The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the College of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis/dissertation entitled:

THE BENEFITS TO HIRING INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES: EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVES

submitted by Taylor Charlene Wells in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Social Work.

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Abstract

Many individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) desire meaningful community participation and are motivated to work. Despite this desire, employment rates for people with ID are considerably low. Negative employer attitudes are one of the main barriers faced by individuals with ID in securing competitive integrated employment. Employers who have had one and a half- to 30 years’ experience hiring employees with ID were interviewed on the benefits to hiring and retaining workers with ID. The sample included 13 employers and 2 additional workplace managers, totalling 15 participants. Four major findings emerged that describe the benefits to hiring people with ID: 1) Workplace Environment, 2) Business, 3) Employer Job Satisfaction, and 4) Community Support and Expertise. Hiring employees with ID led to a more positive workplace environment, bolstered by the employees’ personalities, contributing to a sense of teamwork and employer perspective shift on workplace operations. Employees with ID contributed to better business by filling roles, demonstrating strong work ethics and bringing diversity to the workforce. Employers experienced greater job satisfaction in knowing that they were making a difference by hiring inclusively and connecting to the community. Finally, employers commented on the benefits of community support professionals who assist with hiring, training and retaining employees with ID. One of the primary goals of the present study was to educate employers on the benefits to hiring people with ID. Study participants’ advice to more hesitant employers and further dissemination of results are discussed. No one who wants to work, should be excluded from the labour market, and with the right assessment, tools, support, and welcoming employers, this is achievable.
Lay Summary

Employment is important for all people as it provides a sense of purpose and meaningful contribution to society. People with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) often face employer discrimination when searching for work. In the present study, employers who have hired and retained employees with ID were interviewed on their experiences. The goal of the study was to learn about the benefits associated with hiring people with ID, and to obtain advice from experienced employers. Negative stereotypes about people with ID in the workforce can be challenged with knowledge and education on how they contribute and thrive in the workforce. The findings from the present study can be used to educate hesitant employers on the benefits to hiring people with ID, with the hope of improving employment rates for people with ID.
Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished work by Taylor Wells. Ethics approval for this research was granted by The University of British Columbia Okanagan Behavioural Research Ethics Board H17-02777.
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List of Definitions

**Ableism**  
Discrimination in favour of able-bodied people (non-disabled people)

**Adaptive Functioning**  
How well a person independently manages common life demands, such as social skills, conceptual skills, and practical skills

**Affirmative Model of Disability**  
Theoretical perspective that disabled people are heterogeneous and have authority over their own lives

**Competitive Integrated Employment**  
Employment in the open-labour market that provides at least minimum wage and similar benefits to all employees, regardless of ability

**Customized Employment**  
Employment that involves carving out/tailoring a position within a company that may not have previously existed

**Demand-side Approaches**  
Approaches used to promote the employability of individuals with disabilities by creating a demand for disabled workers

**Developmental Disability (DD)**  
Umbrella term that includes all disabilities that manifest before the age of 18 years, such as intellectual and/or physical disabilities

**Disabled People/People with Disabilities**  
Terms used interchangeably; all people with any type of disability

**Diversability**  
Rebranding of the term ‘disability’. Connotes the recognition of the diverse abilities of individuals who want to contribute and participate in society

**Emancipatory Framework**  
Research intending to facilitate social and political change through bringing to the forefront, the lived experiences and struggles of those belonging to oppressed groups

**Employment First**  
Initiative for systemic change that prioritizes competitive integrated employment for disabled people, before any other non-employment options are considered

**Heterogeneous**  
Diverse in character
**Intellectual Disability (ID)**
A form of Development Disability; Impaired intellectual and adaptive functioning that manifests before the age of 18 years

**Interpretive Description Strategy**
Applied qualitative research that leads to greater knowledge in applied health fields, contributing to an actual practice goal for positive change

**Social Model of Disability**
Locates the struggles that disabled people face within society and its systemic disadvantage, such as discrimination in favour of able-bodied people

**Supported Employment**
Involves the assistance of rehabilitation workers (community support professionals) in helping individuals to apply to, and maintain existing work positions in one’s community
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To all who face discrimination in seeking employment
1 Introduction

Employment is an important milestone for all individuals, regardless of ability. Employment is a social determinant of health, contributing to improved physical and mental health, including self-esteem, confidence, and greater life satisfaction (Raphael, 2006; Skellern & Astbury, 2012; Waddell & Burton, 2006). Employment can provide a structured routine and a social community/network, as well as provide purpose and a sense of meaningful contribution to society (Lysaght, Petner-Arrey, Howell-Moneta, & Cobigo, 2016). Additionally, employment can provide an environment to learn new and relevant skills (Lysaght et al., 2016; Shandra & Hogan, 2008), and, one of the primary motivators, money/benefits for life’s necessities and pleasures (Prince, 2010). These benefits to employment are similar for those with disabilities, and those without disabilities (Lysaght, Ouellette-Kuntz & Morrison, 2009). Along with allies of the community living sector, it is my strong belief that no one who wants to work should be excluded from the labour market.

Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) desire meaningful community participation and are motivated to work (Lysaght et al., 2016; Scott, Foley, Bourke, Leonard, & Girdler, 2014). ID, a form of developmental disability (DD), is defined by Community Living British Columbia (CLBC) as “significantly impaired intellectual functioning that a) manifests before the age of 18 years, [and] b) exists concurrently with impaired adaptive functioning…” (CLBCa, n.d.). Adaptive functioning can be separated into social skills, conceptual skills (such as abstract thinking) and practical skills. One practical skill might be an ability to work, such as following a schedule/routine and managing money (CLBCb, n.d.). Nonetheless, it is a myth that many of those with ID do
not want to work and/or are unable to work. Recognizing the aforementioned benefits to employment, people with ID explain that work is important to them for financial reasons, benefits, opportunities for promotion, opportunities to help others, socializing, the enjoyment of working itself, and self-development (Lysaght et al., 2009; Lysaght et al., 2016). In fact, when describing what it means to have a good quality of life, some people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities mentioned five main outcomes: 1) living independently, 2) participating in meaningful activity, such as employment/school, 3) having a reliable income and access to services, 4) maintaining health and wellness, and 5) having authentic relationships (Miller, Cooper, Cook, & Petch, 2008). Similarly, in a study by Scott and colleagues (2014), individuals with Down Syndrome were asked about their definition of “the good life”. Participants indicated that community participation, independence and hope for the future were important in living a good life. Employment addresses many, if not all, of these indicators described by people with ID.

The employment rate for individuals with ID are much lower than those without disabilities (Domin & Butterworth, 2013). Indeed, in 2006, people with ID reported a 26.1 percent employment rate whereas people without disabilities reported an employment rate of 75.1 percent (Statistics Canada, 2006). Employment rates for people with ID are also much lower than those with other non-developmental disabilities: 26.1 percent versus 52.7 percent (Crawford, 2011). This means that only 26.1 percent of individuals with ID in Canada are reaping the aforementioned benefits of employment. This statistic is similar in the United States and in other commonwealth countries (Mirenda, 2014).
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) prohibits discrimination with respect to employment, as well as recognizes the right that each person with disabilities has to work, and encourages greater rehabilitation services in employment (United Nations, 2006, Article 26-27). Similarly, the Government of Canada outlines in their Employment Equity Act that no individual should be deprived of opportunities of employment and that there should be equality in the workplace for all peoples, including women, Aboriginal people, members of visible minorities, and persons with disabilities (Minister of Justice, 1995). The government of British Columbia, through the Minister’s Council on Employment & Accessibility, has a 10-year action plan, titled Accessibility 2024; this action plan strives for greater accessibility for disabled people, with the hope that people of all abilities can live inclusive lives (Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, n.d.). Part of the Accessibility 2024’s leadership team is the Presidents Group, who strive to connect with employers to increase job opportunities for disabled people. One way they are doing this is through the Pathfinding Project where they are teaching businesses to recruit and hire more disabled people by identifying and eliminating barriers to employment (Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, n.d.). Also in 2012, CLBC launched a Community Employment Action Plan aimed at improving employment outcomes for individuals with ID desiring and/or looking for employment (Community Living BC & Community Partners, 2013). Additionally, in 2013, Inclusion BC commenced the “Ready, Willing & Able” campaign, raising awareness and building connections for job candidates with ID and/or autism in BC (Inclusion BC, n.d.).
Kiernan, Hoff, Freeze and Mank (2011) discuss the Employment First initiative and its attempts for systemic change, including competitive integrated employment for disabled people. Competitive integrated employment is employment in the open labour market that provides at least minimum wage and similar benefits to all employees. It includes working with colleagues who do not have disabilities and provides promotion opportunities. Full-time is typically optimal, if the job seeker is willing and able (Kiernan et al., 2011). Employment First posits that employment should be the first option provided to disabled people, regardless of severity, before other non-employment options are considered. Some of its principles include self-determination, career development, adequate employment-related training services, and protection against exploitation (Kiernan et al., 2011).

