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A Qualitative Exploration of the Experiences of General Education Teachers in the Transition Planning Process

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Abstract

The transition from school to assuming adult roles is difficult for many, but individuals with disabilities often face additional challenges during this time. A variety of stakeholders are involved in helping students during the transition process and teachers, in particular, guide students through many transitions. Using a phenomenological approach, this study explored teacher perspectives and understanding of the transition planning process (TPP). Thirteen elementary and high school general education teachers completed questionnaires and participated in semi-structured interviews. The responses to their questionnaires were explored using descriptive analyses while interview data were examined using thematic analysis. The results focus on teacher perceptions in three overarching areas: skills important for transition planning, roles of stakeholders, and the larger policy context. The themes that emerged highlighted the skills deemed important for transition planning: interpersonal, academic, coping, learning, and self-determination skills. Themes related to the role of stakeholders underscored the notions of stakeholders as providers of knowledge, the importance of interactions between stakeholders, and involvement in procedural aspects of the TPP. The larger policy context revolved around a discussion of legislation, procedural components of the TPP, and the timing of transition planning. An examination of the barriers and supports to the TPP revealed challenges that elementary and middle school teachers encounter and how stakeholders such as psychologists and administrators can support teacher involvement in the TPP. Recommendations for practice, policy, and future research will be presented that center around resources and training for teachers, starting transition planning earlier in a child's education, and utilizing community resources.

Résumé

La transition de l'école à la vie active est difficile pour de nombreux individus, mais pour ceux qui sont en situation d'handicap, il y a souvent des défis supplémentaires durant cette période. Divers intervenants sont impliqués dans ce processus de transition, et les enseignants, en particulier, guident les étudiants à travers de nombreuses transitions. En utilisant une approche phénoménologique, cette étude à explorer les perspectives des enseignants, ainsi que leur compréhension de la préparation d'un plan de transition (PPT). Treize enseignants des niveaux primaires et secondaires ont rempli des questionnaires et ont participé à des entretiens semi-directifs. Les réponses aux questionnaires ont été explorées à l'aide d'analyses descriptives, tandis que les données des entretiens ont été examinées à l'aide d'une analyse thématique. Les résultats se concentrent sur les perceptions des enseignants dans trois domaines généraux: les compétences importantes pour la planification de la transition, les rôles des intervenants et le contexte politique plus large. Les thèmes clés de l'étude ont soulevé les compétences jugées importantes pour la planification de la transition: les compétences interpersonnelles, académiques, d'adaptation, d'apprentissage et d'autodétermination. Les thèmes liés au rôle des parties prenantes ont souligné l'importance des parties prenantes en tant que fournisseurs de connaissances ; l'importance des interactions entre les parties prenantes; ainsi que la participation des intervenants aux aspects procéduraux du PPT. Le contexte politique plus globale était axé sur une discussion de la législation, des composantes procédurales du PPT et du calendrier de la planification de la transition. L'examination des obstacles et des soutiens PPT ont révélé des défis auxquels sont confrontés les enseignants du primaire et du secondaire, et la façon dont les intervenants, tels que les psychologues et les administrateurs, peuvent soutenir la participation des enseignants au PPT. Des recommandations pour la pratique, la politique et la recherche

seront présentées et organisées autour de ressources et de programmes de formation pour les enseignants; de la création d’un PPT plus tôt dans l'éducation de l'enfant; et de l’utilisation de ressources communautaires.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Transitions are an inescapable part of life and frequently pose challenges for those involved. However, individuals with disabilities often face additional challenges when it comes to making the transition from high school to postsecondary education, the workplace, or to the community (Kohler & Field, 2003). These challenges may be encountered when forming life goals, living independently, learning new life skills, and adapting to physical barriers at work and within the community (King, Baldwin, Currie, & Evans, 2005). Additionally, coping with physical, cognitive or behavioural difficulties that may be inherent to a disability, as well as dealing with a lack of appropriate accommodations may further exacerbate these areas of concern (Field, Hoffman, & Posch, 1997). While all adolescents form expectations about their life beyond high school, these expectations and beliefs of how they will fare in various life domains, such as education, employment, and parenthood, may differ for students with disabilities when compared to those without disabilities (Shandra, 2011). During their years of schooling, students with disabilities may require additional support and assistance to help prepare them for life beyond high school. Since it is vital that students be set up for future success, it is crucial that those involved within students' support network possess the appropriate knowledge and attitudes needed to effectively provide support.

In order to support students within the school system, there is a push towards Inclusive Education. Through involvement in and access to the general curriculum, students can learn important life skills that will assist them when transitioning to adult roles (Wehman, 2013). In inclusive classrooms, children with disabilities are educated alongside children without disabilities, but are provided with appropriate accommodations and supports to establish the least restrictive environment (Valentine, 2001). The opportunity to participate in inclusive classrooms

is a strong predictor of post-school adjustment (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010). Coupled with the opportunity to develop other important life skills, participating in inclusive classrooms help students with the transition of leaving school and assuming new roles within the community, work force, or with future education (Wehman, 2013). Plans are set up within the school system in order to help students achieve success while attending school and preparing for the future. To identify the needs and supports a student requires, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are documents that are created by the school system, often for students with an identified disability. IEPs are reviewed annually to review progress and to establish goals (Wehman, 2001).

Although transitions may be commonly thought of as the movement between various classroom activities or physical settings, the transition planning literature often defines transition as "a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community" (Halpern, 1994, p. 117). These roles in the community encompass areas such as employment, pursuing postsecondary schooling, maintaining a home, involvement in the community, and the development and maintenance of personal and social relationships (Halpern, 1994). Therefore, having opportunities to develop skills in these areas would help with transition outcomes. Areas such as planning for future employment, inclusion in general education classrooms, family involvement, training in social skills, and self-determination training are areas that should be taken into consideration when planning for the future (Wehman, 2013). Of note, self-determination refers to "volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one's life and to maintain or improve one's quality of life" (Wehmeyer, 2005, p. 117) and can include skills such as: choice-making; decision-making; problem-solving; goal-setting and attainment; independence, risk-taking, and safety; self-observation, evaluation, and

reinforcement; self-instruction; and self-advocacy and leadership (Wehmeyer, Agran, et al., 2007; Wehmeyer, Sands, Doll, & Palmer, 1997).

Transition planning generally refers to the process of preparing for adult roles and future life beyond high school, through the identification of the goals and needs required for a smooth transition. This process is collaborative in nature, involving the student, family members, teachers, and other professionals and service providers, while taking a holistic approach where multiple life domains are identified in order to assist in the transition (Steere, Rose, & Cavioulo, 2007). The transition plan, as initially described in the Ontario Transition Guide (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002) refers to "the school's written plan to assist the student in making a successful transition from school to work, further education, and community living" (p. 3). However, in a draft of a document of Special Education policies in Ontario, which was released to the public in the fall of 2017, this explanation was expanded to indicate that transition plans must apply to all key transitions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017). Transition plans need to address a range of skills and services that students require in order to successfully integrate into the community upon leaving school (Brooke, Revel, & Wehman, 2009). In some cases, the Individual Transition Plan (ITP) could be a component of a student's IEP and would be reviewed at the same time as the IEP (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, 2017).

Since both IEPs and ITPs require the identification of the needs, abilities, and preferences of the student, gathering information and opinions from various stakeholders would be highly beneficial to the process when creating these documents. These perspectives may include gathering information from the student, their families, teachers and other professionals within the school system, and any other influential person in the student's life. Therefore, it would be

useful to understand how these various stakeholders interact and how teachers in particular interact with the other school stakeholders.

Study Overview

This study seeks to examine the role of teachers in the transition planning process (TPP), since they are at the forefront of teaching students the skills to help them succeed when adopting adult roles. Additionally, as transition planning is complex and multifaceted, this study seeks to examine teachers' perceptions of their role, as well as the role of other stakeholders in the TPP. Specifically, how teachers perceive the role of school psychologists and administrators will be examined, as these stakeholders are valuable supports and resources that can provide assistance and resources in the shaping of the class and school environment. This thesis will begin with a discussion of models that provide a framework of how transition planning can be conceptualized to best support students on their life paths beyond high school. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) will be used to highlight the interactional factors and contexts that shape human development and how these factors are important in order to understand transitions and challenges during transitory periods. Subsequently, models specific to transition planning will be presented. Following will be a review of the literature on transition planning, as well as the involvement of various stakeholders in the process, in particular teachers and their roles and perspectives. Next will be a description of the qualitative research methodology employed for the current study and the reasons this methodology was selected. This will be followed by a description of the data and exploration of the themes that arose from the teacher interviews and a discussion and interpretation of the themes and how the derived information can help inform future practice.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development and the TPP

Transition planning involves a complex interplay among a variety of factors, and includes the involvement of multiple people and their perspectives in the process. Furthermore, each stage of development shapes the way we approach transitions at various points in an individual's life. Bronfenbrenner created a theory of development that provides a framework for understanding the complex interactions between the diverse factors involved in the TPP. Bronfenbrenner's model has evolved over the course of three phases starting with his ecological model of human development to a bioecological model of human development, the most current model (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) illustrates the way in which reciprocal interactions influence and structure the course of human development. There are four different levels that impact an individual's development: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. Planning for one's future beyond school is complex and multifaceted, and can be conceptualized by the consideration and coordination of the different levels within this model.

The bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) places an emphasis on complex systems and processes where development is viewed as nuanced interactions within and between contexts. This model also highlights how individual characteristics and the environment influence these processes (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The bioecological model is based on two prepositions, the first:

> …human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environments. To be effective the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of

> time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 797)

The second preposition:

> The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person, the environment – both immediate and more remote – in which the processes are taking place, the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration, and the social continuities and changes occurring over time through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 798)

The bioecological model also assumes that biological and evolutionary factors impose limits on an individual's development, and certain environmental conditions and experiences are required to ensure development of an individual's highest potential (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Since students with disabilities enter environments with set biological predispositions, environmental conditions must be altered to help students achieve their utmost potential. This is where teacher knowledge and preparation is important, since teachers help shape the classroom environment and provide support for student success.

In order to operationalize these concepts to be used in research design, the process-person-context-time model was described to help researchers understand and examine the factors that are related to development. There are three types of person characteristics described in this model: forces, resources, and demands (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Force characteristics are those most likely to have an influence on developmental outcomes, and are those behavioural factors that can either initiate and sustain, or disrupt and interfere, with proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Those with disruptive forces would

find it challenging to engage in more complex interactions over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Resource characteristics are those that impact an individual's ability to effectively engage in proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Resource factors that can support proximal processes include: "ability, knowledge, skill, and experience" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 812) and those that can interfere with or disrupt proximal processes include: "genetic defects, low birth weight, physical handicaps, severe and persistent illness, or damage to brain function through accident or degenerative processes" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 812). Demand characteristics are those that "invite or discourage reactions from the social environment that can disrupt or foster processes of psychological growth" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 812). Therefore, for those individuals who are already at a disadvantage due to biological factors, exposures to experiences and acquisition of skills are important to increase the ability of individuals to engage in proximal processes.

Transition planning and the microsystem: Aspects that support interactions within the environment. A number of people and factors are involved in supporting students through school and these interactions shape the way a child develops and is prepared for life beyond school. The microsystem encompasses the immediate aspects of the environment that the individual experiences, including activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). At this level, in addition to the direct influence of the individual's family, teachers are one of the main stakeholders involved in helping students develop the skills required to support transitions. Therefore, how teachers shape the classroom environment and the way in which they work with the students within their classroom is important to creating an atmosphere to support successful transitions for students.

Past research has shown that successful inclusive environments are shaped and influenced by teaching strategies, effective instruction methods, as well as teachers' attitudes and behaviours (Lindsay, 2007). In particular, a high sense of self-efficacy among teachers is considered integral to successful inclusive classrooms (Sharma, Loreman & Forlin, 2012). Self-efficacy refers to the belief in one's capability to perform a test necessary to achieve certain goals (Bandura, 1977). Teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy are likely to acknowledge the difficulties their students face in the classroom and alter teaching methods accordingly (Brady & Woolfson, 2008), are more likely to implement inclusive programs successfully (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002), and report less behavioural issues from all types of students and hold more positive attitudes towards inclusion (Munthe & Thuen, 2009). The greater the degree of self-efficacy, the more likely that teachers are resilient and will persevere in overcoming obstacles and facing failure, which may then have a positive impact on future teaching and student learning (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). Furthermore, collective teacher efficacy, referring to teacher perceptions that the combined efforts within the school can have a positive impact on students, is strongly related to, and predictive of, student achievement in school (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000). In order to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy, teachers would benefit from the support of other professionals, since their prior training may have insufficiently prepared them to work with students of varying needs and abilities or the demands placed on them may exceed their workload capacity.

At the level of the student, fostering skills in certain domains can bolster student success upon leaving structured school environments. Specifically, self-determination skills should be promoted throughout a student's education, in order for them to have the capabilities to participate in desired roles and activities upon leaving school (Wehmeyer, 1997). In order to

engage in self-determined behaviour, students must: "act autonomously, self-regulate their behaviour, and be psychologically empowered and self-realizing" (Wehmeyer et al., 1997, p. 307). Wehmeyer et al. (1997) provided a description of these four characteristics. Acting autonomously refers to the capability to independently behave according to one's own preferences, interests, or abilities. Self-regulated behaviour involves the ability to evaluate an environment or situation and manage one's own behaviour accordingly. Being psychologically empowered refers to the perception of one's ability to control a situation and of the skills one possesses that can be applied to achieve a desired outcome. Finally, self-realization refers to an awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses in the context of their environment (Wehmeyer et al., 1997). Fostering self-determination skills supports a student's ability to have control over their lives, make choices, and increase positive outcomes upon leaving school (Wehmeyer, 1997). Educational practices can be implemented across a student's education, starting in the pre-school years, to provide students with opportunities to learn and practice self-determination skills (Wehmeyer et al., 1997).

Although further investigation is required, previous research has found that self-determination impacts adult outcomes, and that there is a positive relationship between self-determination and employment (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, & Little, 2015). Research has also shown a link between self-determination and student involvement in the TPP. In particular, self-regulation and self-realization are noted to contribute more to knowledge and skills related to transition planning, as opposed to their type of disability (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, Garner, & Lawrence, 2007). However, research has also demonstrated that overall, student involvement in the IEP process is typically minimal, with a tendency to have more involvement at the secondary level and less so at the elementary and middle school levels

(Mason, Field, & Sawilowsky, 2004). Lack of involvement in processes such as IEP meetings means that students are not given the opportunity to self-advocate or to develop a greater self-knowledge and awareness of the process. Therefore, students are losing out on the chance to develop their self-determination skills and be active participants in the process when planning for their future. Previous research looking at the viewpoints of individuals with disabilities of what aided self-determination highlighted that students described their experience at school and with teachers as insulated; they felt they were sheltered and assisted too much during the process. This did not provide an environment that would allow them to develop self-determination skills. It was once they left the safety of school and were participating in situations that presented with greater risk that they were able to use goal directed behaviour and develop their self-determination skills (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2011).

While pre-service teachers may have a basic understanding of what self-determination is and strategies that can help teach self-determination skills, there is a superficial understanding of how to implement these strategies and misconceptions of when to implement self-determination strategies (Thoma, Pannozzo, Fritton, & Bartholomew, 2008). Previous research has examined the viewpoints of general and special educators on the importance placed on various self-determination domains and the extent to which they teach within those domains. While these studies have suggested that teachers value the concept of self-determination and the various skill domains (Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Stang, 2008; Stang, Carter, Lane, & Pierson, 2009), they spend less time teaching the self-determination skills in their classrooms (Stang et al., 2009) and there is a relationship between how important a domain is considered and the amount of time teachers devote to it (Carter et al., 2008). In addition to the importance placed on self-determination, teachers have also provided a viewpoint of when self-determination would be

appropriate to implement. From their perspective, self-determination would be more of a focus at the middle or high school levels, as opposed to during elementary school (Stang et al., 2009). Nevertheless, some general educators conceptualize self-determination as something that would benefit all students, not just students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2008). Therefore, although teachers may be aware of and understand the value of teaching self-determination skills, how and when to implement the teaching of these skills remains less clear.

Cho, Wehmeyer, and Kingston (2011) identified some of the barriers that prevented teachers from promoting self-determination in their classrooms. These barriers included the belief that self-determination skills would be more useful in secondary school to prepare for transitions, that students were too young, the challenge of addressing the other diverse and more urgent needs in the classroom, and the lack of training and enough time (Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2011). However, it was also found that self-regulation strategies were more likely to be taught when the teacher had more experience in the classroom (Cho, Wehmeyer, & Kingston, 2013). Although less frequently mentioned, other barriers included lacking sufficient skills, challenges with student communication, and a small number believing that due to the nature of their disabilities, students would not benefit from learning self-determination skills (Cho et al., 2011). Furthermore, other instructional priorities and curriculum requirements, as well as the behavioural challenges that are associated with some disabilities, may prevent teachers from placing a higher priority on fostering self-determination within their classroom (Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006).

Therefore, while a student's immediate environment will have an impact on their development of many beneficial skills, this only describes part of the story. Both attitudinal and situational barriers exist which pose challenges to the way a student, and teachers, can engage in

various roles and interpersonal relationships. Examining these interactions, as well as the climate and system where learning occurs, is also an important aspect for determining future outcomes.

Transition planning and the mesosytem: Interactions among transition planning participants. While who is involved in the process is very important in supporting students, it is also important how these stakeholders interact, both within and external to the school environment, in order to promote student success post-school. The mesosystem involves the reciprocal interactions between the different aspects of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Successful transition planning allows the individual to interact effectively among components of the microsystem, such as with parents, teachers, and individuals from community agencies. Identifying and nurturing supports are important for successful transitions, and parents are one resource that should be involved. One way this can be accomplished is by parents providing information about the student, such as identifying needs or providing suggestions of how to solve problems that may exist in the home environments (Wehman, 2013), and evaluating how this may relate to or influence the school environment or community involvement. Even though the importance of collaboration between schools and community agencies has been frequently addressed in the transition literature, this area has been found to be the least demonstrated transition practice based on a review of transition best practices (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010).

In order to support transitions, individuals involved in the TPP should be aware of the services and supports available for transitioning individuals to be successful in the community. Furthermore, it is helpful if the roles and responsibilities of individuals involved in the process are clear and well understood. This is often achieved by the implementation of rules and policies

that can provide guidelines, structures, and laws to clarify and highlight the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process.

Transition planning and the exosystem: The influence of setting on the process. Political and economical systems can influence a child's development. How this occurs can be understood through an individual's ability to access services or resources in their environment. Laws or regulations enacted within the system they live in will influence the individual's degree of access. Within Bronfenbrenner's model, the exosystem is a setting that impacts the child's development indirectly, such as the local government that determines laws and regulations or a parent's workplace, which may determine health benefits (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The province of Ontario, where the current study was conducted, has established legislation that addresses the need for all individuals to be equal members in society. The Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA, 2001) was established to ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal opportunities to be fully participating members within their community; this involves identifying and removing barriers that can impede the attainment of equal opportunities including physical, architectural, attitudinal or policy barriers. Legislation has been enacted for the development and enforcement of accessibility standards in areas that impact schools such as services provided or the structure of buildings (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act [AODA], 2005). Within the education system, school boards are required to provide students with disabilities access to special education programs and services (ODA, 2001).

Legislation impacts the child's environment by providing guidelines for school structures and regulations, which result in the rules that students and teachers are required to follow. At this level, administrators are influential in shaping the school climate and teachers' sense of

empowerment (Goddard, et al., 2004). This in turn may shape the classroom atmosphere. In the United States, a country known for strong federal disability legislation, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was first established in 1990 and has gone through subsequent amendments. Within IDEA, the use of IEPs and transition planning for students with disabilities is mandated (IDEA, 2004).

Within Canada, legislation regarding education is mandated at the provincial level; therefore, each province has different standards for inclusive education and transition planning and the policies and guidelines vary from province to province (Valentine, 2001). Within the province of Ontario, students with disabilities are included in regular classrooms for some subjects, while being pulled from the classroom for additional support when needed (as determined by an IEP team) in subjects such as language arts and mathematics. The Education Act in Ontario refers to students with disabilities as exceptional pupils: "a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program" (Education Act, 1990). In this policy context, a special education program, which can be enacted in an inclusive or specialized setting, refers to an educational program where an IEP is created based on the information derived from continuous assessment and evaluation. An IEP contains specific objectives and an outline of services and resources that the student requires to have their needs met (Education Act, 1990).

Within the past couple of years, the province of Ontario made amendments to legislation regarding transition planning. Prior to the changes, transition plans were mandated for a student on an IEP by the age of 14 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002, 2017). Following the changes in legislation, effective September 2014, transition plans were required for any student from

Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12 who has an IEP. These transition plans are reviewed when the IEP is reviewed, and if no supports are required during transitions then it is written that no actions are needed. All transition plans "identify specific transition goals, support needs, the actions required to achieve the goals, roles and responsibilities, and timelines for the implementation and/or completion of each of the identified actions" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 2). Plans will also be "developed in consultation with the parent(s), the student (as appropriate), the postsecondary institution (where appropriate), and relevant community agencies and/or partners" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 2). However, changing the legislation is not sufficient to ensure inclusion of transition planning within the IEP process is effective.

While it is useful to have transition plans as a component of an IEP, focusing on the year-to-year needs of a student may overpower the benefit of having a long-term vision guiding the process. Shifting how IEPs are conceptualized from a yearly plan to a strategic long-term plan can provide a different way of conceptualizing educational planning and supporting students with disabilities. Therefore, IEPs can be used to monitor progress toward long-term goals and can become individualized transition programs, and can be used as an approach for all major transitions (deFur, 2003). By conceptualizing the IEPs and ITPs as articulated by deFur (2003), we can provide a meaningful vision of how the changes in Ontario transition planning legislation can help enhance the TPP. Goals should be established early, all types of transitions should be considered, and smaller goals should be linked and provide a check-in system for longer-term goals.

Ministry guidelines also help provide a guide as to the roles and responsibilities of individuals involved within the school system. Teachers, administrators, and other professionals

within the school system (such as psychologists) must work together in order to support student development and nurture the skills that are needed for the student to be successful in the transition beyond high school. Professionals such as psychologists help assess the needs and abilities of the student and provide any recommendations or strategies to help support the student. The principal and other administrative staff help facilitate the interactions between all stakeholders and establish the guidelines and procedures involved, including ensuring that TPs are included in IEPs regardless of the child's age (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017).

Although legislation and regulations are mandated at the provincial level, the way in which these laws are enacted and implemented will vary based on the school board and the community where the school is located. School boards enact policies for an entire district, while principals determine policies and allocation of resources that suit the needs of their specific school community. However, legislation alone is not a guarantee that schools will be compliant in following the legislation, because it is also impacted by other factors. Landmark & Zhang (2013) examined how compliant transition components were with IDEA legislation within the United States. They found that less than half of the IEPs involved were fully compliant, that disability type had an influence on level of compliance. For example, compared to the other disability groups examined, students with emotional disabilities were less likely to have fully compliant IEPs, and ethnicity had an impact on level of compliance and evidence of best practices (Landmark & Zhang, 2013). Therefore, investigating some of the factors that may influence the way that legislation is understood and implemented, as well as the community and school factors that have an impact on a child's development, can be beneficial in gaining a greater understanding of factors influencing the TPP.

Transition planning and the macrosystem: The impact of culture on the process. Examining the individual aspects, relational interactions, and settings that influence development, still only provides part of the picture as to the factors that shape how a child develops. Examining the cultural climate can provide an overarching picture of how the systems previously discussed work and interact with each other. According to Bronfenbrenner's model, the macrosystem encompasses the culture to which the individual belongs and development is shaped by the beliefs and ideologies inherent in that culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). While culture has an impact on the way in which the settings within the exosystem operates, culture also plays a role in the skills that are valued within society, and therefore what is taught and encouraged within the schools and reinforced at home to support student success. This in turn can shape the supports that students receive within the classroom and the type of classroom environment that is created. Canada is a multicultural society and encourages a cultural mosaic; however, this framework poses its own challenges when supporting students at school and preparing them for life beyond school. Since students live in cultural climates that may differ between home and school, the TPP requires that communication, understanding, and cultural sensitivity is considered when there are clashes between home and school expectations and level of involvement (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001; Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2005).

Transition planning and the chronosystem: How time influences development. The concept of time is also an influencing factor in development. Bronfenbrenner introduced the concept of time in phase two of his ecological model, but the concept was further developed and refined in his bioecological model (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Bronfenbrenner discusses three levels of time: microtime, mesotime, and macrotime. Microtime refers to "continuity versus

discontinuity in ongoing episodes of proximal process" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 796), mesotime is related to how frequently these episodes happen over a time span of days or weeks, and macrotime "focuses on the changing expectations and events in the larger society, both within and across generations, as they affect and are affected by, processes and outcomes of human development over the life course" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 796). This concept of time can be useful in providing a lens for exploring how and when individuals are given opportunities to engage in reciprocal interactions. This understanding can help foster skill development and provide information about the opportunities and expectations that exist for individuals over time, aspects that are part of the TPP.

Overall, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development provides a picture of how interactions with individuals and society shape development. Taken together, the various levels of Bronfenbrenner's model highlight the variety of factors that can impact the success of transition planning. As such, it is crucial that all of the different systems are taken in consideration when planning for future transitions. Each level provides important information as to what barriers or supports may be available to individuals. The various levels also highlight areas that shape development and which can be viewed as targets of intervention or available resources that can be tapped into. Using these systems as a basis of understanding how to support students can also help better understand models specific to transition planning and how to provide supports to students for their transition beyond school. This framework was used in the current study to guide the types of interview questions that teachers were asked, as well as to develop probes to further understand teacher responses. Furthermore, this framework also provided a basis in the analyses from which to understand the various systems and interactions

that teachers are involved in, and how these processes impact student development, and more specifically the development of self-determination skills.

Models of Transition Planning

While Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model effectively demonstrates how interactions and processes shape development, it is useful to also consider models that identify those aspects that are most salient in the TPP. A few models have been developed that illustrate the different components and systems that are important and should be considered when preparing for the transition beyond school. The following transition planning models will be discussed: Will's bridges from school to working life (1983), Halpern's community adjustment model (1985), and Kohler's taxonomy of transition planning (1996).

Will's bridges from school to working life. Will (1983) wrote a concept and policy paper that guides the school to work transition. Within this document a model is described, which is comprised of three ways in which the transition from high school to employment for students with disabilities is supported: no special services, time-limited services, and ongoing services. The first bridge, no special services, is common to students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. For this bridge, students with disabilities are not provided with any special support or resources to help pave the way for this transition, and will rely on generally available or personal supports. The second bridge, time-limited service, describes the supports that students with disabilities received that they may require, such as job skills training; however, after a period of time these services are terminated once goals have been met or employment has been acquired. The final bridge, ongoing services, consists of supports that are made available that help individuals engage in and maintain work opportunities. For this to be feasible, services and policies would have to be established that would provide opportunities for this supported

employment. By taking into consideration each aspect of the model, plans for transitions can be implemented at each level to support successful transitions (Will, 1983).

While Will's model provided a simple way to identify the various transition bridges that can lead to employment and introduced the notion of supporting the transition for students with disabilities, the models that follow expanded on these concepts and provided a description of the multiple factors that interact and are integral for successful transitions.

Halpern's community adjustment model. Halpern (1985) developed the community adjustment model, which provides a comprehensive approach to transition planning that incorporates the range of supports and services that students with disabilities require to be successful in community settings upon leaving school. This model includes three components which address the transition from school to adult life and focuses on community adjustment: 1) areas that are critical to community adjustment including employment, residential living, and social and interpersonal relationships; 2) type of support or services needed to support successful transitions; and 3) systemic planning that promotes valued transition outcomes (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010). These three components must be strengthened by personal components including satisfaction, self-esteem, and empowerment (Halpern, 1989).

Halpern's model emphasizes the importance of addressing the multiple domains that make up community life. While preparing for employment is an important factor, students also need to be prepared for living in the community as well as fostering social and personal relationships. To help with the transition from school to community life, supports or services are integral, and the type of support necessary will vary depending on the needs of the individual. Supports can take the form of: generic services that are available to all people, such as counselling and advising services or supports provided by family and friends; time-limited

support, such as vocational training programs or temporary residential living support; and ongoing supports, which individuals may receive throughout their lifetime to help facilitate the transition to community living (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010).

