koseki, 2017; Raj, 2022; Turnage, 2020). As these schools struggle to fund their most basic educational services, additional services for special education are severely limited. Various methods of cost-cutting are used in low-income school districts to reduce the cost of special education services, including creating shared services through traveling personnel or centralized classrooms between districts (Parsons, 2020). Despite the best effort of families, students with disabilities may still end up with an IEP that does not address their needs. The need to have adequate financial resources to effectively challenge a school's decisions regarding special education services leads to further injustice.

The special education system in the United States is purported to be based on the idea of a free appropriate public education for all students with disabilities. However, within a system that uses the word "free" in their central definitions, vast resources can be required for a parent to ensure that their child is receiving the appropriate services. Many low-income families lack the knowledge to effectively advocate for their child in the IEP process and may even find themselves intimidated by the expertise surrounding them during IEP meetings (Francis et al., 2020; Gumas, 2017; Koseki, 2017). Families in

lower-income communities are also less likely to know what services could be appropriate or made available for their children, forcing them to accept the expertise of educators who may not have a true understanding of the needs of their child (Gumas, 2017; Koseki, 2017). For those parents that wish to contest the school district's decisions, due process can be a long and costly procedure.

Understanding both the positive and negative factors associated with the current special education due process system can be accomplished through the lens of polarities of democracy. The polarity pair justice and due process are interrelated poles in this issue (Benet, 2022). Due process can be beneficial when it provides the means for ensuring that those eligible for a service or benefit are able to receive it. However, due process without justice becomes a slow-moving bureaucracy. Justice is required to ensure that those who need a service or benefit can obtain it without bureaucratic barriers that make it infeasible or impossible for them to gain access in a timely manner. Due process without the consideration for justice results in advantages for those who know how to play the bureaucratic game, which are typically people who are already at an advantage, and a barrier for those without the knowledge or resources needed to be successful in navigating the system (Marsico et al., 2021). This situation is what is seen when looking at the IDEA-mandated due process system that is meant to give parents a chance to have their grievances with a school's provision of a free appropriate public education heard and addressed in a manner that holds schools responsible for providing appropriate services.

Parents who wish to contest a school's decisions in matters of special education can apply through the due process procedure. Under due process procedures, parents can file a complaint with their state board of education, ask for mediation to be conducted with the school, or file a formal due process complaint that is heard by a hearing officer and can be appealed in court if desired (Prince et al., 2020; Turnage, 2020; Zirkel, 2020). While these options may make it appear that parents have several avenues for having their complaint heard, all three options require resources and knowledge to effectively utilize. Problems related to resources for parents from low-income families include the reimbursement nature of a successful due process suit. Schools may be required to reimburse legal fees or private school tuition (Gumas, 2017; Parsons, 2020; Turnage, 2020), however, to be reimbursed, parents must first have the resources to utilize this option. Further, under IDEA and various court rulings, parents may not be reimbursed for expert witnesses who may be needed to help prove the needs of the child in contradiction to what the school has determined (Marsico et al., 2021; Raj, 2022; Zirkel, 2020). Even if parents are able to access these needed resources, the filing party has the burden of providing proof of the failure to provide a free appropriate public education and the courts have heavily favored schools, deferring to the expertise of the school personnel unless there is a clear case of procedural violations, (Marsico et al., 2021; Turnage, 2020; Zirkel, 2020). Considering that parents without sufficient personal resources are unable to call on expert witnesses to prove their complaint against a school, the system heavily disadvantages those from low-income families. These barriers taken all together make it almost impossible for low-income families and those in poverty to secure the needed

services for the children with disabilities. The way these requirements result in discrimination against low-income families and those in poverty create a system where due process exists at the expense of justice and creates a significant social problem.

Engaging in College Services

Through the examination of the literature on high school accommodations and transition services, it can be inferred that many of the barriers that occur for students with disabilities at this time in their education relates to the differences in how and what services are provided under IDEA and those that are available under ADA. In addition, the manner in which students with disabilities must obtain these services are significantly different. These factors can result in a challenging transition for these students as they progress from high school to postsecondary education. To determine what policy solutions may be feasible to address the needs of these students, the availability of accommodations and the limitations of those accommodations, factors that will help students with disabilities be successful in postsecondary education, and the challenges and barriers these students face in their transition into postsecondary education once they have left high school must be examined.

College Accommodations and Limitations

College students face many barriers and challenges in typical circumstances. For those students with disabilities, these barriers can be compounded into seemingly insurmountable difficulties. (Prince et al., 2020a; Trainor et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2005). Receiving access to accommodations in the postsecondary education setting is a significantly different procedure with different requirements of which students with

disabilities entering postsecondary education may not be aware. The ability to navigate this system is important for these students in their efforts to succeed in college.

Perhaps the most significant difference in postsecondary education from high school is the requirement of students to self-identify as individuals with a disability. In the high school setting, these students were used to being identified by school personnel and the process was all overseen behind the scenes. In postsecondary education, the institution is not permitted to inquire about the disability status of an individual due to possible discrimination in the application and acceptance process (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2008). In both the case of ADA and Section 504 regulations, students are protected by anti-retaliation laws that are meant to allow them to apply for accommodations and services without fear of negative consequence (Meyer, 2022). Further complications may arise, however, based on the documentation required by the postsecondary institution.

It is the responsibility of the student seeking accommodations to provide adequate documentation to the appropriate staff at the postsecondary education institution. In some cases, postsecondary institutions choose not to accept documentation from high school in the form of IEP or 504 plans because of the difference in identification procedures and requirements or testing was not done within a reasonable amount of time prior to enrollment in postsecondary education (Keenan et al., 2019; Wadlington et al., 2017). When these documents are not accepted, this historically places the burden on the student and their families to pay for expensive evaluations and tests to provide adequate documentation of a disability (Banks, 2014; Wadlington et al., 2017). Current guidance

has been provided, however, to attempt to change the difficulty of proving one's disability in a postsecondary education setting.

ADA does not specify what documentation is required to show that an individual has a disability (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2008). However, because many universities view disabilities from the medical model supported by the current diagnostic statistical manual, providing documentation can become burdensome for a student and may prevent them from seeking services (Parsons, 2020; Wadlington et al., 2017). To alleviate this problem, the 2008 amendments of the ADA contain provisions to ensure that the determination of a disability does not require extensive medical or statistical documentation (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2008). Further, the Association for Higher Education and Disabilities has been providing guidance in their professional developments and training that encourage disability service staff in postsecondary settings to focus on the needs of the student in the postsecondary setting instead of the provision of documentation unless necessary to do otherwise (Meyer, 2022). By relieving students with disabilities of the burden of providing extensive medical documentation, the focus can turn to providing adequate accommodations (Johnson et al., 2018; Krause & Ueno, 2021; Meyer, 2022). Removing these barriers is a significant step towards assisting students with disabilities in receiving accommodations in the college setting. However, it does not remove the burden of self-identification. Nor does this different focus change the issues that accommodations available in high school are not always available in the postsecondary education setting.

While IDEA mandates are intended to ensure that a student with a disability receive academic accommodations that allow them to perform to their highest level possible, postsecondary accommodations are not addressed in the same manner. For students with disabilities in postsecondary education, accommodations are not mandated to scaffold a student to their top performance, but merely to provide general access to the educational materials (Banks, 2014; Hotez et al., 2018; Monahan et al., 2020). As such, many accommodations, scaffolding, and direct remedial instruction that students with disabilities may have received in high school are no longer available. This change can be a source of stress and anxiety for these students and negatively impact their ability to successfully complete postsecondary education (Dillon, 2007; Keenan et al., 2019; Krause & Ueno, 2021). Teaching students the skills they need earlier in their educational experience can help alleviate these problems if a student can translate these knowledge and skills into an ability to succeed with less accommodations than those to which they are accustomed. Knowing how to address and overcome these barriers and what factors lead to success in the postsecondary setting for students with disabilities may foster postsecondary education graduation at higher rates than are currently seen for individuals with disabilities.

Success Factors

There are many factors that can contribute to a successful transition to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. The development of certain skills and the provision of specific supports can enhance the postsecondary experiences of students with disabilities and may lead to greater rates of college completion for this

population. While some of these areas may be mandated by IDEA, stronger and more consistent implementation that is required by public policy with less ambiguity than is currently present could help with this issue. Some of the skills and factors that can lead to a successful postsecondary education transition and experience for students with disabilities include the development of self-determination skills (Dillon, 2007; Flowers et al., 2018; Krause & Ueno, 2021) and clear, personally valued goals involving postsecondary education (Alverson et al., 2019; Balestreri et al., 2014; Ressa, 2022). Examining each of these areas may aid in understanding what factors need to be emphasized to facilitate a more successful transition from high school to postsecondary education for these students.

Self-determination skills are important for all individuals but may not come naturally for students with disabilities. The time spent teaching these skills can have significant positive impact throughout their lives, including during the transition from high school to college (Flowers et al., 2018). Self-determination skills include self-advocacy, an understanding of one's disability and how it impacts the individual, and personal goal setting (Hotez et al., 2018; Keenan et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2020). This skill set allows a student to take the personal responsibility and accountability needed for the postsecondary education setting. Students with an advanced self-determination skills set may feel more confident seeking accommodations, advocating for what they need, and interacting with professors to have the accommodations implemented (Hotez et al., 2018; Scruggs et al., 2021). Further, the development of these skills can lead to individuals with disabilities being more empowered in their own lives and carrying that

success past postsecondary education into independent living and employment (Flowers et al., 2018; C. Johnson et al., 2018; Morningstar et al., 2017). As a part of self-determination, clear and committed goal setting by the individual with a high-incidence disability is worth examining as an independent factor in transition. These self-determination skills may then be used by students to leverage the polarities, particularly the polarity pairs of freedom and authority and participation and representation.

Students enter postsecondary education for a variety of reasons, both personal and sometimes due to the desires of others. For individuals with disabilities a critical factor that can contribute to a successful transition and college experience is if their goals are internalized and they are personally committed to achieving them (Alverson et al., 2019; Ressa, 2022). Further, when students link these goals to personal interests and aspirations directly and clearly, they may be more likely to have the motivation to engage in the arduous task of making the transition from high school to postsecondary education (Alverson et al., 2019; Balestreri et al., 2014; Morningstar et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Combined as a part of self-determination skills, setting clear goals aligned with intrinsic motivations provide a solid foundation from which these students can see themselves in control of their own lives. Even though individual empowerment is a key factor to a successful transition to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the support of family and educators cannot be underestimated either.

While the ultimate goal of transition services should be to prepare a student with a disability to be able to access accommodations in the postsecondary education setting and set them up for success in their future endeavors, it takes a team of dedicated individuals

to successfully plan and implement the transition process. When students have family or educators who are committed to their success, they are more likely to develop the skills needed for self-determination and independence (Alverson et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2018; Trainor et al., 2016). When parents and educators set high expectations for individuals with disabilities, they send the message that they believe the individual can meet their goals (Francis et al., 2018, 2019; Johnson et al., 2018). When an individual can internalize the encouragement and expectations of those who are influential in their lives, they may begin to further believe in themselves. This belief can foster self-determination skills and ownership of future goals. While these factors can help foster successful transition from high school to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the lack of them may create a further barrier or challenge for these individuals.

Without proper guidance and information, some of these issues may arise due to unfamiliarity with the accommodation process in the postsecondary setting. Other factors may include an unwillingness of students with disabilities to self-identify and a lack of adequate transition planning or information with appropriate personnel from within and outside of the school. When these factors are present, they may result in other challenges and barriers to transition.

Other Challenges and Barriers to Transition

Given the many barriers and challenges discussed in the literature to the transition from high school to postsecondary education by students with disabilities, it is not surprising that these students struggle to enter and graduate from postsecondary education. As found in chapter one, individuals with disabilities obtain college degrees at

approximately half the rate of individuals without disabilities (Krause & Ueno, 2021; Prince et al., 2020a; Wagner et al., 2005). While many of these factors have been discussed, there are a few remaining areas that need to be addressed to have a complete understanding of the problem faced by students with disabilities who wish to enter and complete postsecondary education. These factors include instructor perceptions in high school and postsecondary education, the lack of focus on functional skills curriculum, and issues related to the requirement for students to self-identify as having a disability once they enter postsecondary education.

It has already been established previously in the review of the literature that setting ambitious goals and standards is important to the development of self-determination and may have a positive impact on the transition experience of youth with disabilities (Flowers et al., 2018; Monahan et al., 2020; Morningstar et al., 2017; Trainor et al., 2016). One factor that can contribute to a student internalizing high standards for themselves is the perception of their teachers and professors throughout their educational experience (Flowers et al., 2018; Ressa, 2022). Teachers, particularly general education teachers, working with students with disabilities may set lower standards and expectations of success for these students than they do for the students in their classrooms without disabilities (Doyle et al., 2017; Francis et al., 2018; Ressa, 2022). According to Ressa (2022), students with disabilities have their lives impacted more by teachers, peers, and their families than do those without disabilities. This impact can create negative outcomes and less opportunities for these students if these individuals misjudge that their disabilities make them unable to learn the skills needed to be successful in the community

and postsecondary education. Looking at this problem, however, there is another disadvantage that can be seen for students with disabilities who desire to transition to postsecondary education. This disadvantage is that some of these students do lack basic social and academic skills not directly tied to a content area, yet they are not always provided with direct instruction to develop and improve these skills.

For individuals with disabilities, essential skills in the areas of social and general academic skills can be needed for a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education, which are not typically taught in the regular classroom (Alverson et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2018; Morningstar et al., 2017; Scruggs et al., 2021). When a lack of essential skill instruction is combined with trends of providing students with disabilities with less rigorous or college preparation curriculums (Monahan et al., 2020; Morningstar et al., 2017; Trainor et al., 2016) students are left unprepared to transition successfully from high school to postsecondary education. The lack of proper preparation can leave students with disabilities with a negative view of disability services at a critical time when they become responsible to self-identify as an individual with a disability to continue receiving accommodations.

As discussed previously, a critical difference between students with disabilities receiving services and accommodations in high school and receiving them in college is the requirement of the student to self-identify in the postsecondary education setting. For a number of reasons, many individuals with disabilities do not self-identify and seek out accommodations. Stigmas and discrimination against individuals with disabilities prevent some students from self-identifying with a disability (Banks, 2014; Scruggs et al., 2021).

