

6-9-2014

# The Impact of Special Education Transition Services on the Post-Secondary Education Preparedness of Students with Emotional Disturbance: A Study of Student Perceptions

Cyrhonda Denise Hill-Shavers

University of Missouri-St. Louis, [cyrhonda@yahoo.com](mailto:cyrhonda@yahoo.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Hill-Shavers, Cyrhonda Denise, "The Impact of Special Education Transition Services on the Post-Secondary Education Preparedness of Students with Emotional Disturbance: A Study of Student Perceptions" (2014). *Dissertations*. 248.

<https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation/248>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the UMSL Graduate Works at IRL @ UMSL. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of IRL @ UMSL. For more information, please contact [marvinh@umsl.edu](mailto:marvinh@umsl.edu).

Running Head: THE IMPACT OF TRANSITION SERVICES

The Impact of Special Education Transition Services on the  
Post-Secondary Education Preparedness of Students with Emotional Disturbance:  
A Study of Student Perceptions

Cyrhonda Denise Hill-Shavers

A.A., Florissant Valley Community College, 1998

B.A., University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2002

M.Ed., University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2005

A Dissertation Proposal Submitted to the Graduate School at the University of  
Missouri- St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

November 15, 2013

Advisory Committee

E. Paulette Isaac-Savage, Ed.D.  
Chairperson

Hewitt B. Clark, Ph.D.

Mavis Clark, Ed.D.

Gwendolyn Turner, Ed.D.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the post-secondary special education transition planning experiences of currently enrolled college students with emotional disturbance (ED). In addition to exploring students' perceptions of their experiences, understanding, through the narrative analysis of semi-structured interviews, the role special education transition planning played in their perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness upon high school graduation was sought. The research revealed students with ED are most likely to participate in career-based special education post-secondary transition planning. In addition four overarching themes were revealed which included defined by my disability, invisibility, employment vs. post-secondary education, and college bound. It was concluded that special education post-secondary transition planning did not adequately prepare the students with ED for post-secondary education participation. It also revealed participation in special education negatively impacted the students' sense of school belonging. The limitations of this study include the use of a convenience sample and self-report measures. This research adds to the growing body of knowledge related to special education transition planning for students with ED. This study may compel educators and policy makers to review and revise policies and practices that are discriminatory against students with disabilities, especially those identified with ED.

## DEDICATION

*“Honour thy father and mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which thy*

*God giveth thee.” Exodus 20:12*

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. I would like to thank Mr. Ronald Hill Sr., my father and dear friend for his unconditional love. As a child, I was intrigued by his wisdom and enjoyed the moments we shared. He was a strong believer in the saying “knowledge equals power”. We spent countless hours reading to each other, playing math games, and discussing current and historical world events. I credit those moments with increasing my awareness and preparing me for academic success. The times we spent walking to school or coloring in the evenings were the most educational times in my life. His only request was for me to earn a Master’s degree. Well daddy, your “Dawlin” has earned a Doctoral degree!

Next, I would like to thank my mother, Ms. Valencia Hill for being an excellent mother and role model. You have supported and encouraged me to always do my best. When I was feeling discouraged and/or defeated, you forced me to pick myself and try again. You never allowed me to give up. You never stopped believing in me, even when I made mistakes. You knew I could when I thought I couldn’t. Not only are you a great mother, you are also an excellent grandmother to my children. Because of your love and support I am here today. I couldn’t have asked for a better mother. Thank you!

To my brother Ronald Hill Jr. thank you for your support and encouragement over the years. Your presence in my life has been wonderful. I wish you nothing but the best

in life. Always remember that your big sister “has your back”. We were blessed with a level of intelligence that most people can only dream of. Don’t waste it!

***“Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.”***

***Psalms 127:3***

To my son, Mr. Michael Stevenson Jr. you were truly a blessing from God. When the Lord blessed me to become your mother I knew that you deserved nothing but the best. I’ve worked hard to be the mother you deserve and to set an example for you to follow. Always remember, anything worth having is worth working hard for. Never settle for anything less than what you deserve. You were born to be a leader, put those leadership skills to work!

To my daughter, Ms. Camryn Hill when I prayed for a daughter, the Lord answered my prayers by sending you. You are intelligent, beautiful, talented, and kind. Thank you for being the best daughter any mother could wish for. When I look at you I see a little of me each and every day. I am so proud of the young woman you are becoming. I love you and will always be here for you, even when you are married with children! Thank you for allowing me the time I needed to complete my degree.

To my beautiful granddaughters, Aunjel Stevenson and Lo’Riah Stevenson, your granny loves you more than words can express. I know that I am not the type of granny to bake cookies with you; however if you ever have a question about how to navigate in this world, or need help writing your dissertation in the future, don’t hesitate to ask.

*“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.”*

*Proverbs 18:22*

Finally, to my wonderful husband Mr. Christopher Shavers, I could not have prayed for a more kind, caring, and supportive husband. Through the tears and frustration, you were there on the sidelines cheering me on. You never let me give up or second guess my ability to succeed. Your unwavering support and confidence in my ability to accomplish my goals is invaluable. With your love and support we have been able to climb mountains together. I love you and pray that I continue to make you proud. This is the beginning of the rest of our lives; the best is yet to come!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*All praises to the Most High and His only begotten son for blessing me with the intelligence, ability, and perseverance needed to succeed!*

The development and completion of this study could not have been done without the support and assistance of many individuals. A special thank you to my advisor and committee chair Dr. E. Paulette Isaac-Savage for your support, guidance, and encouragement. Your high expectations, attention to detail, and commitment to academic excellence helped me become a consummate professional. With your guidance and support, I have accomplished many goals. Thank you!

Dr. Mavis Clark your in-depth understanding of qualitative research methods was invaluable. I appreciate the advice and suggestions you provided along the way. Thank you for your assistance and support.

Dr. Hewitt B. Clark your contribution to the field of education and profound knowledge of the transition of students with ED served as a guide during the development of my literature review. Thank you for your assistance and support.

Dr. Gwen Turner, thank you for agreeing to serve on my committee. I truly appreciate your assistance and support.

Lakisha Swope my sister, thank you for your friendship and shoulder to cry on during this process. I also thank you for taking the time to proof read my dissertation even though you had your own work to complete. I love you!

Senia Bonner I love you and thank you for being the voice of reason over the years. Your wisdom has kept me sane. I pray the Most High continues to bless you.

To the research participants, thank you for your participation and candid reflections. I could not have done this without you.

Lastly, thank you to those who offered words of encouragement, proof read, and/or made a contribution to my success. Your assistance was greatly appreciated.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Committee Approval Page	
Abstract	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	x
List of Tables	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Background	2
Problem Statement	5
Purpose of the Study	5
Significance of the Study	7
Assumptions	8
Limitations of the Study	8
Definition of Terms	9
Organization of the Study	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	14
The Emotionally Disturbed Student	14
Post-Secondary School Outcomes	19
Post-Secondary Education Barriers	22
Prior School Experiences	26
Conceptual Framework	28
Ability Grouping	29

School Belonging	31
Stereotype Threat	32
Self-Efficacy	35
Special Education Transition	38
Special Education Transition Planning	40
Summary	42
Chapter Three: Methodology	44
Research Questions	45
Researcher Subjectivity	46
Design Rationale	47
Setting	50
Participant Recruitment	51
Participant Selection	51
Data Collection	53
Data Analysis	55
Trustworthiness	56
Ethical Issues	59
Chapter Four: Participants	61
Narrative One: Angel's Story	62
Narrative Two: Heaven's Story	68
Narrative Three: Star's Story	73
Narrative Four: Romeo's Story	78
Narrative Five: Sunny's Story	84
Summary	89

Chapter Five: Narrative Presentation of Data	91
Participants	93
Narrative Responses	94
Ability Grouping	94
School Belonging	100
Stereotype Threat	106
Self-Efficacy	111
Post-Secondary Education Preparation	117
Post-Secondary Education Barriers	126
Post-Secondary Education Disability Support Services	128
Summary	130
Chapter Six: Metastory: The Post-Secondary Transition Planning	
Experiences of Students with Emotional Disturbance	131
Prologue	133
Overarching Theme One: Defined by My Disability	133
Subtheme One: Exclusion	134
Subtheme Two: Am I Abnormal	136
Overarching Theme Two: Invisibility	138
Subtheme One: I Have a Voice- May I Speak	139
Subtheme Two: Low Sense of School Belonging	142
Subtheme Three: Post-Secondary Ed Institutions Ignored Us	145
Overarching Theme Three: Employment vs. Post-Secondary Education	147
Subtheme One: Career Readiness	148
Subtheme Two: Post-Secondary Education Readiness	150
Epilogue	152

Overarching Theme Four: College Bound	153
Subtheme One: Deadlines and Fees	154
Subtheme Two: Accommodations	157
Subtheme Three: My Reality	159
Summary	162
Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion	163
Discussion of Findings	164
Defined by My Disability	164
Invisibility	166
Employment vs. Post-Secondary Education	167
College Bound	167
Conclusion	168
Implications for Practice	173
Recommendations for Future Research	175
References	177
Appendices	199
A. Request for Participants Letter	200
B. Interview Questions	202
C. IRB Approval	205
D. Informed Consent Form	206

**List of Figures**

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework of the relationship between stereotype threat in special education transition planning and students' perceived level of post- secondary education preparedness	29
---	----

**List of Tables**

Table 2.1: Student Rights and Responsibilities	24
Table 4.1: Participants	62
Table 5.1: Overarching Themes	132

## CHAPTER ONE

**Introduction**

The period of time immediately following high school graduation is a complex period for most students as they make the transition to young adulthood. Once the celebration ends, students are faced with the reality of choosing a post-secondary activity to complete the transition. Participation in post-secondary education continues to be a common alternative to direct employment for students after high school graduation. The transition to post-secondary education has been identified as an important transition outcome for young adults with or without disabilities due to the positive impact a college degree has on future adult outcomes (Shaw, Madaus & Banerjee, 2009; Webb, Patterson & Syverud, 2008).

Over the course of a lifetime, individuals who earn a college degree will have a significantly higher lifetime earning potential than those who earn a high school diploma (Julian & Kominski, 2011; Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagle, Shaver, ... Schwarting, 2011). Due to the positive impact a college degree has on future adult outcomes the education levels of Americans has risen steadily over the last 70 years (Julian & Kominski, 2011). The rate of students participating in post-secondary education has also increased; however participation rates of students with disabilities remain lower than the rates for their nondisabled peers (Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, & Benz, 1995; Knis-Matthews, Bokara, DeMeo, Lepore, & Mavus, 2007; Lehman, Clark, Bullis, Rinkin, & Castellanos, 2002). A subcategory of students with disabilities identified as mentally ill participate in post-secondary education at an even lower rate

than students with disabilities in general (Halpern et al., 1995; Knis-Matthews et al., 2007; Lehman et al., 2002).

In 1983, the poor post-secondary education participation rates of students with disabilities drew national attention and caused the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) to declare transition from secondary school to post-secondary school or employment a national priority (Halpern et al., 1995; Will, 1983). Federal laws such as Public Law 94-142- Education of all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 1990 were developed, revised and/or implemented to address the concern (Garrison-Wade & Lehman, 2009). Access to post-secondary education increased for students with disabilities; however, the post-school outcomes for students with disabilities remained poor. IDEA was later reauthorized in 2004 which caused significant changes to be made to the transition services students with disabilities received in secondary education. Secondary education institutions became responsible for creating transition plans that would enable students with disabilities to successfully transition to the workforce or post-secondary education upon high school graduation or aging out of special education (Schmitz, 2008).

### **Background**

Post-school outcomes for students with mental illness also known as Emotional Disturbance (ED) have not been promising (Sadao & Walker, 2002; Wood & Cronin, 1999). Students with emotional or behavioral disorders perform poorly in relation to their



peers with other disabilities on almost every transition outcome variable in follow-up studies (Sitlington & Neubert, 2004; Zigmond, 2006). Sadao and Walker (2002) reported students with ED have higher dropout rates and even poorer success rates in transitioning to post-secondary education or work. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) revealed the percentage of students with ED having ever enrolled in post-secondary education programs was significantly lower than those with other disabilities such as: learning disabilities, speech and language impairment, hearing impairment, visual impairment, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury and deaf /blindness (Newman et al., 2011). The percentage of students with disabilities that matriculate and graduate from post-secondary education is also lower than their nondisabled counterparts. Tincani (2004) stated only 53% of students with disabilities attained a degree or vocational certificate within five years. Students with disabilities are graduating from high school and/or aging out of Special Education without obtaining the skills necessary to succeed in post-secondary education, even with having a transition plan in place (Garrison-Wade, 2012).

In 1990, the IDEA mandated transition planning and transition related activities be included in the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) for every student with disabilities who received a free, appropriate public education (IDEA, 1990; Mahanay-Castro, 2010; Thomas & Dykes, 2011). In 2004, the reauthorization of IDEA affirmed that the primary purpose of the free, appropriate public education guaranteed to youth with disabilities is to prepare them for post-secondary education, employment, and independent living (IDEA, 2004; Zigmond, 2006). The establishment of these acts and various other legal mandates such as Section 504, of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with

Disabilities Act of 1990 and 2004 increased the employment and independent living rates for students with ED; however post-secondary education remains largely underutilized by this population (Garrison-Wade & Lehmann, 2009; Knis-Matthews et al., 2007).

Effective transition planning is a critical component of preparing students with ED for successful post-secondary outcomes, including successful movement from secondary education to post-secondary education (Thomas & Dykes, 2011; Wood & Cronin, 1999). The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) (2004) reported the transition planning process for students with disabilities is fairly complex and difficult due to limited levels of collaboration among schools and community service agencies and federal education reforms. The findings of the study conducted by Garrison-Wade and Lehman (2004) were consistent with previous research, which suggested many students with disabilities are not expected to attend college. As a result, they are not encouraged to pursue college as an option limiting the possibility of college preparatory objectives in their transition plans. They are also passive participants in the post-secondary transition planning process (Collett-Klingenber, 1998).

In 2004, IDEA mandated schools to provide transition services that assist students with disabilities in reaching their goals (IDEA, 2004; Wilson, Hoffman, & McLaughlin, 2009; Storey, 2007). Yet the transition services that are provided for students with disabilities focus mostly on skills associated with independent living, employment and post-secondary education (not necessarily college) (Wilson et al., 2009). Scanlon, Saxon, Cowell, Kenny, Pérez-Gualdrón, and Jernigan (2008) stated the opportunities presented to students in high school greatly influence the directions they will take upon graduation.

Although IDEA included provisions to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, students with disabilities routinely participate in separate transition planning processes, take fewer academic courses during their last two years of school, and often participate more in pre-vocational and vocational courses than non-disabled students (Wilson et al., 2009).

### **Problem Statement**

Many studies have investigated the efficacy of post-secondary transition planning for students with disabilities such as specific learning disabilities, hearing and vision impairment, and cognitive impairments; yet little research has examined the efficacy of post-secondary transition planning for students with ED (Garrison-Wade & Lehman, 2004; Newman et al., 2011; Trainor, 2007). Much of the research surrounding special education transition planning focuses on the skills students will need once they reach adulthood and how to effectively prepare them for life thereafter; however what is missing from the research is the students' voice and how the transition planning process impacts their perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the special education transition planning experiences of students with emotional disturbance. In addition to exploring students' perceptions of their experiences, this study sought to understand through narrative analysis, the role special education transition planning played in their perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness.

This study attempted to answer the question, “How does participation in special education transition planning impact students with ED’s perception of their level of post-secondary education preparedness?” The following questions served as a frame for the research question:

1. In what ways did the method of the transition planning services received in secondary school impact participant’s level of academic self-efficacy?
2. To what extent were participants able to select the transition planning services they received in secondary school?
3. How much influence did participants feel transition planning had on their post-secondary education decisions?
4. Based upon participants’ perceptions, did the special education transition planning services he/she received in secondary school adequately address his/her post-secondary education preparation needs?
5. Based upon participant’s perceptions, how can post secondary education institutions assist ED students during the special education post secondary transition planning process?

This study may add to prior research related to special education transition and expand upon what is currently known about the relationship between school experience and academic self- efficacy among students with emotional disturbance.

### **Significance of the Study**

Sadao and Walker (2002) stated little research has focused on student perspectives or feelings on their preparedness for transition and emancipation from special education programs. The themes that emerged from this study may assist educators as they provide transition planning services for students with disabilities. Understanding the experiences of students can assist educators in implementing transition plans that foster self-determination, increase post-secondary education participation, and enhance the self-efficacy of students with disabilities. Exploring the perceptions of students identified as ED in particular may help educators eliminate transition planning practices that perpetuate feelings of inadequacy commonly associated with this population of students, thus eliminating task avoidance behaviors that hinder academic success.

The examination of ED student perceptions and experiences has several implications for educators at the secondary and post-secondary levels. ED students' ability to experience post-secondary education success is greatly influenced by their level of preparedness and the support they receive in the post-secondary education environment. As students with ED reflect upon their transition planning experiences and their perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness educators at the secondary level may be able to eliminate ineffective transition planning practices. In addition, educators at the post-secondary level may be able to provide support services that are uniquely designed to meet the needs of students with ED which may positively impact their ability to matriculate and graduate from post-secondary education institutions.

Emerging themes from the analysis of interviews revealed information from the view of the participants as well as a story from the point of view of the researcher (Creswell, 2007).

### **Assumptions**

The research question focused on the experiences and perceptions of students with emotional disturbance that were special education transition planning participants in secondary school. Previous research has proven students' academic self-efficacy and desire to participate in post-secondary education is directly related to previous school experiences (Wagner & Cameto, 2004). The assumption of this study was that special education transition planning based on employment and/or vocational preparation has a negative impact on students' perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study took place during the summer semester of the school year at a Midwestern public university. The research focused on the perceptions of students enrolled in a public university who were identified as emotionally disturbed in secondary school and participated in post-secondary transition planning. The convenience sample included 5 students registered with the university's Disability Access Services office or were referred by other participants in the study. The transition planning services the participants received varied to some degree; however they all met the federal and state requirements for special education transition planning. Since the study only utilized students from one Midwestern public university or their referrals, the findings may be

limited to a student population similar to the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The University of Missouri- St. Louis has a population of approximately 16, 800 students (Student Body Profile Fall, 2011). The study may also be somewhat limited by the use of only self-report measures.

### **Definition of Terms**

Many terms and phrases have multiple meanings. To allow for a complete understanding the most commonly used terms and phrases are defined in context below.

#### **Ability Grouping**

Ability grouping is defined as any organization of students designed to reduce the heterogeneity, is based upon ability, and/or instructional content and method (Gamoran, 1992; Slavin, 1990).

#### **Ableism**

Ableism is defined as a set of practices and dominant attitudes that devalue and limit the potential of persons with disabilities. Ableism practices and beliefs assign inferior value to people who have developmental, emotional, physical or psychiatric disabilities. Hehir (2007) state, “Ableist assumptions become dysfunctional when the education and development services provided to disabled children focus on their disability to the exclusion of all else” (para. 6).

#### **Disability**

“The ADA defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a person’s life in one or more major life activities” (Clark, 2006 p. 312)

### **Emotional Disturbance**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act uses the term emotional disturbance to describe a wide range of emotional disturbance, behavior disorders and mental illnesses. Emotional Disturbance (ED) is a condition that exhibits one or more of the following over an extended period of time that negatively impacts a child’s educational performance:

1. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
2. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
3. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
4. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Emotional Disturbance also includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (IDEA, 1997; IDEA, 2004; Knobluach & Sorenson, 1998; Mathur, 2007).



**Normalcy**

The medical practice and social policy of normalcy is uncompromised and unimpaired physical and mental status (Silvers, 1996).

**Post-Secondary Education Preparedness**

According to Brand and Valent (2013), post-secondary education preparedness means being prepared for post-secondary education without the need for remediation.

**School Belonging**

School belonging is defined as a sense of membership in a school to the extent that a student feels personally accepted, respected and included in the school social environment (Goodenow, 1993; Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010).

**Self-Efficacy**

According to Bandura (1997) self-efficacy is a person's belief in their capabilities to organize and execute the course of actions required to produce given attainments. He argued the four main sources of self-efficacy include enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997).

**Stereotype Threat**

Steele and Aronson (1995) stated stereotype threat refers to being at risk of confirming, a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's social group.

### **Transition Services**

Transition Services is defined by IDEA (2004) as a set of coordinated activities for a child with disabilities that are designed to be within a results-oriented process. The activities must focus on improving the academic functional achievement of the child with disabilities to facilitate movement from school to post-school activities. The post school activities include post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, adult education, and independent living.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter discusses the context of post-secondary education participation of students with emotional disturbance. This chapter also includes the research problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, assumptions, delimitations of the study and definitions and terms.

Chapter two includes a review of related literature divided into three sections. The first section includes an in-depth discussion of students with ED, the post-secondary school outcomes of students with ED, and the impact of prior school experience. The second section examines the concepts of school belonging, stereotype threat, self-efficacy, and the impact of each on student perceptions of post-secondary education preparedness. The third section provides an overview of special education transition.

Chapter three includes the research methods. It discusses the methodology, design rationale, setting, participant selection and recruitment, data collection, interview

questions, and data analysis. It provides a description of how trustworthiness will be established. It also addresses ethical issues.

Chapter four includes a narrative story of each research participant. The narratives include an overview of the participants' life, their special education experiences, and the impact of those experiences on participants' decision to participate in post-secondary education.

Chapter five provides a narrative presentation of the participants' responses to a series of questions followed by a discussion of the emerging themes. Chapter six includes a metastory that represents the shared voice of student with ED's reality during their post-secondary transition planning.

Chapter seven, the final chapter included in this dissertation, includes a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings as they pertained to the results of this research, and the conclusion. Attention was given to addressing the implications of this research for relevant audiences, as well as suggestions for future research on the topic of interest in this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Literature Review**

To provide a foundation for understanding, emotionally disturbed students will be defined along with a discussion of their post school outcomes. Next the impact of prior school experiences on the ED students' desire to participate in post-school education will be presented. The review will then progress to provide a description of special education transition. These topics will allow for the analysis of student perceptions of post-secondary education preparedness during special education transition planning.

### **The Emotionally Disturbed Student**

Sadao and Walker (2002) reported students with emotional disturbance are the third largest category of students with disabilities. Students who exhibit significant emotional or behavioral problems often receive an educational diagnosis of Emotionally Disturbed (ED). Zions, Zions, and Simpson (2002) stated the first official label given to a student exhibiting emotional and behavioral problems is frequently from school personnel. The label a student receives may vary according to the state of residence. Historically the labels students received include but are not limited to emotionally impaired, serious emotionally disturbed (SED), conduct disorder (CD), behaviorally disordered (BD), socially maladjusted (SM), educationally handicapped, or emotionally disturbed (ED) (Zions et al., 2002).

The terminology and definition for children with emotional or behavioral disorders has always been problematic because of possible misinterpretation, stigma, and

lack of a common understanding about the nature of these disorders (Forness & Kavale, 2000). Merrell and Walker (2004) reported Eli Bower was the first to develop a federal definition for ED in the 1960s. Bower's definition was adopted in its entirety within the Education of All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 which was later renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for almost 20 years (Kavale, Forness, Mostert, 2004; Merrell & Walker, 2004). Bower (1982) proposed emotionally handicapped children exhibited one or more of five major characteristics over an extended period of time based upon a protocol he developed from the study he conducted to identify students in California that required services for their severe behavior and emotional problems:

1. An inability to learn which is not explained by cognitive, sensory or health reasons.
2. An inability to establish and maintain adequate interpersonal relationships with peers and adults.
3. Inappropriate behavior and feelings under normal circumstance.
4. A pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains, or fears, associated with personal or school problems.

Bower's definition was used by IDEA to create the disability category SED (Forness & Kavale, 2000; Forness & Knitzer, 1992; Merrell & Walker, 2004). Bower's definition was problematic because it did not include provisions for the socially maladjusted (Forness & Kavale, 2000; Merrell & Walker, 2004). The reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 dropped the term "serious" from the SED category, but continued to exclude provisions

for those with socially maladjusted behaviors only (Forness & Kavale, 2000; O'Neill, 2006). Students with social maladjustment behaviors exclusively do not meet the criteria to receive an ED diagnosis; therefore they are ineligible to receive special education services (Kavale et al., 2004)). Students with social maladjustment behaviors solely are considered to have a conduct disorder (CD) (Forness & Kavale, 2000; Kavale et al., 2004; Merrell & Walker, 2004; O'Neill, 2006). CD is a specific psychiatric diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition Revised (DSM-III-R) and is equated with symptoms such as aggressiveness, dishonesty, destructive, and noncompliant behaviors (Forness & Kavale, 2000; Kavale et al., 2004).

The exclusion of maladjusted behaviors in IDEA's definition of ED has caused considerable confusion regarding who meets the eligibility criteria. IDEA does not provide a definition of what it considers social maladjustment (Kavale et al., 2004; Merrell & Walker, 2004). Due to IDEA's failure to define SM the description of this construct has become the responsibility of professionals and organizations in the field, including state and local education agencies (Merrell & Walker, 2004). O'Neill (2006) reported IDEA's definition of SED differs significantly from the definition of SED used by pediatric mental healthcare systems. IDEA's definition of SED is also condemned by special education scholars condemn for its exclusion of categories used in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) published by the American Psychiatric Association in its definition of serious emotional disturbance (O'Neill, 2006).

The vague and subjective definition of emotional disturbance has been scrutinized and criticized for over 30 years, yet the main factors used to determine if a student will receive an educational diagnosis of ED are intensity, pattern, and duration of problem behavior (Forness & Knitzer, 1992; Merrell & Walker, 2004; Smith, 2006; Zionts et al., 2002). According to IDEA (2004) to qualify under the federal label of ED, a student has to exhibit one or more of five major characteristics to a marked extent and over an extended period of time that adversely affects his or her educational performance. The five characteristics include:

1. An inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
2. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
3. Inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances.
4. A general, pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains, or fears, associated with personal or school problems.

The term ED includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004; IDEA, 2004).

The most common behaviors are externalizing and internalizing behaviors and functional disorders (Merrell & Walker, 2004; Zionts et al., 2002). Zionts et al. (2002) stated externalizing behavior is defined as behaviors that disturb others such as constant talking, aggression, disobedience, distracting others in the classroom and juvenile delinquency. Internalizing behaviors include behaviors such as mental depression, anxiety, withdrawal, substance abuse and schizophrenia (Zionts et al., 2002). Functional disorders include eating and elimination disorders (encopresis and enuresis) (Zionts et al., 2002).