In addition to addressing the desired outcomes, it is also important to examine the individual skills that support successful transition planning. Transition planning must encompass four major components: self-determination and empowerment, self-evaluation, identification of post-school goals, and relevant educational experiences (Halpern, 1994). These areas should be taken into consideration when constructing the transition plan in order to support successful transitions. Self-determination, which was previously discussed, is one of the major components of this model. This component involves "helping students to gain a sense of empowerment with respect to their own transition planning" (Halpern, 1994, p. 118). Self-evaluation involves teaching students how to use various assessment domains and results to appraise their knowledge, skills and needs; post-school goals address the notion that the needs and interests of the student should drive the TPP and the desired future goals; and relevant educational experiences, including hands-on learning experiences, should be pursued to help further develop the student's skills (Halpern, 1994). It is necessary for each of these areas to be attended to in order to ensure that the students' goals and needs are addressed.

Kohler's taxonomy of transition planning. While Halpern's model is focused on adjustment to the community and focuses on the areas that will help with the school to community adjustment, Kohler's (1996) taxonomy of transition planning examines multiple aspects of education that impact transition planning. Within this model the importance of outcome-oriented planning and individualization is stressed, and looks at transition planning from a broad perspective (Flexer, Baer, Luft, & Simmons, 2013). Therefore, while Halpern's

model mainly was used to address the transition to community life, Kohler's model addresses a wider range of transitions, including the transition to further education, employment, and life within the community. Through the application of this model, the goals and outcomes are geared towards each person uniquely, and the model is used as a guide to the important aspects that should be considered when planning for transitions. This model has been used to develop tools for transition planning in the United States, is widely accepted as a framework for secondary transition (Test, Fowler, et al., 2009) and appears to be the only research-based transition model currently found in the literature (Beamish, Meadows, & Davies, 2012). It has been suggested that the categories used within this taxonomy are effective when classifying predictors for postsecondary outcomes (Haber et al., 2015). This taxonomy has also been adapted for use in other cultural contexts (Beamish et al., 2012; Xu, Dempsey, & Foreman, 2016).

Kohler's taxonomy is made up of five areas: student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, program structure, and family involvement (Kohler, 1996). The first area, student-focused planning, focuses on the development of self-determination skills. It is integral that teachers provide students with opportunities within the classroom to develop their self-determination skills, as these skills need to be cultivated early in order to help prepare students with the transition beyond high school (Sitlington, Neubert, & Clark, 2010). Beginning in elementary school, and continuing throughout high school, students are guided by teachers through practice and application to strengthen these skills. Any educational decisions that are made are based on the student's goals and interests, so students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences to help inform future decisions (Kohler & Field, 2003). The second area, student development, focuses on the development of life, employment, and occupational skills, which is achieved through school and work based learning experiences.

Assessments are used in order to help determine if these experiences are beneficial, and accommodations needed are determined and put in place to help achieve successful transitions (Kohler & Field, 2003). The third area, collaborative service delivery, involves the inclusion of community businesses, organizations, and agencies to provide students with opportunities to learn and assist in transitions (Kohler & Field, 2003). The fourth area, family involvement, addresses the involvement of parents and families in the TPP (Kohler & Field, 2003). The final area, program structure, involves the policies, philosophy, planning and evaluation that provide the context within transition-focused education can be situated (Kohler & Field, 2003). A basic premise of this taxonomy is that transition planning should provide the foundation for education and not merely be seen as an additional requirement or activity that must be completed (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010).

Kohler's taxonomy of transition planning provides a helpful framework in addressing the variety of needs, situations, and individuals involved in planning for successful future outcomes. By involving students in the process and helping students develop the skills needed to reach those goals, planning would encompass and be driven by the desires of the individual. Furthermore, the involvement of important stakeholders in the process, as well as the collaboration between these individuals and service providers, are supports that are integral to those in transition. Lastly, the policies and structures put in place will guide the process. These areas and how they continue to relate to transition planning and the research in this field will be further discussed. The question then arises of when it would be most appropriate to start applying this model as it relates to preparing students for post-school transitions.

Overall, the abovementioned models show a progression of how planning for transitions has evolved over time. While Will's model highlighted the areas that are useful to consider

when transitioning to employment, Halpern's model includes the range of community settings that individuals may transition to and the skills needed and supports required to achieve this transition. Kohler's taxonomy of transition planning expands further to address the range of needs, settings, and stakeholders involved in planning for successful future outcomes, as well as the educational aspects that guide transition planning. This taxonomy is congruent with the various components of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model and the factors that impact an individual's development. These models also provide a framework from which to understand the factors, systems, and individuals that exist within school environments that have an impact on the transition beyond high school. Furthermore, they can be useful in understanding what areas should be examined to gain a greater understanding of how school psychologists and other stakeholders can support teachers in creating a successful learning environment for students with disabilities and support the development of self-determined behaviour.

The Timing of Transition Planning: Elementary and Secondary School

In order to facilitate the development of self-determined behaviour in younger children, children need to be provided opportunities to practice self-determination skills in controlled environments (Papay, Unger, Williams-Diehm, & Mitchell, 2015). Self-determination skills can be encouraged as a child develops by providing opportunities to practice and use these skills in various contexts. For instance, during the early elementary years, adults can provide children with opportunities to make choices and help them understand and recognize the benefits of various options, while self-evaluation skills could be encouraged through discussion of a student's work and comparing their work with a sample of exemplary work (Wehmeyer et al., 1997). Specific interventions for younger children could focus on areas such as goal setting, self-regulation, and strategies that relate to the student's education, such as completing

schoolwork. These school-based activities, combined with opportunities to observe, practice, and evaluate self-determination skills, are important in order for the interventions to be effective (Dunn & Thrall, 2012). Even though children still require the support and guidance from adults to care for their needs, when children are provided opportunities to learn and practice skills related to self-determination, it provides the foundation for the development and application of these skills during adolescence and adulthood (Palmer, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2017).

Therefore, by providing developmentally appropriate opportunities to foster self-determination skills a foundation is created that can be built upon throughout a student's education. By encouraging the development of self-determination throughout the KG-12 educational system, students will be better prepared to use those skills once they transition beyond high school. In order to support successful adult outcomes, transition planning should start early in elementary school and be ongoing, and it should focus not only on academics, but also infused in lessons that encourage vocational, social skills, self-awareness, and self-advocacy (Cummings, Maddux, & Casey, 2000). While it is not necessary for children in elementary school to be making career choices at such a young age, it is important that they learn about the diversity of career options and how their abilities and interests will have an influence on their vocational decisions (Papay et al., 2015). This helps build student self-awareness of their skills and areas of interest. Overall, this focus on self-determination can be implemented school-wide for all students, not just students with exceptionalities (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003).

Having students participate in IEP meetings prior to meetings regarding the postsecondary transition can aid in the development of self-determination skills and can help students be more engaged and an active member during IEP and ITP meetings (deFur, 2003). Starting the transition process early is not only beneficial to students, but also to parents. Earlier

engagement provides more opportunities for families to be involved in the process and to understand the importance of the process and their role within it; teachers in the earlier years can help build the foundation for future family involvement by fostering relationships where parents feel heard and involved in their child's education (Papay et al., 2015).

While transition planning should start earlier in a child's education, there are differences between the elementary and secondary environments that may impact the way in which this process could feasibly be implemented and executed. Issues examined at the secondary school level may differ from the issues that are inherent at the elementary school level. At the secondary level, individuals assisting with the transition process must have a strong understanding of the resources and services that are available to maximize employment opportunities (Brooke et al., 2009). While teachers may have a general understanding of transitions, many do not possess knowledge of agencies or support services that assist in the transition process (Knott & Asselin, 1999). Some teachers believe that further training and coordination among service agencies is needed to increase the effectiveness of transition planning and more student/family involvement in the process (Wasburn-Moses, 2006). It would be advantageous to examine teacher perspectives at the elementary level, a critical time period when self-determination skills can be cultivated. It is unclear whether themes seen in research at the secondary level would be the same as those found at the elementary school level.

Transition Planning Variables Stemming from the NLTS-2 Research

In the United States, a national study was conducted examining transition planning for students with disabilities, titled the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2; Cameto, Levine, & Wagner, 2004). This 10-year study followed students with disabilities, who were preparing for the transition beyond high school, collecting data from multiple perspectives in five

waves, on such information regarding the TPP (Cameto et al., 2004) and transition outcomes including: postsecondary experiences, employment, engagement in school or work, social and community involvement, independence – both residential and financial, and marriage and parenting (Newman et al., 2011).

Data from the NLTS-2 study suggests that for students with high-incidence disabilities (learning disabilities [LD], attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders [ADHD], and emotional disturbances), special education teachers, parents, students and school counsellors were listed as participants in transition planning. Of note, general education teachers participated at a rate of 63% when teaching academic courses and 43% when teaching vocational courses (Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016). For students with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or with an intellectual disability (ID), special educators were most likely to be involved, as well as parents and the student, while general educator teachers were involved significantly less often (Shogren & Plotner, 2012).

Although students with high-incidence disabilities were likely to be involved in the process, that degree of involvement varied (Trainor et al., 2016). The degree of involvement was much less for students with ASD, with the majority of students either not being involved or having little involvement in the process (Griffin, Taylor, Urbano, & Hodapp, 2014; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Wehman, Schall, et al., 2014); students with ASD were less likely to attend meetings when less time was spent in inclusive settings (Griffin et al., 2014). Furthermore, expressive communication related to attendance at transition meetings, as those with higher self-advocacy were more likely to participate in meetings (Griffin et al., 2014). Students with an ID were also less involved and were not as likely to provide input during the process (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Woodruff, & Dixon, 2005; Shogren & Plotner, 2012).

For students with high-incidence disabilities, while parents had a high involvement in formal transition meetings (89%), only around half of parents reported that they met with teachers about transition goals outside of formal meetings (Trainor et al., 2016) with many reporting that they had not met with teachers prior to the formal transition meeting where goals are set (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Findings from the NLST-2 also highlighted the importance of parents' expectations regarding their child's future; if parents have low expectations it may prevent parents from seeking out school and community resources to aid in the transition (Wehman, Sima, et al., 2014). As such, encouraging parent involvement and ensuring their understanding of the process and of their child's needs is critical for successful collaboration with the school and to promote positive outcomes.

These findings are consistent with other research within the field. Previous research involving students with moderate to severe disabilities highlighted that the students were not involved fully in the process. The directions of transition planning appeared to be adult directed, were deficit focused, and student opinions did not always appear to be listened to aside from information derived from questionnaires if the content was deemed acceptable (Thoma, Rogan, & Baker, 2001). Research has also demonstrated that although student needs and preferences may be sought out and identified prior to planning meetings, the information gathered may not be incorporated into the transition plan or reflect the preferences and interests of students (Thoma et al., 2001; Zhang & Stecker, 2001). Furthermore, meetings were set up in such a way to make it easy for professionals to participate, as opposed to facilitating the participation of parents and students (Thoma et al., 2001). A meta-analysis of the literature on transition planning interventions highlighted that transition practices were not consistently implemented, parents and students were not frequently involved in the process, there were limited views on the

post-school outcomes for students with disabilities, and that the instruction relating to transition was not clear (Cobb & Alwell, 2009). It is important to consider the academic and non-academic skills and needs of the student, in conjunction with the development of support networks and meaningful education, to order to promote successful post-school outcomes (Cobb & Alwell, 2009).

Students with ID are also more likely to receive education relating specifically to transitions, compared to other disability groups examined (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Furthermore, while students with ID or ASD were more likely to have post-school goals in the areas of increasing independence or improving their social interactions, they were less likely to have goals related to postsecondary education or employment (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Students that possess higher levels of communication, self-help skills, and self-advocacy skills are linked with having competitive employment once they leave school. Furthermore, having opportunities to access work experiences or employment training during high school are also deemed as important variables to gaining employment post transition (Wehman, Sima, et al., 2014).

Similar patterns have been found in other research for students with social, emotional, and/or behaviour problems. As previously mentioned, although students with social, emotional, and/or behavioural problems may frequently attend IEP meetings, they are less engaged in the process. The same pattern is found with regards to involvement in transition planning; although parents and students may attend IEP meetings regarding the postsecondary transition, there has been found to be a lack of congruence between the perceived goals of parents and students, and what is actually written in the IEP (Harrison, State, Wills, Custer, & Miller, 2017). Furthermore, even when students have specific postsecondary goals, the goals are written more generally or

vaguely in the transition plan itself. Having specific and measurable goals, continued input from students and parents, and frequent monitoring of the progress of goals and the understanding of goals from the perspective of students and parents are important aspects of the TPP (Harrison et al., 2017).

Overall, previous research from the NLTS-2 has highlighted that teacher involvement in transition planning has varied depending on the type of disability, and indicated that general educators are not always involved, even for those students with high-incident disabilities such as LD or ADHD. Additionally, there is a lack of congruence of goals not only between stakeholders, but also with what is actually implemented in IEPs. A lack of consistent implementation was also noted regarding the fostering of skills needed for life transitions. Gaining a better understanding of the factors that limit general education teacher involvement in transition planning, their interactions with other stakeholders, and the skills that teachers perceive as useful for all students to develop, can help provide a greater understanding of how to further engage and support teachers to be involved in the TPP. However, in order to know how to support teachers, it is also important to understand the factors that can lead to successful post-school outcomes, which will be discussed next.

Predictors of Postsecondary Outcomes

Test, Mazzotti, et al. (2009) conducted a review of the correlational transition literature that examines 16 evidence-based predictors of postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, specifically outcomes relating to education, employment and/or independent living. Participation in inclusive classrooms, paid work experiences, independent living skills, and student support were predictors of positive outcomes for all three areas. Career awareness, occupational courses, vocational education, transition programs, interagency collaboration, social

skills, and self-advocacy/self-determination were predictors of positive outcomes in the areas of postsecondary education and employment. The remaining predictors, community experiences, work study, program of study, high school status upon exiting, and parental involvement were predictors of positive outcomes in the area of employment (Test, Mazzotti, et al., 2009).

Haber et al. (2015) presented a meta-analysis of the literature that examines the predictors, including interventions and types of collaboration, of postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, in order to further expand the review conducted by Test, Mazzotti, et al. (2009). They used the predictors as mentioned in the study above, but also used the categories based on Kohler's taxonomy. A positive relationship was found between interventions that have been widely researched, such as vocational education and transition programs, as well as specific aspects of programs, such as paid working experience and placement in inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, areas that emphasized collaboration among stakeholders, including student-focused planning, parent involvement, and interagency collaboration, were also found to have positive effects (Haber et al., 2015). Findings highlighted that the strategies used to support postsecondary outcomes may differ for education versus employment and thus strategies used to improve education outcomes cannot be assumed to be helpful for employment outcomes. Although there were few samples in the analysis, collaboration about multiple stakeholders was found to have a strong influence on outcomes (Haber et al., 2015).

Based on Kohler's taxonomy, Test, Fowler, et al. (2009) conducted a review of the literature to identify evidence-based practices in secondary transition research. While moderate to strong levels of evidence was found for practices that fell within the Student Development area, particularly referring to life skills instruction, there was a dearth of studies that involved practices regarding Interagency Collaboration (Test, Fowler, et al., 2009). Interagency

Collaboration is an area which has been identified as a predictor of positive postsecondary outcomes (Haber et al., 2015; Test, Mazzotti, et al., 2009), and thus identifying evidence-based practices that could be implemented to provide support in this area would be greatly beneficial. Mazzotti and Plotner (2016) surveyed individuals who were responsible for providing transition services regarding factors relating to preparedness and implementation of services for students with disabilities. The results of their study indicated that those providing transition services did not have much training or preparation related to evidence-based practices in transition planning and many did not receive professional development in this area (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016).

Overall, these studies highlight the need for collaboration among stakeholders to ensure successful post-school outcomes for students. They also highlight the importance of developing self-determination skills and students being provided with work experiences to continue to build skills that are necessary following the post-school transition. Further, examining teacher preparedness and training to aid in transition planning would help inform how to best support them in applying these evidence-based predictors and infuse them within the curriculum.

The Role of Teachers in the TPP

Much of the research within the realm of transition planning has focused on specific stakeholders in the process. In particular, the perspectives of the individual and their families on the TPP have been extensively examined. The goal of the current paper is to highlight the perspectives of in-service teachers and their role in the TPP, given the fact that they work at the forefront of educating students, implementing interventions, and bringing students to the team that identifies students requiring further assistance. Previous research involving teachers has mainly focused on the perspectives of secondary school teachers, and since self-determination skills should be cultivated early to help with transitions (Sitlington et al., 2010), teacher

preparedness to work with students with disabilities during their formative years should be examined. Furthermore, previous research has mainly focused on special education teachers; however, it is general education teachers that frequently interact with and teach students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Gaining a better understanding of general education teachers' perceptions is also important.

Within the province of Ontario, teachers are expected to be part of the transition planning team along with the student, family members, and other professionals or organizations that will provide support to students. It is the role of teachers to provide relevant information about the strengths, needs, interests, and abilities of the student. Furthermore, teachers are also responsible to teach students the necessary knowledge and skills and assess their progress in order to help the student achieve the goals outlined in the transition plan (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2017) also provides information about the role of special education teachers, who provide information about the needs and abilities of students, as well as their expertise about appropriate goals and actions based on their knowledge of the student and other students with similar needs. Furthermore, special education teachers help to develop modified or amended learning expectations and provide plans, as well as materials and resources (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017).

The Effect of Teachers' Knowledge and Efficacy on the TPP

Working within inclusive settings and assisting with transitions can be extremely complex and multifaceted. It is beneficial to understand the particular knowledge, attitudes and perceived self-efficacy of individuals involved in the process. Teachers play a significant role developing and executing transition plans for students with disabilities; therefore, gaining an understanding of their role and the process is important in order to know how to assist teachers in

supporting students within the classroom. The amount of knowledge that teachers possess and their perspectives on their role in the process will have an impact on the way in which teachers interact with and teach their students within inclusive classrooms (Lindsay, 2007).

Perspectives and experiences of teachers in the TPP. Goupil, Tassé, Garcin and Doré (2002) conducted a study in which transition-planning activities for students with cognitive impairments were implemented and they queried those stakeholders involved in the process about their experiences and perspectives. Respondents completed a questionnaire containing open-ended questions about the TPP. From the teachers' perspectives, it was important for parents and students to be involved in the process; however, students were frequently absent from meetings or had minimal involvement, often due to the limitations of their disability such as communication or cognitive awareness (Goupil, Tassé, Garcin, & Doré, 2002).

Within the study, there was no general agreement as to the types of difficulties encountered during the process, but those mentioned included: too much time required, some topics were difficult to address or were considered sensitive in nature, and differences of opinion and expectations of stakeholders. With regard to their role, there were also a variety of responses including: providing information about the student's abilities, or facilitated transition meetings. Teachers also expressed that involvement in the TPP led to changes in the content of their teaching. Administrators were considered to have less of a role in the process, with about a third of participants expressing that the administrators had little to no involvement; however, when involved, their role included aiding with setting up meetings or providing general information. The role of the student involved giving their opinions and being involved in decision-making (Goupil et al., 2002).

With regard to the TPP, Goupil et al. (2002) found that a majority of teachers noted that the content of transition plans influenced the content of IEPs, it was realistic and crucial to plan goals over a three- to five-year period with some teachers, and that if given sufficient time and effective collaboration among stakeholders, it would be realistic to develop an ITP for all students in their classrooms. Teachers also expressed that training would be useful in areas such as how to moderate ITP meetings, how to adapt the process based on the individual needs of students, and learning more about community resources (Goupil et al., 2002).

Li, Bassett, and Hutchinson (2009) examined the perspectives of 343 special educators involved in the TPP. Results indicated that special educators were involved in developing curriculum and activities to promote self-determination, and were less involved in transition planning assessment. They were also highly involved in developing transition goals and IEPs, whereas they had only occasional involvement in interagency collaboration and job development. Overall, special education teachers were less involved in transition services, and those responsibilities were mainly the responsibility of transition coordinators or those who were involved in both roles. Training, both pre- and in-service, contributed to involvement in the TPP (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009).

Park (2008) conducted interviews with six special education high school teachers in Manitoba in order to gather teacher perspectives regarding transition services. Teacher roles included coordinating transition services, informing parents and students about the process, helping students develop the necessary skills, and supporting families in connecting with outside agencies (Park, 2008). Teachers reported that students and parents were involved in the process, particularly within the area of goal setting; however, the teachers commented that involvement was impeded by communication challenges. This was addressed by relying on parents to express

the interests of the student (Park, 2008). Barriers working with families included impractical demands for services, unrealistic future expectations, lack of acknowledgement of the student's disability, and lack of resources, parental characteristics, or systemic issues within the family (Park, 2008). Additionally, teachers reported that keeping parents informed was challenging due to a lack of involvement, a complex service system, and a lack of knowledge about information sources (Park, 2008). With regards to educational instruction within the transition area, vocational development was the most implemented with each student provided with work experience while in high school, although the type of employment and supports provided varied for each of the students (Park, 2008). Teachers expressed that a variety of stakeholders were involved in the process and included a range of professionals; however, there were varied opinions on the roles and responsibilities of those involved in offering transition services (Park, 2008).

Strnadova, Cumming, and Danker (2016) investigated teacher and parent experiences on the transitions for students with ID and ASD who were attending specialized schools. Participants were 14 parents and 13 teachers from four different specialized schools in Sydney, Australia. In this study, while transition planning started somewhere between year 10 and year 12, teachers acknowledged it was important to start transition planning as soon as possible. They also acknowledged that students were often left out of the transition meetings, usually due to the nature of their disability. The teachers also highlighted ways in which the TPP can be improved, including: mentoring from more experienced teachers; gaining more knowledge and seeking out information; receiving support from transition professionals; collaborating with external organizations; and gaining additional knowledge and information about options post high school (Strnadova, Cumming, & Danker, 2016).

While these studies provided interesting perspectives of teachers involved in implementing transition planning for students, there are a number of limitations. These studies consisted of a small sample of teachers, many of whom were recruited from special education schools that have additional imbedded supports. Additionally, in the Goupil et al. (2002) study, the teachers' perspectives were lumped with the responses of a psychologist and integration specialist who would have different perspectives of the process. Furthermore, the students within many of these studies were those identified with cognitive impairments, and thus the stakeholder involvement and perspectives of teachers and challenges encountered may be different for students with different disabilities or needs.

Teacher perceptions of transition competencies. Wolfe, Boone, and Blanchett (1998) queried general educators about the importance of various transition competencies. Competencies within the areas of communication, interpersonal skills, employment and residential concerns, were considered important by the majority of respondents. However, certain aspects of residential, leisure and interpersonal skills, such as sexuality education, were considered less important in comparison (Wolfe, Boone, & Blanchett, 1998). This illustrates that teachers may not consider transitions as a holistic concept, and fail to consider other vital areas of assuming adult roles within the community. Furthermore, employment aspects of transition were also rated highly, which suggests that teachers emphasize the importance of finding and maintaining employment. They also identified that assisting students being independently involved in the community, in addition to job skills or finding jobs, were considered optimal outcomes for transition. With regards to their role in the process, these teachers identified that the assessment and instruction of interpersonal skills, as well as communication with parents, are important areas to be competent in for their involvement in transition planning. While general

education teachers reported that they wanted to be more involved in the TPP, based on what competencies they rated highly, they did not see their direct involvement in activities such as planning, coordination or management of how transition planning is delivered (Wolfe et al., 1998).

Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2009) examined the perceptions of middle and high school special education teachers regarding their transition competencies. More specifically, they examined the perceived levels of preparedness, satisfaction with training, and the degree to which they implement transition services. About half of these teachers reported that they did not take any coursework relating to transitions, the rest varied to have taken between one and four courses prior to teaching. Furthermore, across all items, teachers felt somewhat prepared to execute transition services, and those with a greater degree of background experience, including years of teaching and degree of transition training, rated their level of preparedness higher. Additionally, overall, they felt less satisfied with their transition training, with the least satisfaction within the collaboration domain. With regards to implementation, the frequency with which they planned and implemented transition services fell somewhere between rarely and occasionally, and once again were less likely to implement services related to the collaboration domain (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2009). They also concluded that based on their results, it appeared that teachers received the most transition education while in-service, not pre-service, meaning that they received their knowledge while working within the field (Benitez et al., 2009).

Chan and Chadsey (2006) investigated the perceptions of high school teachers in special high schools in Taiwan of school-to-work transition practices. Surveying 106 teachers in special high schools by having them complete the Survey of School-to-Work Transition Practices questionnaire, their results indicated that student-focused transition planning and interagency

collaboration practices were considered most important and most frequently implemented, while family involvement and structure/policies practices were implemented less often and considered less important. The authors suggest that teachers should be aware of the cultural diversity of their students, particularly with regard to encouraging family involvement in transition planning (Chan & Chadsey, 2006).

Teachers have reported challenges when engaging in the TPP including: lack of time, difficult to address certain themes, and differences of opinion between parents and school personnel regarding goals and expectations of the student (Goupil et al., 2002). Lubbers, Repetto, and McGorray (2008) surveyed 533 middle and high school special education teachers in Florida on transition best practices. This research demonstrated that special education teachers perceive barriers to teacher involvement in transition planning including a lack of resources, lack of stakeholder involvement, system and policy issues, and information and training (Lubbers, Repetto, & McGorray, 2008), while effective practices identified by teachers included stakeholder involvement, systems and policy, and communication and collaboration (Lubbers et al., 2008). Special education teachers also identified systems and policy and information and training as areas where transition practices can be improved (Lubbers et al., 2008). The middle school special education teachers in this study had less training and experience in the field of transition compared to high school special education teachers. Although transition planning was not required until the high school years, many of the skills and experiences begin to be developed earlier on and therefore teacher knowledge prior to the high school years is also important (Lubbers et al., 2008).

Importance of teacher training to aid in the TPP. The pre-service and in-service training and experiences that teachers receive impacts how prepared they feel to work with

students with disabilities and their contribution to the TPP. Teacher training is related to increase in knowledge of the TPP (Knott & Asselin, 1999), while lack of appropriate training can be seen as a barrier to teacher involvement in transition planning (Park, 2008). In order to examine transition-related education, perceptions of transition related knowledge and skills, and barriers to implementation, Wandry et al. (2008) surveyed 196 pre-service teachers at the undergraduate and graduate level in special education teacher programs. Prior to taking formal classes on transition, participants reported minimal previous training on transition-related topics; however, they reported the most instruction they received was related to family involvement. Participants reported that they felt more empowered to serve the needs of students after taking a transition course; however, most believed that further training would be advantageous, particularly in self-determination, goal setting, and career goals, as well as having additional classroom resources (Wandry et al., 2008).

With regard to perceived competencies, they reported the greatest degree of competency for family involvement and student development-curriculum and instruction. In contrast, they had the least competence in accountability, assessment, and post-school outcomes, and interagency collaboration. Participants also cited that starting the process earlier for students, such as in elementary school, is needed to develop crucial self-determination skills. Both prior to taking the course and post-taking the course, teachers cited that the greatest barriers to transition services were lack of educator knowledge, and inadequate staff, fiscal support, and parental involvement (Wandry et al., 2008).

In order to increase knowledge about transition planning, teachers reported that it would be useful to receive training in areas such as community resources, facilitating meetings, and adapting the process to the needs of individual students (Goupil et al., 2002). Unsurprisingly, the

areas in which teachers reported receiving the most training were often the areas they cited as being the most important, whereas those areas they received less to no training in were deemed the least important, such as competencies within the areas of leisure/recreation (Blanchett, 2001). Morningstar and Benitez (2013) surveyed middle and high school special educators to examine their training and professional development and how it relates to the implementation of transition planning practices. The results of their study indicated that receiving training in transition practices, through coursework or professional development opportunities, was significantly correlated with how often the secondary special educators implemented transition practices. It also demonstrated that transition specialists, who received more training in these areas, were more likely to implement transition services, as compared to special educators (Morningstar & Benitez, 2013).

Linking theoretical knowledge with practical experience. Theoretical and abstract knowledge should be accompanied by practical experience. Additional exposure and experience to topics relating to inclusive settings provides teachers with opportunities to expand their knowledge and leads to a change in attitudes towards students with disabilities (Kamens, Dolyniuk, & Dinardo, 2003). Goals for the students can be shaped by the attitudes and opinions of stakeholders in the process. Cooney (2002) found differing opinions between parents, teachers, and youth with disabilities regarding transition goals. The youths' goals for the future centered on the themes of work, spending time with family and friends, and moving towards independence; parents' goals for transition centered around the child's happiness and safety while acknowledging their child's strengths; whereas professionals looked at transition in terms of resources available to address the needs and limitations of the particular child (Cooney, 2002). The discrepancy between parental and teacher goals highlight the need to work as a collaborative

team when creating transition plans for students. As well, teachers must receive sufficient training and access to resources to be able to support families and youth in the transition process.