These students may fear that they will create a negative perception of themselves at a time when they are able to develop a more desirable persona or that they will be revealing a weakness (Banks, 2014). Other individuals with disabilities find the process of applying for accommodations to be unmanageable, not worth the effort, or unattainable due to the necessary documentation (Krause & Ueno, 2021; Scruggs et al., 2021; Wadlington et al., 2017). These requirements can become more complicated as there is no single set of procedures that all postsecondary education institutions follow to accept and evaluate sufficient documentation for disability and accommodation determinations. Finally, some students, particularly those with high-incidence disabilities, may feel that they do not need the services that are offered to them in postsecondary education (Johnson et al., 2018; Krause & Ueno, 2021). Considering the process of receiving disability services must be initiated by the student in the postsecondary setting, those students unwilling or unable to self-identify cannot receive their needed accommodations. By not preparing these students to advocate for their needs, schools set students with disabilities up for failure at a time when they are already at a disadvantage.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I discussed and synthesized the current literature related to transitional services mandated by public policy for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to postsecondary education. In doing so, I reviewed various issues that arise during this transition. Further, a thorough review of the literature reveals that little has been written to address these problems in terms of the gap that exists between the policies that mandate special education services in high school and disability services in

college. In my analysis of the current literature, I showed examples of how the problem could be viewed through the theoretical framework of polarities of democracy. In the next chapter, I will discuss my research design and rationale and address potential issues that were anticipated prior to my research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to explore the perceptions of college students with high-incidence disabilities as they transition from receiving services primarily under IDEA in high school to ADA in college. In this chapter, I will describe the research methods that were used in conducting this study.

This chapter will start with an explanation of the research design and rationale. Next, I will analyze my role as the researcher. This role is particularly important for qualitative research as the researcher acts as the data collection tool (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I will continue with a discussion of the research methodology that I used, focusing on the site selection, data collection and sampling procedures, and my plan for data analysis. I will then conclude with a discussion of issues of trustworthiness. These will include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical concerns.

Research Design and Rationale

I sought to address the research question: What are the perceptions of college students with high-incidence disabilities about their transitional services as they transition from receiving IDEA-based services in high school to ADA mandated services in college? In addressing this research question, there are several core concepts or aspects of the topic that were explored.

Included in the core concepts that are addressed in this study are special education services in primary and secondary school, disability services in postsecondary education, public policy that mandates and sets requirements for these services, and the impact that

these policies have on the experiences of college students with disabilities transitioning from receiving those services in high school through IDEA to receiving services in college through ADA. As discussed in the previous chapter, IDEA is the foundation of special education services provided to students in primary and secondary education. These services may consist of basic accommodations, direct instruction in skill deficit areas, therapeutic services, and various classroom supports and modifications based on the needs of the individual student (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Disability services in postsecondary education vary significantly, as they provide only basic accommodations that allow an individual with a high-incidence disability to access education and less guidance is provided in ADA as to how institutions are expected to plan or provide these services (Cushing et al., 2004). This vast difference between IDEA and ADA may cause difficulties for students with disabilities as they graduate out of services under IDEA and enter an institution where some of those services are provided under ADA and other familiar services are not available at all.

Through the research design outlined in this chapter, I attempted to learn what the perceptions of these students can reveal about the existing gap between the policies. Understanding the perceptions of postsecondary students with disabilities as they transitioned from high school to college was best accomplished through qualitative research. To address the research questions in this qualitative study, the specific research tradition used consisted of a generic qualitative research design (Kahlke, 2014). Generic qualitative research is appropriate when the chosen research question does not match a specific qualitative method (Kennedy, 2016; Milne & Oberle, 2005; Percy et al., 2015).

As previously mentioned, this research combines views from critical methodology and interpretive methodology as I analyzed my data both from the perspective of a shared reality and that each individual's reality may vary based on their life experiences.

Kennedy (2016) described generic qualitative research as falling in the middle of the spectrum of knowing and posits that this quality of generic qualitative research makes it appropriate for a researcher who simultaneously embraces the notions of a shared reality and an individually constructed reality. Thus, the use of generic qualitative research is not merely a means to avoid committing to having thorough knowledge of a specific methodology but is a type of qualitative research that is appropriate for research that does not fit neatly into the methodology of other qualitative research types.

To gather data, I conducted interviews with college students (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and document analysis of participants' Individual Education Plan or 504 Plan from their final year of high school (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) to understand the experiences of college students with high-incidence disabilities as they transition from receiving services under IDEA and Section 504 in high school to receiving services under ADA and Section 504 in college. Once the data were collected, analysis occurred through an inductive thematic analysis with constant comparison as each interview was completed (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). The document analysis and generic research design utilized in this study allowed for a greater in-depth understanding of these students' experiences that led to the ability to make policy recommendations that address needed social change. Using a constant comparison inductive thematic analysis further allowed the perceptions of the participants to shape the research as it progressed and facilitated a more responsive

identification of themes as described by Kostere and Kostere (2022). Adherence to this method of analysis contributed to ensuring the rigor of the research method.

Role of the Researcher

One of the significant differences between quantitative research and qualitative research is the role of the researcher. In quantitative research, formal tools are used to measure the variable of interest and the researcher is assumed to be separate from the data. In qualitative research, however, the researcher is the tool that is used to collect data, and this connection between the researcher and their participants creates concerns that must be acknowledged and addressed to ensure that the data collected reflects the views and experiences of the participants instead of the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In the case of this research, I collected data through interviews and document analysis, both of which have the potential for high levels of researcher bias if one is not careful.

A researcher must be careful to allow their data to reflect the views and experiences of the participants with minimal influence from the researcher. Researchers using interviews, as I did for this study, need to be aware of factors such as their tone of voice, body language, or the way the questions are phrased to avoid creating a bias in the data based on the researcher's preconceptions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All researchers should engage in a reflexive approach to ensure that they are aware how their positionality may impact the research (Holmes, 2020). The researcher must realize that there is no way to separate their previous knowledge and experiences about a topic and directly address areas which may directly impact their research (Holmes, 2020). Part of

this reflexive approach includes avoiding any suggestion, prompting, or phrasing that may suggest to the participant that there is a correct way to answer the questions in the interview. Any indication of the researcher's views on the topic can cause the participant to answer in ways that they think are likely to be viewed as socially acceptable or in accordance with what they think the researcher wants to hear (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Therefore, since the researcher cannot separate themselves from the data collection, they must be aware of and plan for these complications through methods such as journaling or creating field notes after completing interviews so the researcher can address these concerns as the research proceeds. This planning and reflection must include issues of prior or current relationships with participants.

Any relationship between the researcher and their participants outside of the research setting has the potential to cause ethical concerns in the collection of the data. Ravitch and Carl (2021) referred to a primary type of existing relationship between the researcher and participant as one dealing with positions of authority. Potential ethical issues may occur when the researcher has a position of power in which the participant may fear repercussions for what they share, and they may give answers that they think will help the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The relationship between my original intended population and my position in the university at which I work was a significantly relevant potential problem for my original plans to conduct my research. When I first began to plan my research, I was seeking to conduct data collection at the university for which I work. My current role in the university put me in the position of working directly with every student that could be a potential participant in my research. Further, given the

nature of my work and the direct connection I have to the accommodations these students receive on campus, this power imbalance between myself and potential participants was an ethical concern. This concern was addressed, and alternate plans made after discussing the issue with the Walden University IRB.

Through my discussions with the Walden University IRB, it was determined that the best way to avoid ethical concerns related to my current and previous relationship with potential participants would be to conduct the research outside of my university of employment. To address this, I contacted two other Kentucky universities with a similar population of students. A tentative arrangement was agreed upon whereby I would be able to recruit participants from their population that fit the criteria for my research participants. In addition, I would be assisted in identifying these individuals for initial contact by university staff. It was made clear to the participants that I did not have any affiliation with their university, nor would their university have any means of identifying their participation in the research to avoid concerns of coercion by my partner organization. Further, I was allowed to conduct interviews on their campus to provide convenience and avoid feelings of discomfort that may arise from conducting the interviews in an unfamiliar area; however, due to time and geographical limitations, interviews were conducted virtually. These plans were approved by the Walden University IRB and each of the partner university IRBs. This plan avoided concerns regarding prior relationships and power imbalance between the researcher and the participants. The other ethical issue that needed to be addressed in my research design was my plan to provide incentives for participation.

Students in postsecondary institutions are busy. To compensate my participants for their time, I provided two small incentives for each participant at different points in the study. The first incentive was a gift card valued at \$10 to a local restaurant or coffee shop. Participants received these after submitting a copy of their IEP or 504 plan as required for the document analysis portion of my research. Obtaining these documents may have required some effort on the part of the participant, but the importance of them justifies the provision of an incentive. A second gift card valued at \$10 to a local restaurant or coffee shop was provided when the participant arrived for their interview. Participants were provided the second gift card at the start of the interview to ensure that they understood that further participation is voluntary and would not result in the loss of the incentive should they decide to terminate their involvement. At this point in the interviews, participants were engaged to an extent that they did not take the gift card and immediately withdraw from the study. Further, giving the gift cards prior to the interview reinforced the message that students should be open and honest with their answers and not seek to identify and meet the expectations of the researcher as they participate.

If a researcher ignores pre-existing knowledge and biases that they bring to the research due to their own life experiences, they have an ethical issue with their research. These explicit or implicit biases are particularly significant in qualitative research due to the direct involvement of the researcher as the data collection tool (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Bias regarding my topic is something I had to be constantly aware of and intentional about addressing throughout my study. I have a long history of involvement with students with disabilities as a teacher, a parent, and a staff member

working in disability services at a local university. Because of these preconceived ideas about my topic, I used a high level of caution to ensure that my data was not biased. To address this issue, I was prepared to seek the input of my committee chair and second committee member anytime I thought there may be a chance of my bias becoming apparent in my research. This step did not prove to be necessary. Instead, a reflective journal helped me track thoughts and potential bias as I progressed through the research. This journal also provided an extra measure of trustworthiness in the data collection as will be discussed later in this chapter. Through the frequent opportunities to address my pre-existing ideas about my topic from a position of reflexivity, this reflective journal helped reduce researcher bias in my research and the ethical issues that result from ignoring these positions and opinions. Finally, member checking was put into place to serve as a valuable tool for ensuring that my data captured the experiences and beliefs of my participants and not of my own (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Checking for understanding during the interview as well as allowing my participants to review my data following the interview ensured that I capture their meaning and not my own.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

As discussed in the previous section, my sites were two Kentucky universities. The universities were selected because they have an office of student accessibility that has a history of successfully providing services to students with disabilities in accordance with ADA. In addition, these universities have large student populations and draw

students from many of their local high schools. This population made it more likely that I would be able to recruit an adequate sample from their population of students with high-incidence disabilities.

Instrumentation

Data for this study were collected through interviews and document analysis. The documents that were analyzed were the participant's last IEP or 504 plan from high school prior to transitioning to postsecondary education. Interviews were conducted individually with participants to address the research question (See Appendix – Interview Protocol and Questions). I reviewed the IEP or 504 plan to identify key pieces of information that enhanced understanding of the participants' responses and shaped some of the questions asked during the interview. A further analysis of each of the proposed questions for the interview explains the need for each question and what information was expected from the data collected.

To understand the connection between a participant's IEP or 504 plan goals or services and their experiences, it is useful to know their identified disability when they were in high school. In the case of high-incidence disabilities, there is often little physical indication of the individual's disability, and these "hidden" disabilities can create additional barriers for these students since their disability is not apparent to some people (Cuda, 2022). Likewise, asking the student to tell me about the services they received in high school provided information on the wide variety of services that a student may have received to address their disability. Some services are common for students with high-incidence disabilities based on their diagnosis but may not always be appropriate for the

individual (Pillay et al., 2021). Comparing the documented plan for services on the IEP or 504 plan with the participant's perceptions of those services allowed me to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the execution of the original plan. Allowing the participants' perceptions to guide understanding of how effectively IDEA transition mandates are followed helped create an understanding of the issue from the perspective of public policy and administration.

Students with disabilities are required by IDEA to have transition planning implemented by the IEP during which the student will turn 16 (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004). Asking students about their earliest experiences with transition planning helped determine if the transition planning was made an explicit part of the participant's IEP by the required time as opposed to at the last moment. In addition, asking students to tell me about their experiences with receiving transition specific services to prepare them to enter college while they were in high school addressed the concern raised by previous studies (Francis et al., 2018; Hughes et al., 2018; Doyle et al., 2017; Alverson et al., 2019) that suggest that students with disabilities are not provided sufficient transition services when transitioning from high school to college. At this point in the interview, having previously reviewed the documentation provided by the student, a series of questions addressed specific services that the student received and asked them to talk about the effectiveness of these services in preparing them to transition to postsecondary education. Further evaluation of this data helped determine if students were active participants in the development of meaningful transition goals and services.

Effective planning for educational services requires a variety of knowledge and experience. Accordingly, IDEA (2004) mandates that an IEP meeting that will discuss transition from high school needs to include, at a minimum, the student, the parent, a district representative, a special education teacher, a general education teacher, representatives of outside agencies that will be working with the student following graduation, and any other relevant professionals that work with the student in the school on a regular basis. According to research on the topic, this collaborative planning that is mandated is often ignored (Francis et al., 2019; Flowers et al., 2018). To address this concern, a question about who the participant remembers being at their final IEP meeting provided data to compare to the participants page of the IEP. If the student is given a voice in this planning process, as mandated by IDEA (2004), researchers have found that special education services are more likely to result in successful preparation for postsecondary education (White & Rae, 2018). To address this area, I asked each of the participant in the interview if they felt they were adequately included in their transition planning and to indicate if they felt the services prepared them for college. From this point, the focus of the interview was shifted to the participant's postsecondary education experiences.

Partly based on the effectiveness of transition services provided to students while still in high school, students must be able to navigate the procedure for securing the appropriate accommodations in the postsecondary education setting. Lovett et al. (2015) discussed the proactive steps that a student with a disability must take to receive accommodations in college. These requirements on the part of the student need to be

captured in terms of the changes in how securing services are mandated by public policy in high school compared to college. Asking a student about their experiences setting up these services provided an opportunity to let them reflect on these distinct differences and potential challenges that they faced. In addition, asking directly about their knowledge of those differences mandated by different public policies in high school compared to postsecondary education informs the researcher if they were educated in the policies that shape their access to services in high school and college. This knowledge is particularly vital when this social problem was examined from the perspective of public policy problems and solutions.