Despite these initiatives and policies, there is still considerably less disabled people in the workforce compared to those without disabilities (Grant, 2008). Disabled people and, more specifically, people with ID, are excluded from competitive integrated employment; it seems that little has to do with ability and intellectual capacity. There are many barriers that contribute to the low employment rate for individuals with ID. One of these barriers includes a lack of related experience and skills training (Bruyere, Erickson, & VanLooy, 2006), speaking to ineffective or non-existent youth transition programs, such as school-employer partnerships and other employment supports and training (Trainor, Carter, Owens, & Swedeen, 2008). Brown and Kessler (2014) cite poorly trained staff, inadequate or irrelevant instruction, low expectations, a lack of opportunity, and minimal long-term supports, as reasons why many individuals with ID are not securing competitive employment. Shier, Graham, and Jones (2009) interviewed disabled
people from Alberta and Saskatchewan on their experiences of searching for employment. Participants indicated a variety of barriers for seeking employment including lack of reliable transportation and support networks, low self-esteem and, most prevalent, employer discrimination. Participants indicated that they were uncertain whether to disclose their disability for fear of stigmatization (Shier et al., 2009).

Individuals with ID in Ontario also spoke to attitudinal barriers faced in searching for and maintaining employment (Lysaght et al., 2016). Moreover, Duvdevany, Or-Chen, and Fine (2016) interviewed employers on their willingness to hire individuals with ID and concluded that stereotype thinking affects employers’ opinions on employability, therefore preventing people with ID the opportunity to show their capabilities.

Negative employer attitudes are one of the main barriers faced by individuals with ID in securing competitive integrated employment. Some employers see disability legislation and anti-discriminatory policy as a hindrance and assume that individuals with ID have lower productivity levels and are associated with high accommodation costs, safety risks, and emotional problems (Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Zappella, 2015). Furthermore, many employers state that they lack awareness of how to accommodate employees’ needs as well as concerns with increased supervisory time and negative reactions and responses from colleagues and customers. Another primary concern is a fear of lawsuit regarding discipline or termination (Amir, Strauser, & Chan, 2009; Hernandez, McDonald, Divilbiss, Horin, Velcoff, & Donoso, 2008; Jasper & Waldhart, 2012; Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011; Lengnick-Hall, Gaunt, & Kulkarni, 2008). Many employers have also voiced more readiness to hire people with physical disabilities over those with ID (Snyder, Carmichael, Blackwell, Cleveland, & Thornton III, 2009;
Zappella, 2015) and voiced concern about their company’s/organization’s appearance (Butcher & Wilton, 2008). Jasper and Waldhart (2012) labeled this barrier as aesthetic anxiety and is defined as anxiety related to the potential of one’s business being perceived as less attractive. Some employers have also stated that the nature of their work cannot be performed by disabled people and that disabled people are not qualified for their positions, lacking necessary knowledge and skills (Brostand, 2006; Jasper & Waldhart, 2012; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008). Additionally, lack of financial incentives such as tax breaks and accommodation costs were also stated as a barrier by employers to hiring individuals with disabilities (Fraser, Ajzen, Johnson, Herbert, & Chan, 2011).

These negative attitudes and opinions by employers on the employability of those with ID act as a barrier in giving people with ID a chance to work in a competitive integrated environment. These attitudes and opinions may stem from the historical mistreatment of disabled people as well as present day ableism – discrimination in favour of able-bodied people (Linton, 2006). These prejudices toward disabled people may be influenced by the lens through which employers look at disability and their notions of normalcy in an ableist society. Ableism is present when employers view individuals with ID as a homogenous group. Indeed, Zappella (2015) states that if employers have a negative experience with a disabled person, they are more hesitant to hire anyone with a disability. This stereotyping also seems apparent for positive experiences; when an employer has a positive experience with an ID worker, they may limit all ID employees to a particular role within the company (Zappella, 2015). Additionally, some employers’ main (or only) reason for hiring people with ID is for altruistic/socially desirable motives.
There are, however, some employers who have positive attitudes towards the employability of those with ID. Some of these employers have expressed their positive experiences with ID employees and state a willingness to hire others (Kaehne & Beyer, 2013). Disabled people have been described as loyal, reliable and hard-working, and have proven low absenteeism for shifts and long tenures. Furthermore, some employers explain that accommodation costs are minimal (Hernandez et al., 2008). Luecking, Cuozzo, and Buchanan (2006) summarized employers’ responses regarding disabled employees and stated that specific company needs were met, including production goals, customer satisfaction, and improved operation seen in the reduction of backlogged work. For youth with ID, some employers notice increased social inclusion, self-management and, independence/autonomy (Skellern & Astbury, 2012). Moreover, Zappella (2015) found that employers’ experiences with employees with ID were positive: e.g., employers stated that ID employees can be as productive and reliable as non-disabled coworkers.

1.1 The Present Study

Employer positive attitudes toward the employability of individuals with ID exist as people with ID demonstrate they are capable employees. The purpose of the present study was to explore the experiences of employers who have had positive experiences employing individuals with ID with the intent to promote the employability of those with ID. The present study included interviews with employers who have had one and a half-to 30 years’ experience hiring employees with ID to glean information on the benefits to hiring and retaining workers with ID. As each individual is different, employees with ID
(discussed in the present study) uniquely contributed to their workplace in different ways. Additionally, there were similarities in how these employees contributed to their workplace. In this study, these similarities are discussed as general themes and the unique differences are woven through as examples. The employers also discussed their learning experiences in having employees with ID and share the barriers that were overcome in order for their employees with ID to successfully perform their jobs. I discuss these learning experiences in hope that this study can be used for the promotion of employees with ID and in educating employers who are hesitant to hire people with ID.

Although the present study did not focus solely on transitioning youth, the findings contribute to the Transitioning Youth with Disabilities and Employment (TYDE) project. The TYDE Project includes an interdisciplinary team of individuals in British Columbia who are devoted to understanding and increasing employment rates for youth (age 14-25) with ID and/or autism (The TYDE Project, n.d.). The TYDE project is a partnership with 15 partner organizations that includes 10 non-profit organizations serving individuals with ID/DD and their families, three postsecondary institutions, and two provincial ministries as well as the crown agency, Community Living British Columbia (CLBC), who is responsible for supports and services for individuals (age 18+) with ID and their families in BC. Part of the TYDE project includes understanding employers’ perspectives on the benefits of hiring individuals with ID and to learn about successful practices in order to provide this information to receptive employers.

1.2 Thesis Structure

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter served as an introduction to ID and employment. In Chapter 2, I explain why many employers have
negative attitudes toward people with ID through a discussion of disability throughout history and the theoretical lenses in which people view disability. I also discuss existing initiatives and theories that promote the employability of people with ID and review the existing literature on employer attitudes toward employees with ID. Chapter 2 ends with a discussion on the rationale for my study, and why this topic is important. In Chapter 3, I explain my study’s methodology, including recruitment strategies and participant demographics. In Chapter 4, I describe the findings based on my analysis of the interviews with my study participants, using the employers’ quotes to support these interpretations. Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss my results with reference to the existing literature on employer attitudes towards the employability of those with ID. This chapter includes a discussion on how my findings contribute to the real-world to better employment rates for those with ID.
2 Disability Theory and Literature Review

Negative employer attitudes and opinions toward people with ID act as a major barrier for people with ID who desire competitive integrated employment (Duvdevany et al., 2016; Shier et al., 2009). These negative attitudes and opinions that many employers have, may be rooted in historical interpretations of disability that caused the horrendous abuse towards disabled people, as well as present day ableism (Linton, 2006). In fact, the lens through which employers understand disability may influence employer prejudices toward disabled people. It was determined that some employers view people with ID positively and indicate that they can be productive and reliable employees (Luecking et al., 2006). Indeed, the literature outlines disparate views held by employers, with many holding discriminatory views toward hiring an employee with ID. How does one make sense of these contradictory positions? Critical Disability Theory helps to describe and understand aspects of these differing employer attitudes regarding the employability of individuals with ID.

