

FACTORS THAT IMPACT THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF JOB TRAINING
PROGRAMS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

A Record of Study

by

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ABSTRACT

Access to employment is important for students with disabilities(SWD). Employment improves finances, contributes to independence, and empowers people. Despite the value of employment, SWD are less likely to be employed due in part to their lack of job readiness.

This study discusses the implementation of job training programs for SWD. The impact of job training programs, factors that contribute to their successful implementation, and best design practices were explored using a case study involving two sites. The data revealed that campus-based job training programs enable SWD to progress towards their IEP goals, promote relationships between SWD and peers without disabilities, and allow SWD to engage in meaningful activities. Gaining buy-in from stakeholders is a critical step prior to the implementation of a job training program. The data revealed that program design should incorporate adequate staffing and an intentional focus on coaching students towards their unique transition goals.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to Evelyn Pearl and all of the other beautiful children who need assistance turning their dreams into reality.

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I would like to thank my wife Dana and our children Abel, Ishai, Evelyn, Daniel, Uriah, Orion, and Yllaine who accepted my commitment to this work without complaint.

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Contributors

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All other work conducted for the dissertation was completed by the student independently.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The Context

The ultimate goal of public education is to assist students as they transition from a state of dependence to independence. Parents and educators alike hope that students will gain the ability to create meaningful lives in which they find self-fulfillment and contribute to society. Public schools are required to educate and plan for all students with disabilities (SWD) as they transition to independence. Unfortunately, school districts and communities have limited resources and can provide actual job experience to only a small fraction of the students with disabilities.

In 2017, Innovation ISD established a beverage service truck called the Coffee Hut. The Coffee Hut is operated by SWD on their campus in order to increase access to job training for students enrolled in special education (SPED). In addition to the Coffee Hut, Ellen's plant nursery in Norm, Texas, is another business that was established to provide job skills to SWD. Ellen's Nursery is also in its second year of operation and provides transition job training primarily to high school students in the local school district. Businesses dedicated to training SWD such as the Coffee Hut and Ellen's Nursery are a needed resource in the State of Texas. The purpose of this study is to gather data from the stakeholders of both programs in order to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence the successful implementation of job training programs for people with disabilities.

National context

Access to employment is important for SWD. Employment can improve quality of life in several ways. Employment improves finances and can contribute to independence. According

to research by Gold, Macias, & Rodican (2016), employed participants report higher satisfaction than non-employed peers in all measured facets of life satisfaction including living situations, finances, and social relations. In addition to the personal benefits, employing people with disabilities provides an opportunity to contribute to their community while providing labor in job positions with high turnover rates. Employment is empowering. These opportunities afford people with disabilities to experience self-actualization and interact with their communities in a meaningful way (Mueser, Drake, and Bond, 2016).

Despite the benefits of having a job, people with disabilities have a challenging time gaining and keeping employment. Based on significantly lower rates of employment compared with non-disabled peers, people with disabilities need assistance finding and maintaining employment. According to a large Nationwide survey (Newman et al., 2011), 66% of youth who are non-disabled are employed eight years after high school graduation. The employment rates vary for youth depending on the type of their disability but are consistently lower. For instance, youth with blindness or deafness are employed at a rate of only 30% while youth with traumatic brain injury have an employment rate of 52%. According to the same survey, youth with an emotional disability have an employment rate of 50% compared with 37% of youth with autism. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2017), the percentage of people with disabilities who were available and actively looking for a job (unemployed) was 9.2% compared to 4.2% of individuals without disabilities. Furthermore, 32% of employed Americans with disabilities are employed part-time versus 17% of citizens who are non-disabled (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

In response to the need to raise employment levels of Americans with disabilities, the U.S. Department of Education requires school SPED programs to prepare SWD for the transition

to independent living that is anticipated upon graduation. Section 300.43 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that transition services should be “designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities” (2004). Specifically, every school is required to provide a committee of faculty members to develop a transition plan tailored to the abilities and interests of each student. In Texas, this supporting team of education professionals is referred to as the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee. Although the requirements of IDEA demand a ‘results-oriented process’, many of the transition plans observed during ARD meetings are minimal or even tokenish. The deficiency in transition services is due in part to a lack of personnel and time available to provide thorough training and support.

Typically, students who have less profound disabilities such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or a learning disability receive scant transition assistance. Based on my observation as a SPED teacher who participated in ARD meetings for five different high schools, transition assistance for many students in Central Texas consists of discussing individual goals and providing students with contact information to employment resources at required annual ARD meetings beginning at age 14 and attending until graduation from high school. Transition services for a significant number of students in SPED therefore consist of an interest survey in the 8th grade and a follow-up discussion once a year until graduation. Students with more significant disabilities such as Down’s syndrome or an intellectual disability (ID) who do not present with the likelihood of functioning independently may receive more intense transition support if they choose to remain as a student after they

complete their academic requirements. Transition support for such students sometimes includes learning basic job skills in class or even receiving job training at a local business.

Situational context

Most of the trainees at Ellen’s Nursery are current students or recent graduates from Norm ISD. Norm ISD is similar in demographics to many other medium and large districts in the Central Texas region. Figures 1 and 2 have data adapted from Norm ISD’s website which indicate that there are approximately 12,000 students of whom 12% are enrolled in the Special Education program which is higher than the State average of 8.6% (DeMatthews & Knight, 2019). In addition, 45% of students in the district are considered economically disadvantaged and 7% have limited use of English.

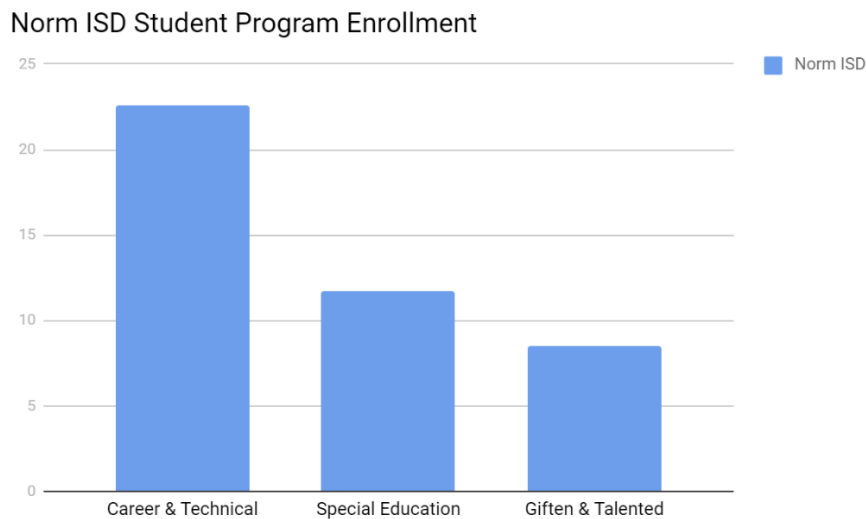


Figure 1 Enrollment in Special Programs

Risk Factors

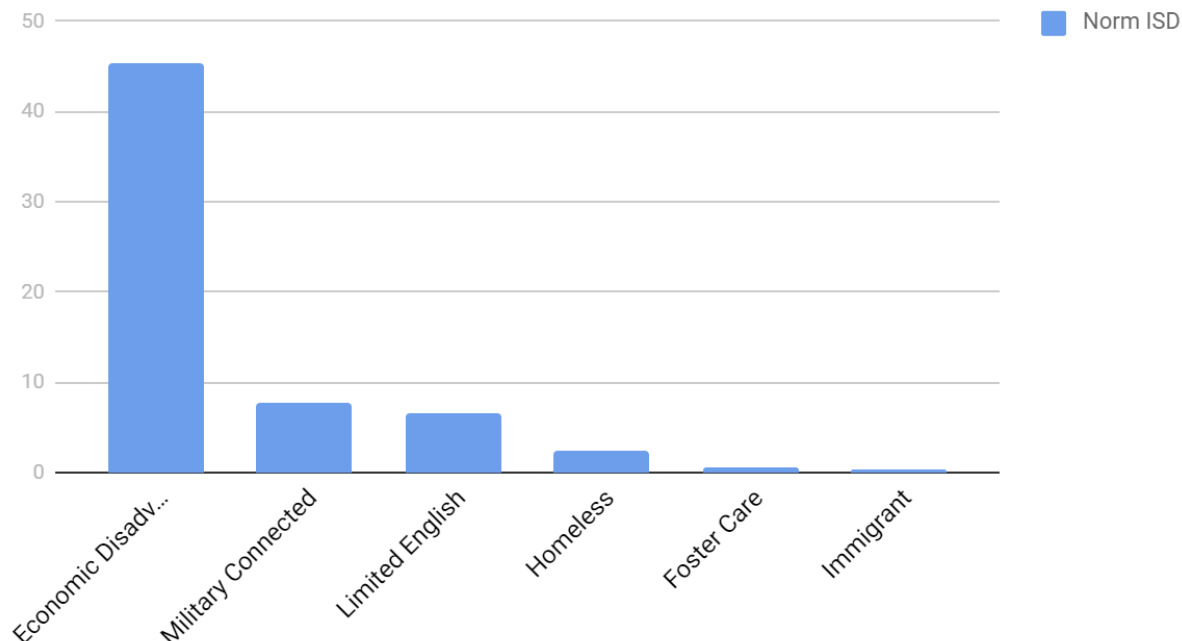


Figure 2 Norm ISD Risk Factors

If SWD complete their academic requirements and choose to remain enrolled in school in order to continue receiving services, the school-day is devoted to improving their independence. Students in the 18+ program, as it is sometimes referred, have completed their class work and are better able to focus on gaining independent-living and job skills. Services for students in the 18+ program include instruction on workplace expectations combined with placement at a job in the community. Work at job sites depends on the willingness of community businesses to host and supervise trainees with significant disabilities. During internship programs, students do not choose their job location or to receive payment for their work. Students and their parents must rely on state agencies such as the Workforce Commission

or local resources such as Ellen’s Nursery to assist with employment goals when they age out of public school at 22.

Students with profound mental or physical disabilities such as those who do not have the ability to perform basic self-care, communicate, or remain in public without immediate skilled care receive a separate level of transition services. Services for students who are identified as profoundly disabled focus on the teaching functional skills including washing hands or performing basic communication. Students who are identified as profoundly disabled are not usually qualified to participate in job training activities.

The Problem

The shortage of job training programs for people with disabilities is related to the difficulty of implementation and operation. The school districts and educators within the community are limited in their ability to create job training programs for several reasons. Specifically, educators lack the experience and knowledge on how to implement job training programs. These skills include, (1) gaining support from the school and community, (2) gathering operational start-up funds, and (3) planning a business that can serve as a job site. Innovation ISD and the founders of Ellen’s Nursery have successfully established job training programs. Their programs can serve as models from which other educators can learn.

Relevant history of the problem

A school district’s ability to provide intensive transition support which includes participation at a job training site located in the community is severely limited by personnel shortages and logistical obstacles. For instance, Norm ISD serves approximately 4,000 high school students of whom approximately 12% are enrolled in SPED. The district is able to provide basic services for this population, but there are only two professional faculty with a job

role that focuses on transition. Those faculty members are often occupied providing services mandated by the state and district including providing input at ARD meetings and coordinating visits between students and the Workforce Commission. Additionally, providing in-depth guidance and training outside of the school day is extremely difficult because SWD require the participation and transportation assistance of parents.

Although early work experiences (EW) are the most effective way to improve employment outcomes for SWD (Haber et al., 2016) the lack of availability of job training programs limits the number of students that can participate. Coordinating with local businesses, transporting students, and supervising them at work sites around the community is the biggest obstacle to providing EW. In addition, host businesses often limit the number of students that they accept as trainees. Furthermore, host businesses lack faculty trained to work with SPED students and frequently terminate students that are not deemed compatible, and the location forces school faculty to travel in order to conduct routine observations. Conducting job training off campus also requires school faculty to transport students to job sites and perform a second-round trip when it is time to pick them up. If districts lack vans with wheelchair lifts faculty members have to use lift equipped buses to transport students with impaired mobility to community work sites.

There are additional problems with using local business as job training sites instead of using a program designed for job training. When students work at job sites around the community they often perform tasks without supervision. This lack of oversight increases the potential for accidents and diminishes the educational quality of the experience. SWD are easily ignored or assigned trivial tasks when in a work environment that lacks faculty skilled and focused on creating meaningful work experiences for the students involved. Job training

programs are designed to include SWD and therefore offer a larger selection job training positions to match diverse abilities of the trainees. Campus-based job training programs have the added advantage of eliminating travel. Establishing a dedicated job training program is an effective solution to the deficiencies of relying on volunteer community businesses.

Significance of the problem

As a result of the lack of available transition faculty, limited host sites, and transportation difficulty, a small percentage of SWD receive work experiences as part of their transition experience. Although dedicated job training programs are a logical solution to the challenges of providing work experience, few school districts and communities have them. Insights from this study would better equip educators to create programs similar to Ellen’s Nursery and Innovation ISD’s ‘Coffee Hut’. This study can also contribute to the overarching discussion of transition services for special education students. A literature search conducted with assistance from the University’s librarian for the College of Education did not uncover any peer reviewed articles on the topic of campus-based job training opportunities for high school students. Although this study will not be published, it can increase awareness of an emerging solution in the field of transition services.

Research Questions

The research questions this study explored are:

1. Do job-training programs for people with disabilities have an impact on student outcomes?
2. What factors impact the successful implementation of job-training programs?
3. What are some best practices for the successful implementation of job-training programs?