To complete the interview, I ended by asking the participant if there is anything further they want to share about their experiences as a student with a disability transitioning from high school to college. According to Patton (2015), giving an open-ended question such as this at the end of a qualitative interview embraces the spirit of qualitative research and can provide new insight into areas that researchers may not have considered exploring previously. Thus, this question gave the participant a final voice in the research and allows their perspectives to shape the research as it progressed.

Asking the questions explained above allowed me to answer my research question by examining the perceptions of students with disabilities of their transition from receiving IDEA services in high school to ADA accommodations in post-secondary education. These questions were developed after an extensive review of the literature. Considering the main barriers to transition for individuals with disabilities addressed in the literature, the questions each focused on specific barriers as explained in the

discussion of each question above and the literature review in chapter 2. Content validity of the interview questions was expected from the basis of the questions being grounded in the current literature with consideration given to how the current literature and the literature on polarities of democracy theory align. When evaluating the data, the interview questions, having the necessary content validity, will be shown in the following chapters to have addressed all parts of the research question and the topic being studied.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

For my research design, I needed to recruit college students with high-incidence disabilities who previously received accommodations and services in high school through an Individual Education Plan or 504 Plan for individual interviews. The proposed interview protocol in the Appendix and was designed to address the problem and purpose of this study. I also needed to collect copies of Individual Education Plans or 504 Plans from my participants to perform document analysis. The data includes responses to the student interview questions regarding how the services and accommodations they received in high school under IDEA prepared them for the transition to receive accommodations in college under ADA and Section 504. The data will also include evaluating the' participants' Individual Education Plans or 504 Plans to determine what transitional services and accommodations were planned during their final year of high school and compare those services in the plan with the participants' self-report during the interview.

Recruitment

The population studied consist of students attending one of two Kentucky partner university that have transitioned from receiving services under IDEA in high school to receiving services under ADA in postsecondary education. A purposeful sampling strategy was used in which individuals were identified as potential participants based on their ability to address the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). An invitation to participate was sent through e-mail by each of the universities' office of student accessibility to all students receiving services for high-incidence disabilities. Students interested in participating were asked to complete a brief online survey through Survey Monkey to identify if they met the criteria for the study. Criteria that was addressed include that the student is a full-time student, that they were receiving services on an IEP or 504 plan while in high school, and that they have continued to use accommodations for their disability in the postsecondary setting. Students who meet these criteria were asked to submit a copy of their last IEP or 504 plan. Those potential participants who can do so were invited to continue in the study in the form of an interview.

An area to be addressed in any sampling plan is the number of participants needed to reach data saturation and adequately answer the research questions. When considering a sample size for a qualitative research study, the focus is on what number of participants will result in data saturation. According to Guest et al. (2006), data saturation occurs when a researcher finds that they are not adding or changing anything to the research code book. Further, the authors state that this number may vary greatly based on the research questions and study design (Guest et al., 2006). Eventually, the authors state that

"a sample of six interviews may be sufficient to enable development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations" (Guest et al., 2006, p.78). This work has been cited and supported many times since it was published in 2006 and matches recommendations of other researchers, although the most frequent conclusion seems to be that the number of participants to reach data saturation depends on the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest et al., 2006; Saunders et al., 2018). Given these recommendations, the nature of the research question in my study, and the best practices for generic qualitative research, it was my intent to conduct interviews with between 10 to 12 participants. Seeking 10 to 12 participants was intended to ensure that even if some participants were unable to provide the required documentation or drop out of the study, I would still have enough participants for a meaningful generic qualitative research study. My final sample consisted of seven participants out of 21 who completed the initial survey. Fourteen of the 21 potential participants did not respond to further contact after multiple attempts to invite them to participate in the study. At that time, it was agreed upon by myself and the dissertation committee that data saturation had been reached.

Data Collection

Data was collected through two Kentucky universities by inviting students registered with the Office of Student Accessibility to participate. The data collection was conducted through individual interviews and document analysis. Interviews ranged between 30 to 60 minutes, and the interviews took place until data saturation had been reached. Interviews were recorded through audio devices and transcribed on a word processing program, such as Microsoft Word. Participants were debriefed following the

interviews regarding how to contact the researcher after the interview was done with any concerns or further information. In addition, I requested permission to follow up with each participant if necessary and provided information about the member checks that were conducted once the transcription was completed. Participants were protected during recruiting, data collection, and the debriefing process using participant ID numbers in place of names. These ID numbers were used on all documentation linked to the student, and the list of participant names and ID numbers were, and continue to be, kept in a secure location accessible only to myself in case follow-up is needed. Once the research is complete and the required time period dictated by the Walden University IRB for keeping participant materials from a dissertation study has passed, all identifying information, such as the list of participants' names and ID numbers, will be destroyed. Until that time, all identifying data will remain secured and accessible only by me.

Data Analysis

Coding of qualitative data was used to analyze student responses to interview questions. Thematic coding of the IEP and 504 plans provided by the students was used to evaluate and analyze the transitional services and supports indicated on Individual Education Plans or 504 Plans. Continuous comparison of the documents was used as the IEP or 504 plans were provided by the participants with a code book being developed based on the themes as they emerged. The following section will describe the instrumentation used, procedures utilized for data collection, and the data analysis plan implemented.

Data Analysis Plan

For my data analysis, I utilized an inductive thematic analysis with constant comparison to establish themes which were coded and entered into a code book as each document or interview was analyzed (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). To avoid the potential of biasing my research with preconceived ideas and opinions of the topic that emerge from my experience with the subject matter, I allowed the themes and codes to emerge as the data was analyzed and avoided the establishment of a priori codes. Although I have a priori knowledge of the subject, I believe that allowing the themes to emerge from the data independent of my knowledge and opinions gave me better insight into the perceptions of the participants and reduced the risk of potential bias that could result from utilizing prior knowledge and preconceptions of the topic to create a priori themes.

The perceptions expressed by my participants were used to understand the individual realities perceived by the participants based on their personal experiences within the common reality shared by others with similar experiences. As I approached the data from this dual perspective of the coexistence of individually perceived realities and a shared common reality, the choice of generic qualitative research for this study allowed me to identify where these realities intersect and how they impact the perceptions of my participants regarding their transition from IDEA services in high school to ADA accommodations in post-secondary education (Kennedy, 2016). Each of these analysis plans required an in-depth evaluation of the data. By immersing myself in the data, using various sources to back up and triangulate my findings, such as documentation analysis, member checking, and multiple rounds of coding, I was able to see patterns and themes

that indicated if there is a gap in the present transition policies in IDEA. Based on the literature, these anticipated potential gaps included, but were not limited to, the perceptions reported by my participants indicating that their high school transitional services did not provide them with the skills or knowledge needed to successfully enter post-secondary education with access to the accommodations they needed in that setting. I utilized Quirkos Qualitative Data Analysis Software to facilitate this analysis and pattern-finding task.

Quirkos allows a researcher to visually code, organize, and display their data to make the coding task more efficient while helping to find evolving patterns from which themes may emerge (Capterra, Inc., n.d.). With QDAS programs, a user can get a better visual of their data based on more than counts or grouping of categories. There is no need to repeatedly go back through a spreadsheet to ensure that codes are being used consistently (Woods et al., 2016). Additionally, there is no need to have a spreadsheet that becomes hard to manage because too many identified categories or themes require more space for additional columns. While these matters may seem trivial, given the cost-effectiveness of Quirkos, the tools offered can be of great value when dealing with large sets of data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the lack of statistics and calculations that can be tested and easily repeated by other researchers makes issues of the trustworthiness of the data an important consideration. According to Patton (2015), ensuring that qualitative research is credible depends on fieldwork and data analysis that is conducted systematically, the

deliberate and in-depth analysis of the data, the researcher's credibility, and the belief of the reader in the value of qualitative research as a legitimate research method. According to Shenton (2004), four considerations regarding the trustworthiness of qualitative data are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. When designing a research plan, a qualitative researcher must account for all these issues to have their research accepted by their intended audience.

Credibility

The first consideration for a qualitative researcher is credibility. Credibility analyzes how well the findings match the reality being studied and is like internal validity in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). In my research, some methods to ensure credibility included triangulation of the data through member checks and document analysis of the IEP and 504 plans from when the participant was in high school. Further, by using established interview protocol based on the current research literature on the topic, I can show that the research was conducted in a manner that produced credible findings. By ensuring participants understand that their participation is entirely voluntary and allowing them to withdraw from the study at any time, the likelihood of the participants lying was decreased, and credibility was increased.

Transferability

Transferability is a concept that may seem counter to the ideas of social constructivism that underlie qualitative research. It is typically aligned with internal validity and generalizability in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). When one's reality is created by their experiences and the influences around them, it is unlikely that

qualitative data can be used to generalize to others in the population. However, this issue does not mean that transferability is ignored. By providing a thick, detailed description of the participants and the research setting, I increased the likelihood that other researchers may be able to use my data as a basis for studying others from the same or similar populations (Shenton, 2004). This thorough explanation of who I studied and where I studied them makes it possible that my research could be applied to a broader population.

Dependability

The next focus for a qualitative researcher to ensure the trustworthiness of data is dependability. This concept aligns with the quantitative concern of reliability (Shenton, 2004). Like the issue of transferability, the focus on understanding a phenomenon from the participants' perspective makes it difficult to ensure that another researcher conducting the research could copy the study and obtain the same results. However, by providing a thorough and thick description of the processes involved in the research, a researcher can address the dependability of the data. Critical to ensuring dependability is that documentation of all of steps and conducting a frequent reflection on the process as research is conducted (Shenton, 2004). This frequent reflection in the form of a research journal allows one to provide enough description of the process and researcher actions that other researchers would find the conclusions to be dependable. For this reason, during the study, I completed a reflection after each research interview. These reflections were typed into research memos that were reviewed throughout the study to ensure a focus on dependability. The focus of the research memos was to track the process being utilized to conduct the research, note how concerns of bias were being addressed, and

make comparisons across interviews. The comparisons made across interviews were a means to ensure that consistency was maintained throughout the interviews and to facilitate the continuous comparison being conducted as part of data analysis.

Confirmability

The final trustworthiness concern for qualitative researchers is confirmability. Regardless of the type of research being conducted, all researchers want to ensure that their work is as objective as possible. However, in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collection tool, leading to concerns about their objectivity (Patton, 2015). This issue can be addressed through an audit trail (Shenton, 2004). An audit trail involves the researcher providing a detailed description of the research study methodology from which a reader can understand each decision made throughout the research (Shenton, 2004). Further, triangulation of data is a way to use multiple data sources to reduce the likelihood of researcher bias. Throughout my research, I utilized extensive journaling to ensure that I provided a complete audit trail. Further, my use of interviews, document analysis, and member checks provided the needed triangulation to address concerns of confirmability in my data.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical considerations are a vital part of research. Researchers must ensure that they are accessing participants and gathering data in ways that prevent harm to the greatest extent possible. Further, ensuring that participants are completing the study with all the information they need to make a rational decision about their choice to participate is essential to keeping a high ethical standard of research. These ethical concerns can

include areas like institutional permissions, ethical concerns related to recruitment, informed consent, ethical concerns related to data collection, and maintaining confidentiality. Other areas of concern may include issues of power and positionality when conducting research in one's own workplace and justification for the use of incentives.

To ensure that research is conducted to the highest ethical standards, universities are required to maintain an IRB that makes determinations on the acceptable level of ethical practice in every study done within their institution. For my study, I worked with Walden University to obtain my degree and two Kentucky partner universities to conduct the research. The partner universities required that I provide evidence of support from a university department and conditional approval from the Walden IRB prior to their review of the study. I worked to obtain the conditional approvals from Walden University. These conditional approvals stated that I had addressed any concerns from the Walden IRB and had completed their review. This approval was conditional on the need to have verification from each of the partner universities that their IRB had approved the study. With this conditional approval from Walden, I submitted my materials to each of the partner university for their approval. After addressing any ethical concerns the partner institution had, I submitted my final request for approval to the Walden IRB, addressed any final issues they had, and received final institutional permission to conduct my research. At this point, I began to work on recruiting participants, the ethical concerns regarding this step having already been addressed and approved by the IRB of all institutions.

Recruitment for my study was done with the assistance of the Office of Student Accessibility from each of my partner universities. These offices agreed to send out an e-mail invitation and link for their students to participate, if they choose to do so, in the survey to determine eligibility. These partnerships allowed me to ensure that the correct students were being approached to request they participate in the study. After the initial invitation was sent from each of the Office of Student Accessibility offices, those offices were no longer involved with the recruitment or research process. Ceasing their involvement ensured that students were free from any potential or perceived repercussions or conflicts of interest due to their preexisting relationships with the Office of Student Accessibility and staff from their university. Recruitment proceeded on a voluntary basis for all potential participants. These participants were given several opportunities to ensure that they wanted to continue in the study or withdraw without fear of repercussion and informed consent was obtained.

The foundation of ethical research practice is informed consent. Researchers are obligated to make sure that potential participants know all the information that will allow them to make a rational choice about if they want to participate (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Further, the issue of informed consent means that a researcher needs to be sure that participants are mentally and emotionally capable of providing consent and can do so without coercion or fear of repercussion (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In my study, I collected informed consent when providing the link to the eligibility determination survey to ensure that participants were aware of the choices they were making for specific points in the research. The informed consent came prior to the start of the study as part of the

survey to determine eligibility. Potential participants were given brief information about the study, the possible outcomes of the research, and were informed that they could refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without fear of repercussions. Participants were ensured that if they decide to withdraw from the study that their documents will be destroyed. Also, participants were informed that all identifying data would be blacked out of the document and a participant number would be used in its place to maintain confidentiality. The participants were also asked if they would be willing to check over the interview transcripts and any portions of the study that use their data to verify accuracy and that their intended views were presented correctly. Participants provided informed consent by continuing with the eligibility determination survey. After this, all documentation that identifies the participant by name was, and continues to be, kept in a locked storage container accessible only by myself until the appropriate time at which they may be destroyed.