Overall, these studies highlight the need to build on the knowledge and training that teachers have received to provide additional support in the areas of transition planning. The role of teachers in the process varies based on where the data were collected; however, a recurring theme emphasizes the importance of fostering self-determination skills, as well as collaboration with other school personnel and with community agencies to support students in the transition beyond high school. The knowledge, attitudes and self-efficacy that teachers possess shape the way they provide support and how to collaborate with others in the process.

Stakeholder Support in Effective Transition Planning

While pre-service education and training can play a role in preparing teachers with the knowledge to work with students with disabilities and about transition planning, the manner in which this occurs can vary. While professional development opportunities can further teacher knowledge, interactions with other stakeholders can also help provide support to teachers, through the sharing of knowledge and acting as an additional resource that assists in parts of the TPP. Different stakeholders can support teachers in a range of ways, based on the role they fulfill in the school system. The level of support provided by others, as well as the school climate that is created and encouraged, will shape the ways that teachers can effectively teach within inclusive settings. One of the mediating variables that may influence how teachers act within the classroom and within the school system is the belief of the principal and the school norms that stem from those beliefs (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). The beliefs of principals and the norms established in the school can also impact effective teaching practice (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998), as school culture and climate can

have an impact on teacher attitudes and the way that they teach in inclusive classrooms (Stanovich & Jordon, 1998; Weisel & Dror, 2006). The procedures that school boards and principals establish regarding teachers' responsibilities working in inclusive settings have an impact on teachers' work. Moreover, changes in school culture and climate are required to help facilitate inclusion within classrooms (Hamill & Dever, 1998) and improvements need to be made within the school system, using evidence-based practices, in order to facilitate inclusion (Ferguson, 2008).

Weisel and Dror (2006) found that both school climate and teacher-efficacy influenced teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, with teacher-efficacy having a greater contribution. When teachers were in an environment that encouraged cooperation between teachers and a sense of autonomy, they endorsed more positive attitudes towards inclusion. School and school board policies will determine how empowered teachers may feel to make changes to the way in which inclusive practices are implemented. The school climate will play in a role in the amount of power teachers feel they have in these settings.

Teachers are concerned about working in inclusive settings, and feel inadequate in their ability to do so, when they lack material, personnel and resources supports within the classroom (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). The funding that the school boards allocate to support students with disabilities will influence the resources and supports that teachers receive in classrooms. In order to feel more effective in inclusive classrooms, teachers have reported that additional supports in the form of reduced class sizes and additional time with teaching assistants are important to work in inclusive settings, as well as additional in-service training and training in collaboration (Horne, Timmons, & Adamowycz, 2008). Through the development of relationships with other staff in the school, teachers can build a sense of community, help foster a

support system, and help build additional resources to support teacher instruction in inclusive classrooms. Collaboration with other professionals can help increase teacher efficacy and foster positive attitudes towards inclusion (Soodak, Podell, & Lehman, 1998). Teachers interact with parents, other teachers, and support and administrative staff in the schools on a daily basis; therefore, further training in collaboration can help teachers learn how to effectively work with other teachers, support staff, and parents to create the most effective learning environment.

Another resource within the school system that can provide support to students with disabilities, as well as provide support to teachers, are psychologists. Psychologists have a wealth of knowledge on development, assessment, and interventions when working with students with varying needs and abilities. The role of school psychologists includes providing "direct educational and mental health services for children and youth, as well as work with parents, educators, and other professionals to create supportive learning and social environments for all children" (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2010, p. 1). At a school wide level, school psychologists can be involved in activities such as using evidence-based strategies to create and implement effective policies and practices in a variety of areas including staff training, student transitions, and home-school partnerships (NASP, 2010). School psychologists can help teachers identify ways to assist students with diverse learning needs and can establish appropriate expectations for students. Through their knowledge of development and processes that influence learning and behaviour, as well as through the use of standardized assessment procedures, school psychologists can address the challenges and questions that teachers have about learning and behavioural concerns within their classrooms (Jeary & Schwean, 2012).

Additionally, school psychologists can provide teachers with support by helping them gain additional knowledge and training (Gibbs, 2007) and by providing feedback on performance

to help foster critical self-reflection when working in inclusive settings (Bollich, Johannet, & Vazire, 2011). Psychologists can use their skillset and knowledge of development and assessment to help target certain skills and behaviours that students need to work on in order to help with transitions (Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2007). Identifying individualized transition goals and skills to work on for transitions can commence during a student's elementary school years (Kellems, Springer, Wilkins, & Anderson, 2016). This could be at the individual level to help students develop skills, but also at the classroom and school-wide level to help suggest classroom structures and school policies that could be beneficial for the development of all students (CPA, 2007).

Psychologists can also collaborate with the various stakeholders in the process, including teachers, parents, and other professionals, to foster connections between home, school, and the community (Kellems et al., 2016). Within the province of Ontario, it is suggested that psychologists can assist in the identification of needs and strengths, as well as act as a resource and providing training to teachers to implement recommended strategies. When needed, psychologists could also be involved in the assessment of students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017). Psychologists can further be involved in the TPP by using information derived from assessment to create transition plans with goals that are appropriate for the individual student, focusing on areas that will contribute to a meaningful life once they transition beyond high school (Kellems et al., 2016).

Although school psychologists can play a vital role in assisting teachers in becoming more knowledgeable and prepared to assist in the TPP, their actual role within the schools are often shaped by the school system. In particular, how transition planning is reinforced and structured is often determined by school boards and by administration within schools. Within

the province of Ontario, the role of the principal is to ensure that the transition plan is developed and follows the appropriate regulations. The principal must ensure that parents and students aged 16 and older are involved in the process, as well as consult with appropriate community agencies and postsecondary institutions. Principals can develop school-level procedures, create a transition planning staff resource group, and develop strategies to ensure that individuals are familiar with the TPP. Moreover, principals are also responsible to ensure that transition planning procedures are in adherence with ministry policy and school board policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017).

Research Objectives

The purpose of the present study is to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences working with students with disabilities within their classroom. In particular, this study was conducted to explore teachers' understanding of and involvement in the TPP for students with disabilities. More specifically, this study examines elementary and secondary teachers' understanding of their roles and responsibilities when working with students with disabilities and in the TPP. Qualitative methodology was used in the current study to further the research done in the field and to gain a deeper understanding of teacher involvement in transitions and their attitudes toward working with students with disabilities and fostering the development of self-determination skills in students within their classroom. A qualitative approach allows for this more in-depth understanding of teachers' experience by providing teachers with opportunities to elaborate on responses, giving the researcher opportunities to probe further on topics raised by participants, and allowing more opportunities for teachers to provide personal examples and anecdotes to illustrate their viewpoints.

The purpose of the proposed study is to answer the following questions:

1) According to teachers, what skills are important for students with disabilities to develop in order to succeed in the transition beyond school?
2) What are in-service teachers' perspectives of the procedures, roles, and responsibilities of individuals involved in the TPP? In particular, how do teachers perceive the roles and involvement of stakeholders such as administrators and psychologists?
3) What role does legislation play when working with students with disabilities? In the TPP?
4) What are the perceived barriers and supports teachers report in regards to working with students with disabilities in inclusive settings and assisting in the TPP?

Teacher responses to questionnaires and interview questions were qualitatively analyzed to develop an understanding of teachers' knowledge and perspectives of transition planning, as well as their role and the role of other stakeholders in the TPP. The specific methodology used and the analysis from the data collection will be discussed in the sections to follow.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Introduction and Overview

Within this chapter, the research methodology will be described and will include discussions about the following areas: an overview and the motivation for using a qualitative research design; a description of the research sample; a summary of the information needed; a discussion of the data collection methods, analysis and synthesis; ethical considerations; issues of trustworthiness; and assumptions and decisions.

Using Qualitative Research Design to Explore Transition Planning Experiences

Transition planning is a relatively new field and is still growing. Gaining a greater understanding of teachers' lived experiences in the classroom is beneficial in understanding their viewpoints and involvement in the transition planning process (TPP). Qualitative methodology is often used to explore a problem or issue, particularly when a complex, detailed understanding is desired (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative approach allows for a detailed understanding of teachers' experiences and provides opportunities to examine overall themes that emerge following in-depth conversations with teachers. Qualitative studies within the field of transition research can be useful in areas such as understanding the trends and gaps in the current services and supports that are available, as well as exploring the relationships that exist among the various factors that influence transition planning (Carter et al., 2013).

The qualitative research approach used for this study falls within the phenomenological tradition. "A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, pp. 57-58). As such, these common experiences are described in greater detail in order to gain an understanding

of the phenomenon being investigated. More specifically, a hermeneutical phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007) was employed in the current study. Also referred to as interpretive phenomenology, this approach is used to understand the meaning of experience and involves the researcher engaging with the data in an interpretive manner (Langdridge, 2007). In addition to describing participants' experience of a phenomenon, the researcher also interprets the meaning of these experiences (Creswell, 2007). This approach was used for the current study in order to explore teachers' experience working with students with disabilities within the school system, and to provide teachers with the opportunity to discuss their own experiences in the classroom and their involvement working with students with disabilities and in the TPP. Furthermore, this method allows for a more in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, and allows for an understanding of the contexts or settings where the problem arises (Creswell, 2007).

While quantitative methodology allows researchers to test a theory or explanation, to investigate the effectiveness of an intervention, or to understand what characteristics best predict certain outcomes, the qualitative approach allows for more of an exploratory approach while learning about concepts or phenomena (Creswell, 2013). In the case of the current study, qualitative methodology would provide opportunities for teachers to share their experiences and expand on their thoughts; quantitative measures do not always capture the essence of the issue being explored, particularly with regards to interactions between individuals, and are often not sensitive to differences in variables such as: gender, economic status, and individual differences (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative approach provides opportunities to ask open-ended questions and explore this phenomenon in greater detail. Quantitative measures were used in this study as a way to provide context and background information about participants and to gain a greater

understanding of the composition of participants as a group, while qualitative measures were used to gain more in-depth understand of teachers' experiences and perspectives of the TPP.

Researcher Reflexivity

Due to the nature of qualitative research, since the role of the researcher is central to data collection, it is important to identify any personal biases, values, and assumptions held by the researcher at the beginning of the study. Researcher reflexivity is an important aspect of qualitative studies, and as a result the researcher both influences and is influenced by the created interactions and research relationships (Maxwell, 2012).

My perceptions of teacher experiences in the classroom and with the TPP have been shaped by my own experiences. Prior to pursuing graduate studies I completed a Bachelor's degree in Education, while concurrently completing a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology. While each year in the program provided experiences working within diverse classrooms, during my final year of the program I was placed in a classroom with students who had a wide diversity of needs. I found myself frustrated with the fact that the students who required more individualized attention were not able to receive it seemingly due to the nature and demands of the classroom. I reflected on how this was a trend that I had previously observed throughout my years in the Bachelor of Education program and during other previous experiences in classroom settings, such as when working one-on-one with students during classroom lessons or through conversations with peers who had already graduated but had struggled when they were in elementary school.

This experience, in addition to my interest in Education and Psychology, resulted in my pursuit of graduate studies within the field of School Psychology. However, once again, my experience in the graduate program resulted in frustrations at the perceived disconnect between

school psychology training and providing effective assistance to teachers within the classroom. Personal discussions with teachers also highlighted the lack of or limited contact that teachers had with school psychologists, even during the assessment process. All things considered, due to my prior pre-service education teacher experiences, as well as my experience working with teachers as an emerging school psychologist, I bring certain biases to the study. Since these biases may shape the way I perceive and understand the data collected, steps were taken to maintain objectivity, and this will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

My previous experiences helped guide the conceptualization of this study and the initial development of the research questions. Throughout the study, I used a reflexive approach and asked myself questions such as my purpose for carrying out the study, how I may influence the research, and how my perspectives may influence the analysis (Langdridge, 2007). I also reflected on how this may impact my understanding of the discipline and my career, which is described in the discussion section.

Research Sample

Initially participants were selected by purposeful sampling, which involves selecting specific participants based on a certain set of criteria (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). More specifically, in a phenomenological study, using a criterion-based sampling method is suitable when researching a group of people who have experienced the same phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The participation criteria are based on a keen interest in inclusive education and the desire to learn more about the TPP in the vast majority of schools. I was interested in exploring the experiences that general education teachers have in inclusive classrooms and included teachers who were teaching in general education classrooms in a public school board in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), located in Ontario, Canada. The purpose of this requirement

was to exclude those teachers who worked in private school settings and special education classrooms, as these settings have differing demands than public school boards or general education classrooms. More specifically, teachers in special education classes were excluded from this study as these classrooms typically have additional supports, smaller class sizes, and different demands than general education classrooms. This was done to establish a relative degree of consistency between the environments participants work in. The Ministry of Education of Ontario regulates school boards within the GTA. Recently, legislative changes occurred within the Ministry of Education in Ontario, which impacted the rules and requirements surrounding transition planning. While introduced February 1, 2013, it was required for the changes to be put into effect within the school boards by September 2014.

Additionally, kindergarten (KG) – grade 12 teachers were included who taught in a classroom for a minimum of one year in order to be eligible for the current study. The purpose of this requirement was to help increase the probability that participants had the experience that a full-time teacher would have, including all roles and responsibilities assumed by in-service teachers. In-service teachers refer to individuals who have already graduated from teacher education programs and are currently teaching, either as Short-Term Occasional (STO), Long-Term Occasional (LTO) or full-time teachers. This is in contrast to pre-service teachers, which refer to those who are in the process of completing their educational studies to become teachers. In-service teachers who have only had LTO experiences were also included in the study if they had taken over a classroom for a minimum of an entire school year (such as with maternity leave placements).

Initial participants were recruited by networking with contacts that worked within the school system and knew of individuals who met participation criteria. The teachers who were

contacted to participate in the study had no prior contact with the researchers prior to study participation. Additional participants were recruited for the current study by snowball sampling. This approach provided a way of identifying teachers who exhibit certain characteristics and had them recommend those who possessed the same or similar characteristics (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), which facilitated participant recruitment.

Contextual information. Participants were either initially contacted by phone or e-mail and the script can be found in Appendix B. All participants were spoken to on the phone prior to agreeing to partake in the study in order to provide information about the tasks involved in the study and an approximate time commitment. Questions about study involvement were initially addressed at this time, including any concerns about confidentiality (which was also discussed upon meeting for the interview). Questionnaires were sent in advance via e-mail, and in a few instances dropped off to the individual in person prior to the scheduled interview date. Of the participants who were contacted to participate, two declined to participate once the time commitment was described and three indicated that they were unable to participate at that point in time due to time constraints, but if needed could be contacted again in the future. In total 13 participants agreed to participate in the study.

Participants received their education degrees from a variety of schools and had a range of previous experiences working with students with disabilities. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to discuss and elaborate on their prior training and experience in these areas to get a sense of their background and experience working with students with disabilities and working within an inclusive setting.

Participant information. Participants were comprised of in-service regular education teachers working within the Greater Toronto Area, who were teaching at the elementary, middle

school, and high school levels (grades KG-12). Participants were recruited and then data were collected and analyzed until a saturation of the data was reached. Data saturation is reached when no new information is gained (Morse, 1995). Out of the 13 teachers interviewed, nine were female and four were male, which is reflective of the gender demographics by year of licensure over the past ten years in Ontario (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016b). Three were teaching at the secondary level, while 10 were teaching at the elementary level. Years of training ranged from teachers with a minimum of two years experience as an LTO teacher to 24 years experience within the classroom. Eleven teachers completed their education degrees at a university within Ontario, one at a school in Buffalo which follows the Ontario curriculum, and one who studied in South Africa before relicensing as a teacher within Ontario.

The majority of participants (85%) completed at least one additional qualification in the area of Special Education after being registered with the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). Twelve teachers identified that they have had experience working with children with an identified exceptionality. Upon further questioning, the remaining teacher acknowledged he has worked with students who have been labeled as gifted. Eleven of the teachers interviewed expressed that they have at least one student with a disability currently in their classroom; the two teachers who expressed they do not have a student with a disability in their current classroom teach at the high school level. Twelve of the teachers identified that they have not had any formal education in the area of transition planning; however, four mentioned that they have had informal experience in the area, such as involvement in meetings to help with grade transitions. Eight of the teachers also identified they did not have enough information about or access to resources designed to aid in transition planning. Three teachers shared that as a student they received special education assistance as a student with a disability. In order to maintain

confidentiality, teachers did not disclose the name of their school; however, they noted that their schools were located in suburban, multicultural environments. Through their experiences they described a diversity of needs and cultures within the communities where their schools were located. See Table 1 and 2 for a detailed description of the teachers who participated in the current study. Table 1 provides information about the grades and teaching levels for each of the participants, while Table 2 highlights when each participant graduated and how many years they have been teaching. Pseudonyms are used in all charts/tables to maintain participant anonymity.

Table 1

Demographic Information: Participant Teaching Backgrounds

ID	Participant	Gender	Teaching Level*	Current Teaching Placement	Previous Teaching Placements	AQ Spec Ed
T1	Charlene	F	P/J/I/S	6	6, 7, 12	N
T2	Adam	M	P/J	5/6	KG-3, 7/8	Y
T3	Paul	M	J/I/S	9-12	9-12	N
T4	Lyla	F	P/J	KG	KG	Y
T5	Greg	M	J/I/S	6-9	5-9	Y
T6	Lina	F	P/J	Prim Prep**	KG, ESL 2-8	Y
T7	Hinda	F	P/J	KG	KG-5 (no 3)	Y
T8	Jordana	F	P/J/I	KG-8 Prep	K-8	Y
T9	Amina	F	P/J	KG	KG, 1	Y
T10	Pamela	F	I/S	9,11,12	9-12	Y
T11	Grant	M	P/J	2/3	4, 6-8 Prep	Y
T12	Melanie	F	P/J	4	2-4	Y
T13	Laura	F	P/I/S	9-11	9-12	Y

Note. *P=primary, J = junior, I = intermediate, S = senior. **Prep refers to prep coverage teacher

Table 2

Demographic Information: Years of Teaching

ID	Participant	Year of Degree	Years Teaching	Years as LTO
T1	Charlene	2010	0	2
T2	Adam	2009	6	1
T3	Paul	1991	24	0
T4	Lyla	2001	11	1
T5	Greg	1997	19	0.5
T6	Lina	2002	11	2
T7	Hinda	1980	19	2
T8	Jordana	2010	0	5
T9	Amina	2007	8	1
T10	Pamela	2009	2	4
T11	Grant	2009	4	1
T12	Melanie	2008	7	1
T13	Laura	2010	(PT5)*	(PT5)

Note. *PT = part time (the participant taught semestered courses in a high school). Years teaching refers to years as a full-time teacher.

Research Design

Once participants were selected who met the study eligibility criteria, participants were asked to complete the questionnaires prior to the interview and bring it to the scheduled interview. Participants were then scheduled to participate in an individual semi-structured interview. The duration of the interview ranged from approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour 15 minutes. Prior to study participation, participants signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the study and provided permission to have their interviews recorded in order for their responses to later be transcribed and analyzed. The interviewer, the primary investigator of the current study, followed the specific interview questions and prompted the participants as needed to have participants expand on their responses or to clarify any misunderstandings. Participants were also provided a transcript of the interview to review and clarify the accuracy of the information provided and request any changes.

Pilot study. Two teacher interviews were conducted prior to announced changes in legislation. Although the interviews conducted prior to the change in legislation were not formally analyzed, the participants provided feedback to help address any questions or confusions with the questionnaires and interview questions, and this feedback was also incorporated into any changes to the research study. Due to the timing of the changes in legislation and the feedback provided by the participants of the pilot study, modifications were made to the research study to take in account the changes in legislation and address any content that was unclear. These changes are discussed below.

When interacting with teachers, the term *exceptionality* was used instead of the term *disability,* as exceptionality is the term used within the Ministry of Education in Ontario to refer to students who are identified as requiring special education services. Interview questions as well as questions on the background questionnaire were revised to reflect this change. However, both terms will be used where appropriate throughout this paper. Interview questions were also amended to take into consideration the changes in legislation; we included a section providing participants with information about the changes in legislation and inquiring if they had heard about any of the changes or were given any information about it within their schools.

Participants also provided feedback regarding the questionnaires completed. The vignette from the Multidimensional Attitudes Scale (Findler, Vilchinsky, & Werner, 2007) was changed in order to provide an example that was more relevant within the classroom system, as participants articulated that it was vague and did not relate to their classroom experiences. Due to the alteration of this questionnaire an additional questionnaire was added, the Teachers' Expectations for Future Outcomes (Ivey, 2007), in order to provide an additional piece of information regarding teacher attitudes to disability. It was adapted to refer to students with

disabilities instead of referring solely to students on the autism spectrum. These questionnaires will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections.

Data Collection Methods

Participants who agreed to participate in the study were asked to complete the following questionnaires prior to the interview: a demographic/background information questionnaire, The Collective Efficacy Scale (CE Scale; Goddard & Hoy, 2003), The Teacher Efficacy Scale for Inclusive Practices (TEIP; Sharma et al., 2012), Teachers' Expectations for Future Outcomes (TEFO; Ivey, 2007), a modified version of the Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities (MAS; Findler et al., 2007), and the Disability Social Relations Generalized Disability Scale (DSRGD; Herganrather & Rhoades, 2007). These measures were selected because they have demonstrated reliability and validity in previous studies that have examined similar areas, such as experiences in the area of inclusive education or disability. These questionnaires will be further discussed in subsequent sections.

Since teachers address a wide range of student needs within their classroom, and these needs vary from year to year, teachers were instructed to think about their students in general when responding to questions and completing questionnaires. However, if teachers had difficulty, they were instructed to think of a particular student in order to respond, but to provide the primary investigator with general information about the student. All teachers opted to think about students in general, but a number commented that it was still challenging to complete the questionnaires.

Participants were asked to complete a two-page questionnaire in order to gather information about previous training, current and previous experience in teaching and working with children with disabilities and their involvement in the transition process. The first page of

the questionnaire consisted of demographic and background information questions, including information about their previous education as well as past and current teaching information. In addition, at the bottom of the first page participants were prompted to provide a definition for the following terms: transition, transition planning, inclusion, and exceptionality. At the top of the questionnaire written instructions were included, instructing participants to complete the first page fully prior to continuing onto the next page. The second page of the questionnaire consisted of questions about their previous experience and training in working with students with disabilities and with their knowledge of the TPP. On the top of the second page of the questionnaire, participants were provided with the definitions of transition, transition planning, and an exceptional pupil from which to base their responses on. A copy of this questionnaire can be found in Appendix D.

In order to gather information about teacher efficacy, teachers completed the CE Scale (Goddard & Hoy, 2003) and the TEIP scale (Sharma et al., 2012). Since successful inclusive environments are shaped by teacher attitudes and behaviours (Lindsay, 2007), and school climates influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion (Weisel & Dror, 2006), these measures were used to examine the self-efficacy of each individual teacher and the perceived collective efficacy within their schools, and to contextualize their interview responses.

Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) developed the CE scale to evaluate the collective experience of teachers in schools and their perception of whether the school faculty has a positive impact on student achievement. The scale consists of 21 items, measured on a 6-point Likert scale, which form a single factor of collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000). This scale was developed to evaluate collective teacher efficacy, as opposed to individual teacher efficacy, and was found to be valid and have high internal reliability (Goddard et al., 2000).

Sharma, Loreman and Forlin (2012) developed the TEIP scale to evaluate teachers' perceived self-efficacy when working in inclusive classrooms. The scale consists of 18 items, each rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree which load onto three factors: efficacy to use inclusive instructions, efficacy in collaboration, and efficacy in managing behaviour. This scale involves examining the environment and teaching practices in inclusive settings, as opposed to focusing on factors related solely to the individual student, and has strong validity and reliability (Sharma et al., 2012).

Participants were also asked to complete questionnaires that looked at their attitudes towards disabilities: the TEFO (Ivey, 2007) and a modified version of the MAS (Findler et al., 2007). These measures were used in order to provide additional information about teacher attitudes towards disabilities in general, not only in their perceived ability for self-efficacy in working in inclusive settings. The modified vignette for the MAS can be found in Appendix F.

The Teachers' Expectations for Future Outcomes (TEFO; Ivey, 2007) is used to investigate perceptions of the importance and likelihood of students with disabilities achieving certain goals. While originally used to investigate parental perceptions of children on the autism spectrum (Mutua, 1999), this measure has also been used to investigate expectations for children with disabilities in other studies (Ivey, 2007). The scale consists of 20 items, measured on a 5-point Likert scale, which consider both the importance and likelihood of four factors: adult roles, community and civil access, educational attainment, and personal fulfillment. This measure also has strong reliability (Ivey, 2007). Since Ivey (2007) had adapted this measure from the original by amalgamating the four factors and using an overall expectations rating for importance and likelihood of the outcomes, the principal investigator and one other rater allocated each item to one of the four factors and inter-rater reliability was established. Inter-rater reliability was

achieved ($r = 0.95$) and the remaining one item was discussed. One rater had originally placed the item in a different factor, recognizing that depending on how the item was interpreted it could fit within multiple factors, and upon discussion a decision was agreed upon where it was most appropriate to be placed.

The Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities (MAS; Findler et al., 2007) was developed to create an instrument that examines attitudes towards persons with disabilities that is based on theoretical foundations and is psychometrically sound. Findler, Vilchinsky, and Werner (2007) created the MAS, which examines affective, cognitive, and behavioural attitudes and has strong reliability. The scale consists of 34 items, measured on a 5-point Likert scale: 16 within the affective factor, 10 within the cognitive factor, and eight within the behavioural factor. This measure can help provide information on any possible differences between attitudes from different dimensions to help guide future directions and interventions.

While all participants completed the DSRGD (Herganrather & Rhoades, 2007), another measure that examined attitudes towards disabilities, this questionnaire was removed from the study prior to the analysis following participant feedback about the relevance of the questionnaire in relation to their classroom experiences. Upon reflection, this questionnaire did not capture the nuances of what the participants were trying to express, as it did not delve into attitudes toward disabilities in relation to their classroom experiences. The majority of participants expressed challenges completing the questionnaire due to the nature of the questions and the variability of the definition of disability. Even with encouragement to provide the context within they were responding to questions, they still had challenges due to the perceived disconnect from their experience within the classroom to the context of the questionnaire.

Semi-structured interviews. Finally, the primary investigator of the current study conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants, a data collection approach common in phenomenological studies (Langdridge, 2007). The interview consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix E) related to the research topic and lasted approximately one hour in duration. The interview questions developed for this study were informed by research in this area conducted at the Master's level (Sobel, 2010). This previous study used a quantitative approach and provided insight into areas within pre-service teacher education and knowledge of transition planning that required a deeper examination, suitable to a qualitative approach. The lack of teacher education and preparedness at the pre-service level guided the question development process as to the level of involvement and knowledge of the TPP for in-service teachers. In phenomenological research, questions are generated which explore participants experience in a specific phenomenon and contexts or situations that may impact their experiences (Creswell, 2007). As such, for this research questions were generated that tapped into their experiences in the TPP, specifically how interactions with other stakeholders, legislation, and previous knowledge and experience have impacted their involvement and understanding of the TPP. All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Notes were also taken during the interview. The transcribed interviews were then coded, using thematic analysis to develop categories for responses.

Identification codes. Each participant was assigned a specific identification number, which was used to identify the information collected. The audio-recorded interviews were uploaded to the primary investigator's computer and the file was password encrypted to prevent others from having access to the interviews. Transcribed interviews did not contain any identifiable information and were labeled using the specific identification number assigned to

that participant. The list, which contains information about the participant's name and identification number, was kept in a separate cabinet and was only accessed by the researchers on this study. Furthermore, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and are used in the description of results and interpretation of the findings.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Questionnaire data. The data derived from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive analyses. Means, standard deviations, and ranges were reported for each item on the questionnaires. Additionally, when appropriate, based on the questionnaire, means, standard deviations, and ranges were also reported for the factors that were calculated on the questionnaire. This information was used to describe the collective attitudes teachers had towards disabilities and student future outcomes, as well as individual and collective efficacy towards working within inclusive settings. This information was also used to illustrate and gain a greater understanding of the individual profiles of each participant and provided a greater understanding of their viewpoints and perspectives regarding the aforementioned attitudes. This quantitative data was gathered as a way to provide context and background information about participants and to gain a greater understanding of the group composition of participants.