2.1 Critical Disability Theory and History

Disability is often seen as misfortune. This is, in part, due to a history of oppression, institutionalization, and the medical model, all of which relate to a cultural othering that disabled people face. The medical model (or individual model) defines disability as a functional defect and limitation (Watermeyer, 2013). According to the medical model, ‘disability’ is a deviation from a ‘normal (able, healthy) human’ and any problems associated with disability are located within the individual (Oliver, 2009). The medical model leads individuals [employers] to treat disabled people as “passive recipients of services and treatments who need to be cured” (Heenan, 2007, p.180).
When disabled people are viewed solely through the lens of a medical model – as impaired and abnormal – it contributes to the perception of disabled people appearing unemployable. This is particularly troublesome for those with ID as the medical model offers little guidance regarding the employability of those with differing cognitive abilities, an ability that cannot be cured or medicated (Lysaght, Ouellette-Kuntz, & Lin, 2012b). In this view, job applicants are typically seen in terms of their pathology (Zappella, 2015). While marketing the employability of those with disabilities in the 1960s and 1970s, slogans such as “Hire the Handicapped” were prevalently used (Fabian, Luecking, & Tilson, 1994). This marketing scheme played to employers’ altruism, suggesting charity, as opposed to the job skills and potential of disabled people. This is further perpetuated by media portrayals of people with disabilities as dependent and incapable of meaningful activity (Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, & Lysaght, 2007). Altruism or feelings of pity are still motives for hiring disabled people today; as previously mentioned, some employers’ main rationale for hiring people with ID is for altruistic motives or for making their company appear diversified and accepting (Ellenkamp et al., 2016; Simonsen et al., 2015). This philanthropic positioning suggests that people with disabilities are victims of their situation and need charitable treatment and pity (Lysaght et al., 2012b). In this view, people’s employment goals and career development are often ignored. Similar to this positioning is a compliance approach to employment, which is when employers comply with law or government regulations with minimal effort (Oliver, 2004).

When interpreting the low employment levels of those with ID through a strict medical model, one would presume that people with ID do not have the skills or ability to
perform at work (Lysaght et al., 2012b). Employers may also presume an economic burden when considering whether to hire disabled people as they weigh the perceived costs associated with hiring. Perceived costs may be seen in the form of lower productivity levels and therefore less-revenue, or in accommodation costs (Lysaght et al., 2012b). When disability is viewed solely as an impairment within the individual, there is no consideration of removing external barriers to assist disabled people in obtaining employment. Instead of seeing disabled people as capable of performing work in a competitive integrated environment, they are often enrolled in sheltered employment: a method of providing disabled people - who may be perceived as lacking employable skills - with the opportunity to perform meaningful activity. Sheltered employment is a segregated method to “train” disabled people for the workforce. It typically includes assembly lines and monotonous tasks for subminimum wages (Butcher & Wilton, 2008). It is uncommon for employees to reach their full potential, and although there are some benefits such as a sense of community with other disabled people, it typically does not provide disabled people with the opportunity for competitive integrated employment. Indeed, a manager of supported employment has stated that the “comfortable setting” of the workshop deters from the organization’s goal for their employees to receive competitive employment (Butcher & Wilton, 2008, p. 1087).

The social model provides an alternative view to the medical model. The social model locates the struggles that disabled people face within society (Oliver, 2009). Watermeyer (2013) explains that it is discrimination and systemic disadvantage that diminishes the status of people with disabilities, not disability itself. In other words, it is society – the social, economic and political context – that creates the disability, not the
impairment (Jongbloed, 2006; Lysaght et al., 2012b). As opposed to trying to fix the person with a disability, changing the social, economic and political environment would help to improve employment rates for disabled people (Jongbloed, 2006). Particularly, as discussed by Stone and Colella (1996), negative attitudes and stereotyping are the biggest social barriers for integrated employment for disabled people. When these social barriers are addressed, and employers are willing to accommodate needs, job candidates with disabilities can be perceived as qualified (Lysaght et al., 2012b). However, as a cautionary note, the social model is not a panacea. While the social model offers alternative ways to understand disability and directs interventions towards disabling factors in society (e.g., barriers to employment), it has been criticized for denying the lived experience of impairment and minimizing the diverse experiences of disability. In fact, Oliver (2009), an early champion of the social model, explains that this model can be used to help understand disability but can never explain or capture everyone’s experience with disability.

The criticisms of the social model should encourage one to interpret this model through the lens of human variation; seeing disabled people as a heterogeneous group with differing strengths and considerations (Luecking, 2008). This is particularly relevant to those with ID, as this population has an array of differing intellectual ability and accommodation needs (Lysaght et al., 2012b). Indeed, the definition used for Intellectual Disability in the present study is a broad one. Similar to the definition given by CLBC, the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) define intellectual disability as “a disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social
and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18” (AAIDDa, n.d.). Intellectual functioning, also known as intelligence, refers to an individual’s general mental capacity; this is partly examined by an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test and a score around 70 to 75 or below indicates an intellectual disability. Adaptive behaviour in persons with ID is sometimes seen in lower conceptual skills such as money and time management, social skills, as well as practical skills such as personal care and occupational skills (AAIDDa, n.d.). There are a plethora of variables, including biological and environmental factors that influence ID. ID can also be separated into different severities such as mild, moderate, severe, and profound, depending on IQ level and adaptive behaviour. For the purpose of this present study and in recognizing the heterogeneity of the population labeled as ID, employees are not defined by their IQ number nor the severity of their disability. It is also important to note that the above definition for ID, including the IQ score parameters, is provided in this study because as a social work practitioner in Canada, I must practice within the frameworks that guide our policy and procedures in Canada. That said, there are controversies in defining ID with IQ in that some argue that the particular scores are more about policy eligibility than intellectual functioning.

Some examples of ID diagnoses include Fragile X Syndrome, Down Syndrome, Prader-Willi Syndrome, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). There are other unspecified forms of ID as well. Autism is frequently mis-cited as an ID. Autism is a Developmental Disability (DD), which is an umbrella term that includes ID but also includes other disabilities present during childhood, including not only cognitive disabilities but also physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy and epilepsy (AAIDDb,
However, it is true that Autism is known as a spectrum disorder, as most disabilities should; this means that some people with Autism also have an ID, while others do not. Because DD is an umbrella term, all people with an ID have a DD, given the onset of symptoms prior to age 18. This is not necessarily true the other way around; not everyone with a DD has an ID. It is for this reason that the present study focuses specifically on ID and employability, focusing on the strengths of those with differing intelligence and adaptive functions.

Emphasis is placed in this study on the heterogeneous group of people with an ID. Luecking (2008) discusses a study completed by DuPont de Nemours and Company in 1993 where employers consistently provided positive ratings for their employees with disabilities, stating they were just as, or more productive than their non-disabled coworkers. Although positive in theory, this study was used in employer recruiting materials that sold people with disabilities as “super achieving workers” and failed to recognize the diversity in the heterogeneous group (Luecking, 2008, p. 4). When employers view people with disabilities as a homogenous group, one negative experience, could lead employers to believe that all experiences with disabled people will be negative. When informed by a social model that includes an appreciation for human variation, job applicants are typically seen as a person, as opposed to solely their pathology. When viewed in this manner, employers can see the possibility of a positive employment partnership through adequate accommodation (Zappella, 2015).