Two other ethical issues need to be addressed. These are issues of power imbalance occurring because of dual relationships between the researcher and participants, or conflict of interest, and use of incentives. Initially, my intended plan for my research was to conduct the study at the university at which I am employed. Due to the nature of my position and the topic of the research, it was deemed that a potential conflict of power imbalance existed. It was for the reason of this ethical concern that I determined it would not be ethically appropriate to conduct my research at my own work setting and instead sought partner universities at which I could conduct my study as was discussed previously in this chapter. In terms of use of incentives, I gave two modest

incentives to participants. Per the guidelines outlined earlier in the chapter, these incentives were intended to compensate the participants for their time and effort. Obtaining a copy of their final IEP or 504 plan may have required an additional effort for the student. Asking them to do this for the research warranted a small incentive for their time. Likewise, students in a university setting are extremely busy and have many commitments. Asking for additional time out of their schedule to meet could have been an inconvenience and may have taken up valuable time. As such, a small incentive was intended to compensate them for the effort they made to find the time to meet and conduct the interview. Given the reasoning and modest amount of the incentives, the practice was ethically justified in this case.

Summary

In this chapter, I described my proposed procedures for conducting my research study. I presented the research design and rationale. I then discussed the role of the researcher in qualitative research and specific to my study. Next, I discussed my methodology. This discussion included site selection, data collection, sampling procedure, data analysis, instrumentation, procedures for data collection, and my data analysis plan. Finally, I discussed issues of trustworthiness, addressing validity, reliability, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations specific to my study. In the next chapter, I will present the data collected and the results of my study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This generic qualitative research study was conducted to explore the perceptions of college students with high-incidence disabilities as they transition from receiving services primarily under IDEA or Section 504 in high school to ADA and Section 504 in college. Through this study, insight can be gained into ways that barriers faced by students with disabilities during this transition may be addressed from the view of the field of public policy and administration and through the lens of the polarities of democracy theoretical framework. By conducting this study, the goal was to answer the following research question: What are the perceptions of college students with high-incidence disabilities about their transitional services as they transition from receiving IDEA-based services in high school to ADA-mandated services in college?

In this chapter, I will describe the setting and demographics of the sample of participants that completed the study. I will then discuss data collection and analysis. Next, I will provide evidence of trustworthiness, addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability within the study. Finally, I will discuss the results of the data analysis before summarizing the information from the chapter and proceeding to the discussions, conclusions, and recommendations in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Setting

This study was conducted through an online survey to determine eligibility, a document analysis of IEP or 504 plans provided by participants, and a virtual interview

conducted with each participant. While the goal had been to conduct interviews in a face-to-face setting, this was not able to occur for two reasons. The first reason was that, based on the time at which final approval was received to conduct the study, the school year ended within 2 weeks. Because summer had begun, many of the students associated with the original partner university were no longer in the area or available for face-to-face participation.

In addition, even after alterations were made to the eligibility criteria for the study, only three students had been recruited from the original partner university after 5 weeks of attempting to recruit. As a result, permission was granted from the Walden IRB to seek an additional university partner through which participants could be recruited. While I was able to recruit an additional four participants and reach data saturation through my partnership with the second university, this university was not local and it was not feasible for myself or the participants to meet and conduct interviews face-to-face. Instead, all interviews were conducted virtually.

Due to the interviews being conducted virtually, it is possible that some of the communication through non-verbal methods were lost in the data collection process. Further, I did not have control of the environment in which the research took place for the participant. During one of the interviews, the internet connection was poor and repeatedly disconnected the virtual interview. The interview was completed successfully, but not without complications from this issue. While these issues were factors to be addressed and managed appropriately, they were not significant enough to jeopardize my ability to use the data for this study.

Demographics

The final sample used in this study consisted of seven participants. Participants were all full-time, undergraduate college students. Each participant had received a form of disability services in high school. Four of these participants had 504 plans and three of the participants had IEPs. Two of the students had anxiety, with one of these having comorbid ADHD, two had specific learning disabilities, two were being provided services for hearing impairments, and one student was being served for learning difficulties stemming from chronic migraines. All students participating in the study were registered with their disability services office, referred to as the Office of Student Accessibility at one university and the Disability Service Center at the second university. Each student was receiving a variety of accommodations based on their individual needs. See Table 1 on the following page for summary of demographic and service information.

Table 1

Participant Diagnosis and Accommodations

Participant ID #	Participant diagnosis	High school services	College services
P01	Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time for tests and quizzes • Use of technology for writing • Counselor check-in for anxiety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop-the-clock testing • Quiet testing environment
P02	ADD/Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time for tests and quizzes • Advanced notice of tests and quizzes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time for tests and quizzes • Quiet testing environment
P03	Specific learning disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time for tests and quizzes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time for tests and quizzes

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet testing environment • Teacher checks for understanding • Calculator when not otherwise allowed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet testing environment
P04	Learning difficulty due to chronic migraines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of agenda • Stop-the-clock testing • Quiet place for assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop-the-clock testing • Quiet place for assessment
P05	Deaf/hearing impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferential seating • Extended time for tests and quizzes • Use of technology for writing • Enlarged print • Notes or PowerPoint slides provided to student • Break from screen time as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferential seating • Extended time for tests and quizzes • Quiet testing environment • Technology for recording lectures • Use of technology for writing • Alternate text format (audio)
P06	Deaf/hearing impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time for tests and quizzes • Use of technology • Preferential seating • Tactile graphics • Breaks allowed when requested • Magnified or enlarged materials • Tactile representations for math • Scribe for tests and essays requiring extensive writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time for tests and quizzes • Breaks allowed • Alternate format materials • Enlarged print • Assistive technology • Preferential seating
P07	Specific learning disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time for tests and quizzes • Reader • Paraphrasing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended time for tests and quizzes • Quiet testing environment

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- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of technology• Scribe for tests and essays requiring extensive writing | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breaks allowed as needed• Use of technology for writing |
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Data Collection

Participants started their involvement in the study by completing an online screener survey through SurveyMonkey. Students took approximately 3 to 5 minutes to complete this portion. Each participant who was eligible was then invited to provide a copy of their IEP or 504 plan and to schedule their interview. IEP and 504 plans were submitted prior to their interview to provide the interviewer time to review the documents and analyze them for any relevant information to be addressed during the interview. Each interview varied in length, but typically lasted between 15 and 25 minutes per interview including time spent before recording started to provide the participant with their second round of incentives, as described in Chapter 3, and obtain permission to record.

All interview data were recorded as audio through Zoom. Zoom provides audio files separate from the video files, so interviewer was able to retain only the audio per Walden University IRB requirements. All interview recordings were downloaded to local storage and transferred to a flash drive accessible only by myself for confidentiality purposes. I then transcribed interviews into Microsoft Word. Once I completed these transcripts and checked them for accuracy, a copy of the transcript of their interview was sent to each participant with an invitation to take part in member checking.

Aside from the need to conduct interviews virtually, which was a backup already addressed in the original data collection plan and approved by the IRB, all data collection

occurred as presented previously in Chapter 3. Further, no unusual circumstances were encountered during data collection other than the connectivity issues discussed previously in this chapter. Because data analysis was being conducted as an inductive thematic analysis with constant comparison, each interview was analyzed while data collection was still ongoing until the last interview. The result of this research design was that once the interviews started, data collection and data analysis were occurring simultaneously. Data analysis will be discussed in the following section.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted as an inductive thematic analysis with constant comparison. As previously discussed, inductive thematic analysis was chosen to provide a method of avoiding the bias that could influence a priori coding development. As such, with each new interview, codes were identified that were grouped into categories and themes as the research was conducted. Development and analysis of these codes, categories, and themes will be discussed in this section.

Codes generated during the first interview conducted included “accommodations in college,” “high school accommodations,” “transitional services/planning,” “student awareness of disability,” “transitional planning meetings,” “self-advocacy,” “knowledge of applicable public policy,” and “setting up services in college.” These codes were defined as seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Codes Generated After P01 Interview

Code	Definition	Quote from interview
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College Accommodations	Information related to accommodations received in post-secondary setting.	P01: “here at college I noticed it’s more like here I am able to go to a specific website and book a testing room for a test rather than the informality of high school just emailing a teacher, ‘hey can I get extended time on this?’”
High School Accommodations	Information related to accommodations received in the high school setting.	P02: “I only received extended time on tests and assignments and papers. So, um...in high school they would let me take as long as I needed to complete an exam.
Transitional Services/Planning	Information related to planning and accommodations and services received in the high school setting directly related to transition from high school to college.	P01: “Um...I mean, like I said, there wasn’t really a discussion about the transition to college and how my accommodations would translate over here.”
Transitional Planning Meetings	Meetings held either specifically to discuss transitional planning for high school to college or meetings that should include discussion of transitional planning per IDEA or best practices.	P01: Answering who was part of her planning team at her last meeting in high school for her 504, “Um, I think it was just my counselor and the assistant principle.”
Self-Advocacy	The ability of a student with a disability to advocate for their own needs in the high school or post-secondary educational setting to allow them access to the educational curriculum that would otherwise be hindered by their disability.	P02: “Other than getting me my 504 plan to give to my college, you know, I really just did it for myself. My mom went to the school and we figured out how to get the services I needed in college by ourselves. No one was involved in that from the high school.”

Knowledge of Applicable Public Policy	Student awareness and knowledge of the laws applying to their services in high school, IDEA and Section 504, and/or college, ADA and Section 504.	P01: “I actually didn’t really know like anything about the laws. It’s kind of just like, I let the administrators do that work and just tell me about the accommodations.”
Student Awareness of Disability	The knowledge and ability of a student to express necessary information related to their disability, the services they need to access the educational curriculum, and why they need these services.	P01: “For anxiety and depression...Like, that’s the medication I’m taking, but the specifically for the extended time it was anxiety.”
Setting Up Services in College	The experiences and perceptions of students as they coordinated with their disability services office in the post-secondary educational setting to establish accommodations in college.	P01: “Once I was here, I think I like reached out by, like, email or something. And that was when I set up a meeting to meet with her [Assistant Director of the Office of Student Accessibility] in person.”

During the second interview, many of these codes were seen to be applicable to information provided by the participant. In addition, the codes “issues with high school accommodations,” “advantages of college accommodations,” and “preparing for college readiness” were added as codes. These codes, the descriptions, and quotes from participants that emphasize their importance are in Table 3 below.

Table 3

New Codes Generated After P02 Interview

Code	Definition	Quote from interview
Issues with high school accommodations	Negative aspects related to establishing and receiving	P02: “When I was in high school and had to take it [a

	disability services in the high school setting.	test] with the rest of the class. Then they would leave and I would get like, I would be behind and I would miss my next class in high school.”
Advantages of college accommodations	Positive aspects related to establishing and receiving disability services in the post-secondary setting.	P02: “Um, but I do know that the help that I’ve received in college has definitely, you know, made me more...made me feel more OK with, you know, processing things at a slower pace.”
Preparing for college readiness	Transitional planning or curricular activities directed at ensuring that the student with disabilities is prepared to transition from the high school to college setting.	P03: Speaking about her transitional services which were to help her be more organized, “but other than that, I...I really can’t say that there was more of, that there was more, that there was more that they did aside from that.”

The last three codes came from interviews with P03 and P04. The codes “advantages of high school accommodations” and “outside agencies” were added to the code book following my interview with P03 and the final code, “parental guidance,” was added after the interview with P04. These codes, their definition, and quotes demonstrating their importance are found in Table 4 below.

Table 4

New Codes Generated After P03 and P04 Interviews

Code	Definition	Quote from interview
Advantages of high school accommodations	Positive aspects related to establishing and receiving disability services in the high school setting.	P03: Speaking about her high school accommodations, “I would say that they were pretty

Outside agencies	Involvement or lack of involvement of agencies outside of those directly associated with the public-school district in assisting a student with disabilities with transitional planning or services.	effective...Because I was able to use that skill at my college and map out different assignments and things that were most important and things that were least important.” P06: “So they’ve [Office of Vocational Rehabilitation] been really good with, like, making sure I have the orientation and mobility I need to get around campus.”
Parental guidance	Information reported about parental involvement in the transition planning process during high school intended for transition to college.	P04: “My mom is a, um, special education teacher. So, part of the reason why she wanted me to get those services in high school was so that they would transition into college.”

In the interviews that followed, these codes were seen to frequently reoccur and no additional codes were added. As indicated in chapter 3 and by Guest et al. (2006) this lack of new codes or codes being updated in the code book suggested that data saturation had been reached as no new information was resulting from additional interviews. Looking at how the codes could be further grouped together, categories were next established from the existing data.

As the data was analyzed, the categories that were most evident involved breaking the process of students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college into a chronological grouping. These categories included “high school services and planning,” “preparing for college accommodations,” and “setting up and receiving college

accommodations.” Further evaluation of the data within the structure of the codes and categories led to the emergence of three primary themes. These themes were “services received,” “procedural matters,” and “advocacy.” These themes will be discussed further under the results section later in this chapter.

A final consideration to discuss when addressing data analysis is the presence or absence of discrepant cases in the data. Each of the seven participants could be categorized as having a unique range of experiences that contributed to their view of the services they received and the transition process as a whole. A brief summary of each participant’s high school experience and relevant factors as it relates to their special education and transitional services is given in table 5 below. As can be seen from this table, none of the participants had an experience significantly different enough from other participants that they would be determined to represent a deviant case. Instead, participants represented a wide variety of the types of experiences that can be seen throughout the literature addressed in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Table 5

Summary of Participant Experience With Special Education Services in High School

ID #	General experience described by participant	Experience described by the participant regarding advocacy during the transitional planning
P01	Services focused more on current issues in high school and ensuring she graduated.	Expresses feeling that she had a voice in transition planning. Access to services in college the result of information received from the college and self-advocacy.
P02	Services focused on current needs in high school and not transition to college.	P02 felt she lacked a voice in the transition process and the services she did get were a result of her parents’ advocacy.

P03	Significant transition focus and experience provided while in high school.	P03 attributes this focus not on the school, but on parental involvement and outside agency assistance.
P04	Late identification of eligibility for disability services occurred during senior year of high school. P04 reports intensive involvement of the school in transitional services.	P04's mother worked as a special education teacher in the district enabling both the necessary contacts and knowledge to ensure P04 received the proper services.
P05	P05 reported that transition was only addressed after she had started taking college courses during high school.	P05 reported that she was often talked over by school staff in planning meetings and only had a voice in the process because her parents ensured she had a chance to talk.
P06	Dual enrollment in public school and a school for the blind resulted in certain standard services and focus on transition.	Participant expressed the feeling that she had a voice in her planning process. In addition, because of her status as a student in the school for the blind, P06 was automatically registered with OVR as part of her high school services.
P07	P07 reported receiving little transitional help from her school and an adversarial relationship with the special education teacher.	P07 reports that her parents were her main advocates for receiving necessary services in high school. P07 further noted that she was often threatened with the loss of her services by the special education teacher.