Interview data. The way in which the interview data were analyzed uses both deductive and inductive methods of analysis. The initial codes were formed deductively based on the literature review, but then as codes were adapted and modified based on experience and through reviewing the data from pilot studies, patterns and themes started to emerge and were coded inductively (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In hermeneutic phenomenological approaches, data are analysed thematically (Langdridge, 2007). More specifically, the method of analysis used in this study was thematic analysis, which is described as "a method for identifying, analyzing and

reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79). Braun and Clark (2006) described six phases of thematic analysis: 1) familiarizing yourself with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report. Each of these phases will be described, as well as an explanation provided of how each phase was conducted in the current study.

Within the first phase of thematic analysis, the researcher becomes familiar with the data through transcribing and reading the data in great detail, making notes of any initial ideas (Braun & Clark, 2006). In the current study, each interview was transcribed by the primary investigator, and was subsequently re-listened to and reviewed to check that the information was accurately transcribed. During this process of transcribing and reviewing the interviews, any initial thoughts and notions were recorded in a notebook.

During the second phase of thematic analysis, initial codes are developed that identify features of the data that are considered interesting. By working through the full data set, repeated patterns, also known as themes, are identified. Any information that deviates from the main story in the analysis is also noted when coding, as this information may inform the overall story (Braun & Clark, 2006). Initial codes were developed through the process of jotting down notes in the margins and underlining key points and quotes within the transcribed interviews. This information was organized in chart form in order to visualize any emerging themes. The initial codes were reviewed with a research assistant to help identify repeated patterns and expand or collapse codes as needed.

Next, during the third phase, the researcher widens the analysis by looking for broader themes and sorting the codes into different possible themes. During this stage, main themes, sub-themes, and information that is irrelevant or to be discarded are determined. Visual

representations, such as mind-maps, can be used to help visualize and organize the thematic information. At the end of this stage, potential themes, sub-themes, and remaining data codes have been gathered (Braun & Clark, 2006). The initial codes derived during the previous phase were reviewed and then re-organized into over-arching themes. Cue cards were used to help sort and visualize thematic information. Graphic organizers were also used to provide a visual representation of the data and the final versions are included within the results section.

During the fourth phase, the potential themes and sub-themes are reviewed and refined. For instance, it may be determined that some of these prospective themes are not reflective themes, or potential themes may be combined. This review occurs at the level of the coded pieces of data and by examining the overall data set. By reviewing the entire set of data, it can be determined whether themes are representative of the data and to see if any additional data has been missed during the initial coding stages. At the end of this theme, there should be clarity about how the themes tell the overall story of the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). The entire set, including the interviews, initial codes, and main and sub themes were reviewed in order to see if the information fits within the context of the data and to check if any pieces of information were missed. These main and sub-themes derived from the previous phase were also reviewed with a research assistant to discuss the themes derived and review any of the information that does not fit within the presented themes. Changes were made as deemed necessary and appropriate.

During the fifth phase, the themes are further refined by describing what each theme is about and how the theme captures the data. This includes explaining why the data is interesting, not only a description of the content. Each theme is written up as a detailed analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). Once all the themes are finalized, the final phase involves writing up the analysis in a way that illustrates the story of your data, providing examples and extracts that illustrate the

point being made. This phase involves not only describing the data and the analysis, but also linking it to the research questions posed in the study (Braun & Clark, 2006). Once the themes were further refined based on a review of the data set and discussion with the research assistants after reviewing the themes, the final themes derived from the data were presented within the results section. Sample quotes and examples were pulled from the teacher interviews to further illustrate the theme being described, within the overall context of the current study.

Ethical Considerations

As previously mentioned, permission was given by each participant to have their interview audio-recorded and later transcribed. Participants were informed that their interviews would not be labeled with any identifying information and would be stored in a secure place. Upon study completion, all audio-recordings would be deleted and interview transcriptions and questionnaires stored in a secured locked cabinet at McGill University, as per McGill ethics review board guidelines. Additionally, in order to further ensure confidentiality, participants were reminded not to provide any names or identifying information of students they may use as examples, nor provide information about their specific school or work colleagues. They did express what school board they worked within, to ensure that they met participation requirements. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time. Additionally, they were reminded that if any question arose that they did not feel comfortable responding to, they did not have to answer the question. Through the ethical review process it was deemed that there were no known risks to participants.

Issues of Trustworthiness

A transcript of the interview was provided to participants to clarify the accuracy of the information provided and provided opportunities for participants to clarify any

misunderstandings. Additionally, since the principal investigator of the study was fully immersed in the study and may have unintentionally led to reviewer bias, the initial codes and themes were reviewed by a second person. Using a random sample of the questionnaires, two questionnaires were re-coded using a template provided by the initial investigator. Any discrepancies were discussed and amendments made as required. After this review, any discrepancies were reviewed in the other interviews as well. Additionally, themes were reviewed and discussed with a research assistant and committee members (mainly the primary supervisor) to support reliability of the data. Categories were collapsed, verified, or combined based on the information discussed and queries formed.

Assumptions and Decisions

A number of decisions were made in order to address limiting factors of the study. One such factor is the variability regarding the understanding and definition of disability and the experiences with disabilities that teachers have encountered in their classroom. In order to address this limitation, all teachers were provided with the same definition of disability (or exceptionality) as outlined by the Ministry of Education in Ontario, and were encouraged to provide examples of experiences (without identifying any student), in order to place their responses within a context.

Additionally, at the time of study participation, some of the teachers were involved in a work-to-rule position within their school boards. As such, teacher interactions with other stakeholders and supports available with the school would have been impacted and may have influenced their responses to some of the interview questions. Since strikes and work-to-rule are fairly common occurrences within the education system, these participants were still included in the study as it contributes to their experiences within the school system. However, it was noted

which teachers commented that their school boards had been involved in work-to-rule, either during or just prior to study participation.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this section provided a detailed overview of the research methodology for the current study. Qualitative methods, specifically phenomenology, were used to highlight the experiences and perspectives of general education teachers in working with students with disabilities and their views towards the TPP. The participants for this study were comprised of 13 teachers from the elementary, middle and high school levels who had worked at least one full year in the classroom. Data were collected through the completion of questionnaires and an in-depth semi-structured interview. The data were analyzed for emerging themes and reviewed and refined through multiple examinations and in consultation with research assistants and the dissertation committee. The next section of this thesis will be comprised of an analysis and description of the themes that arose from the questionnaire and interview data.

Chapter Three: Results Section

Overview

The purpose of the current study was to gain insight into the perspectives of 13 in-service teachers on their experiences working with students with disabilities and with their involvement in the transition planning process (TPP). A better understanding of this perspective will allow other stakeholders in the process to be more informed of how to support teachers to promote more successful transitions in general, but particularly for the transition beyond high school. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from 13 in-depth interviews and information from questionnaires exploring teacher perceptions and attitudes towards working with students with disabilities and within inclusive school settings. In particular, the questionnaires were used to investigate their perceptions of self- and collective efficacy and attitudes towards disability. The information derived from these questionnaires will be qualitatively described within the demographic profile section and the themes that emerged from an analysis of the semi-structured interviews will follow (Creswell, 2013). Following the presentation of results will be a discussion and interpretation of the themes that emerged and how the derived information can help inform future practice, policy and research in the area of transition planning.

Group Profile

Participants completed questionnaires regarding the perceptions of teacher and collective efficacy and attitudes towards disability, in order to gain an understanding of the composition and profile of the participants as a group. Perceptions of collective efficacy and teacher self-efficacy were gathered using the Collective Efficacy (CE) scale and the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice (TEIP) scale. On the CE scale, participant ratings of overall Collective Efficacy fell within the somewhat agree range ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.62$). On the TEIP scale, teacher

ratings regarding their efficacy to use inclusive instructions (E-UII; *M* = 5.23, *SD* = 0.42), in collaboration (E-C; *M* = 4.94, *SD* = 0.66), and in managing behaviour (E-MB; *M* = 4.92, *SD* = 0.58) fell within the agree range, suggesting a high self-efficacy in these areas. As a group, the participants perceive themselves to have a high overall self-efficacy (*M* = 5.03, *SD* = 0.52) to teach in inclusive settings. Overall, comparing group to individual efficacy, teachers appear to rate individual teacher efficacy as slightly higher than collective efficacy.

Attitudes towards disabilities were obtained through the Teacher Expectations for Future Outcomes (TEFO) scale and a modified version of the Multidimensional Attitudes Scale Towards Persons with Disabilities (MAS) scale. On the TEFO, the group of participants rated the importance of students achieving the variety of adult outcomes (*M* = 4.12, *SD* = 0.59), as higher than the likelihood of students actually achieving those future outcomes (*M* = 3.72, *SD* = 0.76). Figure A1 illustrates this pattern across the various domain areas. On the MAS, the group held more positive behavioural (*M* = 2.28, *SD* = 0.60) and cognitive (*M* = 2.33, *SD* = 0.34) attitudes and more neutral affect (*M* = 2.91, *SD* = 0.75) attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, within the context of the hypothetical classroom scenario provided.

Overall, while the group profiles provide a glimpse into the perceptions of collective and teacher efficacy and attitudes towards disability, they do not provide a picture of the richness found within individual responses. See appendices A2-A5 to view tables of the individual profiles for each questionnaire. A description of each individual's profile provides a deeper understanding of the background and previous experiences of the participants in this study, which is described next.

Demographic Profiles

The aim of this study was to gain teacher perspectives of their experiences, in alignment with phenomenology (Creswell, 2013), which allows for a more exploratory approach and provides teachers opportunities to share their experiences working with students with disabilities and their involvement in the TPP. The goal of this study is to understand participants' perspectives on their interactions with other stakeholders, as well as their level of knowledge of and involvement in the process. Participants included 13 in-service teachers who have taught in a classroom for a minimum of one-year on a full time basis. Teachers were asked questions about their experiences within their school systems, as well as questions about their experiences as a classroom teacher. Their responses are summarized in the following section. Pseudonyms were assigned for each participant.

Charlene. Charlene is currently a grade 6 teacher but has previously taught grade 7 and 12. Like other junior teachers, she teaches a wide range of subjects. Although she graduated in 2010, due to challenges in finding work she has only had two yearlong Long-Term Occasional (LTO) teaching placements, but since graduation she also completed a Master's of Education. Charlene expressed that she decided to become a teacher because she had such supportive teachers, including her English as a second language (ESL) teachers, when she moved to Canada as a child. She also found herself gravitating toward jobs that involved teaching in some capacity. She described that as she continues to work with students, she sees herself helping students become increasingly independent by providing scaffolded support to students throughout the years. She commented that she hopes to reach out to and support students at young ages before they have developed the notion that they cannot be independent and believe they require constant support or monitoring.

Adam. Adam is currently teaching in a grade 5/6 split classroom, but previously has taught students across the primary division (kindergarten - grade 3), and has experience with teaching intermediate aged (grades 7 - 8) students. He has been teaching for the past seven years. Adam decided to become a teacher because he enjoyed working with young people and wanted the opportunity to "inspire young people." He worked in a private school setting prior to joining the public school boards. He described his current classroom as following a different model, where "the administration has grouped people with exceptionalities, IEPs in my classroom." He also shared that he was identified with a learning disability when in school, which shaped his experience within the school system.

Paul. Paul is currently a high school mathematics teacher, teaching students from grades 9-12. Prior to being a teacher, he earned an MBA and had been working within the business field for 16 years. Facing questions of job security, he looked into a career change and found teaching to be appropriate. He has been teaching for the past 24 years. Through all his years of teaching, the only students with exceptionalities that he has knowingly taught are students identified as gifted learners. Paul pursued his principal's papers but did not want to become a principal upon being exposed to the bureaucracy involved. In the future he would like to have more input and involvement in supporting his students' futures and explained that he feels he is a wasted resource if people, such as other teachers or administrators, do not consult with him regarding his current and former students.

Lyla. Lyla is currently a junior/senior kindergarten (JK/SK) teacher and has been a kindergarten (KG) teacher for the past 11 years. She described that this is her first year experiencing full day KG after returning from maternity leave. She noted that she has been getting used to this new play-based model. Within this model, students in JK and SK are in the

same class, and support is provided in the form of an Early Childhood Educator (ECE). She decided to become a teacher because she enjoyed working with kids. She recalled that as a child she pretended to be her younger brother's teacher and always wanted to go to school even when she was feeling ill. In the future, Lyla wishes to pursue an MA in Child Development and has considered going into Guidance to work with high school students.

Greg. Greg is currently a middle school teacher, teaching science and technology, as well as mathematics, to students in grades 6-9. He has been teaching for the past 19 years. His original plan was to pursue a career in medicine, but after those plans fell through, he noticed that he gravitated toward jobs or roles that involved teaching. Greg mentioned that he grew up with family members and friends who had disabilities and witnessed how these individuals did not allow their disability to hold them back from living a full life. Someone once told him "there's no such thing as special [education]…every kid has special needs…and if you look at kids that way you'll be a much more effective teacher." This has impacted how he approaches teaching. Looking towards the future, and with the advent of technology, Greg expressed that he sees education "swinging away from the curriculum" and that "the hidden curriculum will be brought much more to light in future years."

Lina. Lina is currently a primary prep teacher, and teaches subjects such as health, drama, and dance. She previously taught KG and was an ESL teacher for grade 2 and grade 8 students. She has been teaching for 11 years. She expressed that family was a huge influential factor in her becoming a teacher, as her family highly respected the profession. She enjoys interacting with children and was told that "it's the best career you could have especially for a woman, having a family and it's a good balance." As a prep coverage teacher, she commented that she is not really consulted and is often not invited to meetings, possibly because she is not

there all the time. Looking toward the future, she believes that her role is not just confined to the teacher label and described, "…it seems like it's more parent, role model, teacher, life coach."

Hinda. Hinda is currently a JK/SK teacher, but has previously taught classes across the primary and junior division. She first started teaching in South Africa and later moved to Canada, and has been a teacher for 19 years. Hinda originally entered the teaching profession because it allowed her time with her children. After taking a break from teaching to spend time with her kids, her sentiments toward teaching changed. When asked what prompted the difference she explained, "I have no idea. Maybe it was because I was a parent. Maybe it was because [I was teaching in] South Africa and then [teaching in] Canada and that's completely different. I have no idea, but I really, at the beginning I did it because it was my job. And I do it now because I love it." Looking toward the future, she expressed "I'm retiring in five years" and elaborated that she may continue as a supply teacher, or work part time in a private school or daycare setting, but she'll see what happens closer to her retirement.

Jordana. Jordana has been working as a prep coverage teacher for the past five years. Her own personal experience going through the education system with a label of a learning disability (LD), and the struggles that she encountered and negative experiences she had with her teachers, left a strong impression on her. She explained, "…no kid should have to do what I went through. And that really influenced me into becoming a teacher…kids shouldn't fall through the cracks." She recalled that her mother was a strong advocate for her to attend meetings. "My mother believed that I should be allowed in every aspect of my education, that there shouldn't be a part that I couldn't be a part of." As a prep teacher, she expressed frustration about not being involved in things and has invited herself to meetings because, "…I know everyone is just going to be saying negative after negative…but I have a whole lot of

positives to say." She also hates the term "prep coverage teacher" because, "when you're teaching prep coverage, you're teaching science, you're teaching art, you're teaching music, you're teaching health and [physical education], those are things in the curriculum."

Amina. Amina is currently a KG teacher and has been teaching for eight years. She has also previously taught grade 1. Amina decided to enter the field of teaching because at a young age she knew she wanted to do something that involved working with children, and her work and volunteer positions related to teaching. Amina has taken the initiative to welcome incoming students with exceptionalities into her classroom and described that she wanted the experience and wanted to learn more about how to help diverse students in her classroom. She will be on maternity leave next year, but expressed that she would like to continue to work with students with different exceptionalities and to create an inclusive classroom and explained that, "…kindergarteners are so innocent…so if they have those experiences early on, hopefully it translates beyond kindergarten…"

Pamela. Pamela is a high school teacher and has been teaching for the past six years, four of which were full-year LTO positions. She teaches subjects such as religion, drama, English, ESL, business, and history. She decided to become a teacher because she really connected with her high school teachers. She described, "...at that time in my life I didn't really get along with my own parents so much, so they were kind of role models" and expressed "I know it sounds ironic and corny but that's kind of what I hope to do as well." Pamela described that she works in a school located in an ethnically diverse community, where few students are on individual education plans (IEPs), but she has previously worked in schools where a larger percentage of students had IEPs. In the future, Pamela foresees more students identified with

exceptionalities and a decrease in the stigma associated with being identified, but does not feel her role as a teacher will change much due to the strength of teacher unions.

Grant. Grant has been teaching for the past five years and is currently teaching in a grade 2/3 split classroom. He has previously taught grades 4 and prep coverage for grades 6-8. His mother was a teacher, so growing up he heard a lot of stories about teaching and life in the school. He also enjoyed his own school experience and working with children. All of these factors influenced his decision to become a teacher. Looking to the future, he expressed, "I definitely see my own role developing so that I'm teaching older students in the future. So that would mean a lot more thought about getting students to think about… where they want to go as they have to start planning about their jobs and their future, their education." He also was hopeful that he will "continue relationships with students who have graduated or … are alumni from our school. And continue to sort of help them as they transition into their lives."

Melanie. Melanie is currently a grade four teacher and has been teaching for the past eight years. She has previously taught grade 2, 3, and in a 3/4 split class. Prior to deciding to enter the field, Melanie was torn between teaching and doing Social Work or Psychology. She previously completed an MA in Child Study and Education. Since she did not enjoy the research aspect associated with Psychology, and realized she enjoyed the teaching aspect of working with kids, she decided that she wanted to work with students. She chose to work in a culturally diverse community and feels that she has been very lucky to be able to establish a good rapport with parents. Melanie will be on maternity leave the following school year, but has had discussions with the principal of her school about taking on a Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT) role in the future, based on her interests in the areas of special education and her ability to work collaboratively with parents.

Laura. For the past five years, Laura has worked in two different schools in high school settings, in one school as a part-time teacher and the other as an LTO teacher. She has taught subjects ranging from learning strategies, Spanish, law, introduction to psychology, sociology, anthropology, civics and career studies, history, and English. She completed an MA in interdisciplinary studies. The factors that influenced her decision to become a teacher included having family members who were teachers, her enjoyment of teaching in the past, and her personal experience of moving to Canada and struggling as a high school student. She explained that during her school experience she was identified as gifted LD. This impacted her school experience and how she relates to her students as a teacher. She expressed, "I wanted to be a mentor and help other students that went through similar things as I did." In the future, Laura will be involved in the Advantages school program, where she will work with students who are 18-20 years old. The program is designed to help students get credits and transition past high school.

Overall, the individual demographic profiles of the participants provide a deeper understanding of the background and previous experiences of the participants in this study. While the participants come from a variety of backgrounds and have a range of experiences, they also share many commonalities. When analyzing the themes that emerged in the study, gender and years of experience demographics were explored, and overall, the same themes were discovered irrespective of these factors. However, there were a few minor nuances that were seen regarding gender and years of experience, and these will be discussed in greater detail in the relevant sections. In the next section will be a discussion of the themes that emerged from an analysis of the participant interviews. The themes fell under four separate areas: skills needed

for transitions beyond school, stakeholder involvement in the TPP, policies and procedures related to transition planning, and barriers and supports encountered by teachers.

Skills Needed for Transitions Beyond School

Teachers provided insight into the types of skills they perceived were necessary for students with disabilities to succeed in life beyond school. Rather than having teachers identify which skills are important from a checklist, a strategy that is common in quantitative research (Creswell, 2013), teachers were instead asked to describe any important skills. By using this method, teachers were provided opportunities to share the skills that first come to mind and were most salient when referring to prepare for life beyond school. The responses provided by teachers varied, and the majority identified multiple skills. The main areas that arose regarding the skills necessary to aid in the transition beyond school include a discussion of the following: a) interpersonal skills, b) self-determination skills, c) coping skills, d) academic skills, and e) learning skills.

Interpersonal skills. The majority of teachers (10 out of 13) raised the importance of developing interpersonal skills, such as social and communication skills, in order to succeed in life beyond high school. This is consistent with the fact mentioned previously that many teachers indicated they have either worked, or are currently working, with students who have been identified with an LD or who are on the autism spectrum. Both of these identifications fall under the communication domain area of disabilities within the Province of Ontario (Education Act, 1990). More specifically, teachers discussed that effective social interactions were almost always necessary regardless of the roles an individual takes on upon leaving school, whereas academic skills were not always as important. For instance, Hinda explained:

> You know it's funny to hear like a teacher telling you this but honestly the science and the math, and the [language]…it really doesn't matter at the end of the day. It's how you take care of yourself and being able to be social. (T7, April 2016, p. 4)

When discussing social skills, many teachers also highlighted the importance of being able to communicate effectively. Most often, teachers discussed this skill within the context of students they have worked with who had challenges with communication and required support to improve on their communication abilities. Amina described her experience with a student who was non-verbal in her KG classroom:

> Out of all the students I've had with autism, she's the only one I've had so far that was not verbal, at all. And that's one of the first things we put into place for her is how to communicate her needs, her wants, because she was getting frustrated. (T9, April 2016, p. 6)

Amina further described other teaching experiences, highlighting the importance of developing appropriate social and conversational skills, even for those students who are high academically but require support in these other areas:

> I've seen kids…who socially they don't know how to interact with people. Like, they're very bright, you know. Or even, some of my kids with autism, the ones that are really high, they're high academically. But socially, they don't know what's appropriate. They don't know how to… like those conversational skills they don't have either because they don't know what's socially appropriate. (T9, April 2016, p. 9)

Although the majority of teachers discussed the importance of interpersonal skills, they less frequently mentioned the range of skills more directly related to self-determination. As such, teachers' identification of skills related to self-determination was examined in greater detail.

Skills related to self-determination. Overall, the majority of teachers (11 out of 13) identified at least one skill related to self-determination students with disabilities should develop prior to leaving high school. However, far fewer teachers, only two, identified a second skill related to self-determination that would also be considered important. Table 3 highlights the self-determination skill areas that were identified and the number of teachers that recognized the specific skill area. These categories are based on the categories described by Wehmeyer et al. (2007) of ways to categorize the self-determination skill areas. Of note, there were no teachers that identified choice-making, decision-making, or goal setting and attainment, as skill areas that are important for preparing for life beyond school. While many teachers recognized the importance of self-advocacy and independence, skills related to how to be successful in these areas (such as decision making and goal setting) were not identified. This finding was somewhat unexpected since these aspects are very important in transition planning involvement (Wehmeyer, Palmer, et al., 2007) and one would think these skills should be a driving force in preparing students for life beyond school and making decisions about their future. The implications of this finding will be considered in greater detail in the discussion section.

Table 3

Self-Determination Skill Areas Identified by Teachers

Self-Determination Skills Area	Frequency
Self-advocacy and leadership	5
Independence, Risk Taking, and Safety	4
Problem Solving	3
Self-observation, evaluation, and reinforcement	1
Choice making, decision making, goal setting and attainment, self-instruction	None

A number of teachers mentioned the importance of self-advocacy. Some teachers expressed that students needed to advocate for themselves, especially in order to convey to their

teachers what supports they require. Greg articulated the importance of the ability to self-advocate, since situational demands increase and there are changes in school culture as the student progresses throughout the school system. Greg explained how he communicates this to his students:

> We do explain to kids that as they get older in school their classroom size increases, the population of the school itself doubles or triples when they leave elementary school to go off to high school. And a lot of them need to be able to advocate for themselves and need to be able to be pretty patient and persistent with what their needs actually are. And we tell them that you know in high school…a lot of teachers won't look up to see what your exceptionality is, you have to go to them and say this is who I am, this is my identified exceptionality, here is what I need from you in order to be successful. (T5, March 2016, p. 3)

Independence was another area that some teachers identified as an important skill area to develop. Pamela described a program that some of her high school students are in: the Functional Life Skills (FLS) program. In the FLS program, her students have opportunities to learn independence skills and other important life skills. Students were taught to count change by baking and selling food, were trained how to take the bus, and learned about customer service through programs at the local cinema. Pamela explained:

> …to the best of their abilities take care of themselves because…at some point if their family isn't around, then at least if they can do their best to take care of themselves or find a place to live where they have people to support them. (T10, May 2016, p. 5)

A few teachers also mentioned learning about problem solving or how to go about dealing with conflicts. Amina explained:

> A couple of kids that I had were very high functioning but when it came to conflict, they didn't know how to cope…and it's figuring out how to deal with conflict, how to stop, how to think about it…who to ask for help instead of crying or getting upset. (T9, April 2016, p. 8)

Overall, while the vast majority of teachers were able to identify at least one aspect relating to self-determination, such as self-advocacy, independence, problem solving, and self-awareness, it appears that teachers are not spontaneously thinking of the range of skill areas that should be considered that would lead to self-determined behaviour.

Coping skills. While less frequently mentioned, a few teachers also described the importance of skills related to adaptability and resiliency. They emphasized the necessity for students to persevere in the face of adversity, particularly for those areas that most likely will continue to be areas of difficulty due to the nature of their disability. Grant described the importance of resiliency in order to be able to overcome challenges:

> I also think resiliency would be a skill that's very important to develop because…all students are going to be faced with challenges they need to overcome. And especially students… with exceptionalities, they may find themselves struggling in challenging situations. They need to be able to sort of learn how to fight through it and how to, stay above water when things get tough. (T11, May 2016, p. 3)

As a result, students should learn how to face the challenges that may arise due to their disability and persevere in the face of adversity.

Academic skills. Overall, slightly over a third of teachers (5 out of 13) identified skills that fell within the academic domain as those that are important for the transition beyond high school. The academic areas identified, as well as the number of teachers who endorsed the skill

area, can be seen in Table 4. Of note, teachers trained in and currently teaching at the high school level were the only ones to endorse the work skills area.

Table 4

Academic Skill Areas Identified by Teachers

Academic Skills Area	Frequency
Math	2
Literacy	2
Financial Literacy	3
Work Skills	3

Academic skill areas were not frequently mentioned as important for transition planning, and those that were mentioned were described in terms of the practical uses. Melanie discussed that while academics are important, students may struggle with academic areas once they leave school, which makes the development of learning skills even more important. She explained:

> I mean there's obvious academics, like you should know how to read and write. But at the end of the day, sadly, there are students who will leave high school…who have very little understand of language and reading and writing. That doesn't mean they can't be successful but it means that those learning skills will really need to come to the forefront. (T12, May 2016, p. 5)

Overall, academic skills were mentioned the least frequently than the other skill areas discussed. This finding was notable to the researchers as there is often an emphasis on adhering to the teaching of curricular expectations. Those teachers that did mention the importance of academic skills further elaborated that it is the foundational skills that are important. Teachers discussed the importance of focusing on learning skills that would be beneficial for students to have when they leave school. The implications of this finding will be addressed further in the discussion section.

Learning skills. The term "learning skills" refer to a set of skills that are outlined in the report cards as part of areas of growth according to the Ministry of Education in Ontario. These skills include: self-regulation, collaboration, initiative, organization, responsibility, and independent work (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). The learning skills identified, as well as the number of teachers who mentioned any particular learning skill, is contained within Table 5. Approximately half of the participants identified at least one of the learning skills areas as defined on the Ontario Report cards.

Table 5

Learning Skills Areas as Identified by Teachers

Learning Skills	Frequency
Self-regulation	5
Collaboration	4
Initiative	2
Organization	2
Responsibility	2
Independent Work	2

Although self-regulation is noted by the Ministry of Ontario (2010) as one of the learning skills in the school report cards, self-regulation also falls under one of the self-determination skill areas by Wehmeyer et al. (2007) as discussed previously. However, for the ease of discussion and because teachers often discussed self-regulation within the context of the learning skills on the report cards, they will be included in this section.

The ability to self-regulate was mentioned by five of the 13 teachers. This was discussed within the context of the importance for students to learn when something exceeds their abilities and when they need to gain assistance. Grant explained how developing learning skills also help students when they leave the school system:

> Okay, having a growth mindset. Being able to learn from mistakes. As well as the general, like the learning skills that we teach as well…like responsibility and organization, it's on their report card. Like those, those are skills that would benefit them undoubtedly as they grow up and enter a workplace. (T11, May 2016, p. 19)

Grant elaborated: "…initiative, self-regulation, collaboration, and independent work…to one degree or another are all obviously those skills that are going to help anybody… I think education in those areas is very helpful in getting those skills" (T11, May 2016, p. 20).

Overall, this set of skills was not mentioned as frequently as one might expect, given the fact that the learning skills are part of the Ontario report cards and teachers have to evaluate and monitor student progress on these skills. It would be advantageous to carefully consider the type and range of skills that are included in the learning skills section of report cards, clarify the reasons why those specific skills are included, and distinctly highlight how these skills will support student development and future outcomes.