Data collected include data from interviews with stakeholders consisting of parents, program directors, and faculty. Data from the internet includes: grantors online applications, social media, local online news, and program web pages are also included. Photographs of the Coffee Hut and Ellen's Nursery are also included.

Important terms

Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Meeting - A meeting required at least annually in which district faculty and educators meet with a student with a disability in order to establish an individualized education plan.

Campus-based Job Training - A program located within the school property that provides a work-based learning experience as part of a transition program.

Early Work Experiences (EW) – Volunteer or internship experiences used to gain skills and experiences in preparation for future paid employment.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) - The education plan designed to accommodate students with disabilities

Job Training Programs (JTP) – A program in which people with disabilities learn specific skills in order to improve their employment outcomes

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) - The legal requirement placed on school agencies to educate students with disabilities in the same environment as non-disabled peers to the maximum extent practical based on the student's ability and behavior.

Transition Services - Actions taken by school district faculty with the intent of preparing students with disabilities for independent living once they complete high school.

Students With Disabilities (SWD) - Students who have been diagnosed with a physical, mental, or emotional disability and are enrolled in special education services on the campus.

Work Based Learning - Supervised work by students with disabilities conducted for the purpose of teaching the student work related skills.

Journey to the problem

The problem of transition for a student with a disability became more immediate when my daughter was disabled following an accident in 2015. I realized that the topic of life for a disabled child after public school is a scary subject that many parents are not eager to address. Based on conversations in ARD meetings, a significant number of parents are unaware of the resources or options for their children after they graduate from high school. Parents lack a vision or plan for who will care for their child when they are unable to. Parents seem unaware that without intervention, the state will treat their dependent child as a legal adult regardless of their ability to make appropriate decisions for themselves. This study provided the opportunity to learn about job training for children with disabilities in order to share data with educators and to assist students and their parents. Pseudonyms were used to reference both job training sites and all participants mentioned in this study.

The Coffee Hut in Innovation ISD is a unique job training program because it is located on a school campus. Educators in that district were not content with reaching minimal standards. They took the initiative and created a program that meets student needs in a way few other districts have. Ellen's Nursery is unique because it is one of only two job training programs in a county with 350,000 people.

Personal Context

Educators have a goal of providing students with the education and skills that will assist them with the transition to independence. Special education teachers provide a more individualized education to students with disabilities.

Researcher's roles and personal histories

The ultimate purpose of education is to prepare students for life after school. All of the academic classes and experiences have a common goal of providing the skills for students to make the transition to independence and self-realization. I serve as a special education teacher in a position that requires regular attendance and input at weekly ARD meetings. Although addressing the unique transition goals for every student is a required element of the individualized education plan (IEP), I usually have the impression at the end of the transition meeting is that the ARD committee is just going through the motions to meet the mandatory requirement. Committee members frequently entertain unrealistic transition goals during ARD meetings. For example, participants often fail to comment when a student who is not on the high school basketball team expresses a goal of playing in the NBA. At another ARD meeting I observed the ARD committee supported a goal of military service expressed by a student who was oppositional defiant and had a felony record. Moreover, parents do not seem to know what they should do to prepare their child with a disability for life after high school. The overwhelming impression is that many educators, parents, and students spend years in school and attend mandatory ARD meetings without every making results-oriented progress towards employment.

Significant stakeholders

The ability of SWD to transition into independence after high school is a critical issue for the families involved. Parents often have to support and care for their children if they fail to learn the skills required to live independently. Students who lack job skills are more likely to be unemployed which contributes to a lower quality of life and financial instability. Job training programs are an effective resource for special education teachers and school districts. Campus

and community-based businesses such as the Coffee Hut and Ellen's Nursery enable SWD to provide a service to their non-disabled peers which may affect their perception of people with disabilities. Government agencies and members of the community are positively impacted by the ability of people with disabilities to function independently. All of these stakeholders benefit when SWD learn skills that increase their independence and improve their quality of life.

Closing Thoughts on Chapter 1

There is a huge deficiency in transition services. Work-based learning is the most effective intervention that schools can provide (Fraker et al., 2016), but there are not enough job training programs to meet the demand. The Coffee Hut and Ellen's Nursery are recently established job training programs that can serve as models. Significant potential to improve student outcomes exists if educators learn how to establish similar job training programs.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF SUPPORTING SCHOLARSHIP

Introduction

Section 300.43 of the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires transition services to be a ‘coordinated set of activities’ that are, ‘designed to be within a results-oriented process’. In contrast, transition services for the many SWD in Central Texas consists of a discussion of what the student wishes to become upon graduation with little meaningful support or preparation to achieve the student’s goals.

People with disabilities have made steady progress towards inclusion, a significant gap between the expectations of IDEA and current transition practices remains. This study explored the factors that led to the establishment of job training programs for people with disabilities. The purpose of this action research was to support the needs and rights of students with disabilities to integrate into the workforce and society as a whole. Empowerment and Systems Theories provided the conceptual framework through which literature was viewed and data was collected. The literature revealed that providing work experiences is the most effective intervention that educators can provide to students participating in transition programs.

Relevant Historical Background

The campus-based employment program (CBE) located at Innovation ISD exemplifies the progression of services for people with disabilities during the last 100 years. The educators who implemented the Coffee Hut are unique because they created job training opportunities on their campus. Until the 1930s, schools and institutions for the blind were the main forms of support provided for people with disabilities. People with disabilities lacked community support and were often kept home and out of sight. Except for the March of Dimes, parent-initiated

organizations were the primary advocate for students with disabilities (Fleischer, Zames, & Zames, 2012).

The disability rights movement emerged in the 1930s through the 1950s and generated a shift in public thought and law. As an example, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's need for a wheelchair was an open secret during the time of his presidency (Nielsen, 2013). President Roosevelt's leg paralysis from Polio was considered a hindrance to his election and hidden from the public. With the cooperation of news photographers, hidden leg braces, and the use of a wheelchair only in private, a small minority of Americans were initially aware that their president had a disability. The gradual revelation of his disability combined with other events such as the influx of disabled WWII veterans, and hundreds of thousands of youth affected by polio contributed to an awareness of the needs of people with disabilities (Switzer & Vaughn, 2003). This emerging public consciousness resulted in a steady stream of Presidential committees created to improve the employment of the 'physically handicapped'.

In the 1970s two social movements led to national laws that supported the transition process for students with disabilities. Before the civil rights movement, few Americans with disabilities considered asking for accommodations beyond the bare essentials. For instance, Frieda Zames a student with a disability (Fleischer et al., 2012) recalled feelings of anxiety and fear as she struggled to navigate steps on her way to her university class during the 1950s. She said that she considered herself fortunate to attend a university with a disability and would not have considered asking the institution to place handrails or ramps to facilitate access to buildings. The Civil Rights Era enlightened citizens to the idea that governments have a responsibility to create policy that improves conditions on a societal level. Cold War tensions in the 1960s and 1970s influenced national policy that supported vocational training (Switzer &

Vaughn, 2003). Spurred by a desire to provide job-ready graduates and to reduce dropout rates, the Federal Government provided funds to support vocational training in secondary schools. As a result, schools across the nation created classes and curricula to support job training (Repetto & Correa, 1996).

Although federal funding for many of the vocational programs ended during the early 1970s, the belief that vocational transition is an essential aspect of education endured and contributed to a steady increase in supportive legislation. For example, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is the result of a desire to legislate vocational equity for people with disabilities. This Act provided Federal organization and funding to support services and vocational training for Americans with disabilities. Section 504 is a facet of this law that is significant for schools because it, 'prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities by any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance' such as schools and universities.

The Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) of 1983 was the next significant development because it mandated requirements for secondary transition services (Repetto, 1996). The requirement to educate students with disabilities in the 'least restrictive environment' (LRE) was the most significant clause in this law. The LRE clause resulted in the inclusion of students with disabilities in the vocational programs of the general population.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 was the next national law created to improve vocational success for students in special education programs. ADA is a comprehensive civil rights law that added 'disability' as a Federally protected civil right which pressured employers to accommodate people with disabilities. ADA was an advancement for the education and training of students with disabilities, but it had at least two significant shortcomings. First, ADA's guidance that employers and postsecondary institutions should provide 'reasonable'

accommodations was too vague. In addition to a level of ambiguity, ADA law places some responsibility for requesting and advocating for accommodations on students (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 and its amendments of 1997 and 2004 provide the most current major legislation that affects student transition. Section 300.43 of IDEA mandates funding and clearly describes the requirement of schools to provide services needed by students for academic and vocational outcomes (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). This specific section is relevant to because work-based employment opportunities are the most 'results oriented' and effective intervention to 'facilitate' transition. Ellen's Nursery and the Coffee Hut are examples for schools that endeavor to comply with this and other laws governing student transition.

The Nation's evolving attitudes and perceptions are reflected by the progression of laws created to support people with disabilities. Research and best practices related to transition are still in the development process because national transition the application of IDEA amendments are only 20-30 years old. The implementation of job training programs are examples of the evolving response to student needs.

Alignment with Action Research Traditions

Work-based learning experiences are one of the strongest predictors of employment success for people with disabilities but the opportunities are difficult to access. Work-based learning programs require collaboration between employers, schools, government agencies, and families. The extensive collaboration and transportation requirements reduce the number of students that can participate in this intervention. This study is a case study of two job training sites with cross case analysis. My purpose was to explore the factors that led to the successful

implementation of both job training programs. The process used by developers to gain support from stakeholders, obtain funds, and design their programs are described in this action research study.

Action research is the method of inquiry in which a participant takes the role of the researcher in order to address a problem. Unlike other traditions in which the researcher is objective and distanced from the study, the action researcher is an active stakeholder within the research environment (Burns, 2007). This study followed the action science (AS) approach within the tradition of action research.

According to Argyris, Putnam, & Smith (1985), AS distinguishes itself from action research in two ways. First, AS may consider theory building and testing during the problem investigation. Second, the action science researcher has the conscious aim of ‘generating liberating alternatives’ and ‘challenging the status quo’ (Argyris et al., 1985), p. xi). As a result, the action researcher has a lower priority on empiricism and rigor than found in classic action research (Argyris & Schön, 1989). The nature of AS results in an approach that is more pre-determined and less emergent than action research.

The Theoretical Framework

The perspective of this study was framed in part by the Empowerment Theory. According to Zimmerman (2000), Empowerment Theory is a “theoretical model for understanding the process and consequences of efforts to exert control and influence over decisions that affect one’s life, organizational functioning, and the quality of community life” (p. 43).

Empowerment theorists believe that “genuine opportunities for individuals to participate may help them develop a sense of empowerment” (Zimmerman, Marc A., Israel, Schulz, &

Checkoway, 1992, p. 724). According to Zimmerman, providing an opportunity to learn skills that enable people to interact with others is the most effective means of increasing a sense of empowerment. Although there is not a consensus of which theoretical model of empowerment to adopt (Peterson, 2014), Peterson and Zimmerman suggest that a variety of factors can contribute to an escalating sense of empowerment. Empowerment variables include the facets of skill development, perceived competence, resource mobilization, and community involvement. Programs such as Ellen's Nursery and the Coffee Hut align with this approach because they provide students with empowering experiences discussed in Zimmerman's theoretical model.

In addition to recognizing the need for people with disabilities to gain practical skills, Empowerment Theory rests on the belief that people have a right to pursue autonomy. Proponents of this theory have the perspective that society should recognize and focus on the abilities of individuals as opposed to their disabilities. This is a very relevant perspective for the record of study (ROS) because student transition is a legal requirement to promote the development of student autonomy. Transition is a mandate to empower students. In addition to Empowerment Theory, Systems Theory has helped shape the ROS questions.

Systems Theory (ST) was pioneered in the late 1960s and early '70s by researchers including Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1968) and James Miller (1973). These authors described ST as an alternative to the industrial mechanistic approach to understanding organizations. Under the ST approach, researchers consider the relationships of an organization's components in an effort to understand how the organization functions as one system. Several tenets are encompassed in the ST approach. A primary tenet is that systems should be viewed as a whole entity that combine to make something greater than the sum of its parts. Another tenet in ST is

that departments within the organization are interdependent and that the organization is dependent on the community and environment in which it functions. ST approach also embraces the concept that methods for accomplishing goals should adapt based on changes in the system and environment. Although Systems Theory applies to education, Bela Banathy (1992) who was a pioneer on the topic wrote, “the professional educational community is probably the last among all other professions to get interested in the system idea” (p. xi). As a result, nearly 30 years after this observation literature on systems approaches within the context of education are minimal.

A systems theory approach is relevant to a study on an innovative solution to student transition because school districts and communities are bureaucratic institutions composed of layers of stakeholders with compartmentalized goals and responsibilities. For instance, students are responsible for their own behavior and graduation from school. Teachers interact with students but are accountable to parents, students, and administrators. Teachers are at risk of losing their jobs for poor performance or gross errors, but they are not rewarded for exemplary performance. Parents spend the least amount of time on the school campus, but have the ultimate authority over students and perhaps the most influence over district leadership. Campus administrators are the most visible of the stakeholders and have the highest level of responsibility. They are held responsible for every action on their campus and are often reluctant to take risks. District leaders are the least engaged with parents, students, and teachers. As district leaders, they have a district-wide perspective, access to resources, the most experience, but they lack incentive to take risk. District leaders including superintendents and department directors are governed by a school board who have the ultimate responsibility of hiring or firing every district employee annually.