Lacking any deviant cases within the data, one can continue to evaluate the information learned as a whole and turn to concerns regarding trustworthiness in the results of the research.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is frequently scrutinized and criticized for its lack of objective measurements and the inability to reproduce a study exactly as it was initially conducted to confirm agreement with the results of the study. However, through systematic and deliberate data analysis, rich description, and the credibility of the

researcher, qualitative research can be as credible as quantitative research (Patton, 2015). When considering the trustworthiness of qualitative data, one must examine it in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Even though qualitative research seeks to explore reality from the perspective of participants, it is still possible to ensure that the conclusions drawn match the reality being studied (Shenton, 2004). Credibility in research starts by basing the interview protocol off of established protocol found in the current literature on the subject. The protocol for this research study was only finalized after the review of the literature had been completed in chapter 2 of this dissertation, which provided me with the ability to verify that the research protocol being utilized was based on the current literature. Further concern about the credibility of qualitative research may come from the potential of participants to provide false information during the data collection process. An accepted way of addressing this issue is to provide detailed information to participants prior to the data collection so they can make their decision to participate through informed consent. When participants understand that their participation is completely voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time, they are less likely to provide false information during the interview. In this study, informed consent was obtained after a thorough description of the study in the survey to determine eligibility and again at the beginning of each interview. In addition to these standard practices to ensure credibility, ways of confirming the credibility of the data a researcher is collecting or has collected also helps improve confidence in the findings presented in the study.

Two additional methods for ensuring credibility are member checks and document analysis that provides confirmation of what is reported during data collection. These methods allow the researcher to engage in triangulation of the data and provide opportunities to demonstrate the credibility of the findings. For this study, my plan was to utilize both member checks and document analysis to triangulate the data with the information provided in the interviews.

Prior to each interview, each participant submitted a copy of either their last IEP or 504 plan, depending upon which they were served under in high school. These documents were reviewed prior to each interview and questions about accommodations provided in high school were aligned with the contents of the documents. After each interview, the documents were checked again in comparison to the data collected from the interview to ensure that what was reported by the participants matched what was written in the document. No discrepancies were noted that had not already been addressed during the interviews. Based on this outcome, it can be inferred that the documents provided were good sources of data triangulation and that the evaluation of these documents added credibility to the study. Further efforts to ensure credibility were taken in the form of member checks.

At the end of each interview, the participant was notified that they would be sent a copy of the transcript so that, if they chose to, they could ensure that the contents of the transcript matched the meaning they intended to convey during the interview, a process known as member checking. After each interview, the contents of the interview were transcribed into a document by the researcher. The transcription was done over several

rounds of reviewing the audio recording to ensure that information was recorded verbatim. Once these transcripts were complete, a copy of the transcript was sent via email to each participant with a request to review the transcript and report any comments or concerns related to the contents of the transcript. Out of the seven participants, only one participant responded to this request. That participant indicated that everything was recorded in such a way that they felt their perceptions and experiences were accurately represented.

Transferability

Given the purpose of qualitative research to explore the experiences and perceptions of participants through a constructivist lens, it can be difficult to determine that transferability exists and trustworthiness of the data has been accomplished. However, while an exact replica of a qualitative study may not be able to be created in the same manner as in quantitative research, this point does not mean that researchers cannot provide a degree of transferability in qualitative research. According to Shenton (2004), a way to increase the likelihood of transferability in qualitative research is to provide thick, rich descriptions of all parts of the research process. In this study, I provide thorough descriptions of my population and the sample drawn from that population.

Through my thick description throughout this dissertation, I address the trustworthiness of the research in terms of ensuring as much transferability as is possible given the nature of qualitative research. Sufficient amount of detail about the participants is provided as much as possible while still maintaining participant confidentiality. In both chapter 3 and in this chapter, the details which I provided about my research protocol, my

participants, and the results of following the protocol are provided to an extent that another researcher could take this study and replicate it with a similar population. While the results would not likely be identical, there exists the probability that the results of another researcher may be similar to those found in this study.

Dependability

Similar to issues with transferability in qualitative data, ensuring that the standard of dependability is met can be challenging. While it is not possible to be certain that another researcher conducting the same research could duplicate the results, Shenton (2004) stated that through frequent reflection and documentation of processes, researchers can ensure a high level of dependability. In this study, reflection was completed after each research interview and put in the form of research memos. Further, each of these memos was able to be used to track the process being utilized to conduct the research, identify how concerns of bias were being addressed, and make comparisons across interviews to facilitate the continuous comparison being conducted as part of identifying codes, categories, and themes in the data. While these reflections cannot guarantee duplicated results if another researcher were to conduct this study, they do provide a sufficient level of description of the process and procedures to ensure that the findings have dependability.

Confirmability

Objectivity is a goal for any researcher. Because the researcher is the data collection tool in qualitative research, this leads to a greater concern about objectivity than is seen in quantitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). One effective way of

addressing this concern is through a detail-rich description of the research study methodology, known as an audit trail (Shenton, 2004). This audit trail allows interested stakeholders to be able to see each decision that has been made during the course of the research. In this study, confirmability is enhanced through the use of journaling, which created an audit trail. Journal notes were made and turned into research memos throughout the research process. These research memos provide evidence of confirmability should an interested party want to follow the process of decision-making behind the study. In addition, use of triangulation, already discussed under credibility, further lends to the confirmability of the research. By utilizing multiple sources of data, both documentation of disability services and interviews, and giving participants the opportunity to correct any issues they see in the transcripts from the interview, confirmability and the overall trustworthiness of the study is enhanced.

Results

The research question I sought to answer during this study was: What are the perceptions of college students with high-incidence disabilities about their transitional services as they transition from receiving IDEA-based services in high school to ADA-mandated services in college? Looking at the results of this study can be most effectively done through the themes that emerged during data analysis. In this study, three primary themes emerged from the data. These themes were “services received,” “procedural matters,” and “advocacy.” I will now discuss each of these themes individually, focusing on the specifics of each theme and why they were the themes chosen.

Services Received

The theme “services received” was apparent in the data as participants shared their experiences with receiving services, both those that they felt were beneficial and those they felt were not, in both high school and college. As the focus of this study was to examine the perceptions of college students as they transitioned from receiving services and accommodations under IDEA or Section 504 in high school to receiving their accommodations under ADA and Section 504 in college, this theme is not unexpected. The theme “services received” consists of the data previously coded under “accommodations in college,” “high school accommodations,” transitional services/planning,” “issues with high school accommodations,” “advantages of high school accommodations,” “preparing for college readiness,” and “advantages of college accommodations.” These areas highlight the perceptions of students as they received their services in both settings.

Within the theme “services received,” participants expressed both positive and negative experiences with their services in high school, transitioning, and in college. Some of these observations came in the form of comparison of the services in either setting. According to P02, college presented the opportunity to receive services without some of the issues she had experienced in high school as she stated:

In the testing center, being by myself in this cubicle in college has helped way more than, than when I was in high school and had to take it with the rest of the class. Then they would leave and I would get like, I would be behind and I would miss my next class in high school. Whereas the testing center at [my university],

you can schedule what time you need to take your exam so you're not missing any classes.

Similarly, when discussing the differences between high school and college accommodations, P01 shared that, "the only thing I would say is I kinda noticed that there's like a big difference between the way they go about accommodations." Other observations about services in high school included the issue that the services students received in high school did not translate seamlessly into the college setting. Discussing her scribe services in high school, P07 noted, "no one writes by hand in college anymore. So, I don't really need a scribe." Instead, she goes on to explain, finding and utilizing the correct technology were more important skills and tools than those for which high school services had prepared her. Participants also expressed that in some cases, the skills and goals that were a part of their transitional planning had more to do with their current day-to-day academics in high school as opposed to skills that would carry over into college. P03 shared that:

Um, along with I had a certain block during, um, high school where I was with, I was in a specific room with, I guess like a special education teacher. And she would kind of help me through, like map out different assignments and when they were due and the timing of things.

However, other participants felt that even if the accommodations in high school were related to current needs, there was still benefit to be derived once they started college. P02 stated, "I think that kind of having that extra time to take that exam [in high school] has made me better at taking exams in college." However, when discussing if her

transitional services were effective in preparing her for college, P02 stated, “I don’t really, other than getting me my 504 plan to give to my college.” Others felt that their services in high school were more directly beneficial once they reached college because of foresight on the part of their high school teachers. According to P04, “so my teachers that sat in with me and my counselor, they were really concerned about me taking tests in a lecture setting.”

When looking at the experiences of the participants in this study, it is not surprising to note that the three students who reported that they experienced a significant transition focus through the involvement of a parent in a special education role or an outside agency were the participants who reported their services most effectively prepared them for college. Those students who reported a lack of parental or outside agency involvement were the participants who reported the least benefit from their high school services when transitioning to college. These experiences and perceptions reported by the participants may indicate that while current public policy does mandate transitional services as part of IDEA, further policy may be needed to address the inconsistency in provision of these services across different schools and availability of resources. In addition, as will be discussed further in the recommendations section of chapter 5, public policy focused on transition may further benefit students who receive high school services on a 504 plan as well. Regardless of the varied experiences of these participants in their high school services, there seemed to be a more positive perception of both establishing and receiving services once in college.

In setting up their disability accommodations in college, participants expressed positive interactions with university personnel that sometimes even exceeded their expectations. These positive experiences started for some participants before they made their initial contact with the disability services office at the university. P01 stated, “during the beginning of the year, they had like so many presentations about all the different resources on campus. And I was like ‘oh, I should make use of this resource.’ Because in my high school we didn’t have like a specific like program or anything like an office or something.” According to P02, speaking of her experiences in establishing her services in college, noted that “it was a breeze getting those services set up.” Once these participants were made aware of the available resources, they found substantial benefit in accessing the disability services on campus.

The ease of establishing disability services in college was a shift from what participants had experienced in high school. For some participants, it was a matter of feeling that they were being heard. P02 stated, “it was very very very welcoming and I did feel like I had more of a voice there because they asked me what I needed.” P07 shared how she quickly discovered that disability services in college were going to be vastly different from those she had experienced in high school:

Um, I remember it as a very different experience because when I got here, I was ready to fight like I was ready to like go and swing and being like, “no, I need this” because I was, I had the experience in high school of constantly having to argue and fight. And so, when I had my little zoom meeting with my little like accommodation person, she's like, “all right, what accommodations do you

want?” And she was just gonna write a list and I was like, “What? I thought I was gonna have to argue here. I thought you were gonna hand me a little plate and just being like all you get and I'm gonna be like, ‘no, this’ and then you're gonna be like ‘this.’” I thought it was gonna be like a like custody battle, a negotiation or whatever. And then she just was like this and I kind of got shell shocked and I was like, she's like, “do you want a reader?” And I was like, “yeah,” “and like a room, would you like food? Like would you be like to have water there.” And I was like, “yeah, can I be in the room alone?” She's like, “heck yeah.” “Can I walk around?” “Yeah,” it was, it was, I was just totally shocked...by the experience.

The defensive stance with which P07 entered into preparing to request disability accommodations in college speaks to the challenges that students with disabilities may face in receiving appropriate transition services. Inadequate transitional services in high school may lead some students to either be unaware of the services that are available to them in college or hesitant to seek these services out once they arrive on campus. As was discussed in the review of the current literature in chapter 2 of this dissertation and will be discussed further in chapter 5 under the interpretation of the findings and implications sections, it may be that the lack of effective high school disability transition services could explain why some students choose to not pursue their allowable services in college. Further concerns can be seen when looking not only at the disability services received, but in procedural matters related to establishing these services.

Procedural Matters

The second theme that emerged from analysis of the data was procedural matters. This theme was comprised of data that had been coded as “transitional planning meetings” and “setting up services in college.” While much has already been examined about setting up services in college as it relates to the experiences of the participants with their disability services in college, there is still much to be examined in terms of transitional planning meetings in high school. As was noted in the literature review in chapter 2, procedural violations are the area in which courts most frequently rule against school districts (Marsico et al., 2021; Turnage, 2020; Zirkel, 2020). However, the experiences of these participants suggest that these policies may still be violated by schools.

Despite the public policy surrounding transitional services in IDEA, students may fail to receive adequate services from school districts that do not follow procedural requirements. These procedural requirements can include such areas as ensuring students are involved in their own transition planning. As shared by P02, instead of being a part of the planning process from the beginning, her parents and guidance counselor “would like have a meeting and then would call me in.” In addition, explicit discussion of transitional needs and services is required by IDEA, however, some students may not experience this type of planning. P01 shared of her experiences that “there wasn’t really a discussion about the transition to college and how my accommodations would translate over here.” Other students, due to parental involvement or outside agencies, were able to experience the transitional planning that is mandated. P03 shared that the school personnel “were

very adamant about asking me questions and asking me how I felt about it. If I wanted to do that or if I didn't want to do that." P05 felt that they were sometimes heard as an important participant in their disability services planning, but only with the assistance of their parents. She stated that, "my parents made sure I had a voice because teachers would try to uh speak over me as if I didn't know about my own disability." The mixed outcomes of transitional planning amongst the participants may be indicative of a need for public policy that strengthens requirements for schools to provide adequate transitional services that meet the needs of all students regardless of the resources they bring to the table. As will be discussed further in the next section and in the implications section of chapter 5, these inconsistent applications of current public policy that is meant to provide transitional services to students with disabilities may indicate a need for a greater focus on advocacy training.

Advocacy

Advocacy has always played a role in ensuring that individuals with disabilities have access to what they need to access the same opportunities as anyone else in society. Because this access is shaped and guaranteed in the form of public policy, it is vital that those involved in the advocacy have knowledge and skills related to advocating for these needs. That knowledge, however, is not limited to technical knowledge of bureaucracy, procedural matters, or policies. It is for this reason that IDEA requires schools to include a student in their transitional planning process. The individual's knowledge of self and their own needs should shape transitional planning and services as students with disabilities transition from high school to college to allow them the same level of self-

determination as any other student. The importance of this topic and the frequency in which instances of advocacy-related matters appear both in the literature and in the data that was collected for this study is the reason advocacy is the third theme to emerge from the data analysis.

