

DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK-BASED LEARNING MODEL FOR YOUTH WITH
DISABILITIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYERS

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK-BASED LEARNING MODEL FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYERS

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For youth with disabilities, transitioning from school to work and adult life often means overcoming multiple social, academic, and environmental constraints that may present as roadblocks to meeting society's expectations of 'successful transition' (Lehman, Clark, Bullis, Rinkin, & Castellanos, 2002). According to the United States Department of Labor (2014), the employment rate for youth with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 19 was 16.6% and the employment rate of 16-19-year-old youth without disabilities was 29.9%. In total, that is a 13.3% difference in the rate of employment for youth with disabilities compared to youth without disabilities of the same age. Further, the employment rate of youth with disabilities between the ages of 20 and 24 was 31.6% while the employment rate of youth without disabilities of the same age was 65.0% which is a difference of 33.4% between 20-24-year-old youth with and without disabilities.

A gap remains when comparing youth with disabilities to the general youth population on factors such as high school graduation rates, readiness for the world of work, post-secondary education participation, employment rates, wages, and poverty levels (Turner, 2007). Further, a lack of alignment of the employer needs and expectations from employers is a shortcoming that is frequently encountered in the transition process (Rutkowski, Daston, Van Kuiken, & Riehle, 2006). To address the unemployment gap, work-based learning has been deemed an opportunity for youth with disabilities to apply academic and vocational skills and knowledge to real work

situations as they develop the attitudes, values, problem solving skills, and behaviors that will help them in their transition from school to the world of work and adult life (Burgstahler, 2001).

This study was conducted using qualitative methods to explore and describe employer perceptions of work-based learning in order to develop a conceptual model of work-based learning for youth with disabilities. Interviews were conducted with eight participants who were currently or previously involved in participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities in the Lansing, Michigan area. Data for the current study was collected using semi-structured interviews that were done face-to-face with participants. The results of the study stress how employers describe work-based learning; and what factors do employers believe are important in the successful execution of a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. From the results, participant's responses were coded into five major themes: role of employer, critical factors, key stakeholders, targeted program outcomes, and challenges to program implementation. Additionally, a conceptual model emerged from the results of the study to help describe employers' perceptions on work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. Implications for practice, policy, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Work-based learning, youth with disabilities, employment, demand-side employment, and employers.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Life is a series of transitions; diapers to underpants, daycare to preschool, preschool to elementary school, elementary school to middle school, and middle school to high school. However, one of the most difficult and traditionally significant points of transition is from high school to adult life (Test, D. W., Mazzotti, V. L., Mustian, A. L., Kortering, L., & Kohler, P., 2009; Kohler & Field, 2003; Russell, 2002; King, Baldwin, Currie, & Evans, 2005). Test et al. (2009) highlighted that this period of change signifies a time filled with excitement, fear, and challenges for many youth as they transition into employment, postsecondary education, and adult life.

Halpern (1992) defined *transition* as “a period of floundering that occurs for at least the first several years after leaving school as adolescents attempt to assume a variety of adult roles in their communities” (p. 115). Further, the definition of transition has evolved from an emphasis on post-school employment, driven more by what education professionals determined were appropriate outcomes and programs for youth, to an orientation based on self-determination, in which youth direct the planning of their post-school experiences and identify their support needs (Lehman et al., 2002).

More importantly, the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines transition services as: “...coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and/or community participation.” The definition of

transition services stated in the IDEA implies that transition should address all domains of a person's life (Lehman et al., 2002).

Transition services and systems should be designed around a solid framework of values and proven strategies (Clark & Foster-Johnson, 1996). Unfortunately, the literature on youth transitioning from school to work and adult life provides little evidence on what approaches and strategies are effective (King et al., 2005; Peraino, 1992) within special education services. A review of the literature on transition issues and services for youth with disabilities (i.e. youth receiving special education services, youth with visual impairments, youth with emotional disturbance, youth with chronic illness, youth with autism, youth with cognitive impairments, etc.) highlighted needs and provided generic recommendations of practices to plan and support transitions (McDonnall & Crudden, 2009). However, few studies have examined the effectiveness of transition-related approaches or strategies.

For youth with disabilities, transitioning from school to work and adult life often means overcoming multiple social, academic, and environmental constraints that may present as roadblocks to meeting society's expectations of 'successful transition' (Lehman et al., 2002). Educational systems in the United States are mandated to provide guidelines, tools, and a process to facilitate transition planning for youth with disabilities (King et al., 2005). Phelps and Hanley-Maxwell (1997) reported that outcomes identified for youth without disabilities are also relevant to youth with disabilities. However, a disparity exists in the educational and employment outcomes between youth with disabilities and the general youth population. A gap remains when comparing youth with disabilities to the general youth population on factors such as high school graduation rates, readiness for the world of work, post-secondary education participation, employment rates, wages, and poverty levels (Turner, 2007). Further, a lack of alignment of the

employer needs and expectations from employers is a shortcoming that is frequently encountered in the transition process (Rutkowski et al., 2006).

Demand-Side Placement Services

Typically, professionals working with individuals with disabilities have been known to operate on the supply side of the labor market (Luecking, Cuozzo, & Buchanan, 2006; Symanski & Parker, 2005). The traditional supply-side approaching to employment outcomes (i.e. providing medical, psychological, educational, and vocational services to improve functioning, physical stamina and job skills) without taking into account organizational behaviors, employer needs, and the changing labor economy is no longer adequate for achieving meaningful employment outcomes for people with disabilities (Chan, Strauser, Gervery, & Lee, 2010). The goal has primarily been to inform and prepare job seekers to facilitate their connection to jobs. This approach relies on offering employers a supply of workers who present, in various ways, skills that will meet the needs of the labor market (Luecking et al., 2006). Even though these are important functions, an exclusive supply side approach neglects the importance of influencing workplace operations in order to create a demand for rehabilitation services (Luecking et al., 2006).

There have been few attempts to adopt demand-side approaches by providing services directly to employers to help them meet their labor needs and change the nature of the work environment so as to be more accessible for job candidates with disabilities (Luecking et al., 2006; Gilbride & Stensrud, 1999). It is important to know how employers view interactions with rehabilitation counselors and job seekers who are approaching them to negotiate customized positions (Chan et al., 2010). As such, many job development and placement researchers have

recommended that both the client and the employer be viewed as rehabilitation customers (Gilbride & Stensrud, 2010).

There is evidence that exists that demonstrates that employers are receptive to meeting the needs of rehabilitation counselors who create a demand for workers with disabilities (Luecking et al., 2006). Customized employment is a strategy for assisting individuals who are unlikely to compete for jobs with standardized job descriptions due to intensive support and accommodation needs (Luecking et al., 2006). Customized employment strategies are designed to result in employment where job tasks are carved from an existing job, restructured from one or more existing job positions, or created to match the skills and accommodation needs of the individual job seeker (Luecking et al., 2006). The key here is to negotiate with the employer so that customized arrangements meet specific operations needs of the employer.

In spite of the growing literature on employer perspectives on hiring people with disabilities, little is known about employer attitudes, willingness, and ultimately, expectations about changing the nature of their hiring and operational procedures when considering applications who cannot compete for “off the shelf” jobs (Luecking et al., 2006). That is, those individuals who may not have the skill, training, stamina, or life circumstances that will allow them to present themselves as viable candidates for positions listed by prospective employers. Individuals in this category may include individuals with significant accommodation needs, candidates for supported employment, youth transitioning from special education without a diploma, and individuals living or working in segregated settings. In order for successful employment to occur, innovative programming and strategies need to occur in order to assist individuals with disabilities, in the context of the proposed study specifically youth with disabilities, in determining potential employment options (Luecking et al., 2006). An innovative

solution and strategy that has been identified by transition coordinators as a service that assists youth with disabilities in the transition from school to work and adult life is work-based learning.

Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning (WBL) is defined as planned activity that uses the context of work to develop knowledge, skills, and understanding useful in work, including learning through the experience of work, learning about work and working practices, and learning the skills for work (Department of Children, Schools, and Families, 2008). Hanney (2005) drew a distinction between a work placement and WBL. He defined the former as an experience of work for a short duration, whereas WBL is a structured learning experience that leads to a youth receiving more formal instruction on the work site to assist in maturing in work ethic. WBL is a frequently recommended solution for addressing the employment outcomes of at-risk youth and youth with severe disabilities. However, there are many models of WBL reported in the literature and many more locally-developed variants on such models. Models frequently described in the WBL literature in the U.S. include tech prep, career pathways, youth apprenticeships, career academics, and co-operative education (Hutchinson, Versnel, Poth, Berg, deLugt, Dalton, Munby, 2011).

While practitioners and educators report that work-based learning is a service that is considered to be a ‘best practice’ for a successful transition into adult life and the world of work for youth with disabilities, limited research has been conducted on work-based learning. The overall concept of work-based learning is vaguely defined. Research is needed to ‘paint a picture’ of the overall concept of work-based learning.

Statement and Significance of the Problem

As the United States population ages, the percentage of people with disabilities grows (Stoddard, 2014). For ages 18-64, the rate of increase is 10.5% (Stoddard, 2014). According to the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 56,672,000 individuals, or about 18.7% of people living in the United States, reported at least one disability condition in 2010 (Stoddard, 2014). People with disabilities make up at least 10% of the United States working population, ages 18-64 (Bruyere, 2016). In 2013, of the United States population with disabilities, over half (51.9%) were people ages 18-64 (Stoddard, 2014). Yet, the national workforce participation statistics reveal that people with disabilities are not accessing employment near the rates of their peers without disabilities (Bruyere, 2016). According to the United States Department of Labor (2014), the employment rate for youth with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 19 was 16.6% and the employment rate of 16-19-year-old youth without disabilities was 29.9%. In total, that is a 13.3% difference in the rate of employment for youth with disabilities compared to youth without disabilities of the same age. Further, the employment rate of youth with disabilities between the ages of 20 and 24 was 31.6% while the employment rate of youth without disabilities of the same age was 65.0% which is a difference of 33.4% between 20-24-year-old youth with and without disabilities. The data reported by the United States Department of Labor on youth employment rates only go up to age 24 because that is the common age that special education services are no longer available to youth with disabilities. However, it is important to note that youth with disabilities in the state of Michigan can receive special education services until the age of 26.

The employment outcomes for youth with disabilities point to the need for WBL programs for these young people. Even before the recent economic recession, youth worldwide

were experiencing high levels of unemployment, up to three times as high as adults in many countries and twice as high as adults in Canada and the United States (Smith & Oughton, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Given the plethora of WBL programs and the poor employment outcomes of youth with disabilities, it would be helpful to know what factors characterize effective WBL programs. Little existing research has focused on WBL, and a significant dearth of research is from the perspective of employers involved in providing WBL to youth with disabilities. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to use a qualitative approach to develop a model of work-based learning for youth with disabilities from the perspective of employers.

Research Question

Given that there is limited empirical research on WBL, and the high percentage of youth with disabilities that continue to live in poverty and are unemployed, additional data is needed to help guide families, practitioners, and employers working with youth with disabilities on what WBL consists of, and ultimately looks like. In this study, data was collected, analyzed, summarized, and reported from the perspective of employers who have participated in a WBL learning program for youth with disabilities. The following research questions were of interest:

How do employers describe work-based learning; and what factors do employers believe are important in the successful execution of a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities?

Brief Summary of Methodology

To address the research question, a qualitative approach was utilized to collect, summarize, and report data from the perspective of employers in the Lansing, MI area who have participated in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. The data collected

from employers was to provide families, professionals, and employers a better understanding of the factors that comprise WBL, as well as a conceptual model of WBL from the perspective of employers. Data from the study was for designing and developing effective WBL programs that meet employer needs and facilitate positive employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Work-Based Learning: A planned activity that uses the context of work to develop knowledge, skills, and understanding useful in work, including learning through experiences of work, learning about work and working practices, and learning the skills for work.

Youth with Disabilities: An individual with a disability that is between the ages of 16 and 26 who is attending school.

Demand-side Employment: Vocational services that are related to employer demands and the interaction of employer demand and the environment as predictors of employment outcomes for persons with disabilities.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the past fifteen years, there has been increased focus on transition education and services has been characterized by three specific initiatives: (a) federal special education and disability legislation; (b) federal, state, and local investment in transition services development; and (c) effective transition practices research (Kohler & Field, 2003). In this section, an overview of current employment and career status of youth with disabilities, the federal special education and disability legislation is provided, along with the role of federal, state, and local investment in transition services will be provided. To conclude this section, a review of the literature underlining effective transition practices, work-based learning, and employer perceptions of hiring individuals with disabilities will be discussed.

Current Employment and Career Status of Youth with Disabilities

The percent of people with disabilities in the United States rose from 11.9% in 2010 to 12.6% in 2013, 2014, and 2015 (Kraus, 2017). As the United States population ages, the percentage of people with disabilities increased. In the United States in 2015, less than 1.0% of those under the age of 5 had a disability; those ages 5-17, the rate was 5.4%; and for those ages 18-64, the rate was 10.5% (Kraus, 2017). Of the people with disabilities, over half were of working-age (51%), while 41.2% were 65 and older. Further, disability in children and youth accounted for 7.2% (ages 5-17) and 0.4% (under 5 years old) (Kraus, 2017).

According to the 2016 Disability Statistics Annual Report, in the United States, 34.9% of people with disabilities ages 18-64 living in the community were employed (Kraus, 2017). The employment percentage was more than double for people without disabilities, 76.0%. This illustrates that the difference between the employment percentage for people with disabilities

(34.9%) and people without disabilities (76.0%) was 41.4%. Kraus (2017) highlighted that his gap of employment between persons with and without disabilities widens steadily over the past 8 years from 38.8% in 2008 to 41.1% in 2014.

More specifically to youth with disabilities, the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2014), the employment rate for youth with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 19 was 16.6% and the employment rate of 16-19-year-old youth without disabilities was 29.9%. In total, that is a 13.3% difference in the rate of employment for youth with disabilities compared to youth without disabilities of the same age. Currently, the youth labor force (16-24) working or actively look for work grows sharply between April and July each year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). During these months, large numbers of high school and college students with and without disabilities search for or take summer jobs, and many graduates enter the labor market to look for or begin permanent employment. In July 2016, 11.5% of youth 16 to 24 years old were counted as unemployed. The unemployment rate for youth was 12.2% just a year earlier, in July 2015 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Since 2000, the youth unemployment rate in July has been as low as 9.6% and as high as 19.1%.

The United States Department of Labor (2014) compared the youth employment rate between youth with and without disabilities during the months of January thru August in 2014. The rate of employment in January 2014 for youth between the ages of 16 to 19 with disabilities was 10.0% while the rate of employment for youth without disabilities in the same age range was 24.6% (United States Department of Labor, 2014). An employment rate difference of 14.6%. In the same month for youth between the ages of 20-24 with disabilities was 30.1% while the rate of employment for youth without disabilities in the same age range was 61.6% (United States Department of Labor, 2014). An employment rate difference of 31.5%. In August of 2014, the

rate of employment for youth with disabilities between the ages of 16-19 was 16.6% while the rate of employment for youth without disabilities between the same ages was 29.9% (United States Department of Labor, 2014). A rate of employment difference of 13.3%. During the same month, the employment rate for youth with disabilities between the ages of 20-24 was 31.6% while the rate of employment of youth without disabilities of the same age was 65.0% (United States Department of Labor, 2014).

More recently, the United States Department of Labor published the monthly youth employment and unemployment rates for youth with and without disabilities. In January of 2017, the rate of employment for youth with disabilities between the ages of 16-19 was 27.4% (United States Department of Labor, 2017). The employment rate of youth with disabilities has increased by 10.8 % compared to the employment rate reported in August of 2014. The employment rate, in January 2017, for youth without disabilities between the ages of 16-19 was 32.8%; this rate has increased by 2.9% since August 2014. The employment rate gap between youth with and without disabilities between the ages of 16-19 in January 2017 is 5.4%. The employment rate of youth with disabilities between the ages of 20-24 in January 2017 is 39.1% while the rate of employment for youth without disabilities between the same ages is 71.2% (United States Department of Labor, 2017). This is an employment rate difference of 32.1% between youth with and without disabilities.

The unemployment rate of youth with disabilities in January 2017 that are between the ages of 16-19 is 25.6% while the employment rate of youth without disabilities between the same ages is 15.1% (United States Department of Labor, 2017). This is an unemployment rate difference of 10.5% when comparing youth with and without disabilities. The unemployment rate of youth with disabilities between the ages of 20-24 in January 2017 was 19.3% while the

unemployment rate of youth without disabilities between the same ages was 8.8% (United States Department of Labor, 2017). This is an unemployment rate difference of 10.5% between youth with and without disabilities.

Brief Overview of Federal Special Education and Disability Legislation

The state-federal vocational rehabilitation program, administered by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), is the largest employment program for adolescents and young adults with disabilities in the United States (United States Department of Education, 2014). The United States Department of Labor (DOL) explained that the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, authorized under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, emphasizes that importance of good-quality transition services for youth with disabilities by requiring state vocational rehabilitation agencies to enter into a formal interagency agreement with state education services for youth with disabilities.

More importantly, the reauthorization of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, P.L. 101-476, 1990), mandated transition services for students in special education who were sixteen years of age and older with disabilities (United States Department of Education, 2014). The quality of an individual's life becomes the responsibility of more than just the educational and vocational professionals (Russell, 2002). In order to address the post-school activities (i.e. employment) explicitly stated in the definition, school personnel must draw upon community resources to empower youth to make informed choices that lead to long term success (Lehman et al., 2002) and evaluate all levels of the youth's environment that impacts a successful transition to adult life.

More recently, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (2014), which is authorized through 2020, requires 15% of vocational rehabilitation funds that state agencies receive to implement comprehensive vocational rehabilitation programs must be used for transition services. The United States Department of Education explains that these comprehensive vocational rehabilitation programs provide individuals with disabilities a wide range of services to prepare them to engage in employment and transition into adult life (Wehman, Sima, Ketchum, West, Chan, Leucking, 2015). These services within the WIOA include, but are not limited to, job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling related to postsecondary opportunities, workplace readiness training, and self-advocacy training. Notably, the WIOA highlights that these activities are required to be coordinated by partnering with schools and local workforce development programs, as well as vocational rehabilitation programs, to support transition activities for youth with disabilities (Wehman et al., 2015).

Federal, State, and Local Investment in Transition Services. Since 1983, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has funded more than five hundred projects that focused on transition education and services for youths with disabilities in secondary and postsecondary education (Kohler & Field, 2003). Federal funding has supported transition system change in forty-six different states, as well as transition related professional development for educators and professionals (Kohler & Field, 2003). Projects supported by federal dollars have ranged from family-focused and interagency collaboration initiatives to dropout identification and retrieval to transition from high school to employment and adult life (Kohler & Field, 2003). Through investment in transition services development, the field gained a much better understanding of the many aspects of transition services and ways to implement transition in local contexts.

Review of project outcomes indicated that the impact of these initiatives on program development and student skills and outcomes has been significant (Kohler & Rusch, 1995; Rusch, Kohler, & Hughes, 1992).

Successful Transition Services

Like all young people, youth with disabilities face a number of stages of life transition at the time they leave school and enter into the world of work and adult life (King et al., 2005). The review of existing literature highlighted five main domains of effective transition services in which youth with disabilities need to have a successful transition from school to work and adult life. The five main domains found within the literature are (1) promoting self-determination and self-advocacy; (2) access to postsecondary education and employment; (3) increased parent participation in planning and decision-making; (4) development of social skills; and (5) increased collaboration and community supports. Supporting research within each of these five main domains will be discussed and defined below.

Promoting Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy

Self-determination is considered a best practice within the transition literature (Wehmeyer, 1998), but research describing transition planning practices consistently indicate a lack of involvement and participation by the youth with disabilities (Thoma, Baker, & Saddler, 2002). Wehmeyer (1992) defined self-determination as “acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life free to make choices and decisions about one’s quality of life, free from undue influence or interference” (p. 302). Thoma et al. (2002) stressed that the skills that are necessary to support youth in being self-determined and to teach self-determination skills to youth with disabilities are different from skills that are necessary to support a more traditional model of transition planning.

Enhanced knowledge of the self and a future vision of the self are based on self-awareness (i.e. awareness of personal strengths and values), knowledge of disability and associated accommodations, and a personalized vision of post-school success (Park, 2008; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Enhanced skills include self-determination, problem solving, self-efficacy, and self-advocacy; social and interpersonal skills, employment skills, work skills, and social skills (Lehman et al., 2002). Additionally, research states that in order to empower youth with disabilities to make decisions about their own lives, the development of self-determination and advocacy should be included as part of the transition process (Green & Kochhar-Bryant, 2003; Stuart & Smith, 2002; Kohler & Field, 2003).