All of the aforementioned groups are regulated by federal and state laws regarding education. Students with disabilities necessitate additional legal requirements and the intervention of state agencies. The relationships between the stakeholders, their obligations, and their resources can be understood as a system.

The complex relationship between the education stakeholders and legal obligations makes it difficult to make changes within the education system. If any of the stakeholders resist, a proposed change will likely never happen.

There is an overall shortage of job training programs, but campus-based employment programs such as the Coffee Hut are rare. Its creation is primarily the result of the exceptional dedication from a team of educators in spite of numerous barriers. The following diagram illustrates the obstacles that stakeholders had to overcome in order to establish their CBE program.

Most Significant Research

The central theme in the literature is that early work experiences (EW) are the most significant intervention for employment outcomes for people with disabilities (Fraker et al., 2016). Discussions about student and program variables are the other important themes discussed.

Haber et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of in-school predictors of post-secondary employment and determined that vocational training was the most impactful intervention. In contrast, interagency collaboration and transition programs without vocational training did not have a positive effect on employment outcomes. Their data from the United States are supported by the perspective of teachers in Saudi Arabia (Ghaleb, 2016) the teachers in Saudi Arabia reported that exposing students to work experiences is the most significant intervention for improving employment outcomes for students with disabilities. Researchers from England

(Hanson, Codina, & Neary, 2017) agreed with Alhandi (2016) that work experiences and supported employment are the most consistently effective transition intervention for students with disabilities.

Fraker et al. (2016), summarized data from six work sites across the United States that provided over 5,000 youth receiving Social Security Insurance (SSI) who participated in Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) projects. Participants received job training and employment counseling. Fraker et al. determined that students who participated at select training sites were 9-16% more likely than peers to have paid employment one year after completion. Their data align with Mamun, Carter, Fraker, & Timmins (2018), who observed a 17% improvement in employment outcomes for youth who participated in YTD projects. These data are significant because students who qualify for SSI often have more significant disabilities and less financial incentive than peers with disabilities who do not receive SSI.

Receiving SSI is one of the most significant factors that affects employment outcomes. Both Wehmen, Chan, Ditchman, & Kang (2014) and McDonnall and O'Mally (2012) confirmed a negative correlation to the reception of SSI and employment levels. The authors noted that even though individuals with disabilities who receive SSI are more likely to receive job training, they are still 20%-39% less employed than peers with disabilities. Wehmen et. al. (2014) speculated that recipients of SSI have more severe disabilities than non-receiving peers which makes employment more difficult. Capella and O'Mally (2012) suspect that SSI recipients fear that income from employment may decrease SSI benefits. SSI recipients view government benefits as more reliable and easier to 'earn' than income from work. When presented with the option of obtaining and keeping paid employment many adults with disabilities choose SSI. In light of this knowledge, when educators provide employment training

to students who receive SSI, they could emphasize the non-monetary value of employment. For instance, educators could discuss the ability of employment experiences to improve communication and promote feelings of achievement and worth.

In addition to the impact of SSI, the literature revealed the need for students with disabilities to enroll and complete specific Career and Technical Education (CTE) course programs. CTE is more likely to lead to post-graduation employment when students receive at least four credits in a specific course of training (Wagner, Newman, & Javitz, 2017). Students who earned a concentration certificate in a CTE program were almost twice as likely to be employed than peers who earned three or fewer general CTE credits. These data reveal the significance of early course planning for students during the IEP process preferably before high school.

In addition to CTE experience, the specific type of disability has a significant effect on employment outcomes. For instance, students diagnosed with mild 'intellectual disability' (ID) have lower rates of employment and lower incomes than peers with other disabilities (Bouck & Joshi, 2016). Test, Smith, and Carter (2014) state that students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) 'had higher rates of unemployment than graduates with speech/language impairments, learning disabilities, and intellectual disability' (p. 81). Although this statement appears to contradict Bouck and Joshi (2016), one can deduce from their writing that disabilities (such as ASD) have degrees of severity and that the level of disability impacts employability. A survey of Swedish adults revealed that hearing impairment had the least impact on employment status and psychological disabilities have the most negative impact (Kavanagh et al., 2015). The lesson learned from the literature on the relationship between disability type and employment is that

disabilities are diverse and a failure to distinguish type and severity of disability may contribute to vagueness in research on the topic.

Closing Thoughts on Chapter 2

The primary theme of literature on the topic is the positive effect of work-based learning on employment outcomes. Work-based learning is the best way to prepare students with disabilities to find and maintain a job, but there are not enough programs to meet the demand. There is a lack of literature that discusses implementing job training programs in the community or on a school campus.

CHAPTER III

SOLUTION AND METHOD

Implementing a job training program for SWD is a logical solution to the need of students to receive early work experiences. The Coffee Hut is a beverage trailer located on a high school campus that serves beverages and snow-cones to students. It is operated solely by SWD with oversight from SPED faculty. Innovation ISD was selected as a site for this study because it is one of the few districts that I am aware of that has a well-developed job training program. The Coffee Hut is a viable solution that other districts could replicate if they were aware of campus-based employment and understood the best practices that it models.

In addition to Innovation ISD, data was also collected from Ellen's Nursery. Ellen's Nursery is a plant nursery located in Norm ISD. It was established in 2017 to provide job training to people with disabilities. The nursery was initiated by Ellen Penders who is a retired teacher and an expert at transition. Ellen's Nursery is not 'campus-based', but it is a recently implemented work-based transition program. This program acquired non-profit status and was awarded a grant to expand its facility in 2019. The program is managed by an extremely dedicated expert and is also supported by members in the community that are immersed in the field of services for SWD. Data from Ellen's Nursery was combined with data from the Coffee Hut to provide a more robust and meaningful study. I conducted a program implementation case study and created an artifact that can serve as a resource for other districts.

As an example of a typical district, resource availability from Norm ISD is presented. Although Norm ISD is not participating in the study, this district can serve as an example of the lack of school personnel available to provide transition training across Texas. Norm High School serves approximately 4,000 students 12% (480) of whom are enrolled

in special education services (SPED). The district only has one faculty member dedicated to vocational preparedness. This individual, known as the vocational adjustment coordinator (VAC) manages the district's transition services for all students receiving SPED services aged 14 and over. Another teacher assists the VAC by teaching and facilitating training to students who are 18-21 years of age and have completed academic requirements. The majority of students in the 18+ program have significant disabilities that will prevent them from employment without intensive assistance. Both faculty members have administrative responsibilities that decrease the amount of time they have to directly assist with job training. For instance, both faculty members must attend admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) meetings on a regular basis. ARD meetings usually last between 30 minutes to an hour and may occur several times a week. ARD meetings require coordination with other school faculty and parents and the completion of time-consuming ARD documents. The two transition educators also teach classes and attend professional training and meetings on a regular basis.

The leaders of Innovation ISD are unique because they pioneered a solution to the difficulty of providing work-based learning. A description of the process of establishing this program for the benefit of other school districts who may take a similar path in the future is included in this study. Personal interviews, phone interviews, photos, observations, business plans, and grant information provided data for this study. Data was collected via email, phone calls, during periods of mentorship at Ellen's Nursery, and during on-site visits from the Spring of 2018 to the Fall of 2019.

The Coffee Hut is located in a large West Texas school district. The Coffee Hut is a food trailer that serves students on school property and is operated by students with disabilities (SWD) in order to provide the students with work experience as part of the district's transition program.

Providing an opportunity for students with disabilities (SWD) to gain job skills is one of the most effective interventions that improve employment outcomes. It is extremely difficult for school districts to provide job training at job sites at random community businesses for three reasons. First, there is a shortage of available school faculty to implement and monitor the training. Second, transporting students to and from job sites is very time-consuming. Lastly, few businesses in the community are able to host SWD and provide supervision to students as they work.

Transporting students off campus is another major obstacle that decreases access to job training. Ellen Penders who established the plant nursery job training site in Norm Texas stated, “transporting students to and from job sites was the single biggest obstacle to providing job training” (Personal Communication, September 24, 2019). District faculty have to obtain a school vehicle, transport the student, check students into the host business, and return the students to their campus a few hours later. The act of transportation is so time-consuming that students are limited in the number of visits and the length of stay at their job sites. Districts have a limited number of buses equipped with wheelchair lifts and driving them is cumbersome and requires the attendance of an adult monitor.

SWD have limited access to job training because of a lack of local business available to serve as host sites. Host businesses must provide work that is appropriate to SWD. Some work is too dangerous or complex for youth with disabilities. Host businesses have to provide supervision for students who are in training. SWD often need adults to train them to perform basic tasks independently. Checking in and out on a timeclock, washing hands after a restroom break, and answering questions from customers are tasks that SWD often need supervision with until they develop the skills. If SWD are not actively monitored, they risk attending job training

but not gaining the skills needed to work independently at a future job. Explicit, systematic training programs designed for SWD are an effective solution to these deficiencies.

Relying on businesses in the community result in only a small fraction of students receiving early work (EW) experiences as part of their transition plan. With few exceptions, Norm ISD provides job training only to students in the 18+ program that have significant but not profound disabilities. This equates to approximately 15 out of 480 (3%) of students who receive transition services. The conditions and experiences of this district are typical of other districts in Central Texas. Smaller school districts often lack funding to employ a full-time VAC or the ability to provide work-based learning at all.

Outline of the Proposed Solution

Creating an artifact that provides insight on the process of establishing a job training program is the purpose of this study. This artifact provides guidelines for educators considering implementing a work-based learning program on their campus. This guide was created by studying two sites that have recently implemented job training programs for SWD.

Data were collected from semi-structured interviews, photos, observations, and by reviewing internet resources and grant applications. Documents and interviews were collected during on-site visits conducted through May and July of 2019. Participants included the founders of Ellen's Nursery and parents with children who have participated in the program. The founders of Ellen's Nursery are a married couple who began the program after retiring from previous careers. Participants in Innovation ISD included the VAC and teachers who supervise the program on a regular basis. An interview guide with questions about the process of establishing both programs was used during interviews. Follow-up phone interviews were

conducted in June of 2019 to clarify responses and to expand on themes uncovered during the personal interviews. Photographs were collected during on-site visits.

Justification of Proposed Solution

The Coffee Hut deserved study because it is empowering. This program provides job skills to students in need of support by creating a venue in the middle of their school campus. This beverage trailer is a training resource, but it also creates an opportunity for SWD to demonstrate to their peers, teachers, and the community their current abilities and future potential.

There are always reasons to not implement a solution; especially solutions that involve youth with disabilities, money, and extra work. There were many logical arguments against establishing both job training programs. Ultimately, the educators valued students enough to create transition programs despite financial costs, time required, and the liability involved. Examples of educators that have created job training programs are hard to find. SWD often cannot advocate for themselves, and their achievements go unlauded. Football games are broadcast play by play across Texas. Every attempted pass and catch is blared from a stadium and on the radio. When a child with autism or down syndrome hands a hot drink to a peer, the community should also pay attention. Volunteering at a food truck on a cold November day is as relevant and valuable of an accomplishment as a football play or any other achievement made by their peers without disabilities. The efforts that established Ellen's Nursery and the Coffee Hut deserve study in order to facilitate similar programs on near other school districts.

Study of the implementation of job training programs is an under-researched topic. Even with assistance from the university academic librarian, I located few peer reviewed articles on the topic. There are a small number of dissertations on the topic of campus-based employment

and most of them focus on programs on college campuses as opposed to high-school campuses. Although work-based learning is the most significant intervention for improving work outcomes and campus-based programs are a solution to increasing student access, zero peer reviewed articles on the topic were located. This study is also relevant because establishing job training programs is an emerging response to the lack of access to work-based learning opportunities. For instance, the other work-based learning program located in the same county as Ellen's Nursery and two of the three campus-based programs contact during this study were established in 2017-2018. It appears that these types of programs are growing in popularity. A study on this topic is timely and relevant to educators and stakeholders who wish to improve employment outcomes.

Ellen's Nursery and the Coffee Hut were ideal sites for the study of the implementation of a work-based learning program. Both programs were in their second year of operation which means that the program founders were still employed on site and able to provide valid data for this study. Both programs were also ideal because they received grants and were expanding their facilities or services. Both programs are also considered successes by their founders and the community. These very different programs serve as positive examples for program implementation and models for best practices.

Ellen's Nursery is one of two facilities in its county that provides job training to people with disabilities. Ellen's Nursery is not campus-based, but it has the same function as the Coffee Hut and encountered many of the same obstacles during its implementation. Furthermore, the founder of Ellen's Nursery is a retired educator who served as a VAC. Her depth of experience in program implementation and transition services are well suited for this study.

The Coffee Hut was the largest campus-based employment program that I located. Two other job training programs were identified in which SWD served beverages or food, but both programs were much smaller in scope.

Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this type of study for several reasons. I wanted to learn how to establish job training programs. The aim of the study was to gain revelation of, “experience, meaning, and perspective” (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016, p. 499) from the perspective of the participants. A defined variable was not measured, but sought to draw out and collect data from a very small group of leaders and stakeholders. Stakeholders were invited to share experiences and insights that they believed were meaningful. Deep insights from a small number of participants were better derived from deliberate conversations with select participants.