In this study, the theme “advocacy” emerged from the data coded “student awareness of disability/receiving services,” “self-advocacy,” “knowledge of applicable laws,” “outside agencies,” and “parental guidance.” It is also a critical element of the polarity pair, participation and representation, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. In transitional planning for individuals with disabilities transitioning from high school to college, there are many possible advocates to speak for student needs. Parents, school officials, outside agencies, and, most importantly, the student are all in positions where they should be able to add their knowledge and expertise to the discussion and combine them with the desires of the student to ensure equity in the opportunity present in post-secondary education. However, not all of these parties are consistently advocating for the needs of the student.

Many of the statements made by participants in this study show that being a self-advocate and feeling they have a voice in the transition process was a significant problem. P02 shared that her school did not assist her in knowing how to access accommodations once she reached college, but “that was something I had to do on my own and my parents helped me a lot with that.” P04 discussed how her mother’s career in special education helped her learn important ways to self-advocate:

I know a lot of like special ed terminology from my mom, like I used to volunteer in her classroom. Um, so having like kind of sitting back and watched her say those things and then me putting the input and hearing what other perspectives were coming in, um, let me just be able to advocate for myself in ways that I don't think I would've without being able to get those services in high school.

In a similar manner, some of the participants felt that the skills they developed that aided them in transitioning to college were gained not from their high school services, but from their own experiences and learning outside of the educational setting. Speaking of coping skills she had developed to address issues related to her disability that impacted her academically, P07 stated, "they were things that I picked up along the way. Um, I found the Speakify app on Tiktok. Someone was like, here's this app, it will read to you. And I was like, I freaking need that." Further, P07 shared that some of her accommodations in high school hindered her ability to be independent. She shared, "I felt like had like my senior year we tried to like not pull back on the accommodations, but try to find alternate ways so I can be independent because, again, there is no, like, person that's constantly right next to me being like 'here's this, here's this, do you need this kind of thing?'" Far from promoting independence and self-advocacy training, these participants were prevented from developing those essential skills that they would need in their transition to college and throughout life at a time when they needed them most. It is possible that some of their struggle with self-advocacy was related to a lack of knowledge of the public policy that mandates the reception of their services.

Throughout the interviews, participants shared that they had little to no knowledge of their protections under the law. This may in part explain why those participants who had knowledgeable parents or outside agencies assisting had a better perception of the effectiveness of the services they received as someone was involved in the process from outside the school that understood their rights. P01 discussed her knowledge of the policies, stating “I actually didn’t know like anything about the laws. It’s just kind of like, I let the administrators do that work and just tell me about the accommodations.” P03 similarly stated, “I want to say at the time, to my knowledge, there wasn’t anything that I like saw or like heard of that stood out to me... Yeah, I can’t really think of anything that stood out to me in that aspect.” Perhaps the most concerning experience shared by a participant, in terms of lacking the knowledge of their rights needed to self-advocate, was P07:

I’m not going to lie to you. In high school I was very unaware of how I was protected. Um, it was ever, I don’t think this was an intentional way it was presented to me, but I feel like this is just what I picked up is that what I had was a privilege. I was privileged to receive these accommodations because so many other kids didn’t get these accommodations and um, that I was just that like, I don’t know. Especially in the senior year when the whole like they’re [her disability accommodations] gonna be taken away from me thing happened. Um, it really freaked me out that they could just take it away. Like I was terrified and I did not understand the laws that protected me as a disabled person, that they can’t just do those kinds of things. Uh, I have a much better understanding in college,

especially after that whole experience, because I was just like study. God, this is never going to happen to me again, kind of thing.

These statements and problems shared by participants highlight the significant problem that can occur when individuals lack the knowledge to be effective self-advocates. Despite the mandates in IDEA that students with disabilities are included in the transition planning process, there is no mandate to ensure that they understand their rights thoroughly outside the presentation of a dense and very technical procedural safeguards paper that is offered to parents at each IEP meeting. In the case of students on a 504 plan, the schools are not even required to offer this value-limited informational sheet and it is entirely on the parents and students to ensure that they know their rights. Parents and students need to be educated in these areas. Parental input and participation in disability services and transitional planning are important enough to be specifically required by IDEA and schools must document certain efforts to reach parents to schedule meetings to be compliant with IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). As such, parents' value as advocates for a student are well recognized.

Parental guidance and involvement in transitional planning was stated by multiple participants as a reason they received the disability accommodations and transitional services provided by the school. Both parents with and without specialized expertise fight for their children to have access to the services and accommodations they need to be successful in their education. P04 shared, "and so that's why my mom was very fluent and very knowledgeable in the K through 12 and she's like, we're, we're doing this right now so that we can guarantee whatever may change, whatever may happen through

college, you have this right now.” P05 stated, “my parents made sure I had a voice because teachers would try to uh speak over me as if I didn’t know about my own disability.” P07 shared that her parents made a consistent presence at her planning meetings and make sure she always had someone advocating for her. When discussing her final transition meeting, she said, “um, both my parents were there. I think just my mom was there at that time, but my dad is usually involved. He’s just a busy man.”

These parents are just some examples of the many parents of children with disabilities who make a concerted effort to ensure that their children are receiving what they need. Unfortunately, as the previous literature has shown and will be discussed further in the next chapter, many factors can limit the effectiveness of parents in this advocacy. The stories told by these participants about their successes and struggles advocating for their needs to be met to allow them to have equitable access to education highlight the importance of advocacy and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, suggest the need for significantly altered or new public policy to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills needed to be lifelong self-advocates.

Summary

This study was intended to answer the research question: What are the perceptions of college students with high-incidence disabilities about their transitional services as they transition from receiving IDEA-based services in high school to ADA-mandated services in college? Through the analysis of the data in a constant comparison inductive thematic analysis, three themes emerged from the data. These themes were “services received,” “procedural matters,” and “advocacy.” In this chapter, I discussed the results

of the study. I discussed my findings in terms of the setting, demographics of my participants, data collection procedures, and the progression of my data analysis from initial data collection to identifying and examining emerging themes. I reviewed my evidence of trustworthiness and explained how my original plan compared to the execution of my study as well as how my methods ensured credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, I discussed the results of my data analysis broken down into the three themes that had been developed from the data.

In the next chapter, I will go over my discussion, conclusions, and recommendations. I will provide an interpretation of my findings from this chapter. I will then discuss the limitations present in the study and provide recommendations for future research and implications for practice that emerged from the research. I will then conclude the chapter and, simultaneously, this dissertation.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of college students with high-incidence disabilities as they transition from receiving services primarily under IDEA in high school to ADA in college. Through this study, I gained insight into ways that barriers faced by students with disabilities during this transition may be addressed from the view of the field of public policy and administration and through the lens of the polarities of democracy theoretical framework. By examining the results of this study, it may be possible to suggest changes to existing public policy or the creation of new public policy to make the transition from high school to college more successful for students with disabilities.

My study suggests that the struggles previous literature has examined for individuals with disabilities attempting to access and graduate college may be explained, at least partially, by the failure to leverage the positive aspects of the five polarity pairs found in the polarities of democracy theory. Specifically, the perceptions of the participants in my study demonstrate the need for increased access to advocacy, skill training to enable individuals with disabilities who want to attend college to be effective self-advocates, and greater knowledge about the rights and responsibilities of an individual with disabilities transitioning from high school to college. From these results, it is possible to make suggestions that creating new public policy or changing current policy to require greater access to these areas for individuals with disabilities may provide more equal access to post-secondary education. In doing so, one can promote

positive social change and justice by suggesting ways to continue to eliminate barriers to access to higher education for individuals with disabilities, improve both college entrance and graduation rates, and better provide access to the opportunities needed to give those with disabilities access to the same liberties experienced by their peers without disabilities.

Interpretation of the Findings

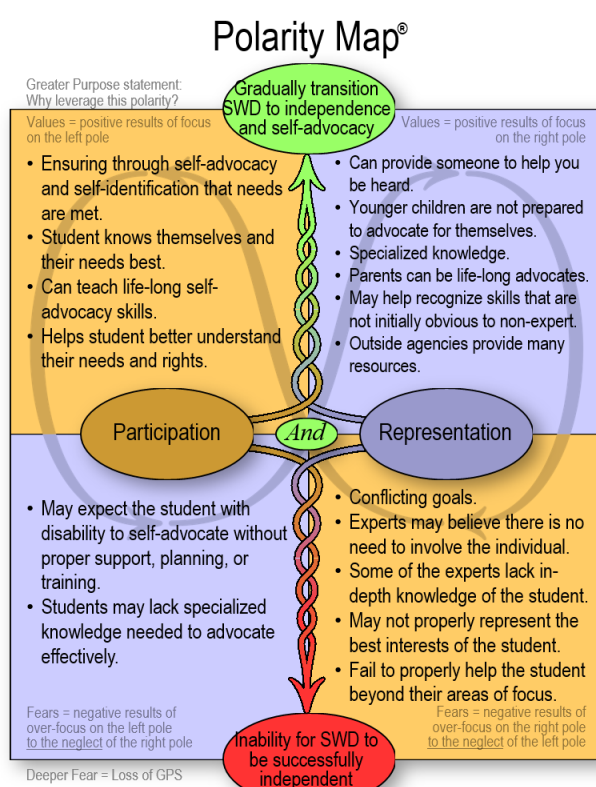
With the findings of this study, I both confirm the current knowledge found in the literature of the social problem addressed and provide suggestions for possible public policy solutions. By examining the reported perceptions of the participants in this study, one can begin to see that many of the issues addressed by previous scholars may be best addressed through the field of public policy and administration through the lens of the polarities of democracy theory. Some of these critical elements to be addressed include the need to simultaneously prepare students to be self-advocates while providing adequate representation while they are still in high school, finding the best ways to balance limited resources to serve both the general population of schools and those within the schools who face greater struggles to access their education, and providing equal opportunities for all while still addressing and embracing the diversity found within a community and the children in that community's schools.

As previously stated, when using the polarities of democracy theory, all five polarity pairs must be considered and addressed. However, this need to address all polarities does not mean that one cannot focus specifically on certain polarities within a given topic. Much of the research in the literature and the data collected through this

study addressed the polarity pair of participation and representation. See Figure 2 below for a polarity map of participation and representation as derived from the findings of my study.

Figure 2

A Polarity Map Representing the Polarity Pair Participation and Representation Derived From the Findings of This Study



Note: image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships and the Polarities of Democracy Institute. Content derived from the findings of this study.

Research has shown that when a goal is personally valued and developed by an individual, they are more likely to be committed to the goal. This commitment has been seen to be relevant to individuals with disabilities transitioning from high school to

college (Alverson et al., 2019; Balestreer et al., 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2020). However, individuals with disabilities may lack the needed knowledge and skills to advocate for themselves as these are not taught in high school curriculum (Francis et al., 2020; Scruggs et al., 2021). Participants in this study generally seemed to agree with those conclusions from the literature. P06 shared that it was not until she got to college that she started to understand what she needed to do for a successful transition. She stated, “They have been great with working with me and like transitioning and being just really communicative and helping me like with getting through this process of learning what I need to do now as compared to high school.” Similarly, P01 shared, “There wasn’t really a discussion about the transition to college and how my accommodations would like translate over here.” Lacking these skills and knowledge, it becomes vital that students and their families can effectively leverage the representation part of the polarity pair.

Special education planning potentially begins early in a child’s educational career and often involves children who are not developmentally able to understand their needs and how services can help them. As such, the special education system is built around the idea that a team of professionals and family connected to the child will serve as representatives to ensure that the child is receiving what they need. Once the child reaches a stage in life where they are more able to understand what is happening in their education related to their disability, the goal of IDEA is to have them begin to participate in the planning and decision-making process (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Research has shown that parents are often the most critical advocate for a child’s needs throughout their time in special education (Alverson et al., 2019; Doyle et

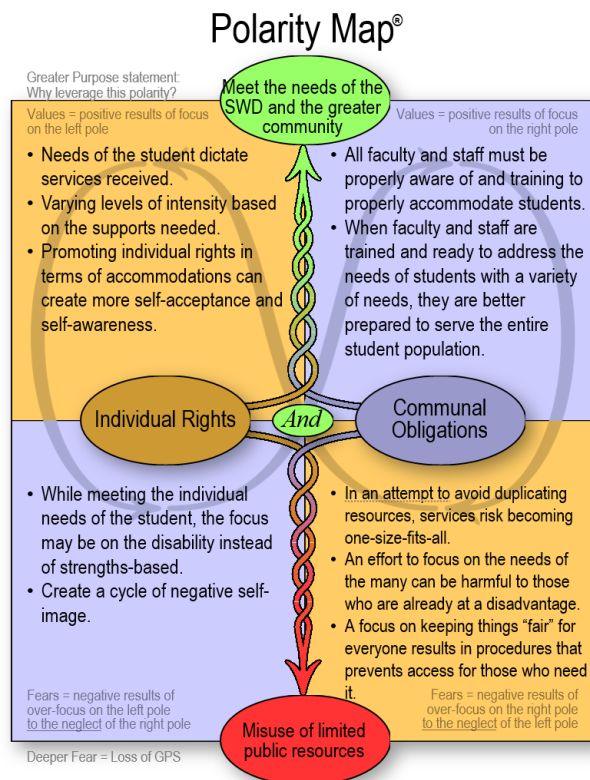
al., 2017; Flowers et al., 2019). However, research has also shown that parents are often not involved to the extent intended by law and beneficial to the child (Alverson et al., 2019; Elias & White, 2018). Similar to the findings of the current research, the experiences of the participants in this study frequently showed the importance of parental advocates.

When discussing her transition meetings, P05 shared that “my parents made sure I had a voice because teachers would try to uh speak over me as if I didn’t know about my own disability.” P02 similarly shared that, “I know my mom and dad did a lot of it while I was still in high school. Like setting it up and, you know, getting me the help I needed.” Research shows that when parental involvement is not valued in special education planning, it has a negative impact on the success of students in the transition process (Francis et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2020; Mello et al., 2021). Further, not all parents have the specialized knowledge or resources to be effective advocates for their children and the importance of these resources or expertise further widens the gap between opportunities for those from different socioeconomic backgrounds in a situation where the presence of a disability already creates additional barriers compared to those without disabilities. When considering all of these aspects, looking at the problem through the lens of polarities of democracy provides a way of addressing the problem by effectively leveraging the positive aspects of both the participation and representation pole at different times in the life of a child with a disability while striving to minimize the negative impacts of each pole in the polarity pair. The same pattern can be seen when looking at the polarity pair of human rights and communal obligation.