Universal skill development for all students. The majority of teachers (11 out of 13) frequently referenced the concept of "all students" when discussing the needs of students within their classroom. When describing the skills needed for transition planning, it was discussed as something that all students could benefit from, not just students with disabilities. Laura summarized this sentiment:

> All students have exceptionalities, just some of them have been written into an IEP and made into a legal binding document but others don't. That doesn't mean they don't have some form of exceptionality. Maybe not enough to designate into a legal document. (T13, May 2016, p. 10)

Several teachers (3 out of 13) also mentioned the idea of the "whole student", and highlighted the importance of not only focusing on academic strengths and needs. Advances in technology allow information to be accessed more readily and teachers can focus on more holistic aspects of students as opposed to specific curricular requirements. Lina shared her philosophy of teaching and the importance of educating the whole child, and not just focusing on curriculum expectations:

> I believe in educating the whole child as well, not just the stuff they need to know for school. So, you know I do think that they need to be taught to be kind and interact with people and they need to maybe taught organization, or those sorts of things. (T6, April 2016, p. 10)

Overall, the majority of teachers identified interpersonal skills as most vital to develop in order for students to be successful during the transition beyond high school. Altogether, teachers discussed a wide range of skills that would be beneficial for students to learn including: skills relating to self-determination, coping skills, academic skills, and learning skills. However, identifying these skills is just one step in the direction of supporting students. Another area is identifying how to best support the student, including who can provide support to teachers within their classroom to help foster these skills and to set students up for future success. The next section will examine the various stakeholders that are involved in the transition process, and delve further into how psychologists and administrators can provide support to teachers in order for them to most effectively teach students.

Stakeholder Involvement in the TPP

Knowing who teachers work with and their perceptions of their interactions with these individuals can provide knowledge about where gaps in service occur and how to best provide

support during the TPP. Participants were asked to identify who should be involved and were encouraged to elaborate on their responses when necessary. Table 6 shows a list of individuals teachers believed should be involved in the TPP, and the number of teachers that identified that stakeholder.

Table 6

Who Should be Involved in the Transition Planning Process

Who Should be Involved in TPP	Frequency
Parents	13
Teachers	12
Other professionals*	10
Students	9
Administrators	6
Psychologists	5
Community Members	5
Other family members	3
Those who have known the child for a long time	7

Note. *Other professionals include one or more of the following: Speech-Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, Behavioural Therapist

Many teachers described that *everyone* should be included and when prompted listed those stakeholders identified above. Teachers were asked to further identify and describe their role, as well as the roles of administrators and psychologists, in the TPP. The main themes that arose regarding the roles and responsibilities of individuals involved in the TPP included a discussion of: a) providers of knowledge or information, b) interactions among stakeholders, and c) procedural aspects of the involvement.

Knowledge/Information. Participants identified that teachers, administrators, and psychologists all held the role of providing information or knowledge; however, the degree of involvement and the way in which it was executed varied. The overall primary role of both teachers and psychologists fell within this thematic area, and will be discussed in greater detail.

Within this theme, the specific role of teachers fell under the following two areas: 1) provide student data, and 2) assess student needs and educate. Overall, the primary role of teachers was identified as providing student data, cited by 8 out of 13 teachers. Their secondary role was described as assessing needs and facilitating learning, cited by 6 out of 13 teachers.

Providing student data encompasses the idea that teachers should provide observations about the student in order to inform the TPP. The way participants described this role varied, from providing information about how the student functions within the classroom, to observations about student strengths and learning needs. Greg identified that he provides information and has insights based on his time spent with his students:

> I am a piece of that puzzle. I spend a lot of, depending on the kid, I spend a significant amount of time with them over the course of the day and I have insights in to what that child's been able to do for me based on the program that I offered much like all of my colleagues would have the same type of thing for each student. (T5, March 2016, p. 13)

He also explained the importance of gathering information from multiple perspectives to inform the overall picture of a student's needs and abilities:

> I fully admit that these are very subjective, we all see things very differently but that's why the more people that interact with this child, or [are] involved in this meeting, you get a much more objective picture by looking at all the little subjective pieces as they come. (T5, March 2016, p. 13)

In addition to providing student data and observations, teachers identified that they would be involved in assessing needs and educating the student. This would involve assessing the current levels of knowledge and abilities of students and to teach any further knowledge or skills outlined within the IEP or ITP. Helping develop skills could take the form of creating an

environment where students feel they can succeed and then help them develop skills. Grant explained:

> As a primary teacher, I feel like my role is, as I sort of talked about before like, I'm helping build that character or help create a mindset for students that they're able to be successful. And provide them with some of the skills that are going to be useful as they grow up. (T11, May 2016, p. 15)

Part of helping to facilitate learning is to make sure that students are aware of what is involved in the TPP. Jordana identified that her role would be to ensure the appropriateness and student awareness of the plan:

> As a teacher, my role in the transition planning process should be…make sure the plan is appropriate for my student. And making sure that my student knows the plan, is aware of the plan. You know the last thing you want to do is set up a plan in place, that the goal is unattainable. (T8, April 2016, p. 20)

Within the area of knowledge/information, the specific role of psychologists fell under the following two areas: 1) provide knowledge and/or tailored info, and 2) assess students. The primary role of psychologists was cited as providing knowledge or tailored information about the student, cited by 12 out of 13 teachers.

Within the context of providing knowledge or tailored information to teachers, participants describe that the knowledge from psychologists would pertain to child development in general, knowledge of diagnoses, or queries about specific students following an assessment. Grant illustrated the idea of providing information across development and explained how psychologists could provide support:

> The other way I suppose psychologists could help is that they could be providing ideas or resources throughout the child's development through school. So it's not just transition planning explicitly but rather creating more of an environment that sets the student up for success. (T11, May 2016, p. 17)

The role of psychologists would also include an assessment of students when needed, as cited by 5 out of 13 teachers. Assessments could help inform the TPP and include any required information or supports in legal documentation. Amina described how psychologists could provide information about the student and about the profile of a student's diagnosis:

> With the psychologist, it's more or less providing background information on the child, their needs, their understanding of the exceptionality…The information we typically get from them is sort of, what this diagnosis is, what does it mean for this particular child. What are their strengths and needs. So therefore you can plan, based on sort of the information they provide. (T9, April 2016, p. 33)

However, the concern was raised that recommendations made in assessment reports are not always easy to implement effectively. Laura emphasized the disconnect between recommendations and what is feasible in the classroom, explaining the psychologist role should extend beyond assessments and include classroom visits to see what is possible:

> I don't know because I think there's a piece missing that we see these diagnostics on their IEPs and they're so far fetched … they think of accommodations and away they go. And then the entire, everything else trickled down from that diagnosis, from that exceptionality and from the recommendation areas of strength, areas of weakness. But there's such a disconnect between what they say and what we can actually do in the

classroom. If they could come down a little bit and see it perhaps it would help. (T13, May 2016, p. 33)

While administrators were also identified as having a role in providing information or knowledge, this responsibility did not seem to be a significant role for administrators, (cited by 5 of 13 participants), when compared to their involvement in interpersonal interactions and procedural aspects of the TPP. Grant noted that administrators could provide information based on previous experiences: "They could provide resources, provide knowledge, share perspectives, be open to conversations" (T11, May 2016, p. 16). Adam also noted that administrators have knowledge of policies and programs that others may not be aware of: "…ministry documents that may help or programs…different things that the board could offer, that administrators may know about that teachers don't" (T2, December 2015, p. 16).

Interpersonal interactions. Participants identified that teachers, administrators, and psychologists should all be involved in the role of interpersonal interactions; however, the degree of involvement in this role varied. The overall primary role of administrators fell within this thematic area, while this area fell as a secondary role for psychologists and a minor role for teachers. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

Within this theme, the specific role of administrators fell under the area of consulting and liaising with stakeholders, cited by 10 out of 13 teachers. While administrators' roles were described as helping facilitate interactions with parents or outside supports/resources, psychologists were mostly identified as collaborating with teachers, cited by 8 out of 13 teachers. Additionally, 3 out of 13 teachers identified that psychologists could assist with parents.

Teachers elaborated that since administrators and psychologists are seen as more "senior" and have a greater degree of expertise, parents place a greater value on their word in comparison

to when teachers attempt to communicate with parents. Adam commented that it is helpful when administrators or psychologists are involved when dealing with parents, since it brings more weight and degree of seriousness to the issue being discussed: "It's great when administration deals with parents and I don't have to. Because I think when administrators tell a parent something, it's much more serious. Same as a psychologist. And I've seen that first hand" (T2, December 2015, p. 16). Pamela commented on how having psychologists involved in the process, as an authority figure, helps address the stigma of being identified:

> …with the stigma part, and with parents, in this community who don't believe in this. It's a doctor, it's an actual doctor telling you something. Right, versus, I don't think when they hear it from teachers, they don't take it seriously. When you hear from a doctor who's seen your kid, that's a little bit different. (T10, May 2016, p. 21)

To a smaller degree, cited by 4 out of 13 teachers, teachers identified that part of their role involved liaising between people involved in the process, such as parents. Lyla described the importance of getting parents involved, having an open conversation about their child and encouraging their involvement in the process:

> Going back to the parents and having them as part of this transition planning. Like having them sit and having that discussion with them that, and again not everyone's going to be on the same page and in my experience that hasn't always been the case. But just trying to get different points of view out there about the student and what we want to, or what we may want to see as a goal or what they might want to see and just getting everyone, just to have that, open conversation. (T4, February 2016, p. 19)

Procedural. Participants identified that administrators and teachers had involvement in the procedural aspects of transition planning. They did not mention psychologist involvement in

this thematic area. The overall secondary role for administrators fell within this thematic area, while this area was mentioned by few and seen as a minor role for teachers. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

Administrators were seen as the ones responsible to develop school level procedures, cited by 8 out of 13 teachers. Furthermore, participants elaborated that administrators were responsible to ensure the TPP is in line with regulations, and that transition plans were developed and maintained. This was cited by 5 out of 13 teachers. Amina identified that administrators were responsible for funding allocation based on the needs of their school: "They typically provide what kind of funding, what kind of supports are available. Whether it's from a cost perspective or like based on the needs in the school" (T9, April 2016, p. 31). Not only are administrators responsible for the funding and supports within the school, they are also responsible to ensure that any procedures and responsibilities are followed. Grant described how administrators' role encompasses ensuring that everyone is adhering to the roles and responsibilities outlined in the IEP:

> Ideally the role of an administrator is to ensure everything that everyone else is doing their part. So that requires knowledge of the student…ensuring that staff is working effectively with that student and parents are involved in the appropriate way. And the role of the administrator could be to step in in a more, explicit role if needed. (T11, May 2016, p. 16)

From a procedural standpoint, a few participants mentioned that teachers were responsible to create and foster the type of environment that was supportive for not only students with disabilities, but for all students. Furthermore, a few teachers have noted that technological advancements and the use of technology in and outside of the classroom has changed the ways

and purpose of teaching. Since students have the ability to look up information easily through the Internet, technology has made the curricular material less important and the teacher's role evolve to be more holistic. Greg commented on how technology has influenced the teaching landscape:

> …so much less focus these days…should be given to the curriculum itself because it's so easy to acquire knowledge. All you have to do is open up any laptop, any telephone, you can get any information about anything. So the curriculum starts to become less important and you start looking at the kid more holistically. (T5, March 2016, p. 18)

Paul expressed concern about the lack of foundational knowledge students possess in his math classes. While technology has been a great tool, it can also prevent students from developing a basic understanding of the subject matter. As a result, teachers need to be vigilant in ensuring that students possess foundational knowledge and teach students ways to verify the reliability of information derived from the Internet. He explained:

> Technology, it's a wonderful tool, but that technology also is hindering them from really understanding what it is they are doing. Calculators for example, they are using calculators in the elementary panel. I think they should do away with it until later on…because they don't really understand what they are doing. (T3, December 2015, p. 9)

This was one area where a gender difference was observed. Only male teachers explicitly mentioned the concept of technology changing the ways and purpose of teaching. While female teachers discussed the use and benefits of technology in the classroom, none focused on how technology changes the way and purpose of teaching. The reason for this difference is unclear; future research should be conducted to examine if this trend persists in a larger sample or by asking more targeted questions about technology use in the classroom.

Limited Involvement. Of note, with regards to administrator and psychologist involvement, approximately a third of teachers expressed that stakeholders with limited interactions with the students should have limited involvement in the TPP. It was acknowledged that when administrators are knowledgeable about the student they could provide a lot of support, especially when interacting with parents. However, if they are not familiar with the student, particularly in settings such as high schools, they fulfill the role of more of a facilitator and authority figure in outlining the process and allocating available resources. Jordana commented on the lack of administrator involvement:

> I find it's, especially in high school, administrators don't know the students, they don't really know the parents. They can try to play a role, but what real role can they play? It's different in elementary school when they know the parents and they can explain things. (T8, April 2016, pp. 21-22)

This sentiment was the same for psychologists; their involvement would also be limited if they did not interact more directly or more frequently with students. They could provide information or knowledge in general or could conduct assessments on students, but may not have a more in depth involvement because they do not know the student very well. Amina expressed how she perceives the role of psychologists since they are not as involved with the student.

> So it's more of a consult, it's like from what I've worked with, to say, they're not involved. But like, they're, it's more of a consulting kind of role. You know. So what do you think, this is what we came up with. Do you think this is something that might be helpful for that student. (T9, April 2016, p. 33)

Overall, participants highlighted the various roles teachers, administrators, and psychologists can play in the TPP. The roles of these stakeholders fell under the themes of

providers of knowledge/information, interpersonal interactions, and procedural aspects of their involvement. However, the specific roles described under these themes varied as a function of their position and degree of involvement with students. This interaction is illustrated in Figure 1.

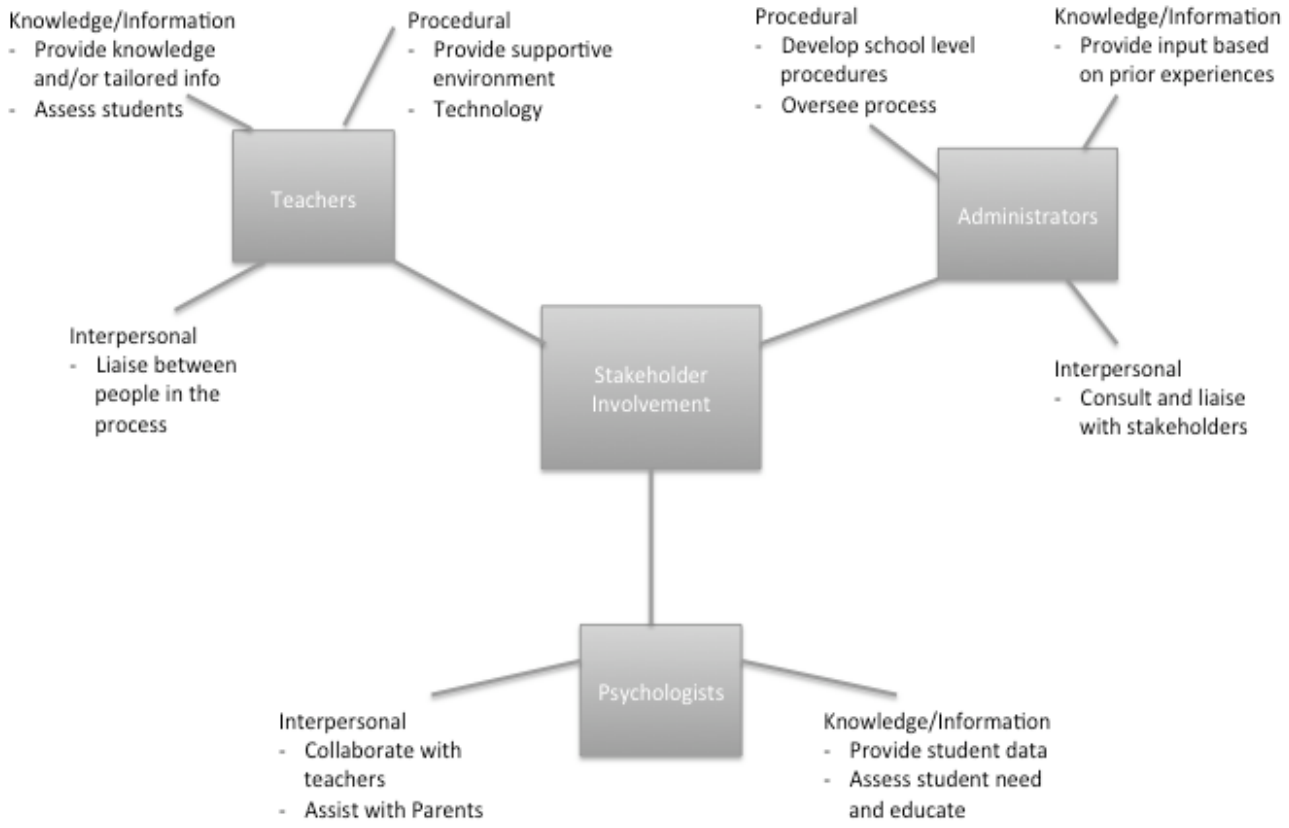

Figure 1. This figure illustrates the roles of various stakeholders and their involvement in the transition planning process from the perspective of in-service teachers.

While it is necessary to understand the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders and how they can provide support during the TPP, it is important to further examine how these roles are outlined and regulated. Legislation created by governments and procedures developed within school boards and individual school systems will impact the way in which teachers are permitted to interact with students and the supports that are provided. The next section will

examine teacher awareness regarding legislation and their perspectives on policies and procedures related to transition planning.

Policies and Procedures Related to Transition Planning

Throughout the interview, teachers were asked questions related to the policy and procedures of the TPP. The topics included a discussion of the following: a) legislation, b) what an effective transition plan would look like, and c) timing of transition planning. Each of these areas will be described in more detail.

Legislation. Teachers were asked their prior knowledge about legislation and how it influences how they currently approach working with students with disabilities. The majority of teachers, cited by 9 out of 13 teachers, indicated that legislation had no/minimal impact on their work with students. Many expressed that they believe their job is to put the needs of students first, regardless of what the legislation says. Paul shared his view of putting the needs of students first and believed this was a common sentiment among teachers:

> Well legislation always determines how a teacher looks at their strategies so…if we are mandated to do something, you have to do it. You know. I think, but a lot of teachers take the approach they do what's best for their students. And I've always taken that approach as well. Like I always feel that I could never go wrong if I say that, I'm trying to do what's best for my student. And even though it may be off track a little bit from what the legislation says, or what the policies are of the board, I still take that approach. And I think a lot of teachers do that as well. (T3, December 2015, p. 4)

Although the majority of participants believed that legislation had no/minimal impact on their work, they elaborated on their responses and shared some ways in which legislation may

relate to their work with students. Their responses fell under three areas: a) legislation is restrictive, b) student supports/funding, and c) the gap between legislation and the classroom.

Some teachers indicated that legislation tends to be restrictive, outlining what you can and cannot do. For instance, Greg articulated the fact that legislation impacts funding and restricts the amount of time that support staff is available within the classroom. He explained:

> I'm aware that there are certain cutbacks that are made, there are certain support people that are removed out of the classrooms, I know there's a big fight right now to have, you know, the DEC in classrooms and things like that. It's the teaching, when you've been doing it as long as I have, you start to learn that you do the best you can with what you have in front of you. And with the resources that you have and you make them work. (T5, March 2016, p. 7)

Charlene questioned the way in which legislation defines what is considered an exceptionality, using her own personal struggles in school during gym class as an example.

> I remember having a very open discussion in [my special ed course], I'm like why is it that we deem exceptionalities for students that struggle with math and language. Like, I'm exceptional in gym. Right, like why isn't that an exceptionality? Why can't I get an IEP for gym? Or for Art? Or for music? Like that's because they are not seen as, as valuable skills, in mainstream society in terms of the job course. That it's okay to suck at gym. And it's okay to suck at visual arts. But it's not okay to be bad at math. And you have to be on a plan for it, and you have to, unfortunately be stigmatized for it. (T1, December 2015, p. 9)

As a result, the way in which legislation defines exceptionality restricts the type of support provided and the funding that is available and support provided to specified subject areas.

Furthermore, it was noted by approximately a quarter of the participants (4 out of 13 teachers) that there is a gap between legislation and the classroom; either people who create legislation are not in the classroom and thus uninformed about what is truly feasible, or there is a breakdown in how to efficiently translate the legislation and implement the requirements in the classroom. Pamela emphasized that while legislation dictates a lot of what can and cannot be done, decisions are often made by individuals who are removed from the classroom, resulting in a gap between legislation and the classroom. As such, those who create legislation are not fully aware of what is realistic to achieve within classroom settings.

> As far as I'm aware of, legislation runs a lot of what we can and cannot do. And in terms of funding, in terms of supports that are there, that dictates what's going to happen in our classroom…a lot of decisions are made by people who are so far removed from the classroom, that their ideas seem great, but realistically, I mean what I guess I'm thinking may not actually pan out. (T10, May 2016, pp. 9-10)

While teachers expressed a great degree of negativity towards legislation, there were several teachers who noted the benefits of legislation. This included the fact that legislation outlines what is required and makes it a legal obligation for students to be provided with supports and funding. Grant summarized this sentiment: "…it ensures that there's IEPs in place, makes sure that students are getting the support that they're entitled to. Ensures students are assessed appropriately" (T11, May 2016, p. 8).

Shifting to a discussion of legislation specific to transition planning, none of the 13 teachers were aware of the changes in legislation that were expected to be implemented in schools as of September 2014. Consistent with their responses to the impact of legislation on working with students with disabilities, all teachers noted that legislation would have no/minimal

impact on their involvement in the TPP. The majority of participants indicated they were unsure how the legislation would impact their practice since they had a lack of knowledge of what was involved in the TPP.

Although teachers were unaware of the legislation surrounding transition planning, slightly less than half of participants, 6 out of 13 teachers, indicated that they had informal involvement in transition planning. A few described that there are some procedures put in place within their schools/classrooms to assist with transitions, including the transition to KG and high school.

Pamela and Laura are both high school teachers who are unfamiliar with the expectations surrounding the TPP, yet both described their informal involvement in this process. When describing what she knows about transition planning, Pamela discussed:

> I feel like I still do it sort of informally. Because I recognize that, yeah, in grade 11 or grade 12 you're finishing high school, what are your plans for next? You know, like that's, as much as we're teaching curriculum, it's life skills, like you need to show up at class on time, you need to submit your things in on time because you don't always get you know a window of opportunity and late marks deducted. At some point you just have to be there or you miss it. (T10, May 2016, pp. 13-14)

Laura reflected on why she may not be familiar with the TPP and came to the conclusion that she does not take part in writing up the formal documents such as IEPs. She explained: "I think the issue might be that I don't write IEPs, right. I'm familiar with them from my students but I don't write them and because I don't write them I would not have seen this change" (T13, May 2016, pp. 20-21).

For the few teachers that were aware that transition planning was being done within their school, it was within the context of grade transitions, such as the transition into KG or the transition from middle school to high school. Teachers who work within KG classes also described some of the steps and strategies that have been established within their classrooms. Some children upon entering KG have never had experience in either a formal or informal school setting. Amina described the procedure that has been put in place to support students in the transition to KG, which commences in the month of June prior to the school year they are entering school. She explained:

> Once they've been accepted and they have a space for them, they'll go and visit the schools, and meet the teachers and meet the [Educational Assistants], [Early Childhood Educators], whoever will be involved with, go visit that environment. So there are like, things put into place to help them make that change. (T9, April 2016, p. 26)

Amina also added how teachers try to reduce the number of small transitions required and then provide support for any remaining transitions:

> So, like any plans we have for transition, we try to find ways of, how can we minimize the number of transitions. And then how can we, the transitions that they need to follow, how can we prepare them for it ahead of time, right. So what supports can we put into place to help them with the transition. (T9, April 2016, p. 24)

Greg, whose experience has largely been in the middle school years, reflected on the TPP that is established within his school system to support every student transitioning from middle school to high school. However, he also commented that he was unaware of any mandates regarding this process and how it is just something that he has always been involved with in his 19 years of teaching.

> I know that we do transition planning and I know that it is an important aspect. But I've been doing this, if it was something that's been mandated into law or legislation, it would be new to me. I've been doing it since I started teaching. It's always, always been part of transition meetings and this isn't [only] for students with exceptionalities. I know that, because I've taught middle school so often we always do a transition meeting from the grade eights, going off to grade nine, the seven to the eights, the six to the seven, so it's something that I've been indoctrinated into since I started teaching. (T5, March 2016, p.6)

While some teachers are informally having conversations with students about their future or trying to support them, other teachers have commented that they don't think of the transition beyond school and are more focused on transitions that are more relevant to them. Grant works with younger children and when asked about his involvement in transition planning he explained: "See that's something I don't think too much about. I'm more worried about the grade nine transition than that" (T11, May 2016, p. 8).

And in particular the level that they teach has an impact on how they perceive their involvement in the process. Melanie commented:

> As an elementary school teacher. I don't really think so to be honest. Unless I was an intermediate teacher because then I would be thinking about maybe how to prepare my intermediates with exceptionalities for kind of the course they want to take in high school. But as a grade 4 junior teacher, no. (T12, May 2016, p. 10)

However, on the other hand, there are teachers who are starting to make the connection between supporting transitions in the younger years and how that can relate to the transition beyond high school. Amina commented: "I know I'm thinking about it from a kindergarten perspective, but

it's like the more opportunities they have to kind of be exposed, the less apprehensive they are…about the transition" (T9, April 2016, p. 27).

Overall, teachers expressed that legislation had no/minimal impact on how they work with students with disabilities or in their involvement in the TPP. However, they have noted that they are informally involved in supporting students in transitions. This is achieved by having conversations about the future with students, or procedures have been established for other types of transitions such as the transition to KG or high school.

Procedures of transition planning. In order to gain an understanding of teachers' perceptions of what is involved in the TPP and what components or procedures they believe would be important, teachers were asked to describe what a highly effective transition plan would look like. Their responses are categorized into two overarching themes: a) content and b) procedural aspects of the transition plan.

With regards to the content of transition plans, the following subthemes were discussed: a) strengths/areas of need of students, b) supports available or provided, and c) roles/responsibilities or stakeholders. The majority of teachers (11 out of 13 teachers) identified that it is important to include the strengths and areas of need of students within the transition plan. A few teachers also emphasized the notion that non-academic skills should also be included. Grant discussed how identifying the students' strength and building upon that over time would be helpful in the TPP:

> A highly effective transition plan would definitely use the student's strengths as a foundation for thinking about where the student could go in terms of finding work, after school. It would plan for that years in advance so the student can focus on that, and it would highlight the areas…that are most helpful, in order to ensure that the student…gets

> towards that role…so a transition plan would be specific to the needs of the student. (T11, May 2016, p. 11)

Charlene described that students should be involved in the identification of their strengths and areas of need:

> I would love to see strengths and room for improvement, so what they think they are amazing at and what they need to improve on…from their opinion…I think it should just be a really detailed account of how they're progressing throughout the years. (T1, December 2015, p. 11)

Furthermore, participants emphasized that student strengths and needs should be specifically outlined for each student, since students have unique profiles. Greg shared his views on the types of areas that should be targeted in an effective transition plan:

> I think that it should be holistic, it shouldn't just focus on academics and the curriculum. It should focus on social aspects of the kids as well; mental health should be included in there as well. It looks at the kid from a holistic perspective, takes everybody's opinions into account and makes a determination that we'll do everything possible to make the child successful in the future. (T5, March 2016, p. 8)

Furthermore, around half of the teachers (7 out of 13) indicated that any supports available or provided should be incorporated, while a little over a third of teachers (5 of 13) indicated that the roles of responsibilities of stakeholders should also be included. This would include any applicable timelines by when the stakeholders are required to implement their responsibilities. Melanie highlighted the aspects she felt would be useful:

> So they have their goal and the transition would need to include steps that they would have to take to reach their goals. So, maybe timelines, resources for support like who might they seek for help with interviews or resumes. (T12, May 2016, p. 14)

With regards to the procedural aspects of transition plans, the following subthemes were discussed: a) student and family involvement, b) use of clear/concise language, and c) timing of transition plans. Approximately two thirds of participants, 8 out of 13 teachers, identified that students should be involved in the process. While it is a step in the right direction that these teachers have acknowledged the importance of student involvement, it remains that over one third of participants did not explicitly acknowledge that the student should be involved. Furthermore, the involvement of the student's family was indicated even less frequently, mentioned by approximately one third of teachers (5 out of 13).