After the implementation of Ellen’s Nursery and the Coffee Hut, school districts were able to increase the amount of work-based learning experiences for students. The increase in hours was possible because of increased capacity and convenient location. Prior to the implementation of the Coffee Hut, district faculty had to obtain a district vehicle and transport students to participating businesses across the community. Dropping off and picking up students is time consuming and difficult for students who rely on wheelchairs or have physical disabilities. Locating the training site on campus also made required observations by the VAC easier. Prior to the Coffee Hut, the VAC had to verify the attendance of students at a business and drive throughout the community to conduct regular observations. The coordination and travel time required to observe students in their work setting consumed a significant portion of the VAC’s work week. In addition to saving student and faculty time by reducing travel to and

from business locations, the campus-based solution to providing work experience is safer for students.

Inherent safety risks are inherent anytime students with disabilities (SWD) are transported off campus to work. In addition to the basic hazards of car travel, SWD are often not able to communicate or advocate for themselves to the same degree as their peers without disabilities. Working at a remote site increases the potential for SWD to be more vulnerable to verbal or physical abuse by school faculty, business employees, and patrons. In addition to eliminating transportation time and reducing risks, the Coffee Hut benefits the district by enabling SWD to interact with and provide a service to their peers without disabilities. Finally, the Coffee Hut provides beverages and treats that students in the district enjoy and would not otherwise have access to.

Study Context and Participants

Innovation ISD and Ellen's Nursery are the two participating sites in this study. Job training programs are uncommon. In addition to Innovation ISD, Ellen's Nursery is a small plant nursery in Central Texas that is participating.

Innovation ISD is a medium sized school district that serves approximately 14,500 students in total (The Texas Tribune, 2018). Two high schools and one freshman campus have a total of 4,114 students (Innovation, 2018) 6.4% (263) of whom receive transition services (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Concerning academics, ACT, SAT, and graduation rates are all slightly higher than state averages (The Texas Tribune, 2018).

In respect to ethnicity, approximately 60% of students are Hispanic, 33% are White, 4% are African American, 2% are two or more races, and 1% are Asian (The Texas Tribune, 2018). In respect to economics, teacher and household incomes are slightly lower than state averages.

The Coffee Hut was converted out of a 7'x18' animal trailer in 2017 using material purchased from a grant of \$5,000 and labor supplied by district maintenance workers.

The Coffee Hut serves beverages one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon three days a week. The Coffee Hut is operated directly by 15 SWD who operate the trailer and serve. An additional 15 SWD are involved by preparing items and cleaning the trailer. 70% of sales are used to fund the trailer operation and the remaining 30% of sales are deposited to the student activity fund. The \$8,000 deposited in the student fund for the 2018-2019 school year funded a field trip to a Texas Rangers baseball game.

The VAC for the West Texas school district is the primary participant. The Coffee Hut was his idea and he was responsible for obtaining funds and supervising its construction and implementation. The VAC has worked in the field of special education for 15 years and served in his current position for three years. In addition to the VAC, the director of special programs provided approval and oversight. There are also four teachers and eight special education aides that work with and provide training to participating students and manage the Coffee Hut on a regular basis. Some of the teachers participated in this study.

Ellen's Nursery was established in 2017 and gained 501(c)(3) status in November of 2018. This Nursery is staffed by two-three able bodied adults who train an average of five-six people a day. Trainees who receive support at Ellen's Nursery range in age from 18-34. Most trainees have significant disabilities such as Down Syndrome or Autism. All trainees are verbal but with a wide variation in their individual abilities.

The Nursery is located in Central Texas near downtown Norm. The Nursery contains numerous ornamental and fruit trees, shrubs, and plants on a 75'x 300' plot of land. All initial funding was provided by the two founders. Improvements to the only covered structure were

funded by a \$5,000 grant in May of 2019. Labor for the establishment and all improvements were provided by the owners and volunteers. A local businessman (and board member) provided funding for a third faculty member as well as funding to improve the internet presence and marketing for the nursery. Although the program had improved financials during the current year, it has a net loss of revenue for both years of operation.

The founders of Ellen's Nursery are additional participants for this study. They are a married couple that initiated the program out of compassion for the unserved members of the community. One spouse provides labor and supervision for the program and the other is a retired special education teacher. Ellen Penders specialized in providing education and transition support to students in the local district and made significant changes to the 18+ program before her retirement. Her husband Bob worked was a transportation coordinator for the Federal Government.

Proposed Research Paradigm

This study explored the problem of establishing a job-training located in the community or on a school district. The obstacles encountered and the solutions that were implemented during the establishment and current operation of both programs were researched. A program implementation case study involving two recently established transition programs was used. I relied solely on qualitative data collection methods because the relationship between the problem and the intervention were too complex to be explained through surveys or experimental strategies (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). Sources of data included semi-structured interviews conducted in person and over the phone, observation, participatory observation, analysis of internet data, and recent grant applications.

The purpose of this study was to collect data about the process that educators navigate when implementing job training programs for SWD. The experiences studied are relevant to educators but remain specific to the location and unique qualities of the educators who initiated these programs.

This study explored how Ellen's Nursery and the Coffee Hut align with the tenets of Empowerment Theory. According to Perkins & Zimmerman (1995) who pioneered the early development of this theory:

Theoretically, the construct connects mental health to mutual help and the struggle to create a responsive community. It compels us to think in terms of wellness versus illness, competence versus deficits, and strength versus weaknesses. Similarly, empowerment research focuses on identifying capabilities instead of cataloging risk factors and exploring environmental influences of social problems instead of blaming victims. Empowerment-oriented interventions enhance wellness while they also aim to ameliorate problems, provide opportunities for participants to develop knowledge and skills, and engage professionals as collaborators instead of authoritative experts. (pp. 569-570)

The Coffee Hut and Ellen's Nursery were established by educators who understood that successful transition programs require a focus on student abilities. Albert Einstein is not remembered as someone with Autism and former Vice President Joe Biden is not defined as a former stutterer (Langtree & Langtree, 2018). The purpose of this study is to research two programs that develop the capabilities of the students that they serve.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through personal and phone interviews, analysis of relevant websites, including grant applications, multiple observations, and photographs. Stakeholders including the program developers, parents, and special education teachers were interviewed.

A first-hand account of how stakeholders overcame challenges such as the financial, safety, faculty, IEP, course planning, and faculty scheduling requirements were explored. Semi-

structured interviews were appropriate because in-depth knowledge from subject matter experts were sought. This format allowed participants to reflect and express themselves in a more complete way (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). Interview were flexible and allowed adjustment to follow-up questions based on responses. Other data collection methods such as a survey provide less depth to the responses and are less flexible. Participants were selected purposively based on their key roles in implementing the programs studied. Two participants established Ellen's Nursery and three participants provided the majority of the effort to establish the Coffee Hut. Multiple interviews of key participants provided more insight than quantitative methods that are more suited for a large number of participants.

In addition to interviewing, data were collected from direct and participatory observation. Observation of the Coffee Hut occurred first at a distance from the faculty and students in order to understand how the program worked without disturbance from the observer. A field journal was used to take notes. The basic operation of the business and its overall relationship on the campus was identified. Items of interest included impressions from the physical structure of the trailer and the location of the trailer compared to the flow of student traffic. The weather and temperature, are also considerations that affect the operation of the Coffee Hut. Data were collected by observing activity at close proximity inside the trailer. Tasks and equipment used by students were noted in order to learn about physical hazards and the level of skill involved in the business. The actions of faculty were observed in order to better understand what level of support was required on a daily basis.

A similar process occurred during observations of Ellen's Nursery in addition to overt participatory observation. Participatory observation enabled the author to develop better rapport with the leaders of the nursery, understand the students served, and the skills that students gained

during training. Photos captured images of the physical structures. The pictures were taken of both sites in order to better record the structures and the facilities' place within their environments. Photos of menu items from the Coffee Hut and plants from Ellen's Nursery also served as a record of the business and may help educators understand the services provided. In order to protect vulnerable populations and promote anonymity, students, faculty, or customers were not included in the photographs. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Codes were developed using an inductive coding method.

Justification of Use of Instruments in Context

In order to maximize the amount of data collected and ensure that interview time was used as productively as possible an interview protocol was used. Participants were reminded that the purpose of the study was to gain insight on their experiences overcoming obstacles during the establishment of their programs. Participants were reminded that the study did not evaluate them or the effectiveness of their intervention. In addition to aligning research aims and listing interview questions, the protocol provided a script that concluded interviews with a reminder of confidentiality, a timeline of the study publication, researcher contact information, and a message of appreciation.

The researcher, served as the main instrument within the context of qualitative research. There are a few perspectives that can assist novice researchers to maintain an informant centered approach as opposed to a researcher centered approach (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). The informants and their perspectives were the most important source of knowledge. Maintaining an openness with the informants was another aspect identified as significant by Peredaryenko & Krauss (2013). A good rapport was established with the founders of Ellen's Nursery and had open communication with the stakeholders of Innovation ISD until

the end of the study when participants were less responsive to communication and efforts to collect data. The open relationship was due to the good nature of the informants and the context of the study. The informants were naturally willing to share data about their programs because their interventions are recognized by the community as success stories.

Data Analysis Strategy

Qualitative data were analyzed using general qualitative analysis techniques (Tak Yan Lee, 2008). During the first phase, meaningful categories were identified. Conducting line by line coding was the second phase of data analysis. During the third phase, codes were placed into categories in order to identify themes in the data.

Reliability and Validity Concerns

The original goal of this study was to collect data from campus-based job training programs exclusively. The inclusion of only one site in the study inhibited the ability to generalize using assertions reached. Other school districts with campus-based job training programs were not included because there were none within close proximity. Ellen's Nursery was included because it is an educator designed program that trains current students and recent graduates. Lessons from two sites that have successfully implemented job training programs (JTP) for students may generalize to public school districts because of a shared similar context. For instance, school and community-based educators operate under the auspices of federal laws such as IDEA and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Designing a JTP for people with disabilities entails similar challenges regardless of the location. Campus-based and community programs must both gain the support of stakeholders, acquire funding, and design a student-centered business model.

Closing Thoughts on Chapter 3

A program implementation case study with cross case analysis was appropriate because the Coffee Hut is nearing completion of its second year of completion. Both programs have progressed beyond the implementation phase and the educators responsible for its initiation are still employed and available to participate. Research on the implementation of job training programs is minimal and any contributions should be meaningful.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this case study, data were collected at two separate job sites through:

- Observations
- Volunteering
- In-person Interviews
- Phone Interviews
- Email Correspondence
- Photographs

At the beginning of this study the researcher intended to include data solely from campus-based employment programs. One campus-based program that operates on a scale that involves numerous faculty members, a dedicated training location, and numerous students was located. In order to better explore the questions of this research, another new and innovative job training site referred to as Ellen's Nursery which was introduced in the previous chapter of this study.

Data were collected at Ellen's Nursery after submitting an amendment with the institutional review board. Methods of collecting data included observing as a volunteer, interviews with stakeholders such as the directors, faculty, and parents. Data were also collected by reviewing the program's social media and webpage and by collecting photographs. While volunteering at the nursery, the researcher gained insight about developing student centered job training and the impact of that training on students through assisting trainees in watering, re-planting, and cleaning.

Data were collected at Innovation ISD via in-person and telephone interviews, emails, and by taking photographs. Interviews provided firsthand accounts of the implementation and daily operation of the job training programs. Conducting multiple interviews enabled

participants to reflect on their experiences and provide thoughtful responses. Most of the interviews with Innovation ISD (IISD) faculty were conducted over the phone due to the geographical distance between the researcher and the campus. Jay Bonell, the district's Vocational Adjustment Coordinator (VAC) was the primary source of data from IISD because he initiated and currently directs the Coffee Hut program. Data were provided through phone conversations, in-person interviews, and email. The VAC introduced the researcher to faculty in the SPED department that established and continue to operate the program.

Photographs contributed by illustrating the physical layout of both programs and by showing the student accommodations. For instance, instructions are posted in large print above the coffee makers and the register has large icons that made taking orders easier for students with visual or reading disabilities. The signage and organization of the coffee trailer are also depicted in the images.

Data collected from websites that hosted grants that contributed to both programs provided insight on community interaction with and support for programs.

The interview transcripts were put into a single Word document and color-coded responses based on the participant. Data was categorized based on how they provided insight into the research questions.

Presentation of Data

This study includes data from two job training programs for people with disabilities: Ellen's Nursery and the Coffee Hut. Descriptions and data from each site are presented separately in the beginning of this chapter and then combined when generalizations about program implementation are discussed.

Ellen's Nursery Job Site

Ellen's Nursery is located in a Central Texas city with a population of approximately 21,000 people. The city provides a fair representation of the demography of Texas but has slightly more white students than the state average, higher incomes, and a lower drop-out rate. The school district has the best reputation of the three major districts in the county and enjoys broad support from the community. The positive environment resulted in Ellen's Nursery receiving significant support from the community.

In 2016 Ellen and Bob Penders looked forward to enjoying their retirement. They planned on spending more time with their grandchildren who live in Austin, and pursuing their hobbies of reading and traveling. Prior to her retirement, Ellen served as the local school district's vocational adjustment coordinator (VAC). While working as the VAC, Ellen implemented a program that taught independent living skills to high schoolers with moderate to significant disabilities. Students with significant disabilities are taught basic self-care skills such as washing hands and self-feeding. More able students leave the campus to receive work experience at local businesses such as an animal shelter, local restaurant, and country club. Ellen worked with parents to design meaningful transition plans, provide skills to students, and place students with local businesses. While serving as the VAC, Ellen worked to coordinate with local agencies, the school district, and parents. Although federal law requires one IEP meeting a year, Ellen routinely arranged monthly ARD meetings for seniors who needed extra support before graduation. ARD meetings were held when parents returned from work at 6:00 or 7:00 in the evening. As her retirement from the local school district approached, Ellen became concerned about students who lacked a facility to provide job training to them once they graduated.