A variety of factors may contribute to the development of ED. A few are genetics, such as brain damage or dysfunction, family factors, such as structure and interaction, and school factors, such as deficiencies in the school's ability to accommodate student needs adequately (Zionts et al., 2002).

Although ED may appear at any age, gender, race, or socioeconomic status its incidence is difficult to determine due to the discrepancy in its definition (Mathur, 2007; O'Neill, 2006; Zoits et al, 2002). Cheney (2010), stated, "according to the U.S. Department of Education (2001) African Americans account for 14.8% of the general population of students 6 to 21 years of age, yet they are classified as EBD about twice as often as would be expected"(p. 26). The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) (2010) reported nearly 2.9 million children have been prescribed medication for emotional or behavioral difficulties.



### **Post-Secondary School Outcomes**

Adolescence is a transitional period of time in which one moves from childhood to adulthood. The transition from childhood to adulthood can be especially challenging for those diagnosed as ED. In addition to the normal fluctuations in mood and behavior caused by physiological and social changes during this time period, those with emotional disturbance must also manage subsequent behaviors associated with their disorder. During late adolescence students begin to make preparations for life after secondary education. Research has shown that participation in post-secondary education continues to be the most common alternative to direct employment for students after high school graduation (Halpern et al., 1995). The post-secondary school outcomes for students with ED have not been promising (Sadao & Walker, 2002). They typically have higher dropout rates and less success in transitioning from secondary school to post-secondary education and/or work (Sadao & Walker, 2002; Sitlington & Neubert, 2004; Zigmond, 2006). Post-secondary education has remained largely underutilized by those with mental illness (Knis-Matthews, 2007).

Wagner and Blackorby (1996) stated “the majority of high school students with disabilities intend to enter the workforce upon leaving high school. The negative school experiences of students with disabilities may contribute to the decision to forgo post-secondary education and enter the workforce (Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). Lehman et al. (2002) indicated students with ED are least likely to belong to clubs and social groups and have the highest rates of absenteeism of any disability group in secondary school. A study conducted by Wood and Cronin (1999) revealed students with ED have higher

school dropout rates, lower employment rates and lower post-secondary education participation rates than their peers. ED students tend to have lower grade point averages (GPA) and fail to be promoted to the next grade more frequently than other students with disabilities (Wagner, 1995). Wagner (1995) also noted the perceptions of students with ED may influence the lower grades they earn in class.

During elementary and secondary school they are typically educated in more restrictive environments than students with other disabilities (Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004). Wagner and Blackorby (1996) pointed out young people with disabilities who graduate from high school on average earn 22 credits, as did students without disabilities; however they earned more credits in nonacademic areas than their nondisabled peers. The academic classes in which students with disabilities frequently enroll are not college preparatory courses (Sitlington & Neubert, 2004; Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). Students with disabilities often leave secondary school with poor self advocacy skills, and a lack of understanding of the impact their disability has on their learning (Frieden, 2003). They also lack the skill and knowledge necessary to access assistance which may help mitigate the impact (Frieden, 2003). Students with ED are left with inadequate direction and skills upon completion of secondary school and usually end their academic careers at this point (Wynne, Ausikaitis & Satchwell, 2013).

Newman et al. (2011) reported that the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) revealed the following information regarding post-secondary education enrollment for students with disabilities:

- Enrollment varied considerably across the disability categories ranging from 30% to 75% for high school graduates with disabilities.
- The overall post-secondary education enrollment rate of students with ED was 53%.
- The highest percentage of students with ED enrolled in 2- year colleges.
- The lowest percent of students with ED enrolled in 4- year colleges.
- The percentages were even lower for ED students without high school diplomas.

The poor adult life outcomes for students with ED continue several years after leaving secondary school. In addition to lower post-secondary education participation, Wagner (1999) stated ED students continued to be uninvolved in the community at large and have lower employment rates in comparison to other youth with disabilities.

There have been several follow-up studies conducted on the adult life outcomes of students' with disabilities. Yet few studies have examined the emotional/behavioral disorder population exclusively (Wood & Cronin, 1999). Salzer, Wick, and Rogers (2008) stated people with emotional illness have a strong interest and desire to enroll in college and obtain higher education; however; 86% of the students with mental illness that manage to enroll in post-secondary education institutions withdraw prior to completion.

In 2004, McLeod and Kaiser conducted a study to determine if childhood emotional and behavioral problems diminish the probability of completing secondary and post-secondary school. Their study revealed the probability to complete high school and

enroll in post-secondary education declined as increasing levels of externalizing problems increased. They found youth with high levels of externalizing problems less likely to achieve academically. They also discovered a positive correlation between early onset and academic trajectory. The earlier students began to have problems the greater impact it had on their academic trajectory. Kiuahara and Huefner (2008) reported young adults with mental illness have the cognitive abilities and the academic skills to attend college; however the challenge is providing the assistance they need to achieve their educational goals and complete college.

### **Post-Secondary Education Barriers**

Although there are federal laws that guarantee benefits for students with ED in post secondary education there are many barriers that negatively impact their success. Individuals with psychiatric disorders are significantly less likely than others to enter college, and are more likely to terminate without completion of their degree (Collins & Mowbray, 2005; Kiuahara & Huefner, 2008). One of the primary barriers to the successful matriculation and degree completion for students with ED is lack of academic integration (Megivern, Pellerito, & Mowbray, 2003). Many students with disabilities are unaware of the legal and academic changes that occur once they complete secondary school; therefore they are underprepared and lack the skills necessary to successfully navigate in their new environment. The Missouri Association on Higher Education and Disability (MOAHEAD) (2010) contended students with disabilities must know their rights as well as their responsibilities under the law in order to experience success in the post-secondary

education setting. The differences in secondary and post-secondary education student rights and responsibilities according to MOAHEAD (2010) are listed in Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1.

*Student Educational Rights and Responsibilities*

<b>Secondary Rights</b>	<b>Post-Secondary Rights</b>
Services are provided under IDEA or Section 504, Subpart D	Services are provided under ADA and Section 504, Subpart E
School district responsible for identifying and evaluation disability at no cost to student or family	Student must self-identify and provide documentation of disability
School provides evaluation	Student must pay cost of evaluation
School is responsible for the cost of special programming	Post-secondary institutions responsible for costs involved in providing accommodations based on documentation of disability
Provides special programs and comprehensive support services	Post-secondary institutions not legally required to provide special programs with comprehensive support services
<b>Secondary Responsibilities</b>	<b>Post-Secondary Responsibilities</b>
Career decisions not expected	Student expected to know career
Student assisted with decisions	Increased number of decisions; student expected to make independent decisions
Limits set for student by parents and teachers	More self-evaluation/ self-monitoring required; student establishes and attains own goals
Schedule set by school	Students are responsible for designing a schedule
Attendance and progress well monitored	Attendance and progress not monitored
Student's time structured by home and school	Student responsible for managing time and commitments
Special education teacher liaison between student/teachers/ administrators, and parents	Student determines when help is needed.

An additional barrier to the successful completion of post-secondary education for students with ED is the concept of ableism. Hutcheon and Wolbring (2012) stated:

Ableism as a concept describes, and is reflected in, individual and group perceptions of certain abilities as essential. Ableism can be treated as both a hegemony which promotes ability preference and as an analytical tool used to understand these preferences and their impact (p. 40).

Ableism is grounded in negative assumptions about disability (Hehir, 2002). Clark (2006) reported the experience of disability is most understood and/or investigated through the lens of disease, rather than a social phenomenon. Disability policy and practice in post-secondary education use a primarily biomedical framework of disability (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012). A common assumption of the biomedical framework is that disability is primarily a medical illness, deficiency, or abnormality (Marks, 2000). Marks (2000) further stated, the medical model conflates impairment and disability with the sick role, therefore discriminatory norms and values are perpetuated. The use of the biomedical framework in post-secondary education policy and practice contributes to well-known ableist signification of ability and functionality (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012)

In addition the use of a biomedical framework in post-secondary education policy and practice disregards other sources of disablement such as the attitudinal barriers caused by its structure. Although post-secondary education institutions provide services and support for students with disabilities through their disability access offices many students with ED fail to utilize those services (Collins & Mowbray, 2005; Megivern et al., 2003). The barriers most reported by students with ED to using the services provided by the disability access office were not knowing about the service and fear of disclosing

their illness due to potential discrimination (Salzer, Wick & Rogers, 2008; Sharpe, Bruininks, Blacklock, Benson, & Johnson, 2004) When students with ED utilized the services provided by the disability access office they faced incorrect, stereotyped views about their disability upon disclosure and/or endured the negative consequences that accompany disclosure of such an illness (Sharpe et al., 2004).

Collins and Mowbray (2005) reported students with a psychiatric diagnosis can and do succeed in post-secondary education if they receive appropriate services and supports. Services and supports for students with disabilities are available at the post secondary level; however students must disclose and provide documentation of their diagnosed disability. Previous research indicates students with ED fail to utilize disability support services at a rate comparable to students with other disabilities due to lack of awareness. Although students with ED participate in special education transition planning at the secondary level, they remain underprepared for post-secondary education participation after high school graduation.

### **Prior School Experiences**

The prior school experiences of students with ED significantly impact their decisions to participate in post-secondary education. Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong and Thoma (2003) stated school policies, teacher attitudes and fundamental beliefs and/or practices of the institution often deny students that are different the full benefit of school membership (e.g., access to higher-level courses, academic tracking, and placement in special education). When students are denied full school membership they are likely to disengage from the schooling process (Brown et al., 2003). Griffin (2002) stated students who experience unsuccessful school outcomes over time, such as poor grades may suffer



an impaired perception of self that may lead to complete withdrawal. Irvin et al. (2011) suggested students with disabilities are at risk of having negative perceptions of school due to disengagement. A study conducted by Irvin et al. 2011 examined the relationship between school perceptions and educational aspirations of rural students with learning disabilities and found school perception and educational aspirations play a critical role in students' educational attainment.

Uwah, McMahan and Furlow (2008) stated:

It may be the simple act of inviting students to play a more active part in the school community and the students' perception that they are welcomed and appreciated may play a crucial role in helping underserved populations believe that they can succeed in a school environment (para. 31).

When students feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in the educational environment they are less likely to abandon education and have higher academic aspirations. Griffin (2002) stated, "The more success a student experiences, the more identified with school the student becomes" (p. 71).

Students with ED have a high incidence of poor post- school outcomes. Previous research indicated the poor post-school outcomes are a result of low post-secondary education participation. Students with ED have a desire to participate in post-secondary education however; many forgo participation due to previous negative school experiences. The negative school experiences include low expectations, repeated school

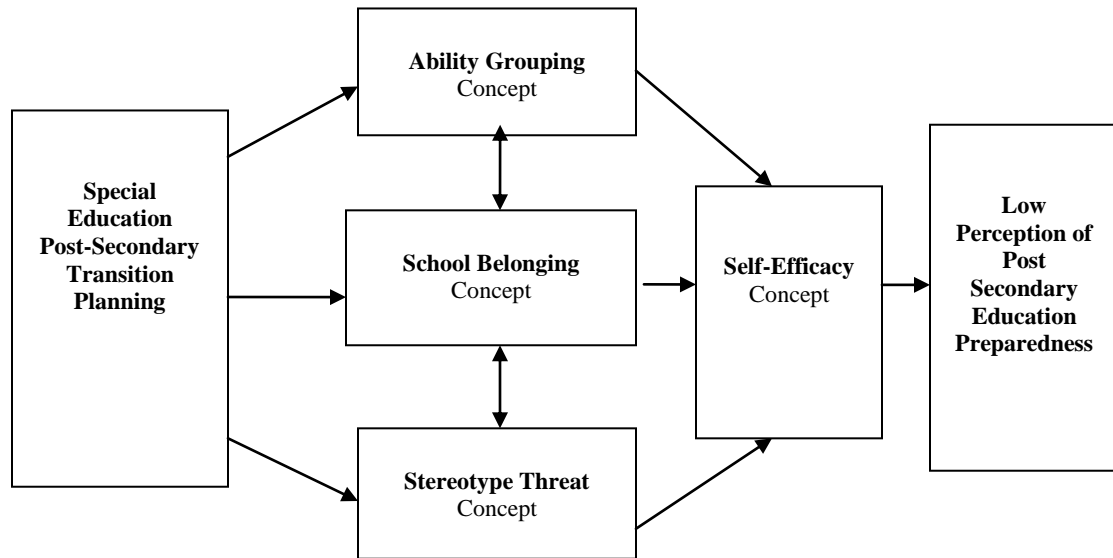
failure, and lack of post- secondary education preparedness. An abundance of literature exists indicating the best practices for the successful transition of students with disabilities; however what is missing is the study of the impact of special education transition planning on the perceptions of post-secondary education preparedness in students with ED.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Past research into the efficacy of post-secondary transition for students with disabilities is abundant (Newman et.al, 2011; Valentine, Hirschy, Brener, Novillo, Castellano & Banister, 2011; Wagner et al. 2005). While many studies have investigated the efficacy of post-secondary transition for students with disabilities there still remains a need to explore the experiences of ED students and their perceptions of the transition planning process. Valentine et al. (2011) argued rigorous studies are needed that investigate the interaction between programs and student characteristics to determine what types of programs are most effective for students. Much of the research surrounding transition focuses on the skills students will need once they reach adulthood and how to effectively prepare them for life thereafter; however what is missing from the research is the students' voice and their perceptions of the transition process.

To gain an understanding of how participation in special education transition planning impacts students' perception of their level of post-secondary education preparedness the concepts of ability grouping, school belonging, stereotype threat and self-efficacy were explored (see Figure 2.1). These concepts greatly influence the level of post-secondary education preparedness and post-secondary education participation of

students with ED. The research question and literature review emerged from these concepts



*Figure 2.1.* Conceptual Framework of the relationship between stereotype threat in special education transition planning and students' perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness.

### **Ability Grouping**

Ability grouping has been one of the most controversial issues in education. In the early 1920s northeastern American cities began experiencing an influx of poor, uneducated, unskilled immigrants from eastern and southern Europe along with job seeking youth later joined by African Americans and Puerto Ricans. As a means to educate them ability grouping and comprehensive schools were created (Worthy, 2010). The comprehensive schools used ability grouping to separate students into college preparation and vocational tracks (Slavin, 1990; Worthy, 2010). Slavin (1990) stated:

Ability grouping is defined as any school or classroom organization plan that is intended to reduce the heterogeneity of instructional groups; in between-class ability grouping the heterogeneity of each class for a given subject is reduced, and in within-class ability grouping the heterogeneity of groups within the class (e.g., reading groups) is reduced (p. 471).

Proponents of ability grouping contend it enables teachers to adapt instruction for low achieving students and increase the level of difficulty of material to challenge and stimulate high achieving students. Ability grouping was originally viewed as a form of equal education opportunity that would meet students' needs, abilities and interests (Lleras & Rangel, 2009; Slavin, 1990; Worthy, 2010). Ability grouping allegedly motivates high achievers into working harder and provides opportunity for low achievers to experience success (Khazeenezhad, Barati and Jafarzade, 2012). Khazeenezhad et al. (2012) examined the impact of ability grouping on the academic success of undergraduate students in general English courses. The results of their study indicated students grouped according to ability significantly outperformed their counterparts in the random groups.

As time passed, educational researchers began to investigate the effects of ability grouping and discovered that ability grouping does not positively impact educational attainment (Gamoran, 1993; Ireson, Hallam & Plewis, 2001). Previous research indicates students placed in low ability groups have fewer academic gains than students placed in high ability groups (Gamoran, 1993; Slavin, 1990). This may be due to lower teacher expectations, watered down instruction, and less student engagement. Although there has

been a decline in the use of the traditional method of ability tracking in schools, the practice of sorting and classifying students based on ability still remain; however other names are used to describe the practice (Worthy, 2010).

Hallam and Ireson (2007) suggested ability grouping systems have a negative impact on the social and personal outcomes of lower achieving students with them becoming stigmatized, disaffected and alienated from school. Gamoran (1993) reported ability tracking polarizes the student body into “pro-school” and “anti-school” groups.

### **School Belonging**

School belonging is defined as a sense of membership in a school to the extent that a student feels personally expected, respected and included in the school social environment (Goodenow, 1993; Singh et al., 2010). Students with ED often report negative experiences while in school. They often engage in behaviors that result in negative or punitive consequences. They are more likely to have poor attendance and lower grade point averages than nondisabled peers or peers from other disability groups. A history of negative school experiences and failures negatively impact a person’s level of self- efficacy and engenders feelings of psychological inadequacy and inferiority (Chen & Kaplan, 2003; Finn, 1989). Chen and Kaplan (2003) argued early negative experiences in school set in motion a cascade of later disadvantages in the transition to adulthood. They also assert stigmatized individuals may have lesser motivation for upward mobility (Chen& Kaplan, 2003).

Finn (1989) and Wilson et al. (2009) contended school failure is often cited as a cause of problem behavior and poor school performance; which may lead to an impaired self-view resulting from frustration and embarrassment. Simmons and Burke (1966) conducted a study to explore the school experiences of youth in a detention center to identify a cluster of school experiences common to that population. The results indicated a strong positive relationship between school experiences, dropout rates and incarceration. They also found certain school experiences contributed to students' desire to leave school as soon as legally possible (Simmons & Burke, 1966). Based upon previous research a student's connection and sense of belonging in school positively impacts their ability to achieve academic success.

### **Stereotype Threat**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) as reported in Kihara and Huefner (2008) stated:

Individuals with disabilities are a discrete and insular minority who have been faced with restrictions and limitations, subjected to a history of purposeful unequal treatment, and relegated to a position of political powerlessness in our society, based on characteristics that beyond the control of such individuals and resulting from stereotypic assumptions not truly indicative of the individual ability of such individuals to participate in, and contribute to, society (p. 105).

As students with disabilities navigate through the educational system they are often faced with discrimination and negative stereotypes which may lead to a decline in their self-efficacy. Stereotype Threat posits that decreased performance is often a result of situational experiences with negative stereotypes that may cause an individual to feel vulnerable or pressured by the possibility of confirming or being judged by the negative stereotype (Griffin, 2002; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003; Steele, 1998; Steele, 2010).

Social structure and stereotypes shape academic identity and performance of stereotype groups (Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003; Steele, 2007; Steele, 2010; Steele & Spencer, 1992). Stereotype threat is a situational threat that in general form can affect members of any group in which a negative stereotype exists (Steele, 1997). Steele (1998) suggested stereotype threat occurs when one recognizes that a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs is applicable to oneself in a particular situation. Steele (1998) argued identification with a stereotyped group is threatening because a person then realizes he may be seen or treated in terms of the negative stereotype. Steele (1997) contended where bad stereotypes exist about a group, members can fear being reduced to that stereotype, thus prompting avoidance or underperformance in certain situations.

In "A Threat in the Air", Steele (1997) stated if a relationship to schooling does not form or is broken, achievement may suffer. Steele (1997) and his colleagues tested situational stereotype in groups of African Americans and women taking standardized tests. The results indicated when stereotype threat becomes chronic in a situation it can pressure disidentification, a reconceptualization of the self and one's values so as to remove the domain as a self-identity. Steele (1997) noted, although disidentification

offers the retreat of not caring about the domain in relation to self, it can undermine sustained motivation in the domain which can be costly in a domain such as school.

Society's negative attitudes towards people with disabilities frequently undermine the success of students with disabilities. A common stereotype faced by people with disabilities is known as ableism. Ableism is defined as the belief that it is better or superior not to have a disability than have one and that it is better to do things the way that nondisabled people do things (Hehir, 2003; Storey, 2007). In addition, Storey (2007) claimed ableism has been historically represented in schools and is tied to the medical model of disability that seeks to "fix" people. Hehir suggested negative cultural attitudes toward disability can undermine opportunities for all students to participate in school and society. Negative attitudes and stereotypes regarding ED students frequently result in lower expectations that influence the recommendations of career counselors, vocational educational specialists, and special education teachers and service providers, especially when recommending occupations (Hehir, 2003; Obiakor & Wilder, 2010). Hehir (2003) asserted:

Ableist assumptions become dysfunctional when the focus of educational programs becomes changing disability. School time devoted to activities associated with changing disability may take away from the time needed to learn academic material. The ingrained prejudice against performing activities in ways that are more efficient for disabled people may add to educational deficits (para. 6).



Hehir (2003) also states no other group suffers from negative attitudes and experience poorer outcomes than students with ED. The ability to understand how negative thoughts, actions and behaviors about certain groups negatively impact their educational outcomes can assist educators in avoiding behaviors that perpetuate such stereotypes.

### **Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1997a) defined self-efficacy as individuals beliefs in their capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. Individuals have a self system that enables them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Bandura, 1997a). Self- efficacy beliefs determine how people think, behave and motivate themselves. The four main sources of self-efficacy include enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997a; Bandura, 1997b).

Bandura (1997b) defines the four main sources of self-efficacy as follows:

1. Performance Accomplishments: personal mastery experiences in which successes raise mastery and repeated failures lower mastery.
2. Vicarious Experience: seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences generate expectations that success is possible.
3. Verbal Persuasion: lead by suggestion into believing success is possible.
4. Emotional Arousal: relying on physiological states of arousal to determine outcome such as associating high stress with failure and low stress with success.

Bandura and Locke (2003) posited efficacy beliefs predict behavioral functioning between individuals at different levels of perceived self-efficacy and also changes in functioning in individuals at different levels of efficacy over time. It also predicts variation within the same individual in the tasks performed and those shunned or attempted (Bandura & Locke, 2003). Bandura and Cervone (1983) stated in applying acquired skills, strong belief in one's self-efficaciousness intensifies and sustains the effort needed to realize challenging goals, which are difficult to attain if one is plagued with self doubt. They also claimed failed performances are likely to be demotivating by undermining perceived efficacy (Bandura & Cervone, 1983). According to Bandura and Locke (2003):

Among the mechanisms of human agency, none is more central or pervasive than beliefs of personal efficacy. Whatever other factors serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce desired effects: otherwise one has little incentive to act or persevere in the face of difficulties. (p. 87)

Bandura and Cervone (1983) specified substandard performances give rise to despondency and goal abandonment. Wilson et al. (2009) reviewed two large scale national studies that analyzed youth with disabilities in high schools and the impact of high expectations, aspirations, and access to academic curriculum on academic preparation and enrollment in a two or four year post-secondary education institution. Based on their study, Wilson et al. (2009) indicated academic success plays an important

role in improving the likelihood students will plan to attend college upon high school completion.

Students with disabilities often have lower self-efficacy and suffer from more often from stereotype threat than nondisabled students due to “repeated failure, limited social skills development, reduced success in living independently, and/or difficulty advocating for themselves (Scanlon, Saxon, Cowell, Kenny, Pérez-Gualdrón & Jernigan, 2008). As students with ED prepare for post-school activities it is important for educators to avoid practices that negatively impact their level of self-efficacy.

School belonging, stereotype threat, and self-efficacy have a significant impact on student perceptions of post-secondary education preparedness. School experiences such as repeated failure, peer alienation, and negative stereotypes may lead to the development of a pessimistic attitude towards one’s ability to experience academic success. Students with ED often report feelings of discrimination and isolation in their educational settings (Chen & Kaplan, 2003). Special education was put in place to provide the additional support services students with disabilities need to succeed and successfully transition to post-secondary life; however the use of evidence-based practices that meet the individual needs of students is uncommon (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008; Stodden & Conway, 2002). Bradley et al. (2008) reported less than half of the students identified as ED receive behavioral interventions or mental health services within their schools.

### **Special Education Transition**

Transition is the time in which adolescents begin to make immediate, concrete and realistic decisions about their future after leaving high school. Students with disabilities face an uncertain future in many aspects of adult life, often ending with poor outcomes. To address the transition issues students with disabilities encountered, federal education transition policy was initiated with the enactment of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act Amendment of 1983 (section 626 P.L. 98-199) (Lehman et al, 2002). Halpern et al. (1995) argued the federal government began to place emphasis on improving outcomes of students with disabilities, resulting in more than 300 model demonstration projects in the area of transition, including approximately 100 projects focusing on transition exclusively. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) was implemented and required students ages 16 years and older be provided with coordinated services to address their needs when moving from school to adult life (Council for Exceptional Children, 2009). The primary focus was movement from school to work (Kohler, Johnson, Chadsey-Rusch & Rusch, 1993).

Although an increase in post-secondary education participation among students with disabilities occurred, the outcomes of students with disabilities continued to fall significantly behind those of their nondisabled peers after the enactment of IDEA 1997. To address the continued lag in outcomes success for students with disabilities the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education created recommendations that influenced the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 (Schmitz, 2008). Wilson et al. (2009) state, "special education policy as articulated in IDEA focuses on improving the post

school outcomes of students with disabilities, including college enrollment” (para. 1).

The changes to IDEA were as follows:

- A coordinated set of activities (included in IDEA 1997)
- A focus on improving academic and functional achievement
- Age appropriate transition assessment
- Transition services
- Indicators 13 and 14: Annual data reporting tools for states
- Creating measurable post-secondary goals using age-appropriate transition assessments (Kohler et al., 1993; Schmitz, 2008; Wilson et al., 2009).

It also included language that extended beyond simple access to general education curriculum and positions access to the curriculum as a means to achieve post-secondary goals (Wilson et al., 2009). Transition services and activities consist of instruction, community experiences and the development of other employment, independent and daily living objectives (Bateman & Herr, 2006; Shriner, Plotner & Rose, 2010). The transition component of the IEP must include four key elements as stated by Shriner et al. (2010):

- An assessment process that focuses on the identification of one or more post-secondary goals for the student.

- A specific listing of one or more postsecondary goals in the area of education and training, employment, and when appropriate, independent living.
- A specific listing of IEP annual goals that are directed to assist students to meet their postsecondary goals.
- A specific listing of transition services, including instructional activities and community experiences designed to help the student in transitioning from school to anticipate post school environments and to help achieve identified postsecondary goals (p. 175).

Students with disabilities must also receive a summary of their high school functional and academic performance (SOP) upon high school completion (Bateman & Herr, 2006; Kocchar-Bryant, Bassett, & Webb, 2009; Kohler et al., 1993; Shriner et al., 2010; Sitlington & Neubert, 2004).

### **Special Education Transition Planning**

IDEA 2004 mandated transition services for students with disabilities begin at age 16 years; however, transition planning for students with disabilities usually begins at the earliest appropriate age, which is usually age 14 years (Cheney, 2010; Kocchar-Bryant et al., 2009; NCSET, 2002; Shriner et al., 2010). Special Education transition planning provides an opportunity for students with disabilities to set goals and identify the services required to transition successfully from secondary education to post-secondary life, including education, work, and independent living. The transition plan is developed by an

IEP team. The IEP team includes the student, parents, teachers, administrators, and support agencies (Bateman & Herr, 2006; NCSET, 2002).