Starting with the 1990 IDEA legislation, transition services must be based on the youth's needs and take into account youth's interests and preferences (Kohler & Field, 2003). To accomplish this, youth must be prepared to participate in planning for their own future. Self-determination and advocacy can be enhanced by helping youth with disabilities develop the knowledge, skills, and beliefs that allow them to exercise greater control during the transition process by providing opportunities for self-awareness and by teaching decision-making, goal setting, and negotiation skills (Kosciulek, Bruyere, & Rosenthal, 2002).

Access to Postsecondary Education and Employment

Considerable research has been done on the transition from educational systems to vocational rehabilitation and employment for youth with disabilities. However, the National Council on Disability (2014) reported a lack of empirical research has been done to identify variables that affect the successful transition to employment. McDonnall and Crudden (2009) emphasized that “work experience has consistently been associated with the successful transition of youth with disabilities to employment” (p. 329). Additionally, the number of youth with

disabilities in postsecondary schools reporting a disability has increased dramatically, climbing from 2.6% in 1978, to 9.2% in 1994, to nearly 19% in 1996 (Kohler & Fields, 2003). More recently, this number has increased to 45% in 2009.

Research has demonstrated that work experiences for youth with disabilities was a predictor of obtaining competitive employment post-graduation (McDonnall & Crudden, 2009; McDonnall & O'Mally, 2012; Stodden, Dowrick, Gilmore, & Galloway, 2001; Wolffe, 1996; McDonnall, 2010a; Shaw, Gold, & Wolffe, 2007; Crudden, 2012; Berry, 2000; Giesen & Cavanaugh, 2012; Goertz, van Lierop, Houkes, Nijhuis, 2010; Kohler & Rusch, 1995; Rusch et al., 1992). Peraino (1992) emphasized that compared to youth without disabilities, youth with disabilities are one-third less likely to be employed and one half less likely to participate in postsecondary education.

The process and experience of participating in a work experience (i.e. paid, unpaid, volunteering, part-time, full-time, etc.) is one of the most important elements in the transition to self-sustaining employment (Olney, Compton, Tucker, Emery-Flores, & Zuniga, 2014). Young (1983) emphasized work experience for youth with disabilities increases realistic career directions, as well as knowledge of career possibilities and related requirements. Recent research using data from the Rehabilitation Services (RSA) 911 and Second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS2) have identified career counseling, job skills training, placement assistance, vocational education, self-determination, academic competence, social skills, and skill development (McDonnall & O'Mally, 2012; Geisen & Cavanaugh, 2012; McDonnall & Crudden, 2009; Wolffe & Kelly, 2011) as being some of the common factors that affect youth with disabilities from the successful transition from school to the world of work.

In spite of an expressed desire by Social Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) beneficiaries (i.e. persons with disabilities) to get off benefits (Berry, 2000), less than one percent of youth with disabilities go off of SSI/DI and go to work each year (Berry, 2000). Berry (2000) found that the odds of being employed were nearly double for youth who were not receiving SSI benefits. SSI participants and nonparticipants differed significantly in terms of work history, current employment, hours worked per week, and monthly earnings (Berry, 2000). Furthermore, Berry (2000) found that SSI participants achieved similar employment outcomes relative to transition-age non-SSI participants, but still found that 45% of youth with disabilities transitioning into the world of work were not employed after receiving services.

Understanding the importance of early work experience of youth with disabilities does not necessarily guarantee that youth will participate in a work experience before the transition from school to the world of work. It is important to understand the barriers and their complexities that are affecting youth with disabilities from participating in a work experience before this important transition in a young person's life.

Increased Parent Participation in Planning and Decision-Making

Transitions affect both youth with disabilities and their families. Parents can feel the stress of this 'launching stage' for their children (King et al., 2005), and may experience difficult emotional times when the future fails to live up to their expectations for the youth. Additionally, research highlights that youth and families often remain passive members of the transition team and are not well aware of the transition process and services (Greene & Kochlar-Bryant, 2003).

Morningstar, Turnbull, and Turnbull (1995) demonstrated that youth with disabilities whose families were actively involved in transition planning achieved better employment-related

outcomes after graduation than those without strong family involvement. Brolin and Lloyd (2004) emphasized that family is the continuous advocate, informant, and supporter for youth with disabilities throughout the process, and often times into adult life. On the other hand, Park (2008) demonstrated that challenges existed in when working with some families due to the impractical demands for support services for the youth with disabilities, unrealistic expectations for the future, denial of the youth's disability, and familial lack of resources and dysfunction.

Kohler and Field (2003) stated that direct, routine communication strategies (i.e. face-to-face conferences, telephone contacts, open house events, teacher notes, and classroom visits) improved educator and family interactions. In reference to transition planning for youth with disabilities, effectively engaging families in selecting work experiences and developing long-term job placements for youth with disabilities were shown to improve and satisfy family's involvement in the transition process (Kohler & Field, 2003).

In a study conducted by Benz, Johnson, Mikkelsen, Lindstrom (1995), parents suggested that better informational materials; joint training for vocational rehabilitation and school staff members, parents, and youth; resource fairs; a single, knowledgeable contact person; and support groups and networking opportunities would improve the transition planning process and the quality of parental involvement. More recently, deFur, Todd-Allen, and Getzel (2001) found factors that improved parent participation in transition planning were based on those professionals that communicated effectively and shared information, developed collaborative partnerships, and illustrated genuine care for and recognition of their youth.

Development of Social Skills

A qualitative study conducted by Cooney (2002) acknowledged the importance of needing help from friends as sources of both emotional and physical support. However, the

National Longitudinal Transition Study, conducted by the United States Department of Education (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006), found that youth with disabilities were at risk for social difficulties after high school. Further, youth with disabilities rate of participation in extracurricular activities to increase their social skills showed an increase from 1987 to 2001 was below that of youth without disabilities (Wagner et al., 2006). Other studies have shown that youth with disabilities take part in fewer organized social activities, have fewer contact with peers outside of school, and are more likely to engage in passive or solitary activities such as watching television or playing video games (Stevenson, Pharoah, & Stevenson, 1997; Test et al., 2009).

Youth with disabilities who exited high school with high social skills were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment (King et al., 2005; Test et al., 2009) and have a higher quality of life (Test et al., 2009). Test et al. (2009) demonstrated that social skills are not only a predictor of future employment, but also a predictor of academic performance. Because social skills are interrelated across the domains of successful transition for youth with disabilities, it is vital that youth are offered and encouraged to partake in activities that will increase social skills.

Increased Collaboration and Community Supports

When transition services require the involvement of a variety of professionals from many disciplines, their collaboration is essential (Park, 2008). A qualitative study, conducted by Park (2008), on the transition services to prepare high school youth with disabilities into adulthood from the perspective of the special education teachers in Winnipeg emphasized the importance of schools and teachers. The duties that the teachers were involved with regarding transition for youth with disabilities included coordinating transition services such as networking stakeholders and arranging meetings, informing youth and families of the transition process and services,

developing the skills that youth require for adult life (i.e. vocational, daily living, social, and personal skills), and supporting youth and families in finding and applying for suitable adult service agencies for the youth with disabilities (Park, 2008). However, to arrange and coordinate all of these services, collaboration and community supports are needed in order to allow the schools and teachers to be success in the transition planning process.

As noted in the IDEA, transition planning needs to begin by the time the youth is 14. The purpose should be to develop a course of study and plan of action that will follow the youth throughout their high school education. During the youths' sophomore or junior year, it is appropriate and encouraged to bring in other professionals from adult vocational services to allow for the youth and the family to feel comfortable about the upcoming transition into the world of work and adult life (Nuehring & Sitlington, 2003).

Therefore, it is critical that professionals understand the transition process and services for youth with disabilities and each other's roles and responsibilities in the process (Park, 2008; Lehman, et al., 2002; Test et al., 2009; Kohler & Field, 2003). To develop these channels of communication, research has suggested the development of school-interagency transition teams (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). Furthermore, Greene and Kochhar-Bryant (2003) suggested that the interagency team should aim to facilitate interagency linkages, improve the ability of systems to respond to changing need of youth, and reduce fragmentation of local services.

Work-Based Learning

The term 'work-based learning' has different meanings in different contexts. However, work-based learning programs, in the context of working with students with disabilities, connect students with disabilities with the world of work prepare them for entering the workforce (Burgstahler, 2001). Work-based learning is a frequently recommended solution for addressing

the employment outcomes of youth with disabilities (Hutchinson et al., 2011). Burgstahler (2001) highlights that youth with disabilities benefit from work-based learning programs as much as, if not more than, their peers without disabilities. However, there are many models for work-based learning reported in the literature and many more locally-developed variants on these models. These models frequently described in the work-based learning literature in the United States include tech prep, career pathways, youth apprenticeships, career academics, and co-operative education (Hutchinson et al., 2011).

Burgstahler (2001) states that work-based learning allows for youth with disabilities to apply academic and vocational skills and knowledge to real work situations as they develop the attitudes, values, problem solving skills, and behaviors that will help them become informed citizens and productive workers. Situated conceptions of learning have revealed the way in which learning in natural settings, such as the workplace, results from participation in socially valued activities within communities of practice (Miao & Hoppe, 2011). Further, it gives students an opportunity to try various careers on a day-to-day basis to provide exposure which can help identify what career choices they want to make, or do not want to make. Work-based learning can introduce students to adults who may act as mentors and positive role models.

A work-based learning program offers opportunities to students through work experiences where students can apply what they learn in school to the world of work. It links them to the “real world” (Smith, Petty, Oughton, & Alexander, 2010). Miao and Hoppe (2011) highlighted that work-based learning is based on socio-cultural understanding of learning rooted in “Activity Theory” (Vygotsky, 1962), as well as situated learning and the community of practice approach (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Miao and Hoppe (2011) states that in an ideal

work-based learning program, learning opportunities arise from normal work practice, and the curriculum is based on work needs and adapted to each individual and each work environment.

However, a work-based learning program should be individualized to suit a student's needs, preferences, and interests. Because a student's disability could have an effect on the type of work he or she might do, it is important to consider the student's abilities and barriers for placement purposes (Smith et al., 2010). For example, one student may like repetitive tasks, but another may like variety. Or, one student may need a quiet work environment, while another needs freedom to move about. Hutchinson et al. (2011) states that employment sites must provide a variety of learning experiences appropriate for a student's interest and developmental level. For example, Smith and Oughton (2010) highlighted that tasks given to students with disabilities by employers can vary; such as counting, packing, labeling, recording weight, checking equipment, etc. The idea is that the student will have the opportunity to demonstrate his or her current skills as well as to develop them further. Blending these two learning approaches enables a work-based learning program to be tailored to the needs of learners and organizations while still operating within an academic framework (Miao & Hoppe, 2011).

Benefits of Work-Based Learning Programs

In today's global economy, employers must possess cutting-edge technology and highly skilled employees to remain competitive. Technology is moving at a pace that it is near impossible to keep up with. Schools will never have the financial resources to maintain state-of-the-art equipment, which is necessary to prepare youth for the ever-changing workplace (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2003). When schools work as partners with businesses, youth can receive relevant instruction from experts, while gaining experience with cutting-edge technology. Work-based learning should be viewed as a rational

investment. Employers, parents, and schools recognize that when youth with and without disabilities understand the nature of work and the opportunities available to them, they are more likely to become more productive, responsible members of the community (Manufacturing Advocacy and Growth Network , 2013). Additionally, the business-school support for a work-based learning program helps to create a community-wide environment of collaboration and cooperation.

Students. Students that participate in a work-based learning program may have increased focus and purpose; better understanding of real life issues as they learn academics in context; be more goal-oriented; develop better problem-solving skills; understand the concept of work and work ethic; improved attendance and better grades; earn significant income to support future endeavors; develop mature communication skills; be better prepared for future employment; develop portfolio of skills relevant to their future career paths; have increased confidence to assume responsibility and make decisions; and better understand issues of budget, personnel, and organizational structure (Manufacturing Advocacy and Growth Network , 2013). Further, students will increase their self-confidence, acquire real world experience and work readiness skills; and with connect with an adult role model (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2003).

A study was conducted on a work-based learning program by the University of Washington called DO-IT CAREERS. The study examined participants rate of change in specific areas as a result of their participation in particular work experiences offered through the work-based learning program. A survey was solicited which asked youth with disabilities to estimate changes in their motivation to study and word toward a career; their understanding of skills needed to effectively work with co-workers and supervisors; their knowledge of their

specific career interests; their understanding of disability-related accommodations they may need at work; their ability to use computers, the Internet and/or other technologies; and their knowledge of their legal rights with regard to employment (Burgstahler, 2001). Overall, the data collected suggested the greatest positive changes in the students' motivation to study and work toward a career and their understanding of skills needed to succeed. There was also an increase in the students' knowledge of specific career interests and accommodation needs (Burgstahler, 2001).

Parents. Parents remain the most significant influence on more young peoples' lives. While work-based learning programs are focused on the student, there are advantages and benefits to parents. Work-based learning affords benefits to parents from their child participating in a work-based learning program. Specifically, parents become partners in the education of their child, and collaborate with other assisting their child to make informed career choices (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2003).

Schools and Educators. Work-based learning programs requires teachers and schools to understand how business and industry work, and what businesses are looking for when hiring post-graduation. Specific benefits for educators and schools is they establish a viable employment link for students; create enhanced non-traditional learning opportunities for students; skills are practiced and evaluated under supervision on the job in a real-world environment; incorporate certification and dual credit provided access to "earn and learn opportunity"; improve student outcomes, placement, and completion rates; increase graduation rates; new opportunities to develop programs and partnerships outside of the school environment; advocacy for school and program; increased industry contacts; validate program success and accountability; increased student motivation with paid job opportunities and industry

certification; and curriculum resource enhancement (Manufacturing Advocacy and Growth Network , 2013). In addition to the above listed benefits, the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning (2013) pointed out that schools also benefit from improved relationships with the community.

Employers. There are benefits to participating companies and employers in work-based learning programs. The specific benefits to employers include better prepared employees who understand workplace expectations; reduce recruitment and training costs; derive value from student's work; and improve morale and management skills of current workers (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2003).

Quality Work-Based Learning Program Requirements

The Tennessee Department of Education (2016) created a document that discussed what it takes to build a quality work-based learning program. Figure 1 outlines the layers of support needed to ensure quality of work-based learning programs. The layers of support need to build quality work-based learning programs are (1) Skills-Based Student Learning; (2) Quality Work-Based Learning Experiences; and (3) Quality Work-Based Learning Programs (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016).

Skills-Based Learning. Participation in career fairs or internships will help students meet both academic and workplace standards (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016). Employability skills can and should be introduced in earlier grades and reinforced as a student's knowledge and skills grow. This particular layer represents the time when students are gaining knowledge of the world of work, developing personal and social skills, and learning how to apply academic and technical knowledge into the world of work.

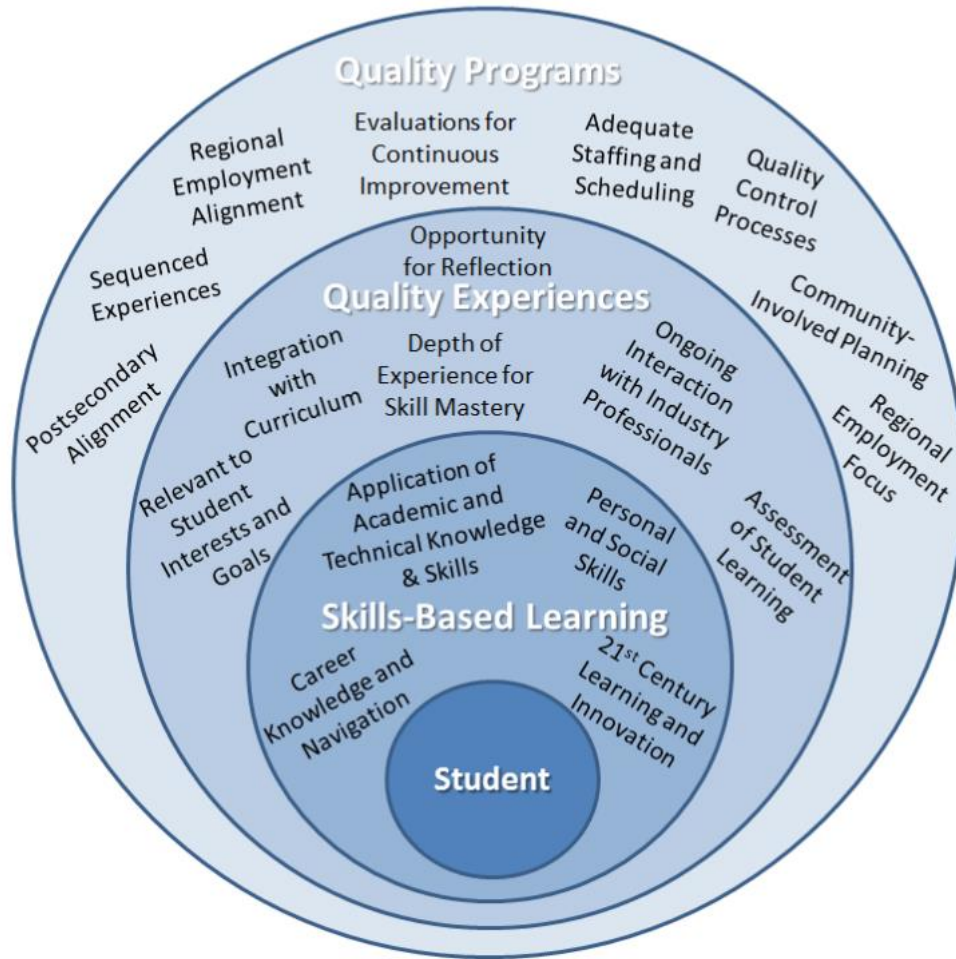


Figure 1: Layers of Support for Quality Work-Based Learning Programs. Reprinted from "Work-Based Learning Implementation Guide", by Tennessee Department of Education. (2016). p.2.

Quality Experiences. Tennessee Department of Education (2016) highlights that to help students learn these skills, experiences must be of high quality. Quality experiences are defined as having the following characteristics (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016, p. 4):

1. A purposeful focus on applied learning in preparation for postsecondary education and careers
2. Learning outcomes as the driver for designing experiences and personalized learning plans
3. Relevance to student interests, their plan of study and learning goals

4. Integration with curriculum or connection to related instruction
5. Sufficient variety to provide exposure to multiple career options
6. Sufficient depth to allow for employability skill development and professional community engagement
7. Ongoing interaction with professionals from industry and the community
8. Close supervision from both teachers and employers
9. Opportunities for reflection and analysis
10. Assessment of student learning that is aligned with industry-specific expectations
11. Alignment with postsecondary and career opportunities regionally
12. Documentation of student learning through the development of artifacts and portfolios

Overall, the purpose is to provide depth of experience in order to master the skills for the job, and to create opportunities to take what is learned in the classroom and demonstrate these skills within the world of work. The focus for this layer is the experience that the student has on their worksite.

Quality Programs. Quality programming doesn't happen without some form of structure or system. This structure and system is there to support the teacher and employers in implementing a work-based learning program that provides students with a rigorous experience for students. The Tennessee Department of Education (2016, p. 5) specifically states that quality programs provide:

1. Sequenced experiences to ensure preparation and "next steps"
2. Partnerships with postsecondary institutions, apprenticeships, and job training programs to facilitate successful transitions beyond high school
3. Adequate staffing of the work-based learning coordination function

4. School schedules that enable quality work-based learning and supervision
5. Communication materials to inform employers, students, and parent of opportunities
6. Technology infrastructure to support placements, orientations, and actual work-based learning experiences
7. Tools, processes, and documentation for quality control and compliance with legal requirements
8. Community-based advisors involved in program and experience planning and generating opportunities for students
9. A culture that values and supports work-based learning across the curriculum for all students
10. Regionally-aligned pathways with community-shared expectations for work-based learning experiences and learning outcomes
11. Evaluative measures that facilitates continuous program improvement

This layer is touching on and highlighting the evaluation of students' skills for continuous improvement, and this cannot be done without some kind of process and structure that helps to monitor maintain quality control.