During a 2019 interview with a journalist from a local news channel Ellen described her motivation for initiating the program. “After a great deal of time and thought we made the decision that since there is nothing like this [in the county], that we were going to purchase this nursery and set it up so that we could be a training program for people with disabilities.”.

Ellen and her husband, Bob, worked at the program nearly every day without pay since its opening in January of 2017. The goal of the Ellen’s Nursery is to provide SWD with the skills needed for independence. Ellen’s Nursery empowers SWD in their home environments and improves their ability to find paid employment.

During an interview with a local reporter in 2017, Ellen stated, “Owning and running the nursery has been a learning experience because the purpose behind it was to expand into the community what I have been working to do with the school district.” (McCarthy-Everett).

The program’s design and business model

Ellen’s Nursery was founded in January of 2017 as a job training site and a facility to sell trees, shrubs, flowers, and other plants that are suited for the hot savannah climate of Central Texas. The goal of the nursery is to provide people with disabilities the opportunity to receive job skills, social skill development, and experience working with supervision in order to increase independence. Ellen’s is open Monday through Saturday from 8:30 am to 1:00 pm.

Ellen’s Nursery coaches an average of 11 individuals throughout the week who work all or part of the day depending on their availability. The business is funded through contributions from Ellen and Bob Penders, daily sales, grants, contributions from local sponsors, and fundraisers. The value of the plant inventory and greenhouses is approximately \$30,000. The nursery employs one paid assistant who performs basic plant care duties 30 hours a week which enables Ellen to manage the program and instruct participants. The paid employee is an able-

bodied nurse who recently retired. Her salary is paid by a local business that sponsors the nursery. Positive reviews on Facebook, Yelp, and on its webpage frequently mention the good selection of plants and low prices. Although Ellen's Nursery was voted the best nursery in the county in 2018, the business is not yet profitable because it does not have enough sales.

The physical environment

Ellen's Nursery is located in the heart of a small city in Central Texas. The site is located on a narrow 75'x300' lot adjacent to a landscape supply company. Ellen's Nursery is positioned about 100' off of the main street and is not easily visible to passing cars. The main structure is a 40'x70' green house located in the front of the lot. The facility contains a register, rows of small potted plants along the sides, and a break area which consists of a refrigerator and white plastic table. The flooring of the main greenhouse is light brown synthetic decking that was purchased through a grant and installed in the Spring of 2019. Prior to the installation of this decking, the flooring was gravel and dirt which usually became muddy after hard rains. A small bench in the rear serves as a workspace where trainees preparing cuttings for replanting. Ten separate 20'x50' greenhouses are set in rows behind the main greenhouse. The greenhouses are covered by dark plastic mesh. Each of the ten greenhouses contains distinct plant species such as cacti, house plants, succulents, or flowers. The plants are aligned on the sides of the greenhouses in green and black plastic quart sized pots. The rear of the lot is filled with three rows of large potted trees. Most of the trees are native to the area such as live oak, Bur Oak, and Cedar Elms which are commonly used for landscaping. Ellen's sells some fruiting trees including Sam Houston Peach or Moonglow Pear but the majority of their trees are ornamental. All plants on the site are lush and watered frequently. A restroom is available at the adjacent landscape supply business.



Figure 3 Ellen's Nursery Front

Ellen and her trainees are quick to greet and offer assistance to visitors. The nursery offers a wide selection of plants and looks professional as seen in Figure 1. However, when I began volunteering there were several indicators that Ellen and her team could benefit from an extra set of hands. Most of the greenhouses contained scores of pots that contained plants that were shriveled or not visible which indicated that the plants had died weeks before. The area in the far rear of the site contained discarded blue plastic pallets and misplaced pots ranging in capacity from 1-50 gallons. Many of the misplaced pots were full of brown rainwater that teemed with mosquito larvae. I learned to wear pants after enduring multiple bites while assisting the first day. The trainees received explicit instruction on how to water plants, but still needed continual supervision. The trainees often squirted water with too much force on a single

spot instead of showering the pot from a distance. The careless watering often blasted the potting soil too hard which exposed the roots of the trees to the brutal Texas sun.

The human environment

Most of the trainees at Ellen's Nursery are current or former students of Norm ISD. Demographics from Norm ISD provides insight into the participants of Ellen's Nursery and a better understanding of the human environment in which the nursery operates. Norm ISD is in a county that has approximately 1,550 high school students who are enrolled in special education programs. In the entire county, there is only one other program that provides job training to people with disabilities. The other job training program is approximately 35 minutes west of Ellen's Nursery and was also founded by retired SPED teachers who are addressing the lack of transition support in the area.



Figure 4 Ellen's Nursery Side

How the participants interact within the program

On a typical morning, the program director and a part-time grant funded assistant supervise four to six trainees. Trainees are aged 18-23 and have a wide range of disabilities. Some are very high functioning and do not readily present as having a disability and others present with significant Autism and have minimal verbal skills. Trainees wear a grey t-shirt which has a small business logo of yellow daisies on the front. Most of the program participants are current or former students from the local school district.

Trainees begin their day by completing their sign-in sheet and then watering plants in an assigned section such as those depicted in Figure 2. Watering takes an average of one hour and is usually followed by tasks such as preparing plants for propagation or repotting. Everyone on the site takes a break before noon by which time some participants are usually picked up. Female trainees are often assigned in the main greenhouse. They are able to interact with each other more often and sometimes sit down while they work. More of their tasks are conducted in the main greenhouse which provides shelter from the sun and has fewer mosquitoes. The trainees assigned watering duties in the rear greenhouses are often lower functioning and sometimes expressed a dislike for working at the jobsite. The trainees expressed that they did not like the continual physical demands and stress of working in a nursery. Tasks such as moving the water hose, picking up bags of soil, and repotting plants are tiresome in the summer heat.

Gaining independence is the mission of every trainee at Ellen's. Ellen assesses new trainees for several days by giving them different responsibilities and observing their problem-solving ability, work ethic, social skills. Ellen assesses trainee's mobility, ability to communicate with customers, understand oral directions, and to complete tasks independently.

Ellen then assigns job duties based primarily on their ability. Common tasks include operating the cash register, greeting and assisting customers, watering, trimming, and repotting plants. Trainees who cannot communicate with other participants or customers are assigned tasks such as watering or repotting which do not require interacting with others. Trainees who lack mobility or cannot tolerate heat are assigned positions inside the main greenhouse such as clipping plants while seated at the work table. The goal of every task is for trainees to handle responsibilities independently so that regardless of their future work environment they will be a capable asset to their employer. Trainees at Ellen's often come from environments in which they do not have responsibilities or high expectations from their parents or care providers. In contrast, Ellen routinely places trainees in situations in which they have to concentrate and complete tasks over a long period of time. Ellen allows trainees to make mistakes but she is always close by to correct and assist trainees when needed.

The Coffee Hut Job Site

Jay Bonell is the VAC for Innovation ISD and the person who initiated the campus-based job training program on his campus. After earning a degree in education, he worked at a youth rehabilitation center located near the Texas A&M campus in College Station. He enjoyed working with students with disabilities and decided to earn an MA in Special Education. After earning his MA, Jay returned to his hometown in West Texas. After serving as a SPED teacher for several years, Jay was promoted to VAC. He spends his free time working on his cattle ranch outside of town and is also completing a PhD in Divinity.

Jay initiated the program because students in the SPED program lacked the job skills necessary to obtain or keep employment after graduation. Some students in the SPED department were able to gain work experience at businesses located around the town, but Jay

realized that his students needed to receive training before they reached off-campus training. He wanted to create a type of 'pre-training' for students under 18 years old so they would be better prepared for less supervised work experiences once they graduated. In 2016 Jay proposed creating a job training site by renovating one of the district's unused animal trailers and converting it into a food trailer located on their school campus.

The program's design and business model

The Coffee Hut provides job training for 25-30 students per semester. Students are assigned positions in three different areas: logistics, cleaning, and serving. Approximately ten students have positions in the logistics and accounting department. These students learn skills in math reasoning and basic calculation. Students in the logistics and accounting department use Excel spreadsheets and calculators to track expenses and earnings. With the assistance of a SPED teacher, students collect and review receipts and calculate expenses from purchases. Faculty members purchase supplies with a department business card and then share receipts with students who track the transactions. Funds are held in a school directed account. The \$8,000 profit collected during the 2018-2019 school year was used to take participating students to a Rangers baseball game during the last month of school. In addition to tracking monies, the accounting and logistics department keeps inventory and initiates orders when appropriate.

Approximately ten students have positions on the cleaning crew. These students learn to clean and restock the Coffee Hut after every shift. Typically, five students spend part of a class period sweeping, mopping, and wiping down the trailer. They are also responsible for restocking paper coffee cups, napkins, straws, and single serve cups. Kaily who is a SPED teacher that works in transition explained that before the Coffee Hut existed, students were trained by cleaning their classrooms. She said that the Coffee Hut provides a much more realistic

environment. “Sometimes there are spills and trash in odd places that students have to notice. In a classroom it is the exact same every day, students at the Coffee Hut really learn how to clean a business.” (K. Conner, Personal Communication, June 17, 2019).

Approximately ten students are responsible for serving and operating the Coffee Hut. Five students operate the morning and lunch shifts. Students arrive at 6:40 am to prepare for the 7:00-7:30 morning shift. During their shifts, students improve skills such as operating a register, mathematics calculation, writing, and social skills. One student improves social and writing skills by standing outside of the Coffee Hut door and taking orders on a 3x4 inch order form. A second student improves reading and communication skills by picking up orders and relaying them to the students who make coffee. A fifth student is responsible for operating the register and handing orders to customers. Both cash and debit cards are processed at the register which has large icons designed for the visually impaired. Students typically receive 10-15 customers per shift but occasionally have periods when business is slower, usually during testing weeks.

The physical environment

The actual Coffee Hut consists of a professionally refurbished trailer that provides coffee and sno-cones to students and faculty of the school district. The campus is made of tan brick buildings of different sizes and age which creates the look and feel of a small college campus. The trailer is located in a large open square on the campus near a busy walkway.



Figure 5 Coffee Hut Front

The trailer is a 8'x16' metal trailer coated with fresh light tan paint as seen in Figure 3. It has a small doorway, a foldable sign, and a serving window facing the student walkway. Figure 4 shows the interior of the trailer is neatly organized and contains coffee and sno-cone making supplies and equipment and a register below the serving window. Figure 5 shows directions designed to assist students are posted on the interior walls.



Figure 6 Coffee Hut Interior

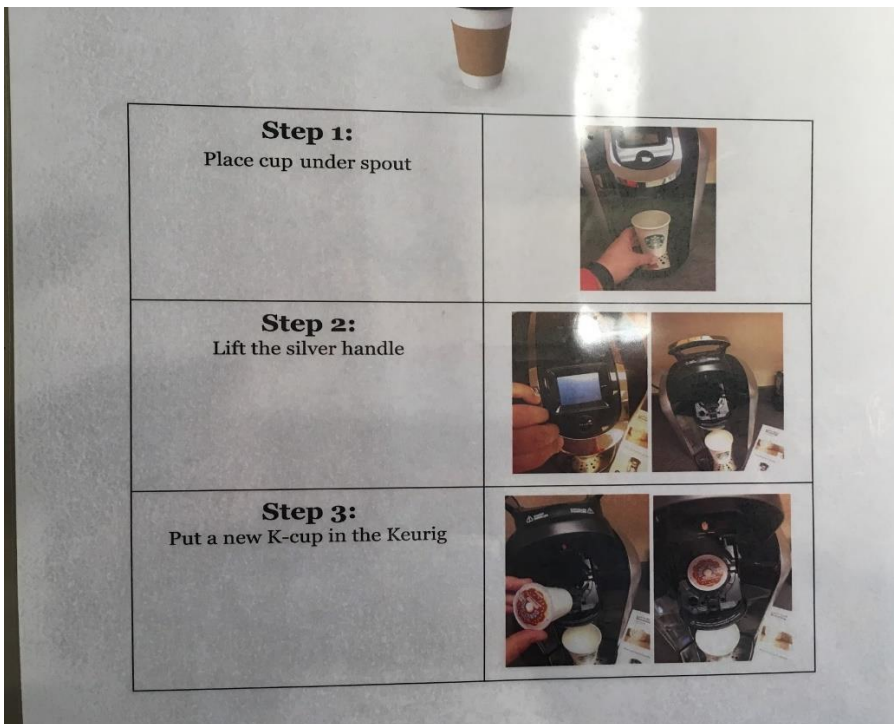


Figure 7 Coffee Hut Accommodations

The Human Environment

Innovation ISD

The Coffee Hut job training program that is part of Innovation ISD (IISD) which is located in a mid-sized West Texas city. IISD is a good site for a case study because student demographic and characteristics are very similar to the State's averages. Data were adapted from The Texas Tribune and illustrated in Figure 6 and Figure 7.