Prior to the determination of the transition services a student will receive a transition assessment is conducted using a transition assessment tool. A transition assessment is a collection of data on the student's needs, preferences, and interests related to current and future education, employment, living, personal and social environments (Mazzotti, Rowe, Kelley, Test, Fowler, Kohler, Kortering, 2009). Transition assessment tools may vary; however they usually include transition planning inventories, person centered checklists, academic and behavior measures, self-determination scales and interest inventories (Shriner et al., 2010).

Upon completion of the needs assessment, measurable post-secondary goals are written for the student. The goals must address the students' needs, interests, strengths and preferences. The goals include objectives which the student works to accomplish in preparation for post-school activities. Special Education transition plans include components such as curriculum and instruction, career awareness and work experience, linkages to adult services, post secondary education awareness and planning, and specific instruction on independent living (Collet-Klingberg & Kolb, 2011). Transition plans for students have many components and must be approached by taking a realistic view of the student's skills (Mahany-Castro, 2010). Effort should be placed upon providing real, authentic opportunities for students to make decisions and accept consequences.

The results of previous studies indicated many students with disabilities fail to meet their post-secondary goals because they lack the skills required to navigate and

negotiate successfully in the post-secondary setting (Friedan, 2003; Kocchar-Bryant et al, 2009). Best practices in transition planning include providing the opportunity for students to develop strong self-advocacy and self-determination skills by being active participants and providing access to college preparatory coursework when possible while at the secondary level (Webb, Patterson, Syverud & Seabrooks-Blackmore, 2006; Wilson, Hoffman & McLaughlin, 2009).

### **Summary**

The review of literature presented here provides a foundation for understanding the context of the study. The achievement of positive post-school outcomes continues to be a challenge for students with emotional disturbance. It is an even bigger challenge for educators and policy makers nonetheless. Previous research has indicated the completion of post-secondary education significantly increases the chances of achieving positive post-school outcomes for students with or without disabilities (Frieden, 2003; Julian & Kominski, 2011; Kocchar-Bryant et al, 2009; Newman et al., 2011). However, the transition from secondary to post-secondary education for students with emotional disturbance often mean overcoming multiple social, academic and environmental constraints which serve as deterrents to enrollment and participation.

Assessing the perceptions of post-secondary education preparedness of students with emotional disturbance can be useful in identifying effective post-secondary education transition planning practices. The development of self-determination skills have been identified as a forerunner in effectively preparing special education students for success; however post-secondary education has remained largely underutilized by



those with mental illness (Knis-Matthew, 2007). Negative stereotypes and ableism in the field of education may be contributing factors.

Understanding student perceptions of their level of post-secondary education preparedness and how their perceptions of their level of preparedness impact post-secondary education participation is vital for educators. Special education transition planning has been previously studied; however the impact of transition services on students' perception of post-secondary education preparedness has been ignored. The focus of this study allows for the exploration of this phenomenon.

The next chapter discusses the research methodology. The research methodology includes a description of the design rationale, setting, participants, data collection, and analysis. Lastly, a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical issues is provided.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Methodology**

The methodology section includes a detailed description of the research procedures. The design rationale, interview questions, setting, data collection, and data analysis procedures are explained. In addition, an overview of validity and ethical issues related to the study are provided.

Prior research in the efficacy of special education transition is plentiful, as is research in the post-school outcomes of students with disabilities (Newman et al, 2011; Scanlon et al., 2008; Valentine et al., 2009; Wagner et al, 2005). The NLTS and NLTS2 provided educators and policy makers an abundance of information about the outcomes and effective special education transition and transition planning practices; however the impact of special education transition planning on the perceptions of post-secondary education preparedness in students with Emotional Disturbance (ED) has been subsumed. As students with ED prepare to exit secondary education, their perceptions of their level of post-secondary education preparedness can have a major impact on their decision to participate in post-secondary education.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how participation in special education transition planning impacts students' perception of their level of post-secondary education preparedness. This study also explored the relationship between special education transition planning and academic self efficacy. This study moved

beyond examining post-school outcomes into examining the experience of special education transition planning from the perspective of the students.

### **Research Questions**

This research question was, “How does participation in special education transition planning impact students with ED’s perception of their level of post-secondary education preparedness?” The following questions served as a frame for the research question:

1. In what ways did the method of the transition planning services received in secondary school impact participant’s level of academic self-efficacy?
2. To what extent were participants able to select the transition planning services they received in secondary school?
3. How much influence did participants feel transition planning had on their post-secondary education decisions?
4. Based upon participants’ perceptions, did the special education transition planning services they received in secondary school adequately address their post-secondary education preparation needs?
5. Based upon participant’s perceptions, how can post secondary education institutions assist ED students during the special education post secondary transition planning process?

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

Peshkin (1988) argued researchers should systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of their research. According to Peshkin (1998), when researchers observe themselves in a focused way, they learn about the particular subset of personal qualities that contact with their research phenomenon has released. Malterud stated:

During all steps of the research process, the effect of the researcher should be assessed, and, later on, shared. Adequate accounts of these effects should be presented in the publication, as the frame of discussions of limitations and strengths of the study, and transferability of findings (p. 484).

I am the researcher in this study, a high school special education teacher with over five years of experience teaching in an urban public school setting. I have served as a classroom teacher, special education department head, and case manager for students with a wide range of disabilities. In 2011, I was selected along with two other special education teachers to serve as a special education case manager. My responsibilities include developing and monitoring individual education plans (IEP), transition plans, and review of existing data for students with disabilities. I also assist general education teachers with developing instructional strategies and on how to implement the accommodations and modifications outlined in student IEPs.

My experiences as a special education teacher and case manager will enhance my awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity to the issues being addressed in this study. Every effort will be made to ensure objectivity. According to Mehra (2002)

The idea is to keep the two voices separate - emic (insiders'/ participants' voice) and etic (outsider/ researcher's voice) - as much as possible in your data, and decide which voice will be the predominant voice in your text. The etic voice is of course, always there, hidden may be, but is always present in the text by way of how the text is organized, how the data is presented, what quotes are used and what data is ignored etc., etc. If you are interested in the emic voice being the predominant voice to tell the story, then it is important that you keep your personal judgments/interpretations out as much as possible (para 45).

I remained open to the thoughts and opinions of others and set aside my experiences in order to understand those of the participants in this study. A reflexive journal was used throughout this study to record my personal beliefs, preconceptions, and assumptions about the topic (Mehra, 2002; Penner & McClement, 2008)

### **Design Rationale**

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry that explores issues, seeks to understand phenomena and answer questions. According to Merriam (2009), “A central characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds” (p. 22). Qualitative research methods will be used in this study to explore the phenomenon of special education transition planning’s impact on the perception of post-secondary education preparedness in students with ED. This study is

exploratory because little is known about the impact of special education transition planning on ED student perceptions of post-secondary education preparedness.

This study is situated within a constructionist paradigm. “Constructionism holds that knowledge is constructed out of human engagement with objects that are already in the world rather than meaning being discovered or created anew by each person, which is a subjectivist epistemological position” (Crotty as cited in Caelli, 2000, p. 372). The constructionist paradigm is used by researchers who study the meanings people live by and how those meanings are created (Harris, 2010). Constructionist main areas of concern are how human behavior assembled into identifiable categories, why certain categories become important or significant, and how categories become embedded in cultural traditions of particular groups and societies (Keel, 2007).

The specific methodologies that guided the method of data collection, analysis, and interpretation were phenomenology and narrative inquiry. Husserl (1982) introduced phenomenology as a descriptive study of the varieties of experience. “Husserl- inspired phenomenology is primarily an approach that investigates the objects of experience in order to draw up a theory of experience” (Mortari & Tarozz, 2010, p. 12).

Phenomenological analysis seeks to describe the lived experience within the context of culture rather than searching for a universal or unchanging meaning of it (Caelli, 2000). Merriam (2009) stated phenomenology focuses on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness. She also stated the phenomenological approach is well suited for studying affective, emotional and intense human experiences (Merriam, 2009). According to Finley (2009), phenomenology’s aim

is a fresh, complex, rich description of phenomenon as it is concretely lived. “In other words, the role played by phenomenology is mainly theoretical, deepening the theory behind the method or the understanding of the mode of inquiry” (Manen as cited in (Mortari & Tarozz, 2010, p. 11).

Kramp (2004) stated that “narrative inquiry serves the researcher who wishes to understand a phenomenon or an experience rather than to formulate a logical or scientific explanation. The object of narrative inquiry is understanding” (p. 104) Clandinin (2006) posited people shape their lives by stories of who they are, who others are, and how they interpret their past in terms of these stories. As a research approach, narrative serves as both the process a narrator/participant (*telling/narrating*) and the product (*story/narrative told*) (Kramp, 2004). Fisher (1987) identified the following five assumptions of the narrative paradigm:

- People are storytelling animals
- We make decisions on the basis of good reasons
- History, rationality, biography, culture and character determine what we consider good reasons
- Narrative rationality is determined by the coherence and fidelity of our stories
- The world is a set of stories from which we choose and constantly re-create our lives.

Narrative analysis involves constructing stories from the data collected. Polkinghorne (1995) stated the constructed story must fit the data while at the same time bring order

and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data. Narrative analysis is practically intuitive and utilizes terms identified by the analyst (Reissman, 1993). Reissman (2000; 2008) asserted narrative analysis permits the systematic study of personal experience and meaning, which enables investigators to study the active, self-shaping quality of human thought. Narrative research is classified as either descriptive or explanatory depending on the purpose of the research. According to Polkinghorne (1998), descriptive research describes the narratives already held by individuals and groups. He further explained explanatory research explains through narrative the reason why something happened (Polkinghorne, 1998). This study utilized a descriptive approach to answer the research question by describing the themes of participants' stories as they recounted their special education experiences and post-secondary transition planning activities.

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was a public Midwestern university. Based upon the university's student body profile for fall 2011, there are approximately 16,800 enrolled students (Student Body Profile Fall, 2011). The student to faculty ratio is 18 to 1. Financial aid is utilized by 76.7% of undergraduates, 61.5% of graduate students, and 98.2% of professional students enrolled. The numbers of degrees conferred during the last academic school year were as follows:

- Baccalaureate degrees: 2,092
- Master's degrees: 868
- Education Specialist degrees: 22



- Doctoral degrees: 50
- Professional degrees: 44
- Graduate certificates: 71 (Student Body Profile Fall, 2011).

The university has a Disability Access Services office that provides services for students with disabilities. They provide services on an individual basis aiming to mainstream students with disabilities into the general student population and to assure a positive learning experience.

### **Participant Recruitment**

An email explaining the study and request for participants was sent to the director /coordinator of the university's Disability Access Office. A subsequent telephone conference was held to provide further detail and answer additional questions regarding the study. Upon completion of the telephone conference the director /coordinator agreed to email eligible participants a copy of the participant request letter (see Appendix A) that provided an overview of the study along with the researcher's contact information. Subjects who wished to participate in the study contacted the researcher via email or telephone to schedule an interview. Participants received a \$10.00 gift card for Subway Restaurants for their participation.

### **Participant Selection**

Sample selection in qualitative studies is typically much smaller than the sample selection in quantitative studies (Mason, 2010). Marshall (1996) argued an appropriate

sample size for qualitative research is one that sufficiently answers the research question. The essence of qualitative research is not to predict or to generalize. The goal of qualitative research is to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In qualitative research the sample size is determined by data saturation (Hodges, 2001). Marshall (1996) concluded the sample size for simple questions or very detailed studies may be in single figures. Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam (2003) reported qualitative research reaches a point of diminishing return as the study progresses; therefore more data does not necessarily lead to more information. According to Creswell (1998) and Mason (2010) a sample size of 5 to 25 is appropriate for phenomenological research studies.

The criterion used to identify participants was guided by the research question. Polkinghorne (2005) indicated qualitative samples should not be random or left to chance because the aim is to collect data that sufficiently refines and brings clarity to understanding the phenomenon. Morse (2000) stated, "if data are on target, contain less dross, and are rich and experiential, then fewer participants will be required to reach saturation." (p. 4). Instead of focusing on how many sources or how much data could be collected purposive sampling along with snowball sampling were the participant selection techniques used in this study. "Purposive sampling is the most important kind of non-probability sampling used to identify participants" (Kruger as quoted in Groenewald, 1999 p. 8). Purposive sampling involves selecting data in which the researcher can substantially learn about the phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 2005). Snowball sampling is a method used to access hidden or hard to reach populations (Heckathorn, 1997). Snowball

sampling is defined as a chain referral sampling process that relies on referrals from initial participants to generate additional subjects (Johnson & Sabin, 2010).

The research focused on the perceptions of five students enrolled in a public Midwestern university who were between the ages of 20 - 24 years old, received an educational diagnosis of ED/EBD/SED prior to high school graduation, had an IEP, and received special education services in a public high school. Initially, three students expressed interest to participate in this study. Two additional students were later invited to participate in the study by two of the initial participants. The purposive sample for this study included five post-secondary education students that received special education services in high school due to an educational diagnosis of emotional disturbance. The purposive sample of participants varied in regards to gender, age, and class standing. Participants were able to adequately reflect and verbally describe their experiences.

### **Data Collection**

The research interview is a common data collection method in qualitative research. In qualitative research the interview enables the researcher to understand a phenomenon from the subject's point of view and to uncover the meaning of their experiences (Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996), reported, "The research interview is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest" (p. 125). The interview has three stages which include establishing the context of the subject's experience, construction of the experience, and finally a reflection on the meaning it holds (Seidmen as cited in Wimpenny & Gass, 2000, p. 1487). Qualitative research interviews may occur in a variety of settings, such as individual and group

sessions (DiCiccolo-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Qu & Dumay, 2011). Individual interview is the primary method of data collection in a phenomenological study in addition to the researcher exploring his or her own experiences to become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints and assumptions (Merriam, 2009; Wimpenny & Gass, 2000).

Interview methods include structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Semi-structured interviews will be used to gather data for this study. “The semi-structured interview involves prepared questioning (see Appendix B) guided by identified themes in a consistent and systematic manner interposed with probes designed to elicit more elaborate responses”(Qu & Dumay, 2011 p. 246). DiCiccolo-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) stated that most semi-structured interviews are usually scheduled in advance, only conducted once, and take between 30 minutes to several hours to complete. One on one interviews versus group interviews were used in this study to enable a more focused discussion of the participants’ experiences, to provide confidentiality, and to enable the researcher to focus on the nonverbal behaviors of the participants. Each participant was interviewed once for approximately 90 to 120 minutes.

Elwood and Martin (2000) stated it is important for qualitative researchers to select an appropriate site to conduct interviews. When selecting an interview site it is important to consider the relationship and interactions of people in particular places. Participants must feel comfortable and be able to speak freely about the topic (Elwood & Martin, 2000). The interviews in this study took place in various locations that were selected by the participant.

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Verbatim transcription and researcher notation of participants' nonverbal behavior is central to the reliability, validity, and veracity of qualitative data collection and management (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Kvale (1996) stated qualitative data sets of text must be presented and organized in the same manner to avoid difficulty when cross comparing data within the transcripts. To ensure that every transcript was generated systematically all transcripts included mispronunciations, slang, grammatical errors, and nonverbal sounds such as laughter and sighs. Participants were emailed a copy of their transcribed interview to check for accuracy and to ensure their point of view was accurately captured.

### **Data Analysis**

Phenomenological method encompasses three interlocking steps; phenomenological reduction, description, and a search for essences (Giorgi, 1997). Phenomenological reduction occurs when the researcher explores, brackets, and puts aside previous knowledge, experiences and opinions about the phenomenon in order to view the phenomenon precisely as it is presented (Giorgi, 1997; Husserl, 1982; Merriam, 2009; Mortari & Tarozz, 2010). The researcher's exploration of his or her own experiences is called "*Epoche*" which has a Greek origin and "*means without judgment*" (Finlay, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Mortari & Tarozzi, 2010).

Data analysis began with verbatim transcription of each audio recorded interview. The transcriptions were checked for accuracy by comparing them to the audio taped interviews. Thematic analysis was used to identify common and recurrent themes. The

first step in thematic analysis according to Green, Willis, Hughes, Small, Welch, Gibbs and Daly (2007), requires the researcher to become immersed in the data prior to coding. In addition to becoming immersed in the data, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested the following steps be included in thematic analysis:

- **Open Coding:** The aim of open coding is to discover, name and categorize phenomena. Open coding consists of examining transcripts line by line to identify phrases and assign code names.
- **Axial Coding:** This process includes analysis of the codes assigned during open coding and grouping them into related categories.
- **Selective Coding:** This process includes organizing categories around central explanatory concepts that represent the main themes that emerged during the research.

Sanders (1982) explained themes refer to commonalities present within or between narratives. Themes capture important information in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes are based on the importance and centrality accorded to them rather than on the frequency in which they occur (Sanders, 1982). The themes were compared to those found in the literature. A storied analysis of each participant was constructed using the data gathered from each participant. Individual summaries were also provided to participants for input as a part of the member checking process.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) trustworthiness in qualitative research can be established by using their model of trustworthiness. Their model suggests measuring the degree of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in a study to establish qualitative trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Kreftig (1991) provided the following definitions for credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability:

- **Credibility:** Indicates the research findings represent a credible conception of the data drawn from the original data. Credible research presents accurate descriptions and interpretation of data that is recognizable by those with a similar experience. It is also the most important criterion for the assessment of qualitative research.
- **Transferability:** The degree of which research findings can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project.
- **Dependability:** Variability that can be tracked. The quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory development.
- **Confirmability:** The degree of how well the research findings are supported by the data.

The trustworthiness of this study was increased by the use of bracketing, triangulation and member checking.

Bracketing (epoche) in phenomenological research is used to temporarily hold in abeyance the foreknowledge of the researcher (Hamil & Sinclair, 2010). Bracketing includes identifying beliefs, preconceptions, and assumptions about the topic and recording them in a reflexive journal (Penner & McClement, 2008). Bracketing enables the researcher to remain open to the data as it is revealed without making judgment. The process of bracketing is ongoing and was used throughout the course of this study.

Triangulation is a process of combining methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon to reduce biases, increase comprehensiveness, and ensure trustworthiness (Cohen, 2006; Jonsen & Jehn, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There are four methods of triangulation which include methods of triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and theory/perspective triangulation. The method of triangulation used in this study was theoretical/perspective triangulation. Theoretical/Perspective triangulation is defined as the use of multiple theories to examine and interpret data (Cohen, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thurmond, 2001). Using multiple theories to analyze and interpret data provides the researcher with different lenses in which to view the same data.

Member checking is another strategy used to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research. Member checking occurs when data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions are provided to participants for review to check for accuracy (Cohen, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checks can be performed during and/or after the data collection process. Member checking in this study occurred during the data collection process. The researcher restated, summarized and/or



paraphrased information received from the participants during the interviews and provided participants with a copy of the transcribed interview to ensure accuracy.

### **Ethical Issues**

The proposal was sent to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Missouri- St. Louis for approval (See Appendix C). In all four participants participated in a semi-structured interview. They were questioned about their experiences participating in post-secondary special education transition planning and how those experiences may have influenced their decisions about their level of post- secondary education preparedness. All participants provided consent to participate in this study. There were no anticipated risks associated with this study.

Participants were informed that there was no direct benefit for their participation in this study (see Appendix D). However, their participation may expand what is currently known in the field of special education regarding post-secondary transition. Participants were also informed that they had a right to refuse to answer any question and/or terminate the interview at any time without penalty. Participants received a \$10.00 Subway restaurant gift card as compensation for their time.

Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms for their names. The pseudonyms were used on all written records. Data was stored on a password protected computer and/or stored in a locked office.

In conclusion, qualitative research methods were used to examine the impact of special education post-secondary transition planning on the perception of post-secondary

education preparedness in students with ED. Purposive sampling and individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of the phenomenon.

Bracketing, triangulation, and member checking were used to establish trustworthiness.

The next chapter provides a brief overview of the research participants.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Participants**

According to Reissman (1993) narrative analyst should work with a single story, isolating and ordering events in chronological order. As depicted in the methodology, the research focused on the perceptions of five students enrolled in a public Midwestern university who were between the ages of 20 - 24 years old, received an educational diagnosis of ED/EBD/SED prior to the completion of secondary education, had an IEP, and received special education services in a public high school (see Table 4.1.). A brief overview of the research participants along with an analysis of the interviews of the post-secondary transition planning experiences of students with ED is presented.

The participants' stories presented in this chapter are depicted as unbroken holistic narratives. The individual narratives are followed by a list of themes obtained from the participant's story. The list of themes provided for each of the research participants was obtained thematic narrative analysis. Thematic analysis includes open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The aim of thematic analysis as explained by Braun and Clarke (2006) is to discover, name and categorize phenomena. Thematic analysis involves the identification and analysis of themes and patterns of similarity within qualitative research (Braun & Clark, 2006). Sanders (1982) explained themes refer to commonalities present within or between narratives. Themes capture important information in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

TABLE 4.1.

*Participants*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Enrollment Status</b>	<b>Disability Support Services</b>
Angel	23	Female	Black	Full-Time/3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Registered
Heaven	22	Female	Black	Full-Time/2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Not Registered
Star	21	Female	White	Full-Time/3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Registered
Romeo	20	Male	White	Full-Time/2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Not Registered
Sunny	24	Male	Black	Full-Time/3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Not Registered

**Narrative One: Angel's Story**

Angel is a 23 year old Black woman that lives with her mother in the city of St. Louis, Missouri. She is a full-time student and works part-time at a local parcel shipping company. She is single with no children. She is majoring in social work.

**The early years.** Angel grew up in the inner city and attended school in the St. Louis Public school system. She and her older sister were raised by her mother after their parents divorced when she was 7 years old. Angel recalled spending summers and a few weekends out of the year with her father; however much of her time was spent with her mother, sister and maternal grandmother.

**Angel's path to special education.** Angel remembers being a happy child until she reached middle school. Angel stated,

*“Out of nowhere, something changed in me. I started feeling depressed and sad.”*

Her behavior changed from good to bad. She began acting out at home and at school.

There was also a dramatic change in her sleep habits and a decline in her overall health.

*“I was always sleepy and sick. I had daily stomach aches.”*

Angel recalled her mother questioning her on a daily basis about her behavior; however she was too young to accurately explain the changes she was experiencing. Angel spent a significant amount of time in the school disciplinarian's office.

*“My teachers would send me to the in-school suspension room almost every day!”*

Then one day during a parent/teacher conference, her teacher recommended that her mother take her to see a psychiatrist. Instead of seeing a psychiatrist, her mother took her to see her pediatrician. The pediatrician diagnosed her with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). She was put on medication; however her emotional problems remained. Her pediatrician then referred her to see a child psychiatrist who later diagnosed her with Bi-Polar Disorder, Social Disorder and ADHD. She was placed on several medications which negatively impacted her ability to function. She stated,

*My mother was not happy about the negative side effects of all the medicine I was taking. She went around and around with the psychiatrist, until we found a combination of medicines to help my emotions without too many negative side effects.*

After Angel's moods were stabilized by the medication, she was evaluated by the school psychologist. The results of her evaluation revealed she met the requirements to receive an educational diagnosis of Emotionally Disturbed. Angel immediately began receiving special education services. She was placed in smaller, more restrictive classes, and received additional support from her teachers. She was not happy about her new placement in school.

*"I really hated going to school because I was pulled away from the kids I was used to being in class with, you know the kids that were normal".*

Angel felt her new diagnosis and class placement were an indication that something was terribly wrong with her. She did not like being in special education and began to resent her teachers. She believed that her problems were the result of her behavior being too much for some teachers to handle. She was ashamed of her medical condition and her educational placement at school.

**The impact of special education.** Participation in special education had a negative impact on Angel's academic self-efficacy and willingness to participate academically in school. She felt as though the special education teachers had little faith in her academic skills and ability to succeed. The special education teachers' low

expectations caused Angel to doubt her ability to experience academic success. Angel's placement in special education also caused her to develop a high level of resentment towards her teachers and school in general. Once she made it to high school her behavior had slightly improved. When she realized her negative behavior was a hindrance to her general education participation she put forth more effort to improve her behavior and grades. She stated,

*"I never really had learning problems."*

**Angel's return to general education.** By the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade her behavior had improved tremendously. The improvement in her behavior enabled her to return to the general education setting. She still received special education assistance occasionally; however when she did receive help it occurred in the general education setting. Angel continued to take her medication and work with her therapist. She learned how to control her anger and emotions. She joined the volleyball, soccer and co-ed wrestling teams. Angel was able to earn decent grades and reduce the number of behavior referrals she received. She recalled only falling behind in class if she was suspended or absent from school. Although she enjoyed playing organized sports for her school; she still felt like an outsider.

*"I never really had school spirit".*

Although Angel's return to the general education setting had a positive impact on her academic aspirations; her sense of school belonging remained unchanged.

**Post-secondary transition planning.** Once Angel returned to the general education setting she was eager to participate in post-secondary education transition planning. She was looking forward to life after high school. When she was in the special education setting she had no interest in her academic future. She was unable to recall any special education transition planning activities that significantly impacted her level of post-secondary education preparedness.

*“I can’t really remember participating in any special education college transition stuff, it is really vague. If I did it wasn’t really helpful”.*

She did credit her participation in the general education post-secondary education transition planning activities with helping her prepare for post-secondary education participation. She was most fond of her participation in a program called “College Summit”. College Summit played a pivotal role in helping Angel prepare for college. Upon high school graduation, Angel believed her level of post-secondary education preparedness was comparable to most graduating seniors in her high school. According to Angel,

*“Once you want to go to college, you do what you have to do to get there.”*

**Post-secondary education experience.** Angel’s cumulative grade point average upon high school graduation was 3.3 on a 4.0 scale. She recalled taking the ACT exam several times during her junior and senior year of high school. Her highest score was 21 which met the requirements for acceptance at the university she currently attends.



Angel's first year as a college student was challenging. She had trouble meeting the academic expectations in many of her classes. Angel was referred to the disability support office at her school by her math professor. According to Angel, she registered with the disability support office and began receiving support during the second semester of her freshman year in college.