A couple of teachers described how students should be involved in transition planning, and that involvement can and should start as young as in KG. Greg discussed the involvement of students in the process:

> I would say beginning at kindergarten and all the way through, I think that those kids should be involved as well. Obviously a kindergartener isn't going to be as effective in saying specifics as to what he or she might need in order to be successful in future years but they certainly could say, you know, what were, what I liked this year, what I didn't like. Typically what a kid doesn't like means what they struggled with. (T5, March 2016, p. 8)

Around one third of teachers also indicated that the transition plan should be checked on frequently and should be specific and written in simple and clear language. Lyla emphasized the importance of how language is used in the plan: "And simple language. I think very simple

language. Direct, simple, not a lot of big words like just very simple language" (T4, February 2016, p. 15). Lyla further expressed the usefulness of providing teachers with samples to model plans from, which can then be individualized for students:

> Examples of the expectation or the clear instruction like give examples of what that can look like. Or a few examples so we, cause that student may show one way to one person and have a different response to another person or just maybe different examples like very very specific I think. (T4, February 2016, p. 15)

Reviewing transition plans frequently also provides opportunities for students to develop and build on skills; more time allows for more experiences in the skill areas. Adam also explained the importance of time and experience when it comes to help in building the awareness of what they need and why:

> I think some kids with exceptionalities because they are young, I'm dealing mainly with younger kids, that they don't, they are not fully aware of what is happening with them. They know they have challenges and it's difficult for them, but like the next step is that self-awareness being like, well, this is not working for me because of this. Right, so…that I think comes with time and experience. (T2, December 2015, p. 12)

Additionally, planning ahead not only provides opportunities to practice the skills needed, but also provides opportunities for students to connect with people knowledgeable about the types of options available following high school and the requirements for each path. However, although it is something deemed to be important, Laura commented on the amount of work it would take to revisit a transition plan yearly:

> But that is something you really should revisit, not just in grade 10, but grade 10, grade 11, grade 12. It needs to be revisited. But then again you put that into context, you know how much work that is? (T13, May 2016, p. 24)

Overall, the content and procedural aspects raised by teachers that make up an effective transition plan are illustrated in Figure 2.

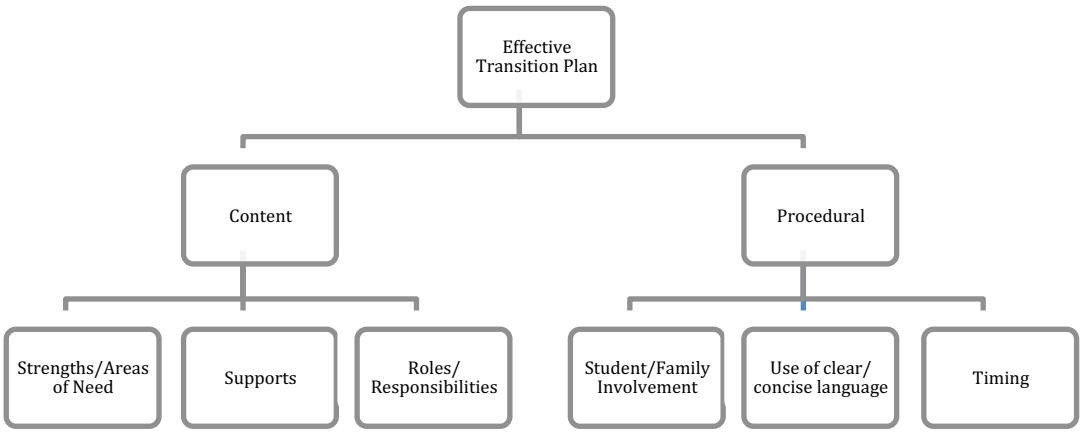

Figure 2. Components of a highly effective transition plan. Teachers discussed effective transition plans within the context of procedural and content aspects of the process.

Overall, teachers described that in an effective transition plan, it is important to identify student strengths and needs, the supports that are available to students, and information about who is involved. Additionally, families and students should be involved in the process, the transition plan should be written in concise language with clear expectations, and a timeline should be outlined. While considered an important process, the reality of being able to be involved effectively was questioned by a number of teachers.

Timing of transition planning. Teachers were also questioned about when the TPP should start. The majority of teachers suggested that transition planning should commence during the intermediate-senior years (9 out of 13 teachers), with an even split between those who

proposed intermediate grades (grades 7-9) and those who proposed senior grades (grades 10-12) as one teacher proposed the plan commence during grades 9-10. When asked why transition planning should commence at that point, regardless of the timing they proposed, more than half of the teachers explained that the starting point would provide students with time to develop the skills needed for the transition beyond high school. However, for those teachers who proposed that transition planning should start in the intermediate-senior grades, their rationale was this timing allows students an opportunity to mature and further develop their interests. For instance, after commenting that transition planning should start around grade 7 or 8, when asked the benefit to starting transition planning at this point Grant explained:

> Well, I guess I was thinking more along the lines of career choices or, you know, workplace choices. So…the advantage then is that students at a younger age don't tend to know what they want to do and if they do know that often changes several times over the course of many years. So, there's just a better sense of knowing where they want to go. (T11, May 2016, pp. 13-14)

A couple of teachers also commented that starting the TPP too soon can be detrimental, as it could lead to additional stress and pressure for the student to think so far ahead. Melanie expressed her concerns about starting the process too soon and how timing should be decided on a student-by-student basis:

> So to be able to say, 'Hey let's start putting something in place that can help map out what this will look for you' it might really help them, right? It might ease their anxiety. But with other students it might compound it. So I really think you have to play it by ear with the student. (T12, May 2016, p. 15)

Around a third of teachers (4 out of 13) commented that the TPP should start earlier, during the early elementary school years. Lina described that transition planning should start in KG and explained why:

> We should start in kindergarten because that's where your main, every, everything you learn in life that saying you learned in kindergarten, right? All those posters. So yeah, you know. Sharing or taking turns or communication, waiting your turn to speak. Or just everything. Self-regulation. Conflict resolution and all those things. (T6, April 2016, p.14)

Charlene commented on how starting early allows for planning with the end in mind and connected this with what she learned about how to approach lesson planning: "I remember in teacher's college they taught you to, when you plan lessons you have to keep the end in mind. Like, where are we going with this? So, like where do we see these students" (T1, December 2015, p. 13).

When asked more specifically about when working on the skills needed for effective transitions should start, the majority of teachers identified that they should start as early as possible. Adam explained the importance of starting early and how that influenced him when he was a student:

> To be a successful person you need to be developing all skills at a young age. And if you don't develop your organization skills in grade 5 or 6, that's going to impact you in high school. Like you're not just going to get it in grade 8, because you don't know how to write in your agenda and you forget your stuff all the time. That's not going to help you, right, so kids need support in a lot of different ways to get there. I have my own experience in those kind of things. I was a special [education] student. I was identified

> in grade 2 or what it was, and I was given support to be successful, and without that I don't think I would be in my position. (T2, December 2015, p. 13)

Through their discussion of the timing of transition planning, it was evident there was a disconnect between the belief of when transition planning should start and when the skills necessary for the transition should be taught. While the majority of teachers believed that transition planning should occur closer to the high school age, as students have more experience, greater maturity and a better understanding of where they should be in the future, when asked more directly about when the skills needed for transition planning should be taught, the majority of teachers who were asked identified that the skills should be taught immediately.

While the previous sections have focused on the skills considered important for the transition beyond school, the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, and the policies and procedures in place to guide the process, the final section will focus on the barriers and supports that teachers encounter regarding all of the areas addressed in the abovementioned sections.

Barriers and Supports Working with Students with Disabilities and with the TPP

Teachers were asked to describe the perceived barriers and supports they encountered when working with students with disabilities and with regards to their involvement in the TPP. In addition to providing responses to the directed questions, teachers also spontaneously brought up situations and general comments about barriers and supports throughout the interview. The topics raised by the teachers will be discussed in this section.

The main themes that arose among the barriers and supports of working with students with disabilities were similar in both areas. For both barriers and supports, the main topics raised by teachers involved discussions of a) resources and knowledge, and b) interpersonal interactions.

An additional theme that arose within the barriers to their involvement was that of c) accountability and time.

While teachers were able to identify supports when working with students with disabilities, when queried about supports in the TPP many teachers identified supports that they would like, as opposed to supports already in place. With additional prompting teachers were mostly able to identify current supports to assist in their involvement in the TPP. Three of the 13 teachers did not mention any current available supports. These desired and available supports will be discussed further below.

Resources. While resources were noted to be a barrier for both working with students with disabilities and in transition planning, the way in which teachers described the barriers varied. These barriers encompassed lack of resource support in the form of personnel, such as special education resource teachers (SERTs) and educational assistants (EAs); lack of materials or barriers in the use of material resources; and limited knowledge and/or training.

Personnel Resources. When referring to working with students with disabilities, the majority of teachers (9 out of 13) noted that the resources they had access to were limited. For instance, they did not have sufficient amount of access to SERTs, nor did they have EAs present for sufficient time in their classroom. Pamela described her experience with a lack of resources in her high school classroom:

> Like our goal was to be inclusive right, that [was] what we focused on for these three students, to integrate them and have them be a part of our class. But when you don't have enough support for it and I have to look after twenty-six other kids in the class, it's very difficult to manage…. It's very challenging to manage all of that without more support. So I think there needs to be more. (T10, May 2016, p. 7)

Teachers who taught younger students, in particular KG aged students, expressed the lack of sufficient support due to the fact that students were either not identified with a disability upon entering school or that even with an identification, the support provided was spread out too much and was insufficient based on the needs of the student. Amina expressed the challenges she has seen in her KG classroom:

> Sometimes we deal with it more in kindergarten because sometimes they don't come in identified. So then of course they don't receive the support. But even the ones that come in identified, you know that, we have these kids coming in, the amount of support that they really need is not there so it's stretched between the kids in the school. And so you almost, unless you have like two or three or four of those kids in your class at one time, you don't get full time support. (T9, April 2016, p. 11)

This limited resource support was also attributed to lack of funding. Pamela highlighted how the lack of funding impacts the amount of personnel resource support provided:

> It's the funding. I mean the EA was fantastic. She was, she wanted to be there and to help but she was stretched so thin trying to manage three kids all in one go. When you're not even physically present in the classroom as much. That's really, really challenging. (T10, May 2016, p. 7)

Availability of resource support was also impacted by work-to-rule bargaining positions. Since teachers and support staff were only permitted by unions to work during specified school hours and on certain tasks, the tasks that support staff were able to accomplish was limited. A number of teachers spoke about this barrier. Charlene explained:

> "So because of work to rule, she could only work during school time, she was in her resource room working on IEPs basically for the first two to three months of school, and

> missing all the periods that she was supposed to support my class and other classes" (T1, December 2015, p. 6)

However, the majority of teachers (12 out of 13) also noted that these personnel resources served as a support when present and were a great source of information and assistance. Amina spoke enthusiastically about the support team that was available for students:

> Like, literally there's a team of people that support these kids especially when they are coming in identified… So they have an early interventionist that we can speak to that will tell us, like give us information [how to] help them, help them transition into kindergarten, right. And then after that you have like, depending on their needs you have a speech path, you have a PT/OT, you have a psychologist…and all these people sit around a table and you have literally, like EA, SERT, Principal and there's like a team of sometimes, you know, so many of us. (T9, April 2016, p. 16)

The majority of teachers (9 out of 13) also identified personnel supports as supports to their involvement in transition planning. Personnel such as SERTs were identified as individuals that teachers could seek out additional information from and ask questions about transition planning; however, SERTs were identified as the ones responsible for procedural aspects, such as writing up IEPs and providing additional recommendations and strategies. As a result, teachers referred to these personnel supports as those they would defer to regarding the TPP.

Overall, limited personnel resource supports impacted teachers across school grades and classrooms. The lack of this resource was noted to have an impact on teachers' abilities to manage the diversity of needs in their classroom, and even when the resource is available they are stretched thin or restricted by other variables such as work-to-rule positions. However, all teachers noted that when present, personnel resources served as a great support in working with

students with disabilities in their classroom and many identified personnel resources as a support in the TPP.

Material Resources. A few teachers (4 out of 13) commented that access to material resources also served as a support when working with students with disabilities; however, a barrier was noted in the knowledge of how to use the material (i.e. technological support), the amount of time it took to receive the item (i.e. laptops for students), or the consistent availability of the resource. Melanie provided an example of the frustrations she has experienced with material resources, and in particular her experience with one of her students who had a Specialized Equipment Amount (SEA) claim, a request for funding for specialized resources for a specific student. Melanie explained:

> I have one student who has a SEA claim so she has a laptop but does she ever really take it out? No, she's still receiving training on it. And it's May and by the time she's trained on it, it will be June and that's it. And then teacher training, like what training do I really have on Kurzweil or on a lot of the programs that are on SEA computers? (T12, May 2016, p. 7)

Laura elaborated on the challenges of the use of technology in her high school classrooms and how a common IEP recommendation is that students should have access to technology, such as computers, which is not always feasible:

> What if I'm in a classroom that doesn't have a functioning computer? I would then have to disrupt his learning environment and move him so he can get one…it's difficult for them to give me a laptop. So then I have to bring my own. A lot of times I do bring my own laptop or iPad for the kids that I know needs it. But…what I'm doing is still a barrier because what if I'm a teacher that doesn't have it. (T13, May 2016, p. 14)

Material resource supports were not identified as being a resource available to assist teachers in being involved in the TPP.

Overall, while a few teachers identified that access to material supports aided in working with students with disabilities in their classrooms, teachers also mentioned the challenges of using these material resources. Material resources were not currently identified as a support in the TPP, however, it was raised that some sort of guide would be useful to increase understanding and involvement in the TPP.

Knowledge Resources. Having sufficient knowledge was also described as a barrier to participants' work and interactions with students, particularly with regards to possible involvement in the TPP. A few teachers (3 out of 13) noted their own limited training on how to work with students with disabilities, and more than half (7 out of 13) raised the issue about their lack of knowledge of transition planning. When working with students with disabilities, teachers commented that they did not receive enough training to address the diverse needs in their classrooms. Laura explained: "Your average classroom teacher does not have enough training on how to accommodate, on how to modify, or how to deal with students with exceptionalities…an additional qualification in special [education] is not a requirement" (T13, May 2016, p. 36).

This was highlighted even the more so for teachers who have been in the profession the longest; if they had not sought out additional educational opportunities, their base training would not have sufficiently prepared them for working within the classroom while addressing all the diverse needs. Hinda reflected on her own experiences during her 19 years of teaching and interacting with other teachers: "We don't have much support as far as that we rely on our training. And unfortunately some teachers are not trained in special [education]. And they do

not have the training or the sensitivity" (T7, April 2016, p. 7). However, even when teachers sought out professional development opportunities on how to support students with disabilities within their classroom, the knowledge of how to apply that information was lacking. Laura elaborated:

> When I did my course for special [education], there was a lot of information of how to recognize students with exceptionalities, there was a lot of information on how to accommodate a student with exceptionalities, but there were no resources on how to do that. (T13, May 2016, p. 15)

Possessing sufficient knowledge of students' needs and abilities were also described as being a barrier, particularly for younger students who may enter the school system and the school is provided with very little, or inaccurate, information. Amina provided an explanation of this issue:

> You don't always have all that information. So it becomes trial and error. Like I said, there are some parents who have no idea…so that would be a barrier, if you're doing it with very little information. Or inaccurate information. Sometimes assessments on these kids are done at like, age two. And nothing has been redone since age two. (T9, April 2016, p. 34)

In contrast, if students are not identified when they are young, this can result in a barrier to accessing resources and teachers lacking sufficient knowledge of how to support students. At times, teachers want to allow time for students to develop and be exposed to the school environment and are therefore more hesitant to refer for evaluation. Amina further explained: "Another challenge is getting children identified. Because they're so young when they come to us. They're young and we don't want to jump the gun either" (T9, April 2016, p. 13).

With regards to their involvement in transition planning, teachers commented that a barrier was their lack of knowledge and awareness of what transition planning was and what it involved. Adam expressed:

> So I'm lacking my own understanding of what it is because it hasn't, I haven't had to deal with it. So then, it's not on a teacher's radar…it's full of so many different things, and unless you're dealing with something specific, it's not on your radar. (T2, December 2015, p. 17)

It was noted that perhaps this information was distilled to those in other areas, such as administrators or SERTS, and thus may not be relayed to general classroom teachers.

Furthermore, teachers explained that when working with younger students, envisioning what support they need to help with the transition beyond school is challenging since students are still quite young. Grant commented:

> I'm seeing a very young version of these students. So it's hard for me to imagine what they look like in ten years. You know. Or even, even two years is really challenging. So limited knowledge since they're still young. (T11, May 2016, p. 18)

On the other hand, over a third of teachers (5 out of 13) noted that professional development (PD) opportunities and their own previous experience served as a support when working with students with disabilities. They were able to pull from their prior experiences to make adaptations within the classroom, or they were able to access further learning opportunities to gain additional knowledge in areas they felt they had gaps of knowledge. Amina commented on the range of PD opportunities available to teachers:

> There are opportunities for education. Like I could take special [education] part two or take special [education] part three, you know, I could get my specialist and I can

> take…there's tons of courses, either through [the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario]…through different universities that offer, you know workshops, seminars. There's plenty of them, there's ton of them. (T9, April 2016, p. 12)

Professional development opportunities, however, did not extend to their involvement in transition planning. Teachers commented that although they would be able to use their previous experience to informally support transitions, they would like professional development opportunities to exist to further support and expand their knowledge of how to help in this domain. In particular, having students who have made the transition come back and provide input to what was helpful to them was expressed as being something that would be desired. Charlene explained:

> In terms of PD it would be nice to see students who are in post secondary or are in a job and have made that transition or have adapted to that transition, just getting their input what support that they needed. (T1, December 2015, p. 21)

Overall, teachers described how their lack or limited knowledge of how to work with students with disabilities within their classrooms, as well as insufficient or inaccurate knowledge of the needs and abilities of students, posed as a barrier when trying to support students within their classroom. Furthermore, this was a greater issue in the TPP as teachers identified a lack of knowledge of what transition planning is and what is involved in the process. Teachers also noted that pulling from their prior knowledge and experience has been useful for working with students with disabilities and would also help with their involvement in the TPP.

Interpersonal Interactions. Another thematic area that arose when discussing barriers and supports to teacher involvement involved the interactions between various stakeholders. More specifically, teachers described that attitudes of individuals, communication between

stakeholders, school culture, and community connections were areas that either hindered or bolstered student success.

All 13 teachers described that attitudes of various individuals were a great barrier to working with students with disabilities. The attitudes of parents, other teachers, and the students themselves were the individuals mentioned most frequently. The majority of teachers (10 out of 13) expressed that parents often posed a great barrier when trying to provide resources and supports for students. Adam shared:

> If they don't have the parental support, then that's the number one barrier. If parents aren't willing to really evaluate what's going on and accept it for what it is, and for where their child is going to go in the future, or where they are not going to go…then all the work we do at school is almost redundant. (T2, December 2015, p. 6)

Various reasons why parents may not be supportive were mentioned, including a lack of awareness of any issues or an unwillingness to listen to the expressed concerns of teachers. Lina explained how this has played out in her experience:

> When they're in denial or are not aware it's difficult because you have to make them aware…it's easy for me to pinpoint because I don't have one or two at home. I've got thirty in front of me. So when you have thirty and they're all sitting and one is not and they're doing headstands or whatever, you notice things more. So it's difficult. (T6, April 2016, p. 7)

Particularly for high-school students, teachers have commented that parents can sometimes be too strong advocates for their child, which does not allow opportunities for students to advocate for themselves. Laura explained:

> The parents are also very strong advocates for the children's rights. Sometimes a little more than they should be, because these are high school students. We try to teach them to advocate for themselves. So that's something we're struggling with. (T13, May 2016, p. 5)

Many teachers attributed the challenges of interacting with parents to possible sociocultural differences. The majority of teachers (9 out of 13) commented that they worked within a multicultural community. Some of these cultural differences have posed challenges with communicating with parents in order to get support for their child. Charlene provided an example to explain:

> And it's also cultural too as well. I think, especially this one student I teach, I think the country that his parents are originally from they definitely treat students with special needs completely different than Canada, Ontario does. So maybe they just have that filtering through when they are making the decision process of him being tested or not. (T1, December 2015, p. 6)

Some teachers (5 out of 13) elaborated that there was a perceived stigma among families about having a child identified with a disability. Often students would not be assessed and without a formal identification they would not be provided with additional or appropriate supports within the classroom due to funding or legislative constraints. Jordana explained:

> Sometimes before a student is identified, with an exceptionality or special need, parents don't want that. They still see it as this stigma. And it's very hard to get through to parents, like look at all the supports that your child will receive, if we could just identify the student. Without it, there's only so much we can do. So a big barrier is getting

> parents to understand that there isn't a negative stigma so much anymore. (T8, April 2016, p. 7)

Therefore, teachers take on the role of having to provide education and assurance to parents about their child and why it is important for a student to become identified, when needed, in order to receive extra supports.

These cultural differences were also noted to be a barrier in the TPP, as parents may have different goals or expectations based on cultural expectations, in contrast with the aims of the student or school. Therefore, it made it challenging to come to a common ground as to how to best support the student for success beyond school.

However, teachers commented that when teachers and parents were able to find common ground and work together, parents were found to be a great support in educating the student with a disability. Lyla expressed:

> If the parents are on board with supporting the child, that makes things a hundred times better. And if they're not on board and they just, you know may not acknowledge or you know if … I'm trying to be on the same page with them and they may not be on that page so that's a challenge. (T4, February 2016, p. 3)

Parents were found to be excellent informants about the student, and were willing to use feedback from the teacher to continue the learning and growth at home, developing a school-home collaboration to ensure consistency in both settings. Grant highlighted: "By working together to create a vision, working together to follow through the things going on at school so that there is a continuum between their day at school and their day at home" (T11, May 2016, p.7).

While parents were more frequently mentioned as a barrier to working with students with disabilities, other stakeholders were also noted as both barriers and supports. Other attitudinal barriers that were described were at the level of the teacher (mentioned by 6 out of 13 teachers) and of the students (mentioned by 3 out of 13 teachers). Participants explained they have worked with teachers who believed that students were lazy and did not need the supports they were given, thus affecting the quality of instruction they received. Others commented that teachers assumed students were unable to do something, and thus did not challenge the student or provide them with opportunities to challenge or extend their knowledge. Both ends of this spectrum impacted the type or supports that teachers offered to students with disabilities. Laura commented on the negative attitudes of teachers that she has observed while working in various high schools:

> A lot of teachers think it's a waste of time. A lot of teachers think that now that all students have an IEP, that it's not individualized anymore. That anybody can get an IEP so, a lot of teachers take it for granted and they don't even look at it. But a lot of teachers don't understand the importance of actually filling out the IEP correctly. (T13, May 2016, p. 25)

Student attitudes were also identified as a barrier; students were either unaware of their needs or abilities, or perceived they were incapable of doing something and thus did not try. Teachers commented that students would give up and it was hard to reach them if they got to that point. Greg observed that student attitudes might prevent them from facing and working through challenges they may encounter: "So they have this preconceived notion of things that they can and can't do. So they put unnecessary limitations upon themselves" (T5, March 2016, p. 4).

A number of teachers described what they try to do to address or combat the barrier of student attitudes. Melanie shared how she approaches working with students in her classroom so that she does not underestimate their abilities, but instead continues to challenge them in a way that does not extend too far outside their ability:

> What I've started to do is, with the three students who have modifications, is I don't actually modify their tests. Because I feel like I'm deciding what they can and cannot do. So instead they have my support when they write their tests and the minute they say…this is too much for me, it's done. That's the question I would have taken off. (T12, May 2016, p. 6)

From his experience working in a high school setting with students identified as gifted, Paul commented on the challenges he has encountered:

> They've achieved well over the years without putting in any efforts. So they think…they continue that. In some ways I think the fact that they've been successful has hindered them. And then they hit a block [and it] becomes a problem cause now they don't know how to study, and they've thought all this time, well you know I've been successful doing nothing…why should I change? And then, for them, now to be able to learn, how to learn, becomes a problem for them. (T3, December 2015, p. 8)

On the other hand, student attitudes have positively guided inclusive environments as a result of their prior experiences and home situations. Jordana explained that her students have come from diverse backgrounds and this has positively impacted their views and perspectives of how to be empathic and interact with others:

> I was talking to one of my grade sevens, and he was like, what right do I have to judge something else, this is where I'm coming from, you know, I can't help my dad anymore than they can help where they're coming from. (T8, April 2016, p. 5)

Teachers also described communication among stakeholders as a barrier to working with students with disabilities, and in particular in their involvement in transition planning (mentioned by 5 out of 13 teachers). Less communication contributes to lack of consistency of student support and lack of awareness of student needs. Teachers expressed that they would like to see increased communication across stakeholders to support the TPP. As a "prep coverage" teacher, Jordana discussed the lack of consistency across classes and subject areas and emphasized the need for communication. "Really keeping communication clear across all the channels is incredibly important, because you really need to be consistent. And that's a really big barrier that I find, just being consistent, keeping communication open" (T8, April 2016, p. 7). Grant also shared how increased communication can help support students: "It's nice to be able to collaborate and work with other teachers and staff in the building including administrators and social workers and EAs, because they often have perspectives, helpful perspectives" (T11, May 2016, p. 5).

Teachers also described that community involvement would serve as a support in the TPP. This involvement could take the form of former students sharing their experiences and needs with current students or teachers, increasing communication with community partners such as postsecondary educators or workplace employers, or students being provided with opportunities to be involved in the community in various ways prior to transitioning beyond high school. Charlene commented on how great it would be for former students to return to the school and

share their transition experiences, what supports were helpful, and what supports they wished they had.

> I think it would be more helpful than, than I think anything else. Because if that's where we want our students eventually to be, and these students, in whatever fields they are saying, yes, I lacked support in this, I need supports in that, I wish teachers knew this about me throughout the years. So…they are just helping the next generation out and as the next generation of students and teachers in implementing a successfully transitional planning phase. (T1, December 2015, pp. 21-22)

Another barrier mentioned was within the school culture. A number of teachers who identified as "prep coverage" teachers (3 out of 13), commented that within their schools they were not considered "real" teachers since they taught subjects such as music, gym, art, social studies and not subjects such as math or language arts. Therefore, they were often excluded from meetings or conversations about student needs and were not always provided information about the supports and resources for the student (i.e. IEP content). These teachers commented that they had a lot of information they could provide about the strengths and abilities of the students, and yet were frequently excluded from conversations unless they explicitly attempted to be involved. Jordana explained how being a prep coverage teacher has been a barrier to her involvement in transition planning and working with students who have an IEP.

> Sometimes I'll be given the full IEP and sometimes I'll just be given an accommodation page. I won't be given a full IEP because I'm a prep coverage teacher. I'm not needed, they feel I don't need to be given a full thing which is wrong. Because I'll be teaching grade eight music and I'll give out an assignment. And then I'll find out the student I

> gave a big research assignment to, as a reading level, is on a modified English program for grade four. Well, if not given an IEP how do I know? (T8, April 2016, p. 29)

However, even with these barriers and limitations to involvement, teachers spoke positively about the school culture and community involvement that has been fostered to support student development. Laura discussed how the school community comes together to provide a great degree of support to help students to transition beyond high school.

> The fact that they have these IPRC meetings, or the fact that they have a student success team where they focus on how to help the student transition…that's a huge support because it means that we have, it's not perfect, but we have somewhere or someone to talk to, someone else who knows about it and can then go ask and get the information you need and then get the support, you can then apply it with the students. (T13, May 2016, p. 35)

Overall, the attitudes of people such as parents, teachers, and the students themselves pose as barriers to working with students with disabilities in the classroom. These attitudes can also pose as barriers in the TPP, particularly as a result of the stigma of identification or lack of communication between stakeholders. The school culture also impacts how engaged teachers are, particularly for those teachers who may not teach core subject areas, such as prep coverage teachers. However, when stakeholders were on the same page and communicated effectively, these served as supports to assisting students in the classroom and preparing for transitions.

Accountability. The final theme that appeared related to barriers regarding accountability and time. More specifically, teachers described that time, the diversity of needs within the classroom, and added pressure/accountability pose challenges when working with students.