Student Demographics

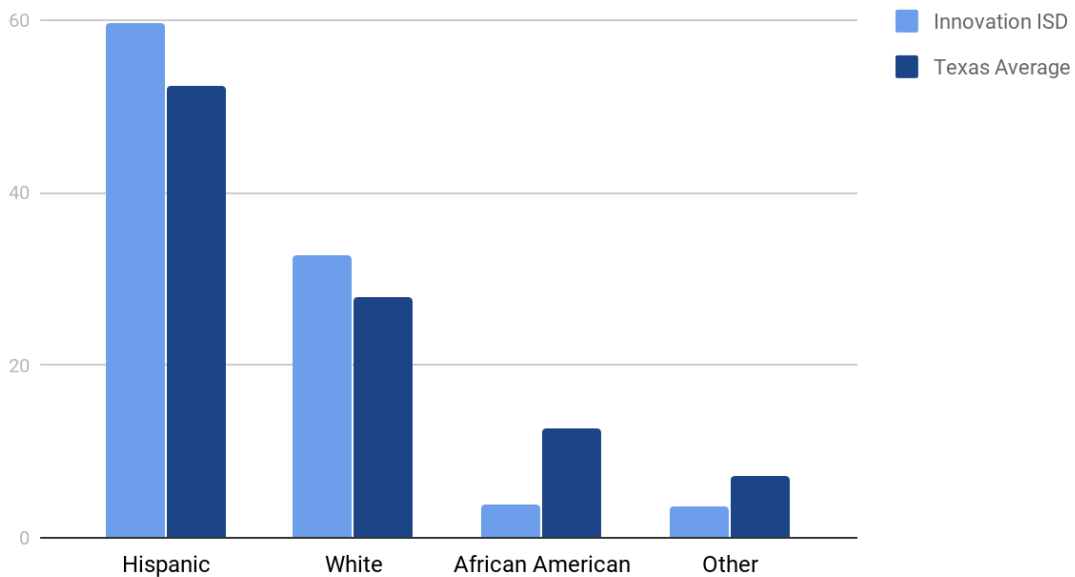


Figure 8 Innovation ISD Demographics Adapted from The Texas Tribune

Enrollment & Risk Factors

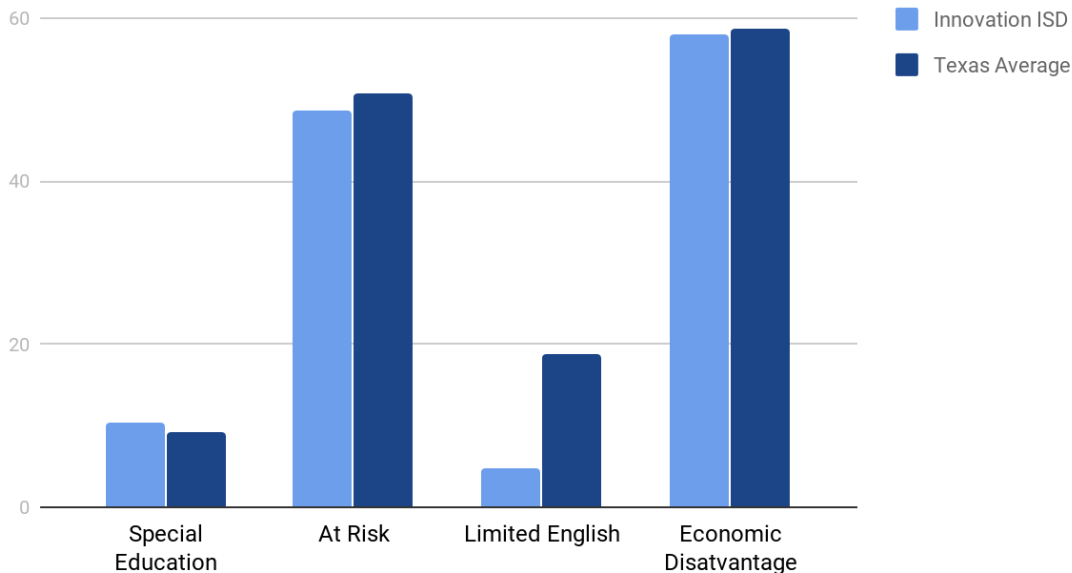


Figure 9 Innovation ISD Enrollment and Risk Factors Adapted from The Texas Tribune

Innovation ISD has an enrollment of approximately 14,500 students. The district is the only school district located in a West Texas city with a population of approximately 100,000 people. The city has developed primarily around the oil industry and according to city-data.com if you like clubs and nightlife the city is “boring”. When describing the atmosphere of the city, a current resident stated, “It is a safe and community-friendly town. The people are extraordinarily friendly and caring. It a great place for family-oriented people and a retirement community” (City reviews, 2019). Due in part to a lack of entertainment and attractions in the city, the school district plays a significant role in the community. Community members express support for student activities including sports events, UIL competitions, and graduations through attendance and financial contributions. The Coffee Hut benefited from this pro-student environment

through receiving a community-based grant of \$5,500 which paid for the renovation materials including electrical, paint, cabinets, tires, coffee makers, ice maker, and register.

The Impact of Job Training Programs

According to the program directors and parents, both of these job training programs positively impact participants in several ways. The training programs improve job skills such as communication, social competence, math calculation, and basic problem solving. The job training programs also enable people with disabilities to build relationships with people in their community and engage in meaningful activities.

Do Job-Training Programs for People with Disabilities Have an Impact on Student Outcomes?

Determining if the job training programs impact student skill requirements, IEP goal progress, and employment outcomes are three of the most integral questions of this research. Jay Burrell the VAC for Innovation ISD observed that trainees make significant progress on their IEP goals. Initiating verbal communication, performing basic computation with money, and wearing a uniform appropriately are typical goals found written on his student IEPs. The attainment of skills improves the ability of students to solve problems, follow directions, and work independently which makes them more employable. For instance, one participating student had IEP goals to, “correctly count change during money exchanges” and, “operate a register without assistance”. The student’s initial ability was assessed and he was assigned a position in the Coffee Hut receiving money from customers. During the first several weeks of training, a faculty member stood near him to assist and ensure that he was competent in this position. His progress was discussed during one of the regular SPED meetings and halfway into the semester the team decided that he no longer needed direct supervision and was considered

employable. Mr. Bonell described another student who participated during the first year of the Coffee Hut who lacked the confidence or skill to interact in basic verbal communication with strangers. He was a student with Down Syndrome who, “Had a good personality but struggled with social dynamic of a lot of people in one area” (2019). The team decided that since this student had a transition goal of working in a retail environment that he should be coached how to receive orders from customers at the Coffee Hut. Initially, Kim Blevins who served as his job coach provided a piece of paper with common greetings and responses written on it. She stood next to him and guided him when customers approached to place an order. She recounted that, “At first he was too uncomfortable with people to look at them and often didn’t respond when people walked up and talked to him.” (2019). Within the first semester, the student consistently interacted appropriately with customers while taking their orders. This student was hired as a host at The Olive Garden after he graduated. When describing the impact of the Coffee Hut on the student’s success, Bonell stated, “The safe environment allowed him and the faculty to work through his struggles” (2019). Jay Bonell cannot definitively state that job training at the Coffee Hut led to this student’s successful employment, but he believes, “The program is definitely helping students acquire essential job skills” (2019).

The director of Ellen’s Nursery stated that 13 of 35 of her trainees have found employment within the community during or after participating in her program. Based on her previous experience as a transition specialist, students receive better training and are more likely to find employment after participating in her program than from a typical program provided by a school district.

Cindy Lynch has a son who gained full time employment operating a register at local sandwich shop after training at Ellen’s Nursery. During a 2019 interview with a local journalist,

Cindy stated, “When he worked at Ellen’s he would ask customers, ‘What are you looking for?’ ‘or, ‘What kind of roses would you be interested in?’ [The program] really helped boost his confidence”.

Participants build relationships

In addition to providing employment skills, job training programs enable participants to interact with their community and to develop friendships with peers. For example, the Coffee Hut brings students with disabilities out of their designated section of the campus and places them in the busiest area of the campus. The programs enable participants to interact with and build genuine relationships with students in the general population. Karen said that before the Coffee Hut, many students with significant disabilities only interacted with peers in the general education setting during the Partners PE program. “We have a student who became friends with peers that he met while working at the Coffee Hut. They take him to football games and dances. They hang out on the weekends” (K. Blevins, Personal Communication, June 5, 2019).

During a 2019 interview for local news report about Ellen’s Nursery a participant stated, “I used to be really shy, but maybe if I improve myself I won’t be nearly as shy as I used to be”. Participants do not always make lasting friendships with peers in the community, but even subtle improvements in verbal and social skills are meaningful. Mary Sarek described progress that she has observed in her son who has Autism and limited verbal communication,

The environment has been helpful to learn how to be more sensitive to sounds, because there is a loud train that goes by at all times. It helps him to tolerate sounds. Working outside has taught him to tolerate the weather, especially thunder and lightning which are his greatest fears. This generalizes to church because he is more comfortable when he goes out and not as afraid. (2019)

Participants engage in meaningful activities

When people with disabilities serve beverages on campus or assist customers at the nursery, the dynamic changes from a position of disability to one of empowerment. When participants are enabled to meet the needs of others by providing a service or a product they are engaged in meaningful activities. The students and faculty of Innovation ISD need coffee and the students that can provide that service have value. Members of Ellen's community need a place to buy healthy and affordable plants and the trainees who provide those plants experience being valued. Job training programs allow people with disabilities to transition from a role of 'disabled' to enabled. Ellen and Mary Sarek both stated that if it was not for the nursery, most of the participants would be stuck at home. Mary said that the program, "Allows him to be purposeful and feel like he is contributing like his peers are" (2019).

The job training programs provide realistic environments that help participants predict what employment is like. Participants, "have a better idea of what they like and don't like. They choose better suited jobs which leads to longevity" (K. Conner, Personal Communication, June 17, 2019).

The Impact of Job Training Programs on Schools and Families

The Coffee Hut has a positive impact on teachers who interact with participating students. According to Kim Blevins who serves as an immediate supervisor for the Coffee Hut, "The program makes all teachers more aware of the students. They get to know their abilities" (2019). Special education teachers, "Get to see growth and the positive impact that they have" (K. Conner, Personal Communication, May 21, 2019). Campus-based programs meet the intent of inclusion which states in part that all students should be, "Educated with their peers in a general setting to the maximum extent possible" (IDEA, 2004).

In addition to enlightening and encouraging school faculty members, job training programs sometimes provide a service that would not otherwise be available. For example, the Coffee Hut only serves coffee on days when the school cafeteria or other organizations do not. The training facility does not compete with, but compliments other food and drink providers. For instance, the faculty of the Coffee Hut estimate that it serves over 3,000 cups of coffee per school year on days that the cafeteria cannot provide the same service. Providing hot coffee at an affordable price is a service that improves the environment of the school campus for students and faculty alike.

The job training programs help families by giving them hope and helping them to feel less isolated. During a 2019 interview for a local news channel one parent stated,

Ellen has been amazing. To see his possibilities rather than his limitations. He has increased his independence even on things that we take for granted like signing in or even telling time because he has learned how to use a watch.

Results of the Research

Exploring the factors that impact the successful implementation of job training programs for students with disabilities was the primary goals of this study. This section of the record discusses what answers the data provided and questions that remain unanswered. The research revealed that gaining ‘buy-in’ from stakeholders, using an appropriate business model, and maintaining a student centered are key factors when implementing a job training program.

What Factors Impact the Successful Implementation of Job-Training Programs?

Gaining buy-in from stakeholders was the most significant factor that contributed to the successful implementation of a job training program. Creating a job training involves all of the responsibilities of a regular business combined with additional obstacles and requires the support of all stakeholders. The program needs a functioning business, with equipment, employees,

accounting, customers, cash on hand, compliance with organizational and state regulations, and a product or service that attracts customers. In addition, a job training program is operated by employees who have disabilities and are more dependent.

Campus-based employment programs (CBE) are viewed by campus administrators as supplemental add-ons that serve a small segment of the student population (J. Bonell, Personal Communication, June 27, 2019). These specialized programs are not considered an essential priority and do not receive financial or staffing support that other school programs receive. CBE are subject to campus guidelines and are dependent on other departments for approval and support. One of the primary tenets of Systems Theory (ST) is that departments within an organization are interdependent and that the organization is dependent on the community and environment in which it functions (Banthany, 1992). The Coffee Hut's dependent status was very evident during the approval and implementation phase. The Coffee Hut came into existence only after conforming to district standards, receiving community grants, labor from district employees, and support from parents. Ellen and her husband Bob are extremely passionate and dedicated to their program, but they rely heavily on grants and donations from the community to fund their payroll and material.

Buy-in from SPED faculty

SPED faculty are the core personnel that run the Coffee Hut. Gaining their support and input was the first phase in the Coffee Hut program's development. Jay Bonell the VAC for Innovation ISD stated, "Everyone on the [SPED] team caught the vision and supported it from the beginning" (Personal Communication, May 21, 2019). I was impressed that the program directors obtained whole-hearted buy-in from SPED faculty. His team were committed to

starting the program, and they were willing to show up to work early on a regular basis. One of the team members who helped plan the program stated,

The SPED team takes turns coming to work early in order to supervise trainees as they serve coffee to fellow students and staff before school starts. We rotate shifts and most of us come to work early anyway so it really isn't that big of a deal. (K. Conner, Personal Communication, May 21, 2019)

In order to gain the buy-in of the SPED team, Mr. Bonell explained that he first reminded his faculty of several students in the 19+ program that were not successful in their job training programs. Many of their students lacked the social skills and experience to work in a public environment. His faculty understood that pre-employment training that allowed SPED faculty to closely support their students was necessary before students were placed at off-campus job sites. Mr. Bonell's faculty agreed that only a campus-based job training site could provide such an opportunity.