The affirmative model of disability addresses some of the criticisms of the social model. Swain and French (2000) eloquently describe the affirmative model:
The affirmative model…directly challenges presumptions of personal tragedy and the determination of identity through the value-laden presumptions of non-disabled people. Whereas the social model is generated by disabled people’s experiences within a disabling society, the affirmative model is borne of disabled people’s experiences as valid individuals, as determining their own lifestyles, culture, and identity…[The] affirmative model is held by disabled people about disabled people. Its theoretical significance can also only be developed by disabled people who are proud, angry, and strong in resisting the tyranny of the personal tragedy model of disability and impairment. (p. 578-581)

The affirmative model encourages the term ‘disabled people’ as opposed to ‘people with disabilities.’ Eisenhauer (2007) explains that the term ‘disabled people’ emphasizes the importance of identity and disability. Mary Duffy explains that using the term ‘people with disabilities’ simply tags the word ‘disability’ on as if disabled people are trying to be ‘normal’ (cited in Eisenhauer, 2007, p. 9-10). Due to the prefix ‘dis’, the world disability in itself connotes separation and otherness; however, for many disabled activists and scholars, it is a word that connotes identity and pride. As powerfully stated by Linton (2006), this underscores the importance of ‘reassigning meaning’ to ‘disability’, rather than picking a new name.

When disabled people are viewed within an affirmative model, it promotes positive social identities, both individual and collective, that are influenced by the lifestyle and life experiences associated with being disabled (Swain & French, 2000). From this position, disabled employees work within their interests and strengths. Zappella (2015) explains that employers have the crucial task of recognizing each of their
employees’ strengths, regardless of disability status, tailoring the most suitable position. If employers’ roles are viewed in this manner, the employer appreciates the assets and abilities of each employee, disabled or not. In Chapter 3, I describe the current study’s methodology and describe how it fits within the social and affirmative models of disability. I view employer attitudes as a barrier for individuals with ID seeking employment, and concur with Zappella (2015) that positive employment partnership is possible by addressing barriers through adequate accommodation. Furthermore, in line with the affirmative model, I view people with ID as having unique strengths and interests, and that they should be encouraged to work within these strengths and interests.

2.2 Existing Initiatives: Promoting the Employability of People with ID

There are community programs and supports that currently exist to promote the employability of those with ID. Some of these programs begin during grade school, while others are catered for adults. These initiatives have evolved over time as more research is published in this field, and as the public increasingly views the importance of employment for all peoples. I begin by describing transitional programs for youth, and then discuss supported and customized employment. I then present demand-side approaches to employment; the present study contributes to this initiative in promoting the employability of people with ID. To conclude, I discuss financial incentives available for employers.

2.2.1 Transitional programs. Adolescence is a crucial period where individuals prepare for their future and the workforce. It is also a time of growth and skill development. School-to-work transition programs contribute greatly to effective transition planning, preparing school-aged youth for sustainable employment (Gormley,
The Ministry of Education in British Columbia states that transition planning should begin no later than age 14 and continue until age 25. Some of its guiding principles include a holistic, strengths-based approach that is innovative, flexible, sustainable, and inclusive (Cross Ministry Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Special Needs, 2009).

An effective transition plan typically includes individualized assessment of ability and interests, and practical experience with employer connections (Gormley, 2015; Kumin & Schoenbrodt, 2016; Lysaght et al., 2009). Each of these components should also include collaborative efforts between student, parent, school staff, and employers (Skellern & Astbury, 2012). In a literature review examining the predictors of employment for individuals with ID/DD post-high school, Southward and Kyzar (2017) state that paid work experience while in high school is the best predictor of post-school employment success. They discuss that this work experience promotes the development of relevant work-related- and social skills in a natural setting, and raises expectations of teachers, parents, and the students themselves of future employment goals and success.

Gallagher and Bennett (2013) explain that transition programs need to seek school-employer partnerships where employers have an understanding of the benefits that disabled students can bring to the workplace and have the capacity to support students as they learn and execute job related skills. Gallagher and Bennett (2013) state that the ultimate goal of transition programs is to foster independence in work placements in preparation for the workforce.

Test, Fowler, and Kohler (2013) and Test (2016), in exploring the evidence-based practices and predictors of success for transitioning youth, depicted 20 transition
components that were associated with greater post-secondary employment. They are as follows: 1) career awareness, 2) community experience, 3) high school completion, 4) goal-setting, 5) inclusion in general education, 6) interagency collaboration, 7) occupational courses, 8) paid employment/work experience, 9) parent expectations, 10) parental involvement, 11) program of study, 12) self-advocacy/self-determination, 13) self-care/independent living, 14) social skills, 15) student support, 16) transition programs, 17) travel skills, 18) vocation education, 19) work study and, 20) youth autonomy/decision making. Many of these components appear to be addressed in effective transitional programs.

Beyer, Meek, and Davies (2016) discussed the Real Opportunities Project in the United Kingdom that assisted youth with ID and autism to prepare for employment post-school. Job coaches assisted youth in finding compatible work placements in a variety of fields. Beyer and colleagues (2016) found that students’ work skills improved between first and second work placements. The students stated that they preferred the practical experience of skill development as opposed to their school work. Their family also explained that the students had a greater outlook for employment in the future. Beyer et al. (2016) concluded that work experience while in school is a predictor of job success as an adult, and that job coach support provides a greater learning experience for students while in school. Kaehne and Beyer (2013) argue that transition programs are not only beneficial for students with ID, but for peers without disabilities as well. These researchers discussed the peer support model, where non-disabled peers partner with peers with ID of similar age to maintain a job while in high school; this is said to promote
inclusion as well as develop greater work-related skills and social skills (Kaehne & Beyer, 2013).

Project SEARCH was created in the United States and is gaining momentum in Canada and other commonwealth countries such as Australia and England (O’Bryan, Daston, & Riehle, 2014). The program takes place in business settings and is a one-year, employer-led approach that assists youth with disabilities in obtaining their goal of employment. It includes over 800 hours of skill development in a variety of internships to discover interests and strengths, helping youth with ID to discover their career goals. The benefits have been found to be mutual for the adolescents and the employers; O’Bryan and colleagues (2014) explain that this program is helping employers to redefine suitability and helps them to understand how hiring individuals with ID can be a good business decision. Indeed, helping employers realize the benefits to hiring individuals with ID is the ultimate goal of rehabilitation professionals and advocates.

2.2.2 Supported and Customized Employment. Supported and customized employment are two support strategies for securing and maintaining employment for working age individuals with ID. These approaches may be used separately or in combination depending on the needs of the individual employee. Given my focus on positive experiences of employers, understanding employers’ experiences related to supported and customized employment and how to improve these supports is relevant to the present study.

Supported employment involves assisting individuals to apply to and maintain existing work positions in one’s community. A vocational rehabilitation worker would ensure that the individual is going to be successful in their workplace through partnership
with the employer and by ensuring worksite supports (CLBCc, n.d.). Customized employment is similar to supported employment except for in customized employment, rehabilitation professionals assist individuals in carving out/tailoring a position within a company that may not have previously existed (Luecking et al., 2006). CLBCc (2008) defines customized employment:

[It is the process of] individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in ways that meet the needs of both. It is based on an individualized assessment of the strengths, needs, and interests of the person with a disability. It is also designed to meet the specific needs of the employer.

Customized employment involves similar supports to transitional programs such as person-centered training, and individualized discovery processes where strengths and accommodation needs are determined. Individualized job search plans are also conducted, and hidden job opportunities are found through conversation with employers about their potential unmet needs (Luecking & Luecking, 2006; Yamatani, Teixeira, & McDonough, 2015). Expectations, work schedules, and responsibilities can be negotiated and, when necessary, vocational rehabilitation professionals address employers’ concerns with factual information (Burke, Bezyak, Fraser, Pete, Ditchman, & Chan, 2013; Luecking, 2011). Research addressing supported and customized employment demonstrate positive outcomes (Gallagher & Bennett, 2013; Simonsen et al., 2015; Skellern & Astbury, 2012). For example, Luecking et al. (2006) surveyed nine employers on their experience with the customized program in their region of the United States. Employers highly rated their experience and stated that one of the main reasons why they hired a disabled person was because they were shown how the candidate’s skills could be
match to specific, negotiated duties. When asked for feedback on the program and if they would refer other employers to try customized employment, they collectively stated that they would recommend this program and that they had no recommendations for improvement.