The 19 narrative themes for Angel obtained through open coding were as follows:

- Graduated from a Public High School
- Depressed
- Poor Behavior at home and school
- Teacher recommended she see a psychiatrist
- Placed in smaller classes
- Hated going to school because she was pulled away from normal kids
- Ashamed of medical condition and educational placement
- Special Education teachers had low expectations
- Really never had learning problems
- Enjoyed playing organized sports but still felt like an outsider
- Began receiving Special Education services in middle school
- Doesn't recall participating in special education transition planning

- Returned to general education setting
- Received adequate post-secondary education preparation assistance in general education setting
- Strong desire to attend college prior to high school graduation
- Perception of post-secondary education preparedness comparable to most graduating seniors in her high school
- Had difficulty with applying for financial aid
- Registered with Disability Services at her post-secondary education institution during second semester. She was not aware of the service when she initially enrolled
- Post Secondary Education institutions could help students by visiting the high schools and explaining what they have to offer.
- Took ACT Exam

### **Narrative Two: Heaven's Story**

Heaven is a 22 year old Black female. She is single and has no children. She is a full time student and works part-time at a local bank. She currently lives with her roommate in St. Louis County, Missouri. She was enrolled in two summer courses and majoring in business and accounting. Heaven volunteers at a local food bank when time permits. Heaven does not have any hobbies. She stated,

*“I don’t have any hobbies because I rarely have time for anything other than school and work.”*

**The early years.** Heaven is the eldest of three children. When she was younger, she lived in a rough neighborhood in the inner city. Although she lived in the city, she did not graduate from a public school near her home. When Heaven was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade she and her siblings were accepted into the Missouri Voluntary Transfer program. That program allowed inner city students to attend schools in the county and/or rural areas in the state. Heaven attended school in the Mehlville school district. According to Heaven,

*“I went to Mehlville school district. It was mostly for White people but my mom thought I would have better opportunities if I went there.”*

She was not pleased with her mother’s decision to send her and her siblings to school so far away from the other kids in her community. She felt weird going to school in a community she did not live in.

**Heaven’s path to special education.** When Heaven initially transferred to Mehlville’s school district, she had trouble adjusting to the change. The schools were different, the teachers were different, and the students were different. Heaven became severely depressed and socially withdrawn at school. She remembers her teachers sending her out the class to meet with the school social worker on a regular basis.

*“Everyone was concerned about me and my sadness.”*

Heaven was later tested and placed in special education by the time she reached high school. She received an educational diagnosis of emotional disturbance. She dreaded

going to school even more because she was in smaller classes with modified curriculums. Heaven continued to receive special education services in the special education environment until she graduated.

**The impact of special education.** Heaven was ashamed of her educational placement and opted out of telling her friends at home about her troubles at school. Heaven's educational diagnosis and placement had a profound effect on her self-esteem. She felt as if there was no hope for her since she had a mental illness. She developed an apathetic attitude towards school and was anxious to graduate. She was very uncomfortable with the over accommodating behaviors of her teachers. She stated,

*It really amazes me that people think all people with mental illness have mental retardation too. I mean it's like people go out of their way to make things easier for you. I always felt like teachers were afraid they would set me off or something.*

She recalled having a few good teachers over the years; however majority of her teachers failed to challenge or push her to do better.

**Post-secondary transition planning.** Heaven's post-secondary transition planning occurred in the special education setting. Her transition plan included independent living and job skills training. She learned how to write a resume, create a financial budget, and how to manage a household. She participated in an internship where she worked along with a job coach and other students with disabilities. When Heaven graduated from high school she had received no post-secondary education preparation.

She reported preparing for college with her best friend over the summer. When asked about her level of post-secondary education preparedness after high school graduation, she replied,

*“I had absolutely no clue about college, what was required to enroll, where to enroll or even if I would be able to get into a college.”*

She reported having excellent job skills after high school graduation.

*“I was, able to get a job, and keep my job with the stuff I learned in the job skills class.”*

**Post-secondary education experience.** Heaven’s cumulative grade point average upon high school graduation was a 3.4 on a 4.0 scale. Heaven took the ACT one time during her senior year and earned a score of 19. She reported having test anxiety and believes she could have done better on the test if she was able to relax. According to Heaven, she did not register with the disability support office at her school. When Heaven initially enrolled in college, she was unaware of the disability support office. She was uncomfortable with disclosing her disability due to the stigma associated with having a mental illness.

*“I didn’t want the same thing to happen that happened in high school once they found out I had mental issues.”*

The 22 narrative themes for Heaven obtained through open coding were as follows:

- Graduated from a Public High School

- Participated in the Voluntary Transfer Program
- Everyone was concerned about her sadness
- She felt there was no hope for her because she had a mental illness
- Apathetic Attitude towards School Participation/No Participation
- Dreaded going to special classes
- She is amazed that people think all mentally ill people are also mentally retarded
- Uncomfortable with the over accommodating behavior from her teachers
- Majority of her teachers failed to challenge or push her to do better
- Began receiving Special Education Services in High School
- Remained in Special Education setting until high school graduation
- Participated in Special Education Transition Planning
- Transition based on independent living and job skills training
- Received no Post-Secondary Education Preparation in high school
- Didn't think about going to school in the future
- Educational placement determined type of transition services students received
- Believes she is smart

- Had absolutely no clue about college , what was required, where to enroll, or if she would be able to get into a college
- Prepared for college the summer after high school graduation
- Financial aid and meeting deadlines were barriers to post secondary education
- Did not know about or register with Disability Services at her post secondary education institution during the enrollment process
- Post-Secondary Education Institutions can provide information about the programs they have for students with disabilities

### **Narrative Three: Star's Story**

Star is a 21 year old, White female that lives in St. Charles, Missouri. She is a full-time student who is currently enrolled in one class this summer. She was recently laid off from her job and is now unemployed. She has not declared a major; however she is interested in conservation. Star is not very social; however she enjoys reading and spending time with her family. Star is very concerned about her “carbon footprint” and the current state of the environment. She is a vegetarian; she recycles, and rides her bike or carpools whenever possible.

*“I am very concerned about the environment and how our generation is destroying the planet. I think we are a wasteful generation that is not concerned about the future of our planet. I urge people to recycle whenever possible.”*

**The early years.** Star was raised by her mother and father in St. Charles, Missouri. She is the eldest of three children. She attended school in the Francis Howell school district. Star has a very large extended family that she enjoyed spending time with when she was younger. She stated that her most memorable times from her childhood were the family camping trips they took several times a year. She stated that the camping trips and the time her family spent with nature are what sparked her interest in saving the environment.

**Star's path to special education.** Star was educated in the special education environment during elementary, middle and high school. Star stated,

*“Wow, I have been in special ed since forever. I think I may have been in special education in preschool.”*

Star began having emotional and behavioral problems at a very young age. She stated that her parents were concerned about her emotional well-being and began taking her to a therapist when she was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. In addition to having behavior/emotional issues, she developed an eating disorder when she was in middle school. Her mental health problems had a negative impact on her academic development. According to Star,

*“I don't have a learning disability. I was in special-ed because I was distracted really easy and needed a smaller learning environment.”*

Star received most of her education in the special education program. When she was allowed to participate in the general education setting, she would be too overwhelmed to function. She required a small structured environment with minimal distractions.



**The impact of special education.** Star's special education placement had a profound effect on her academic self-efficacy. Star began receiving special education at the beginning of her academic career. As Star grew older, she began to realize her educational placement was not the norm. She was ashamed and felt she did not belong in school. Star stated,

*“As I got older I didn't want to go to school because I always felt I didn't belong there. I wanted to be homeschooled or something; I don't know.”*

Star never socialized with her nondisabled peers. She did not participate in any extracurricular activities. According to Star,

*“I just existed in school.”*

**Post-secondary transition planning.** Star's post-secondary transition planning consisted of her participation in a special education career readiness program. Star learned valuable work and independent living skills. She even received school credit for working at one of the career readiness job sites. Star stated she never participated in college related preparation activities. Star added,

*“I only prepared for work after high school.”*

She believes her disability played a major role in her being placed in a career based transition planning program.

*“I assume my mental illness had an impact in the type of activities I was eligible to participate in. They have different transition opportunities for students with disabilities.”*

Star graduated from high school totally unprepared for post-secondary education participation. She did take the ACT exam and scored well enough to be accepted into several universities. She credits her mother with helping her prepare and enroll in college.

**Post-secondary education experience.** Star’s cumulative grade point average upon high school graduation was 2.5 on a 4.0 scale. She earned a score of 21 on the ACT exam. Star believed her post-secondary education options for college were limited due to her low GPA; therefore she enrolled in the community college near her home. She remained at the community college until she earned enough credits to transfer to a university. When Star enrolled at the community college and later transferred to her current university she registered with disability support services at both institutions. Star asserted she received more support at the community college than she receives at the university. She believes that her ability to experience success is directly related to the support services they provided.

The 17 narrative themes for Star obtained through open coding were as follows:

- Graduated from a Public High School
- Always had trouble controlling her emotions
- Did not want to go to school because she felt she did not belong

- Low sense of school belonging had no effect on her / Never really liked school
- Began receiving Special Education Services in Elementary School
- Remained in Special Education Setting until High School Graduation
- Low School Participation
- Low Sense of School Belonging
- Average Academic Ability but believes Mental Health Issues had a Negative Impact on Academic Achievement
- Participated in Special Education Transition Planning
- Only prepared for work after graduation
- Did not start thinking about college until after graduation
- Took the ACT while in high school
- Biggest barrier to post-secondary education was her attitude
- Her mother helped her prepare and enroll in college
- Post-Secondary schools can work with high schools to help everyone learn what is expected at the college level, even for the special education students
- Her mother new about the services and helped her register with Disability Services at her college

**Narrative Four: Romeo's Story**

Romeo is a 20 year old, White male. He is single with no children. He currently lives with his parents in the city of St. Louis, Missouri. He is a full-time student. He also works full-time at a local pizzeria. He enjoys art and music. He wants to become an artist or perhaps teach art at a local gallery upon completion of his post-secondary degree. He is currently majoring in Art History.

**The early years.** Romeo was raised by both of his parents in St. Louis city. He is the eldest of two children. When Romeo first began school he attended a private Catholic school near his home. He was later transferred to the St. Louis Public school district where he remained until high school graduation. Romeo has always had an interest in art and painting. He was a member of several local art programs in his community. When he wasn't drawing or painting he enjoyed working on cars with his father. Romeo wasn't very popular in his neighborhood so he rarely socialized with the other kids in his neighborhood.

**Romeo's path to special education.** When Romeo was in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade he began having behavior problems at the Catholic School he was attending. After his parents and the school staff determined that the Catholic school was not the best placement for him, he transferred to the public school near his home. When Romeo first enrolled at the public school, things went well. After awhile, he began having behavior problems and was referred for special education testing. After Romeo was diagnosed with Emotional Disturbance, he was placed in smaller classes and began receiving special education support. Romeo stated,

*I started receiving special education services in elementary school. At first my parents fought to keep me in the least restrictive environment at school. They did not want me separated from the general population. That turned out to be a huge problem because my grades suffered and my behavior spiraled out of control.*

By the time Romeo reached middle school, his behaviors were so erratic that his parents took him to see a psychiatrist. Romeo began taking medication to control his behavior and para-educator support was added to his special education services. According to Romeo the para-educators served the following purpose,

*“Para-educators are similar to mentors. They followed me from class to class and helped me if I needed help.”*

Romeo continued to work with a para-educator in the special education setting until his junior year in high school. Romeo rarely socialized with other students. He was unhappy about his educational placement, but understood it was the best placement option for him.

A significant change occurred when Romeo’s art teacher encouraged him to join the art club at his school. Romeo was elated that someone noticed his phenomenal art skills. Romeo’s self confidence increased tremendously after joining the art club. He made new friends and began to socialize with students in the general education setting. Romeo informed his parents that he no longer required assistance for the para-educator and that he wanted to participate in a few general education classes. Romeo’s parents informed the school and the changes were made immediately.

**The impact of special education.** Romeo's participation in special education had a negative impact on his social and emotional development. Romeo stated he was able to focus more and complete his assignments; however he had no social life. Romeo stated,

*I never really socialized with other students until 11<sup>th</sup> grade. I just didn't feel like I belonged. I am sort of a loner; well at least I used to be. You know it's really difficult to be social when you have an adult following you around all the time.*

Romeo believed he wasn't as smart as the other students because of his educational placement. He was rarely exposed to nondisabled students; therefore he had no understanding of the issues other kids faced at his age. His depression continued to escalate until he was hospitalized. After his release from the hospital Romeo's mental health improved. He was allowed to participate in a few general education classes. Once he was allowed to participate in the general education setting with nondisabled students he began to realize he wasn't really that different from the other kids his age. Romeo's self-confidence flourished and his social skills improved.

**Post-secondary transition planning.** Although Romeo participated in the general education setting, the majority of his education occurred in the special education setting. Romeo's post-secondary transition planning occurred in the special education setting as well. Romeo participated in an employment based transition program. Romeo stated,

*“The transition program I first participated in was sort of like a sheltered workshop.”*

Romeo’s parents were not happy about his transition program because that program was created for very low functioning students. He was soon placed in a different transition program that enabled him to work in the various offices in his school. Romeo worked on job skills and how to behave appropriately in the workplace. He stated that he rarely if ever discussed post-secondary education with his special education transition counselor. Romeo reported,

*“My school was really into helping special education students find suitable employment.”*

When asked about his level of post-secondary education preparedness upon high school graduation he believed he was just as prepared as everyone else. He stated that he was mentally prepared for post-secondary education participation.

**Post-secondary education experience.** Romeo’s cumulative grade point average upon high school graduation was 3.4 on a 4.0 scale. He earned a score of 22 on the ACT exam. He applied at two universities and was accepted to both; however he decided to attend the institution that was the most economical. Romeo’s first semester of classes were a little more challenging than he predicted, but he was committed to working hard to master the information presented. He was aware of the disability support services his school provides for students with special needs; however he did not register for services because he did not require the support.

The 19 narrative themes for Romeo obtained through open coding were as follows:

- Graduated from a Public High School
- Poor/Compulsive Behavior, spiraled out of control
- Felt weird and out of place at school/ didn't feel like he belonged
- Never participated in activities at school until he joined the art club
- If he would have had the same attitude he probably would not have gone to college
- Began receiving Special Education Services in Elementary School
- Remained in Special Education Setting until high school graduation; however he was able to participate in a few general education classes
- Participated in Special Education Transition Planning
- Unhappy about Educational Placement; however realized it was the best placement option for him
- Transition services are decided by the IEP team
- Being in smaller more restricted classes makes you feel that you are not smart
- Average Academic Aspiration after joining the art club
- Employment based transition/ did not prepare him to college



- Once he was able to participate in general education classes he realized that he was just as smart as the other students
- Average Perception of Post-Secondary Education Preparedness due to him being mentally prepared
- No real barriers to post-secondary education
- The best thing Post-Secondary Education Institutions can do to help students with mental illness is to let students know they have services for them in college
- He found out about Disability Services from the school's website during the enrollment process, but did not register with them
- Took the ACT

#### **Narrative Five: Sunny's Story**

Sunny is a 24 year old, Black male. He currently lives with his fiancé and two children in Florissant, Missouri. He is a full-time student and works full-time at a bottle manufacturing company in the evenings. He is also the coach for a little league football team. Sunny graduated from a public high school in the city of St. Louis. He is currently majoring in business administration.

**The early years.** Sunny was raised by a single mother in St. Louis, Missouri. Sunny has three older brothers and two younger sisters. Sunny's mother was very strict on him and his siblings when they were younger. Sunny's mother always worked two jobs to make ends meet, so his older brothers were left to care for him and his younger

siblings. Although, Sunny's mother worked long hours she always stressed the importance of getting a good education. She made sure she attended every parent/teacher conference and was easily accessible if the school required her assistance.

**Sunny's path to special education.** According to Sunny, he was placed in special education when he was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Sunny stated,

*"I was a bad ass, 'oops', excuse me, my bad! But seriously, I stayed in trouble!"*

Sunny's problem behavior began when he was in elementary school. He was unable to control his anger and aggression. He had a difficult time getting along with his peers. He struggled to obey class and school rules. He was unable to be redirected without a struggle. Due to his poor behavior he was frequently suspended from school and/or placed in the detention room during school hours. His mother was called to the school on a regular basis. His poor behavior became a constant source of stress and tension for him at school and home. Sunny reported,

*"I thought my teachers just didn't like me because I would get in trouble for dumb stuff."*

The school staff suggested that his mother take him to see a specialist for an evaluation. Sunny was diagnosed with ADHD. His doctor recommended that he be placed on medication. Sunny's mother declined to medicate her son and began working closely with the staff at his school to identify an alternative solution. Sunny was evaluated by the school psychologist and it was determined that he met the criteria to

receive an education diagnosis of Emotionally Disturbed. He was later diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). Sunny was then placed in a smaller, more restrictive classroom setting.

**The impact of special education.** As Sunny progressed through school he remained in the special education environment. He was not bothered by his educational diagnosis or his need for special education services. Separation from the general education population is what bothered him the most. The exclusion from the general education environment negatively impacted Sunny's academic self-efficacy and sense of school belonging. Sunny stated,

*“At one point I stopped looking forward to anything school related.”*

Once Sunny reached high school he remained in the special education environment. He was however, able to join the football team as an incentive for good behavior. He excelled in football and began controlling his behavior to remain eligible to play on the team. Although his behavior improved, his grades continued to decline until it jeopardized his eligibility to play football. Sunny was convinced that he was academically inferior; therefore he focused very little on his academic skills.

*“I wasn't trying to be a scholar or nothing, so it didn't really matter.”*

Sunny did not understand why his grades mattered he was just a football player. He stated,

*“Well you know what they always say; athletes are dumb and only good for playing sports.”*

In order for him to remain on the football team he had to improve his grades. Sunny began working one on one with his coach after school until his grades slowly improved.

**Post-secondary education transition.** When Sunny reached the 12<sup>th</sup> grade he began working on a transition plan for life after high school. According to Sunny,

*“Well the programs I was able to participate in were in the special education department.”*

Sunny’s transition plan did not include post-secondary education preparation. His transition plan included life skills, independent living skills, job skills, and anger/behavior management preparation. Sunny insisted his coach was the only person in his school to discuss college with him. Sunny’s coach assisted him in registering for the ACT and began working with him while he explored his options for college. He credits his coach with helping him prepare for college. Sunny stated,

*“I don’t recall them [special education teachers] really talking about college.”*

Sunny’s coach convinced him he was intelligent enough to succeed in college.

**Post-secondary education experience.** Sunny did not recall his exact cumulative grade point average upon high school graduation but stated it had to be at least a 2.5 on a 4.0 scale. He did recall earning a 17 on the ACT exam. After high school graduation, Sunny did not have many post-secondary education options due to his low grade point average and ACT score. He considered attending Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri; however he enrolled at a community college instead. Sunny’s first semester of

classes at the community college was difficult. He recalled enrolling in classes that were above his academic level. After trial and error he enrolled in a few developmental classes to build his skills. After spending two years at the community college he earned enough credits to transfer to the university he currently attends. When Sunny initially enrolled at the community college he was not aware of the disability support services. By the time he transferred to the university he was aware of the services post-secondary education institutions provide for students with disabilities; however he declined to register for services because he no longer required the support.

The 18 narrative themes for Sunny obtained through open coding were as follows:

- Graduated from a Public High School
- Poor/Compulsive Behavior
- Referred for Special Education by School Staff
- Began receiving Special Education Services in Elementary School
- Remained in the Special Education until High School Graduation
- Victim of negative stereotypes towards athletes
- Began receiving Special Education Services in Elementary School
- Remained in Special Education Setting until high school graduation; however he was able to participate in a few general education classes
- Participated in Special Education Transition Planning/ Job Skills

- Average Academic Ability
- Received no post-secondary education preparation assistance from school
- No desire to participate in post-secondary education until his coach convinced him that he was intelligent enough to succeed
- When he graduated from high school he had no clue about what he needed to do
- Poor Sense of Belonging in the Academic school setting, but above average sense of belonging on the football team
- He did not know about disability services when he enrolled in college. Once he found out he chose not to register with them
- The best thing colleges can do is work with the high schools to help students know the services they provide
- Took the ACT
- The entire post-secondary enrollment process was a barrier. He struggled with financial aid, scheduling classes, and finding out if he met the enrollment requirements

### **Summary**

The research participants varied in age, gender, ethnicity, and academic standing; however their paths to post-secondary education participation were similar. Emotional and behavioral concerns were the rationale for their educational diagnosis and placement.

Participation in special education had a negative impact on their sense of belonging in school. All of the participants with the exception of one participated in special education post-secondary transition planning in high school. Those that received post-secondary transition planning services in the special education setting reported the focus of the transition services were career/employment oriented. Four of the research participants reported receiving little or no post-secondary education preparation support in high school. All of the participants reported their perceptions of their level of post-secondary education preparedness had little impact on their decisions to enroll and/or participate in post-secondary education.

Prior to the presentation of the metastory in chapter six the following chapter provides a narrative presentation of the research participants' responses to a series of questions that centered on the concepts of ability grouping, school belonging, stereotype threat, and self-efficacy as they relate to students with ED's experiences in special education. The participants' post-secondary transition planning experiences and their post-secondary education participation barriers are presented.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**Narrative Presentation of Data**

This chapter provides a narrative presentation and analysis of the data. The method of data collection included semi-structured individual qualitative interviews with five research participants. In narrative analysis the researcher is interested in determining the meaning of a particular experience or event for the one who had it, and tells about it in a story (Kramp, 2004). The purpose of this study was to examine the special education transition planning experiences of students with emotional disturbance. In addition to exploring students' perceptions of their experiences, this study sought to understand through narrative analysis, the role special education transition planning played in their perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness upon high school graduation.

This study answered the question, "How does participation in special education transition planning impact students with ED's perception of their level of post-secondary education preparedness?" The following questions served as a frame for the research question:

1. In what ways did the focus of the transition planning services received in secondary school impact their level of academic self-efficacy?
2. To what extent were students able to select the transition planning services they received in secondary school?
3. How much influence do students' feel transition planning had on their post-secondary education decisions?



4. Based upon student perceptions, did the special education transition planning services they received in secondary school adequately address their post-secondary education preparation needs?
5. How can post secondary education institutions assist students with ED during the post secondary transition planning process?

This study adds to prior research related to special education transition and expanded upon what is currently known about the relationship between school experience and academic self- efficacy among students with emotional disturbance.

In chapter four each interview was not fragmented, but interpreted as a whole using thematic narrative analysis (Reissman, 2008). Thematic narrative analysis was used to analyze each of the research participants' stories individually and then analyzed collectively to identify common themes. The events of each interview were organized into relevant events within the research topic. Reissman (2008) argued language is a resource rather than topic of inquiry, therefore close attention was paid to the content of each story rather than how or why the story was told. In this chapter themes were identified in the participants' responses to a series of questions using thematic narrative analysis. The themes that emerged were compared to the themes identified in chapter four to develop a metastory of the participants' special education post-secondary transition planning experiences. The metastory will be presented in chapter six. Chapter seven presents a concise summary of the study, discussion of the research findings, and the final conclusions. This research is compared to the literature review and implications for further research are provided.

**Participants***Angel*

Angel is a 23 year old Black woman that lives with her mother in the city of St. Louis, Missouri. She is a full-time student and works part-time at a local parcel shipping company. She is single with no children. She is majoring in social work.

*Heaven*

Heaven is a 22 year old Black female. She is single and has no children. She is a full time student and works part-time at a local bank. She currently lives with her roommate in St. Louis County, Missouri. She is majoring in business and accounting. Heaven volunteers at a local food bank when time permits.

*Star*

Star is a 21 year old, White female that lives in St. Charles, Missouri. She is a full-time student who is currently enrolled in one class this summer. She was recently laid off from her job and is now unemployed. She has not declared a major; however she is interested in conservation.

*Romeo*

Romeo is a 20 year old, White male. He is single with no children. He currently lives with his parents in the city of St. Louis, Missouri. He is a full-time student. He also works full-time at a local pizzeria. He is currently majoring in Art History.

*Sunny*

Sunny is a 24 year old, Black male. He currently lives with his fiancé' and two children in Florissant, Missouri. He is a full-time student and works full-time at a bottle manufacturing company in the evenings. He is currently majoring in business administration.

**Narrative Responses**

To gain a complete understanding of participants' special education experiences and the impact of special education transition planning on their perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness upon high school graduation a series of questions that centered on the concepts of ability grouping, school belonging, stereotype threat, and self-efficacy were asked (see Appendix B). A review of related literature indicated these concepts greatly influence the level of post-secondary education preparedness and post-secondary education participation of students with ED. The participants' post-secondary transition planning experiences and their perceived post-secondary education participation barriers are also presented.

**Ability Grouping**

Ability grouping is defined as any organization of students designed to reduce the heterogeneity, is based upon ability, and/or instructional content and method (Gamoran, 1992; Slavin, 1990).

## Question 1:

When and why were you referred for special education services?

Angel was referred for and began receiving special education services when she was in middle school due to emotional instability.

*Um, well, when I was younger, like middle school age I started getting in trouble a lot at home and at school. I was feeling depressed but didn't really know it was depression at the time. I just remember not wanting to go to school or hang out with my friends. I pretty much slept a lot. I was also feeling sick too. I would have the worst stomach aches! So after a while, my teachers started sending me to this room for kids who acted out in class. Then I think one of my teachers told my mother to get me tested for special education.*

Heaven was referred for and began receiving special education services near the end of her freshman year in high school due to poor behavior.

*I was put in special education in my freshman, no; well I think it might have been the beginning of my sophomore year or maybe the very end of my freshman year in high school. So at first nothing happened. They let me stay in my regular classes for a while, but then my behavior was still poor, so that's when I went to resource classes.*

Star was referred for and began receiving special education services when she was in preschool due to emotional instability.

*Wow, I have been in special-ed since forever. I think I may have even been in special education in preschool (smiles). I have always struggled with controlling my emotions. I can remember kids saying things like, 'that girl is emu!' you know, that's what they called the drama queens in my school. I think my parents just knew that I was emotionally unstable and put me in therapy at a young age.*

Romeo was referred for and began receiving special education services when he was in elementary school due to emotional instability and poor behavior.

*I started receiving special education services in elementary school. At first my parents fought to keep me in the least restrictive environment at school. They did not want me to be separated from the general population. That turned out to be a huge problem because my grades suffered and I continued to spiral out of control. When I got to middle school my parents and IEP team determined that I would be better served in a smaller more restrictive environment and that I needed to have a para-educator with me at all times. Para-educators are similar to mentors. They followed me from class to class and helped me if I needed help.*

Sunny was referred for and began receiving special education services when he was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade due to poor behavior.

*I know I got put in special ed when I was in about the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. My mama wasn't into putting me on medicine, so I guess that's why she put me in*

*special-ed because I was a terror (laughs) I stayed in trouble. I thought my teachers just didn't like me because I would get in trouble for dumb stuff. They stayed calling my mama on me! Half the time I didn't even know what I did. All I know is that I was in trouble for something. My behavior problems was the main concern.*

Question 2:

Did your high school offer post-secondary transition planning services for students with and/or without disabilities?