Barriers to Employment for Youth with Disabilities

People with disabilities comprise one of the largest minority groups facing poor labor force participation rates (Lindsay, McDougall, Menna-Dack, Sanford, & Adams, 2014). Studies and reports have demonstrated that individuals with disabilities are under-represented in the workforce despite their willingness and ability to work. Having a disability is a key barrier to obtaining paid employment for persons with disabilities due to a wide variety of factors such as stigma and discrimination, inadequate transportation and support, low self-esteem, inaccessible

jobs, and non-accommodating environments (Lindsay et al., 2014). As a result, individuals with disabilities have found themselves in low paying jobs or were unemployed.

Specifically, the employment rate for youth with disabilities has hovered at approximately half of that of similarly aged youth without disabilities for the last several years (Pebdani, 2014). There has been considerable research that has focused on what personal factors are related and are said to lead youth with disabilities becoming employed, as well as preventing them from being employed.

Factors Related to Early Termination of Youth with Disabilities

A study, conducted by Benz and Halpern (1993), on employment for youth with disabilities found that 46% of students with emotion disorders were fired from work during their senior year of high school. Another study, conducted by Carter & Wehby (2003), found that employed youth with emotional or behavioral disorders had different views of their performance at work, rating themselves differently than their employers. McDonnall and Crudden (2009) defined different variables associated with employment for youth with visual impairments who are served by vocational rehabilitation agencies. What was discovered was that the total number of jobs and jobs after disability diagnosis; academic competence, specifically the areas of reading and mathematics; and self-determination and the use of assistive technology were significant to successful employment (McDonnall & Crudden, 2009).

Recently, a study by Pebdani (2014) studied factors related to the early termination of youth with disabilities. The research found the following factors being reasons for early termination: interpersonal conflict with supervisor or coworker; transportation problems; abandoned job and quit; low quality work; violated employer policies; inappropriate behavior with employment representative; and quit in lieu of termination (Pebdani, 2014). Research

conducted by Lindsay et al. (2014) on barriers to employment for youth with disabilities support the findings from Pebdani (2014). The results indicated that barriers to employment for youth with disabilities are peers and work; disability and work; family relations and work; lack of accessible jobs and employment services; counselors linking youth to employers (Lindsay et al., 2014).

Social Security Benefits

One factor that demonstrated to be an impact on for youths with disabilities from obtaining employment or participating in a paid work experience was social security benefits. Research on persons with disabilities, who are receiving social security has received considerable attention. Berry (2000) found that the odds of being employed were nearly double for youth who were not receiving social security benefits compared to those receiving benefits. Social security participants and nonparticipants differed significantly in terms of work history, current employment, hours worked per week, and monthly earnings (Berry, 2000). Berry (2000) also found that social security participants achieved similar employment outcomes relative to transition-age non-SSI participants, but still found that 45% of youth with disabilities working with vocational rehabilitation agencies were not employed after receiving services.

Further, a large number of youth with disabilities receive a combination of social security benefits (Social Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance), making the payout each month more substantial and difficult to overlook when seeking employment (Berry, 2000). Many social security beneficiaries do not want to risk losing their benefits (Social Security Administration, 2014); many fear the loss of benefits (i.e. health care coverage); and many are unaware and misunderstand available work incentives (i.e. PASS, Ticket to Work, 1619(b)) (Olney et al., 2014).

A variety of public supports and programs are available to enhance youth with disabilities human capital development and aid in the transition to adulthood (Davies, Rupp, & Wittenburg, 2009). These programs include cash and in-kind public benefits (i.e. Medicaid, Food Stamps, and housing assistance) (Social Security Administration, 2014). Davies et al. (2009) highlighted that the Social Security Administration (SSA) has developed employment-oriented interventions focusing on childhood SSI recipients and youth with disabilities with a goal of improving long-term labor market outcomes; the Youth Transition Demonstration (YTD) currently offers employment supports and work incentives to child and youth SSI recipients ages 14 to 25).

Employer Perceptions of Hiring Persons with Disabilities

Competitive employment and other meaningful work activities are fundamental to the well-being of people with and without disabilities (Burke, Bezyak, Fraser, Pete, Ditchman, Chan, 2013). Compared to persons who are employed, those who are unemployed tend to experience higher prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders, use alcohol more frequently, and report lower scores on self-esteem and quality of life measures (Dutta, Gerverey, Chan, Chou, Ditchman, 2008). Yet, the employment rate for people with disabilities remains remarkably low compared to the general population (Burke, et al., 2013).

There are numerous federal policies and programs that have been implemented in the United States to improve the representation of people with disabilities within the workforce (i.e. Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and Ticket to Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999). Most efforts target the supply side of employment by focusing on vocational rehabilitation and job training. The demand side of this issue (i.e. policies and programs that impact employers' hiring decisions and practices) has received less attention (Ali, Schur, & Blanck, 2011). Moreover, research examining the demand side of disability-related employment has focused

heavily on attitudes toward workers with disabilities (Hernandez, Chen, Araten-Bergman, Levy, Kramer, Rimmerman, 2012).

Researchers seeking to explain the low employment rate of people with disabilities have focused primarily on skill gaps, employment disincentives from disability income, accommodation mandates, and employer attitudes and unwelcoming corporate cultures (Ali, Schur, & Blanck, 2011). There are several reasons that job preferences for people with disabilities may differ from those without disabilities. One, people with disabilities may desire flexibility in work arrangements to deal with health or mobility conditions (Ali, Schur, & Blanck, 2011). Secondly, people with disabilities have lower incomes on average, fewer assets, and are more likely to live in poverty (Burke, et al., 2013). Lastly, their low incomes and greater likelihood of living alone may make them more risk averse and lead them to place a higher value on job security, and thereby to decrease their chances their income will suffer an unexpected drop and they will not be able to meet their basic needs (Ali et al., 2011).

Additionally, Gizzard (2005) reports that the US Department of Labor—The Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL-ODEP) conducted a focus group study with employers in 13 major metropolitan areas representing a variety of industries, company sizes and for-profit and not-for-profit organizations to ask employers what they consider as the most important issue affecting the poor hiring and job retention for people with disabilities. A common concern expressed was people with disabilities could not perform work across both physical and desk occupations. Other concerns related to fear of legal problems, employee and co-worker safety, attendance, negative work attitudes, adverse impact on co-workers and health insurance costs (Burke, et al., 2013). Lastly, employers expressed that their main prominent fear or concern was the cost of accommodations for people with disabilities (Ali et al., 2011).

On the other hand, Kaye, Jans, and Jones (2011) reported that employers stated that accommodations cost typically little or nothing, but are generally effective and “worth the investment” in terms of retaining experienced workers and increasing productivity, as well as improving organizational culture and climate. Further, most employer surveys appear to paint a picture of successfully accommodated workers in a more or less welcoming environment (Kaye et al., 2011). However, workers and job seekers with disabilities, for their part, often state employer attitudes and workplace discrimination as barriers to acquiring or keeping a job (Shier, Graham, & Jones, 2009).

Kaye et al. (2011) highlight one explanation could be that true employer attitudes and experiences are not being obtained from employer surveys, either because employers are not being completely honest or because only employers with positive attitudes and experiences are responding to surveys. Another explanation could be the result of social desirability bias, in which respondents essentially report what they think the interviewer wants to hear rather than expressing their true attitudes, which are socially acceptable and may run counter to legal requirements (Unger, 2002).

Domzal, Houtenville, and Sharma (2008) found that about 20% of managers view negative attitudes and stereotypes as the most profound barriers to employers of persons with disabilities in their own organizations. Similar findings were also found in the United States National Employers Survey in which about 20% of employers identified supervisors' attitudes as a major barrier to hiring persons with disabilities (Domzal et al., 2008). Moreover, in a series of qualitative and quantitative research studies, managers voiced concerns about persons with disabilities productivity potential and costs for accommodation, expressing the fear that hiring persons with disabilities would alienate coworkers and customers and negatively affect the

organization's bottom line (Bruyere et al., 2000; Domzal et al., 2008; Gouvier, Systma-Jordan, Mayville, 2003; Hernandez, McDonald, Divilbiss, Horin, Velcoff, Donoso, 2008; Heymann, Stein, Moreno, de Elvira Moreno, 2014; Kaye et al., 2011; Livermore & Goodman, 2009; Nota, Santilli, Ginevra, & Soresi, 2013).

Collaborating with Employers to Meet Workforce Demands

Input from employers is as critical to preparing work-based learning programs and course curriculums, just as input from any group of experts is needed to shape state and local curricula (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016). By having a variety of industries offering work-based learning experiences, this will enable teachers to guide students and speak to employers to ensure that students have access to the opportunities that will build a broad range of skills.

However, some industries place greater importance on some skill sets than others. Knowledge of these industry-specific needs is also important. Further, if a community is home to a major industry or employer that will be providing many of the opportunities for students, whether job shadowing or future employment, close communication with the employer community will enable the teacher to prepare students to learn and demonstrate those skills that are particularly valuable in that industry (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016). Tennessee Department of Education (2016) highlight ways to connect with employers to ensure that students' experiences match future workplace demand. These ways are:

1. Teacher job shadows and externships;
2. Communication with employers through intentional outreach or advisory boards; and
3. Collaboration with Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIA) offices.

Regardless of the approach, the intention is to promote systematic communication between industry and educators, so that teachers have input on skill needs and feedback on the

preparedness of their students entering into the world of work (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2003).

Conclusion

Employment status impacts each individual holistically, as it can determine the degree of economic independence, access to health care, and level of community participation (i.e. leisure activities) that one may experience and have access to (Strauser, Wagner, Wong, O'Sullivan, 2013). Additionally, meaningful employment not only affords an individual the ability to earn a living wage, it can have a positive psychological impact by increasing one's social role and level of community integration, which in turn can be leveraged to increase their roles in the communities they desire to reside in (Strauser et al., 2013).

Work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities that are offered during high school allows for youth to explore different industries and employment settings in preparation for the transition from school to work and adult life. More importantly, understanding what employers are looking for when hiring youth with disabilities, as well as understanding their expectations is crucial for youth with disabilities, parents, and professionals working with this population to understand. To better grasp and understand employer's expectations, it is important to consider and incorporate these expectations, as well as the skills needed for the job, into work-based learning programs. This will allow youth with disabilities to better understand the world of work, but also provide an opportunity for employers to see first-hand the youth with disabilities' abilities to complete and perform the job.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a model of work-based learning for youth with disabilities from the perspective of employers. A comprehensive review of the literature that details services identified as crucial for youth with disabilities to successfully transition from school to work and adult life was detailed in Chapter 2. While other studies have identified services deemed important for youth with disabilities to make a successful transition to work and adult life, the present study gives a voice to employers that are working directly with youth with disabilities in a work-based learning program. The current study provided the opportunity for employers to describe their needs and preferences when interviewing, hiring, training, supervising, and evaluating the work quality and productivity of youth with disabilities in a work-based learning context. This methodology chapter addresses the following areas: research question, research design, participants, researcher bias, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Research Question

The research questions of interest in the current study was: How do employers define work-based learning; what key components should a well-designed work-based learning program for include; and what factors do employers believe are important in the successful execution of a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities?

Research Design

The research question was addressed with a qualitative research design that utilized semi-structured interviews with employers. A qualitative study uses the investigator as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, who then strives to derive meaning from the data

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, a qualitative approach was used to explore and describe employer perceptions of work-based learning in order to develop a conceptual model of work-based learning for youth with disabilities. Qualitative methodology is vital as explained by Creswell (2007):

We.... conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature (p.40).

In qualitative interviews, the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants that are generally unstructured and consist of open-ended questions (Creswell, 2013). Some advantages of interviews are when participants cannot be directly observed, participants can provide historical information, and because the researcher can control the line of questioning (Creswell, 2013). In the current study, the data was gathered through face-to-face interviews with employers who have participated in work-based learning programs. The data described employer perceptions of what work-based learning is, how work-based learning should be designed, how work-based learning programs should be implemented, and who should be involved in the work-based learning process for youth with disabilities.

Participants. For the purpose of this study, work-based learning is defined as a planned activity that uses the context of work to develop knowledge, skills, and understanding useful in work, including learning through the experience in work, learning about work and working practices and learning the skills for work (Bellman, Burgstabler, & Ladner, 2014). Criterion sampling was used to ensure that all participants have experienced work-based learning programming for youth with disabilities (Creswell, 2013).

The sample was recruited using the researcher's familiarity with work-based learning programs in the Lansing, Michigan area. Participants were recruited through emails and personal contacts. The work-based learning programs are located in the Lansing, MI and surrounding areas (i.e. Ingham County). The work-based learning programs required students to have a documented disability and be receiving special education services in their local high school.

Characteristics. The target population for this study was employers who were currently at the time of data collection or in the past have participated in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities, have worked closely with youth with disabilities, and hold a supervisory position at the employment site. More specifically, the population of interest in this study was employers who employ youth with disabilities through work-based learning programs. The target number of interviews was between 8 and 10. For this study, eight employers completed the interview and pre-interview questionnaires. Table 1 gives an overview of the answers each participant gave on the pre-interview questionnaire.

The goal of the study was to have variation in the number of years' employers had participated in a work-based learning program, size of the company, and type of industry. Participants were recruited by the researcher through email and personal contacts. All employers were from the Lansing, Michigan area. Based on the answers provided by the employers on the pre-interview questionnaire, all eight participants identified as White or Caucasian Non-Hispanic. Of the eight participants, four identified as male and four identified as female. From the question asking employers their highest degree earned, five reported having a bachelor's degree, one an associate's degree, one a high school/trade school graduate, and one had some college. When asking employers what their current job title was, five stated store manager, one

Table 1. Pre-Interview Questionnaire Summary of Participant Responses								
	Employer 1	Employer 2	Employer 3	Employer 4	Employer 5	Employer 6	Employer 7	Employer 8
Race	White or Caucasian Non-Hispanic	White or Caucasian Non-Hispanic	White or Caucasian Non-Hispanic	White or Caucasian Non-Hispanic	White or Caucasian Non-Hispanic	White or Caucasian Non-Hispanic	White or Caucasian Non-Hispanic	White or Caucasian Non-Hispanic
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Male
Age	41	45	48	48	41	48	28	60
Highest Education Level	Associates	Bachelors	High School Graduate or GED; Trade School	Bachelors	Bachelors	Bachelors	Bachelors	Some College
Current Job Title	Store Manager	Store Manager	General Manager	Manager	Executive Director	Store Manager	General Store Manager	Store Manager
Total Years in Current Position	10	2-3	3.5	11	2-3	9	4-5	20
# of Employees Employed at Site	43	24	19	2	5	34	65	12
Type of Industry	Retail	Non-Profit	Fitness	Bookstore	Non-Profit	Retail	Retail; Pet Store	Retail
Type of Setting	Retail	Retail	Fitness; Customer Service	Retail	Arts & Culture & Education	Retail	Retail	Retail
# of Semesters Participating in a WBL Program For YWD	1-2	3-4	5-6	1-2	1-2	10+	10+	1-2
# of YWD worked with	3-4	7-8	2-3	1-2	1-2	2-3	10+	1-2

Table 1 (cont'd)								
	Employer 1	Employer 2	Employer 3	Employer 4	Employer 5	Employer 6	Employer 7	Employer 8
What is personal experience with disabilities?	Friend	Friend; Other	Child; Previous Employment	Current WBL Program	Spouse; Friend	Spouse; Work	Friend	Work
Current Role/Position in the WBL Program for YWD	Supervisor	Supervisor	Supervisor	Manager	Liaison	Oversee the Program	Immediate Supervisor and Oversight of Program	Supervisor
Total Time of Interview	23.47	15.21	27.43	35.19	40.47	31.34	72.45	30.21

general manager, one manager, and one executive director. The range of total years in their current positions were from 2-20 years, with the average total number of years being 6 years.

The number of employees at each employment site ranged from 2-65 with the average number of employees being 25.5. Based on the employer answers regarding type of industry, four were retail, two were nonprofit, one identified as a fitness center, and one identified as a bookstore. Based on the answers given regarding type of setting, six identified as retail, one identified as customer services/fitness, and one identified as arts and culture. Four employers participated in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities for 1-2 semesters, one for 3-4 semesters, one for 5-6 semesters, and two for more than 10 semesters. Three employers stated that they have worked with 1-2 students with disabilities, two with 2-3 students, one with 3-4 students, one with 7-8 students, and one greater than 10 students. When asked what is the employer's personal experience with disabilities, four marked "friend"; one marked "child"; one marked "previous employment"; two marked "spouse", two marked "work", and one marked "other" and stated through the work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. The last question on the pre-interview questionnaire asked participant's what their current role/position was within the work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. Four participants stated supervisor, one manager, one liaison, one oversight of program, and one immediate supervision and oversight of program.

Interview Guide. The interview guide included items designed to collect data related to participant demographic characteristics (i.e. company size, age, gender, years in position, years participating or had participated in a work-based learning program, position youth with disability held, tasks assigned to youth with disability). In addition to providing demographic information, participants were asked to describe their perceptions of what work-based learning is, how work-

based learning should be designed, how work-based learning programs should be implemented, who should be involved in the work-based learning process for youth with disabilities, supports they find helpful when participating in a work based learning program, and barriers to providing work based learning programs for youth with disabilities. Copy of interview guide is located in Appendix A.

Researcher Bias

Creswell (2014) noted that the researcher should keep in mind their biases, values, and personal background (i.e. gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status) that could shape the interpretations formed during a study. Due to previous work experiences working closely with youth with disabilities in Michigan Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) and with employers, the researcher considered how such experiences might influence data collection, summary, and analysis processes. For example, the researcher may be biased because of having worked with both the employers and students in current work-based learning programs in the Lansing, MI area. To recognize and limit researcher bias, the researcher met with doctoral student colleagues and faculty dissertation committee members to peer review the semi-structured interview guide prior to conducting the face-to-face interviews. Creswell (2014) recommends the use of peer review to assist in eliminating researcher bias.

Data Collection Procedures

Upon receipt of the approval for the use of human subjects in research from the Michigan State University Social, Behavioral, and Education Institutional Review Board (SIRB), the researcher contacted employers in the Lansing, MI area who participate in work-based learning programs in order to recruit potential participants. The potential participants that contacted the researcher by telephone or email participated in an initial information telephone meeting

scheduled by the researcher to enlist participation. The initial telephone call reviewed the purpose and process of the study, help answer any questions the potential participants had, and obtain verbal agreement to continue the study process. Once a verbal agreement was obtained by the researcher, interviews were scheduled at a convenient time and location as indicated by the participant.

The researcher assessed whether potential participants met the study inclusion criteria. If participants met the criteria, a pre-interview packet was sent to the participant via email. The pre-interview packet contained the informed consent document and Interview Guide. The provision of the Interview Guide prior to the interview was intentional to allow participants adequate time to consider and formulate responses prior to being interviewed (Englander, 2012). Participants were instructed that they may bring notes about their work-based learning experiences.

Once participants were identified, the researcher held interviews in appropriate environments where the participant felt encouraged to share and answer questions asked honestly. An appropriate location was determined based on proximity of the setting to the participant, how comfortable each participant felt in the location, noise and other distractions of the surrounding environment, and level of privacy and ability to keep confidentiality within the environment. However, in most cases, interviews were held at locations that employers requested.

Data was collected from in-depth semi-structured interviews that focused on experiences and opinions of the employers involved in work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. In-depth interviews were held with each participant on an arranged time, date, and locations. Interview times were scheduled for approximately 60 minutes in length and were

audio-taped. Prior to beginning the interview process, informed consent information was provided to each participant in both verbal and written format. Participants provided verbal informed consent indicating that they agree to participate in the proposed study. The purpose of the interviews was to (1) ensure the participant meets the study's participant criteria; (2) explain and obtain informed consent; (3) establish rapport; (4) gather information regarding each participant's perspective on work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities, and (5) provide a gift card to a local store as a gesture of gratitude for their participation in the study.



Figure 2. Visual Model for Qualitative Research Design

Data Analysis Procedures

Data was analyzed from the in-depth semi-structured interviews focused on experiences and opinions of the employers involved in work-based learning programs for youth with

disabilities. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated that the process of data analysis in qualitative research involves working with the data, organizing it, breaking it down, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others. Strauss and Corbin (1990) identify three levels of analysis: (1) to present the data without interpretation and abstraction, the participants tell their own story; (2) to create a rich and believable descriptive narrative using interview transcripts and researcher interpretation; and (3) building a theory using high levels of interpretation and abstraction.

Data analysis in grounded theory involves specific procedures which, when applied appropriately and with vigilance will result in theory that is rigorous and well-grounded in the data (Lawrence & Tar, 2013). Strauss (1987) points out that the procedures should be viewed as rules of thumb, rather than hard and fixed rules, and warns researchers that rigid adherence to any procedure can hinder the analytic process and stifle creativity. Initially, the researcher listened to the audio recordings of each interview multiple times while taking notes of thoughts, reactions, or questions. The researcher listened repeatedly to each interview to become familiar with the words of the interviewees and develop a holistic sense of the experience (Maxwell, 2013).