Teachers expressed that one of the barriers in teaching students with disabilities was lacking sufficient time to complete everything that is required of them (mentioned by 5 out of 13 teachers). The number of teachers who cited time as a barrier increased to 9 out of 13 when referring to involvement in the TPP. Teachers lacked sufficient time with needed resource supports and lacked sufficient time for lesson planning to effectively adapt lessons and teach students with disabilities. Adam explained how time serves as a barrier when teaching students with disabilities:

> Time and then resources to…you can always use more. I get a lot of support in my classroom with another, with the SERT teacher, who's like vastly experienced. And obviously qualified, but, we need time…time to implement everything that has to be done with these students with exceptionalities because it's vast. (T2, December 2015, p. 4)

Lack of time also limits the ability of teachers to implement IEP recommendations. Pamela discussed this challenge: "Our special [education] teachers…they do all these IEPs, and they do all this transition planning but we're supposed to be the ones implementing it with the students. And we don't have the time" (T10, May 2016, p. 23).

Beyond the limited amount of time in general, they described that the great diversity within their classrooms contributed to these challenges (mentioned by 5 out of 13 teachers). Adam explained how planning for students with disabilities is also constrained by the lack of time, particularly in a classroom with many students with diverse learning:

> Like if you're just going about your day to day thing, it's not going to be as successful as if you have time to really plan out, and I don't mean your prep time because that is specific to preparing a and b, but with students with exceptionalities you got c, d, e, and f, as well, so you really need more time. (T2, December 2015, p. 5)

Teachers also described the pressures they face trying to address all the curricular requirements and the higher expectations schools face with standardized testing. When discussing their involvement in transition planning, teachers perceived this as just another task added on to their already heavy workload. They questioned how they would be involved in transition planning when they already had external pressure to address all the curricular expectations. Paul summarized the challenges with being involved in the TPP:

> Well I have a curriculum I have to teach. I have timeline issues. I mean I have to teach that curriculum otherwise they're going to be missing things when they get into a more senior level. So, it's hard to deal with 35 individual students when you know, three or four or five of them need special attention. (T3, December 2015, p. 11)

Charlene also discussed the challenges of always meeting the expectations of the Ministry of Education: "I feel like our board, not just our board, but the Ministry of Education expects so much from teachers, and high expectations to do everything not only everything, but everything well. It's a tall order" (T1, December 2015, p. 18).

Overall, the lack of time and the already present demands on teachers were identified as areas that made working with students with disabilities within their classroom challenging. Furthermore, these factors made the idea of being involved in the TPP overwhelming and just another item added to an already daunting list of tasks teachers are required to do.

Chapter Summary

The themes and subthemes that emerged from an analysis of participant interviews provided an overall picture of the understanding and perceptions of participants regarding their involvement working with students with disabilities and in the TPP. By using phenomenology as the method of inquiry, teacher perceptions regarding the skills important for transition

planning, stakeholder involvement, understanding of policy and procedures, and barrier and supports to the process were identified and described. The next section of this thesis will discuss the themes identified and information shared within the context of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and Kohler's taxonomy of transition planning, including a discussion of how the various themes and subthemes identified in this study are referred to in the literature.

Chapter Four: Discussion Section

This study explored the perspectives and experiences of teachers working in inclusive settings in the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario, Canada. Employing a phenomenological approach, this study involved interviewing 13 teachers about their perspectives of, and experiences in, the transition planning process (TPP). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development and Kohler's taxonomy of transition planning were used to develop research questions to explore teachers' viewpoints of the skills needed for successful transitions, their interactions with stakeholders, knowledge and understanding of policies and procedures of transition planning, and the barriers and supports that teachers encountered when working with students with disabilities. Thirteen elementary and high school general education teachers completed questionnaires and participated in semi-structured interviews. Responses to the questionnaires were examined using descriptive analyses and interview data were explored using thematic analysis. This chapter will include a discussion and interpretation of key themes and how this information can help inform future practice, policy, and research in the area of transition planning.

Aspects that Support Engagement and Interactions within the Environment

Teacher attitudes and perceived self-efficacy. Questionnaires were used to gain a general understanding of the 13 participants' composition as a group and explore their perceptions of individual and collective efficacy and attitudes towards disability. Overall, the participants perceived themselves to have a high overall individual self-efficacy and the responses indicated a pattern of individual self-efficacy being slightly higher than collective efficacy. The participants also held positive attitudes about disability based on a questionnaire that examined behavioural, cognitive, and affective attitudes. Furthermore, when queried about

the likelihood and importance of future outcomes for students with disabilities, participants rated the importance of a variety of outcomes as higher than the actual likelihood of students achieving the future outcomes.

These findings are promising, as teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy are more likely to acknowledge the challenges students in their classroom encounter and adapt when needed (Brady & Woolfson, 2008), have more positive attitudes towards inclusion, and report less behavioural issues from all students (Munthe & Thuen, 2009). Furthermore, collective efficacy is strongly related to school achievement (Goddard et al., 2004). Previous research has also demonstrated that teachers' attitudes and behaviours are areas that influence the creation of successful inclusive environments (Lindsay, 2007). However, participants expressed that they possessed less knowledge of, and exposure to, transition planning which suggests a potential area where additional support could be provided to teachers.

Teacher perceptions of skills needed for successful transitions. According to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development, development is driven by the opportunities an individual has to engage in increasingly complex reciprocal interactions, referred to as proximal processes, and skills and experiences are a supporting force for an individual to engage in these interactions (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Supporting students to develop skills and to engage with a variety of opportunities will encourage their ability to engage in proximal processes, aiding in their development. Two levels of Kohler's taxonomy of transition planning, student-focused planning and student development, emphasize the importance of providing students opportunities to develop self-determination skills, as well as life skills and occupational skills, to help achieve successful transitions (Kohler & Field, 2003).

Gaining an understanding of the skills teachers believe are important for transitions would be helpful in planning to support students to engage in interactions and prepare for transitions.

Discussions with participants yielded some interesting themes regarding which skills they believe are important for students to develop. These themes highlighted the skills deemed important for transition planning: interpersonal, academic, coping, learning, and self-determination skills. The majority of participants identified the importance of developing interpersonal skills, in particular social and communication skills. This is consistent with diagnoses that fall under the communication domain such as learning disabilities (LDs) and autism spectrum disorders (ASD) (Education Act, 1990). These areas are important for post-school outcomes, as previous research has highlighted that students who possessed higher levels of communication ability were more likely to have competitive employment when leaving school (Wehman, Sima, et al., 2014) and social skills also positively predict postsecondary education and employment outcomes (Test, Mazzotti, et al., 2009).

Participants mentioned academic skills less frequently than some of the other skill areas discussed. This discord between the amount of time teachers seem to spend on academic content, but the absence of mentioning academic skills as important to post-school life, was an interesting discrepancy. Additionally, several participants stressed the importance of looking at the student holistically. This raises an interesting point, as participants emphasized that non-academic areas were just as important as academic areas, particularly because advances in technology have made it easier to access general information. Previous research has also described the importance of considering both academic and non-academic skill needs of students in order to promote successful outcomes (Cobb & Alwell, 2009).

Since previous research has shown links between self-determination and transition planning involvement and positive adult outcomes (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer, Palmer, et al., 2007), gauging which self-determination skill areas teachers identify and believe to be important are useful to examine. The majority of participants mentioned at least one aspect relating to self-determination including self-regulation, self-advocacy, independence, and problem solving. Participants also mentioned the importance of self-advocacy and independence as skills for students to develop, skills that are linked with competitive employment upon leaving school (Wehman, Sima, et al., 2014). However, it seems that participants are not spontaneously thinking about the range of skill areas that could lead to self-determined behaviour. With a diverse range of student needs and abilities in classrooms, and teachers having to spread their attention across all students, the importance of students being able to work independently and advocate for themselves when needed becomes more pressing.

There was an absence of participant identification of self-determination skills relating to choice-making, decision-making, or goal setting and attainment. This absence is surprising since when individuals go through transitions they often need to make decisions and set realistic goals for themselves, particularly if they are going to be engaged in the TPP. If these skills are not cultivated early on, it makes this task much more challenging for individuals to smoothly and successfully adopt adult roles. If students are more active participants in Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, this can aid in the development of self-determination skills and as a result can increase engagement in Individual Transition Plan (ITP) meetings (deFur, 2003). However, previous research has highlighted that student involvement is minimal at the secondary level, and even less at the primary and middle school levels (Mason et al., 2009).

Participants discussed their perspectives of the barriers to working with students with disabilities and to their involvement in transition planning. Reasons provided included: it is more useful to prepare for transitions in secondary school, students are too young, it is challenging to address the urgent and diverse needs in the class, and lack of training and time. These topics are consistent with previous research on barriers to promoting self-determination within classrooms (Cho et al., 2011). However, participants did not believe that students were too young to develop the skills needed for transition planning, only too young to start the TPP.

Timing of transition planning and how it can be implemented effectively to teach SD skills. Developing self-determination skills is a process that occurs continuously over an individual's lifetime (Papay et al., 2015) and would be useful if instilled in the elementary school curriculum from the beginning of school. Participants varied in their responses for when the TPP should start. The majority of participants suggested that transition planning should commence during the intermediate-senior years, consistent with previous research (Stang et al., 2009). When asked why transition planning should commence at that point, more than half explained that it would provide students with time to develop the skills needed for the transition beyond high school. Starting later also allows students more time to mature and to develop their interests; starting too soon can be detrimental and should be evaluated on a student-by student basis. Participants that commented that transition planning should start earlier in the elementary school years expressed this would provide time to develop skills and plan with the end in mind.

Previous research has suggested the importance of starting early. By providing students with opportunities to learn skills early, it forms the foundation for the development and application of these skills (Palmer et al., 2017) and these transition-related skills can vary and evolve in how it is implemented over the years (Repetto, 2003). When participants were

explicitly asked about when the skills needed for success beyond school should be developed, they mentioned a much earlier timeframe and stated the importance of providing students time to develop the necessary skills. Many students do not know what career path they wish to follow even when in the later high school years or after already starting postsecondary education. Therefore, focusing on specific careers should not be the greatest focus. Instead, ensuring that transition planning revolves around the idea of focusing on skills that would be beneficial regardless of what career or school path students may choose would be more useful to help prepare for the transition beyond high school.

Taking all of this into consideration, self-determination skills should be taught at an early age, using transition goals as a guiding framework. Although it is important to teach students self-determination skills to be successful postsecondary school, it is challenging for teachers to find the time and have the knowledge to implement strategies successfully. By reinforcing the idea to plan with the end in mind, it may provide a framework that will assist with teachers understanding the importance of self-determination education, but also put it within a context to demonstrate why those skills are necessary to focus on and develop early on, not just closer to times of transition.

Disconnect between skills and the TPP. There appears to be a disconnect between the identification of skills needed for transition and the actual TPP. This lack of connection may be a result of how the concept is perceived, with the notion that the student is too young to understand what they want to do in the future, so the TPP itself should start later in a student's education. Even though participants acknowledged the importance of teaching skills necessary for transitions early on, they argued that it is challenging to do so when addressing the diverse needs within the classroom. Additionally, the participants felt that teaching self-determination

related skills was challenging due to the demands of the academic curriculum, however, previous research looking at the relationship between self-determination, self-concept, and academic achievement, found a direct correlation between self-determination and academic achievement in a sample of students with LDs (Zheng, Erickson, Kingston, & Noonan, 2014).

Thus, while participants may recognize the need for students to develop self-determination skills, they may not make this connection to how it applies within curricular expectations, and thus may not translate into practice. Although elementary and middle school teachers see the value in teaching these skills, they may not have the skills/knowledge to know how to implement them (Stang et al., 2009). Previous research has shown that teachers have a superficial understanding of when and how to teach self-determination skills (Thoma et al., 2008). In order to address the challenges in attending to the diverse needs within the classroom, an increase in self-determination education and training would be beneficial. This focused education would not only be beneficial for students with disabilities, but also for all students. Integrating self-determination skills throughout the curriculum and providing opportunities for students to develop these skills within the classroom can promote opportunities to practice these skills within a structured environment. Having these skills identified, similar to the learning skills that are already identified within their report cards, would allow teachers to explicitly monitor and promote them.

If teachers are provided with appropriate training on how to infuse self-determination skill learning within their teaching, it may enhance their willingness and ability to do so. Teachers who were trained on self-determination curriculum had improved perceptions regarding students' ability to have opportunities for self-determination (Shogren, Plotner, Palmer, Wehmeyer, & Paek, 2014). Teachers' use of interventions to teach self-determination skills

would be useful even with limited instructional time, as previous research has found that exposure to self-determination interventions improves post-school outcomes (Shogren et al., 2015). Papay, Unger, Williams-Diehm, and Mitchell (2015) describe strategies and activities that can be implemented to integrate self-determination concepts into the current elementary curriculum. They emphasize the importance of providing opportunities for students to practice and develop these strategies within the classroom. The activities they present can be differentiated for lower and higher-ability levels and are strategies that can be employed across a variety of settings (Papay et al., 2015).

Interactions Between Transition Planning Participants

Transition planning involves a complex interplay between various stakeholders, and understanding how teachers situate themselves in this process, how they perceive their role, and how other stakeholders such as psychologists and administrators can provide support to teachers, can be beneficial to improve on current transition planning processes. Kohler's taxonomy outlines the importance of interagency collaboration and family involvement, and emphasizes that the collaboration between stakeholders and service providers are supports integral to transitions (Kohler & Field, 2003). Previous research has highlighted that collaboration among stakeholders, particularly in the areas of student-focused planning, parent involvement, and interagency collaboration, are positive predictors of post-school outcomes (Haber at al., 2015). As such, examining teacher perspectives of their role in the TPP, as well as the role of other stakeholders, is a crucial first step in seeing how to strengthen these connections to support the TPP. This section will include a discussion of the individual participants identified as stakeholders in the TPP, as well as the main themes regarding their roles and responsibilities:

stakeholders as providers of knowledge or information, the interactions among stakeholders, and procedural aspects of stakeholder involvement.

Engagement of individuals in the process. All participants recognized that parents should be involved in the process, while more than two-thirds of teachers endorsed student involvement. Participants are also recognizing that people who have known the student for a long time should be involved in the process. Being aware of who should be involved in the process also helps to highlight those people that need to be on board and knowledgeable about their role. For instance, parents are important stakeholders in the process as they can identify the needs and abilities of students, and can suggest how to solve problems that may exist at home (Wehman, 2013).

Student-focused planning is an important part of transition planning (Kohler & Field, 2003) and if students are not involved, a vital component is missing. Therefore, it is important that all teachers recognize the necessity of student involvement. Of note, participants did not frequently mention self-determination skill areas nor stress the importance of academic development. Student involvement in the TPP allows opportunities for students to learn and practice self-determination skills (Wehmeyer, Agran, et al., 2007), which is important given that self-determination is a predictor for improved post-school outcomes (Test, Mazzotti, et al., 2009). Moreover, student involvement can provide teachers with insight into the skill areas that students need to develop in order to fully participate in discussions and meetings about their life and future goals. In order to encourage active student involvement, teachers need to teach students the necessary skills and provide opportunities for students to meaningfully participate in meetings (Wehmeyer, Agran, et al., 2007). The development of self-determination skills contributes to the ability of students to participate in the TPP and is important for active student

involvement in the process (Wehmeyer, Palmer et al., 2007). Student involvement in the TPP can be encouraged by providing students with opportunities to develop self-determined behaviours in controlled school situations, to explore careers and develop self-awareness of interests, and by building relationships with families to encourage learning opportunities at home (Papay et al., 2015).

Teacher involvement in the process. Regardless of whether they teach at the elementary or high school level, participants mostly did not recognize any formal involvement in transition planning. A few participants acknowledged some informal involvement, mainly by speaking with students and acting as a resource when the student seeks out their assistance. However, they are not involved in formal transition planning as outlined by policy and procedures, and instead ascribe that role to other people, in particular special education teachers. Additionally, participants involved with major transitions, such as the transition to kindergarten or high school, mainly described procedures in place for all students, not plans specific for students with disabilities. While it may be understandable that elementary teachers do not see their involvement for the transition beyond high school, it raises questions as to why the high school teachers in this study did not see themselves as having greater involvement. This may relate to their understanding of how transition planning is defined and how their role within it is defined as well.

Participants identified that their primary role in the TPP would involve providing student data. This was consistent with prior research (Goupil et al., 2002) and details that teachers would provide observations about the student, including how they are functioning in the classroom and their learning strengths and needs. Since teachers spend a great deal of time with students in the classroom, they would be a good gauge of the needs and abilities of students.

Around half of the participants also identified that their role would include assessing student needs and facilitating student learning. This finding was somewhat surprising as it was expected that more teachers would endorse this role, as implementing Individual Education Plan (IEP)/ Individual Transition Plan (ITP) recommendations into their teaching is currently expected in inclusive settings.

Challenges in transition planning and how stakeholders can help. Participants acknowledged that a number of supports exist within their school systems that allow them to work in inclusive settings. They identified personnel supports, such as educational assistants and special education teachers, as the greatest resource to supporting student with disabilities and with transition planning. However, these resources were also noted to be a barrier due to an insufficient amount of time that those supports are available. Furthermore, if a student has needs but is not formally identified or does not have an IEP, teachers then struggle to teach students without appropriate supports. Teachers may not possess sufficient knowledge of students' needs and abilities, and may also have minimal or inaccurate information about new students. Teachers should not have to solely rely on special education teachers or other specialized assistants to support them in this process, since the amount of time these resource supports already have to spend with students and within the classroom is very limited. Teachers should be empowered to effectively teach the diversity of students within their classrooms.

It would be helpful if teachers were provided with opportunities, through pre-service training or professional development (PD) opportunities, to gain greater knowledge of how to attend to the growing diversity of needs within their classrooms. Although funding may not be easily increased to bolster additional person supports in their classroom, increasing their own knowledge and autonomy can help increase teachers' self-efficacy and, in turn, their ability to

support students. Exposing teachers more often to topics related to working in inclusive settings allows them to expand their experience and knowledge and, in turn, can lead to changes in teachers' attitudes towards working with students with disabilities (Kamens et al., 2003). School psychologists could aid in this area by providing PD workshops throughout the school year on topics relevant to the specific school and school community.

Consistent with previous research (Goupil et al., 2002; Lubbers, et al., 2008; Wandry et al., 2008), participants reported challenges to their involvement in the TPP and identified the following aspects that impeded their participation; these challenges included: lack of time, differences in goals and expectations for students between parents and school personnel, lack of resources, insufficient information and training, policy issues, and lack of stakeholder involvement. Furthermore, participants emphasized the challenges in addressing the diverse needs within the classroom and how the attitudes of various stakeholders, including teacher and student attitudes, have made the process more challenging.

In particular, participants noted that parents pose as a barrier when working with students with disabilities and when attempting to get students the appropriate supports. Furthermore, transition planning meetings are often set up in ways that facilitate professional participation, as opposed to support parent or student participation (Thoma et al., 2001). Even with parental involvement during transition meetings, parents may not be involved or interact with teachers outside of these meetings (Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Trainor et al., 2016). Participants provided interpretations as to what contributes to their challenges interacting with parents and their responses included: a lack of awareness of any issues, reluctance for students to be identified, parents being too involved and not allowing students opportunities for self-determination or to self-advocate, or the stigma associated with a diagnosis. Many attributed the challenges with

parents to cultural differences and the stigma that is often associated with having a child identified with a disability.

Racial/ethnic differences are one factor related to the levels of self-determination reported by individuals involved in transition planning. This suggests that race/ethnicity should be taken into consideration when pursuing self-determination interventions in various populations (Shogren, Kennedy, Dowsett, Villarreal, & Little, 2014). Additionally, structural barriers may be one of the factors that lead to poorer postsecondary outcomes in these populations (Trainor, 2010). Another perspective of why parents from culturally diverse backgrounds may be less involved with school-based transition planning is that school is only one context, and parents may look to other contexts such as community to prepare for the child's transition (Geenen et al., 2001).

Matuszny, Banda, and Coleman (2007) describe a progressive plan to help parents from diverse backgrounds become more involved in the IEP process. Through the phases of initiating the parent-teacher relationship, building the foundation by establishing trust and seeking out parental input, maintenance and support of the relationship, and yearly wrap-up and reflection on progress, Matuszny et al. (2007) describe how by breaking down barriers to participation, parents can be more involved in the IEP process in a collaborative manner. Geenen, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez (2005) describe strategies to increase the level of parent involvement in transition planning, including: increase in positive communication with the school, start planning earlier, provide parents with information on transition planning, use parental advocates, provide more emotional support for parents, and have greater flexibility in how and when to meet with parents.

Participants also commented about how attitudinal barriers existed for various stakeholders in the process, including students, teachers, and parents. Since these stakeholders

should be largely involved in the process, and since attitudinal barriers may impede being able to have equal opportunities to participant in the school community (ODA, 2001), it is important to address any negative attitudes that may impact the process. Participants expressed that students develop negative attitudes about their own abilities and that these issues should be addressed earlier. It is important to push students to the best of their abilities, as opposed to underestimating them. Teacher attitudes also need to be addressed, including those who may not appreciate the importance of IEPs. This is where administrators can intervene to ensure that all teachers follow through on what is mandated. This also extends to the school culture; administrators can work to ensure that all teachers and all subjects are perceived as important. This would apply to subject areas that fall under the prep-coverage teacher designations, such as art, drama, music, and gym. Other stakeholders in the transition process, such as psychologists and administrators, can help address some of the barriers that teachers face in creating an environment to support the development of self-determination skills or to increase involvement in the TPP.

Role of psychologists and administrators in the TPP. Participants identified that psychologists can provide support by sharing knowledge or tailored information about a student. Although cited less frequently, participants also identified that psychologists should be involved in assessing students. However, their role can extend beyond that. School psychologists have background knowledge of the processes that influence learning and behaviour, and through the use of standardized assessment and evidence-based practice, they can help address questions teachers have about learning and behavioural challenges within their classroom (NASP, 2010; Jeary & Schwean, 2012). Furthermore, school psychologists have developed skills observing a wide range of classrooms. Therefore, with this skill and knowledge set, school psychologists can help teachers identify their own sources of biases, identify environmental barriers that may be

impeding their abilities to implement inclusion practices, and help them identify and develop essential skills. Collaboration between teachers and psychologists, and engaging in assessment practices together, can lead to a better understanding of the causes and way in which students learn and the reasons behind their behaviour (Jeary & Schwean, 2012).

Even though psychologists possess this diverse skillset, psychologists still appear to spend a lot of their time in conducting assessments and engaging in report writing (Jordan, Hindes, & Saklofske, 2009; Lean, 2016). Previous research on school psychologist involvement in the TPP highlights that psychologists would like to be involved to a greater degree in this process; however, barriers such as high caseloads, lack of training and awareness, not invited to participate, and role restrictions impede their involvement (Lillenstein, Levinson, Sylvester, & Brady, 2006). Instead of assessing students individually in order to access special education services, psychologists can help empower teachers to intervene more successfully with students. However, it is important to note that although psychologists may have observed a wide range of classrooms, many have never spent prolonged periods of time within the classroom and may not know the realities of what is feasible in the long-term in a day-to-day classroom environment. This was a concern raised by teachers during the interviews that many of the recommendations made in assessment reports are not always easy to implement effectively. Teachers strongly suggested that psychologists should become more familiar with classrooms through classroom visits and greater interactions with classroom teachers to increase awareness of what is feasible.

Participants commented that in order to improve their involvement in transition planning, it would be useful to receive assistance from those more knowledgeable about the process, to gain more knowledge or information, collaborate with outside resources, and gain more information about post-school options – sentiments also consistent with previous research

(Goupil et al., 2002; Strnadova et al., 2016). However, teachers also commented on the importance of having accurate information about the needs and abilities of students, especially vital for younger students, so they know how to best support and plan for the student. Participants identified that administrators can also provide knowledge based on their prior experiences, consistent with prior research (Goupil et al., 2002). Since administrators are familiar with the policies, resources, and programs that are available, and are involved in developing school-level procedures, they can help demystify the process for teachers and enlighten them about when and how to seek out extra supports when needed. Administrators can also assist in increasing community collaborations, an area found to be the least demonstrated transition practice (Landmark et al., 2010), since they would be knowledgeable about the availability of community organizations and resources.

Another way in which participants identified that psychologists and administrators can provide support is by facilitating interactions with parents. In order to be effective and begin developing self-determination in the elementary school years, it is important to take into consideration the family and culture backgrounds of families to ensure they are included as much as possible (Papay et al., 2015). Getting parents involved in the process, both in the role of providing information about the student and helping with the development of skills and connecting with resources, is important to aid students in the TPP. Parents should be brought in as a resource early on in the process so that they can aid in the process and be involved (Wehman, 2013). Since parental expectations of outcomes have an impact on the transition process (Wehman, Sima, et al., 2014), it is integral that teachers and other stakeholders find ways to help increase parents' opinions of the possible outcomes for students with disabilities. Participants commented that psychologists and administrators are often seen as "experts" and therefore

parents may be more receptive to what they have to say. Of note, approximately one-third of participants expressed that stakeholders that had limited interactions with the students should have limited involvement in the TPP, also consistent with previous research (Goupil et al., 2002). Participants emphasized that if the individual did not know the student, their contribution would be limited.

Policies and Procedures Related to Transition Planning

The policies that are mandated at the Provincial level influence the procedures and structures that administrators create within their school. As a result, this influences how schools implement transition planning, and impacts the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders. Kohler's taxonomy illustrates how program structure, including policies, philosophy, planning and evaluation, provide the context for transition-focused education (Kohler & Field, 2003). Therefore, exploring teacher perspectives of program structures can shed light on what aspects facilitate involvement and what gaps exist.

Teacher awareness/knowledge of legislation and its impact on teaching. Participants were not aware of the legislation surrounding transition planning, but more importantly, many identified that legislation does not impact how they approach teaching. They explain that legislation often restricts what they can or cannot do and often determines how funding is allocated with regards to supports. However, their teaching is mainly guided by what they believe is in the best interests of the student. Participants seem to perceive legislation as something outside of what they do and not their main responsibility.

Research examining compliance of transition practices in IEPs in the United States found that less than half of IEPs were fully complaint and disability type and ethnicity were factors related to level of compliance (Landmark & Zhang, 2013). Results from the current study may

provide a window into why this type of trend may be found, although more directed research needs to be done in this area. Overall, there seemed to be a lack of knowledge and clarity about transition planning legislation, and about the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders. For instance, just over half of the participants commented that principals are responsible for school level procedures, and even fewer mentioned administrator roles in overseeing the process and ensuring TPs were developed and maintained. However, in terms of the policy, this is one of administrators' primary roles in the process (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017).

How policy addresses some of the challenges/barriers noted above and what changes still need to be made to improve. Transparency and clarity regarding the policies and procedures involved should be made available to all who are involved in the TPP and to ensure that policies and procedures that are enacted are ecologically valid and realistic to implement. Furthermore, shifting the focus to smaller transitions and how they connect to the larger transition process can provide students with opportunities to practice the skills that will support the larger transition. Some participants made this observation, but this idea should be further reinforced so that more teachers recognize that transition planning should be more consistently integrated in common school routines.

Additionally, since many participants were unaware of all aspects of the transition plan, it would be helpful to increase awareness of its important aspects, including: having specific and measurable goals, frequent monitoring of these goals, the continued involvement of parents and students, and ensuring they understand the goals (Harrison et al., 2017). Furthermore, highlighting the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, as well as timelines, are important for accountability. ITPs should be created using clear and concise language and highlighted that this is done in the IEP process, not something independent of it.

Current changes in policy at the various levels. Changes are being made in Ontario to address gaps in transition planning. In addition to the legislation changes to transition planning, starting in 2015, changes were made to Education programs in Ontario. These changes included extending the length of the program from two to four semesters, increasing the number of practice teaching hours, and adding courses that touch on subject areas such as: preparing students for transitions, increasing focus on student mental health and well-being, teaching with technology, using differentiated instruction, and creating and maintaining professional relationships with a variety of stakeholders (Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996; Ontario College of Teachers, 2016a). Although this is a step towards providing teachers with greater knowledge in this area, it will still be a number of years until these pre-service teachers graduate and gain full employment. In Ontario, recent trends show that only around half of teachers gain full employment within two years, and one in three take upwards of four years. Furthermore, this employment may be piecework teaching such as supply work; only about one in five teachers hold a permanent teaching position by the end of the first year. As a result, teachers in supply roles are less likely to partake in formal and informal PD opportunities that are school-based (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016b). Therefore, further education and knowledge must also take place in the in-service area.