Angel's high school offered post-secondary transition planning for students with and/or without disabilities.

*"Yes, it did."*

Heaven's high school offered post-secondary transition planning for students with and/or without disabilities.

*"Yes."*

Star's high school offered post-secondary transition planning for students with and/or without disabilities.

*"Yes."*

Romeo's high school offered post-secondary transition planning for students with and/or without disabilities.

“Yes, it offered transition services for all students.”

Sunny was not sure if his high school offered post-secondary transition planning for students with and/or without disabilities.

*“I think it did, but I am not really sure about what type of things it offered to the students without disabilities.”*

Question 3:

Did the environment in which you received your special education services have an impact on your desire to attend and/or participate in school?

Angel’s special education placement resulted in her hating to attend school because she was separated from her peers in the general education setting.

*I had always heard about kids who were in special education but never really paid much attention. Well after I was diagnosed with Bi-Polar Disorder, Social Disorder, and, um, ADHD I started seeing a therapist and was placed in special classes. The classes had fewer kids than my old classes. I really hated going to school because I was pulled away from the kids I was used to being in class with, you know, the kids that were normal. I didn’t have learning problems really. I guess my behavior was too much for some teachers to handle.*

Heaven’s special education placement had a negative impact on her desire to attend school in general.

*I think I was put in resource classes by the end of first semester during my sophomore year. I really dreaded that! I hated to go to those classes. I hardly ever participated in class unless it was something I was interested in.*

Star was ashamed of her special education placement. She would have preferred being homeschooled over attending classes in the special education room.

*I was in smaller classes with other kids with disabilities. It wasn't until I realized that it wasn't normal for kids to have a therapist that I started feeling ashamed. As I got older I didn't want to go to school because I always felt I didn't belong there. I wanted to be homeschooled or something; I don't know. Anything would have been better than being in the special room.*

Romeo's educational placement and the additional special education support services he received made him feel weird and out of place; however that did not impact his level of class participation.

*I received services in the special education setting. So you can imagine how I felt, on top of being in special classes I was also being followed around by an adult all the time. I felt pretty weird and out of place. But I did participate in class sometimes.*



Sunny was not pleased about his educational placement. He believes his educational placement caused him to miss many opportunities in school which caused him to lose interest in school.

*I was in resources classes and I hated it. I never got to go on field trips and other stuff like that. I wasn't in classes with my friends. At one point I stopped looking forward to anything school related. The only time I did participate for real was when I was playing football at first.*

The participants' responses regarding ability grouping correlated with the claims made by researchers in the literature. Hallam and Ireson (2007) argued ability grouping systems have a negative impact on the social and personal outcomes of lower achieving students with them becoming stigmatized, disaffected and alienated from school. Based on the participants' responses their educational placements had a negative impact on their desire to attend and participate in school. The participants also reported they felt different from the other students and were unhappy about being separated from the general education.

### **School Belonging**

School belonging is defined as a sense of membership in a school to the extent that a student feels personally accepted, respected and included in the school social environment (Goodenow, 1993; Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010).

## Question 1:

What impact did your participation in special education have on your sense of belonging, comfort, and acceptance in school?

Angel asserted she did not want anyone to know that she was receiving special education services. She always felt she was different from other students and she believed her educational placement was confirmation. Although she played team sports in high school, her sense of belonging in school never improved.

*Um, well I don't think I liked it. I didn't want to be special. I didn't want anyone to know because I didn't want them to know I was different. I didn't tell anyone. I didn't like being in special classes either. But when I went to high school I was mostly in regular classes. But I was always kinda different from everyone else. Um, I played soccer for four years, I did co-ed wrestling for four or three years, um, I was also on the volleyball team. I never did any of the academic related stuff; you know, like, student council or yearbook club. I really never had school spirit (laughs). Even though I really enjoyed playing sports, I didn't really like the school part. I just went to school because I had to. I didn't really have a choice.*

Heaven was generally unhappy about her participation in special education and where she attended school. She participated in the voluntary transfer program which

enabled her to attend school in a suburban/rural school district. In addition to the divide caused by racial and socioeconomic differences she also faced educational biases as well.

*I never told anyone of my friends that I hung around with from my neighborhood that I was in special ed. Cuz; I did not go to school with the friends who lived in my neighborhood. I was in a program that sent kids that lived in the city to schools in the county. I went to Mehlville school district. It was mostly for White people but my mom thought I would have better opportunities if I went there. So, you know, I, uh, um already felt weird at first going all the way out there. Then when they said I had a problem and started sending me to see the social worker in my school, I really thought something was wrong. Well the social worker was really nice and helpful. But I really didn't like that I had to leave class to visit her or go see the speech lady. All I know is that I could not wait to graduate.*

Star's participation in special education had a negative impact on her sense of belonging in school. She felt as if her presence was nonexistent. She was never encouraged or invited to participate in school activities, or join any clubs.

*I had a few friends that were in special education with me, but I never really participated in school activities. I'm not very athletic, so I didn't play sports. No one ever pushed me into joining any of the academic clubs at school, so I basically just existed till the end. I wasn't around any of the*

*regular education students to really know or find out what was cool at my school.*

Romeo's participation in special education created a barrier between him and his nondisabled peers. Romeo required the services of a paraprofessional which had a negative impact on his self-esteem and his ability to fit in with his peers.

*I never really socialized with other students until 11<sup>th</sup> grade. I just didn't really feel like I belonged. I am a sort of a loner; well at least I used to be. You know it is really difficult to be social when you have an adult following you around all the time. So I never really wanted to participate in activities at school. At lunch time I would just sit in the library until the bell rang. Then when I was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade one of my teachers encouraged me to join the art club at my school because I draw really well. When I joined the art club I met a few friends and for the first time I enjoyed going to school.*

Sunny's participation in special education had no impact on his sense of belonging in school. Sunny was an athlete and enjoyed playing football for his school. He had very little interest in his academics, which may have resulted from previous school failures.

*I was a bad ass, oops, excuse me, my bad! But seriously, I stayed in trouble. So, being in special education was small to my problems. I played football all four years in high school, so I was pretty popular. I*

*mean none of the people I hung around cared if you were in special-ed or not. I wasn't trying to be a scholar or nothing so it didn't really matter, I guess. I just wanted to play football at school. I didn't care about much else. But other than playing football, I didn't get involved in other school stuff.*

Question 2:

How did your sense of belonging, comfort, and acceptance within the school community influence your decision to participate in post secondary education upon high school graduation?

Angel's sense of belonging in school had no impact on her future academic aspirations. Angel reported that she had only two options after high school graduation. Those two options were employment or college. Angel decided to further her education beyond high school.

*It didn't really have an influence because I had; well college is a must in my home. Once you graduate, you have to work or go to college. I was always told it is unacceptable to just do nothing with yourself.*

Heaven's lack of involvement in school may have negatively impacted her desire to continue her education beyond high school graduation.

*Um, hmm. I'm not sure I understand the question but I will try to answer. I guess maybe because I wasn't really that involved in things at my school, I*

*didn't think about going to school in the future. I just wanted to graduate and get it over.*

Star reported her sense of belonging in school had no effect on her decision to participate in post-secondary education.

*"I don't think it had any effect on me at all."*

Romeo stated that joining the art club improved his sense of belonging in school which may have sparked his interest in attending college. He mentioned that if his sense of belonging in school had not improved, he may not have wanted to attend college.

*"Before I joined the art club and started making friends, I didn't like school. If I would have had the same attitude during my senior year, I probably wouldn't have wanted to go to college."*

Sunny's sense of belonging in school had no impact on his decision to participate in post-secondary education.

*"I don't think it mattered much."*

Participation in special education had a negative impact on the participants' sense of belonging in school. It negatively impacted their desire to participate in class and school in general. Chen and Kaplan (2003) indicated stigmatized individuals have lesser motivation for upward mobility. Although the participants' low sense of belonging had a negative impact on their desire to participate in secondary school, the participants' responses differed slightly from that in the literature. The majority of the participants

reported it had no impact on their desire to participate in post-secondary education. One participant reported it may have had a negative impact on his decision to participate in post-secondary education if he had not changed his attitude before high school graduation. A second participant reported her low sense of belonging in school did have a negative impact on her thoughts about attending school after high school graduation.

### **Stereotype Threat**

Steele and Aronson (1995) stated stereotype threat refers to being at risk of confirming, a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's social group. Steele (1998) argued identification with a stereotyped group is threatening because a person then realizes he may be seen or treated in terms of the negative stereotype. Steele (1997) contended where bad stereotypes exist about a group, members can fear being reduced to that stereotype, thus prompting avoidance or underperformance in certain situations.

Question 1:

Were you able to select the type of post-secondary transition preparation services you received in high school, i.e. general/special education? If not, why not?

Angel was able to select the post-secondary transition services she received. She received her post-secondary transition preparation in the general education setting. According to Angel, there were a variety of post-secondary transition programs for general education students.

*“Yes, I was able to choose the activities I wanted to do to prepare for college. I wasn’t in the special education program that much by the time I got ready to graduate.”*

Heaven was not able to select the post-secondary transition preparation services she received. Heaven reported that all special education students received special education transition services.

*“No way, if you were a special ed student, you did special ed transition!”*

Star reported working with a transition counselor that set up work experience activities for special education students. She did not receive post-secondary education transition services.

*“No, not really. We worked with a transition counselor that set us up with work experience activities. No college stuff. I think that was mainly for gen-ed kids.”*

Romeo stated that the student’s IEP team determines the type of transition services students received. He reported that he was a member of his IEP team and was able to provide input, but in the end the adults usually make the decision.

*“It depends on your IEP team. The IEP team decided the transition services you receive. I was a part of the team, so I had a little choice, but mainly the teachers and parents make the decisions.”*



Sunny believed he did not have a choice. He stated that no one ever asked him any questions. They just told him what he needed to do.

*“I don’t think I had a choice. I don’t remember anyone ever asking me. They just told me what I had to do and I did it.”*

Question 2:

Did the negative stigma often associated with special education and students with disabilities impact your feelings regarding your ability to succeed academically?

Angel believed that her special education teachers lowered their academic expectations and treated her different because of her disability. Regardless of her ability to complete the work, her special education teachers had lower expectations for her. She enjoyed being in the general education setting because she was held to the same academic standards as the other students. She welcomed the rigor she received in the general education setting. It inspired her to work harder.

*Like I said earlier, I never really had learning problems. Sometimes I fell behind, but that was because I was suspended or something. Especially when I was put in the special ed classes. The work was really easy. I can remember when I was in regular classes I did really good. I always had good grades, but you know you can always tell when a teacher doesn’t like you or thinks something is wrong with you because you are in special ed. It’s like the regular education teachers made me want to try. They didn’t treat me like I was slow the way the special education teachers did. That is*

*one of the reasons I didn't talk to my special education teachers much about college.*

Heaven recalled being treated differently by several of her teachers. She felt that her teachers went above and beyond what was required to make things easier for her. The teachers' low expectations caused her to question her academic ability.

*It really amazes me that people think that all people with mental illness have mental retardation too. I mean it's like people go out of their way to make things easier for you. I always felt like teachers were afraid they would set me off or something. I mean, not all of my teachers. I had some really good teachers for the most part. But those that didn't really push me or challenge made me question my ability. I can remember feeling like my life was over because I was diagnosed with a mental issue.*

Star reported that she was only able to participate in special education activities which were beneath her skill level. The lack of rigor in the special education tasks she was assigned had a negative impact on self-efficacy. She began to believe that she was incompetent and only able to succeed at menial tasks.

*The transition program I worked in was called a um, um, (long pause), a shelter workshop or something like that. It is for people with disabilities. They train you to work. The one I worked at one day a week was a nursing home. I went there to gain job skills. I assume my mental illness had an impact in the type of activities I was eligible to participate in. They*

*have different transition opportunities for students with disabilities. I only participated in special education activities. When we had to take state test or something like that, I always had to take the test in a special location. I was given extra time or help. Maybe that affected my self esteem. I enjoyed working at the nursing home, but I only did stuff like, um, uh, simple things when I was there. Maybe if I would have been challenged more, I would have did better a better job in high school, I suppose. But like I mentioned earlier, I just existed in school.*

Romeo believed he was not as intelligent as his peers in the general education setting until he was able to join them on occasions. Once he began to experience success in the general education setting he realized that he was equally as intelligent.

*Well being in smaller more restrictive class really affects how you feel about yourself. When I was younger I did feel like I wasn't as smart as the others. It wasn't until I joined the art club and started mixing more with the general education students that I realized I was just as smart as the others.*

Sunny faced the stigma associated with special education and athletes. He stated that he always heard the rumors or negative cliché's about athletes and special education students; however he did not let it bother him. His goal was to play football in the NFL. He was proud of his talent and hoped that it would take him far in life. He credits his football coach with helping him realize he was talented and intelligent.

*Well you know what they always say, 'athletes are dumb and only good for playing sports'. I heard it, but I am not sure if I believed it. Like I said, I really didn't care about school much so it didn't bother me that people thought less of me. I enjoyed playing sports and know that I was good at it. My goal was to play in the NFL. It wasn't to my coach told me that I had the ability to be anything I wanted that I started thinking I had the brains to be something else.*

Steele (1997) contended where bad stereotypes exist about a group, members can fear being reduced to that stereotype, thus prompting avoidance or underperformance in certain situations. The participants' responses indicated they were exposed to conditions that increased their chances of experiencing stereotype threat. They recalled experiences of teacher bias and discrimination due to their educational diagnosis and special education placement. As a result there was a decrease in the participants' motivation and academic aspirations.

### **Self- Efficacy**

According to Bandura (1997) self-efficacy is a person's belief in their capabilities to organize and execute the course of actions required to produce given attainments. He argued the four main sources of self-efficacy include enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997).

Question 1:

Did the type of transition planning services you received in high school impact your beliefs/feelings regarding your ability to succeed in post-secondary education?

Angel never received special education transition planning services. She participated in a post-secondary education transition program called College Summit. Angel's participation in the College Summit program increased her self-confidence regarding her ability to succeed in post-secondary education.

*I can't really remember participating in any special education college transition stuff, it is really vague. If I did it wasn't really helpful. I do remember College Summit which was for general education and some special education kids. All seniors had to take the classes. That class was to prepare you for college. I learned um, well College Summit made it a much easier process to research which college you would go to if you have a certain GPA. If you don't believe you are able to get into colleges if you look on College Summit or other websites, there are many websites on line about what colleges you can go to. But it helps you realize, you know what places will be acceptable for you to be able to get into at your period, you know where you are. Once you see there are places for you, that makes you feel better about wanting to go to college. Once you want to go to college, you do what you have to do to get there.*

Heaven post-secondary transition planning occurred in the special education setting. Heaven reported that the post-secondary transition planning activities she participated in were based upon career readiness and independent living. If she had questions regarding post-secondary education the transition team would answer them; however no one volunteered to provide post-secondary education information. Heaven's beliefs regarding her ability to succeed in post-secondary education declined as a result of her participation in the career readiness program.

*I mainly participated in life skills stuff. They wanted to prepare us for living on our own. We talked a little about college, but mainly about how to get a job, how to complete an application, how to make a financial budget, how to write a resume and stuff like that. If we had questions about college, they would answer them, but it was more about job skills. Since they didn't focus on college I really never focused on college stuff either. I prepared for college with my friend over the summer after I graduated. She made me want to go to college and believed I could actually be successful once I got there. I was, able to get a job, and keep my job with the stuff I learned in the special education transition class.*

Star did not participate in post-secondary education preparation activities during high school. The post-secondary transition services she received were based upon gaining employment and independent living skills. According to Star, college was not an option since it was rarely discussed.

*I only prepared for work after high school. I remember talking about college very little at school. I thought college wasn't an option for me. I suppose, if I was really interested in college I may have been able to get assistance, but my transition plan in my IEP was for me to learn independent living skills and work skills. When I graduated from high school I had no clue about college or even what I needed to do to enroll. My mother helped me get prepared for college.*

Romeo participated in career based post-secondary transition planning. He believes his post-secondary transition planning activities had no impact on his desire to participate in post-secondary education. According to Romeo he wanted to attend college to improve his art skills.

*The transition program I first participated in was sort of like a sheltered workshop. When my parents realized that program was for really low functioning students they pulled me out. Then I started working with the special education transition counselor at my school. We talked about work skills and preparing for college. I don't really believe those programs had any effect on my desire to further my education. I wanted to go to art school after high school, so I knew I would attend so college. I just wasn't sure where I would go. If I didn't have a passion for art, I think I would have just got a job after high school. My school was really into helping special education students find suitable employment.*

Sunny's post-secondary transition planning services were based upon career readiness, behavior management, and independent living skills. The lack of post-secondary education preparation activities in Sunny's transition plan may have inadvertently caused him to believe that he could not succeed in college.

*Well, the programs I was able to participate in were in the special education department. I don't recall them really talking about college. If I am not mistaken I learned more about behavior management, how to find resources in my community, create a budget, oh and make a resume. My coach is the one who told me to talk to my counselor about taking the ACT and going to college. I still wasn't really sure I could do good in college, but I was determined to go and try hard because I wanted to play football. My coach also kept telling me I was smart enough to do what I put my mind on. At the time I was ready for anything I guess. But thinking back, shhh, I had absolutely no clue! (laughs).*

Question 2:

How did your experiences with your academic advisor/counselor, teachers, case manager and other high school staff influence your decision to participate in post-secondary education?

Angel's experiences with her counselor and College Summit teachers were really helpful. They inspired her to attend college by sharing the obstacles they had to overcome when they were in college.



*My counselor was really helpful. I met with her regularly to find out about scholarships. She also helped me find money to pay for the college application fees. I think my College Summit teacher really inspired me to go to college. She told the class about the problems she had in high school, so I thought, if she can go to college, I can too.*

Heaven had little contact with her academic counselor. She worked most often with her special education case manager. According to Heaven, her special education case manager was more concerned about her ability to gain and maintain employment. Heaven asserted no one at her school inspired her to attend college.

*"I never really worked with my counselor, besides getting my schedule and stuff like that. My special education case manager was more concerned about me getting jobs skills, so no one at school influenced me to go to college."*

Star's counselor had a little influence on her decision to participate in post-secondary education. He informed her after receiving her ACT scores that she scored high enough to enroll in a university. She doesn't recall discussing college with employment coach.

*Well, maybe my counselor had a little influence on my decision to attend college. After my I received my ACT scores he told me that they were really good. He said that I could get into several colleges with my ACT*

*score. I think that's when I thought a little about going to college. But my, um, uh, my job coach never talked about college with me.*

Romeo's case manager had no influence on his decision to attend college. His art teacher was very inspirational and encouraged him to continue his education beyond high school.

*'My counselor or case manager had no influence on my decision. My art teacher was very influential. He always encouraged me to continue with my education after high school. He helped me realize I had a real talent.'*

Sunny's football coach is the only person he credits with influencing his decision to attend college. Sunny stated that his teachers lacked confidence in his ability to succeed in college. He also shared that his family was very supportive and provided the encouragement he needed to succeed.

*My coach is the only person who influenced my decision to go to college. I mean my teachers didn't really have confidence that I would even graduate from high school. My family was also rooting for me, but it seemed like the school just wanted me out of their hair.*

Bandura (1997a) defined self-efficacy as individuals beliefs in their capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. Previous research indicated the negative experiences of students with disabilities may contribute to their decision to forgo post-secondary education and enter the workforce (Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). The participants reported instances of negative experiences

in school and lower levels of self-efficacy initially; however their occasional ability to experience academic success, the encouragement they received from others, and internal motivators enabled the participants to overcome barriers and continue their education beyond high school.

### **Post-Secondary Education Preparation**

According to Brand and Valent (2013), in the general education setting college and career readiness means being prepared for post-secondary education without the need for remediation; however in the special education setting the focus is on gaining critical skills (independence, self-determination, and social and emotional skills and attitudes).

Question 1:

What is your definition of post-secondary education preparedness?

Angel reported post-secondary education preparedness means meeting the college acceptance requirements.

*“Post-secondary education preparedness means being able to be accepted into a college or university. Like, your high school GPA has to be good and stuff like that.”*

Heaven defined post-secondary education preparedness as knowing what you have to do to get accepted into college. She also added meeting the required deadlines for admittance.

*Um, I think it means applying to the colleges of your choice before you graduate. Uh, and making sure the college get your high school transcripts on time. You also have to take care of the financial aid part, like completing the fafsa online.*

Star asserted post-secondary education preparedness means applying and getting accepted into the colleges before the semester begins.

*Post-secondary education preparedness means a person is ready to start school when the semester begins. They don't have to worry about last minute problems. So that means getting started in enough time handle all the issues that come up when you first enroll in college.*

Romeo posited post-secondary education preparedness means meeting the requirements for enrollment and being mentally prepared to remain in school after high school graduation.

*It can mean different things for different people. To me it means you have to be ready to commit to more schooling. You also have to make sure you can get accepted, so you have to research the requirements for the school you plan to attend.*

Sunny did not know the official definition; however he believes post-secondary education preparedness means having the skills to be successful in college, such as keeping track of your responsibilities.

*I don't know the official definition, but in my opinion you have to be smart enough to do the work. Or at least be willing to work hard if you don't have the smarts. You also have to be independent. Cuz, in college nobody reminds you of stuff you have to do, you gotta keep track of your own responsibilities. Oh, yeah, you also have to know how you are going to pay for college because that's important.*

Question 2:

On a scale of 1 to 5, (1 meaning underprepared and 5 meaning fully prepared) how prepared were you for post secondary education after high school graduation? Explain your answer.

Angel reported she was highly prepared for post-secondary education participation after high school graduation.

*"I would say I was about a four or maybe four and a half. Because I learned a lot in the college summit class. I kinda knew about the fafsa and other stuff."*

Heaven reported she was underprepared for post-secondary education participation after high school graduation.

*"One or Two! I had absolutely no clue about college, what was required to enroll, where to enroll or even if I would be able to get into a college."*

Star reported she was underprepared for post-secondary education participation after high school graduation.

*“Uh, I think I was probably a one. I only prepared for work after school. I say a one because I did take the ACT test. So that was something I needed for college.”*

Romeo reported he was prepared for post-secondary education after high school graduation.

*I was mentally prepared, so I think that deserves a five! But I wasn't fully prepared to start college in other ways. If I had to give a score, I would say a four because I believe success starts in your mind. So I was mentally prepared.*

Sunny reported he was underprepared for post-secondary education after high school graduation.

*That's kinda hard to say because there was still a lot things left for me to do after I graduated. Like I said my coach helped me do a lot, but I had to do a lot on my own after I graduated, so, probably a three.*

Question 3:

Do you feel the transition services you received adequately addressed your post secondary education needs? Explain.

Angel's post-secondary transition planning services adequately addressed her post-secondary education needs. Angel participated in college based transition programs.

*"Yes! College Summit really helped me learn a lot about college. There were somethings that I didn't know, but those are the kinda things you just have to learn once you get there."*

Heaven's post-secondary transition planning services did not adequately address her post-secondary needs. Heaven participated in career based transition programs.

*Not really, well maybe a little. I learned about attendance and how being on time is important. Since I've been in college, time management and organization have been important. But when I first graduated from high school, I wasn't prepared for college at all. So, I guess not!*

Star's post-secondary transition planning services did not adequately address her post-secondary needs. Star participated in career based transition programs.

*"No. The transition stuff I did was for career readiness, not college readiness."*

Romeo's post-secondary transition planning services did not adequately address his post-secondary needs. Romeo participated in career based transition programs.

*"No, they prepared me for employment."*

Sunny's post-secondary transition planning services did not adequately address her post-secondary needs. Sunny participated in career based transition programs.

*“No, they didn’t. When I graduated, I had no clue about what I needed to do to go to college. The only thing I did to prepare for college was take the ACT.”*

Question 4:

How can post-secondary education institutions help students with ED prepare for college?

Angel asserted post-secondary education institutions can assist ED students in preparing for college by visiting the high schools and explaining what they have to offer. She stated there is a huge change in expectations when students reach the college level.

*I think colleges could help new students by doing more visits to the high schools and explaining what they have to offer. Maybe they can assign mentors or something for new students for the first semester. You, know, to help them learn about the campus and what to expect. It’s really a huge change from high school. When you are in high school, they give you all the resources, but in college you have to search for stuff.*

Heaven stated post-secondary education institutions can assist ED students in preparing for college by providing information on the disability support services they offer. She stated that students with disabilities are often ignored when colleges come to visit the high schools.

*Maybe they can provide information about the services for students with disabilities to the special education staff at the high schools. I mean*



*disabled students are left out a lot. The colleges can make sure that all the students in the school get the information, especially about deadlines and how to get money for college. Maybe some people may be interested in going to college if they knew they could be successful.*

Star confirmed post-secondary education institutions can assist ED students in preparing for college by having more orientations for new students. She also stated that the can work with high schools to make sure all students learn the expectations.

*They can have more orientations for new students. They can also work with the high schools more to help everyone learn what is expected. I think special education people are forgotten about. I mean different places in the community that help people with disabilities came to visit us in school, but the colleges never did.*

Romeo reported post-secondary education institutions can assist ED students in preparing for college by providing more information. They can provide information about the assistance and support services they provide for students with mental health concerns.

*The best thing that colleges can do to help people with mental illness is to let them know about the special services they have for them. I get counseling on campus. That really helps. If I am feeling overwhelmed I can talk to people who can help. I think the biggest problem is fear. If they knew about the services on campus, they wouldn't have the fear.*

Sunny recommended post-secondary education institutions work with area high schools to provide more information about the support services they provide. He stated that students need to know that colleges provide developmental courses to assist them if needed.

*I think the colleges should work with the high schools in the area. My first semester of college was rough. I was enrolled in classes that were way above my ability. I think I wasted time taking classes that were hard because I didn't do good. Once I basically failed, I learned about some developmental classes. That's what I should have taken first. But you live and you learn.*

Kiuhara and Huefner (2008) reported young adults with mental illness have the cognitive abilities and the academic skills to attend college; however the challenge is providing the assistance they need to achieve their educational goals and complete college. According to the data the research participants' secondary schools failed to provide the assistance they needed to prepare for education beyond high school graduation. They received limited access to college preparatory curriculums, limited exposure to post-secondary education institutions, and lack of information on how to receive educational assistance and support at the post-secondary level. The participants' failure to adequately prepare for post-secondary education may have contributed to the difficulties they experienced after their post-secondary education enrollment. Adequately preparing for post-secondary education may have eliminated some of the problems the research participants experienced such as struggling through college level courses

without accommodations/support, requiring developmental courses to experience success, and failing to meet the admissions requirements of four year institution.