All of the audio recorded interviews were transcribed by a third-party transcription service. The participants were assigned a number to protect their identities in the data. After the transcriptions were returned to the researcher, the researcher reviewed each transcription document while listening to the recording to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. Each transcription was reviewed multiple times, while the researcher continued to take notes about thoughts and reactions. Note taking while listening to transcriptions is one of the most useful and powerful sense-making tools at hand for researchers to use during analysis (Lawrence & Tar,

2013). Note taking helps the researcher to move easily from empirical data to conceptual level, refining and expanding codes further, developing key categories and showing their relationships, and building towards a more integrated understanding of events, processes, and interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

After getting familiar with the data and ensuring the accuracy of the transcriptions, the researcher then began open coding the data. Creswell (2014) highlights that coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks and writing a word representing a category in the margins. Further, open coding is the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered through the data (Lawrence & Tar, 2013). Open coding is part of the analysis process that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of the data. During open coding, the data is broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

To do this, the researcher analyzed each transcript line by line to obtain significant statements made by participants regarding their work based learning experiences. The researcher reduced and eliminated expressions that were not necessary and do not enhance the understanding of the data collected. The researcher kept working until a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements exist. The goal was for patterns, themes, and categories of analysis to emerge from the data rather than creating them prior to data collection. Next, the researcher evaluated the most commonly occurring themes across all of the participant interviews and wrote a composite summary of each theme from the participant's experiences. These common themes will be labeled with a term based on the actual language of the participants, as well as theme summaries will include direct quotes from participants (Creswell, 2014).

The qualitative data analysis computer software Dedoose was utilized to supplement the researcher's own analysis. Creswell (2014) supports the use of software to both store and organize qualitative data. The researcher will then code specific words, phrases, and quotes. Dedoose was used to organize the data, as well as assist the researcher to locate text associated with a code or theme, and help locate passages that will be identified with two or more code labels (Creswell, 2014). To recognize and limit researcher bias, the researcher met with her dissertation chair to review transcriptions, notes, and analyze summaries.

The researcher interpreted the findings or results of the data (Creswell, 2014). Asking, "What were the lessons learned?" captures the essence of this idea (Creswell, 2014). The result of this would be to suggest that the findings confirm past information or diverge from it (Creswell, 2014). It can also suggest new questions that need to be asked—questions raised by the data and the analysis that the researcher had not foreseen earlier in the study (Creswell, 2014). For the purpose of this study, the audio recordings and printed documents are retained for a minimum of three years. This data is stored in a secured and locked location in the office of the researcher. Any information that was entered into a computer was secured through password identification. Only the principal investigator and researcher have access to the data.

Lastly, from the data, a conceptual model of work-based learning based on employer perspectives was created using emerging themes identified from the data. This model describes the emergent theory and helps to explain employer's perceptions of work-based learning; what key components should a well-designed work-based learning program include; and how they feel work-based learning programs should be designed.

Validity and Reliability

In any research study, reliability and validity of the research findings is an important concern (Creswell, 2014). Researchers must consider the data collection, analysis, and interpretation methods used in qualitative research. Questions asked involve the extent to which the study accurately captures the perceptions of the participants; whether other researcher reach similar conclusions based on the data; whether the analysis is flexible enough to account for variations in experiences; and the degree that the study elements were sufficiently described to allow for comparison to other populations and study findings (Maxwell, 2013). Below is a description of steps and strategies that the researcher will take to ensure reliability and validity throughout the study.

Triangulation. Triangulation is a technique used to increase the validity of qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). Triangulation refers to the process of comparing results from different sources, or gathered using different methods, to validate finding. Sources indicate that triangulation is a common strategy used in qualitative research that reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method, and allows a better assessment of the generality of the explanations that one develops (Maxwell, 2013; Creswell, 2014). In the current study, multiple participants were included and their experiences were compared for similarities and differences. The conceptual model was based on the accumulation of common experiences, rather than data unique to any one participant.

Rich Data. Creswell (2014) states that rich descriptions of the data allows those reading the study to decide if results can be transferred to other populations of interest. Detailed information about how the participants were selected and the criteria for participation in this study were outlined in this chapter. Also, a demographic questionnaire was included in the study

and background information about each participant's gender, racial-ethnic background, professional experience, and experience in regard to work-based learning and students with disabilities is reported.

After interviews, field notes were taken that included a review of the information reported by the participant, as well as researcher reflections regarding the convergence and divergence of the information provided in the interview in the interview in regard to previous interviews. Information about interview setting and significant events that occurred during the interview were documented. Records were kept throughout the data collection and analysis process to document the development of the emerging conceptual model.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual model of work-based learning for youth with disabilities from the perspective of employers. As part of the purpose, the current investigation also attempted to gain insight on what employers deem to be barriers and challenges for work-based learning programs including the types of supports, resources, and accommodations that are helpful and the perceived benefits of participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. A qualitative, semi-structured interview methodology was used in an effort to provide employers the opportunity to describe their needs and preferences when interviewing, hiring, training, supervising, and evaluating the work quality and productivity of youth with disabilities in a work-based learning program.

Work-Based Learning Themes and Categories

After each participant signed informed consent documents and these were received by the researcher, the 8 interview dates and times were arranged. Approximately 5 days prior to the interview, each participant was sent the semi-structured interview guide, as well as a reminder card of the date, time, and location of the interview that was previously arranged. The length of the interviews ranged from 15.21-72.45 minutes. The average amount of time for conducting the interviews was 34.47 minutes. The interviews, once recorded, were sent to a third party for transcription services. The interview audio recordings were transcribed into Word documents.

Throughout the data analysis procedure, interviews were listened to multiple times in full and also in part. Initially, interviews were listened to at least twice all the way through. The first time, the researcher listened to the interviews without taking notes. The second time through, the researcher listened to the interviews while taking notes on a blank interview guide and noted

different times in which the researcher would want to refer back to a comment or statement made by a participant.

Once the interviews were transcribed, the transcripts were reviewed by listening to the interviews while reading the transcriptions to ensure accuracy of the transcriptions. The transcripts were coded into themes based on the responses from the participants. Transcriptions were read several times and significant phrases, statements, and quotes directly related to participant's experiences in participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities were noted. Further, after the transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy, the researcher listened to each interview once more all the way through while taking notes within the word documents. Words and phrases used by the participants themselves were used to cluster responses into themes.

Additionally, participants whose interviews were shorter than 30 minutes were contacted for a follow-up to the interview. A total of three participants were contacted for a follow-up to the interview. Initially, interviews were scheduled to last for 60 minutes. However, the researcher noted during the interviews for these three participants that interruptions occurred from other staff, or situations that required their attention that resulted in short responses to various questions, or ending the interview earlier than expected. The follow-up was to review the transcripts to ensure that all information was captured in the interview. The three participants that were contacted had additional comments that they wanted to be included in the study. This information was recorded using paper and pencil on the transcripts themselves, and later typed out in a Word document by the researcher.

The findings regarding the work-based learning for youth with disabilities themes from the perspectives of employers are discussed below. Table 2 also provides an overview.

Table 2. Work-Based Learning Themes and Categories	
Responsibilities to Students & Program	
Liaison	Supervise
Experience in Work-Based Learning Program	
Disabilities vs. Without Disabilities	Support to Program Coordinator
Length of Time on Worksite	Structured Tasks
Rotation of Tasks	
Design of Work-Based Learning Program	
Coordinator/Liaison	Application Process
Exit Interview	Youth Tasks
Daily Log	
Special Considerations	
Restrictions/Accommodations	Behaviors Related to Disability
Transportation & Attendance	Student Expectations
Key Stakeholders	
Employees/Staff	Job Coach
Para Professionals/Teachers	Parents/Family
Employers	Upper Management
Perceived Benefits to Employers	
Understanding People with Disabilities Better	Satisfaction of Seeing Youth Mature
Relationships/Community Partnerships	Assists Staff
Increase Staff Customer Service	Encourages Different Ways of Teaching
Perceived Benefits to Youth	
Growth/Prep for World of Work	Sense of Purpose/Accomplishment
Social Skill Development	
Barriers & Challenges	
Staff	Job Coaches
An Increasing Minimum Wage	Transportation
Youth Skillset	Lack of Awareness in Addressing Disability Related Events
Types of Supports, Accommodations, & Resources	
Liaison to Program	Job Coaches
Youth Interests/Work History	Information on Students
Supervisor Evaluation	Training on Disability
Employment Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities	
Passion & Motivation to Work	High Social & Customer Service Skills
Match Between Youth & Job	

Following each interview question, a brief interpretation and analysis of the responses is provided with direct supporting quotes from the interviews. Participant responses to each interview question were placed into clusters and themed for each interview question. Note that the phrases “the majority of,” “many,” and “most” were used to discuss concepts expressed by at least 6 of the 8 participants. The words “some,” “several,” and “a number of” show that 4 to 5 of the participants supported the concept. “A few” was used to indicate concepts expressed by 3 or fewer participants. Further, to ensure participant confidentiality, both real names of individuals and names of employment sites have been removed from quotes.

Responsibilities to Student with Disabilities and Work-Based Learning Program

The pre-interview questionnaire asked participant about their current role/position within the work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. Participants were asked to describe and give examples as to what their responsibilities were to the student with disabilities, as well as the overall work-based learning program. The themes that emerged from this question were the following: supervise and liaison. Both of these themes are discussed in more detail, quotes from the interviews are included to support the themes outlined and discussed.

Supervise. Most of the participants stated that their responsibility to the students with disabilities and the overall work-based learning program was to supervise the youth with disabilities. Most went on to expand their definition of ‘supervise’ to supervising the student’s work, help to identify tasks for students to complete, assign students tasks, and help to provide assistance to managers and other employees working with the students with disabilities. Employer 3 shared an overall interpretation of what it means to supervise youth with disabilities participating in the work-based learning program. S/he stated:

“For me it was it was the scheduling, somewhat, and then overseeing training...And then usually pair them up with a veteran employee so that they can learn from them. And I don't always have to be the only person they go to...”

Employer 4 shared a response to their role to youth with disabilities.

“I think my role has been to assign tasks that can be completed without a lot of outside help...”

Employer 4 highlighted that the tasks that s/he assigns to the youth with disabilities is not just “busy work”, but is something that each employee is responsible for doing.

“Looking for things that need to be done around the store, not just busy work, but things that are useful that need to be finished, or need to be looked at, and things that we don't necessarily have time to do on our own...”

What the researcher felt was important about this statement during the interview is that it highlights the importance of the tasks that are assigned to the youth with disabilities; that the work they are doing is not meaningless and is a task that is asked of any other employee to complete.

Liaison. Several of the participants stated that their major responsibility to the work-based learning program and the students with disabilities was to be a liaison and communicate between the work-based learning program coordinator or contact person about the student on site. During the interviews with participants, it was evident that liaison meant communicating between the program coordinator and employees working directly with youth with disabilities about upcoming days off, what is working, what isn't working, and any other work-related matters. Employer 6 discussed and emphasized that his role is to work with their staff. S/he stated:

“...basically, my responsibility is to accept someone’s proposal most of the time and then coordinate with my management team and staff to try to get students involved in the store.”

What was interesting from Employer 6’s response to this question is what s/he emphasized that someone else approached the store about implementing a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities, and from there it was coordinating and working with the program coordinator to prepare for youth with disabilities to be at the store.

Employer 8 discussed that s/he worked with the program coordinator to help identify and know what needed to be done in order to have a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities at the employment site. S/he stated:

“...I relied on them to know what they had been doing in the past in order to communicate the information to my staff. And as I could see what their abilities were and kind of expanded on that...”

Employer 8 emphasized once knowing the youth better, the participant was able to implement various challenges to develop the youth’s skills. Additionally, Employer 8 highlights that working with the program coordinator and acting as a liaison assisted him in then turning and re-emphasizing the information to his/her staff that would be working with the youth. Such data supports why Employer 8 felt their responsibility was that of a liaison to the youth with disability participating in the work-based learning program. Table 2 provides a snapshot of the information listed above.

Table 3. Responsibilities to Student with Disabilities and Work-Based Learning Program	
Sub-Area	Examples
Supervise	Employer #3: <i>"For me it was it was the scheduling, somewhat, and then overseeing training... And I don't always have to be the only person they go to..."</i>
	Employer #4: <i>"Looking for things that need to be done around the store, not just busy work..."</i>
Liaison	Employer #6: <i>"...coordinate with my management team and staff to try to get students involved in the store."</i>
	Employer #8: <i>"...I relied on them to know what they had been doing in the past in order to communicate the information to my staff..."</i>

Experience in Participating in a Work-Based Learning Program

Participants were asked what their experience was in participating in a work-based learning program. Most participants had experience in participating in work-based learning programs with non-profit agencies and schools in the Lansing, MI area. Several participants had experience participating in work-based learning programs that were developed in-house by the employer themselves.

Further, the researcher followed-up by asking to compare the various work-based learning programs and outline differences that existed between such programs. Common comparisons emerged through participant interviews. These common comparisons were the following: disabilities versus without disabilities; support program coordinator; length of time on work site; structured tasks; and rotation of tasks.

Disabilities versus Without Disabilities. A few participants emphasized that the programs that they participated in varied based on whether they were specific for individuals with disabilities versus individuals without disabilities. Employer 1 highlighted what all other participants mentioned briefly in the interview, that the program was not designed differently, but that the way which procedures were executed varied. S/he stated:

“The programs itself were not different—whether it was for those with disabilities or those without disabilities. The biggest difference was how we broke down tasks or what types of tasks that we gave them...”

Support from Program Coordinator. A few participants discussed that the biggest difference for them across the various types of work-based learning programs that they participated in was the level of support that they received from those organizing or coordinating the program. Employer 7 pointed out one program in particular that provided an overwhelming amount of support, and how that made a difference. S/he stated:

“...They are very quick to respond if we have any issues that we do not have the expertise to work with. It is nice to have someone that I can just email really quick and they can just stop in...it is important that you have the support with these students coming in, otherwise it is pulling from everything that you do...I can't pull from all the other resources because I am paying staff to train and assist with whatever we are doing...”

Interestingly, Employer 7 points out that without a particular level of support, s/he has to pull staff to assist the individual on the site, which takes time and costs money. Therefore, the benefit of having assistance from these individuals participating in work-based learning programs is not as high if staff is needing to continuously assist or the overall program is not supported.

Length of time on Work Site. A few participants pointed out that the length of time on work sites varies between the programs. Employer 6, throughout the interview, brought up how the length of the time on the work site can help to identify if the employer would like to hire any of the participants. S/he said: .

“I like the year-long placements a little bit better...They got to learn more and they became really proficient at their jobs. They got really skilled at it and skilled, like I said,

to such a degree that we hired 'em, right. Here it's a little bit harder. They're only here for a couple months. It's kind of hard to judge their skill set and everything."

Structured Tasks. A few participants mentioned that structured tasks allow for the individual that is participating in the work-based learning program to have an understanding of the expectations while at the employment site. Further, it helps to establish anticipated outcomes and a way to measure success to those participating in the program. Employer 5 supports this, and stated:

"I find that with my interns, it is important to see that big picture and the overall effect they're making at the employment site...I feel like all that is just the same with our student with disabilities that we've been working with because we wanna establish those anticipated outcomes. We wanna talk about what success looks like...The way that we can do this is through structured tasks that the participants can check off as they complete them daily to monitor overall progress and expectations that we have as the employer."

Rotation of Tasks. Employer 5 highlighted that the biggest different between the in-house program and the program with a local non-profit was the rotation of the tasks that were given. S/he said:

"There was a peer leadership program...they started with the same job just to show remedial consistency, and then continued with the job that they were interested in and good at. The program with the local non-profit is more a broad experience for the students in the building where the tasks that they were given changed on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis so that they are exposed to variety of tasks."

Table 4. Experience in Work-Based Learning Programs	
Sub-Area	Examples
Disabilities versus Without Disabilities	Employer #1: <i>"The programs itself were not different—whether it was for those with disabilities or those without disabilities..."</i>
Support from Program Coordinator	Employer 7: <i>"... It is nice to have someone that I can just email really quick and they can just stop in..."</i>
Length of Time on Worksite	Employer 6: <i>"They got really skilled at it and skilled, like I said, to such a degree that we hired 'em..."</i>
Structured Tasks	Employer #5: <i>"It is important to see that big picture and the overall effect they're making at the employment site...I feel like all that is just the same with our student with disabilities..."</i>
Rotation of Tasks	Employer 5: <i>"The program with the local non-profit is more a broad experience for the students..."</i>

Design of Work-Based Learning Programs

In order to understand employer's perceptions of the way work-based learning programs are constructed, participants were asked how they thought a work-based learning program should be designed for youth with disabilities? If the researcher felt that more information was needed from the participant, a follow-up question was asked about what key components should be included in a well-designed work-based learning program. Based on participant responses, answers were themed into the following categories: liaison/coordinator, application process, exit interview, youth tasks, and daily log.

Coordinator/Liaison. The majority of participants indicated that a coordinator or liaison was vital to any work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. Participants reported that a coordinator/liaison of the program gathers all the paperwork that is needed for the program and assists in coordinating and arranging transportation. Employer 4 specifically highlighted that the coordinator/liaison should come to the job site frequently to check-in on the student's progress at the employment site. Employer 4 summarized:

“I think if he just came in every day for six months and there wasn’t anybody there to say, “Hey, how is it goin’,” things could get off track. Things that are a little problem become a big problem...”

Employer 8 reported that the coordinator/liaison should also assist the staff at the employment site about how to address the public when it comes to having youth with disabilities on site.

“I know I cannot control the public, but I think what I was thinking was even how to communicate to the public about the youth with disabilities that are working with us, and asking them to be patient.”

Application Process. A few participants commented on the value of having an application process implemented for youth with disabilities entering the work-based learning program that also involved the employer. The application process that participants mentioned included an actual application to the employment site and interview with the employer.

Employer 3 stressed the importance of what can come from implementing an application process.

“I think that if it were for them to learn more, maybe the if they have the ability, an application process. Either the normal application process or a simplified one. And then maybe an interview process would be cool just so we get to meet and learn about what they can do, what they can't do, what they want to do, what their goals are for the workplace, what their scheduling ability is...”

The response from Employer 3 in regards to the application process is not simply so that the youth can understand how the application process works, but also get a better understanding of the youth and what their interests, barriers, and strengths are prior to entering the program.

Employer 7 discussed an in-house program that was designed by the company, and talked about how s/he has the youth for the in-house program complete an application and their reasoning for doing so.

“We have the youth for our in-house program actually fill out an actual application so that they can get to know what that is like...We think it is important to have them apply an actual application process to get the volunteer experience because that's real life. You don't just go out and ask for a job and get it right away....it was parents who wanted their kids to be involved and become responsible. But, the kids didn't want to be here, they were kind of being dragged along...”

This response exemplifies the youth needing to have investment in the program, and not just parents forcing their child to participate. Such data from study participants emphasizes the significance of self-advocacy for the youth to illustrate their level of interest in the program.

Exit Interview. A few participants called attention to needing to have an exit interview when the program is coming to an end for the youth with disabilities. Employer 7 discussed the in-house program, and discussed with their goals were by having an exit interview.

“Also, we do an exit interview at the end of the program. We sit down with each kid one-on-one to and seeing what they learned from the program. And then kind of recapping these are the things we highlighted, do you remember doing this, what did you think about that, is this something that you would want to do in the future...is there anything from their experience that could help us grow....”

The value of the exit interview is not only to assist the employment site in understanding how the company can grow, but also to assist the youth in identifying that they learned from the program. The same participant reported that, *“I feel that sometimes the youth doesn't always get asked*

what they learned...I want to make sure that they know what they like and dislike to help them identify if this is somewhere they would want to work in the future."

Youth Tasks. Several participants highlighted youth tasks as being a key component to a well-designed work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. Youth tasks refer to the way tasks are taught to the youth and the types of tasks that the youth are given. Employer 1 discussed a training method that is used with youth with disabilities, and is a known process throughout the store. The method is a way to provide structure for the youth.

"I would say majority of the work that we do with the students is going to be more like what we call calendar tasking which is specific days have specific jobs. Calendar tasking is a way that we also run a lot of our normal workload for our team. So, in that way giving it to the students is actually a known process for my team..."