2.2.3 Demand-side Approaches to Employment. Appealing to employers’ charity or pity is not typically an effective method for promoting employment for individuals with ID. Therefore, employers’ needs and their attitudes toward the employability of individuals with ID cannot be ignored (Nota, Santilli, Ginevra, & Soresi, 2014). For rehabilitation professionals, employment seeking approaches have evolved from using a supply-side approach to the more beneficial demand-side approach. The supply-side approach typically appeals more to employers’ social responsibility and offers employers with a supply of employees who will meet the needs of the companies’ pre-existing roles. This is not disadvantageous; however, it does not consider how disabled people may meet unmet needs within a company, therefore creating a demand for disabled workers often involving customized services (Luecking et al., 2006).

Demand-side approaches include consulting with employers, focusing on their needs, and rehabilitating their workplace, rather than just the client. This could be done by focusing on roles within a company that are difficult to fill or get done and presenting job candidates to fill that void. The partnership between employee and employer within a demand-side approach means that the employee saves the employer money, helps the employer make money, and/or helps the employer to run company operations more smoothly. Additionally, demand-side approaches involve an ongoing partnership with the rehabilitation professionals, where they continue to support and listen to employers’
concerns and consistently attempt to improve service (Luecking et al., 2006). Using a demand-side approach gives potential for disabled employees to add great value to the companies for which they are employed (Simonsen et al., 2015).

2.2.4 Financial Incentives. The promotion of disabled people in the workforce is sometimes marketed with financial incentives such as wage subsidy and tax credits. There are programs that exist in Canada to access government funding to assist with the costs of hiring disabled workers. Mentor Works, in Ontario, provide employers with two funding options. First, employers can receive up to 50 percent coverage of employee wages in Ontario government grants up to 13,500 dollars, for three to nine months. Alternatively, employers can receive up to 20,000 dollars to offset salary and specialized training for employees for up to 12 weeks or up to 90 percent coverage in assistive devices, specialized training, and assessments (Poulton, 2017). Beyond providing supported and customized employment in British Columbia, WorkBC provides financial supports to disabled people for accommodation costs, in order to alleviate these costs for employers (WorkBC, n.d.). There is also the Opportunities Fund, which is a financial assistance program through the BC Centre for Ability that provides funding for training, wage subsidy, and adaptive equipment (Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, 2017).

There are differing opinions on the use of financial incentive to promote the hiring of disabled people. Financial incentive could be seen as a strategy similar to the “hire the handicapped” slogans of the 1960s and 1970s – as the socially responsible thing to do. Financial incentives may perpetuate stereotypes that disabled workers are not as productive as their non-disabled counterparts, therefore, some incentive is needed to
make up for this lack of productivity. Furthermore, financial incentive can be seen as paternalistic and can minimize the self-determination of disabled people, further reinforcing dependency (Oliver, 1986).

Although there are differing opinions on the benefits to financial incentive for disabled workers, the reality is that financial incentives sometimes assist in the hiring of disabled workers, so they can demonstrate that they are productive and capable workers. Indeed, many employers recommend providing subsidies, tax credits, centralized accommodation funds, and other financial incentives to increase employment statistics for disabled workers (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012; Jasper & Waldhart, 2012; Kaye et al., 2011). Duvdevany et al. (2016) interviewed employers, half of whom had employees with ID and half who did not, and examined whether employers’ awareness of the adjusted minimum wage regulations (wage determined according to ability to work) would influence attitudes toward employing people with ID. These researchers found that awareness of the adjusted minimum wage regulations was not influential in the attitudes towards employing people with ID, yet influential in the perception of the capability of people with ID. Employers who were aware of the adjusted minimum wage regulations perceived workers with ID as more capable (Duvdevany et al., 2016).

The already existing programs and philosophies to increase the employment rates for employees with disabilities discussed above are the most common approaches used in BC and Canada. Aspects of these existing initiatives to promote the employability of disabled people have been found in the literature on employer attitudes toward employees with ID. This literature is discussed in the scoping review to follow.
2.3 Literature Review

In order to glean a clearer picture of the existing literature addressing employers’ perspectives on the employability of individuals with ID, I completed a scoping review of the relevant research literature. To obtain studies for this literature review, I used the research interface, EBSCOhost. Search terms used were “intellectual disability” OR “intellectual disabilities” AND “employment” OR “employee” OR “employer”, and limiters were set to generate only articles that were peer-reviewed, in English, and no older than 10 years. The search was limited to the past 10 years due to rapid changes in employment practices, and so outdated practices would be excluded (Lysaght, Cobigo, & Hamilton, 2012a). This search was conducted on the following social science and medical databases: Academic search complete, Alternative press index, Biomedical reference collection, Business source complete, CINAHL, EconLit, Education source, ERIC, LGBT life, MEDLINE, Philosopher’s Index, PsycINFO/articles/books/extra, Social work abstracts, and Women’s studies international. Articles generated were extracted to RefWorks, a reference management software package, if they included the search terms mentioned above. In total, 1,043 articles were extracted to RefWorks. I removed the duplicates, leaving 612 articles, and removed articles that were published prior to 2005, leaving 599 articles.

I read the abstracts of the 599 articles to determine articles for full review. Articles were chosen according to the following criteria: 1) peer-reviewed, 2) available in English, 3) published between 2006 and 2017, 4) employment related, 5) employers as participants, and, 6) employers speaking to their perspective on employees with ID or discussing individuals with ID in general. After reading the abstracts for these criteria, I
selected 21 articles for full review. After reading the 21 articles, I identified 10 that fit the aforementioned criteria. These articles were examined for location of study, the number of participants, methods used, and the main findings. In order to search for other relevant articles, I looked through the references of the selected 10 articles and performed a Google Scholar search with the keyword search items labelled above. By reading their abstracts, I identified 10 other articles as potentially relevant. I read these additional 10 articles, and one of them fit the six criteria mentioned above. That being said, the total number of articles in this review is 11. These articles are outlined in alphabetical order by author in Table 1. Table 1 depicts the location of the study, participant demographic and sample size, theory/methods used, main findings (if not the employers’ perspective), and the main findings (employers’ perspective).

An analysis of location revealed that the majority of the 11 studies were conducted in the commonwealth countries with three in the United Kingdom (Beyer et al., 2016; Kaehne & Beyer, 2013; Skellern & Astbury, 2012), one in New Zealand (Fillary & Pernice, 2006), and three in Canada (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013; Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Gallagher & Bennett, 2013). Of note, two of the Canadian articles utilized some of the same data for two different publications (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013; Gallagher & Bennett, 2013). Remaining articles were published in Israel (Duvdeveny et al., 2016), the United States of America (Feerasta, 2017), and two in Italy (Nota et al., 2013; Zappella, 2015). One of the criteria for this scoping review was that employers were participants, however, in many of the studies, the employers were not the only participants, and when so, the employers were not the primary participants (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013; Beyer et al., 2016; Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Feerasta, 2017; Fillary &
In many of these studies, the primary participants were individuals with ID. For example, in both Beyer et al. (2016) and Gallagher and Bennett (2014), individuals with ID and their families were interviewed, while the employers were provided with a survey to complete.

In summarizing my literature review, I will first discuss the studies that focused on work placements for transitioning youth and outline its limitations. I will then discuss the remaining studies on paid employment for people with ID. Three general themes emerged from the literature review that necessitate further discussion. By also using additional literature that did not specifically include employees with ID (but employees with a disability, in general), I will summarize the studies’ findings with regards to Intergroup Contact Theory, employer size and the importance of employer education. Finally, I conclude Chapter 2 with rationale for the present study.

The majority of the studies focused on work placements for transitioning youth (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013; Beyer et al., 2016; Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Gallagher & Bennett, 2013; Kaehne & Beyer, 2013; Skellern & Astbury, 2012). Data collection in four of these articles used surveys to explore employers’ experiences (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013; Beyer et al., 2016; Gallagher and Bennett, 2013; Kaehne & Beyer, 2013), while two articles used interviews (Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Skellern & Astbury, 2012). I will first summarize the studies that included surveys, and then discuss the main findings extrapolated from the interviews.