### **Post-Secondary Education Barriers**

Question 1:

What post-secondary education barriers did you face during the post secondary education enrollment process?

Angel completed many of the post-secondary education enrollment requirements while she was a participant in the College Summit program. She did report problems with financial aid, obtaining her high school transcript, and high levels of anxiety as barriers to the post-secondary enrollment process.

*Uh, the usual. I had a hard time with the financial aid office. There were a lot of forms to complete. I panic a lot so I think my anxiety probably made things worse. I didn't know how to get my transcript from high school. I got the runaround with that. But College Summit had helped me avoid other problems.*

Heaven's post-secondary education enrollment barriers were meeting deadlines and completing the financial aid process.

*The whole process was stressful. I think it was a huge problem for me because I waited so long to get started. I mean, most people get started when they are in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, but I had already graduated. So I was rushing to meet deadlines. The campus was super crowded in every office I had to*

*stop by. My mother is very supportive but she didn't really know about financial aid and other stuff. So I guess the biggest barrier was time. I waited so late to get started. I had to rush for everything.*

Star reported the biggest barrier she had to overcome during the post-secondary enrollment process was self-doubt.

*My biggest barrier was my attitude. I didn't think I was capable of attending college deep down inside of me. The only person besides my mom to tell me I could be successful in college was my counselor because of my ACT scores.*

Romeo reported that he did not have any barriers.

*"I didn't really have many barriers."*

Sunny was overwhelmed with barriers during the post-secondary enrollment process. Time constraints meeting and meeting the enrollment requirements were the largest barriers he faced.

*Everything was a barrier for me, (laughs). I didn't know what school to attend. I didn't know if I qualified for any college other than a trade school. I began the process really late in the year, which made things difficult, and limited my choices. My coach was real helpful. He stayed in touch with me after I graduated and really help me out.*

One of the most commonly reported barriers to post-secondary education participation as reported in the literature for students with ED is lack of integration (Megivern, Pellerito, & Mowbray, 2003). Another significant barrier is a lack of the knowledge, ability, and skills necessary to navigate in the post-secondary education environment as reported by MOAHEAD (2010). Based upon the data provided by the research participants the barriers they faced to post-secondary education participants was the ability to meet deadlines and meet the financial obligations.

### **Post-Secondary Education Disability Support Services**

Question 1:

Did you register with your post secondary education institution's disability support services office? Why or why not?

Angel did register with the disability support services at her school. She registered after receiving a referral from her math teacher.

*Yes, I registered during the second semester of my first year. My math teacher recommended that I talk to someone in that office to see if I could get help. I was having a hard time in several of my classes but I didn't know about it before he told me. They helped me get, like, uh, extended time to do my work; they got me a calculator and better seating in my classes.*

Heaven did not register with the disability support services at her school. She was not aware of the services when she initially enrolled in school. Once she found out about

the service she was afraid to disclose her disability because she did not want to be treated differently.

*“No, I didn’t. Well at first I didn’t know about them. But when I did find out, I didn’t want the same thing to happen that happened in high school once they found out I had mental issues.”*

Star did register with the disability support services at her school. Her mother helped her enroll so that she could receive the assistance that she needed.

*“Yes, my mom helped me get everything set up with them so I could receive services.”*

Romeo was aware of the services but declined to enroll until he needed the support.

*No, I did not register with them, but I did meet with someone in their office once. I found out about them from the school’s website. I didn’t know if I would need the help, but I wanted to find out about it just in case I had problems.*

Sunny did not register with the disability support services at his school. When he initially enrolled he was unaware of the service. Once he found out about the services he did not need the support.

*“No, I did not register with them. I didn’t know about them at first. When I did find out, I wasn’t struggling or nothing so I didn’t bother.”*

At the post-secondary level by law, students are expected to request accommodations, so the process to begin receiving support starts with them (Cory, 2011). As indicated by the data and supported by Collins and Mowbray (2005) and Megivern et al. (2003) the most common reason students with ED fail to utilize the support services provided by disability support services is lack of awareness. A second reason as indicted by one of the research participants and Salzer, Wick, and Rogers (2008) is fear of discrimination.

### **Summary**

The results of the thematic narrative analysis implied the participants' were inadequately prepared for post-secondary education participation upon high school graduation. Reports of teacher bias, discrimination, and exclusion from the general student population in high school were common. Furthermore, participation in career based special education post-secondary transition planning hindered the research participants' ability to prepare for post-secondary education. Importantly, the research participants reported post-secondary education institutions failed to provide information on the support services they provide for students with disabilities. As a result less than half of the research participants registered with and/or received assistance from disability support services. Only two of the five research participants reported being aware of the disability support service upon their enrollment.

The themes that emerged through thematic narrative analysis of the participants' responses to questions presented in this chapter and the themes that emerged through thematic narrative analysis of the participants intact stories in chapter four were

used to develop a metastory of their special education post-secondary transition planning experiences. The metastory will be presented in chapter six.

Chapter seven presents a concise summary of the study, discussion of the research findings, and the final conclusions. This research is compared to the literature review and implications for further research are provided.



## CHAPTER SIX

**Metastory: The Post-Secondary Transition Planning Experiences of Students with Emotional Disturbance**

The purpose of this study was to examine the special education transition planning experiences of students with emotional disturbance. In addition to exploring students' perceptions of their experiences, this study sought to understand through narrative analysis, the role special education transition planning played in their perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness upon high school graduation. Four overarching themes revealed the story of the post-secondary transition planning experiences of students with emotional disturbance. These overarching themes emerged through combing the codes that emerged through thematic analysis of the research participants' intact stories and narrative responses to a series of questions (See Appendix B). The overarching themes were used to create a metastory of the participants' special education post-secondary transition planning experiences. This metastory represents the shared voice of students with ED's reality during their post-secondary transition planning. The four overarching themes include the following: Defined by My Disability, Invisibility, Employment vs. Post-Secondary Education, and College Bound (see Table 5.1).

TABLE 5.1.

*Overarching Themes*

<b>Overarching Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme One</b>	<b>Subtheme Two</b>	<b>Subtheme Three</b>
Defined by My Disability	Exclusion	Am I Abnormal	
Invisibility	I Have a Voice - May I Speak	Low Sense of School Belonging	Post-Secondary Education Institutions Ignore Us
Employment vs. Post- Secondary Education	Career Readiness	Post-Secondary Education Readiness	
College Bound	Deadlines and Fees	Accommodations	My Reality

According to Reismann (1993) there are five levels of experience in the research process of narrative analysis. The five levels include attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing, and reading. At the attending level the research participant reflects and remembers personal experiences. At the telling level the research participant shares significant events based upon his or her interpretation of the experience. The transcribing level is when the researcher creates a written narrative by transcribing the data. The analysis level is when similarities are noted and a “metastory” is created. Finally, the reading level is when the drafts are read (Reismann, 1993). The findings of this research were shared with the research participants as encouraged by Reismann (1993).

### **Prologue**

Each participant discussed their tumultuous path to post-secondary education participation. The participants discussed a variety of topics including their journey to special education, the impact of their educational diagnosis and placement on their sense of belonging in school, their post-secondary transition planning activities, and the post-secondary education enrollment process. Their candid reflections provided an invaluable insight to the post-secondary transition planning process for students with ED. The participants' reflections served as a prologue to the transition planning narratives. The following section will present the four overarching themes from the post-secondary transition planning experiences of ED students.

#### **Overarching Theme One: Defined by My Disability**

The research participants discussed the antecedents to their placement in special education. Symptoms of depression, physical illness, and an inability to control their behavior were the main reasons they were referred for and began receiving special education services. They reported average intelligence and academic progress that was commensurate with their nondisabled peer; however they were often excluded from the general education population. The participants asserted their educational diagnosis and special education placement defined who they were, what they were capable of achieving, and how they were treated by their teachers. Reports of teacher bias were common among the research participants. Students with disabilities, especially those with emotional disturbance are often stigmatized and placed on the bottom of the proverbial totem pole in school.

Consequently, the stigma and negative stereotypes associated with mental illness and special education increased their chances of experiencing stereotype threat.

Stereotype threat can lower the academic motivation and sense of school belonging of students from minority groups (Steele, 1997). Dorvil (2011) stated, “Stereotype threat can harm the academic achievement of any individuals belonging to a group that is characterized by a stereotype, especially those students from an ethnic minority group where negative stereotypes about academic prowess exist“(p. 6). Students with ED are considered a minority group when compared to the general student population.

### **Subtheme One: Exclusion**

The educational needs and placement of students with ED are overridden by the desire for institutional efficiency, and professional collaboration for the good of all students is weakened by a division of labor that causes segregation among students and school professionals (Casella & Page, 2004). The research participants’ responses regarding their participation in special education indicated they were often excluded from the general education population regardless of their academic skills and abilities. They were educated in classrooms with students who shared similar characteristics outside of the general education setting. The separation from the general student population had a negative impact on their attitude towards school and resulted in them developing feelings of inadequacy. They also reported feelings of embarrassment and lack of belongingness in school due to their educational placement. The participants’ responses to questions related to ability grouping support Chen and Kaplan’s (2003) argument that the stigma of participation in special education may have a negative impact on student’s perception of

school belonging and incite feelings of alienation. The research participants' comments were as follows:

Angel:

*“I really hated going to school because I was pulled away from the kids I was used to being in class with, you know, the normal kids.”*

Heaven:

*“I think I was put in resource classes by the end of first semester during my sophomore year. I really dreaded that! I hated going to those classes.”*

Star:

*“I wanted to be homeschooled or something; anything would have been better than being in the special room.”*

Romeo:

*“I received services in the special education setting.... I felt pretty weird and out of place.”*

Sunny:

*“I was in resource classes and I hated it.... At one point I stopped looking forward to anything school related.”*

When students are excluded from the general education population they are denied the opportunity to see and model the behavior and work habits of their

nondisabled peers. Exclusion also inhibits ED students' ability to develop social skills and build healthy and meaningful relationships.

### **Subtheme Two: Am I Abnormal**

The research participants' educational diagnosis (label) and educational placement had a negative impact on their self-esteem and self-worth. The research participants frequently referred to the students in the general education setting as the "normal" students; which meant they viewed themselves as abnormal. Thomson (2012) declared,

The whole process of identification, classification and placement in a special programme of exceptional students and consequently labeling them according to their disability, seems to be like a public announcement of an existing disability of the student, and thus impacts their self-esteem (p. 161).

A program that was created to improve the quality of education for students with disabilities has become a program of labels and classifications that excludes its participants from the general education population (Thomson, 2012). Special education was created to individualize education for students with special needs; however it appears it is most often used to eradicate problem behaviors in the general education classroom. The results of the study conducted by Casella and Page (2004) correlate with the findings of this study that indicate students are often placed in special education programs due to perceived behavioral ability rather than perceived academic ability. It may also contribute

to the development of self-stigma and low self-esteem due to the ableist assumptions of its policy makers (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012).

The inclusion of students with disabilities appears to be a challenge for many schools. Storey (2007) stated ableism is a reason schools struggle with the inclusion of students with disabilities and why they are often overlooked and excluded. Hehir (2002) reported ableism is built on negative postulations about disability. Ableism is the belief that it is better or superior to be nondisabled than to be disabled and that it is better to do things the way nondisabled people do them (Hehir, 2002, 2003; Storey, 2007). The research participants' made the following statements:

Angel:

*"I didn't want to be special. I didn't want anyone to know because I didn't want them to know I was different."*

Heaven:

*"I already felt weird.... Then when they said I had a problem and started sending me to see the social worker in my school, I really thought something was wrong."*

Star:

*"It wasn't until I realized that it wasn't normal for kids to have a therapist that I started feeling ashamed."*

Romeo:

*“I just really didn’t feel like I belonged. I am sort of a loner; well at least I used to be.”*

Sunny:

*“I was a bad ass...!”*

The teachers’ biased and unwarranted behavior such as underestimating their skills and abilities, overcompensating, using less rigorous curriculums, and the lack of integration with their nondisabled peers contributed to the research participants’ sense of abnormality.

### **Overarching Theme Two: Invisibility**

According to Rocco (2002), invisibility means one’s experiences are not considered an inconvenience they are simply not considered at all by society, service providers, and others. The research participants were ignored or excluded from the general student population in school. Although the participants were of average intelligence once they were placed in the special education setting they remained until high school graduation. They were excluded from general education programs, events, and activities. Once the participants were moved to the special education setting all but one remained until high school graduation. One participant reported moving back to the general education setting near the end of her junior year in high school. A second participant was able to participate in a few general education classes; however for the most part, the research participants were educated in the special education setting. The



inability to transition back to the general education setting had a negative impact on their attitude towards school. Gamoran (1993) reported ability grouping polarizes the student body into groups of “pro-school” and “anti-school groups”.

### **Subtheme One: I Have a Voice - May I Speak**

Rocco (2002) asserted persons with disabilities are marginalized and the intent of reasonable accommodation is misunderstood. Brown et al. (2003) argued the educational system does not represent or consider the lives of students who are considered to be different. Students with ED suffer more from negative attitudes and experience poorer outcomes than any other group of students with disabilities (Hehir, 2003). Negative stereotypes about students with ED often result in lower staff expectations that influence the support services they receive (Hehir, 2003; Obiakor & Wilder, 2010). The research participants reported their teachers had low expectations and failure to treat them as individuals.

Angel remembered the special education teachers’ expectations were considerably lower than the expectations of the teachers in the general education setting. Angel stated,

*“The work was really easy....Its like regular education teachers made me want to try. They didn’t treat me like I was slow the way the special education teachers did.”*

Casella and Page (2004) interviewed a group of special education teachers that were responsible for providing instruction for ED students in a self contained setting. The participants of their study made the following comments about the ED students in their class:

I know what the rest of the school thinks about us down here. We got the crazy, criminal kids, the retarded kids, we can't handle them, and we just make referrals to get them out of school. But look what we are dealing with- we got the SED, disabled, violent, the tech. ed, the dregs of the school (para. 20).

The participants in Casella and Page's (2004) study further stated, "We put a bunch of rats in a cage and they go crazy" (para. 20). The services and supports ED students receive in school are often limited and rarely meet their needs. The transition needs of students with ED are also overlooked by schools (Landmark and Zhang, 2012).

Dorvil (2011) and Ogbu (2004) asserted African Americans are involuntary minorities; they encounter barriers like racial discrimination and systemic inequalities that limit their perception of greater opportunities, as a result, they create an oppositional culture that devalues education. The same can be said about students with ED because they are a similar involuntary minority group that encounters discrimination and systemic inequality that leads to a diminished concept of education.

The research participants in this study reported their high schools provided separate post-secondary transition programs for the general education and special education populations. Four of the five participants reported the post-secondary transition services they received were based upon their educational placement. Only one participant reported she was able to choose the post-secondary transition services she received; however her educational placement was in the general education setting. Based upon the research participants responses they were passive rather than active participants in their education and post-secondary transition planning. They were not allowed to

select the program and/or activities of their interest which increased their chance of experiencing stereotype threat.

In 2004, IDEA mandated schools provide transition services to assist students with disabilities in reaching their post-secondary goals. Special education best practices contend the most effective post-secondary transition plans are designed to meet the student's individual needs and interests. Although the research participants received post-secondary transition planning services in secondary school four of the five research participants' post-secondary goals and future plans were not considered during the development of their post-secondary transition plan. The research participants' responses regarding their ability to provide input or select the post-secondary transition planning services they received were as follows:

Angel (general education transition planning):

*“Yes, I was able to choose the activities I wanted to do to prepare for college.”*

Heaven (special education transition planning participant):

*“No way, if you were a special ed student, you did special ed transition!”*

Star (special education transition planning):

*“No, not really. We worked with a transition counselor that set us up with work experience activities.”*

Romeo (special education transition planning):

*“I was apart of the [IEP] team so I had a little choice, but mainly the teachers and parents make the decisions.”*

Sunny (special education transition planning):

*“I don’t think I had a choice. I don’t remember anyone ever asking me. They just told me what I had to do and I did it.”*

One participant reported he was placed in an internship at a sheltered workshop that was for students with severe cognitive delays even though he had no cognitive deficits.

### **Subtheme Two: Low Sense of School Belonging**

Singh, Chang, and Dika (2010) reported school belonging is a significant predictor of school engagement. Students with disabilities frequently have a low sense of school belonging and feelings of alienation (Chen & Kaplan, 2003) The study conducted Brown et al. (2003) indicated students with disabilities were more likely to be effected by school policies and teacher attitudes that deny them the full benefits of school membership consequently resulting in a disengagement from the school process. The research participants reports of having a low sense of school belonging and poor school engagement aligned with previous research.

Angel stated,

*“Even though I really enjoyed playing sports, I didn’t really like the school part. I just went because I had to; I didn’t really have a choice.”*

Heaven stated,

*“I really didn’t like that I had to leave class to visit her [social worker] or go see the speech lady. All I know is that I could not wait to graduate.”*

She was unhappy about her educational placement and was anxious to graduate so that she could leave school. She stated,

Star stated,

*“I never really participated in school activities....I basically just existed till the end [school].”*

She felt as if she just existed in school. She had no real connection to the school, students or staff.

Romeo stated,

*“I never really socialized with the other students until 11<sup>th</sup> grade. I just didn’t really feel like I belonged.”*

Romeo’s special education placement created a barrier between him and the general student population. He stated,

Sonny stated,

*“I just wanted to play football at school. I didn’t care about much else. But other than playing football, I didn’t get involved in other school stuff.”*

Romeo's participation in special education had a negative impact on his sense of belonging in class; however his participation in organized sports provided somewhat of a connection to his school.

Although the participants' low sense of school involvement negatively impacted their level of engagement in school, they argued it did not influence their decision to participate in post-secondary education as frequently reported in the literature.

Heaven:

*"But those [teachers] that didn't really push me or challenge me made me question my ability."*

Star:

*"Maybe if I would have been challenged more, I would have did a better job in high school, I suppose. But like I mentioned earlier, I just existed in school."*

Romeo:

*"Well being in smaller more restrictive classes really affects how you feel about yourself. When I was younger I did feel like I wasn't as smart as the others."*

Sunny:

*Like I said, I really didn't care about school much so it didn't bother me that people though less of me.... It wasn't until my coach told me that I*

*had the ability to be anything I wanted that I started thinking I had the brains to be something else.*

Experiences of teacher and staff bias along with the exclusion from the general education population were the factors that contributed to the research participants' low sense of school belonging and school engagement.

### **Subtheme Three: Post-Secondary Education Institutions Ignore Us**

There are many barriers to post-secondary education for students with disabilities. Once a student with disabilities make the decision to participate in post-secondary education the next step is to identify a post-secondary education institution that will meet their needs. Many of the barriers to post-secondary education participation for students with disabilities are subtle; however ableism appears to be the most glaring barrier (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012). Ableism in the policies and procedures at the secondary and post-secondary levels result in discriminatory practices against students with disabilities. When the research participants answered the question of how post-secondary education institutions could assist students with disabilities transition to post-secondary education, their responses correlated with the responses Sharpe et al. (2004) received from the participants in their study. Providing access to information was the most commonly reported way post-secondary education institutions could assist ED students with college preparation. The five responses from the research participants were as follows:

Angel,

*“I think colleges could help new students by doing more visits to the high schools and explaining what they have to offer.”*

Heaven,

*“Maybe they [post-secondary education institutions] can provide information about the services for students with disabilities to the special education staff at high schools.”*

Star,

*“They can have more orientations for new students. They can also work with the high schools more to help everyone learn what is expected.”*

Romeo,

*“The best thing that colleges can do to help people with mental illness is to let them know about the special services they have for them.”*

Sunny:

*“I think the colleges should work with the high schools in the area....Once I basically failed, I learned about the developmental classes.”*

Further noted, the research participants believed post-secondary education institutions were only interested in recruiting students from the general education population. They argued post-secondary education institutions failed to provide



information for the disabled population of students in their high schools. They were also excluded from attending college tours and enrolling in college preparatory curriculums. The post-secondary education institutions failed to provide the research participants with information regarding the availability of services for students with disabilities during and after their enrollment. One participant discovered his post-secondary education institution provided services for students with disabilities after searching the institution's website. A second participant learned about the service after being referred by one of her professors due to performing poorly in a math class.

### **Overarching Theme Three: Employment vs. Post-Secondary Education**

Employment and post-secondary education are the most common transition outcomes for high school graduates. Secondary schools carry the burden of ensuring every student is college or career ready by the time they graduate, yet the term college and career readiness has multiple meanings. According to Brand and Valent (2013), in the general education setting college and career readiness means being prepared for post-secondary education without the need for remediation; however in the special education setting the focus is on gaining critical skills (independence, self-determination, and social and emotional skills and attitudes).

The purpose of post-secondary transition planning is to clearly define the students' post-secondary goals by assessing the student's strengths, needs and desires in order to develop a plan of action (Mazzotti et al., 2009; Mahanay-Castro, 2010). The post-secondary transition planning experiences of the research participants do not suggest careful consideration of their strengths, needs, and desires occurred. Baer and Daviso

(2011) argued secondary programs are driven by the availability of services and tracking certain types of students into certain types of programs. All of the participants except one participated in special education transition related activities that were designed to increase critical skills. The most commonly reported post-secondary transition activity was career exploration; which included unpaid employment internships. The research participant that received post-secondary transition planning services in the general education setting did received post-secondary education preparation assistance.

### **Subtheme One: Career Readiness**

Four of the participants reported participating in an unpaid employment internship during their senior year of high school. They also learned how to write a resume, complete an application, and how to conduct themselves on an interview. One participant reported participating in an internship at a sheltered workshop that was designed for students with very low cognitive abilities. Upon high school graduation, all of the participants reported having the skills necessary to obtain and maintain employment.

Heaven:

*I mainly participated in life skills stuff....We talked a little about college, but mainly about how to get a job, how to complete an application, how to make a financial budget, how to write a resume and stuff like that.*

According to Heaven if she had a question about college, the teachers would answer them; however the main focus employment preparation.

Star:

*“I prepared for work after high school.... My transition plan in my IEP was for me to learn independent living skills and work skills.”*

Star believes she may have been able to receive assistance with post-secondary education transition if she was interested, but she had no interest at that time.

Romeo:

*“The transition program I first participated in was sort of like a sheltered workshop [an organization that employs individuals with disabilities].”*

Romeo argued his school was really into helping special education students find suitable employment.

Sunny:

*Well, the programs I was able to participate in were in the special education department. I don't recall them really talking about college. If I am not mistaken I learned more about behavior management, how to find resources in my community, create a budget, oh and make a resume.*

According to Sunny, his teachers never discussed post-secondary education or discussed how to prepare for post-secondary education participation.

The participants believed they possessed the skills necessary to obtain and maintain employment after high school graduation due to the post-secondary transition planning services they received.

**Subtheme Two: Post-Secondary Education Readiness**

When participants were asked to define post-secondary education preparedness they asserted post-secondary education preparedness relates to the degree in which tasks such as selecting a college, meeting application deadlines, and settling financial obligations are completed.

Angel:

*“Post-secondary education preparedness means being able to be accepted into a college or university. Like, your high school GPA has to be good and stuff like that.”*

Heaven:

*“Um, I think it means applying to colleges of your choice before you graduate. Uh, making sure the college get your high school transcripts on time.”*

Star:

*“Post-secondary education preparedness means a person is ready to start school when the semester begins.”*

Romeo:

*“It can mean different things for different people. To me it means you have to be ready to commit to more schooling.”*

The post-secondary transition planning services the research participants received failed to expose them to post-secondary education opportunities and/or prepare them for post-secondary education participation. A lack of post-secondary education exposure may have had a negative impact on the research participants' perceptions of their level of post-secondary education readiness and ability to succeed in a post-secondary education setting. Heaven stated:

*But when I first graduated from high school, I wasn't prepared for college at all....I had absolutely no clue about college, what was required to enroll, where to enroll or even if I would be able to get into a college.*

All of the participants were initially doubtful about their ability to matriculate and graduate from a post-secondary education institution due to their need for special education services; however only one participant included academic preparation in his definition. According to Sunny,

*I don't know the official definition, but in my opinion you have to be smart enough to do the work, or at least be willing to work hard if you don't have the smarts. You also have to be independent.*

Stereotype threat may have played a significant role in the participants' perception of their ability to succeed in post-secondary education. Their responses indicated a lack of belief in their ability to succeed in college even though their grades and test scores indicated otherwise.

Heaven:

*“Since they [special education teachers] didn’t focus on college I really never focused on college stuff either.”*

Star:

*“I remember talking about college very little at school. I thought college wasn’t an option for me.”*

Sunny:

*“I still wasn’t sure I could do good in college....”*

### **Epilogue**

Landmark and Zhang (2012) found secondary schools have a lack of awareness of the transition needs of students with ED which has a negative impact on their ability to provide quality post-secondary transition services for this population of students. Wood and Cronin (1999) stated, “Goals and expectations are a good place to start but if the experiences and opportunities are not provided, then the transitional “bridge” for students with EBD will continue to deteriorate.” (p. 343). It is clear from the participants’ responses that the transition teams failed to adequately assess their needs and allow their future goals to guide the post-secondary transition services they received. The research participants were passive rather than active participants in their post-secondary transition planning which resulted in the underdevelopment of their self determination and self-advocacy skills upon high school graduation. They also lacked a clear understanding of

the skills needed to succeed in post-secondary education and the difference in services provided at the post-secondary level. Of the five research participants, three planned to participate in post-secondary education upon high school graduation.

#### **Overarching Theme Four: College Bound**

The three research participants that planned to participate in post-secondary education prior to high school graduation were Angel, Romeo, and Sunny. The reasons for their decision to participate in post-secondary education varied; however they included family expectations, exposure to post-secondary education institutions, and a desire to improve existing skills and talent.