In the situation where the polarity pair of individual rights and communal obligations are most efficiently leveraged, schools would be able to meet the needs of both students with disabilities and the greater community as a whole. However, fear of misuse of limited public resources often keeps districts from maximizing the positive aspects of this polarity pair and keeps them in the negative quadrants of the infinity loop for longer periods of time. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 3

A Polarity Map Representing the Polarity Pair Individual Rights and Communal Obligation Derived From the Findings of This Study



Note: image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships and the Polarities of Democracy Institute. Content derived from the findings of this study.

Even though school officials are not likely to be aware of polarities or how to properly leverage them, they will still find themselves stuck within the negative cycle of the infinity loop, just without the ability to find a both/and solution to their problem and instead relying on the ineffective either/or solution that most individuals use to address problems.

When looking at the education of a student with a disability, the individual needs of that student dictate the services that will be provided. In high school, this can take the form of anything from basic accommodations, such as extended time on a test, to modifications in the curriculum. Both in high school and college, these services may be as simple as ensuring that a student is not penalized when they using the coping strategies they had developed over the years to address their disability. Allowing students the ability to use these coping skills and strategieis leads to a greater sense of competence in dealing with their own needs independently and further develops the sense of competence needed to take ownership of their education (Ryan & Deci, 2020). P05 shared that part of her accommodations involved letting professors know in an official manner that she may need to use her coping strategies in ways that would normally not be acceptable, although non-disruptive, measures in class. She stated,

That was something just to let tachers know that I needed to have a break. So that they they didn't wonder what was going on if I lay my head down or if I had to step out for a second. So that way, they weren't wondering what was going on. And also I've had that, I have that put in my accessibility letter for [current university] so teachers aren't wondering what is going on.

In some cases, the very knowledge that accommodations based on their personal level of need are available can help students feel more comfortable in making the transition to college. P03 shared:

Um, I became aware [of the services available] by touring the school. And, um, then my mom kind of asked them what kind of services they provide with students with like disability services. And then during the tour, they took us to the, um, building that we were able to meet people. And, um, there was like different plans that you could do. So, um, with the different plans, and with the different plans, um, there was like how often you could meet with a person [from the disability services office] based off of what you thought you needed or the parent thought the student needed. So, I would say it was a very good transition.

These are just some examples of schools and universities effectively leveraging the polarity of individual rights from the individual rights and communal obligations polarity pair. Individualization based on the needs of the student is supposed to be common practice, even though policy makers are likely unaware of the concept of leveraging polarity pairs. Further, just as social skills and social/emotional training could be useful to additional students with disabilities, the positive aspects of the communal obligations pole can benefit students with and without disabilities.

When all faculty and staff are trained to be aware of individual student needs and accommodations, the school as a whole begins to see the benefits of conveying respect and care for all students as individuals (Ryan et al., 2021). In discussing self-determination theory, Ryan and Decum (2020) stated that a focus on self-efficacy can

benefit all students. This is a way to leverage the positive aspects of the communal obligations polarity and meet the needs of the greater community and students with disabilities while still addressing the reality of significantly limited public funds that are available in public education. It is possible that the kind of awareness discussed by P05 as being needed by her teachers and professors could also benefit many other students who do not have disability diagnoses. However, without the knowledge of polarity pairs, decision makers fail to consider the potential downsides of a focus on either of these polarities at the expense of the other, which can lead to problems arising from a focus on just one part of the polarity pair.

When focusing on the individual needs of a student based on their disability, schools may accidentally ignore the potential negative affects of wider-scale solutions and a focus on the individual's disability. It is possible that schools may fail to implement a more wide-scale social skills training that could benefit students with a wide range of disabilities (Alverson et al., 2018; Ressa, 2022; Scruggs et al., 2021), and even some students without disabilities, in their individualized focus. These social skills include social and emotional learning that can be critical to help with the additional anxiety caused by the greater intensity of demands and requirements that come as a part of transitioning to college (Francis et al., 2020; Monhan et al., 2020; Ressa, 2022). Lacking acknowledgement that there may be a greater need for certain accommodations and skills training can create a cycle of negative self-image for students that comes with feeling singled-out from their peers. P02 shared her experience with this in comparing her high school experience to the experience in college so far when she stated, "In high school, it

felt like I was the only one being held back from leaving class because I had to finish my exam. Um, but at college, like, its very private...And, it like, I don't know, it doesn't boost my confidence, but it makes me feel OK with my disability.” This statement from the participant provides one example of the negative impacts that can occur from singling out an individual with disabilities in an attempt to ensure that they have individualized services.

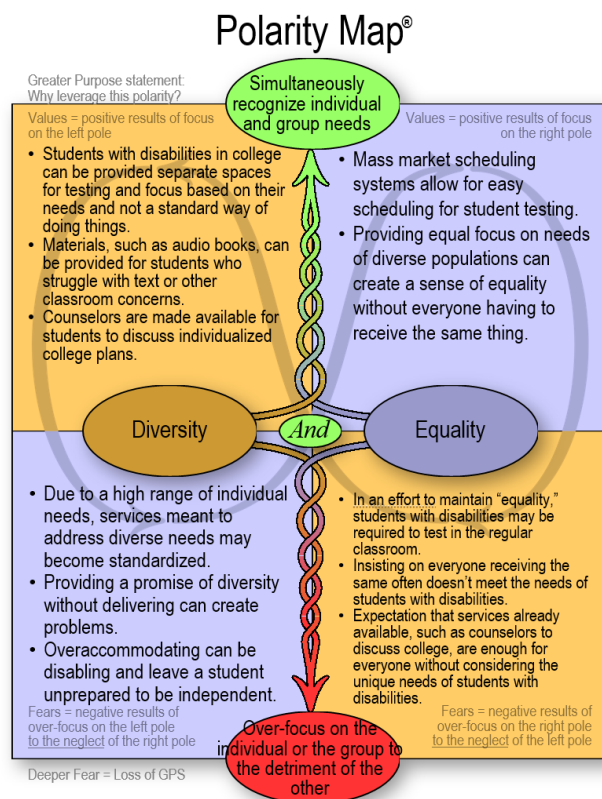
Other problems that can occur may be seen in the lower quadrant, or the negative aspects, of the communal obligations polarity pole. In an effort to ensure that public funds are being spent in a manner that best benefits all students of the district, core curriculum and state requirements may override the needs for skills training in areas like social/emotional learning or self-advocacy that is needed by individuals with disabilities (Alverson et al., 2019; Morningstar et al., 2017; Ressa, 2022; Scruggs et al., 2021). Even when these social/emotional elements are addressed, they may be done in a perfunctory manner in an effort by the schools to spread out the use of highly limited public funds, resulting in a failure to provide the services that a student with a disability would actually need to have a successful transition from receiving these services under IDEA in high school to receiving them under ADA in college. While discussing the counselor services put in her IEP by the school to address her anxiety, P01 shared that the school had put this in, but that she saw “a therapist that is like outside of school. It wasn't related to that [school-based concerns]. I never really went to the counselors or anything at my school unless it was to talk about academics.” Trying to utilize high school counselors to address student anxiety within the school setting because they are a resource that is already there

instead of addressing the more detailed aspects of why the student's anxiety exists in the school setting and how that will impact them as they transition to postsecondary education is just one example of how trying to make accommodations a one-size-fits-all approach can be wasteful and fail to help prepare students with disabilities in ways that they actually need. This one-size-fits-all approach not only fails to properly leverage the polarity pair of individuals rights and communal obligations, it also fails to properly leverage diversity and equality in a similar manner.

When looking at the diversity and equality polarity pair in terms of this research study, it becomes apparent that effectively leveraging the polarity pair allows simultaneous recognition of individual and group needs, but that ineffectively leveraging the polarity pair will cause an over-focus on the individual or the group to the detriment of the other. See figure 4 below. Within common accommodations provided through both IDEA and ADA, providing separate testing spaces and alternative format materials should be standard accommodations that meet the needs of a variety of individuals with disabilities. P07 shared that in college, "when I'm trying to, like, comprehend and listen for like a whole book, I just, my brain fuzzes and doesn't work.. So I really like the accommodation. Like, when I heard that they turned them into audio books, I was like, this is amazing." Similarly, effectively leveraging diversity to provide separate testing spaces was an experience addressed by P02. She stated, "being by myself in this cubicle in college has helped way more than, than when I was in high school and I had to take it with the rest of the class. Then they would leave and I would get like, I would be behind and I would miss my next class in high school."

Figure 4

A polarity map representing the polarity pair diversity and equality based on the findings of this study



Note: image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships and the Polarities of Democracy Institute. Content derived from the findings of this study.

These examples show that there may be times where wide access to resources that address the diverse needs of students can be beneficial in a manner that simultaneously allows for equality among students of similar levels of need.

Gaining the positive aspects of the equality pole does not mean that every person must receive the same things regardless of need. On the contrary, it is when one realizes that equality can be provided in the form of equal access to a basic service, such as education, that one can create equality and allow all students to benefit from diversity.

This ability to create a both/and solution can be seen in a similar manner as was addressed in the individual rights and communal obligations polarity pair when skills training was examined. Research shows that every student can benefit from some extent when transitioning to college from training and education in executive functioning, planning, and organizational skills (Alverson et al., 2019; Moahan et al., 2020; Smith, 2022). Public policy that mandates these services and education for any student deemed to need it, whether identified with a disability or not, would be an effective leveraging of this polarity pair. Further, by requiring slightly differentiated or additional required training, the services meant to be provided equally to all students could be used to meet the diverse needs of specific populations.

School counselors serve a wide variety of functions within a school. One of these functions is typically to help prepare and guide students who are transitioning to college. This service includes students with and without disabilities. P02 noted that “guidance counselors and other counselors that were there [at the high school]. We had a school, I don’t even know what you would call them, like, they weren’t a guidance counselor, but they were someone who would help you apply for college and stuff like that.” However, P02 also indicated later in her interview that there was no staff in high school that assisted her in knowing how to apply for accommodations when going to college. Clearly, if training for guidance counselors had mandated information on preparing students with disabilities for college, or if there were a specific type of guidance counselor or staff member mandated to be at each school that focused on the transitional needs of students with disabilities transitioning to college, the polarity pair of diversity and

equality would be better leveraged to provide equal access to postsecondary education for all students. However, lacking this requirement in public policy is one issue that results in experiencing the negative aspects of this polarity.

When schools and policy makers provide too great a focus on equality, they often create situations where students with disabilities are unable to obtain that equal access to education. One example was already discussed earlier in this chapter regarding the problems of having all students take their tests in the same location when students with disabilities need extended time on these tests. Further, expecting that school counselors know about the different needs of students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college without having public policy that mandates they are trained regarding the differences between how these services are provided under IDEA and how they are provided under ADA leaves the likelihood that individuals with disabilities will not have equal access to these needed services. An over-focus on equality is not the only possible problem that can arise in the diversity and equality polarity pair, however. An over-focus on diversity can also be problematic.

While transition services are addressed in IDEA, research shows that those services being mandated may not be enough to ensure adequate provision of services that allow students with disabilities to make a successful transition from high school to postsecondary education. One issue is that transition services written into IEPs or transition plans are not always followed (Francis et al., 2019; Francis et al., 2020; Ressa, 2020). Further overfocus on the diversity pole may result in inefficient services for individuals with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities have a diverse range of needs, however, an overfocus on the diversity pole can result in efficient delivery of services and students with disabilities being unprepared to successfully transition from high school to college. The issue of accommodations meant to meet individual needs becoming over-standardized until they are no longer diverse in nature was previously discussed in this chapter and is also relevant to addressing the potential negative impacts of overfocusing on the diversity polarity within the diversity and equality polarity pair. Another possible issue is that providing too many accommodations without consideration for the fact that many of these accommodations will not be provided in college can overaccommodate a student and leave them unprepared to be independent self-advocates in college. P07 addressed this concern in her interview when she stated, “I feel like the accommodations I received in high school limited my ability to be independent a lot of the time.” One possible solution that has been suggested in the research to this problem would be the step-down of services (Dillon, 2007; Doyle et al., 2017; Keenan et al., 2019; Scruggs et al., 2021; Wadlington et al., 2017). Yet, despite the vast amount of research on the benefits of utilizing step-down services, whereby supports are gradually reduced as a student is prepared to become more independent, public policy has not adequately addressed this need. Perhaps if policy makers and educational professionals had an understanding of polarity thinking and management, it would be possible to address these issues in a both/and manner that allows proper leveraging of all of these areas.

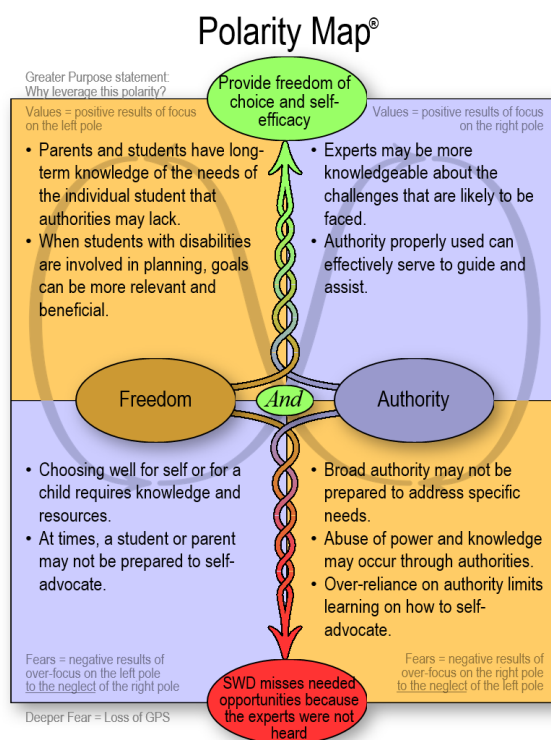
While the polarity pairs justice and due process and freedom and authority were not explicitly explored in this study, it was noted previously that to effectively achieve

the promises of democracy and utilize the polarities of democracy theory, all five polarity pairs must be taken into account. In the interest of ensuring that all areas are covered in this study, I will address these last two polarity pairs.

Many of the potential benefits and problems found in the freedom and authority pair were already addressed to some extent in other polarity pairs. See figure 5 below.

Figure 5

A polarity map representing the polarity pair freedom and authority based on the results of this study



Note: image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships and the Polarities of Democracy Institute. Content derived from the results of this study

Essentially, this polarity pair is important in that it addresses the expertise that different authority figures can bring to the planning process when they use their authority for the

benefit of the student (Flowers et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2019; Pillay et al., 2021).