There were both similarities and differences in the conclusions of the four studies that used surveys to explore employers’ experiences with work placements for students
with ID. Firstly, the employers in both Beyer et al. (2016) and Kaehne and Beyer (2013) indicated by survey that they were satisfied with the performance of their students with ID and their contribution to the workplace. In Beyer et al. (2016), employers reported satisfactory performance of students with ID in all skill areas. These areas included working skills, following safety rules and given instruction, attendance record, punctuality, quantity and quality of work, initiative, interest in task, brakes taken according to rules, productivity, relationship with coworkers and supervisors, and personal appearance. Similarly, in Kaehne and Beyer (2013), employers rated students with ID as reliable employees with positive assessments in performance, attendance, attitudes and work practices. Employers in Kaehne and Beyer (2013) also mentioned the diversity the students brought to their company and how this influenced positive company image. The employers surveyed in Beyer et al. (2016) also indicated that the students had a positive influence on other staff’s productivity and attitudes toward work, on customers, and on company image. Given these responses, 96.2 percent of employers in Beyer and colleagues (2016) stated they would take on other students with ID and that the students would have been hired if there was funding available. However, in Kaehne and Beyer (2013), employers were less positive about continuing to hire the same students with ID. The reasons why employers stated this were not discussed.

Bennett and Gallagher (2013) found through employer surveys that employers were least likely to agree that students with ID quickly experience inclusion in the workplace. Indeed, of all groups surveyed (employers, students, teachers, education assistants, job coaches, parents and non-disabled peers), the employers were least likely to agree with statements indicating positive attitudes and beliefs about individuals with
ID (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). Similarly, although Beyer et al. (2016) and Kaehne and Beyer (2013) found positive employer reviews on student performance, Beyer et al. (2016) explained how there was ambivalence on student ratings in initiative, productivity, and interest in the task, and employers surveyed in Kaehne and Beyer (2013) stated that the students had minimal impact on the productivity of other employees and on customers.

Overall, employers surveyed regarding work placement experiences felt equipped to manage students with ID. In Bennett and Gallagher (2013), many employers had previous experience managing work placements for students with ID; of the 20 employers, 14 of them had three- to over 20 years’ experience. This complements the data further discussed in Gallagher and Bennett (2013) where surveys indicated that employers felt they had the training and skills relevant to providing placements for students with ID. These employers also recognized the importance of job coaches.

There were also several similarities between employer responses in the two articles that included interviews regarding student work placements. Both Butcher and Wilton (2008) and Skellern and Astbury (2012) suspected that the employers interviewed had philanthropic motivations for accepting work placements with students with ID. Employers interviewed in Skellern and Astbury (2012) occasionally felt the role of rescuer (encouraging self-management and independence), rescuing the students from their parents’ protective vigilance. Employers interviewed in Butcher and Wilton (2008) stated that the students with ID were less productive than desired and explained they were paid less for that reason. One employer in Butcher and Wilton (2008) explained that their employee was “very productive” and “cheap labour”, so either way, the work placement
was cost effective (p.1088). Another employer made a comment that they do not allow employees to serve customers if they look like they have a disability, therefore leading to suspected aesthetic anxiety. When commenting on the positive aspects of having the student with ID, the employer stated that she “did not look disabled” (Butcher & Wilton, 2008, p.1088). Another employer stated that their main priority was that the employee attends work when scheduled; given their employee was showing up for work appropriately, the employer was satisfied. In Skellern and Astbury (2012), employers were satisfied with their students as they noticed increased social inclusion, self-management, independence, and autonomy during the work placement (Skellern & Astbury, 2012).

It is apparent through these employer reviews of student work placements that students with ID may be evaluated against different criteria than other employees without disabilities. The review of these six articles already point to existing gaps in the literature. It is difficult to get a clear picture of what employers think of employees with ID when being approached by schools and transition programs to help prepare students for the workforce in the future. One of the reasons that it is difficult to get a clear picture of the attitudes of employers in these situations is that the financial compensation, if any, is low for transition programs (Butcher & Wilton, 2008). Differing expectations, attitudes, and beliefs may be present when employers are paying their disabled workers the same wage as their non-disabled workers. Another opportunity to add to the literature is more inclusion of other methodological approaches. Arguably, surveys can be limiting when exploring attitudes and opinions, as there is typically no room for elaboration. For example, in the Kaehne and Beyer study (2013), employers stated that they would not
hire their current students with ID, but there was no opportunity for the researchers to understand why. The qualitative studies presented in the literature review thus far provided more insight into the attitudes of the employers regarding the work placements as there was room for elaboration (Kaehne & Beyer, 2013; Skellern & Astbury, 2012). None of the six studies on transitional programs included employers’ recommendations for improvement. Additionally, employers were not the sole participants in these six studies, and they were not the primary source of the findings. Also noted, none of the six studies on transitional programs discussed a demand-side approach to improving employment outcomes for individuals with ID. Some, but not all, of these limitations are addressed in the remaining five studies included in this literature review.

The remaining five studies focused on paid employment for people with ID (Duvdevany et al., 2016; Feerasta, 2017, Fillary & Pernice, 2006; Nota et al., 2013; Zappella, 2015). Data collection in three of these articles used interviews to explore employers’ attitudes (Feerasta, 2017; Fillary & Pernice, 2006; Zappella, 2015), while two articles used surveys (Duvdevany et al., 2016; Zappella, 2015). There were common themes throughout the following studies regardless of data collection type. Their similarities and differences will be described below.

Firstly, it was found that employers’ views of disability were significant in determining their attitudes toward hiring someone with ID. In Nota et al. (2013), employers provided greater ratings toward job candidates when they were presented with the positive aspects and skills of the candidates, and this was especially true for candidates with ID. Similarly, in Zappella (2015), when the recruitment process was seen...
as an opportunity, rather than a mandated policy, the candidate with ID was viewed more positively.

Zappella (2015) stated that some of the employers who had previously hired individuals with ID saw the recruitment process as an opportunity and stated that employees with ID can be just as productive and reliable as employees without disabilities. Indeed, Zappella (2015) found that employers who had previously hired individuals with ID were more willing to do so again. Interestingly, Zappella (2015) found that contact theory was true for negative experiences as well: if employers had a negative experience with a person with ID, they were less likely to hire anyone with ID. Duvdevany et al. (2016) also found support for contact theory, in that employers who had previously hired individuals with ID were more willing to hire individuals with ID again in the future. However, Nota and colleagues (2013) found no support for contact theory; there were no difference in social acceptability or work performance ratings according to whether the employer had previously hired someone with a disability.

Nota et al. (2013) surveyed 80 employers regarding the employability of three hypothetical job candidates. All candidates received greater social acceptability ratings than work performance ratings, suggesting that individuals with disabilities are evaluated against different criteria than other employees without disabilities. Duvdevany et al. (2016) also discuss these differing criteria when examining whether employers’ awareness of the adjusted minimum wage regulations (wage determined according to ability to work) influence attitudes toward employing people with ID. They found that awareness of the adjusted minimum wage regulations was not influential in the attitudes towards employing people with ID, yet influential in the perception of the capability of
people with ID. Employers who were aware of the adjusted minimum wage regulations perceived workers with ID as more capable (Duvdevany et al., 2016). Duvdevany et al. (2016) found no significant difference between employer attitudes when considering size of the workplace. Duvdevany and colleagues (2016) concluded that stereotyped thinking still exists regarding individuals with ID, and stated, “[I]t seems that society is not yet ready to give persons with ID an equal opportunity to work and to be able to prove themselves in the workplace” (p. 39). Zappella (2015) found that employers were more willing to hire individuals with physical disabilities than ID and some employers assumed that the candidate with ID would be less productive, be associated with high accommodation costs, and pose safety risks. Some employers were also concerned about having to deal with the emotional reactions of employees with ID. Fillary and Pernice (2006) found that employees with ID experience less inclusion in the workplace. Lack of inclusion for employees with ID was suspected to be related to number of hours worked (less than nine hours), the level of employment support, limiting expectations, and employer/coworker attitudes (Fillary & Pernice, 2006). It was also found that employees with ID were not formally oriented to the workplace by an employer, and the majority did not receive written job descriptions. Employees with ID also received less promotion and, when reviewed in performance, it was typically completed by an employment support agency, as opposed to the employer (Fillary & Pernice, 2006). Recognition of barriers, including why employees with ID are not as included in the workplace, is the first step in breaking these barriers. Indeed, Duvdevany and colleagues (2016) explained that knowledge can change negative attitudes toward individuals with ID.
Feerasta (2017) found that employees with ID are aware of the attributes for employment success. In their study, the manager rated attributes as they relate to employment success. The top two attributes were, first, always tries to improve practice, and second, has a positive attitude; the third top rated attributes, seen as equally important, were demonstrates self-control, is ready to learn, and is a team player. The employees with ID were also aware of these attributes for employment success. The remaining “employers” interviewed in this study were part of sheltered workshops. This study (Feerasta, 2017) was kept in this review as it provides insight into managers’ perspectives on the factors of employment success.