In contrast, Ellen had to gain the complete support of her husband rather than a team of special education teachers. Ellen knew that several students from Norm ISD had an immediate need for job training. She imagined their futures as isolated, dependent, and hopeless. It was difficult for Ellen and her husband to place their hard-earned retirement on hold in order to build a plant nursery and job training site from nothing. During their final day of deliberation Ellen told her husband, "Bob, this could save a life" (Personal Communication, September 24, 2019).

Buy-in from administration

District and campus administrators are responsible for all student and faculty outcomes and are keenly aware of liability and risks. Therefore, SPED leadership must convey to administrators that a campus-based program is necessary to prepare students with disabilities to

transition to a work environment. The SPED team from Innovation ISD explained to their campus principal that from their observations and the inability of their students to maintain employment that their current model of job training was inadequate. Mr. Bonell and his team conveyed to their principal the accounts of recent graduates who were placed on job sites but lacked the confidence to interact with faculty or the ability to perform tasks independently. Their principal agreed that students needed more job training skills prior to placement in the community. Convincing their principal that establishing a job training site on the campus was the solution took more effort and planning.

Jay Bonell and his SPED team gained their principal's support to implement their job training program because he was confident in them.

We had several meetings early on in which we discussed likely objections that our principal was going to have. We had answers ready for the concerns that we expected him to have. He was impressed when he saw that we were all on board as a team and had a solid plan (2019).

Bonell and his faculty succeeded because they proposed a job training program that was safe, complied with district guidelines, and did not disrupt other campus programs or the education of students. Although Ellen and her husband Bob did not have to gain the buy-in of SPED teachers or campus administrators, they had to plan and resource their program's implementation without the support of an organization.

Buy-in from school departments and the community

The Coffee Hut and Ellen's Nursery received support from other departments in the school district and the local community once they became an 'official' program. When the programs transitioned from ideas to sanctioned programs, other stakeholders decided to support them. The school district donated a used livestock trailer. The maintenance department of

Innovation ISD, voluntarily drafted the plans and then supplied the labor to transform an old livestock trailer into a fully equipped food trailer. The maintenance department cut the serving window, installed a breaker box, outlets, and lighting. In 2017, Jay Bonell and his team received a \$2,100 grant from a school foundation governed by their school board and community volunteers. The grantor's webpage states that the purpose of the grant is to, "support innovative academic opportunities." Applications are accepted until the third week in September for grants awarded in November. Their grant award was the single largest awarded by the Schools Foundation that year. One of the reasons that Mr. Bonell's team succeeded in obtaining a larger than average grant is because they requested funds as a team for a campus level program. According to the grant application website, "Grants to Teachers awards will be awarded by: Individual/Teacher (maximum award of \$500), Grade Level/Department (maximum award of \$1,500), and Principal/All Campus (maximum award of \$2,500)."

Ellen and Bob reported that many individuals and businesses in the community are supportive of their job training program. The owner of a local landscape supply company was the first member of the community to support their project. In the Fall of 2016, he sold approximately 20% of his lot to Ellen and Bob which serves as the site for the program. In November of 2018, Ellen's Nursery received a \$5,000 grant from Superior Healthplan which is a health insurance company. According to the grantor's website grants are awarded to, "community organizations focused on promoting the health and well-being of the communities in which they serve." The grant award was used to purchase composite floor decking for the main greenhouse. Ellen organized several opportunities in 2019 through which community members could support their program. In April, the nursery hosted a youth craft event that allowed children to create custom step stones. In August a sandwich shop donated 15% (\$110)

of sales from a selected day and a representative from a multi-level marketing company donated \$200 towards Ellen's. Ellen's Nursery also has an account with Pampered-Chef whereby a small percentage of purchases made through their portal are funneled back to the job training program.

Buy-in from parents

Based on interviews with parents and the program developers, parents support job training programs if they believe that they will help their children. Students with disabilities frequently cannot drive and rely on parents and caregivers to transport them. Students who train at the Coffee Hut need their parents to drop them off at school by 6:40 which is a full 50 minutes before classes begin. In order to gain parent buy-in, SPED faculty conveyed to parents that participating in the job training program was the equivalent of participating in band or sports. Their children would be expected to sacrifice their time and effort but would be rewarded with skills and relationships that could benefit them for a lifetime. "Parents equate participation with the job training program with participation in other activities such as band or sports" (K. Blevins, Personal Communication, May 21, 2019). Parents acknowledge that their children have fun, develop friendships, and gain meaningful skills. As a result, they willingly drive their students to "work" before school starts.

Parents support Ellen's Nursery because there are few productive outlets for people with disabilities once they age out of the public school system at 22. When asked why she chooses to send her son to Ellen's Nursery Mary Sarek stated, "It's the only one in town. If it weren't for Ellen...there's nothing else. And it is a quality program where they see possibilities. There are day-habs that I still would not send my child to" (Personal Communication, September 25, 2019).

Buy-in from participants

Getting students to participate and believe in the Coffee Hut was easy for the faculty that supervise it. I observed that students who greeted and served coffee were excited and quick to initiate conversations. Kim Blevins agreed, “The kids really enjoy working here” (2019). The students who participate in the program appear to find the work meaningful and enjoyable. I had the impression that the students like wearing their aprons and the attention that they get from serving coffee in the middle of campus. The program can place students on the stocking/cleaning crew, the logistics/accounting, or the serving crew. The program has enough diversity for faculty to place students in positions that suit them. None of the job positions are physically strenuous and only the greeter is exposed directly to the sun. Students enjoy interacting with and serving their peers and the campus environment is familiar to them.

In contrast, Ellen’s Nursery is an off-campus business that is less accommodating to participants. Participants are dropped off at the nursery by parents, attendants, or teachers from the local school district. The environment replicates a job site in every way except the presence of Ellen and her faculty that supervise participants. Trainees working in the main greenhouse smiled frequently and appeared to enjoy their jobs. They were able to work in pairs, had a supervisor near them most of the time, and had protection from direct sunlight. Receiving job training at Ellen’s is more strenuous for participants. Shifts can last over four hours compared to 100-minute blocks at the Coffee Hut. Even with a lunch break, four hours of work is a long time for trainees to stay engaged and active. Many of the trainees had not performed physical labor or worked outdoors prior to placement at Ellen’s. Working at Ellen’s is less social than the Coffee Hut. It is common for trainees to spend the majority of their time working independently and to go their entire shift without interacting with customers or other trainees apart from their

break. Although gaining independence is the ultimate goal of Ellen's training program, the experience is not necessarily fun.

Receiving job training at Ellen's is a challenge for the participants. It is a realistic work environment designed by a professional who knows how to prepare people with disabilities to succeed in a 'real world environment'. Unfortunately, participants do not receive pay for their efforts. Earning money for work is one of the highlights of having a job. Some people do not enroll at Ellen's because work is on a volunteer basis. Other participants quit because they are not motivated to work without pay. For participants and their caregivers to buy-in to the program, they need to understand the value of receiving job training. Participants also need the wisdom to know that if they can achieve at Ellen's Nursery they have a solid foundation for paid employment. Bill Dobins placed his 17-year-old son at Ellen's Nursery for job training in 2018. He said that he really liked Ellen, but, "Took him out because he wasn't earning any money" (Personal Communication, September 23, 2019). Bill's son received a paid job with a landscaping company afterwards, but was let go after two weeks because the supervisor observed that he could not follow directions or work independently.

What Are Some Best Practices for the Successful Design of Job-Training Programs?

Designing a student-centered job training program is paramount. The goal of school transition is to empower students, help them to achieve their personal goals, and to improve their quality of life. Participants of the job training program have unique goals, abilities, and areas of need. The experience at a job training program should be intentionally designed to support the unique considerations of each participant.

Provide a range of job positions

The diversity of tasks that students can perform in order to support the Coffee Hut is one of the program's strengths. Non-verbal students can stock and clean the trailer, immobile students can keep track of sales and inventory. Some jobs take the students outside and others are performed indoors. The design of the program creates the potential for students to rotate and experience positions that improve math, reading, writing, and social skills.

In addition to improving multiple IEP goals, a wide range of tasks provides trainees with a more meaningful experience. When students experience a variety of tasks they gain a better understanding of what type of job they want to have. Kaily observed that students often changed their minds on what type of job they wanted once they worked at the Coffee Hut. She said that some students dreaded working at the cash register but really enjoyed it once they learned how. She said that some students had the opposite experience.

Align student tasks with their IEP goals

A job training program needs to be results oriented. When asked why she chose Eldred's Nursery, Mary Sarek remarked, "there are day-habs, that I would not send my child to" (2019). Mary and other parents perceive day-habs as day care for adults with disabilities. They are viewed as holding places where TV watching and finger painting are the daily highlights. In contrast, successful job training programs provide a venue where students can gain the exact skills that they need to access the jobs and lifestyle that they desire. Successful job training programs are the intervention through which educators and students make progress on IEP goals and transition plans.

Participants at the Coffee Hut job training site are assigned positions based on their IEP goals. The IEP goals are developed by SPED faculty after using the interviewing students and

recording data using the Transition Planning Inventory School Form (TPI). Teachers rate students based on their current level of competence on employment related questions. Teachers rate students on a scale of 0-5 for 46 statements. ‘Knows how to gain entry into an appropriate vocational/technical school’ and ‘Expresses feelings and ideas to others appropriately’ are examples of the questions in the survey (PRO-ED, 1997).

The previous account of the student who transitioned from the Coffee Hut to The Olive Garden illustrates the impact of aligning training with goals. The Coffee Hut faculty identified the student’s area of need, placed him in a setting where he practiced, and provided a faculty member to support and monitor him as he learned.

Provide appropriate support faculty

Trainees with disabilities require faculty who are capable and dedicated to training them. Ann Landry said, “It is not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings” (Kruse, 2014). When people with disabilities are at a job site it is sometimes easier to do a task for them or to ignore them than to train and supervise them. For instance, when the nursery is closed on Sunday Ellen waters all of the plants on the site by herself in approximately one and a half hours. In contrast, Ellen spends two hours supervising 2-3 trainees when they water the plants. While training students to water, Ellen has to provide guidance, inspect, and then have trainees re-water plants that they accidentally or purposefully ignored. It would be faster and less frustrating for Ellen to water the plants herself. Ellen has a passion for helping youth with disabilities to become independent so she endures the process of teaching them over and over.

Managers at job sites in the community often lack the understanding or time to supervise trainees with disabilities. Restaurants are fast paced work environments. A job coach visiting

Eldred's told me about a student placed in a kitchen for job training. She conveyed that her student spent a significant amount of his time just standing in the corner of the kitchen because the manager and other faculty were not willing to redirect him when he needed assistance.

Provide appropriate accommodations

People with disabilities may require reasonable accommodations to perform tasks at work. According to the office of disability rights, a reasonable accommodation:

Can be described as any change or adjustment to the job, the work environment or the way work is customarily done which permits a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to perform the essential functions of a job or to enjoy the equal benefits and privileges of employment as are available to a similarly situated employee without a disability (Bowser, 2019)

Job training sites should make a conscious effort to provide accommodations to trainees when appropriate. I observed that trainees consistently forgot to water individual and sometimes entire rows of trees at the nursery. Keeping track of which trees were watered was sometimes confusing for me, and I had to walk around and inspect the soil in the tree pots numerous times in order to find out which trees needed watering. I think that trainees would benefit from signs on the rows to help workers keep track of their progress. Placing placards on individual trees would likely help trainees as well. Accommodations are integrated into every aspect of the Coffee Hut. For instance, faculty use Keurig single serving coffee because it prevents measuring and avoids a hot pot. Faculty posted instructions on the walls and large icons on the cash register.

The Office of Disability Rights provides accommodations for businesses to consider as well as accommodations that are legal requirements. Restructuring a job, allowing flexible work schedules, and modifying or purchasing equipment are methods businesses can use to accommodate employees with disabilities. Job training programs should integrate

accommodations and teach trainees to advocate for accommodations once they transition to regular employment.

Questions That Remain Unanswered

There are questions that this study has not answered that would provide valuable insight into the field of employment training for students with disabilities. One question that should be answered is, ‘What is the impact of campus-based vs community-based programs for schools?’ Educators would be more likely to implement campus-based employment programs if they had data that measures their impact in comparison to community-based programs.

‘What business models are practical besides selling coffee or operating a plant nursery?’ is another unanswered question. Coffee is a popular drink that has higher profit margins than several other beverages. Unfortunately, coffee is considered unhealthy by some and is not always popular during hot days. Making coffee is also a simple task compared with many job skills. Are there business models that incorporate technology or working from home?

Interaction Between the Research and the Context

My interaction with participants in Innovation ISD did not appear to have an impact on the operation of their program. My continual questioning provided an opportunity for them to reflect on the process that they experienced in order to establish their programs and the factors that led to its success. I expect that my inquiry was encouraging and reminded them that their job training program is successful and innovative enough to serve as a model of study.

My interaction with Ellen’s Nursery was more immersive and impactful. I worked as diligently as I could during my time volunteering and attempted to contribute as much as possible. The founder of Ellen’s Nursery asked for my opinion on the program’s operation and I told her that I thought that the participants needed to be reminded of, “Why”. Watering and

repotting plants in the heat with mosquitoes buzzing around is fairly difficult and monotonous. Some of the trainees seemed unmotivated and they did a poor job watering, moved slowly, and appeared to not want to be there. One worker that I assisted brought a smile to my face when after 3 hours of near total silence the first sentence that he initiated was, “Work is trash.” I suggested to the program director that the workers need continual reminders of the value of the job training site and how their experience there will benefit them. I also believe that the workers may be more motivated if they receive frequent reminders of ‘Why’ their efforts are significant. For instance, the workers tend to underwater or skip plants during watering. Ellen should remind trainees that plants will wilt or die if underwatered and thus cannot be sold.