According to Angel, life after high school was frequently discussed in her family. She stated:

*“...college is a must in my home. Once you graduate, you have to work or go to college. I was always told it is unacceptable to just do nothing with yourself.”*

Romeo developed an interest in going to college after he joined the art club at his school. He was interested in improving his existing art skills and abilities. Romeo stated,

*“Before I joined the art club and started making friends, I didn’t like school. If I would have had the same attitude [disconnect from school] during my senior year, I probably wouldn’t have wanted to go to college.”*

Sunny had a strong desire to play football. Although he lacked confidence in his ability to succeed in a post-secondary education setting, he wanted to play college level football. After receiving encouragement from his high school football coach Sunny realized he possessed the skills necessary to succeed in college. Sunny stated,

*“It wasn’t to my coach told me that I had the ability to be anything I wanted that I started thinking I had the brains to do something else.”*

Encouragement from family and friends was the catalyst that prompted the other two research participants into pursuing post-secondary education. Heaven recalled preparing for college the summer after high school graduation after being encouraged by a friend. Heaven stated,

*“I prepared for college with my friend over the summer after I graduated. She made me want to go to college and believed I could actually be successful after I got there.”*

Star was encouraged by her mother to enroll in college after high school graduation. Star stated,

*“My mother helped me get prepared for college.”*

### **Subtheme One: Deadlines and Fees**

The goal of post-secondary education transition planning is to assist students in preparing for activities after graduating or aging out of secondary school. It is also designed to decrease the number of barriers students face in accessing post-secondary



education and/or adequate employment. Common barriers to the successful matriculation and degree completion for students with ED as indicated in previous research are as follows:

- A lack of academic integration (Megivern, et al., 2003)
- Ignorance of the legal and academic changes that occur after the completion of secondary school (MOAHEAD, 2010)
- A lack of the skills necessary to successfully navigate in their new environment (Frieden, 2003)
- Ableist policies and procedures in post-secondary education (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012).

The participant responses regarding the barriers they faced during the post-secondary enrollment process varied. The barriers they reported also differed slightly from the barriers reported in previous research. The research participants' responses were as follows:

Angel:

*I had a hard time with the financial aid office. There were a lot of forms to complete. I panic a lot so I think my anxiety probably made things worse. I didn't know how to get my transcript from high school. I got the runaround with that.*

Heaven:

*“The whole process was stressful....I was rushing to meet deadlines...So I guess the biggest barrier was time. I waited so late to get started. I had to rush for everything.”*

Star:

*“My biggest barrier was attitude. I didn’t think I was capable of attending college deep down inside of me.”*

Romeo:

*“I didn’t really have any barriers.”*

Sunny:

*Everything was a barrier for me, (laughs). I didn’t know what school to attend. I didn’t know if I qualified for any college other than a trade school. I began the process really late in the year, which made things difficult, and limited my choices.*

The barriers research participants reported that differed from the barriers identified in previous research were meeting enrollment deadlines and completing the financial aid process. One participant reported he did not have any real barriers.

**Subtheme Two: Accommodations**

Collins and Mowbray (2005) reported students with psychiatric diagnoses can and do succeed in college if they receive the appropriate treatment and supports. Hurtubis-Sahlen and Lehman (2006) argued,

Although postsecondary institutions have an obligation to level the playing field for students with disabilities, the rules for requesting and receiving accommodations differ from the rules in high school. The differences become apparent as soon as the student who is “otherwise qualified for admission” begins his or her postsecondary education (p. 28).

Students can request accommodations be provided at the post-secondary level by registering with the disability support services office at their post secondary education institution. The registration process entails an interview with the student to learn of the disability’s impact and verification of the disability by the review of third party documentation (Cory, 2011).

When students request support they must disclose information about their disability. Kihara and Huefner (2008) indicated students with psychiatric illnesses may find it burdensome to disclose information about their illness because of the negative stigma associated with their illness. When the research participants were asked if they registered with the disability support services office at their post-secondary education institution their responses varied. Two of the participants reported registering with the disability support office at their school.

Angel:

*“Yes, I registered during the second semester of my first year.... I was having a hard time in several of my classes but I didn’t know about it before he [math professor] told me.”*

Star:

*“Yes, my mom helped me get everything set up so I could receive services.”*

Three of the participants stated they were aware of disability support services office; however they declined to register for different reasons. Two of the participants reported they did not need the service and one reported she did not want to disclose information regarding their disability. One participant stated that her success is a direct result of the support she received from the disability support services office at her school.

Romeo:

*No, I did not register with them, but I did meet with someone in their office once. I found out about them from the school’s website. I didn’t know if I would need the help, but I wanted to find out about it just in case I had problems.*

Sunny:

*“No, I did not register with them. I didn’t know about them at first. When I did find out, I wasn’t struggling or nothing so I didn’t bother.”*

Heaven's fear of disclosing her disability was valid based upon the findings of the study conducted by Sharpe et al. (2004).

Heaven,

*“No, I didn't [register]. Well at first I didn't know about them. But when I did find out, I didn't want them same thing [discrimination] to happen that happened in high school once they found out about my mental issues.”*

The results of the study conducted Sharpe et al. (2004) revealed students with ED that utilized the services provided by the disability support services office at their post-secondary education institutions faced incorrect, stereotyped views about their disability and endured negative consequences upon disclosure.

### **Subtheme Three: My Reality**

Post-secondary education preparation and career readiness are equally important for students with ED. Brand and Valent (2013) contended,

These skills for college and career readiness can be developed in multiple environments, with the support of many different adults, and at all hours and places. Many skills may best be learned in non-classroom, experiential learning settings, such as community service projects, extracurricular activities, internships, work, and after school programs. (p. 6)

The participants' candid reflections of their post-secondary transition planning experiences suggest secondary education institutions fell short in adequately preparing

them for post-secondary education participation. Exposure to a rigorous curriculum and the development of self-determination skills may positively impact ED students' perceptions of their level of post-secondary education preparedness upon high school graduation. Post-secondary education institutions can contribute to the successful post-secondary education transition for students with ED by increasing their access to information.

Bandura (1997b) defined four main sources of self-efficacy. The four sources are performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. The participants' responses to questions regarding their self-efficacy were inclusive of all four of the main sources.

- Verbal Persuasion: Lead by suggestion into believing success is possible.

Angel:

*“Once you see there are places [colleges] for you, that makes you feel better about wanting to go to college. Once you want to go to college, you do what you have to do to get there.”*

Romeo:

*“He [art teacher] always encouraged me to continue with my education after high school. He helped me realize I had a real talent.”*

- Emotional Arousal: Relying on physiological states of arousal to determine outcome such as associating high stress with failure and low stress with success.

Heaven:

*“She [friend] made me want to go to college and believed I could actually be successful once I got there.”*

Sunny:

*“My family was rooting for me....”*

- Performance Accomplishment: Personal mastery experiences in which successes raises mastery and repeated failures lower mastery.

Star:

*“After I received my ACT scores he [counselor] told me that they were really good. He said I could get into several colleges with my ACT score.”*

- Vicarious Experience: Seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences generate expectations that success is possible.

Angel:

*“She [counselor] told the class about the problems she had in high school, so I thought, if she can go to college, I can too.”*

When the participants received encouragement, success, and inclusion in the general education population in secondary school their perception of their ability to succeed in

post-secondary education was greater. When they believed they had the ability to succeed they were also more interested in participating in post - secondary education preparation activities; which had a positive effect on their perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness.

### **Summary**

The metastory *The Post-Secondary Transition Planning Experiences of Students with Emotional Disturbance* illustrates the post-secondary transition planning experiences of the research participants. All of the research participants were students with ED. The metastory included the four overarching themes, the subthemes for each of the overarching themes, and data to support each of the themes. Chapter seven presents a concise summary of the study, discussion of the research findings, and the final conclusions. This research is compared to the literature review and implications for further research are provided.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the special education transition planning experiences of students with emotional disturbance. In addition to exploring students' perceptions of their experiences, this study sought to understand through narrative analysis, the role special education transition planning played in their perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness.

This study attempted to answer the question, "How does participation in special education transition planning impact students with ED's perception of their level of post-secondary education preparedness?" The following questions served as a frame for the research question:

1. In what ways did the method of the transition planning services received in secondary school impact participant's level of academic self-efficacy?
2. To what extent were participants able to select the transition planning services they received in secondary school?
3. How much influence did participants feel transition planning had on their post-secondary education decisions?
4. Based upon participants' perceptions, did the special education transition planning services he/she received in secondary school adequately address his/her post-secondary education preparation needs?

5. Based upon participant's perceptions, how can post secondary education institutions assist ED students during the special education post secondary transition planning process?

This chapter discusses the results of the study within the context of the literature review. Implications for practice, limitations, and recommendations for future research are presented.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The participants' responses to a series of questions revealed four overarching themes. The four overarching themes were used to create the metastory, *The Post-Secondary Transition Planning Experiences of Students with Emotional Disturbance*. These four overarching themes included: Defined by My Disability, Invisibility, Employment vs. Post-Secondary Education, and the Epilogue: College Bound. These themes emerged through the merger of the five narratives.

#### **Defined by My Disability**

The research participants reported they felt defined by their disability. They argued their special education placement and the post-secondary transition planning services they received were based on their educational diagnosis, not their academic skills and abilities. None of the participants reported having a learning disability; however they were often excluded from the general education setting and curriculum. Once they were placed in the special education environment, all except one remained until high school graduation which supports their belief that they were defined by their

disability and not by their skills and abilities. The participants' exclusion from the general education setting supports Cullinan and Sabornie's (2004) claim that students with ED are typically educated in more restrictive environments than students with other disabilities.

Rocco (2002) asserted persons with disabilities are marginalized and the intent of reasonable accommodation is misunderstood. Students with ED encounter more negative attitudes and experience poorer outcomes than any other group of students with disabilities (Hehir, 2003). Negative stereotypes about students with ED often result in lower staff expectations that influence the support services they receive (Hehir, 2003; Obiakor & Wilder, 2010). One participant reported she believed her educational diagnosis was the reason her teachers failed to challenge her or push her to her full potential. A second participant reported his teachers did not have confidence in his ability to complete secondary school. A third participant reported people (school staff) went out of their way to make things easier for her to prevent her from having a meltdown. The participant that was able to return to the general education setting prior to high school graduation asserted the general education teachers did not treat her like she was slow the way the special education teachers did. The impact of teacher biases and exclusion from the general education setting contributed to the participants' development of impaired self perceptions. They frequently referred to the students in the general education setting as 'the normal kids'. They also believed they were academically inferior.

**Invisibility**

Brown et al. (2003) stated students are likely to disengage from the schooling process when they are denied full school membership. The research participants' reflections of their high school experiences were synonymous with the findings of Lehman et al. (2002) study that revealed students with ED are least likely to belong to clubs and social groups and have the highest rates of absenteeism of any disability group in secondary school. Although there is a push for inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, Kauffman and Lloyd (1995) stated, educators should not be guided by overgeneralizations. They added most regular classrooms are not characterized by the strategies known to be effective for students with ED (Kauffman & Lloyd, 1995) which may be the reason the research participants were placed in secluded settings. Particularly relevant is how the participants' special education placement created a feeling of separation from the general education population.

The exclusion from the general education environment had a negative impact on the participants' sense of belonging in school. They reported they were often excluded from activities and ignored by the post-secondary education institutions that visited their high schools. The participants that participated in special education post-secondary transition planning were not even the option to select the post-secondary transition planning services they received. The silencing of the research participants' voices during the post-secondary education transition planning process supports the claim made by Stodden and Conway (2002) that there is no guarantee that the goals and experiences of students with disabilities will be considered by the IEP team.

**Employment vs. Post-Secondary Education**

The participants' experience of receiving little to no post-secondary education preparation in high school is not uncommon. According to Brand and Valent (2013), some low-resourced schools where the student - to- counselor ratio is as high as 500:1 makes it nearly impossible for students with disabilities to obtain the guidance, counseling, and transition advice they need. The participants asserted the objective of the post-secondary transition services they received was to prepare them for the workforce upon high school graduation.

Although post-secondary education transition services were offered at their high schools, they argued students in the special education setting were not encouraged or recommended to participate in or receive post-secondary education transition planning. The participants' secondary school experiences also aligned with the results of studies conducted by Sitlington and Neubert (2004) and Wagner and Blackorby (1996) which indicated students with disabilities often fail to enroll in college preparatory courses and are underprepared for post-secondary education participation upon high school graduation.

**College Bound**

Upon high school graduation many high school seniors have completed the necessary requirements for acceptance at a post-secondary education institution of their choice; however the same cannot be said for the participants in this study. The participants failed to prepare for post-secondary education participation during their post-

secondary transition planning. They were tracked for employment, thus the opportunity to prepare post-secondary education participation was never provided. Four of the five research participants reported they prepared for and completed the process for post-secondary education participation after high school graduation. Due to the delay in their decision to participate in post-secondary education they struggled to meet deadlines and gather the necessary information to enroll the semester following high school graduation. They were also limited in the choice of schools in which they could enroll because they did not meet the entrance requirements.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study provided insight into the special education and post-secondary transition planning experiences of students with ED and confirmed what is currently known. Students with ED have lower post-secondary education participation rates than students with other disabilities. The under enrollment of students with ED in post-secondary education is due to poor or late start post-secondary transition planning, lack of knowledge about the accommodations or services provided at the post-secondary level for students with disabilities, failure to take advantage of a rigorous curricula aligned to postsecondary entrance requirements, and lack of knowledge about the postsecondary environment (Brand & Valent, 2013).

In response to the disparity in post-school outcomes for students with disabilities the IDEA mandated students with disabilities receive post-secondary transition planning services. Although compliance with IDEA's transition mandate has increased over the years, no study has reported 100% compliance and equality (Landmark & Zhang, 2012).

The poor educational, vocational and community outcomes for students with ED relate to how special education transition programs integrate effective approaches to support this population of students (Cheney, 2012). An examination of the research participants' post-secondary transition planning experiences indicate the post-secondary transition planning services they received fell short in utilizing special education transition planning best practices.

An examination of the participants' post-secondary transition planning experiences indicate the post-secondary transition planning services they received fell short in utilizing special education transition best practice strategies. Even though IDEA mandates the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, students with disabilities routinely participate in separate transition planning processes, take fewer academic courses during their last two years of school, and often participate more in pre-vocational and vocational courses than non-disabled students (Wilson et al., 2009). All except one of the participants in this study was excluded from the general education setting and general education post-secondary transition planning and consequently participated in career based special education transition planning.

The definition of post-secondary education preparedness that emerged from this study differed from that found in the literature. The participants' definitions of post-secondary education preparedness were based upon their ability to meet enrollment deadlines, gather the required documents, and complete the financial aid process. The definitions provided by the research participants' failed to include their ability to complete college level coursework without remediation. Although the participants understanding of post-

secondary education preparedness differed from the definition provided in the literature, their perceptions of their level of post-secondary education preparedness upon high school graduation were low. Heaven, Star, and Sunny accorded ratings that were significantly lower than Angel and Romeo. Their lower perception of their level of post-secondary education preparedness may have resulted from participating in post-secondary transition programs that were ill-equipped to meet their needs.

The review of related literature provided an abundance of best practice transition planning strategies to prepare students with disabilities for post-secondary education, employment and independent living. Brand and Valent (2013), Webb, Patterson, Syverud and Seabrooks-Blackmore (2006), and Wilson, Hoffman and McLaughlin (2009) posit special education post-secondary transition planning programs must include the following strategies:

- Define College and Career Readiness
- Set High Expectations, Aspirations, and Attainable Goals
- Improve Access to Guidance, Counseling, and Transition Services
- Provide Access to College Preparatory Coursework
- Create Multiple Pathways to College and Careers
- Opportunities to Increase Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination Skills

The Transition to Independence Process (TIP) is another evidence supported practice that has been proven to increase the post-secondary education and employment



success rates in transition age youth and young adults with ED (Clark & Hart, 2009; Karpur, Clark, Carproni, & Sterner, 2005). Clark (2004) reported:

The Transition to Independence Process (TIP) system was developed to engage youth and young adults in their own futures planning process, provide them with developmentally-appropriate services and supports, and involve them and their families and other informal key players in a process that prepares and facilitates them in their movement toward greater self-sufficiency and successful achievement of their goals related to each of the transition domains (p. 4).

In order to improve the post-secondary outcomes for students with ED transition programs must include a reliance on self-determination, unconditional caring, strength based services and the use of flexible resources (Mallory et al., as cited in Cheney, 2012). The transition programs must focus on identifying students with ED's strengths and weaknesses and provide the services they need to meet their goals.

Even though IDEA mandates the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, students with disabilities routinely participate in separate transition planning processes, take fewer academic courses during their last two years of school, and often participate more in pre-vocational and vocational courses than non-disabled students (Wilson et al., 2009). All except one of the participants in this study was excluded from the general education setting and general education post-secondary transition planning and consequently participated in career based special education transition planning. The exclusion of the participants from the general education setting

and/or general education transition planning process had a negative impacted on their ability to adequately prepare for post-secondary education participation.

Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong and Thoma (2003) stated school policies, teacher attitudes and fundamental beliefs and/or practices of the institution often deny students that are different the full benefit of school membership (e.g., access to higher-level courses, academic tracking, and placement in special education). Another significant finding that emerged from this study was the impact of teacher biases on the ability of ED students to receive adequate academic instruction and training. Even though the participants were able to partake in career related transition activities such as employment internships they were low-level, low skilled positions. The participants were of average intelligence and were able to earned average ACT scores yet they were not allowed to enroll in college preparatory courses. They were also excluded from participating in college recruitment activities. Most of the participants reported a high level of bias among the special education staff at their high schools. Their testimonies included accounts of overcompensation, low expectations, lack of decision making opportunities, and exclusion from extra-curricular activities. Teacher and staff biases had more of a negative impact on the participants' sense of belonging in school than their educational placement.

Contrary to the findings of previous research that indicate students with psychological disorders are most likely to withdraw from college prior to degree completion (Kiuahara & Heufner, 2008) it appears the participants of this study will remain enrolled until completion of their college degrees. The assumption is based upon

the participants' ability to overcome previous barriers, their ability to self-advocate, and their level of academic commitment and previous success.

Although the research participants' perceived level of post-secondary education preparedness was low upon high school graduation they were able to gain the skills necessary to succeed in a post-secondary education environment through trial and error. The participants were not provided access to college preparatory curriculums in high school; however their cognitive skills and abilities were sufficient enough to complete college level coursework. Two of the research participants enrolled in a community college prior to transferring to a university level educational institution. Some of the participants enrolled in developmental courses after struggling in college level courses; however they were not deterred. At the time of the interviews Angel, Star, and Romeo were full-time third year students and Heaven and Romeo were full-time second year students. The participants were very optimistic about their futures and ability to meet their educational goals.

### **Implications for Practice**

The results of this study can help to better inform practice and improve the quality of teacher preparation programs, adult education, and special education post-secondary transition planning. Williams and Algozzine (1977, as cited in Marini, Glover- Graf, & Millington, 2012) indicated teachers are trained and more willing to deal with students with physical and learning disabilities than students with ED. In addition, most teacher education programs fail to equip teachers with the skills necessary to successfully work with ED students (Christensen, Jaeger, Lorenz, Morton, Neuman, Reike, Simpson....,

2005). The results of this study confirmed students with ED are often excluded from the general education setting regardless of their academic skills and abilities. The results also indicated the exclusion of students with ED from the general education setting negatively impacts their ability to adequately prepare for post-secondary education participation. An increase in the number of students with ED educated in the LRE (least restrictive environment) is essential; therefore it is imperative that aspiring teachers adequately prepare to teach and manage the behaviors of those students. Special education teachers are often provided opportunities to develop the skills necessary to effectively teach and manage the behaviors of exceptional students in teacher preparatory and professional development programs for special education; however the same cannot be said for teachers preparing to enter and/or working in the general education setting. Teacher preparation programs can ensure all teachers (general education and special education) are adequately prepared to work with students with ED by providing additional training and/or coursework on students with this disability.

In addition, secondary schools can make every effort to ensure students are educated in the LRE which may have a positive impact on students with ED's sense of school belonging. When students have a strong sense of school belonging they tend to have fewer behavior problems and higher academic aspirations, and achievement (Cedeno, 2010). As the number of students with ED that participate in post-secondary education increase their level of preparedness upon enrollment must also increase. In order to improve their level of post-secondary education preparedness they must receive adequate post-secondary transition planning. The use of best practice special education post-secondary transition planning strategies may be the answer to the problem. Post-

secondary education institutions may also assist secondary education institutions in preparing students with ED for post-secondary education participation by providing access to information. One of the research participants attributed her success to the assistance she receives from the disability support services at her school.

Finally, as revealed by the data provided in this study students with disabilities are often overlooked and/ or incorrectly represented in the field of adult education. Rocco indicated (2002) most adult educators use the medical model focusing on functional limitations. The field of adult education can possibly increase the visibility of students with disabilities, in particular students with ED by expanding its scholarship of disability and disability related issues. Clark (2006) stated,

Yet in the face of all this evidence, adult education as a field has inadequately explored the notion of disability as an issue of oppression, or as a socially constructed phenomenon, and how it affects, impacts, and/or constrains the adult learning contexts (p. 310).

Exploring disability as a social construct, a political concern, and an experience that warrants a theoretical framework may positively impact the educational experiences of adult learners with disabilities.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

To increase clarification of the post-secondary transition planning experiences of students with Ed future research is needed. Future research within public secondary schools in regards to special education post-secondary transition planning practices

would be integral in determining the most effective post-secondary education transition strategies for students with ED. It would also be interesting to compare the post-secondary transition planning experiences of students with ED that opted out of post-secondary education and enter the workforce after high school graduation. Future research could also be completed to determine if there is a correlation between the post-secondary transition planning experiences of ED students that successfully matriculate and graduate from a post-secondary education institution and those that drop out before completion. An investigation of the post-secondary transition planning experiences of adult learners with ED and the barriers they encounter in nontraditional and/or informal adult education programs may expand what is currently known in the field of adult education and disabilities studies.

### References

- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq. (1990).
- Ankeny, E. M., & Lehman, J. P. (2011). Journey toward self-determination: voices of students with disabilities who participated in a secondary transition program on a community college campus. *Remedial and Special Education, 32*(4), 279-289.
- Aronson, J., Lustina, M. J., Good, C., Keough, K. C.M., & Brown, J. (1999). White men can't do math: Necessary and sufficient factors in stereotype threat. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 35*(1), 29-46.
- Baer, R. M., & Daviso, A. (2011). Disproportionality in transition services: A descriptive study. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 46*(2), 172-185.
- Bandura, A. (1997a). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W.H. Freeman
- Bandura, A. (1997b). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychology Review, 84*(2), 191-215.
- Bandura, A., & Cervone, D. (1983). Self-evaluative and self-efficacy mechanisms governing the motivational effects of goal systems. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45*(5), 1017-1028.
- Bandura, A., & Locke, E. A. (2003). Negative self-efficacy and goal effects revisited. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(1), 87-99.

- Bateman, B. D., & Herr, C. M. (2006). *Writing individualized education plans (ieps) for success* (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed). T. Kinney (Ed). Verona, WI: An Attainment Publication.
- Bowers, E. M. (1982). Defining emotional disturbance: Public policy and research. *Psychology in the Schools*, 19, 60-65.
- Bradley, R., Doolittle, J., & Bartolotta, R. (2008). Building on the data and adding to the discussion: The experiences and outcomes of students with emotional disturbance. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 17, 4-23.
- Brand, B., & Valent, A. (2013). Improving college and career readiness for students with disabilities. American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from [http://media.wix.com/ugd/86bed5\\_07e474b692a24939856e37d8dd92d73b.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/86bed5_07e474b692a24939856e37d8dd92d73b.pdf)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Brown, M. R., Higgins, K., Pierce, T., Hong, E., & Thoma, C. (2003). Secondary students' perceptions of school life with regard to alienation: the effects of disability, gender and race. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 26(4), 227-238.
- Caelli, K. ( 2000). The changing faces of phenomenological research: traditional and American phenomenology in nursing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 10, 366-377.
- Cedeno, L. A. (2010) *An examination of the mutual impact of students' sense of school belonging and adjustment in a sample of urban, ethnic-minority, elementary-aged students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.



- Chen, Z., & Kaplan, H. B. (2003). School failure in early adolescence and status attainment in middle adulthood: A longitudinal study. *Sociology of Education*, 76(2), 110-127.
- Cheney, D. (2012). Transition tips for educators working with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 48(1), 22-29.
- Christensen, B., Jaeger, M., Lorenz, R., Morton, S., Neuman, L., Rieke, E., Simpson, B., & Watkins, C. (2005). Teaching students with severe emotional and behavioral disorders: Best practices guide to intervention. S. Curtis, H. Galbreath & J. Curtis (Eds.). Retrieved from <https://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/Families/pubdocs/bestpractices.pdf>
- Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry: A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 27, 44-54.
- Clark, H.B. (2004, original version 1995). *Transition to Independence Process: TIP System Development and Operations Manual*. Tampa, FL: Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida. Retrieved from <http://tipstars.org/Portals/0/pdf/TIPOperationsManual-October04.pdf>
- Clark, H. B. (2008, Fall). Navigating the treacherous pathways to adulthood. *National Council Magazine*, 20-21.
- Clark, H. B., & Hart, K. (2009). Navigating the obstacle course: An evidence-supported community transition system. In H.B. Clark & D.K. Unruh (Eds.), *Transition of*

*youth and young adult with emotional and behavioral difficulties: An evidence-supported handbook* (pp. 47-94). Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.

Clark, M. (2006). Adult education and disability studies, an interdisciplinary relationship: Research implications for adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 56(4), 308-322.

Cohen, C. B. (2006). Qualitative research guidelines project. Retrieved from <http://www.qualres.org/HomeTria-3692.html>

Collett-Klingenberg, L. L., & Kolb, S. M. (2011). Secondary and transition programming form 18-21 year old students in rural Wisconsin. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 30(2), 19-27.

Collet-Klingenberg, L. L. (1998). The reality of best practices in transition: A case study. *Exceptional Children*, 65(1), 67-78.

Collins, M.E., & Mowbray, C.T. (2005). Higher education and psychiatric disabilities: National survey of campus disability services. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 75(2), 304-315.

Cory, R. C. (2011). Disability services offices for students with disabilities: A campus resource. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 154, 27-36.

Council for Exceptional Children (2009). Linking transition assessment and postsecondary goals: Key elements in the secondary transition planning process. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 42(2), 44-51.

- Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cullinan, D., & Sabornie, E. J. (2004). Characteristics of emotional disturbance in middle and high school students. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 12*(3), 157-167.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education, 40*, 314-321.
- Elwood, S. A. & Martin, D. G. (2000). "Placing" interviews: Location and scales of power in qualitative research. *Professional Geographer, 52*(4), 649-657.
- Finlay, L. (2008). Introducing phenomenological research. Retrieved from <http://www.lindafinlay.co.uk/phenomenology.htm>
- Finlay, L. (2009). Debating phenomenological research methods. *Phenomenology and Practice, 3*(1), 6-25.
- Fisher, W. R. (1987). *Human communication as narration: Toward a philosophy of reasons, value, and action*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Forness, S. R., & Kavale, K. (2000). Emotional or behavioral disorders: Background and current status e/bd terminology definition. *Behavior Disorders, 25*(3), 264-269.