Employer 1 later discussed that s/he found this method to work well for youth with disabilities because they knew exactly what they were doing each day, and the staff that was working that shift also knew. As a result, such an approach ensured additional supervision and that staff would circle around and check-in with the youth, as well as knowing where the youth should be in the store.

Employer 6 supported what Employer 1 was saying by emphasizing the youth with disabilities being well versed in routine tasks so that they can develop proficiency.

"When you've got your people all over the place doing something one day, doing something another day, doing something this day, jumping all over the place, it's kind of hard for them to get proficient in anything... That's what I would like to see out of what we do here is just a consistent routine every day so they become proficient in that area..."

Towards the end of the interview, Employer 6 came back to this question and talked quickly stating, *“If they are proficient in an area, their customer service skills will improve.”* This comment illustrates that if a youth is comfortable in the area that they are working in, they are more likely to assist a customer asking a question about product in that area. On the other hand, Employer 5 builds on youth tasks by stating that it is important to examine the way that tasks are taught to youth with disabilities in work-based learning programs. S/he gave an example of an artist that uses different methods of teaching so that all of the classes inclusive to all participants.

“...So in thinking about how a work-based learning program should be designed, it should be taken in a very individualistic perspective. Taking into consideration the individual person’s needs, the individual person’s strengths, their skills, their abilities, and making sure that whatever you’re assigning or whatever the placement may be that it compliments not only the employer, but it also compliments the person and where their abilities lie.”

Daily Log. A few participants stated that completing a daily log at the end day on the work site can assist the youth with remembering what they did that day and seeing what they learned. Employer 7 mentioned that a daily log is something that they do for their in-house program so that youth can reflect on what they learned.

“...before they leave for the day where they just go to their daily log and write down what they learned. It is almost like a reflection period. And I find that it makes them realize that the job is not so monotonous as they sometimes make it out to be, and that they actually learning things and growth has occurred.”

Table 5. Design of Work-Based Learning Programs	
Sub-Area	Examples
Coordinator/Liaison	Employer #4: "...there wasn't anybody there to say, "Hey, how is it goin'," things could get off track. Things that are a little problem become a big problem..."
	Employer #8: "... I think what I was thinking was even how to communicate to the public about the youth with disabilities that are working with us, and asking them to be patient."
Application Process	Employer #3: "...so we get to meet and learn about what they can do, what they can't do, what they want to do, what their goals are for the workplace, what their scheduling ability is..."
	Employer #7: "We think it is important to have them apply an actual application process to get the volunteer experience because that's real life. You don't just go out and ask for a job and get it right away..."
Exit Interview	Employer #7: "Also, we do an exit interview at the end of the program...is there anything from their experience that could help us grow...."
Youth Tasks	Employer #1: "Calendar tasking is a way that we also run a lot of our normal workload for our team. So, in that way giving it to the students is actually a known process for my team..."
	Employer #6: "That's what I would like to see out of what we do here is just a consistent routine every day so they become proficient in that area..."
	Employer #5: "...so in thinking about how a work-based learning program should be designed, it should be taken in a very individualistic perspective..."
Daily Log	Employer #7: "...It is almost like a reflection period. And I find that it makes them realize that the job is not so monotonous as they sometimes make it out to be, and that they actually learning things and growth has occurred."

Special Considerations When Implementing a Work-Based Learning Program

Participants were asked to identify what special considerations should be taken into account when implementing work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. Special considerations were conceptualized by the researcher to be such considerations as attendance, behaviors, level of independence, skill sets, level of communication, and functional limitations. Participant responses regarding special considerations were grouped into the following categories: restrictions and accommodations, behaviors related to disability, transportation and attendance, and student expectations.

Restrictions and Accommodations. A number of participants mentioned the tasks for youth with disabilities being a special consideration. During the interviews, participants noted physical limitations, allergies, safety, additional breaks, task lists, and adjusted training when

discussing restrictions and accommodations for youth with disabilities participating in work-based learning programs. Employer 7 discussed how employees can be busy working with customers and that they may not think about checking-in on a student who has a question about how to complete a task.

“...also, the staff, they get so busy with customers that they don’t necessarily think, “I need to go above and beyond, and I need to go make sure and check in and make sure this person is doing okay.” They just assume, like a new employee—cuz they’re taught just to come up to ask if you have any questions...they don’t know that the student has been hovering in the corner for five minutes terrified to approach them...”

Employer 7 also reported that it is good to have an understanding of the physical limitations of the youth with disability. It is important to be aware of physical limitations due to the work environment.

“...but, obviously, physical limitations. We have concrete floors. They’re standing on their feet most of the time... We do a lot of bending over, whether it’s algae scraping or your arm is up and over on top of the aquarium. Movements that aren’t your standard, maybe, desk job or just standing for a few hours—there’s lots of movement to the job.”

Employer 1 revealed that s/he likes when youth with disabilities that are involved in the work-based learning program are on the employment site during the peak hours of the store so that s/he can ensure that there is enough staff that can assist the youth if there are questions or needs.

“...making sure that it is done during a peak work hours and I mean it is having enough employees to not only handle the workload of the normal day to day tasks, but also to have the one extra hour or two extra people that could also be involved with the students just for help or guidance...”

This statement supports what Employer 7 noted about staff not thinking to check-in with the youth on the employment site. Employer 1 provides an accommodation for what Employer 7 was stating by ensuring that there is enough staff to address questions or concerns of the youth with disabilities.

Further, Employer 3 emphasized that the training needs of the youth with disabilities are different than other employees.

“What their learning curves may be; for some people it might be written, some people it might be visual, some people might be hand over hand. Just so that they get what they need as well as we get what we need from the partnership...”

Employer 3 provided useful data about youth with disabilities potentially needing modified training to better understand the tasks that they are being asked to do, learn the tasks that they are being asked to complete, and work independently.

Behaviors Related to Disability. A number of participants discussed behaviors related to the disability of the youth involved in the work-based learning program. Behaviors of concern are things such as triggers or outbursts that occur on the work site. During the interview, Employer 2 talked about a particular time that a youth had an outburst on the employment site.

“There was a student that would have outbursts; he actually threatened the job coach. He kind of violently went after her and that was in view of other customers and employees...when he did have his outbursts, we would take him in the back for him to settle down...”

Employer 2 mentioned in the example above that the youth was not fired or removed from the program because s/he was part of the program. Employer 2 later in the interview stated, *“If it were a regular employee, they would have been fired by the end of that day and asked to leave*

the work site. But, because this was involving a student, we were a little more understanding and allowed the student to continue on the work site until the end of the placement.”

Transportation and Attendance. A few participants discussed transportation and attendance being a special consideration that was taken into account when implementing a work-based learning program. However, Employer 6 discussed attendance and transportation as being a positive experience for the youth involved in the program.

“Well, I’ll talk to you about attendance for a minute. I can tell you that the kids that come here have better attendance than anyone who works for me, which is great. They’re always here. They never miss. I couldn’t tell you the last time one of the kids missed.”

Employer 6 ended this particular part of the interview by emphasizing, to him/herself, the no special accommodations were made for youth with disabilities.

“I think in all my time doing this I haven’t had any issues where I think any special considerations have been necessary...They wanna work here, I want them to work while they’re here, and I think they feel pride in what they do. I am proud of what they do. Like I said, they work better than some of the people we have...”

Student Expectations. A few participants stated that student expectations were a special consideration when implementing a work-based learning program. Student expectations were described by participants as communicating work expectations to the youth and being aware that the work-based learning program may be a youth’s first work experience. Employer 5 compared interns in their in-house work-based learning program and the youth with disabilities in terms of customer service and previous work experiences.

“I think in terms of ability, too, we see some of our interns come in with retail experience. They have been trained on customer service...I’ve wondered whether at some point we

might add a checkbox that says, “Greet every guest.” Something like that, so students understand the importance of saying, “Hello.”

Table 6. Special Considerations When Implementing a Work-Based Learning Program	
Sub-Area	Examples
Restrictions and Accommodations	Employer #7: “...they don’t know that the student has been hovering in the corner for five minutes terrified to approach them...”
	Employer #1: “...but also to have the one extra hour or two extra people that could also be involved with the students just for help or guidance...”
	Employer #3: “Just so that they get what they need as well as we get what we need from the partnership...”
Behaviors Related to Disability	Employer #2: “When he did have his outbursts, we would take him in the back for him to settle down...”
Transportation and Attendance	Employer #6: “They’re always here. They never miss. I couldn’t tell you the last time one of the kids missed.”
Student Expectations	Employer #5: “Greet every guest.” Something like that, so students understand the importance of saying, “Hello.”

Key Stakeholders

One of the questions in the interview with participants was who are key stakeholders that are important to include in the process of developing and implementing a work-based learning program. The key stakeholders named during the participant interviews are the following: employees/staff, job coach, para-professionals/teachers, parents/family, employers, upper management/board of directors, peers, and local city council/association.

Employees/Staff. A few participants brought up the importance of employees/staff on the employment sites being key stakeholders to include in the process of developing and implementing a work-based learning program. Employer 1 emphasizes the importance of involving his/her team in implementing a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities.

“Like this actually benefits not only us making sure that my team is part of it and I am sure that the managers of my management staff itself is a key role in this because again

we're taking on something outside of our normal team member relationships that we have to have with our staffing...”

It is important to note that Employer 1 mentioned that his/her staff involvement in work-based learning program development is additional responsibility that they are taking on outside of their normal work responsibilities and allows for employee leadership skills to emerge.

Job Coach. A few participants mentioned job coaches as a key stakeholder in implementing a work-based learning program. Employer 4 said it best. S/he stated:

“I think it was helpful having the coach, and I think he interacted well with X, so I could mirror some of that, like how to talk to him and what to expect. He also had to do things for him.”

Para-Professionals/Teachers. A few participants stated that para-professionals/teachers that work with youth with disabilities should be involved in implementing a work-based learning program. Employer 7 gave an example of a time when a youth’s teacher visited the work site to observe the youth.

“Well, and touching on the teacher one, that’s huge. I think it was X’s teacher who would come in and check on him. She was able to help me a lot with understanding X because she offered a different angle that no one else was able to provide cuz she saw him in a classroom setting. That was really helpful...”

Employer 7 noted an important point stating that the teacher was able to provide another perspective and additional information regarding the youth. Such a process, in turn, provided insight to the participant and staff about how to assist the youth in maturing in the world of work.

Parents/Family. A number of participants brought up parents and family as key stakeholders in the process of implementing a work-based learning program for youth with

disabilities. Employer 1 stated more than once during the interview that parents/family were important in the process.

"I would have to revert back to saying that either parents of students would really take good notice and in this program, being here so they could kind of have that one on one encouragement with the student while they were in the building."

Employer 1 highlighted that parents/family members can be a sense of encouragement for the youth. Employer 4 added to what Employer 1 stated about parents encouraging the youth by emphasizing that parents/families can observe their child being successful on the job.

"I think, for their families, too, it's a huge thing to see your kid be able to maybe support themselves, but at least go out and do something productive."

Employers. A few participants mentioned that employers are important in implementing a work-based learning program. In fact, Employer 7 did well at summarizing the importance of employers in work-based learning programs.

"We work a lot with—we're connected strongly to our community and local employers. Hopefully, they always wanna grow the community, and they wanna help in whatever way they can. I think work based learning programs, that's what they're all about is makin' sure that those who may not have opportunity are given the opportunity."

Employer 7 was not specifically talking about their own company, but was emphasizing community connections that they have in the local area.

Upper Management/Board of Directors. A few participants stressed the importance of upper management/board of director support to those employers implementing work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. Employer 5 discussed this; s/he stated:

“...I think as we grow that circle from internal to pseudo-internal or somewhat internal and then external, we look at engaging our board of directors and making sure they understand the value of the program. Then, communicating that externally with those other stakeholders...”

Employer 8 brought up that if the work-based learning program worked well at one site, that it could work at another location.

“And I know that there was not a lot of support directly above. That, to me, would be something really important. Because I think that if it works well here, why can't it work well at another location...”

Table 7. Key Stakeholders	
Sub-Area	Examples
Employees/Staff	Employer #1: <i>"I am sure that the managers of my management staff itself is a key role in this because again we're taking on something outside of our normal team member relationships..."</i>
Job Coach	Employer #4: <i>"So I could mirror some of that, like how to talk to him and what to expect. He also had to do things for him."</i>
Para-Professionals/Teachers	Employer #7: <i>"She offered a different angle that no one else was able to provide cuz she saw him in a classroom setting. That was really helpful."</i>
Parents/Family	Employer #1: <i>"Being here so they could kind of have that one on one encouragement with the student while they were in the building."</i>
	Employer #4: <i>"It's a huge thing to see your kid be able to maybe support themselves, but at least go out and do something productive."</i>
Employers	Employer #7: <i>"I think work based learning programs, that's what they're all about is makin' sure that those who may not have opportunity are given the opportunity."</i>
Upper Management and Support	Employer #5: <i>"We look at engaging our board of directors and making sure they understand the value of the program. Then, communicating that externally with those other stakeholders..."</i>
	Employer #8: <i>"Because I think that if it works well here, why can't it work well at another location..."</i>

A follow-up question asked participants what ways they believed key stakeholders should be involved in the development of work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. Participants stated that the key stakeholders should be involved in one or more of the following ways: guidance/training, support/familiarity of program, and overseeing youth work.

Guidance and Training. Several participants emphasized that key stakeholders should provide guidance and training in implementing a work-based learning program. Employer 3 discussed the importance of the key stakeholders ensuring that the youth with disabilities have a grasp on what they need to do on the work site. S/he stated:

“For me if the person that is working here or volunteering here has a good grasp on what they need to do, what they need, and who they can go to if they need something, then I don't have a problem with them being in the background and waiting for contact as long as they're there for this person should they need them. Anything beyond that I think the team should be accessible, but they don't necessarily have to be here.”

On the other hand, Employer 4 stressed that while guidance and training was important, it was not only about performing the job perfectly and being trained to do so. S/he stated:

“I felt like it was less important that it got done correctly, and it was more important that the student actually did it, to me. Even with the things that he's doing now, if he makes a mistake, or if something gets put away wrong, it's not the end of the world...”

Support/Familiarity of Program. Several participants mentioned support and familiarity of the work-based learning program was an important way that key stakeholders can be involved in the process. Employer 5 stated:

“...Supporting one particular program and feels like this is something they believe in, they might then consider more support for our organization or for that program specifically because they think we're doing the right thing.”

Employer 8 supported what Employer 5 stated in regards to be familiar with the program and what programs employers are participating in.

“I think just a broader support. And honestly if you had broader support, whether it is through, including your local governments, including your local businesses at the various levels, knowing the programs are out there could help educate the public too...”

Employer 8’s response indicates that program familiarity is also important due to the ability of key stakeholders to then inform the general public about programs that are out there to help others who may have limited resources.

Overseeing Youth Work. A few participants mentioned that overseeing the work of the youth was important for key stakeholders. Employer 1 defined overseeing the work of the youth involved in the program as managers checking in on the youth. S/he stated:

"It would be following the chain of command for the managers by having the managers checking with the students and then working with the team underneath the management staff...that way I am seeing who in my store might have some leadership skills that we haven't seen yet."

Employer 2 specifically brought attention to giving the job coach direction on what needed to be done, and relying on the job coach to ensure the youth was completing the tasks assigned by the employer. Employer 2 specifically stated, *“I would give the job coach direction on what needs to be done, but she would go ahead and make sure the task was performed.”*

Table 7.a. Key Stakeholders Involvement	
Sub-Area	Examples
Guidance and Training	Employer #3: <i>“Then I don't have a problem with them being in the background and waiting for contact as long as they're there for this person should they need them.”</i>
	Employer 4#: <i>“I felt like it was less important that it got done correctly, and it was more important that the student actually did it, to me...”</i>
Support/Familiarity of the Program	Employer 5: <i>“They might then consider more support for our organization or for that program specifically because they think we're doing the right thing.”</i>
	Employer #8: <i>“I think just a broader support...knowing the programs are out there could help educate the public too.”</i>

Table 7.a. (cont'd)	
Overseeing Youth Work	Employer #1: <i>"That way I am seeing who in my store might have some leadership skills that we haven't seen yet."</i>
	Employer #2: <i>"I would give the job coach direction on what needs to be done, but she would go ahead and make sure the task was performed."</i>

Perceived Benefits of a Work-Based Learning Program

Participants were asked what the perceived benefits of participating in a work-based learning program were for an employer. From the interviews with participants, responses to this question were categorized into the following categories: understanding persons with disabilities better, satisfaction of seeing youth mature, relationship/community partnership, and assists staff.

Understanding Persons with Disabilities Better. A majority of participants indicated that through participating in the work-based learning program for youth with disabilities, they developed a better understanding of how to work with and serve persons with disabilities.

Employer 4 emphasized this by stating:

"I think understanding people with disabilities better, spending some time with them. Not everybody has a disability that's obvious. Just being around people that aren't like you is a big thing. I think it's part of the mission of the store has been to be a place where everybody has some presence..."

Satisfaction of Seeing Youth Mature. A few participants discussed how much joy it brought them seeing the youth with disabilities mature in the world of work. Employer 6 stated:

"There's a lot of benefits about having 'em here. For me, it's—there's a satisfaction of seeing what these kids can achieve. They come in, give 'em a task, and when they complete a task and it's right, they feel great and I feel great. It's kind of personal satisfaction on both ends for us, for them and for me. It's a good feeling."

Employer 8 supported what Employer 6 stated about seeing the youth with disabilities succeed on the work site, and it being satisfying to employers.

“Sometimes I think the benefit is more for me. I feel like I am helping making an impact in someone's life. I think that there is a lot of personal satisfaction that can be achieved from that...”

Relationship/Community Partnership. A few participants talked about how the youth with disabilities are a big part of the overall culture and team of the employment site and that they are as much of the staff as anyone else. During the interview with Employer 3, the researcher noted the empathy and compassion that the participant had when discussing the youth with disabilities involved in the work-based learning program, and what they meant to the overall team.

“When they're not here, it's a missing piece of the team. So, for me that's super important that I put them in a role that they can work on and excel at, and then when they have certain things mastered, then they can do more and learn more...”

Employer 2 talked about how it demonstrates that the company is willing to serve all types of individuals at their store, and that they are will to work with people with disabilities.

“For being a nonprofit, I think it shows the community we're willing to work with people with disabilities. And I think there's a big impression we do have...one of our customers provided lunch one day for the students. She was happy to see them here you know.”

Assists Staff. Several participants mentioned how youth with disabilities involved in the work-based learning programs assist staff on the employment site. For instance, Employer 7 talked about how the youth provide staff the opportunity to address customers rather than being tied down with tasks.

“This place is like running a small zoo, so there’s always something that needs tended to. We can really put our financial resources into the staff, helping serve the customers, and having the students there helps to get some of the tasks accomplished so it frees them up to be focused more on customers, which is really, really important to stay in business...”

Increase Staff Customer Service Skills. A few participants touched on how having the youth with disabilities on the worksite have assisted in increasing the staff’s customer service skills. Employer 1 provides a broad overview of how their staff’s customer service is impacted by participating in the work-based learning program for youth with disabilities.

“My staff appreciate the fact that the students want to take the time and work here. So my staff then accepts that process much more. They can see that the students are trying, and so just like we teach with our team and we instill in the culture in our business we want them to feel like they take ownership in the process. And so, part of that process now that is implemented is always going to be that they're also helping with students. So, it helps to improve my staff’s overall customer service skills.”

Encourages Different Ways of Training. Some of the participants throughout the interviews spoke to different methods of training not only the youth with disabilities to complete tasks on the worksite, but also the staff. For instance, Employer 5 discussed how tasks are assigned and taught for youth with disabilities are “individualistic,” when talking about the design of work-based learning programs. However, Employer 7 specifically mentions it as something they have noticed in their staff from participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities.

“It’s good as an employer to think about training individuals that have barriers, and how they need an approach that’s a little, maybe, different—it just makes us think about different ways of teaching, which is really helpful, of things that I wouldn’t necessarily think of before...”