The demand-side approach to promoting the employment of those with ID was not discussed in the following five articles. In fact, none of the articles in the literature review included a specific discussion about demand-side approaches and its effect. Some researchers in this area argue that employers’ negative attitudes toward the employability of persons with ID can be challenged with demand-side approaches and education. For example, Duvdevany et al. (2016) stated that “knowledge has the power to change negative attitudes” (p. 38). Duvdevany et al. (2016) was only one of two studies in this review to mention education in some capacity and therefore, was not a prominent finding across the reviewed research. It is, however, an important topic and mentioned throughout other literature regarding employment and disability. It is for this reason that I discuss this topic more thoroughly below.
## Table 1
### 11 Studies with Employers re: Job Candidates/Employees with ID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Theory / Methods</th>
<th>Main findings</th>
<th>Main findings - Employers’ perspective</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bennett &amp; Gallagher (2013)</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>n=20 employers n=21 ID students n=91 teachers n=67 education assistants n=7 job coaches n=22 parents n=43 non-disabled peers</td>
<td>Emancipatory research / surveys (tailored to the participant group in question)</td>
<td>Differences on all subscales between participant groups (attitudes/beliefs re: ID student inclusion; inclusion of ID students in classroom/workplace; Impact of inclusion on peers; Support/ Socialization; Confidence in teaching/comfort in workplace). Job coaches and parents had most positive attitudes/beliefs; parents most likely to agree with statements re: positive effect of inclusion</td>
<td>Of all participant groups, employers least likely to agree with statements re: positive attitudes / re: ID student inclusion and with statements re: workplace assimilation. Employers most likely to agree that ID students have social interaction and are supported. Parents more confident than employers in teaching/comfort in the workplace</td>
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<td>Beyer, Meek &amp; Davies (2016)</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>n= 247 employers n=24 ID students n=25 family</td>
<td>Survey / questionnaire for employers; interviews with students and family</td>
<td>ID students’ improved rating of skills between 1st and 2nd work placements; students preferred practical experience compared to school work; students enjoyed meeting new people; treated well by coworkers; family stated placement taught student about work; Family reported change in outlook for students re: work</td>
<td>84-99.2% employers’ report satisfaction performance in all skill areas; ambivalence on initiative, productivity, interest in the task; 82.5% would employ ID student with supports; 96.2% would employ another ID student; positive impact on other staff’s productivity, attitude to their work, company image and customers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Theory/Methods</td>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>Main findings - Employers’ perspectives</td>
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<td>Butcher &amp; Wilton (2008)</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>n=5 employers n=6 ID students, and their parent/guardian n=1 sheltered workshop manager</td>
<td>Interviews / Participant Observation at employment training program</td>
<td>Alternative activities to school work should focus on preparing for employment, i.e., vocational training center, which received positive reviews / in sheltered workshop, pay is low, some students found work to be easy, lack of integration, yet positive experience and high inclusion / One student had a negative work placement experience due to manager’s high expectations</td>
<td>In agreeing to provide work placement, employers stated altruistic reasons / One manager spoke to importance of appearance and that employee “did not look disabled” / placement worker is paid less than other employees, employers stated this is due to lack of experience, speed and more accommodations / employers’ commended students for showing up to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duvdevany, Or-Chen &amp; Fine (2016)</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>n=79 employers</td>
<td>Survey / questionnaire</td>
<td>Employers’ previous contact with person with ID related to willingness to hire; education of employer and size of workplace no influence on attitudes; awareness of adjusted minimum wage regulations not influential in attitudes towards employing people with ID, yet influential in perception of capability of person with ID</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feerasta (2017)</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>n=1 manager n=2 ID employees</td>
<td>Attribution theory / one-on-one interviews; survey; employee focus group</td>
<td>Top three attributes for employment success ranked by employees, 1) always tries to improve performance, 2) team player, 3) ready to learn</td>
<td>Top three attributes for employment success ranked by manager, 1) always tries to improve performance, 2) has a positive attitude, 3) demonstrate self-control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Theory/Methods</td>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>Main findings - Employers’ perspectives</td>
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| Fillary & Pernice (2006) | New Zealand | n=8 employers
n=8 ID employees with support person (i.e., family)
n=8 non-disabled coworkers | Semi-structured interviews             | Non-ID coworkers had higher inclusion score; ID employees low inclusion scores related to fewer number of hours worked (<9 hours), the level of employment support, limiting expectations and employer/co-worker attitudes; greatest inclusion for ID employees appeared in job design; ID employees less formally oriented to workplace by employer and only two ID employees received written job description; ID employees performance reviewed mostly by employment support agency, not employer; ID employees received less promotion |                         |
| Gallagher & Bennett (2013) | Canada     | n=20 employers
n=21 ID students
n=1 principal
n= 7 job coaches | Interviews with ID students and principal / surveys with employers and job coaches | ID students satisfied with placement and supports and felt a sense of belonging; ID students confident in skills | Employers reported positive attitudes re: inclusion of ID student; employers felt they had the training and skills relevant in providing ID students’ placements; employers recognize importance of job coaches |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Theory/Methods</th>
<th>Main findings</th>
<th>Main findings - Employers’ perspectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kaehne &amp; Beyer (2013)</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>n=4 managers</td>
<td>Analysis of activity records from peers / semi-structured interviews with parents / interviews with project lead and consultant who developed the peer support model and trained local staff in its use / questionnaire/survey with employers</td>
<td>Parents spoke to positive impact jobs had on ID students, including improved social skills / parents felt employment pathways not adequately discussed at review meetings</td>
<td>Employers satisfied with support received by peer-support-program staff / employers rated ID students as reliable employees with positive assessment in performance, attendance, attitude and work practices / Employers stated preparedness to employ ID students again and spoke to diversity and positive company image / less positive ratings on likelihood of employing current ID student / stated minimal impact on productivity of other employees and impact on customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nota, Santilli, Ginevra &amp; Soresi (2013)</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>n=80 employers</td>
<td>Questionnaire / survey</td>
<td>Employers demonstrated more negative attitudes re: people with psychological problems, compared to ID, especially on social acceptability / Greater ratings from employers when presented with positive aspects and skills of employee candidates, especially ID candidates / candidates received greater social acceptability ratings than work performance ratings / previous experience with ID employees showed no relationship with attitudes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Theory/Methods</td>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>Main findings - Employers’ perspectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skellern &amp; Astbury</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>n=5 employers n=8 ID students n=5 education stuff n=5 parents</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Parents alluded to continued protective vigilance in placement, education staff empathized with parents’ perceived role as protector, while prompting student to be more independent (rescuer role) / students stated enjoyment and appreciation of placements / students showed pride in achievements, increased confidence and esteem / students recognize benefits such as money, enjoyment, team participation, and social rewards</td>
<td>Employers alluded to rescuer role (rescuing student from parents’ protective vigilance) / some placements formed by staff provoked sympathy in employers / Employers, ID students and parents noticed increased social inclusion, self-management, independence and autonomy in ID students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zappella</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>n=30 employers n=30 employees with ID</td>
<td>Interpretive phenomenological approach / In-depth interviews</td>
<td>Employers’ attitudes play a role in recruitment / employers influenced by personal characteristics, opinions and concerns (i.e., seeing disability legislation as a hindrance or an opportunity) / prior experience with disabled workers impacted likelihood of hiring disabled workers with the same type of disability (i.e., employers who have hired ID employees state they can be as productive and reliable as non-disabled coworkers) / some employers assumed lack of productivity, high cost of accommodating, safety risks and managing emotional reactions of ID employees / overall, employers more willing to hire physically disabled candidates rather than ID</td>
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Other emerging themes from this literature review that require more examination are Intergroup Contact Theory (Duvdevany et al., 2016; Nota et al., 2013; Zappella, 2015) and employer size (Duvdevany et al., 2016). In order to further understand these themes, I sought other articles that discussed employers’ attitudes. Due to the limited research on employers’ attitudes toward the employability of individuals with ID in the past 10 years, the other articles cited below do not specifically refer to people with ID, with the exception of three studies that included employee or public attitudes regarding people with ID in the workplace (Burge et al., 2007; Gormely, 2015; Novak, Feyes, & Christensen, 2011).