- Forness, S. R., & Knitzer, J. (1992). A new proposed definition and terminology to replace 'serious emotional disturbance' in individuals with disabilities education act. *School Psychology Review, 21*(1), 12.
- Frieden, L. (2003, September). People with disabilities and postsecondary education-position paper. *National Council on Disability*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncd.gov/publications/2003/Sept152003>
- Gamoran, A. (1993). Is ability grouping equitable? *Education Digest, 58*(7), 44.
- Garrison-Wade, D. F. (2012). Listening to their voices: factors that inhibit or enhance post-secondary outcomes for students' with disabilities. *International Journal of Special Education, 27*(2), 113-125.
- Garrison-Wade, D. F., & Lehmann, J. P. (2004). Students' perceptions about successfully transitioning to postsecondary institutions. *The Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal, 2*(4), 37-49.
- Garrison-Wade, D. F., & Lehmann, J. P. (2009). A conceptual framework for understanding students' with disabilities transition to community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 33*, 417-445.
- Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice and evaluation of phenomenological method as a qualitative research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 28*(2), 235.
- Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development, and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools, 30*, 79-90.

Green, J., Willis, K., Hughes, E., Small, R., Welch, N., Gibbs, L., & Daly, J. (2007).

Generating best evidence from qualitative research: the role of data analysis.

*Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 31(6), 545-550.

Griffin, B.W. (2002). Academic disidentification, race, and high school dropouts. *The*

*High School Journal*, 85(4), 71-81.

Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International*

*Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1), Article 4. Retrieved from

[http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3\\_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf)

Hallam, S., & Ireson, J. (2007). Secondary school pupils' satisfaction with their ability

grouping placements. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(1), 27-45.

Halpern, A. S., Yovanoff, P., Doren, B., & Benz, M. R. (1995). Predicting participation

in postsecondary education for school leavers with disabilities. *Exceptional*

*Children*, 62(2), 151-164.

Hamil, C. & Sinclair, H. (2010). Bracketing-practical considerations in husserlian

phenomenological research. *Nurse Researcher*, 17(3), 16-24.

Harris, S. R. (2010). *What is constructionsm? Navigating its use in sociology*. Boulder,

CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Heckathorn, D. D. (1997). Respondent-driven sampling: A new approach to the study of

hidden populations. *Social Problems*, 44(2), 174-199.

Hehir, T. (2002). Eliminating ableism in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72, 1-32.

Hehir, T. (2003). Beyond inclusion. *School Administrator*, 60(3), 36-39.

Hehir, T. (2007). Confronting ableism. *Educational Leadership*, 64(8), 8-14.

Hodges, N. (2011). Qualitative research: A discussion of frequently articulated qualms (faq). *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 40(1), 90-92.

Hurtubis-Sahlen, C. A., & Lehmann, J. P. (2006). Requesting accommodations in higher education. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 38(3), 28-34.

Husserl, E. (1982). *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*. First book (F. Kersten, Trans.). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. (Original work published 1913).

Hutcheon, E. J., & Wolbring, G. (2012). Voices of “disabled” post secondary students: Examining higher education “disability” policy using an ableism lens. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 5(1), 39-49.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq. (1990).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq. (2004).

Ireson, J., Hallam, S., & Plewis, I. (2001). Ability grouping in secondary schools: Effects on pupils’ self-concepts. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71, 315-326.

- Irvin, M. J., Farmer, T. W., Weiss, M. P., Meece, J. L., Byun., McConnell, B. M., & Petrin, R. A. (2001). Perceptions of school and aspirations of rural students with learning disabilities and their nondisabled peers. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practices, 26*(1), 2-14.
- Johnston, L.G., & Sabin, K. (2010). Sampling hard-to-reach populations with respondent driven sampling. *Methodological Innovations Online, 5*(2), 38-48.
- Jonsen, K., & Jehn, K. A. (2009). Using triangulation to validate themes in qualitative studies. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 4*(2), 123-150.
- Julian, T., & Kominski, R. A. (2011). Education and synthetic work-life earnings estimates. *American Community Survey Reports, ACS-14*. U.S. Censon Bureau, Washington, DC.
- Karpur, A., Clark, H.B., Carproni, P., & Sterner, H. (2005). Transition to adult roles for students with emotional/behavioral disturbances: A follow-up study of student exiters from a transition program. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 28*(1), 36-46.
- Kauffman, J. M., & Lloyd, J. (1995). Inclusion of all students with emotional or behavioral disorders? Let's think again. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(7), 542.
- Keel, R. O. (2007). Constructionist approaches to deviance. Retrieved from <http://www.umsl.edu/~keelr/200/constructionism.htm>

Khazaenezhad, B., Barati, H., & Jafarzade, M. (2012). Ability grouping as a way towards more academic success in teaching efl- a case of Iranian undergraduates.

*English Language Teaching, 5(7)*, 81-89.

Kiuhara, S. A., & Huefner, D. S. (2008). Students with psychiatric disabilities in higher education settings: The Americans with disabilities act and beyond. *Journal of*

*Disabilities Policy Studies, 19(2)*, 103-113.

Knis-Matthews, L., Bokara, J., DeMeo, L., Lepore, N., & Mavus, L. (2007). The meaning of higher education for people diagnosed with mental illness: Four students share

their experiences. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, 31(2)*, 107-114.

Knoblauch, B., & Sorenson, B. (1998). *IDEA's definition of disabilities. ERIC digest E560*. Reston, VA: ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education.

Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED429396)

Kochhar-Bryant, C., Bassett, D. S., & Webb, K. W. (2009). *Transition to postsecondary education for students with disabilities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Kohler, P. D., Johnson, J. R., Chadsey-Rusch, J., & Rusch, F. R. (1993). Transition from school to adult life: Foundations, best practices, and research directions.

*Transition Research Institute Illinois, Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS)*: Washington, DC.

Kramp, M. K. (2004). Exploring life and experience through narrative inquiry. In K. deMarrais & S. D. Lapan (Eds.), *Foundations for research* (pp. 103-121).

Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.



- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 45*(3), 214-222.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.
- Kvale, K. A., Forness, S. R., & Mostert, M. P. (2004). Defining emotional or behavioral disorders: The quest for affirmation. In P. Clough, P. Garner & F. Yuen (Eds.) *Handbook of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* (pp. 45-58). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Landmark, L.J., & Zhang, D. (2012). Compliance and practices in transition planning: A review of individualized education program documents. *Remedial and Special Education, 34*(2), 113-125.
- Lehman, C. M., Clark, H. B., Bullis, M., Rinkin, J., & Casetellanos, L. A. (2002). Transition from school to adult life: Empowering youth through community ownership and accountability. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 11*(1), 127-141.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lleras, C., & Rangel, C. (2009). Ability grouping practices in elementary school and African American/Hispanic achievement. *American Journal of Education, 115*(2), 279-304.

- Mahanay-Castro, C. (2010). *Building transitional programs for students with disabilities: How to navigate the course of their lives*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: standards, challenges, and guidelines. *The Lancet*, 358, 483- 488.
- Marini, I., Glover-Graf, N. M., & Millington, M. (2012). *Psychological aspects of disability: Insider perspectives and strategies for counselors*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, LLC.
- Marks, B. A. (2009). Jumping through hoops and walking on egg shells or discrimination, hazing, and abuse of students with disabilities. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 39(5), 205-210.
- Marshall, M. N. (1996). Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice*, 13(6), 522-525.
- Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in phd studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(3). Retrieved from <http://nbn-resolving.de/un:nbn:de:0114-fqs100387>.
- Mathur, S. R. (2007). Understanding emotional and behavioral disorders: Are we paying the cost of borderline ethics? *Education and Treatment of Children*, 30(4), 11-26.
- Mazzotti, V. L., Rowe, D. A., Kelley, K. R., Fowler, C. H., Kohler, P. D., & Kortering, L. J. (2009). Linking transition assessment and postsecondary goals: Key

elements in the secondary transition planning process. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 42(2), 44-51.

McLeod, J. D., & Kaiser, K. (2004). Childhood emotional and behavioral problems and educational attainment. *American Sociological Review*, 69(5), 636-658.

Mehra, B. (2002). Bias in qualitative research: Voices from an online classroom. *The Qualitative Report*, 7(1). Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR7-1/mehra.html>

Merrell, K. W., & Walker, H. M. (2004). Deconstructing a definition: Social maladjustment versus emotional disturbance and moving the ebd field forward. *Psychology in the Schools*, 41(8), 899-910.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Fransico, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Missouri Association on Higher Education and Disability (MOAHEAD). (2010). *Missouri ahead college guidebook*. Retrieved from <http://moahead.org/guidebook/2010%20Missouri%20AHEAD%20College%20Guidebook.pdf>

Morse, J. M. (2000). Determining sample size. *Qualitative Health Research*, 10(3), 3-5.

Mortari, L., & Tarozzi, M. (2010). Phenomenology as philosophy of research: An introductory essay. Retrieved from [http://www.zetabooks.com/download2/Tarozzi-ortari\\_sample.pdf](http://www.zetabooks.com/download2/Tarozzi-ortari_sample.pdf)

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET). (2002, May). *IDEA 1997 transition issues: The iep for transition-aged students. (Parent Brief).*

Minneapolis, MN: Pacer.

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET). (2004a). *Current challenges facing the future of secondary education and transition services for youth with disabilities in the united states.* Discussion Paper. Retrieved from

[http://www.ncset.org/publications/discussionpaper/NCSET\\_Discussion\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.ncset.org/publications/discussionpaper/NCSET_Discussion_Paper.pdf)

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities. (2010). *Emotional disturbance. NICHCY Disability Fact Sheet #5.* Retrieved from

<http://nichcy.org/disability/specific/emotionaldisturbance>

Newman, L., Wagner, M., Knokey, A. M., Marder, C., Nagle, K., Shaver, D.,...

Schwartz, M., (2011). *The post-high school outcomes of young adults with disabilities up to 8 years after high school.* A Report from the National

Longitudinal Transition Study- 2 (NLTS2) (NCSE 2011-3005). Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Obiakor, F. E., & Wilder, L. K. (2010). Transitioning culturally and linguistically diverse learners with emotional or behavioral disorders. In D. Cheney (Ed.). *Transition of secondary students with emotional or behavioral disorders* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (pp.171-213).

Champaign, IL: Research Press.

- O'Neill, M. (2006). Delinquent or disabled? Harmonizing the idea definition of “emotional disturbance” with the educational needs of incarcerated youth. *Hastings Law Journal*, 57(6), 1189 -1367.
- Penner, J.L., & McClement, S.E. (2008). Using phenomenology to examine the experiences of family caregivers of patients with advanced head and neck cancer: Reflections of a novice researcher. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 7(2), 92-101.
- Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A. G. (2003). *Young, gifted, and Black: Promoting high achievement among African American students*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity-one's own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17-21.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and human sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J. A. Hatch and R. Wisniewski (Eds.) *Life history and narrative*. London: Falmer Press.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 137-145.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2007). Validity in issues in narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(4), 471-486. Retrieved from

<http://web.media.mit.edu/~kbrennan/mas790/07/Polkinghorne,%20Validity%20issues%20in%20narrative%20research.pdf>

Qu, S. Q., & Dumay, J. (2011). The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management*, 8(3), 238-264.

Reissman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative Analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Reissman, C. K. (2000). Analysis of personal narratives. Retrieved from

<http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~brooks/storybiz/riessman.pdf>

Reissman, C.K. (2003). Narrative Analysis. In M.S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman and T.

Futing Liao, (Eds). *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*,

3. Sage Publications. Retrieved from

<http://cmsu2.ucmo.edu/public/classes/Baker%20COMM%205820/narrative%20analysis.riessman.pdf>

Reissman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Newbury Park, CA;

Sage

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., & Elam, G. (2003). Designing and selecting samples. In J. Ritchie

and J. Lewis (Eds). *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science*

*students and researchers* (pp.77-108). Thousand Oaks, CA; Sage

Rocco, T. S. (2002). *The invisible people: Disability, diversity, and issues of power in*

*adult education*. Unpublished paper presented at the Midwest Research-to-

Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing, and Community Education, Northern

Illinois University, Dekalb, IL. Retrieved from

<https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/bitstream/handle/1805/414/Rocco%20T%20.pdf?squence=1>

Sadao, K. C., & Walker, W. L. (2002). Emancipation for youth with behavior disorders and emotional disturbance: A study of student perceptions. *Preventing School Failure, 46*(3), 119-125.

Salzer, M., Wick, L. C., & Rogers, J. A. (2008). Familiarity with and use of accommodations and supports among postsecondary students with mental illnesses. *Psychiatric Services, 59*(4), 370-375.

Sanders, P. (1982). Phenomenology: A way of viewing organizational research. *The Academy of Management Review, 7*(3), 353-360.

Scanlon, D., Saxon, K., Cowell, M., Kenny, M. E., Pérez-Gualdrón, L., & Jernigan, M. (2008). Urban adolescents' postschool aspirations and awareness. *Remedial and Special Education, 29*(3), 161-174.

Schmitz, T. (2008). Transition planning, special education law, and its impact on your child. *The Exceptional Parent, 38*(10), 37-39.

Sharpe, M. N., Bruininks, B. D., Blacklock, B.A., Benson, B., & Johnson, D. M. (2004). The emergence of psychiatric disabilities in postsecondary education. *National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) Issue Brief*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=1688>

- Shaw, S. F., Madaus, J. W., & Banerjee, M. (2009). Enhance access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 44*(3), 185-190.
- Shriner, J. G., Plotner, A. J., & Rose, C.A. (2010). Development of individualized education plans for students with emotional or behavioral disorders: Coordination with transition plans. In D. Cheney (Ed.). *Transition of Secondary Students with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (pp.171-213). Champaign, IL: Research Press.
- Silvers, A. (1996). (In)equality, (ab)normality, and the Americans with disabilities act. *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy, 21*, 209-224.
- Simmons, A. E., & Burke, N. S. (1966). The probable syndrome in terms of educational experiences which precipitates dropouts, delinquency, and eventual incarceration. *The Journal of Negro Education, 35*(1), 27-34.
- Sing, K., Chang, M., & Dika, S. (2010). Ethnicity, self-concept, and school belonging: Effects on school engagement. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice, 9*, 159-175.
- Sitlington, P. L., & Neubert, D. A. (2004). Preparing youths with emotional or behavioral disorders for transition to adult life: Can it be done within the standards-based reform movement? *Behavioral Disorders, 29*(3), 279-288.
- Slavin, R. E. (1990). Achievement effects of ability grouping in secondary schools: a best-evidence synthesis. *Review of Educational Research, 60*(3), 471-499.



- Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, *52*, 613-629.
- Steele, C. M. (1998). Stereotyping and its threat are real. *American Psychologist*, *53*(6), 680-681.
- Steele, C. M. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi: and other clues to how stereotypes affect us*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Stodden, R. A., & Conway, M. A. (December, 2002). Supporting youth with disabilities to access and succeed in post secondary education: Essentials for educators in secondary schools. *National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET)*, (Issue Brief) *1*(5), Retrieved from [http://www.ncset.org/publications/issue/NCSETIssueBrief\\_1.5.pdf](http://www.ncset.org/publications/issue/NCSETIssueBrief_1.5.pdf)
- Storey, K. (2007). Combating ableism in schools. *Preventing School Failure*, *52*(1), 56-58.
- Thomas, S. B., & Dykes, F. (2011). Promoting successful transitions: What can we learn from rti to enhance outcomes for all students? *Preventing School Failure*, *55*(1), 1-9.
- Thomson, M. M. (2012). Labelling and self-esteem: Does labelling exceptional students impact their self-esteem? *Support for Learning*, *27*(4), 158 – 165.
- Thurmond, V.A. (2001). The point of triangulation. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, *33*(3), 253-258.

Tincani, M. (2004). Improving outcomes for college students with disabilities. *College Teaching*, 52(4), 128-132.

Trainor, A. A. (2007). Perceptions of adolescent girls with ld regarding self-determination and postsecondary transition planning. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 30(1), 31-45.

University of Missouri St. Louis. (2011). Student body profile fall 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.umsl.edu/about/studentprofile.html>.

Uwah, C. J., McMahon, H. & Furlow, C. F. (2008). School belonging, educational aspirations, and academic self-efficacy among African American male high school students: implications for school counselors. *Professional Counseling*, 11(5), 296-305.

Valentine, J. C., Hirschy, A. S., Bremer, C. D, Novillo, W., Castellano, M., & Banister, A. (2011). Keeping at risk students in school: A systematic review of college retention programs. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 33(2), 214-234.

Wagner, M, M. (1995). Outcomes for youth with serious emotional disturbances in secondary education and early adulthood. *The Future of Children*, 5(2), 90-112.

Wagner, M. M., & Blackorby, J. (1996). Transition from high school to work or college: How special education students fare. *The Future of Children*, 6(1), 103-120.

Wagner, M. & Cameto, R. (2004). The characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of youth with emotional disturbances. *A Report From the National Longitudinal*

*Transition Study* – 2, 3(2). Retrieved from

<http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=1687>

- Wagner, M. & Newman, L. (2012). Longitudinal outcomes of youth with emotional disturbances. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 35(3), 199-208.
- Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., & Levine, P. (2005). *Changes over time in the early post school outcomes of youth with disabilities*. A Report of Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) and the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.
- Webb, K.W., Patterson, K. B., Syverud, S. M., & Seabrooks-Blackmore, J. J. (2008). Evidence based practices that promote transition to postsecondary education: Listening to a decade of expert voices. *Exceptionality*, 16, 192-206.
- Will, M. (1983). *OSERS programming for the transition of youth with disabilities: Bridges from school to working life*. Washington, DC: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, U.S. Department of Education.
- Wilson, M. G., Hoffman, A. V., & McLaughlin, M. J. (2009). Preparing youth with disabilities for college: how research can inform transition policy. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 41(7), 1-11.
- Wood, S. J., & Cronin, M. E. (1999). Students with emotional/behavioral disorders and transition planning: What the follow-up studies tell us. *Psychology in the Schools*, 36(4), 327-345.

Worthy, J. (2009). Only the names have been changed: Ability grouping revisited. *Urban Review, 42*, 271-295.

Wynne, M. E., Ausikaitis, A. E., & Satchwell, M. (2013). Adult outcomes for children and adolescents with ebd: Understanding parents' perspectives. *Sage Open, 3*, 1-14. Retrieved from <http://sgo.sagepub.com/content/3/1/2158244013483133>

Zigmond, N. (2006). Twenty-four months after high school: Paths taken by youth diagnosed with severe emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 14*(2), 99-107.

Zionts, P., Zionts, L., & Simpson, R. L. (2002). *Emotional and behavioral problems: A handbook for understanding and handling problems*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Appendices

## Appendix A

## Request for Participants Letter

May, 2013

My name is Cyrbonda Shavers and I am a graduate student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at the University of Missouri- St. Louis. As part of this program, I will be conducting a research study to learn more about how students with emotional disturbance/mental illness prepared for post-secondary education. I would like to invite you to be a part of this study. Below is some information to help you make an informed decision:

**Why I'm doing this study:** I am really interested in how students with emotional disturbance experience post secondary education preparation. This study will attempt to answer the question, to what extent does special education transition impact ED students' perception of their level of post secondary education preparedness? Sub questions are:

1. Does the academic self efficacy level of ED students differ according to the method used for transition planning?
2. To what extent were students able to select the transition planning method they received?
3. How much influence do students' feel transition planning has on their post secondary education decisions?
4. Based upon student perceptions, does special education transition services provided in high school adequately address their needs?

**What will happen to you if you are in this study?:** If you agree to participate in this study, I'll ask you to meet with me for an interview to talk about your post-secondary (after high school) preparation activities. You can provide any information that you feel is important. You may choose to answer all or only some of the questions I may ask about your high school experiences.

**Will any part of the study hurt you or help you?** This study will not hurt you in any way. It may not help you either. However, this study will provide a chance for you to think and talk about the post secondary preparation services you received while in high school. It will also help you determine if the services you received influenced your decision to participate in post secondary education (college). Your opinions will also be useful in helping teachers identify the services students need to prepare them for college.

**Who will know I am in this study?** No one will know that you participated in the study, your information and participation will be completely **anonymous**. I will voice record the interview and then analyze the information you provide.

**Do you have to be in the study?** No, your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any question you do not want to answer. You will not be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

**What will I receive for my participation?** Participants will receive a \$10.00 gift card for Subway restaurants for their participation.

**Questions?:** You can ask questions at any time. You may ask now or you may ask later. I may be reached at:

**Phone:** (314) 477-9847

**Email:** [cyrhonda@yahoo.com](mailto:cyrhonda@yahoo.com)

If you have any questions about this research you may also contact my advisor, Dr. E. Paulette Isaac-Savage at the University of Missouri-St. Louis who will be supervising this research at:

**Phone:** (314) 516-5941

**Email:** [EPisaac@umsl.edu](mailto:EPisaac@umsl.edu)

If you choose to voluntarily participate in this study please contact me as soon as possible.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Cyrhonda Shavers, M.Ed.

Appendix B  
Interview Questions

**1. Introduction**

- a. Can you please tell me a little about yourself?
- b. When and why were you referred for special education services?

**2. In what ways did the focus of the transition planning services received in secondary school impact their level of academic self-efficacy?**

- a. How did your sense of belonging, comfort, and acceptance within the school community influence your decision to participate in post-secondary education upon high school graduation?
- b. Did the negative stigma often associated with special education and students with disabilities impact your feelings regarding your ability to succeed academically?
- c. What impact did your participation in special education have on your sense of belonging, comfort, and acceptance in school?

**3. To what extent were students able to select the transition planning services they received in secondary school?**

- a. Did your high school offer post-secondary transition planning for students with and/or without disabilities?



- b. Were you able to select the type of post secondary transition preparation services you received in high school, i.e. general education/special education? If not, why not?

**4. How much influence do students' feel transition planning had on their post-secondary education decisions?**

- a. Did the type of transition planning services you received in high school impact your beliefs/feelings regarding your ability to succeed in post-secondary education?"
- b. How did your experiences with your academic advisor/counselor, teachers, case managers and other high school staff influence your desire to participate in post secondary education?

**5. Based upon student perceptions, did the special education transition planning services they received in secondary school adequately address their post-secondary education preparation needs?**

- a. What is your definition of post-secondary education preparedness?
- b. On a scale of 1 to 5, (1 meaning underprepared and 5 meaning fully prepared) how prepared were you for post secondary education after high school graduation? Explain your answer.
- c. Do you feel the transition services you received adequately addressed your post-secondary needs? Explain.

**6. How can post secondary education institutions assist students with ED during the post secondary transition planning process?**

- a. What post-secondary education barriers did you face during the post secondary education enrollment process?
- b. Did you register with your post secondary education institution's disability support services office? Why or why not?
- c. How can post-secondary education institutions help students with ED prepare for college

## Appendix C

## IRB Approval



## Office of Research Administration

One University Boulevard  
 St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499  
 Telephone: 314-516-5899  
 Fax: 314-516-6759  
 E-mail: ora@umsl.edu

**DATE:** July 8, 2012

**TO:** Cyrhonda Shavers, M.Ed.  
**FROM:** University of Missouri-St. Louis IRB

**PROJECT TITLE:** [331746-2] The Impact of Special Education Transition Services on Post Secondary Education Preparedness of Students with Emotional Disturbance: A Study of Student Perceptions

**REFERENCE #:**  
**SUBMISSION TYPE:** Amendment/Modification

**ACTION:** APPROVED  
**APPROVAL DATE:** July 8, 2012  
**EXPIRATION DATE:** July 8, 2013  
**REVIEW TYPE:** Expedited Review

**REVIEW CATEGORY:** Expedited review category # 7

The chairperson of the University of Missouri-St. Louis IRB has reviewed the above mentioned protocol for research involving human subjects and determined that the project qualifies for expedited review under Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 46.110b. The time period for this approval expires one year from the date listed below. You must notify the University of Missouri-St. Louis IRB in advance of any proposed major changes in your approved protocol, e.g., addition of research sites or research instruments.

You must file an annual report with the committee. This report must indicate the starting date of the project and the number of subjects to date from start of project, or since last annual report, whichever is more recent.

Any consent or assent forms must be signed in duplicate and a copy provided to the subject. The principal investigator must retain the other copy of the signed consent form for at least three years following the completion of the research activity and they must be available for inspection if there is an official review of the UM-St. Louis human subjects research proceedings by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Protection from Research Risks.

This action is officially recorded in the minutes of the committee.

If you have any questions, please contact Carl Bassi at 314-516-6029 or [bassi@umsl.edu](mailto:bassi@umsl.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

## Appendix D

## Informed Consent Form



**Division of Educational Leadership  
and Policy Studies**  
One University Blvd.  
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499  
Telephone: 314-516-5941  
Fax: 314-516-5942  
E-mail: EPIsaac@umsl.edu

**Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities**  
The Impact of Special Education Transition Services on  
Post Secondary Education Preparedness of Students with Emotional Disturbance:  
A Study of Student Perceptions

Participant \_\_\_\_\_ HSC Approval Number \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator Cyrhonda Shavers PI's Phone Number (314) 477-9847

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Cyrhonda Shavers and sponsored by her advisor, Dr. Paulette Isaac-Savage. The purpose of this research is to explore how special education transition programs affect students with Emotional Disturbance feelings about their level of post secondary education preparedness.
2. Your participation will involve participating in a one on one interview which will take place on campus or in a private room at a public library. In all, approximately 5 students will be asked about their experiences participating in Special Education transition planning and how those experiences may have influenced their decisions about their level of post secondary education preparedness.  
  
The interview will take approximately one hour, and will be audio recorded for later transcription and analyzing of the data you and others provide. In appreciation of your time, you will be provided a \$10.00 gift card for Subway sandwiches.
3. There is no anticipated risk associated with this research.
4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about emotionally disturbed students' perceptions of post secondary education preparedness after participating in special education transition and may help special education teachers and staff better meet student needs. In addition, your participation will expand knowledge relative to post secondary education participation.
5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
6. By agreeing to participate, you understand and agree that your data may be shared with other researchers and educators in the form of presentations and/or publications. In all cases, your identity will not be revealed. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection). That agency would be required to maintain the

confidentiality of your data. In addition, all data will be stored on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked office.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Cyrhonda Shavers at (314) 477-9847 or [cyrhonda@yahoo.com](mailto:cyrhonda@yahoo.com) or Dr. Paulette Isaac-Savage at (314) 516- 5941 or [EPISAAC@umsl.edu](mailto:EPISAAC@umsl.edu). You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your rights as a research participant to the Office of Research Administration, at (314) 516-5897.

**I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator or Designee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator/Designee Printed Name