While volunteering at Ellen’s I noticed that the trainees watered scores of pots that had dead plants. Pots with dead plants mixed in with the living consume precious space, water, and time. I removed all of the dead plants in the nursery and recycled the soil from those pots. The recycled soil filled two wheel barrels. I also organized pallets and pots in the rear of the nursery and dumped out several 50-gallon pots holding rainwater that were breeding countless mosquitos. I hope that my extra burst of labor contributed in a small way to the success of such a wonderful job training program.

How Did the Context Impact the Results?

Innovation ISD is a mid-sized city that is isolated from other cities. The school district encompasses all of the students within the city and receives a large amount of support from the community. As a result, the Coffee Hut was able to receive a community grant and a grant from the school district. Funds from the grants covered the expense of renovating and equipping the trailer with a register and machinery. Ellen’s Nursery serves students from the community and

also received community grants and support from local businesses. Which indicates that organizations are willing to support job training programs if they serve their local community.

Locating a job training program on a school campus has advantages over an off-campus site. After two years of operation, Ellen's Nursery is still striving to become a profitable business. The program competes with several well-established local and commercial nurseries. In contrast, the Coffee Hut's location in the center of a large campus provides a constant flow of customers who are inclined to support the mission of training students with disabilities. The steady flow of potential customers enabled the business to turn a profit on year one.

Ellen's Nursery is disadvantaged because of its location. The directors had to purchase the property on which they operate. The location is close to the heart of the city, but it is not easily visible to passing cars. City ordinances prevent the Nursery from erecting a large enough business sign which makes attracting customers difficult. Unlike city leaders, the board that makes decisions that affect the Coffee Hut are also stakeholders invested in the success of that business. The Coffee Hut is able to locate anywhere on school property, does not have to compete with numerous other businesses, and is favored by the local leadership.

Summary of Chapter Four

Gaining buy-in from SPED faculty, school administrators, parents, school departments, community organizations, and participants is the most significant factor when implementing a job training program for people with disabilities. Gathering a core team to implement the program is the first step in program implementation. Jay Bonell brought key members of his SPED team together and Ellen Penders gained the full support of her husband Bob. The core team is better equipped to share their vision and plan with other stakeholders.

Communicating the need for dedicated job training for people with disabilities in conjunction with a thorough business plan was an effective process for the leaders of the Coffee Hut. Parents, administrators, and other stakeholders supported the job training programs because they believed that it was safe and beneficial for the trainees.

Designing a student-centered program is also important when implementing a job training program. Place trainees intentionally. Assign them positions that strengthen skills and progress them towards their specific employment goal. The job training program should offer a variety of job positions to accommodate the diversity of trainee abilities and employment goals.

Trainees benefit during job training when there are faculty members who know how to guide them. Supervisors who are not trained frequently do too much to assist trainees or ignore them. The job training program needs appropriate staffing. Finally, trainees benefit when they have accommodations to help them perform their responsibilities. Wheelchair accessibility, appropriate restrooms, a changing area, and visual aids are accommodations that are often needed on a job site.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The activities that students are engaged in on the job site must be intentionally guided by their Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Job training programs are businesses and demand continual attention, time, effort. Educators that run job training programs must maintain a sharp focus on accommodating the needs and goals of their students. For instance, if a trainee wants to work in a retail setting, the student is suited to receive training around merchandise, customers, and a register. If the student has a communication disability that would likely preclude working in a retail setting independently, job training faculty should provide support until the student improves in specific communication goals. Providing work assignments that specifically relate to unique student goals improves student motivation because they can see the relevance of their job training to the career goals that they have expressed in IEP meetings.

In addition to intentionally placing and supporting students based on their explicit IEP goals, the job training program must accommodate the needs and limitations of the faculty that operate it. The job training program must not require school faculty to work outside of normal business hours. SPED faculty are not available on the weekends. Teachers work on a contract basis and cannot be expected to work outside of their contract requirements. In order to prevent teachers from overextending themselves, the business model should not incorporate products that have quick expiration dates or need care during weekends or holidays.

For instance, many of the plants at Ellen's Nursery wilt or die if they are not watered daily during the hot Texas summer months. Responsible faculty must water plants before noon on weekends and during holidays. Watering at Ellen's Nursery takes one person approximately 2 hours which is a huge commitment during weekends and holidays. It is also a best practice to

establish a business model that has a low skill threshold for the faculty that operate it. A plant nursery is a high-skill business. Plants are seasonal and require regular repotting as they outgrow their pots. Knowing when to order plants, which variety to select, and what quantity to purchase is also a high skill task. Skill in purchasing plant inventory has a direct impact on business profitability. Driving to a wholesale nursery and bringing plants back to the job site is time consuming, requires cash on hand, and is physically hard. The high level of skill needed to manage a profitable nursery is a limiting factor for that program model. In contrast, providing coffee and sno-cones is a low skill service that does not involve perishable inventory. With minimal support, students can operate every aspect of the Coffee Hut and SPED faculty do not need a high business acumen to understand the fundamentals of selling coffee. The coffee is shelf stable and does not require attention during weekends or holidays.

Discussion of Results in Relation to the Extant Literature or Theories

The development process of the Coffee Hut illustrates the dependent nature of this job training program but it does not clearly show how other departments are dependent on it. The Coffee Hut required written approval from the school district, funds to buy equipment, and skilled labor; but do the other departments and stakeholders depend on the Coffee Hut for their existence? The answer is both, 'Yes', and 'No' depending on your perspective.

The district administration, maintenance department, students with disabilities, their parents, and teachers all functioned and existed before the Coffee Hut was established. In light of this fact they are not dependent on it. But, before the Coffee Hut these stakeholders were unable to comply with the guidelines of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or the precepts of their own District's mission statement. In respect to the obligation of schools to provide transition services, Section 300.43 of IDEA states that transition services should be,

‘designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities’ (IDEA, 2004). Without access to employment programs, students can only receive instruction. Programs such as the Coffee Hut are necessary to provide training through actual work experience. A job training program that does not offer immersion in a work environment is not ‘results-oriented’. It is equivalent to a football team that doesn’t wear uniforms, walk on a field, or touch a football during practice. If campus administrators would not accept a football program that allows practice to consist of a lecture in the locker room, should they accept job training programs that do not leave the classroom? Is the empowerment of students with disabilities to achieve independence less significant than a sport?

In addition to compliance with IDEA, campus-based employment is necessary for school districts to meet the tenets of their own mission statements. For instance, IISD’s mission statement is, ‘The mission of Innovation Independent School District is to engage all students in a relevant and inspiring education that produces future-ready graduates.’ Job training programs are the only intervention that I am aware of that can enable students with moderate to severe disabilities become ‘future-ready graduates. IISD needs the Coffee Hut to engage and inspire ‘all’ of its students; without it, they are only engaging ‘some’ of their students.

The literature on Empowerment Theory mirrored the results focused expectations of IDEA. According to Zimmerman the most effective means of fostering a sense of empowerment is by providing people with an opportunity to learn skills that enable them to interact with people in a meaningful way (Zimmerman, Marc A., Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992). Work experiences provide the empowerment variables that Peterson discussed (Peterson, 2014) such as skill development, perceived competence, resource mobilization, and community involvement.

Campus-based employment programs are the necessary intervention for school districts to provide the skills that empower students.

Discussion of Personal Lessons Learned

I was amazed that Jay Bonell and his team established the Coffee Hut. Special education departments are often short faculty. SPED teachers often express how busy and stressed out they are over the myriad of responsibilities that they have. Getting his faculty to arrive early to work and take on the stress of establishing an innovative program is amazing to me. The willingness of Jay and his faculty to pioneer a project like the Coffee Hut reflects their passion for students and belief in campus-based job training. The success of Ellen's Nursery is also a testament to passionate educators with a vision. Ellen and her husband Bob have given tens of thousands of dollars and nearly three years of volunteer work six-seven days a week. I am not sure I have ever met a couple that have given so much.

I was also impressed at the level of community support that both programs have received. I learned that stakeholders are willing to contribute and support impactful programs. Both Ellen and Jay's team presented viable plans and showed that they were in the process of making their job training programs a reality. Other people witnessed their good work and were willing to contribute. Communities have resources for worthy endeavors.

I learned how the questions of research guide the study. I was aware at the beginning of this study that it was the driving factor for my research, but I failed to frame all data collection around the research question. I should have focused more when collecting data. I mistakenly assumed that participants would provide data after I developed good rapport with them and conducted initial interviews. In contrast, I should have asked for all data up front in order to give participants as much time as possible to gather and give it to me.

Implications for Practice

Creating opportunities on a school campus for job training is an impactful and efficient way to educate students. According to the director for the Coffee Hut, many students who participate in the program make significant progress on their IEP transition goals. According to the VAC, trainees typically improve in skills relevant to achieving independence such as: communicating, computation, organizing, and cleaning.

In addition to effectively providing job skills, job training programs enabled participants to interact with their community and to develop friendships with peers.

Connect to Context

The Coffee Hut is so well staffed and organized that I have few suggestions. I would consider expanding the menu to items such as power bars or chips. I would also consider encouraging additional teachers to volunteer to operate the Cafe during significant school events such as football games. I think that the students who operate the Cafe would enjoy the experience and the extra profits could allow the department to pay for even more items or field trips. Increasing the menu items or days of operation would be contingent on receiving more staffing outside of the current SPED faculty. What if the Cafe used some of the funds to hire restaurant managers to supervise the trainees during football events? That could provide the trainees with the experience of working with non-SPED trained faculty which is a better reflection of their futures.

Ellen's Nursery is raising funds to make their program more accessible. They want a wheelchair ramp, bathrooms, and more job positions for their students. I see pros and drawbacks to the actual business model. I think that plants require too much care. I think that growing plants in a nursery is too demanding for the faculty. It is too much effort for faculty members to

water plants during weekends and holidays. Trainees with disabilities also affect the plants negatively when they over or under water them. Furthermore, the plant nursery business is very competitive. There are over 10 other plant nurseries in the same small city. The Coffee Cafe is surrounded by students and teachers who eagerly support the business. Ellen's Nursery has to work much harder to attract patrons. Despite the obstacles, Ellen and her team are the only organization that are providing job training in her area. I would recommend for her to install sprinklers on the plants that could water when the business when it is closed.

Connect to Field of Study

This study contributes to the study of transition services for people with disabilities. It describes programs that are results oriented and contribute to empowering students at school in the community. The programs included are examples of what can exist when educators create a plan and organize community resources. Participants expressed that there is a systemic lack of job training programs for people with disabilities. This study explores innovative approaches to creating opportunities that improve outcomes.

Lessons Learned

Including additional sites would have improved the quality of the data, but campus-based job training sites that are developed beyond small coffee cart programs are uncommon. It was difficult to collect data from Innovation ISD because it was located several hours from me. I had to work to build rapport with participants and collect data when it was most convenient for them. Near the end of the study participants sent me a portion of what I requested or did not respond at all. It would have been more practical to select a program with more access if possible.

Comparing the campus-based job training programs with those based in the community would have been ideal. Parents were a good source of data, and I regret not making their participation a priority. They could have shared additional data such as their perspective about the impact of the program on their families.

Recommendations

There are many areas on the topic of job training and transition for students with disabilities that need further research. Campus-based job training programs are logistically easier for faculty, parents, and students. Students in campus-based programs are easier to monitor and supervise. SPED faculty can customize campus-based positions to suit the needs of their students. Researchers need to collect data that measures the impact of campus-based programs in comparison with job training located in the community. If campus-based programs are as economical and effective as I predict, educators need to know.

I also think that educators that create job training programs need fresh ideas on what types of business they can implement. Coffee cart programs dominate the field. Creating plant nurseries is the second most discussed business model. For instance, Jay Bonell mentioned that he wants to add a plant nursery if he expands his job training program. I think that students with disabilities need access to employment in 21st Century jobs. Are there job training models that could include the use of technology? Many people with disabilities would benefit if they could work from home, are there job training models that could prepare them for home-based employment?

Closing Thoughts

Ellen's Nursery and the Coffee Hut exist because a small team of educators were willing to take risks and volunteer a tremendous amount of time. Programs like these are exceptional

and rare but they shouldn't be. It is unfortunate that job training programs designed to prepare students with disabilities are noteworthy enough to study. It is sad that the nearest school with a campus-based job training program was several hours away from me. There are many special education teachers who have established small drink serving stations as part of their career and technology programs for students with IEPs, but campus or district level programs are extremely rare.

Job training should not be an add-on program, it should be the norm in every high school. The goal of the Texas Education Agency is, "to improve outcomes for all public school students in the state." (TEA, 2014). Providing students with disabilities the skills to achieve their goals should be an intentional aspect of every high school campus. School districts should integrate job training opportunities into the campus budgets and staffing plans before the first brick for a school is set in place. Students with disabilities could progress towards their IEP goals by assisting in classrooms, with campus safety, in the cafeteria, main office, and in nearly every other area of a school. It is my hope that public schools transition to organizations that leverage their resources to create opportunities that include everyone.

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