Although it is a step forward that transition plans are now mandated within the province of Ontario starting in kindergarten, there are still some challenges with the way it has been implemented. Since the focus is not only on the transition beyond high school, but also for all transitions, the documentation can note that "no support is needed." Depending on how transition planning is conceptualized, this can often mean that if no immediate supports are required, long-term goals are not taken in consideration. Shifting how IEPs are conceptualized

from a yearly plan to a strategic long-term plan can support the TPP. Yearly reviews of IEPs can serve as a benchmark to one or more long-range goals and can be applied to all types of transitions; in essence, all IEPs become ITPs (deFur, 2003). Therefore, the concept of "no support is needed" would not be an option, and instead, transition plans could link to the development of skills such as self-determination. Actions such as linking the goals in the IEP to future benefits (i.e. building self-determination to aid in future independence) can effectively use smaller transitions to provide opportunities for students to practice and apply self-determination skills in less strenuous and more routine transitions when younger.

Benefit to All Students

The changes in policy and pre-service education are positive steps to providing students with supports and opportunities across their education to prepare them for successful future outcomes; however, these changes operate under the fallacy that this type of process is uniquely helpful to students with disabilities. While students with disabilities benefit from the development of IEPs to provide support for short and long-term goals and support through transitions, the skills targeted and exposures to experiences would be beneficial for all students.

Participants identified that these skills and supports would be beneficial for all students, not just students with disabilities, which is also consistent with prior research (Carter et al., 2008). The majority of participants described that all students would benefit from extra supports and learning skills that would aid in the transition beyond school. If this information is not infused throughout the curriculum, more targeted attention should be established throughout the child's education. Self-determination education can be implemented school-wide, not only for students with IEPs (Field et al., 2003). Helping students identify which supports they need, regardless of their level of needs or disabilities, will help them throughout their education and once they enter

the workforce. Teaching students skills such as self-advocacy, self-awareness, and goal setting can provide students with the range of skills needed for success when assuming adult roles.

Strengths and Limitations of the Current Study

This study contributes to the field of transition planning by examining the perspectives and experiences of in-service teachers in general education classrooms, and their interactions with other stakeholders in the TPP. The current perceptions that teachers hold regarding the skill areas that are most important for students to develop to support transitions was reviewed, as well as the supports and barriers they encountered in their interactions with those involved in the TPP. Furthermore, the minimal knowledge that teachers possess regarding the TPP and their role within it was discussed. In this section, a discussion of the strengths of the study, as well as some of the limitations, will be reviewed. Recommendations for practice, policy, and future research will be presented, to help reframe how teachers think about transition planning and how this area can be further explored to provide greater support to teachers, and in turn, students.

Researcher Reflexivity and Future Directions

I was initially interested in research related to inclusive education and transition planning as a result of my prior education and previous experience in classrooms, as well as interactions with teachers as a school psychologist in training. The process of developing this research project, interviewing teachers, analyzing the results, and connecting the themes to evidence-based practices has influenced my perspectives as a future school psychologist.

At the onset of this process I was overly zealous about the degree of support that school psychologists should provide outside their role of assessments, including the amount of time that could be spent with teachers. During the interview process and hearing teacher perspectives of the roles of various stakeholders, I began challenging my perspective on the role of psychologists

within the school system. I went into the dissertation process with preconceived notions of how I felt psychologist involvement could be beneficial to teachers, based on my own prior experiences. However, my discussions with participants highlighted concerns they had about how current supports provided were insufficient or ineffective and where assistance would be even more impactful, such as helping to implement recommendations into the classroom. Although psychologists are knowledgeable on a diverse range of topics and can be an excellent resource to teachers and parents, this research has heightened my already present awareness of the limited time that psychologists often have with teachers.

While I remain optimistic and interested in supporting teachers within schools, my interactions with participants provided me with insight about different ways that I can provide support to teachers, while also addressing barriers. Teachers identified that it would be helpful if psychologists provided information, both student-specific and general psychological knowledge; however, it would be even more useful to help teachers effectively apply the knowledge or information into practice. The interviews with teachers reinforced my belief in the importance of implementing strategies starting in kindergarten to support student development and their involvement in the TPP. However, it also highlighted the barriers that impede the ability of teachers to support these opportunities for engagement, such as lack of resources and the diversity of needs within the classroom. My experience in lesson planning and knowledge of developmental and educational psychology, ideally positions me to help develop curriculum or unit plans to guide teachers on how to effectively implement concepts relating to transition planning.

In the meantime, I can act as a guide for parents and teachers by enhancing their understanding of the TPP. Through my experience working in various settings, I can help

facilitate interactions between parents and teachers, encourage parents to advocate for their child and access community resources, and share ways that teachers and parents can provide students with opportunities to develop self-determination skills early on. I can impart these skills through PD workshops, parent information sessions, or by sharing resources on topics related to self-determination, transition planning, and the community resources and supports available. Furthermore, during the assessment process and when providing recommendations, it is important for psychologists to be sensitive to the challenges that various stakeholders face. Speaking with teachers and parents about the specific challenges they encounter in their environment will help increase awareness of the limitations within and outside of the classroom where support can be provided.

Finally, if I were to conduct further interviews with teachers, I would ask participants additional questions that would encourage them to be more reflective of their personal experiences and practices. From a professional perspective, I would inquire how they provide opportunities within their classrooms to support students in developing skills that would support post-school success. I would also ask them about their teaching strategies and which proved effective and ineffective. From a personal perspective, I would have participants reflect on their own transition beyond high school and share any challenges they encountered, what supports they found useful, and how they were involved in the TPP. Participants in the study who shared their own personal experiences about their transition were able to share how these experiences influenced and shaped their current teaching methods.

Strengths and original contributions. The strengths of this research include the ways in which it adds to the literature by examining the voice and perspectives of general education teachers at the elementary and middle school level, perspectives less heard from with respect to

their involvement in the TPP. Since changes have been made to legislation to plan for transitions across grades KG-12, examining the current experiences, viewpoints, and barriers to this process provides information that can help highlight ways in which teachers require additional support and how we can provide this support. Since the skills that are important to develop for life transitions should be fostered from a young age, investigating the perspectives of elementary school teachers allows a greater understanding of how their current perspectives relate to the TPP and their role within it.

Furthermore, the perspectives of general education teachers who work in inclusive environments were examined, a population that has received less attention compared to special education teachers in this field. The use of qualitative methodology allowed for a deeper understanding of teacher involvement in transition planning and their attitudes toward this process, including their interactions with other stakeholders. This more in-depth approach provided more opportunities for teachers to share personal examples and anecdotes to illustrate their viewpoints and express the challenges that they encounter within their classrooms.

This research also investigated the current interactions that participants had with a variety of stakeholders, but in particular, psychologists and administrators. Teachers provided their perspectives on what is working in the process and how the gaps could be addressed through implementing various resources, including the involvement of psychologists and administrators. This information can be used to inform further planning and supports that these stakeholders provide to teachers.

Study limitations. As with all qualitative methods, there are inherent limiting variables to this research approach. In qualitative research methods, the notion of generalizability is seen as a limiting factor; however, findings derived from a qualitative approach are not meant to apply

to the greater population; instead, this study provides more in-depth descriptions or information about a specific setting or phenomenon (Malterud, 2001; Maxwell, 2012). Another limitation raised in qualitative research is the influence of the researcher in the process; the goal would not be to remove the influence of the research but to acknowledge their position and perspectives (Maxwell, 2012). As such, the findings in this research could be subject to other interpretations from a person with different positions or perspectives (Malterud, 2001).

There were a number of contextual variables that need to be considered. Due to the timing of this study, a few of the interviews were conducted during or following a work-to-rule strike position in school boards teachers were recruited from. The strike may have impacted their access to PD opportunities, resources, and recent experiences with students and other stakeholders. Furthermore, since interviews were conducted at different points during the school year, responses may also have been influenced by school events such as evaluation periods and writing report cards. Although common to most teachers throughout the school year, these factors may have resulted in some teachers emphasizing certain experiences over others at the time of their interview. Additionally, while all participants completed the demographic questionnaire prior to the interview, due to participant time constraints, some of the participants completed the remaining questionnaires following the interview. As a result, their responses may have been impacted by the discussion that took place during the interview.

Participants expressed some difficulty delving into the depth of their responses due to the wide-ranging diversity of disabilities they encounter. This challenge may also be due to participants' lack of exposure to the concept of transition planning; therefore, they have not had the opportunity to think about transition plans or connect their experiences to this concept. As a result, it may have been difficult for participants to provide examples on this topic. In order to

address this limitation, the participants were encouraged to consider the range of their experiences and provide examples when appropriate to illustrate their responses; however, the majority still chose to speak about their experiences generally. While asking teachers about their experiences in general was a purposeful decision to examine the breadth of teacher experiences, a future direction in this area may be to follow-up with teachers on more specific student examples or focus more on narrowly defined parameters (such as specific disability groups). Additionally, future research could employ research methods that ask participants to keep a journal prior to the interview. Focusing on guided prompts may allow more time for participants to reflect on their experiences and access examples during an interview.

Implications and recommendations for practice. A number of participants at the elementary school level commented that it was hard to see their involvement in transition planning since it is far away and their students are still very young. It would be beneficial to reframe transition planning as the skills or abilities that students need to be successful, such as self-determination skills, as opposed to specific employment or community outcomes. Framing transition planning within this context may help teachers form a better understanding of their role and how to help in the process. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to provide teachers with greater education on transition planning and transition planning theories, as well as further investigate their knowledge and role in the process. School psychologists can be one resource to provide this support by: providing knowledge of child development, demonstrating how to adapt the curriculum to integrate the development of self-determination skills, and linking how these concepts relate to the TPP.

It would be beneficial for individuals responsible for creating transition plans within schools to identify skill areas that a student should develop to support both short- and long-term

goals. For instance, students should have opportunities to develop self-determination skills throughout their education. This can be achieved by implementing self-determination class-wide or school-wide, not only for students with IEPs (Field et al., 2003) and by using transition planning as the foundation for education, not only using it as an additional requirement or activity to be completed (McDonnell & Hardman, 2010). Smaller transitions can be used to provide opportunities for students to practice and prepare for the transition beyond high school. Furthermore, student-involvement should be encouraged in the TPP in developmentally appropriate ways across the educational continuum. For instance, kindergarten students could share examples of their likes and dislikes, while students in the middle school years could attend and participate in IEP meetings at a developmentally appropriate level and share any short- and long-term goals as appropriate.

A few participants noted that connecting with past students who have successfully completed transitions would help guide the process. In instances when this is not feasible or cannot be arranged, teachers could also use fiction and non-fiction examples of individuals with disabilities who hold various adult roles or occupations (Papay et al., 2015). Optimally, speaking with adults with disabilities would be an excellent resource. In prior studies, suggestions from adults with physical disabilities were provided on what supports would have been helpful to encourage self-determination skills when they were in school. Strategies they found helpful included teaching goal-setting, self-assessment, self-reflection, involvement in the development of an action plans, and frequent and repeated opportunities to practice self-determined behaviour (Angell, Stoner, & Fulk, 2010). Furthermore, students with disabilities have described that being provided with opportunities to take risks and face challenges, participating and gradually taking leadership roles in the IEP process, and developing a greater self-awareness and goal directed

behaviour, also aided in becoming more self-determined after leaving secondary school (Ankeny & Lehmann, 2011). These adults also addressed that the attitudes of others posed one of the greatest barriers; when professionals had low expectations, it often impacted the amount of accommodations provided, resulted in educational planning that was insufficient, and led to feelings of isolation (Angell et al., 2010).

While it is important to use evidence-based practice to inform the TPP, it is also important that teachers are effectively trained in the use of these evidence-based practices. When teachers receive training in transition practices through coursework or PD opportunities, this can correlate with how often transition practices are implemented (Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). In 2016, Special Education Part 1 was the number one awarded Additional Qualification (AQ) in Ontario, and Special Education Part 2 and Special Education Specialist AQs fell within the top ten (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016a) indicating that teachers are seeking out PD opportunities in these areas. A number of teachers indicated that involvement in PD activities was a form of support when working with students with disabilities. Although teachers may attend PD workshops and learn about new practices or interventions that can aid in the classroom, solely receiving instruction about the intervention and how to implement the strategies is not sufficient. Training should be paired with continuous practice and feedback on performance in order to ensure treatment integrity (Mustian, Mazzotti, & Test, 2012). Within the current study, participants indicated that they attend in-service PD opportunities that are informative, but there is a gap in how to implement the strategies in the classroom. Psychologists can also provide support in this area, helping teachers transform the knowledge acquired from PD opportunities into practice.

Although there have been changes to pre-service education programs throughout the years, with the most recent being an enhanced and extended teacher education program (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016b), this new foundational knowledge may not be sufficiently extended to in-service teachers. It would also be beneficial to have extended PD for in-service teachers regarding inclusive education topics such as supporting transition planning, as in-service teachers may not receive education on these topics unless sought out.

Implications and recommendations for policy. It would be beneficial for the roles and responsibilities, as outlined in legislation and policy documents, to be clearly identified so that teachers are able to understand their role in the process and identify other individuals that are available resources. For instance, while psychologists have a wealth of knowledge and information that can be shared to assist on various levels in transition planning, currently their role within the schools appears to be highly centered around assessment and consulting with special education teachers. While they may attend planning meetings, their roles may be impeded by the limited involvement that they have with the students and general education teachers. This can be remedied by having psychologists lead educational sessions throughout the year to provide information to teachers on topics relevant for their school community. Psychologists can also be more visible in the schools and present in classroom environments. Participants also identified a gap between research or policy creation and what is feasible or realistic within the classroom. There should be a greater push for those individuals who are making policy or engaging in research to be actively involved in the classroom, so they are aware of the current realities within classrooms and school systems.

Implications for future research. Although steps have been taken to enhance the teacher education programs and integrate coursework on inclusive education and prepare for

transitions, these teachers may take a few years to enter the workforce and have their own full-time classrooms. Future research could investigate whether any differences in perspectives or experiences occur as a result of the changes to pre-service education programs in Ontario. This will help provide insight as to whether pre-service education provides a sufficient foundation for planning for transitions, or how in-service PD opportunities can supplement or enhance further knowledge and awareness in this area.

Since teachers may not be aware of how their current teaching provides opportunities for self-determination, future research could also involve observing teachers in their classrooms to evaluate the extent to which teachers are implementing strategies to foster self-determination skills in their classrooms and how it could apply to transition planning. Although in the current study teachers did not identify some areas related to self-determination, this raises the question of whether this is a genuine absence or if teachers may not explicitly express the importance or their involvement, but may be infusing aspects into their teaching regardless. This type of research can help identify gaps in teacher knowledge and practices, areas where other stakeholders can play a more direct role in the TPP, and how teachers can implement self-determination strategies into their practice.

Concluding Comments

The experience of in-service general education teachers working in inclusive classrooms and in the TPP provide a window to some of the challenges they encounter and the types of interactions they have with various stakeholders in the process. Overall, while teachers are recognizing some of the skills that will support successful transitions, there is an apparent disconnect between the skills needed for transition and when transition planning should commence. In addition, while some supports have been identified, such as resource support

from educational assistants and special education teachers, many barriers were also identified, such as a lack of awareness of policy and procedures, insufficient access to supports and resources, and not enough time to address the diverse needs in classrooms.

Helping reframe and shift the concept of transition planning from focusing on specific careers to developing the skills that will help students assume adult roles would be an important step in supporting the TPP. Although it may be difficult to have in-depth involvement with individual students, stakeholders such as psychologists and administrators can share the knowledge that they possess about child development and community supports so that teachers are more knowledgeable and active in the process. Overall, empowering teachers to support students within their classrooms, and providing opportunities for students to develop and practice self-determination skills, will help encourage successful transitions for all.

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Appendix A

Figures and Tables of Questionnaire Data

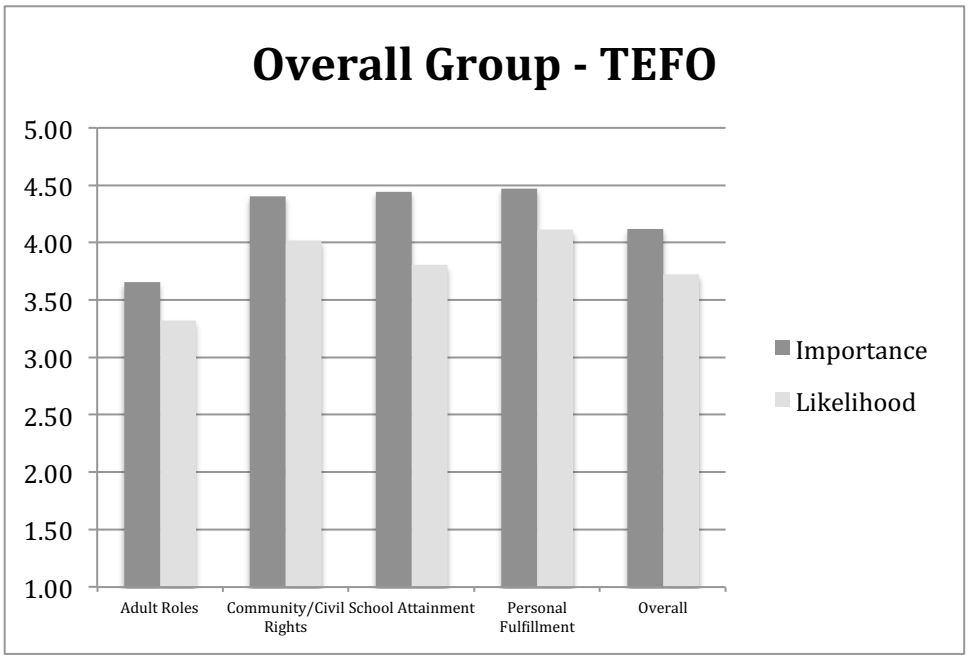

Figure A1. Teacher Expectations of Future Outcomes, comparison of rated Likelihood and Importance of outcomes as rated by the group of participants.

Table A2

Collective Efficacy Scale

Participant	GC+	GC-	TA+	TA-	Overall
Charlene	4.14	2.50	3.25	3.50	3.38
Adam	5.14	5.50	3.50	5.00	4.90
Paul	4.86	3.67	4.50	3.50	4.19
Lyla	5.57	4.33	4.00	5.75	4.95
Greg	3.00	1.67	3.25	4.75	3.00
Lina	4.71	4.33	2.50	4.75	4.19
Hinda	-	-	-	-	-
Jordana	4.29	3.67	2.75	2.50	3.48
Amina	5.14	4.83	4.00	5.00	4.81
Pamela	4.71	3.33	4.00	4.50	4.14
Grant	5.43	4.67	4.25	3.75	4.67
Melanie	4.71	3.50	4.00	4.50	4.19
Laura	4.14	4.00	3.75	4.75	4.14
GROUP TOTAL	4.65	3.83	3.65	4.35	4.17

Note. GC = group competence and TA = task analysis. The +/- refers to whether items are worded positively or negatively within the scale.

Table A3

Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practice

Participant	E-UII	E-C	E-MB	Overall
Charlene	5.17	5.33	5.00	5.17
Adam	5.83	5.33	5.83	5.67
Paul	-	-	-	-
Lyla	5.17	4.83	4.83	4.94
Greg	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Lina	4.67	3.83	4.50	4.33
Hinda	-	-	-	-
Jordana	4.67	4.17	4.17	4.33
Amina	5.00	4.83	4.83	4.89
Pamela	5.00	4.83	4.33	4.72
Grant	5.17	4.50	4.50	4.72
Melanie	5.33	5.83	5.17	5.44
Laura	5.50	4.83	5.00	5.11
GROUP TOTAL	5.23	4.94	4.92	5.03

Table A4

Teacher Expectations for Future Outcomes

	Adult Roles		Community/ Civil Rights		School Attainment		Personal Fulfillment		Overall	
	Imp	L	Imp	L	Imp	L	Imp	L	Imp	L
Charlene	3.38	2.25	4.67	3.33	4.67	3.00	4.67	3.67	4.15	2.90
Adam	3.25	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.30	4.60
Paul	3.88	2.25	4.33	3.33	5.00	3.67	4.33	3.67	4.25	3.00
Lyla	4.38	4.25	4.83	4.40	5.00	4.67	4.67	4.67	4.65	4.42
Greg	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Lina	4.13	4.25	4.17	4.33	5.00	4.33	4.67	4.67	4.35	4.35
Hinda	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Jordana	3.38	2.63	3.67	3.67	4.67	2.33	4.67	3.00	3.85	2.95
Amina	3.75	2.25	4.50	3.33	4.67	3.33	4.67	3.33	4.25	2.90
Pamela	2.25	2.50	3.17	3.50	1.00	2.67	3.67	4.33	2.55	3.10
Grant	3.13	3.13	4.83	4.33	5.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.05	3.60
Melanie	3.25	3.38	4.17	3.83	4.33	3.67	4.33	4.00	3.85	3.65
Laura	4.13	4.00	4.50	4.17	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.20	4.20
GROUP TOTAL	3.66	3.32	4.40	4.02	4.44	3.81	4.47	4.11	4.12	3.72

Note. Imp = Importance, L = likelihood

Table A5

Multidimensional Attitudes Scale

Participant	Affect	Cognition	Behaviour
Charlene	2.06	2.70	2.50
Adam	3.00	1.80	2.25
Paul	2.94	1.90	1.75
Lyla	3.81	2.80	3.50
Greg	1.25	2.00	2.38
Lina	3.88	2.50	2.00
Hinda	-	-	-
Jordana	3.06	2.80	3.00
Amina	2.81	2.50	2.25
Pamela	2.81	2.30	1.38
Grant	3.56	2.20	2.63
Melanie	3.38	2.20	2.25
Laura	2.31	2.30	1.50
GROUP TOTAL	2.91	2.33	2.28

Note. Lower values indicate more positive attitudes

Appendix B

Recruitment Script

Script to Recruit Participants

Hi <insert name>. My name is Hailey Sobel and I am a doctoral student at McGill University. I am <calling/writing> to request your participation in a research study that looks at various stakeholders' perspectives of transitions for students with exceptionalities.

This study is aimed at understanding the knowledge, prior experience, and attitudes that teachers possess regarding working with students with exceptionalities and their role in assisting with transitions.

This study would involve completing a few short questionnaires and participation in an interview. A time commitment of approximately 1.5 hours would be required for the study. This project has been approved by the McGill Ethics Review Board, which addresses issues of informed consent and confidentiality.

I would be more than happy to provide you with additional information about this research project. Please feel free to contact me via e-mail at hailey.sobel@mail.mcgill.ca or by phone at (***) ***-**** to discuss participation and any queries you may have. You can also reach my supervisor, Dr. Tara Flanagan, via e-mail at tara.flanagan@mcgill.ca or by phone at (514) 398-3441.

Thank you,

Hailey

Appendix C

Consent Form

McGill

Faculty of Education
McGill University
3700 McTavish Street
Montreal, PQ, Canada H3A1Y2

Faculte des sciences de l'education
Universite McGill
3700, rue McTavish
Montreal, PQ, Canada H3A 1Y2

Facsimile/Telecopier
(514) 398- 6968

Hailey Sobel, a Doctoral student at McGill University and supervised by Dr. Tara Flanagan, is conducting a study to examine the perspectives, knowledge and experiences of individuals working with students with special needs and helping with various life transitions.

This research entails completing questionnaires that include questions about the educational background of participants, as well as questions about participants' knowledge, experience and attitudes towards working with students with special needs and of the transition planning process. Approximately 30 minutes will be required to complete the questionnaires. For those participants who also take part in an interview, they will be asked questions pertaining to their role in schools and their knowledge, experience, and attitudes towards working with students with special needs and assisting with transition planning. Involvement in this part of the study will require approximately one hour to participate in the interview with the researcher. Interviews will primarily be conducted in-person, but if this is not feasible the interviews may be conducted via Skype; however, although precautions will be taken there is a risk of data being intercepted when transmitted via the Internet. Only the researchers on this study will have access to the audio-recordings.

This research will inform us about various stakeholders' perspectives of the transition planning process for individuals with disabilities. If you agree to participate in this study, please fill out the attached consent form. Please be advised that the information collected in this study will be held in the strictest confidence and will only be used for research purposes. We greatly appreciate your participation in this study. During the course of this research, you are by no means obligated to respond to any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, and you can withdraw from participating at any time. All your responses will remain completely confidential. Only the research team will see your completed questionnaire or transcripts of the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca. If you have any questions about the study or your participation in the study, please feel free to contact me at hailey.sobel@mail.mcgill.ca.

Sincerely,

Hailey Sobel, Ph.D. Student, McGill University
Email: hailey.sobel@mail.mcgill.ca
Supervised by Dr. Tara Flanagan
Tel: (514) 398-3441. Email: tara.flanagan@mcgill.ca

Informed consent:

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND HAVE BEEN INFORMED ABOUT THE TERMS OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS AGREEMENT. I VOLUNTARILY AGREE AND FREELY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

I also agree that the interview may be audiotaped. ☐YES ☐NO

Name:_____ Signature:_____

Date:_____

Appendix D

Demographic and Background Questionnaire

Demographic and Background Questionnaire – Teachers

The information derived from this survey will remain completely confidential. Please read each question carefully and answer each question to the best of your ability. Please respond to **all** questions on the first page **prior** to continuing to the second page.

Educational and Professional Background:

Teaching Level: Primary / Junior / Intermediate / Senior

Gender: _____

Currently teaching grade: _____

Subjects Taught (please list all that apply): _____
_____

Are you certified to teach in Ontario? Yes No

University where you completed your Education Degree? _____

Year when you received your Education Degree: _____

How many years have you been teaching full-time: _____ (do not include time as an LTO/supply)
How many years did you work as an LTO/supply teacher prior to teaching full time: _____

Have you completed any Additional Qualifications in Special Education? Yes No

Do you have a Master's in Education? Yes No

Why did you decide to pursue a Master's in Education?
_____
_____

If no: Are you thinking about pursuing a Master's degree in the future?

Yes No

Please define the following:
Transition: _____
_____

Transition Planning: _____
_____

Inclusion: _____
_____

Exceptionality: _____
_____

Please use the following definitions when responding to the questions on this page.

Transition: refers to a move from primarily being a student to assuming adult roles within the community.
Transition planning: refers to the process of planning for one's future life beyond school.
Exceptional Pupil: a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program

Have you had experience working with children with an identified exceptionality?

Yes □ No□

If yes, please specify in what capacity have you worked with those children:

_____
_____

If you are currently teaching, are there any children with exceptionalities in your classroom?

Yes □ No□

Have you taught in a classroom with students with exceptionalities in the past?

Yes □ No□

Do you feel you have enough information about or access to resources designed to aid in transition planning?

Yes □ No□

Have you received any formal education in individual education plans (IEPs)

Yes □ No□

Have you received any formal education in transitional planning?

Yes □ No□

If yes: please list relevant classes:

Have you had any informal experience (informal, volunteer, seminars, vicarious, etc.) in IEPs?

Yes □ No□

If yes, please explain: _____
_____

Have you had any informal experience (informal, volunteer, seminars, vicarious, etc.) in transition planning?

Yes □ No□

If yes, please explain: _____
_____

Appendix E

Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What factors influenced your decision to become a teacher?

2. How would you define exceptionality? What kinds of exceptionalities have you encountered within your profession?

3. Have you worked with students with an IEP? What makes your school an inclusive environment? Please explain.

SCRIPT (note to self): If teachers have difficulty responding to questions below due to wide range of exceptionalities, tell them to think about the types of exceptionalities they have most experience with and to use it as a frame of reference for the remaining questions.

4. In your opinion, what skills are important for students with exceptionalities to develop in order to succeed in life beyond school?

5. What are some of the barriers/challenges to your work when educating students with exceptionalities?

6. What are some of the supports to your work when educating students with exceptionalities?

SCRIPT: In light of recent changes in legislation, I'd like to talk to you about your emerging views of the role you play in the transition planning process.

7. How does legislation influence the way you approach working with students with exceptionalities? How about your involvement in TP? What is the legislation that impacts the TPP?

SCRIPT (action): Provide a description of the current transition legislation and highlight changes from old legislation (provide graph).

8. Describe a highly effective transition plan. What would it look like?

9. At what point during a child's education do you think transition planning should start? What is the benefit to working on these skills at this point?

10. Who should be involved in this process? What do you believe your role should be? Describe the role of administrators/psychologists in transition planning. How do you think they can help?

11. What are some of the barriers/challenges to your involvement in the transition planning process (TPP)?

12. What are some of the supports/enabling factors to your involvement in the TPP?

13. How do you see your role evolving in the future?

Appendix F

MAS – Modified Vignette

"Imagine the following situation. You are the teacher in a 5th grade classroom. Part way through the school year a new child joins the class. This child requires the use of a wheelchair. The child is introduced to the class and then you seat the new student at a table of three other students in the classroom. At the end of the class period, you ask the three students how things are going with the new student. Try to imagine the situation."