Participants acknowledged these benefits when they discussed the wealth of help provided by their families and other outside agencies. As previously discussed, students also experienced the negative impacts of overfocus on one polarity at the expense of the other in the polarity pair, such as when P07 shared her experiences with special education staff that repeatedly threatened to take away her services and accommodations. Proper leveraging of the freedom and authority polarity pair would have helped in this situation. Similarly, a greater leveraging of the positive aspects of the justice and due process polarity pair could also have assisted with these issues.

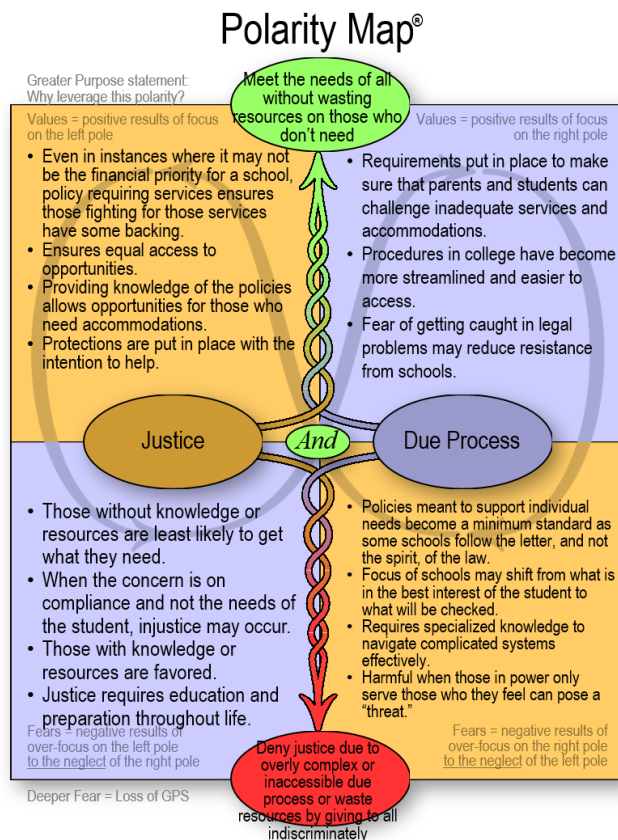
Justice and due process play a large role in the transition from receiving high school services under IDEA to receiving postsecondary accommodations through ADA. See figure 5 below. Perhaps one of the greatest areas of justice and due process that need to be addressed in public policy is that while the due process procedures mandated by IDEA are meant to allow students with disabilities and their families a way to be heard and receive justice when the school is not acting in the best interest of the student, the expense and expertise required to effectively utilize the systems creates barriers for many of the families it is meant to serve (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Francis et al., 2020; Gumas, 2017; Prince et al., 2020; Zirkel, 2020). In terms of the focus of this study, it becomes apparent that along with social skills and advocacy training being needed for individuals with disabilities to successfully transition from high school to college, knowledge of the policies that are supposed to protect those rights are also greatly needed. P07 shared:

I'm not going to lie to you. In high school, I was very unaware of how I was protected. Um, it was ever, I don't think it was an intentional way it was presented to me, but I feel like this is just what I picked up, is that what I had was a privilege. I was privileged to receive these accommodations because so many other kids didn't get these accommodations and um that I was just like, I don't know, especially in the senior year when the whole, like, they're [accommodations and special education services] gonna be taken away from me thing happened. Um, it really freaked me out that they could just take it away. Like, I was terrified and I did not understand the laws that protected me as a disabled person that they can't just do those kind of things. Uh, I have a much better understanding in college, especially after the whole experience because I was just like, study. God, this is never going to happen to me again, kind of thing.

All of the other participants shared, in some manner, that they were unaware of policies that provided their rights as individuals with disabilities in high school or how those policies would be different once they reached the post-secondary education setting.

Figure 6

A polarity map representing the polarity pair justice and due process based on the findings of this study



Note: image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships and the Polarities of Democracy Institute. Content derived from the findings of this study.

It can be seen in the interpretation of the findings of this study, through the theoretical lens of the polarities of democracy theory and with a public policy and administration approach, that there is much that can be done to improve the public policy that currently exists for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to college. The recommendations and implications of these findings will be discussed later in this chapter. However, I will first address the limitations of the study so that they may be taken into consideration when discussing these important areas.

Limitations of the Study

As previously anticipated and discussed in chapter 3, this study had limitations that needed to be addressed to ensure that the research is presented in a manner that ensures its trustworthiness. Critical elements of these limitations relate to credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. All of these will be addressed independently below.

Credibility

Credibility seeks to ensure that the findings of the study are relatable to the reality being studied. Throughout my study, I utilized triangulation of the data, establishment of interview protocols based on the current research, and detailed informed consent prior to participation to enhance the credibility of my study. Data was triangulated through the simultaneous use of interview data, document analysis of the participants' last IEP or 504 plan, and member checks. While only one participant responded to the provided transcript of the interview for the member checking, all participants were provided copies of their interview transcript and offered the opportunity to comment as they desired. These steps allow me to state that while the nature of qualitative research can be a limitation to a study, the precautions taken in this study ensure that those limitations were addressed and credibility was maintained.

Transferability

When conducting qualitative research, researchers are interested in the individual views, perceptions, and stories of participants. This limits transferability and creates an inherent limitation within the study. In addition, the traditional small sample sizes

involved in qualitative research can also impact issues of transferability. Small sample size was a difficulty I experienced with my research study. By the end of the study, I was only able to obtain seven participants, but that provided enough to reach data saturation for my topic. In addition, by providing a thick, detailed description of my research procedures, the participants, the setting, and maintaining a research journal as I proceeded to create a data trail, this issue of trustworthiness was minimized. While my data may not be directly transferable in the same manner that some quantitative research is, the information I provide does make it possible for another researcher to attempt to replicate my study.

Dependability

As with transferability, dependability in qualitative research is inherently difficult. However, similar steps as were taken with transferability in terms of providing a thick, rich description assists with ensuring that the data is dependable to other researchers. Further, as suggested by Shenton (2004), documenting the steps of the research process and completing frequent reflections on the process as the research is conducted can aid with providing research that is high in dependability. Throughout my study, I conducted these steps, maintained a research journal, and turned this journal into research memos to ensure that my data was dependable for any other researcher or practitioner that may want to utilize the results of the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research is a concern because the impact of the researcher as the primary data collection tool causes concern for objectivity (Patton,

2015). However, as suggested by Shenton (2004), the use of an audit trail can reduce this concern. The audit trail I completed as I progressed through my research allows my readers to understand each decision that was made throughout the research. The primary areas of concern were my initial interview protocol and questions and the multiple times I needed to expand my criteria for participation and partner organizations. Each of these areas was addressed in previous chapters of this dissertation to an extent where my decision-making process should be clear to any potential readers of this research and confirmability is achieved.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures can cover numerous areas within research and need to be a guiding factor from the beginning of research planning to the end of the presentation of the research results. Working with not only the Walden University IRB, but also the IRBs of both of the universities with whom I worked as partner sites, all areas of ethical concerns were addressed before any research was conducted with human participants. Areas addressed included possible positionality concerns in regards to power imbalance between my proposed participants and I, ensuring informed consent was adequately provided, and my use of incentives during the research process. Each of these were thoroughly reviewed and discussed with the various IRBs. The final decisions that ensured ethical procedures were followed throughout the research process were described throughout chapter 3 and were adequately addressed to ensure that all procedures used in this study were ethically based.

Recommendations

Given the restricted range and resources associated with this research study, further research into the topic, evaluated through the theoretical lens of the polarities of democracy and the focus of the field of public policy and administration, would greatly benefit the advancement of knowledge of this subject. These recommendations largely focus on the expansion and increase of both the sample and populations utilized in the study.

One of the noted limitations of this study was the small sample size. Conducting similar research with a larger sample of students with disabilities who have transitioned from receiving their services under IDEA in high school to receiving accommodations under ADA in college would be beneficial to get a wider perspective from a greater number of participants. In addition, given that public policy around education is created at both the state and federal levels, it would be beneficial to conduct this study in different parts of the country, looking at greater detail at the state policies that are in place to ensure compliance with federal IDEA and ADA policies. However, the number and geographic range of participants would not be the only beneficial way to expand upon the sample and population of this study.

The transition process involves many different individuals that have input into the process for each student. Parents or guardians, teachers, school administrators, guidance counselors, district administrators, outside service providers, postsecondary institution offices of disability services, and college faculty are just a few examples of individuals who have a stake in this research and may have significant contributions to the

knowledge. By including the perspectives of these groups of individuals in future research studies, there is the potential for a much wider view of the issue from multiple perspectives of different stakeholders. This greater range of perspectives may not only enrich the knowledge gained from this research, but may also make it more likely that policy makers see the issue as a widespread problem and choose to address these matters through public policy.

Implications

Research is conducted constantly for the advancement of knowledge. However, knowledge is most useful and powerful when it can be used to impact positive social change. This research study is intended to share the experiences of college students with disabilities that have transitioned from receiving services under IDEA in high school to ADA in postsecondary education so that the barriers experienced by these individuals can be acknowledged and potentially addressed through changes in current public policy or the creation of new public policy. Along with the goal of this research leading to further research that can ultimately influence policy makers, there are implications for practice within the field of special education that can be undertaken with or without official public policy.

Stakeholders such as high school administrators, special education professionals, general education teachers, outside agency providers, college faculty, and college administrators can find the potential for positive social change that they can enact on their own levels within this research. Creation of curriculum that supports social/emotional learning, self-advocacy skills, and knowledge of individual rights and responsibilities

under current public policy can be enacted by these stakeholders within their own schools, districts, or organizations. This research has supported previous research that shows the strong potential benefits of enhanced partnerships between public schools, postsecondary institutions, and outside service agencies to create transitional plans and services that set up students with disabilities for successful transitions to college and prepare them to be productive members of society. Looking at this research in relation to previous research on the needs of students with disabilities can provide guidance to all potential stakeholders that would benefit from improved outcomes and opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

In terms of addressing these issues through the changing of current or creation of new public policy, several areas could be addressed. Enhanced training for high school guidance counselors being mandated as part of their counselor preparation program could ensure that every school has personnel who can adequately assist students with disabilities in the transition process as it relates to going from receiving their services under IDEA or Section 504 in high school to receiving accommodations under ADA and Section 504 in college. Further, additional public policy or strengthening of IDEA and Section 504 to require advocacy skills training and social skills instructions for individuals with disabilities transitioning to college could help ensure that these services are received by all students with disabilities uniformly across the country. Finally, public policy mandating that specific information be provided to students served under IDEA or Section 504 in high school regarding the process of applying for accommodations along with the provision of contact information for disability services at the post-secondary

education institution desired by the students could be highly beneficial in cases where strong partnerships do not exist between local high schools and universities. This information would ensure that all students with a disability leaving high school would have the information they need to efficiently set up their accommodations in college.

Conclusion

Individuals with disabilities face numerous barriers to participation in society at the same level of access as those without disabilities. Through decades of advocacy and advancement of public policy, these individuals have found greater access to areas of life that were previously out of their reach. However, just because the journey towards equity for individuals with disabilities has come far, this does not mean that it has reached the point where this is no longer a significant social problem. Individuals with disabilities continue to participate in and complete postsecondary education at rates significantly lower than their peers without disabilities. In a society that is heading further and further towards needing a college education to have access to opportunities in employment throughout life, this challenge creates a significant injustice. The advancements of the past in disability rights have been achieved through the advocacy of individuals with disabilities and their allies and then legitimized through public policy. As students with disabilities continue to struggle to access postsecondary education, public policy must again be used to solidify greater access to this vital level of education for all individuals. Advancement may occur only if these social problems are addressed at a level that mandates public schools and postsecondary institutions to provide the needed services, training, education, and support for individuals with disabilities to have equal access to

education. It is for this reason that this problem must be addressed and enforced through stronger and new public policy.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol and Questions

Good morning and thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. With your permission, I would like to audio record our interview so I can be sure to capture all of your thoughts and ideas once we are finished. My study examines what the experiences of college students who have transitioned from receiving disability (or special education) services in high school to receiving accommodations for their disabilities in college can tell us about any gaps that may exist in the current public policies that mandate these services. The completion of this study will allow me to finish my Ph.D. in Public Policy and Administration.

Before we begin, I want to review a few procedural items. First, please know that your information will be kept confidential to the greatest extent possible and permissible by the law. Your name and identifying information will be removed from all documentation and replaced with a participant ID number. Records linking your identity to your participant ID number will be kept on a flash drive in a secure location accessible only by myself.

I do not anticipate any negative effects of participating in this study, however, if you experience any psychological distress after discussing sensitive topics, please let me know and I will work with your appropriate university personnel to provide you a referral to the appropriate professional.

If at any time you choose to withdraw from the survey or wish to stop participating, you may do so without any risk of consequences. Your decision to participate or not

participate will not affect the accommodations or services you receive from your university in any way.

Do you have any questions at this time? Let's start with the interview.

1. What was your identified disability in high school?
2. Can you tell me about the special education services you received in high school?
3. What is your earliest memory of discussing getting ready for college as part of your special education services in high school?
4. Can you tell me more about your experiences with receiving or not receiving transitional services to prepare you for college when you were in high school?
5. According to your IEP, you received [specific transitional service listed in the IEP].
Can you tell me how well you thought this service prepared you to transition to college?
(This question will be repeated for each transition service)
6. Who was part of your planning team at your last special education meeting in high school?
7. Do you feel you had a voice in the transition planning process?
8. How effective do you feel your services were in high school in preparing you for college?
9. Tell me about your knowledge of the differences between the laws that mandated your services in high school compared to the laws that mandated your services in college.
10. Can you tell me about your experiences setting up your accommodations once you reached college?

11. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in transitioning from high school to college as a student with a disability?

Thank you for your time and input in this study. With your permission, I will be sending you a copy of the transcript from our interview today so that you can ensure that all of your thoughts and ideas have been captured correctly. If you have any concerns or comments regarding the contents of the transcript, I will provide you with my contact information. You can also contact me if you wish to withdraw from the study or have any further questions. I may need to ask some follow-up questions based on the analysis of your interview and my interviews with others. Do I have your permission to contact you if I need to do so? Thank you again for your help today.