Table 8.a. Perceived Benefits of a Work-Based Learning Program for Employers	
Sub-Area	Examples
Understanding Persons with Disabilities Better	Employer #4: <i>“Just being around people that aren’t like you is a big thing...”</i>
Satisfaction of Seeing Youth Mature	Employer #6: <i>“There’s a lot of benefits about having ‘em here. For me, it’s—there’s a satisfaction of seeing what these kids can achieve...”</i>
	Employer #8: <i>“I feel like I am helping making an impact in someone’s life. I think that there is a lot of personal satisfaction that can be achieved from that...”</i>
Relationships/Community Partnerships	Employer #3: <i>“When they’re not here, it’s a missing piece of the team...”</i>
	Employer #2: <i>“For being a nonprofit, I think it shows the community we’re willing to work with people with disabilities...”</i>
Assists Staff	Employer #7: <i>“Having the students there helps to get some of the tasks accomplished so it frees them up to be focused more on customers, which is really, really important to stay in business...”</i>
Increase Staff Customer Service Skills	Employer #1: <i>“And so, part of that process now that is implemented is always going to be that they’re also helping with students. So, it helps to improve my staff’s overall customer service skills.”</i>
Encourages Different Ways of Training	Employer #7: <i>“It just makes us think about different ways of teaching, which is really helpful, of things that I wouldn’t necessarily think of before...”</i>

As a follow-up question and discussion, participants were asked what they thought were the perceived benefits for youth with disabilities participating in a work-based learning program. From the interviews, responses were categorized into the following: growth/prep for the world of work, sense of purpose and accomplishment, and social skill development.

Growth/prep for World of Work. When discussing the perceived benefits for youth with disabilities participating in work-based learning programs, a majority of participants noted that youth mature and grow in the world of work. Employer 8 said it best by blunting stating that

the youth with disabilities are learning tools that they are going to need to survive in the world of work.

“Obviously, the benefit, I think, is for the students themselves getting to learn some of the tools they are going to need to survive in life.”

Sense of Purpose and Accomplishment. Several participants discussed how youth with disabilities may feel a sense of accomplishment when participating in a work-based learning program. Each participant that discussed this area mentioned that their achievements give the youth a sense of accomplishment and purpose. Employer 4 discussed an example of this:

“Oh, just having a purpose, having a place to go on a regular basis. I think that’s – and knowing that they did a good job, and getting a thank you for helping out.”

Social Skill Development. Several participants highlighted social skill development as a benefit that youth with disabilities get from participating in a work-based learning program. Employer 7 did well describing the importance of social skill development.

“I think those friendships are really important, feeling accepted, feeling part of a culture of a workplace that you’re accepted in is really important. I think that gives you a little boost of confidence when trying to go out and find jobs as well.”

Table 8.b. Perceived Benefits of a Work-Based Learning Program for Youth with Disabilities	
Sub-Area	Examples
Growth/Prep for the World of Work	Employer #8: <i>“Getting to learn some of the tools they are going to need to survive in life.”</i>
Sense of Purpose and Accomplishment	Employer #4: <i>“I think that’s – and knowing that they did a good job, and getting a thank you for helping out.”</i>
Social Skill Development	Employer #7: <i>“I think those friendships are really important, feeling accepted, feeling part of a culture of a workplace that you’re accepted in is really important.”</i>

Barriers and Challenges When Participating in a Work-Based Learning Program

While participants expressed positive aspects of work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities and employers, this particular question was asked to capture the challenges and

barriers employers encountered while participating in such programs. The question that was asked about what barriers and challenges exist when participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities and how such challenges were addressed. Participant responses were categorized into the following areas: staff, job coaching, an increasing minimum wage, transportation, youth skill set, and lack of awareness in addressing disability related events.

Staff. A few participants conveyed that their staff can be a barrier or a challenge while participating in a work-based learning program. Employer 1 talked about how patience was a barrier or challenge for his/her staff.

"It's making sure that myself and my staff is comfortable knowing that not everyone works at the same pace. And so, if anything this is a good learning experience for us as a team because we're taking on the care and compassion of an individual who is not at the same level of execution or acceptance that I have to hold my team to get the daily job done..."

In addition to patience, Employer 7 talked about how staff turnover can create a barrier when participating in a work-based learning program.

"I'll have a student come on board, and then, maybe, whoever's supervising them changes, it's not really fair to the student because it's not consistent..."

Employer 7 also discussed that it is difficult to manage staff turnover and have a youth on the employment site because, *"it creates too much change, and change can often times lead to creating frustration and confusion for the youth with disabilities."*

Job Coaching. A few participants noted that job coaches are a key stakeholder in implementing a work-based learning process. However, a few participants also discussed that job coaches can be a barrier in the process.

Employer 4 stressed how job coaches can sometimes be a barrier on the worksite. The quote below was a time that the job coach was too focused on doing the task perfectly, and standing over the youth giving them constant direction.

“The job coach wanted to make things perfect, and would always be standing over the student giving him direction after direction rather than letting the student try it himself. Perfect, it’s just not gonna happen, ‘cause it’s not gonna stay that way. That’s okay for me.”

An Increasing Minimum Wage. A few participants stressed that an increasing minimum wage can create a barrier in a work-based learning program. Employer 7 discussed that the goal of a work-based learning program is to provide work experience for youth with disabilities, but also to hopefully transition such youth into employment at the end of the program.

“One thing that is rough—I’m all for minimum wage going up, but it’s killing experiences like this for students because, the more we keep increasing minimum wage, it makes us, as the employer, have to really up the bar for what we expect from employees. There’s some students who I absolutely love to bring them on, but I really need somebody that has that college degree or doing more entry level stuff because it just keeps going up.”

Transportation. A few participants conveyed frustration with transportation and days off for the youth with disabilities in the work-based learning program. Employer 3’s tone of voice

during this point of the interview changed from gentle to harsh when speaking about the transportation for the youth.

“For me, the only thing that's been an issue is like if I have unplanned time off, or scheduling conflicts that I'm not aware of. So, like if the person just doesn't come in...so, that is really the only issue they really ever have is if they don't come in and I don't know about it because like I said there's a worry factor and then there's now I have to find somebody else to fill that position.”

Later, it was determined that the frustration that was noticed during the interview with Employer 3 was from trying to find staff to complete the tasks that the youth with disabilities were scheduled to complete that day. Employer 3 mentioned, *“It is like having any other employee call into work.”*

Youth Skill Set. During the interviews, a few participants mentioned that a barrier to participating in a work-based learning program is the skill set that the youth possess. Employer 7 described the potential of an improper job match between the youth and the tasks at the employment site.

“Another one I had was having the improper student for the task that you have. Here, I feel like there's a high degree of flexibility that we can work with different tasks that we have of different levels and, also—that's nice, but there's sometimes where I think, as an employer, it's just not a good fit. You have to know when to say, “This just isn't working.”

Employer 7 emphasized that if the fit between the youth skills and the tasks they are required to complete do not match that employers need to provide such information to program staff.

Employer 8 also noted that the work completed by youth may not be as high of quality as

that of other employees at the work site. This same participant emphasized that the tasks that the youth are completing may be difficult for them, and the quality of work that youth are completing may require employees to check the work that was completed.

“You are maybe not going to get the quality of work, but then you are not really paying for that work either. So, it is a very easy thing to live with. There are times where you have to circle back around and redo things, but I do not think that is a huge barrier or anything.”

Lack of Awareness in Addressing Disability Related Events. Several participants noted that they may have lack the ability to communicate and address various situations with the youth with disabilities. Employer 5 talked about how difficult it was for them to address a situation where a youth was not completing a task properly, and s/he relied on another staff member to speak with the youth about the situation.

“One thing that I found was that I had a really difficult time addressing something that didn’t go as I had it planned. I never actually did. One of my staff had to step in after another staff member left and ended up addressing this...I just wanted it to be pleasing to her, so I left it that way.”

Employer 2 brought back up the example of the student that had an emotional outburst on the worksite, and not knowing how to handle it.

“The biggest challenge I think was handling the situation with the student with emotional outbursts that took place in front of the public. I, personally, just felt unprepared to handle the situation and, as a manager, I felt like I should have been more equipped.”

Table 9. Barriers and Challenges When Participating in a Work-Based Learning Program	
Sub-Area	Examples
Staff	Employer #1: <i>"It's making sure that myself and my staff is comfortable knowing that not everyone works at the same pace..."</i>
	Employer #7: <i>"I'll have a student come on board, and then whoever's supervising them changes, it's not really fair to the student because it's not consistent..."</i>
Job Coaching	Employer #4: <i>"Perfect, it's just not gonna happen, 'cause it's not gonna stay that way. That's okay for me."</i>
An Increasing Minimum Wage	Employer #7: <i>"One thing that is rough—I'm all for minimum wage going up, but it's killing experiences like this for students because, the more we keep increasing minimum wage, it makes us, as the employer, have to really up the bar for what we expect from employees..."</i>
Transportation	Employer #3: <i>"Then there's now I have to find somebody else to fill that position..."</i>
Youth Skill Set	Employer #7: <i>"But there's sometimes where I think, as an employer, it's just not a good fit..."</i>
	Employer #8: <i>"You are maybe not going to get the quality of work, but then you are not really paying for that work either..."</i>
Lack of Awareness in Addressing Disability Related Events	Employer #5: <i>"I just wanted it to be pleasing to her, so I left it that way."</i>
	Employer #2: <i>"I, personally, just felt unprepared to handle the situation and, as a manager, I felt like I should have been more equipped."</i>

While interviewing participants, the researcher asked about policies that may create a barrier or challenge. A majority of participants stated that they did not or were not aware of any policies that may create barriers. The only policy that a few participants mentioned was safety policies. Employer 1 discussed a safety policy and items that they take into consideration when having youth with disabilities working on the sales floor.

"So, safety would be one; a safety policy in a case like this would be you know we have a few machines throughout the building that that we also have a very strict rule that under 18 team members will not be able to be used. And so, we have some off-limits areas for the students just to make sure that they're safe in the environment that they're working in..."

Types of Supports, Resources, and Accommodations

The researcher was interested in better understanding what participants find helpful when participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. Therefore, participants were asked to identify what types of supports, resources, and accommodations that they found helpful when participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. From the participant's responses, the following categories emerged: liaison to the program, job coaches, and youth interests and work history.

Liaison to the Program. Several participants mentioned during interviews that the liaison to the program was important and helpful for their participation in a work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. Employer 6, during the interview, stated that the liaison is there to assist when needed.

"It's nice to have a liaison here with them, that's very nice. I know that's probably good for—I mean there's times where I don't think they need to be here, because we can direct them also, but in the beginning, that's nice to have a liaison here with them to help out...Then the liaison stopping by, asking me if there is anything that needs to be addressed, talking about other potential students that may be coming to the worksite...."

Job Coaches. Many of the participants emphasized the importance of job coaches as helpful resources when participating in a work-based learning program. Employer 1 talked about job coaches as key elements to the success of the work-based learning programs.

"So, I think the job coach if anything was the key element in all this because then that way there is that not only that liaison with the students but in our case, we actually ran into a situation where a job coach was noticed by the public where they actually appreciated the fact that he was not only working with the students but was comfortable

enough to speak up and help out when needed; almost treated like a regular guest service team member in my building.”

Employer 8 supported what Employer 1 stated about job coaches being an important and helpful support and resource in participating in the work-based learning program because of the knowledge that they may have of the youth. During the interview, s/he stated, *“Job coaches are very, very helpful. For instance, they know the student well enough about what their capabilities were and what they could and could not do.”*

Youth Interests and Work History. A few participants discussed that having an understanding of the youth with disabilities previous work history, or even what tasks they may have completed in the past is helpful in determining what tasks they may be asked to complete on a work site. Employer 4 stated:

“... I know I got the printout of his previous work experiences and the things that he did there. That was helpful too. Just see what he’s done at other places, especially because he was at a library and a bookstore before, the kinds of things that he did there. If we can build on those things or find different things, so that he’s not doing the same thing.”

The researcher was interested in learning not only about what worked for participants currently, but what types of supports, resources, and accommodations they would like to see in the future when participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. The following categories emerged from the interviews with participants: information on students, supervisor evaluation, training on disability.

Information on Students. Several participants mentioned that having information about the youth with disabilities that participate in the work-based learning programs would be beneficial.

“Well, and the bio would be really helpful because when I had the one from X, I was able to post that in our employee Facebook group and send out an e-mail so everybody knew who she was, to see where she’s coming from or why she’s—but just some fun facts about her, just like I would do with any new employee.”

Supervisor Evaluation. A few participants indicated that having an opportunity to evaluate the youth at the end of the program would be something that would be beneficial. Employer 1 emphasized the importance and purpose of the evaluation from the supervisor for the youth.

“... in conjunction with that if it helps there that we would then you know closer to like the last week or the like wrap up of their time in the building; then I in turn would offer like a version somewhat of an evaluation form that the students could use as a future letter of recommendation that the students can show to an employer about the skills that they learned here and how well they performed overall.”

Training on Disability. A few participants stressed the importance of having training on disability in order to be better able to understand and communicate with the youth with disabilities in the work-based learning program. Employer 3 stated, *“I would like to be aware of that and maybe have some training in how to handle a situation with the outbursts. And that’s the biggest thing I would like for me is to be aware of their disability.”*

Table 10. Types of Supports, Resources, and Accommodations	
Sub-Area	Examples
Liaison to Program	Employer #6: <i>“It’s nice to have a liaison here with them, that’s very nice. I mean there’s times where I don’t think they need to be here, because we can direct them also, but in the beginning, that’s nice to have a liaison here with them to help out...”</i>
Job Coaches	Employer #1: <i>“...job coach was noticed by the public where they actually appreciated the fact that he was not only working with the students but was comfortable enough to speak up and help out when needed.”</i>

Table 10 (cont'd)	
	Employer #8: <i>"They know the student well enough about what their capabilities were and what they could and could not do."</i>
Youth Interests and Tasks	Employer #4: <i>"If we can build on those things or find different things, so that he's not doing the same thing."</i>
Information on Students	Employer #7: <i>"I was able to post that in our employee Facebook group and send out an e-mail so everybody knew who she was, to see where she's coming from..."</i>
Supervisor Evaluation	Employer #1: <i>"...offer like a version somewhat of an evaluation form that maybe the students could use as a future letter of recommendation..."</i>
Training on Disability Related Events	Employer #2: <i>"I would like to be aware of that and maybe have some training in how to handle a situation with the outbursts."</i>

Employment Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities

The last question in the interview asked participants how many of the youth with disabilities that participated in the work-based learning program they would hire. A majority of the participants did not give a specific number, but merely expressed that there were very few youth that they would not hire. The researcher followed-up by asking the characteristics of the youth with disabilities have that made the participant interested in hiring them. From the responses given by participants, the following categories emerged: passion and motivation to work, high social and customer service skills, and match between youth and job.

Passion and Motivation to Work. The majority of participants stated that passion and motivation to want to work was a primary reason for participants to want to hire the youth with disabilities in the work-based learning program. Employer 4 talked about the passion that was seen when the youth with disabilities were at the employment site how the youth had such a positive attitude while at work.

"...Well, he's in a good mood, pretty much all the time, so that's why it's true. It's nice to not have somebody come in and be like, "Oh, my gosh, happiness." A positive attitude. Always trying to remember people's names, he makes an effort with some of the regulars— to be polite to everybody, and he completes tasks."

In addition to passion to get the job done, as well as positive attitude, Employer 8 talked about work ethic. Employer 8 talked about motivation to want to work as overall work ethic that the youth demonstrated on the work site.

“Even though he may not be the fastest worker, he has a strong work ethic; he doesn't mind doing some of the tasks...like folding t-shirts, who wants to fold t-shirts?... Just awareness of his abilities to the point, but will advocate like "hey I am good at this, let me do it.”

High Social and Customer Service Skills. A few participants discussed high social skills and customer service skills as important reasons for being willing to hire youth with disabilities. Employer 7 emphasized the importance of communication and customer skills when working at their place of employment.

“The communication skills. As being an employer—and this takes into consideration the minimum wage spike—we need people that have—not only can they perform more basic entry level tasks, but they also need to be able to help the customer...You really have to be able to connect with people when you're doing customer service...”

Match Between Youth and Job. A few participants stressed the importance of the youth with disabilities being appropriately matched to the employment site and the tasks that the youth would be required to complete. Employer 6 discussed the atmosphere of the employment site, and how the culture of the employment site is an important when considering hiring a young person with a disability.

“...That's another thing, about having fun, they were all goofy with me, they all had fun. It was good. It was a good time when they were here. That's just—the two things I look for when I hire people, can you have fun? Because I am fun kind of guy and I try to bring

that to the employment site, and my employees can all have fun. They all have a good time. Are they gonna work? You can do both, it's balancing it. They need to match the already culture that is here to be successful, otherwise drama can happen and the person may just be unhappy about working here."

Table 11. Employment Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities	
Sub-Area	Examples
Passion and Motivation to Work	Employer #4: <i>"Always trying to remember people's names, he makes an effort with some of the regulars– to be polite to everybody, and he completes tasks."</i>
	Employer #8: <i>"Even though he may not be the fastest worker, he has a strong work ethic..."</i>
High Social and Customer Service Skills	Employer 7: <i>"Not only can they perform more basic entry level tasks, but they also need to be able to help the customer...you really have to be able to connect with people when you're doing customer service..."</i>
Match Between Youth and Job	Employer #6: <i>"They need to match the already culture that is here to be successful, otherwise drama can happen and the person may just be unhappy about working here."</i>

Final Thoughts

At the end of the interviews, participants were asked by the researcher if there were any final thoughts they would like to add regarding work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. Several of the participants had positive comments about work-based learning programs. Employer 7, at the end of the interview, asked the researcher to come back into the room so that s/he could say the following:

"I know that I dissected some situations that didn't go so well, but I'd say, overall, the program's been really helpful to the store, and I love being partnered with these programs, and I wish more employers would actually take it into consideration instead of just quickly hanging up. Or, if they have had one experience where it didn't go so well, I wish they'd give it another go because we've tried it so many times, and every experience is so different."

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Given the plethora of WBL programs and the poor employment outcomes of youth with disabilities, it would be helpful to know what factors characterize effective WBL programs. Little existing research has focused on WBL, and a significant dearth of research is from the perspective of employers involved in providing WBL to youth with disabilities. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to use a qualitative approach to develop a model of work-based learning for youth with disabilities from the perspective of employers. Given that there is limited empirical research on WBL, and that a high percentage of youth with disabilities that continue to live in poverty and are unemployed, additional data is needed to help guide families, practitioners, and employers working with youth with disabilities related to what WBL consists of, and ultimately looks like. Therefore, the present study aimed to answer the following research questions: How do employers describe work-based learning; and what factors do employers believe are important in the successful execution of a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities?

Based on the results of the study presented in Chapter 4, the Employer Work-Based Learning (EWBL) Model was developed. The EWBL Model, as shown in Figure 12, is described below. In addition, the strengths and limitations of the study, along with implications of the EWBL Model for practice, policy, and research are discussed.

Employer Work-Based Learning Model

The EWBL is comprised of 5 major components including role of the employer, critical factors, key stakeholders, challenges to program implementation, and target program outcomes. Each of these components are discussed below.

Table 12. Employer Work-Based Learning Model			
Theme	Sub-Heading	Sub-Area	Implications/Interpretations
Role of Employer			
	Responsibilities to Students & Program		
		Liaison	Understanding of the responsibilities between liaison and program coordinator; participation in developing the work-based learning program with program coordinator.
		Supervise	Cooperation of all staff in supervising youth; participation in supervision training for work-based learning programs.
	Experience in a Work-Based Learning Program		
		Disabilities vs. Without Disabilities	Employers are sensitive and understand youth with disabilities can perform same or similar tasks to youth without disabilities; youth with disabilities may need different types of training to perform tasks such as their peers without disabilities.
		Length of Time on Worksite	Employers need to be aware of what the length of time the youth will be on the worksite.
		Support to Program Coordinator	Employers need to be aware of how often the program coordinator will visit throughout duration of program; Program coordinator needs to not only observe and assess the youth, but also check-in with employer to assess needs.
		Rotation of Tasks	Employers need to be aware of the requirements to rotate tasks; rotation of tasks should first be remedial and then should rotate after mastery to allow youth to master a set of tasks before switching to others.
		Structured Tasks	Youth need to understand what employers expect from them on the worksite; Employers need to communicate expectations to youth and work with youth to set goals to achieve expectations.

Table 12 (cont'd)			
Theme	Sub-Heading	Sub-Area	Implications/Interpretations
Critical Factors			
	Design of a Work-Based Learning Program		
		Coordinator/Liaison	Need for a coordinator to create, gather paperwork, and find placement sites for youth; Consider the liaison/coordinators need for recruitment of youth with disabilities into future work-based learning programs.
		Exit Interview	Better understanding of what the youth learned at the worksite; better understanding of what the employer could do to improve their work-based learning program.
		Daily Log	Youth understand the nature of the daily log and implications for writing down daily tasks; need for youth to have training in self-efficacy; need for youth to break-down the type of tasks and be able to identify likes and dislikes.
		Application Process	Need for youth to have an understanding of the application process; Allows employers the chance to meet the youth and learn more about them prior to the start of program; Youth need training in pre-employment skills (i.e. resume development, interviewing, appropriate dress).
		Youth Tasks	Youth understand nature of the work they will be doing on a daily basis; Supervisors and staff understand what youth is doing each day; Job coaches need to know what is expected of the youth; Program coordinator will understand nature of the work the youth is performing at worksite; Need for teachers to incorporate self-determination into the classroom curriculum.
	Special Considerations		
		Restrictions/Accommodations	Understanding of the types of tasks that are available at worksite and if there are accommodations available for youth to perform essential functions of job; Need for employers to have training in different ways of teaching tasks to youth (i.e. individualistic way of learning); Need for youth, parent, and teacher/para professional to visit worksite prior to start of program to ensure there is a match between the worksite and youth.
		Transportation & Attendance	Need for assistance in arranging transportation to and from the worksite; Need for transportation training and the use of public transportation systems.

Table 12 (cont'd)			
Theme	Sub-Heading	Sub-Area	Implications/Interpretations
		Behaviors Related to Disability	Need for employers to cooperate with para professionals/teachers and program coordinator in addressing behaviors related to disability; Open communication about youth and their disability needs to occur for employers to have be able to develop an understanding of potential needs of youth.
		Student Expectations	Employer needs to be clear on how they expect the youth to dress, and what tasks they expect them to complete; Student expectations need to be communicated to teachers/para professionals, as well as parents to assist in the youth understanding expectations of the employment site; Need for employers, staff, and program coordinator to ensure youth is being observed and re-directed as needed to keep them on track.
	Types of Supports, Accommodations, & Resources		
		Liaison to Program	Understand risks for providing too much information to other staff that could create negative stigma towards youth; Understand risks of providing too much support to employer; Create training that promotes independence, work ethic, and positive workplace behaviors; Participates in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to discuss strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations for youth; Develops training to help employers and staff better understand various types of disabilities; Provide ongoing support to employment site throughout work-based learning experience.
		Youth Interests/Work History	Need for employers to allow youth to develop self-efficacy by identifying tasks they enjoy completing; Employers need to understand not only the previous tasks a youth complete, but how well did s/he complete the task (i.e. is it something that they need additional work on); Para professionals/teachers need examples of youth work and tasks that they can successfully complete and struggle with.
		Supervisor Evaluation	Need for employers and staff to work together with program liaison to create supervisor evaluation; Need for employers and staff to identify key factors that are important to obtaining employment to worksite; Need for all staff at employment site to be part of the evaluation process.

Table 12 (cont'd)			
Theme	Sub-Heading	Sub-Area	Implications/Interpretations
		Job Coaches	Job Coaches provide an additional level of support to liaison to program and employment site; Need for job coach to understand various type of job coaching techniques (i.e. passive, non-passive, hands-on, etc.).
		Information on Students	Employers have knowledge of nature of disability; Employers are aware of areas of strength and weakness of youth; Understand risks for providing too much information to other staff that could create negative stigma towards youth.
		Training on Disability	Need for employers and staff to have training on various types of disabilities; Employers continue to work with staff on disability related training; Employers implement various methods of teaching tasks and addressing customers based on disability related training; Employers need to have information on community resources that are available to youth and employment site.
Key Stakeholders			
		Employees/Staff	Staff has training in various accommodations and training techniques to use when teaching youth; Staff has supervision training in order to better serve the youth they may be supervising; Need for staff to be invested in participating in the work-based learning program.
		Para Professionals/Teachers	Need for understanding of the world of work; Need for understanding of current job openings; Aligning transition goals with employment opportunities post-school; Address the training of paraprofessionals and direct support staff to assure that these personnel can fulfill their role of supporting special education teachers and youth with disabilities making the transition into the community; Ensure that special education, vocational rehabilitation, and human services personnel possess the skills and knowledge required to address the transition service needs of youth with disabilities.
		Employers	Employers are aware of their needs at the employment site; Employers communicate the nature of the work the youth will be expected to complete; Employers communicate their needs and expectations to the program coordinator.

Table 12 (cont'd)			
Theme	Sub-Heading	Sub-Area	Implications/Interpretations
		Job Coach	Job coaches understand workplace expectations; Need for job coaches to act as another staff member at the worksite.
		Parents/Family	Participation in Work-Based Learning training (i.e. how to promote independence, how to promote work ethic, how to reinforce positive social behaviors); Commit to maximum independence for their child.
		Upper Management	Need for upper management to better understand work-based learning programs; Need for upper management to have familiarity of which employment sites within the company are participating in a work-based learning program to assist in getting word out about program; Need for upper management to provide guidance to staff at employment sites based on company policies and standards.
Challenges to Program Implementation			
	Barriers & Challenges		
		Staff	Staff have knowledge of the youth with disability; Need for staff to have training in handling interpersonal conflict.
		An Increasing Minimum Wage	Need for teachers, transition coordinators, program coordinators, school professionals, and rehabilitation counselors to have knowledge of what entry level positions are requiring.
		Youth Skillset	Need to ensure there is a good match between the employment site and youth skillset; Need to understand employment site to avoid negative experience for employer and youth; Youth need to understand if postsecondary education may be needed to advance in company; Youth need continued career development and training to understand if potential employment assists in becoming independent.
		Job Coaches	Need for training in self-determination; Need for training in understanding scaffolding learning; Understand nature of disability and implications for giving feedback; Awareness of and sensitive to other work staff; Understand risks to providing too much support; Job coaches need training in assisting how to identify additional tasks that youth could perform on the worksite when time permits.

Table 12 (cont'd)			
Theme	Sub-Heading	Sub-Area	Implications/Interpretations
		Transportation	Employers need to have knowledge of the type of transportation youth is using to get to work (i.e. public transportation, parent or friend, or school bus); Communication should occur so that employers are knowledgeable if youth is running late; Employers need to know beforehand days that youth will not be at worksite.
		Lack of Awareness in Addressing Disability Related Events	Need for employers to have training and knowledge in disabilities; Need for employers to have resources that can be accessed to help eliminate or de-escalate a situation when occurring on the worksite.
Targeted Program Outcomes			
	Perceived Benefits to Employer		
		Understanding People with Disabilities Better	Consider the need for employers to implement open to various hiring techniques to accommodate persons with disabilities (i.e. paper applications versus online applications); Employers can educate staff on disabilities to reduce stigma of hiring persons with disabilities; Need for awareness of hiring persons with disabilities.
		Relationships/Community Partnerships	Consider the need for employers to interconnect together many resources and strategies to enhance communities that support youth with disabilities and families; Need for employers and school personnel (i.e. transition coordinators, para professionals, teachers) to have knowledge of what is available; Consider community service agencies and school personnel participate systematically in the development of transition plans; Consider for the need for employers to establish partnerships with workforce development entities.
		Satisfaction of Seeing Youth Mature	Employers have the opportunity to observe the youth being a valuable asset to the team and meeting the needs of the employer; Employers are able to discuss in detail and give specific examples of the youth performing certain job functions; Employers demonstrate excitement and gratitude for the work the youth perform; Employers develop an investment in the program that benefits youth with disabilities.

Table 12 (cont'd)			
Theme	Sub-Heading	Sub-Area	Implications/Interpretations
		Assists Staff	Staff understand the youth with disabilities skillset; Staff are aware of youth with disabilities level of comfortableness and ability to perform tasks independently; Explore opportunities for creating part-time positions to assist staff on specific days at employment site; Staff have an opportunity to observe the youth being a valuable asset to the team.
		Enhance Staff Customer Service	Staff will have more awareness of meeting customer needs and developing patience when working with different types of customers; Consider the increased professional development of the staff.
		Encourages Different Ways of Teaching	Employers can consider other methods of instructing new employees how to complete tasks; Employers need to demonstrate other methods of teaching to their staff to assist in meeting any employees needs when learning new tasks; Allows for employers to view each staff as an individual that may have different needs than other staff.
	Perceived Benefits to Youth with Disabilities		
		Growth/Prep in World of Work	Consider the need of educating youth with disabilities about their disability; Youth with disabilities need to increase their awareness of types of accommodations they could need on the worksite; Youth with disabilities may develop a better understanding of real life issues as they experience them on the worksite; Consider that youth with disabilities will be connected with an adult role model and a future recommendation for employment.
		Social Skill Development	Youth with disabilities understand and develop skills needed to effectively work with co-workers and supervisors; Youth with disabilities recognize and are able to identify specific areas of interest related to a future career.
		Sense of Purpose/Accomplishment	Consider the motivation youth with disabilities develop in regards to their skills, as well as future employment; Youth with disabilities develop or have increased self-confidence to assume responsibility and make decisions regarding future.
	Employment Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities		

Table 12 (cont'd)			
Theme	Sub-Heading	Sub-Area	Implications/Interpretations
		Passion & Motivation to Work	Employers recognize youth with disabilities value to the company and motivation to come to work every day; Youth with disabilities have an increase in participation in school; Graduation rates for youth with disabilities increase.
		Match Between Youth & Job	Ensure prior to each youth graduating from high school that their IEP team assists the youth in identifying various employment opportunities and what the job requirements are; Need for youth with disabilities to be involved in career exploration opportunities to explore what employment sites youth may be interested in being placed at; Employers reduce training costs by hiring youth with disabilities from work-based learning programs who are already trained.
		High Social & Customer Service Skills	Consider need to incorporate social skill development techniques into school curriculum; Need for parents, employers, and teachers to collaborate to reinforce positive high social and customer service skills in-and-out of school.

Role of the Employer

Previous literature that discusses work-based learning does not discuss the responsibilities of employers that are working directly with the youth with disabilities. However, data from the current study indicated that participants perceived that their responsibility to the program was to supervise and be the liaison between the employment site and the coordinator of the work-based learning program. The Tennessee Department of Education (2016) highlighted that quality WBL experiences are defined by experiences that are high quality for youth with disabilities. Consistent with the findings in the current study, under the umbrella of quality experiences, the Tennessee Department of Education (2016) highlights that close supervision is a requirement of a quality work-based learning program. In the current study, the majority of participants had experience in work-based learning programs that were executed in-house (i.e. by the employer), or were for an individual with versus without disabilities. Previous literature does not discuss how experience in work-based learning programs influence employer's opinions on their responsibility to programs for youth with disabilities.

Critical Factors

Design of work-based learning program. The data gathered in the current study is consistent with how previous literature defines criteria for high quality WBL programs. Participants were asked to describe how they believed a work-based learning program should be designed for youth with disabilities. The Tennessee Department of Education (2016) indicated that opportunities for reflection and analysis, as well as documentation of student learning are part of a quality work-based learning program. In relation to current study results, participants highlighted that a daily log at the end of each day on the work site could assist the youth in remembering what they did that day, but also to reflect back on what they learned.

Additionally, participants noted that an exit interview should part of the overall design of a work-based learning program. Exit interviews provide youth with disabilities with the opportunity to talk about things that they liked, did not like, what they found difficult, and what they found easy. An exit interview provides youth the opportunity to identify things that they enjoyed and didn't enjoy, as well as apply such awareness to future placements and career interests. Also, exit interviews gives the employer an understanding of how the company can be better at including and serving individuals with disabilities within their organization.

The present study found that participants would like to integrate more opportunities for reflection and analysis within the overall work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. Further, the desire for opportunities for reflection and analysis supports previous literature discussing successful transition strategies. Enhanced knowledge of the self and a future vision of the self are based on self-awareness; which consists of awareness of personal strengths and values (Park, 2008; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Specifically, examples participants gave were the use of daily logs and exit interviews to provide youth with disabilities the opportunity to self-reflect.

The current study is unique in that in addition to the opportunities for reflection and analysis, participants noted youth tasks as important when designing a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. While previous literature indicates that a quality work-based learning program should have a purposeful focus on applied learning in preparation for postsecondary education and careers (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016, p.4), participants went one-step further stating that the method in which the tasks are taught to the youth are an important component in the design of work-based learning programs. As such, not only should the tasks that the youth are given have a purposeful focus, but the type of tasks and

the way in which the youth are taught are important considerations as well. Several participants mentioned that the youth tasks are a vital part of the design of a work-based learning program. Employer's emphasized the need for structure, daily tasks so youth know what to expect, being well versed in routine tasks, and the importance of teaching and understanding the tasks from the perspective of the youth with disabilities.

Special Considerations. Considerable research has focused on employer's perceptions about hiring individuals with disabilities; such as the need for a flexible work schedule, negative work attitudes, and the inability to perform the essential functions of the job (Burke, et al., 2013; Ali et al., 2011; Shier et al., 2009). Specifically, one area that employers typically fear when it comes to hiring individuals with disabilities is the cost of accommodations (Kaye et al., 2011). More specifically, factors related to early termination for youth with disabilities were related to transportation problems (Pebdani, 2014), disability and work (Lindsay et al., 2014), and workplace expectations (Carter & Wehby, 2003). The current study probed for special considerations that participants took into consideration when participating in work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. Example of special considerations are attendance, behaviors related to disability, level of independence, skill sets, level of communication, and functional limitations.

Additionally, previous research highlights work and disability as a barrier to employment and a factor in early termination for youth with disabilities (Ali et al., 2011). The current study supports previous research based on employer's responses when asked about special considerations when participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. A study conducted by Pebdani (2014) found interpersonal conflict with supervisor and coworkers, as well as inappropriate behaviors with an employment representative were a reason

for early termination for youth with disabilities. Further, a study conducted by Lindsay et al. (2014) supported the findings from Pebdani (2014) that disability and work was a barrier to employment for youth with disabilities.

In the current study, participants discussed that youth may have an outburst on the work floor or at the work site that participants and staff were unsure of how to handle. Members of the work based learning program were considered as having more opportunities than others, and participants extended this statement by saying that if an individual who had a behavioral outburst were a paid employee, that the employee would have been suspended or even fired. On the other hand, participants also reported that youth with disabilities in the program were given more opportunities to demonstrate appropriate work behaviors than their co-workers without disabilities.

Types of supports, accommodations, and resources. The data gathered in the current study is consistent with previous literature which defines a quality WBL program. Participants were asked to name types of supports, accommodations, and resources that they believed were important when participating in a WBL program for youth with disabilities. The Tennessee Department of Education (2016) emphasized the importance for a high-quality work-based learning program to be relevant to the students' interests. In relation to the current study results, participants emphasized the importance and need to have information on the youth's career interests and previous work history so that youth may complete tasks of interest, as well as not perform similar tasks that they may have already completed at another employment site.

Further, The Tennessee Department of Education (2016) stresses the importance for a high quality WBL program to have ongoing interaction with the industry and community, evaluative measures that facilitate continuous improvement, and communication materials to

keep parents, students, and employers informed. The participants in the current study expressed interest in supervisor evaluations that would allow for parents, schools, and other employers that work directly with the youth to see areas of strength and weakness that the youth demonstrates at the worksite.

Key Stakeholders

Quality work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities identifies parents, employers, teachers/educators, and students as important and key stakeholders (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2013). Interestingly, while participants in the current study also identified parents/family, employers, and para professionals/teachers as key stakeholders in WBL, employers also identified employees/staff, job coaches, and upper management as key stakeholders in WBL.

In the current study, participants were asked to describe the type of involvement of various key stakeholders in a WBL program. Participants from the study stated they wanted key stakeholders to provide guidance and training, as well as support and to have familiarity of the work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. For example, many participants emphasized that they would like for upper management to provide guidance to the employer participating in the work-based learning program, as well as simply understand the program more and support the participation in such a program.

It is interesting to note that youth with disabilities was not once mentioned as key stakeholder in the participation of work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities, even though previous literature highlighted them as a key stakeholder. The question that participants were asked is who they thought are important key stakeholders to include in the process of developing and implementing work-based learning. Participants, when thinking about this

question, may have overlooked youth with disabilities as a key stakeholder because of the use of the word 'develop'.

However, youth with disabilities are an important of the developing in a work-based learning program. Morningstar, Kleinhammer-Tramill, and Lattin (1999) highlight that special education professionals are trained to focus on the youth with disabilities needs, take into account their strengths and interests, and develop transition plans that meet these unique support needs. This is considered student-center planning; where the student's needs are what drives the development of a transition plan to prepare them for the transition into the world of work.

Within the concept of student-center planning is self-determination, which is considered is considered a best practice within the transition literature (Morningstar, et al., 1999; Wehmeyer, 1998). Self-determination is considered to be part of the student-center process because it allows the youth with disabilities to communicate and identify their own personal and career interests. Therefore, by if a youth identifies a career field they would like to explore, or even skills they would like to develop, this drives the types of experiences and potential worksites that they may be placed at. Student-center planning and self-determination are the first step in the development of a work-based learning program (i.e. the youth with disabilities advocates for the opportunity to be placed in the community).

Challenges to Program Implementation and Delivery

Domzal et al. (2008) conducted a study which found that employer's attitudes towards individuals with disabilities created a major barrier to hiring individuals with disabilities. The current study found that staff at the various employment sites can be a barrier or challenge when participating in a work-based learning program. For example, one participant talked about how attitudes towards people with disabilities and the lack of patience in working with individuals

with disabilities was a barrier or challenge for the employer when participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities.

In addition, staff turnover was reported as a barrier and challenge when participating in a work-based learning program. Participants emphasized that the challenge of staff turnover relates to ongoing and increased change for both the employer and youth with disability. One participant, in particular, went on to state that high staff turnover is not fair to the youth with disability participating in the program; especially if they thrive off consistency and structure. The example that the participant from the study gave was when a youth with a disability was unsure of who the new staff was that was working in the department, it confusing to them as to who they should report to.

Interestingly, while job coaches were identified as a key stakeholder in work-based learning program for youth with disabilities, a few participants discussed that job coaches can also be a barrier for employers and potentially for the youth with disabilities. What the participants emphasized is that job coaches need to know how to work with youth with disabilities and communicate effectively with employers. Participants emphasized that if a job coach does not understand what is expected of them, then it only creates more work for the employment site.

Job coaching is viewed as an accommodation and/or job retention technique that is implemented any time the youth is on-site. Job coaches can be with the youth full-time, part-time, or however long the youth needs. At some point, the job coach is expected to “fade” from the worksite. Fading occurs once the job coach, employer, and the youth are comfortable completing tasks more independently or no longer relies on the job coach. Job coaches are typically on the worksite assisting the youth in learning new tasks (Emel, 2000). The critical role

of job coaches is to mediate the needs of the worker with the employer and staff (Isbister & Donaldson, 1987). What is meant by this is that job coaches are to not only teach and help the youth learn new tasks, but also to develop natural supports on the worksite that will be there once the job coach fades.

Natural supports on the worksite are considered to be coworkers or supervisors in the workplace (Corbiere, Lecomte, Lesage, Villotti, Bond, & Goldner, 2014). These supports happen in the workplace “naturally” and are when coworkers or supervisors in the workplace offer any needed assistance to learn new tasks (Corbiere, et al., 2014). Natural supports are meant to exist as a resource for youth during the duration of their employment at that worksite.

While participants in the current study did not specifically address quality of work and work performance of the youth with disabilities as being a barrier or challenge, they did note the issue of minimum wage. Participants in the current study emphasized that because minimum wage is increasing, the expectations and responsibilities of their employees are also increasing. Such a situation may create difficulties for those youth with disabilities who have limited skill sets.

Targeted Program Outcomes

Benefits to Employers. When participants discussed the perceived benefits that employers get from participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities, the responses were consistent with previous literature on the benefits to employers. For example, the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning (2013) emphasized that the benefits to employers of work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities included better prepared employees, reduced recruitment and training costs, improvement of morale and management skills of current workers, and derived value from student work. In the current study,

participants also described understanding people with disabilities better, satisfaction of seeing the youth with disabilities mature in the world of work, and the development of relationships/community partnerships as benefits to employers.

Benefits to Youth with Disabilities. Participants were asked to discuss the benefits of participating in a work-based learning program for the youth with disabilities. Three major themes emerged from the interviews. The three themes were (1) growth and preparation for the world of work, (2) a sense of purpose and accomplishment, and (3) social skills development. These findings are consistent with the current literature regarding the benefits of a WBL program for youth with disabilities (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, & Learning, 2013; Tennessee Department of Education, 2016). The vast majority of participants noted that work-based learning benefits youth with disabilities because it gives them a real-world opportunity to experience the world of work without external pressure and fear of failure. Further, one participant stated that work-based learning programs give youth with disabilities an opportunity to learn what you cannot learn in a classroom or a textbook. The participant went on to state that the youth develops social skills, and learns what it means to go to work daily.

Employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. The labor market is continuously changing (Buchmann, 2002), and it is important when working with employers to understand what knowledge, skills, and potential they expect in potential employees. Customized employment and job carving is a job development tool and strategy often implemented when placing individuals with disabilities (Luecking et al., 2006). However, as participants in the current study indicated, with the minimum wage increasing, employees are being asked to hold more responsibilities and are held to higher work expectations than in the past. Chan et al. (2010) emphasized the importance of rehabilitation professionals to identify demand

occupations, as well as working as human resource consultants to help employers make job modifications and accommodations in order to identify, recruit, and retain qualified individuals with disabilities for specific jobs. Therefore, rehabilitation professionals assisting youth with disabilities in finding and securing work experiences through work-based learning programs and securing potential employment post-school need to be knowledgeable of employer need and expectations.

In the current study, participants were asked to discuss what characteristics youth with disabilities should have in order for employers to be interested in hiring them. The majority of participants discussed the passion and motivation of the youth with disabilities as a reason they would hire them. Participants not only talked about youth passion to want to work, but the overall attitude of the youth. One participant discussed how the youth with disability placed at his/her site was always in a good mood and willing to take on tasks that other employees may not see as 'enjoyable'. The example that was given was folding t-shirts.

Participants in the current study also identified strong social and customer services skills as a reason for wanting to hire a youth with disability that participated in a work-based learning program. Research on successful transition services has shown that youth with disabilities with higher social skills have been more likely to be employed after transitioning from school to work and adult life (King et al., 2005). One participant in the current study viewed high quality social skills as the ability to fit into the culture of the employment site by getting along with and working well with the other employees. Further, the results of the current study indicated that a fit between the youth and the employment site are important. One participant discussed how the fit between the youth and the atmosphere and culture of the employment site is an important factor in relation to potentially being hired. Therefore, effective social skills, customer service

skills, and fit between the youth with disability and culture of the workplace are all critical factors in relation to potentially being hired by an employer.

What Was Left Unsaid

From previous literature and knowledge of special education services for youth with disabilities, there were topics that were not discussed during the interviews with participants that may influence the participation and design of work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. These topics are legal/liability and transition coordinators.

Participants were probed about any policies that may influence their participation in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities, and while a few mentioned safety procedures, majority of participants stated none. While safety is a legal and liability issue, other legal and liability issues that employers may be unaware or did not think of are Child Labor Laws; Work-Based Learning Program requirements as mandated by the State of Michigan; and liability insurance coverage for youth that are not paid or an actual documented employee of the employment site, but have a risk of getting injured on the worksite.

Additionally, when participants were asked who key stakeholders are in the implementation of work-based learning programs, transition coordinators were not mentioned. Whether transition coordinators were considered under the umbrella of ‘teachers’ is unknown; however, transition coordinators are important in the work-based learning process because they are responsible for the developing of transition plans for youth, conduct vocational assessments, ensure post-secondary school referrals for youth preparing for graduation, and coordination between schools and local resources to provide vocational opportunities for youth with disabilities (Park, 2008).

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

A strength of the current study is that the participants were employers who directly participated in work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. As such, employers are speaking and reporting on their own personal experiences of participating in a WBL program. Previous literature that has examined work-based learning programs have not focused on employer's perceptions of work-based learning, but rather the program design, implementation, and benefits (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016; Manufacturing Advocacy & Growth Network, 2013; Minnesota Department of Children, Families, & Learning, 2013). Therefore, the current study provides insights into the employer mindset of those participating in work-based learning programs, which is imperative for promoting WBL at other employment sites, and for future growth of these types of programs.

Further, another strength of the current study is that the researcher felt that adequate and quality data was collected to support the study. In other others, the data collected was analyzed until no new data appeared and all concepts that are outlined in the EWBL model are well-developed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). All participants in the study were asked the same questions, and all probes were also the same for each participant of the study. During interviews, the researcher noticed participants discussing similar concepts as others in previous interviews during the data collection process. Further, when analyzing the data, it became apparent that the data was saturated because no new concepts and themes emerged from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

However, the current study has several limitations that need to be noted when considering the results. First, sample homogeneity limits the extent to which results can be generalized to other employers and other WBL programs. Each of the 7 employer participants was located in

the Lansing, MI area. As such, additional research with different types of employers in different geographic areas is needed to validate results of the current study.

While the researcher anticipated an average of 60 minute interviews, the interviews in the current study averaged 34.47 minutes in length. During interviews, regardless of where and when the interviews took place, interruptions occurred and last-minute meetings would arise. Such a data collection process resulted in many interviews being cut short, which limited the length and depth of participant responses. While the workplace disruptions created another limitation in this study there were several interviews that surpassed the 60-minute time frame. In an attempt to accommodate the interruptions and last-minute meetings, the researcher returned to the participants for follow-up questions and a review of the interview transcription to solicit any additional feedback or comments. Further, the data obtained in the current study are limited based on the small number of research participants recruited to participate in the study. The limited number of participants that comprised the volunteer, convenience sample precludes generalization of findings to other employers participating in work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities.

Finally, because of the researcher's previous work history within the geographic area, and because employers were specifically targeted based on their participation in work-based learning programs, both the researcher and participant may have been biased during the course of the study. Due to familiarity with the researcher, participants may have responded to questions with a positive lens when discussing their participation in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. On the other hand, it is important to note that any previous relationships between the researcher and participants could have allowed for participants to feel more

comfortable discussing their perspective in participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities.

Implications of the Employer Work-Based Learning Model

Previous literature has examined employer perceptions of hiring individuals with disabilities, successful transition services, and factors that comprise high quality work-based learning programs (Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, 2013; Tennessee Department of Education, 2016). The findings of the present study are consistent with previous research and suggest practice, policy, and research implications for work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities.

Practice Implications

There are multiple key stakeholders that are involved in implementing a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. Study results suggest implications for employers, public schools, community rehabilitation programs, and state vocational rehabilitation agencies.

Employers. The State of Michigan has a guidelines and resources document which states that work-based learning programs be a planned program of job training and other employment experiences related to a chosen career (State of Michigan, 2011). The learning experience for the youth may be paid or unpaid, and may be engaged for one hour or more, depending on the availability within the youth's school schedule. The experience must take place during scheduled school hours, and youth are expected to only participate in a work-based learning program when school is in session (i.e. no work on snow days, testing days, or school field trips).

Additionally, work-based learning programs for unpaid positions must follow the Youth Employment/Child Labor Laws. What this requires is that unpaid positions must rotate tasks every 45 days to ensure that the youth are expanding their skill sets and knowledge of the world

of work. Therefore, implications for practice for employers should examine how employers are rotating tasks, as well as identifying new tasks for youth with disabilities so that they are abiding by youth employment and child labor laws.

Public Schools. Based on the results from the current study, it is important for para professionals and teachers who are working directly in the work-based learning program and the youth with disability to have knowledge of the youth with disabilities interests, previous work history, as well as potential accommodations needed on the employment site. Additionally, a few participants in the current study stressed the importance of the youth with disabilities being appropriately matched to the employment site and the tasks that the youth would be required to complete. Therefore, it is important for para professionals and teachers involved in the work-based learning program to not only have knowledge of the youth with disabilities, but also have knowledge of the job requirements to ensure a match between the youth and the job.

Further, the results from the current study and EWBL model could assist in strengthen existing curriculums for youth with disabilities. Teachers and/or transition coordinators may integrate into the day-to-day process opportunities for youth to reflect on work experiences in class discussions; journaling what they learned as a method for reflection; complete end-of-the-year portfolios that gives the youth an opportunity to reflect on the work experiences they had that year; and end-of-course or end-of-semester projects that are related to work experiences. These types of activities that could potentially be integrated into the education curriculum is a way for youth to make connections between the classroom and real-world experiences.

Community Rehabilitation Programs. From the current study, several participants mentioned that the liaison to the program was important and helpful for their participation in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. For example, the majority of

participants emphasized that the liaison was vital to any work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. The liaison can be individuals contracted from community rehabilitation programs, and their responsibilities are to gather all the paperwork that is needed for both the youth and employer to participate in the program, as well as assist in coordinating and arranging transportation for the youth to get to the employment site. In addition, the liaison may be responsible for developing the sites and working with the para professionals and teachers in placing the youth based on their skills and interests. Further, the results from the current study emphasizes that the liaison frequently visited work sites to check-in on the youth, as well as assisting employers with any issues that may be occurring on the worksite.

Policy Implications

Funding. Policy implications based on the results of the current study include funding, qualified personnel, and employer training and ongoing support. Regarding funding, WIOA requirements that at least 15% of state VR agency service funds be dedicated to youth transition services will help facilitate the ongoing development and implementation of WBL programs (Schroeder, 2014). It is critical for public school systems and community rehabilitation programs to work efficiently and collaboratively with state VR agencies in order to design and deliver high quality WBL programs. It is also important to identify a variety of sources of funding for WBL programs and equitable criteria for selecting and enrolling youth with disabilities in WBL programs with resource limitations.

Employer Training and Ongoing Support. Results from the current study indicated that participants had a lack of understanding of how to address disability related issues on the work site, which was considered a barrier in participating in work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. Participants indicated that a future support, resource, and

accommodation was to receive training in how to address disability related issues on the work site, as well as receive ongoing support after the work-based learning program concluded. What is unclear is who would be responsible for providing and implementing the disability related training, as well as providing the ongoing support to employers once the work-based learning program has concluded.

Implications for Future Research

Diverse Demographic Locations. The current study was based in the Lansing, Michigan area. Future research could expand the current study to other geographic locations in order to further define the EWBL model and gain valuable knowledge on perceptions of employers that are located in varying geographic locations.

Diverse Employer Types. The current study had participants from the following types of employment settings: retail, fitness/customer service, as well as art, culture and education. Additionally, the current study had participants from the following employment industries: retail, non-profit, fitness, and bookstore. Future research should expand the employer industry types in order to develop a more comprehensive picture of employer perspectives on WBL programs for youth with disabilities.

Larger Sample Size. The current study had eight total participants based on a volunteer, convenience sample. Future research should attempt to include more participants and employers selected on a random basis. Such a methodological approach would allow the results to be more useful to a broader audience of employers and WBL program service providers.

Research with Key Stakeholders. An extension of the current study that examines parents/families, students, job coaches, and teachers/educators' perspectives of work-based learning for youth with disabilities would facilitate the development of a more comprehensive

model of WBL. Further, additional quantitative and qualitative research studies are needed to further develop and define work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities, as well as overall services to youth with disabilities that have the potential to increase successful transition from school to work and adult life.

EWBL in Practice. The EWBL Model developed in the current study can be used to develop a measure of employer work-based learning program awareness and support needs. The measure can be used as a way for employers, as well as other key stakeholders, to identify employer needs when participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. Additionally, such a measure could be useful for disseminating information to other employers that may be interested in participating in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities and providing community awareness to the type of WBL programs that exists for youth with disabilities.

Further, the EWBL model could assist in assessing overall the quality of the work-based learning program for youth with disabilities, and, with the use of a developed measure, assess the overall effectiveness of the work-based learning program. The purpose of program evaluation is to strengthen the quality of a program and improve the outcomes for the populations that the program serves (Metz, 2007). Program evaluation is a method for collecting, analyzing, and using information to answer basic questions about a program (Metz, 2007), which assists in identifying what works and what does not work. Therefore, the EWBL model can be used to evaluate the quality of a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities, as well as work toward improving the outcomes for the youth involved in the programs. The information within the EWBL model highlights and discusses barriers and challenges, and program design that employers who are participating in work-based learning programs need and want.

Vocational rehabilitation counselors, transition coordinators, teachers/staff, community rehabilitation programs, employers, parents, and youth with disabilities can use the information regarding the program's effectiveness and outcomes. The above individuals can use the information to make an informed decision about whether or not they would like to participate in the program; if vocational rehabilitation counselors should fund work-based learning programs based on outcomes for their clients; or if schools and transition coordinators should include work-based learning in a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) are a few, but not limited to, ways in which the information from this study and the EWBL model can be used.

Varying Research Methodologies. The current study was a qualitative semi-structured one-on-one interview with participants to gauge their perceptions of work-based learning for youth with disabilities. While the information that was gathered in the current study sheds light on employer perceptions of work-based learning for youth with disabilities, future research can continue to gather more information through varying research methodologies. The types of methodologies that future research could include quantitative surveys, focus groups, and intervention studies.

Emerging Topics for Future Research. The current study's results trigger additional topics for research that can continue to strengthen and define work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. One topic for future research is to examine the influence employers have on curriculum development for youth with disabilities. This would be taking employers experiences and perceptions of work-based learning and bringing it into the education setting by making recommendations or influencing the curriculum for youth with disabilities. Additionally, this could lead to discussion and research on if curriculums meet the needs of the workforce.

More specifically, do employers believe that youth with disabilities that are entering the workforce have the skills to maintain and sustain entry level positions.

Further, work-based learning has been discussed as being a critical method for youth with disabilities to get real world experience in the workforce. However, a topic for future research could be examining where teachers, transition coordinators, and school personnel that work with youth with disabilities in their transition from school to adult life and the world of work believe work-based learning fit into the transition process. This topic can be examined by interviewing school personnel about their thoughts on where work-based learning fits in the transition process.

Conclusion

Efforts have been made to bring attention to the concept of work-based learning as it continues to be identified as a critical work experience opportunity for youth with disabilities, and more specifically a program that promotes successful transition into work and adult life (Hutchinson et al., 2011). Work-based learning has provided the opportunity for youth with disabilities to apply academic and vocational skills and knowledge to real work situations as they develop the attitudes, values, problem solving skills, and behaviors that will help them become informed citizens and productive workers (Burgstahler, 2001). However, even with the emphasis on unemployment rates of individuals with disabilities, employer perceptions of hiring individuals with disabilities, and the importance of work-based learning for youth with disabilities, the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities continues to grow (Kraus, 2017).

Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to use a qualitative approach to develop a model of work-based learning for youth with disabilities from the perspective of employers. Specifically, the findings in the present study stress how employers describe work-based

learning; and what factors do employers believe are important in the successful execution of a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities. From the results, participant's responses were coded into five major themes: role of employer, critical factors, key stakeholders, targeted program outcomes, and challenges to program implementation. At the end of the study, the Employer Work-Based Learning (EWBL) Model was formed from the five major themes.

The findings from this study may be used to understand the challenges, as well as needs of employers who participate in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities in order to continue to improve and develop quality work-based learning programs not only for the schools, parents, and students, but also the employers. It will be important to continue to examine employers' perceptions of work-based learning for youth with disabilities as funding, resources, and policies may affect the needs and challenges for employers. Overall, participants had a positive outlook on WBL programs for youth with disabilities, and consider them to be beneficial to both the youth and employer. Although each interview was unique to the employer who partook in the study, the responses were consistent with and expanded findings of previous research.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent Form

1. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:

You are being asked to participate as a research participant in this qualitative interview study of employer's perspectives of work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities. Your participation in this study will take approximately 60 minutes of your time.

2. WHAT YOU WILL DO:

All that is required of you is to complete the pre-interview questionnaire, and complete a 60-minute interview with the researcher. There is a total of thirteen questions on the pre-interview questionnaire to answer, along with face-to-face interview questions.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

Your participation in this study may generate data useful for better understanding of benefits to employers involved in work-based learning programs for youth with disabilities, employer's perspectives on what work-based learning programs are, as well as what a quality work-based learning program for youth with disabilities looks like.

4. POTENTIAL RISKS:

There are no foreseeable risks associated by participating in this study.

5. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

The data for this project will be kept confidential. All data will be collected through the pre-interview questionnaire and an audio recording device during the face-to-face interview. No identifying information will be stored with the data in order to maintain confidentiality. All the data will be imported and stored on one of the researcher's personal computer. The personal computer used and data files created will be password protected to ensure protection of all participant data. Only the researchers and Michigan State University Institutional Review Board will have access to the data. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

6. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. There are no consequences of withdrawal or incomplete participation. You may choose to stop participating at any time.

7. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY:

There are no costs to you for participation in this study other than the value you place on your time. You will not receive money or any other form of compensation for participating in this study. If you have any questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Rebecca Sametz, by mail at Michigan State University, 401A Erickson Hall, College of Education, East Lansing, MI 48824, or via email at sametzre@msu.edu.

If you have any questions and concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, you can also contact responsible project investigator, Dr. John Kosciulek, at 517-353-9443, or e-mail jkosciul@msu.edu.

If you would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may also contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, FAX 517- 432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at: 408 West Circle Drive Room 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

By signing the line below, you are agreeing to participating in this study.

Name

Date

APPENDIX B

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

1. With what race do you identify?
 - ☐ White or Caucasian Non-Hispanic
 - ☐ Hispanic or Latino
 - ☐ Black or African American
 - ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
 - ☐ Other: _____
2. With what gender do you identify?
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Other: _____
3. What is your age? _____
4. What is your education level (highest degree earned)?
 - ☐ Some High School
 - ☐ High School Graduate or GED
 - ☐ Associates
 - ☐ Bachelors
 - ☐ Masters
 - ☐ Doctorate
 - ☐ Other: _____
5. What is your current job title? _____
6. How many years have you served in your current position?
 - ☐ 1 year or less
 - ☐ 2-3 years
 - ☐ 4-5 years
 - ☐ 5-6 years
 - ☐ 7-8 years
 - ☐ Other: _____
7. How many employees are employed at your place of employment? _____
8. What type of industry is your company? Please check all that apply.
 - ☐ Forestry and Fisheries
 - ☐ Mining

- Manufacturing
- Automotive
- Construction
- Transportation and Public Utilities
- Wholesale and Retail Estate
- Finance and Real Estate
- Educational Services
- Government not elsewhere classified
- Education Services
- Healthcare
- Non-Profit
- Human Services
- Other: _____

9. What type of setting is your company? Please check all that apply.

- Warehouse
- Supply-Chain
- Retail
- Food Service
- Custodial
- Medical
- Manufacturing
- Construction
- Other: _____

10. How many semesters have you participated in a work-based learning program for youth with disabilities?

- 1-2 semesters
- 3-4 semesters
- 5-6 semesters
- 7-8 semesters
- 9-10 semesters
- 10+ semesters

11. How many youth with disabilities have you worked with during the period of time indicated above?

- 1-2

- 2-3
- 3-4
- 4-5
- 6-7
- 7-8
- 9-10
- 10+

12. What is your current role/position in the work-based learning program for youth with disabilities?

(For example: immediate supervisor, liaison, mentor, etc.) _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Opening Statement: Work-based learning (WBL) is defined as planned activity that uses the context of work to develop knowledge, skills, and understanding useful in work, including learning through the experience of work, learning about work and working practices, and learning the skills for work (Department of Children, Schools, and Families, 2008). Hanney (2005) drew a distinction between a work placement and WBL. He defined the former as an experience of work for a short duration, whereas WBL is a structured learning experience that leads to a youth receiving more formal instruction on the work site to assist in maturing in work ethic. WBL is a frequently recommended solution for addressing the employment outcomes of at-risk youth and youth with disabilities. However, there are many models of WBL reported in the literature and many more locally-developed variants on such models. Models frequently described in the WBL literature in the U.S. include tech prep, career pathways, youth apprenticeships, career academics, and co-operative education (Hutchinson et al., 2011).

1. I noticed in your questionnaire that you stated you are the _____ (referring to question 12). Can you describe or give examples as to what your responsibilities were to the student with disabilities, as well as the overall WBL program?
2. What is your experience in participating in a WBL program for youth with disabilities?
 - a. **Probe:** How would you compare this to other programs that you were involved in?
3. How do you think WBL should be designed for youth with disabilities?
 - a. **Probe:** What key components should a well-designed WBL program include and look like?
4. What special considerations should be taken into account when implementing WBL for youth with disabilities?
 - a. **Probe:** In this case, special considerations is referring to attendance, behaviors, level of independence, skill sets, level of communication, functional limitations, etc.
5. Who are key stakeholder(s) you think are important to include in the process of developing and implementing WBL?
 - a. **Probe:** In what way should be they involved?
6. As an employer, what are the perceived benefits of participating in a WBL program?
 - a. **Probe:** How about for youth with disabilities?
7. What barriers/challenges do you find exist when participating in WBL programs for youth with disabilities?
 - a. **Probe:** How did you encounter those barriers/challenges?

8. What types of supports/resources/accommodations you found helpful to you when participating in a WBL program for youth with disabilities?
 - a. **Probe:** What additional supports/resources/accommodations would you want in the future?

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