2.3.1 Intergroup Contact Theory. Social scientist, Allport, posited that intergroup contact can reduce prejudice, especially when common goals and intergroup cooperation are present (Pettigrew, 1998). Such is the case for employees and employers when they are both working for the success of their workplace. That said, it is not surprising that employers’ positive attitudes towards the employability of individuals with ID increase with more exposure to employees with ID (Zappella, 2015). This is also true for non-disabled employees’ attitudes towards their co-workers with ID (Gormley, 2015; Novak et al., 2011). Gormley (2015) and Novak et al. (2011) both interviewed coworkers to assess workplace integration and perception of coworkers with ID. Novak and colleagues (2011) found that employees were more accepting of their colleagues with ID if they had the opportunity to get to know the individual as well as work with them to accomplish work goals. Gormley (2015) assessed employees’ attitudes over a period of time and found that, initially, there were negative perceptions towards employees with ID, and that this decreased over time, eventually leading to positive attitudes and
acceptance into the workplace. Kaye and colleagues (2011) surveyed employers who were not complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. Some of these employers indicated positive views of the potential and performance of disabled employees, and it was found that this was typically rooted in previous experience with disabled employees (Kaye et al., 2011). Ellenkamp and colleagues (2016), in their systematic review, concluded that those who previously had employees with DD were more likely to want to hire employees with DD again. Employers with previous experience with employees with DD also had more positive attitudes and indicated more positive aspects of hiring individuals with DD, than employers with no experience (Ellenkamp et al., 2016).

2.3.2 Employer Size. Although Duvdevany et al. (2016) found no difference in employer response based on employer size, other articles that did not include employees with ID have found such differences. For example, Simonsen and colleagues (2015) found that employers from large companies who have employees that are youth with disabilities through a school-to-work program had higher confidence in the transition program staff. Similarly, Jasper and Waldhart (2012) found that employer size was correlated with employers’ openness to hiring people with disabilities: as employer size increased, so did the openness toward hiring candidates with disabilities. They also noted that smaller companies were more concerned about ADA-required accommodations and were more likely to perceive attitudes of customers as a problem (Jasper & Waldhart, 2012). Fraser et al. (2011) completed focus groups with companies that were small (30-100 employees), midsize (101-500 employees) and large (501+ employees). Employers were asked about their intentions to recruit workers with disabilities. Fraser et al. (2011)
noted differences in response according to employer size. Larger companies believed that workers with disabilities would be committed and loyal to their company, however smaller companies were concerned of the loss of potential revenue and possible litigation. Smaller companies were also most likely to require financial incentive in hiring disabled people, as many were lacking the resources in providing accommodations. Midsize companies had similar financial concerns but were also concerned about the reactions of team managers and coworkers. Larger companies were not as concerned about financial incentive or possible litigation and liability, but like midsize companies, were also concerned about manager/employee reactions, and about potential loss of efficiency. Many employers from larger companies also voiced that they believed that vocational rehabilitation cannot operate within a business model (Fraser et al., 2011). This last finding is particularly troublesome given efforts to approach disability and employment within a demand-side approach. This is where the importance of employer education comes into play…and some employers are requesting it.

**2.3.3 Importance of Employer Education.** In Calgary and Regina, Canada, job candidates with disabilities were interviewed on their job search experience and provided advice on what is necessary for employment success (Shier et al., 2009). A prevalent response by many was that employers required education on items such as stereotyping and discrimination. Thankfully, some employers recognized this need and employers in studies completed by Houtenville and Kalargyrou (2012), Kaye et al. (2011) and Jasper and Waldhart (2012) provided ways to improve practice. In fact, both Houtenville and Kalargyrou (2012) and Jasper and Waldhart (2012) found that more disability awareness training is needed. Employers in these studies wanted to see visible top management
commitment, meaning that managers are also receiving disability awareness training and taking on leadership in placing a priority in hiring individuals with disabilities.

Houtenville and Kalargyrou (2012) summarized:

Overall, our results suggest that providing employers and managers with information about the capabilities and performance of workers with disabilities (e.g., overall compensation cost including benefits, attendance, and turnover) would increase the employers’ confidence in hiring them. In addition, our results suggest that human resources professionals should also provide training on accommodations, communication skills, discipline, and performance appraisal issues to supervisors and managers (p. 50).

Kaye et al. (2011) found that employers desired more and better training, including written guidelines on accommodation issues and non-discrimination policy. The authors concluded that employers needed assistance in discovering how tasks in their company can be completed differently. They proposed that testimonies of successful employment of employees with disabilities would encourage hesitant employers to reconsider their negative attitudes on the employability of disabled people (Kaye et al., 2011).

Finally, Lengnick-Hall and colleagues (2008) provided four recommendations on how to provide education to employers. They are as follows: 1) identify success stories and utilize them in marketing to other employers, 2) advertise what disabled people can do, including that they are hard-working and loyal, 3) encourage rehabilitation professionals to take charge in expressing the benefits of hiring disabled people to employers, and 4) encourage more intergroup contact where non-disabled employers/employees have personal experiences with persons with disabilities. Given
their differences in findings based on employer size, Fraser et al. (2011) suggest that educational approaches be catered to employer size, because they have different concerns in hiring disabled people.

2.3.4 Limitations and Rationale for Current Study. Mirenda (2014) evaluated the progress in the past 20 years on community living, inclusive schooling and integrated employment for disabled people, and concluded that there is still much more work to do. The present study focuses on exploring employers’ experiences with their employees with ID in integrated employment.

Employer experiences and attitudes on this topic cannot be ignored. Employers influence whether individuals with ID are hired or not hired, and employers’ attitudes are the most reliable source of information in improving practice (Yamatani et al., 2015). Attitudes toward people with ID can improve through employer and staff education, and by demonstrating positive and beneficial employee/employer partnerships. Employers are requesting this education, meaning that it is lacking and desired. In the present study, I interviewed employers who have employees with ID who are maintaining employment. The present study sought out positive and beneficial employee/employer partnerships in order to educate not only hesitant employers, but also vocational rehabilitation workers, job coaches, transition program staff and anyone else who has influence in the lives of people with ID.

In the past 10 years, qualitative approaches have been sparse and, therefore, exploratory approaches that provide in-depth qualitative data that explores the benefits of hiring people with ID is limited, particularly from the employers’ perspectives. Further, many of the reviewed studies reported on negative employer attitudes, but none of these
studies examined if, or how, these negative attitudes were challenged or overcome. It is for this reason that the present study does not solely focus on the positive experiences but also those experiences that may have been difficult to overcome. People with ID are not a homogeneous group as some require more accommodation than others, and more understanding is needed on how accommodation needs are determined and implemented by employers to secure successful employment for employees with ID. This can inform both policy and practice. In line with Duvdevany and colleagues (2016), the current study advances that qualitative research has the potential to provide a greater understanding of the attitudes and opinions of employers.

Also missing from the literature on the employers’ perspectives regarding the employability of individuals with ID is an exploration of a demand-side approach to creating and facilitating employment. The present study brings forth additional benefits to hiring people with ID, therefore contributing to the demand-side approach. Another contribution of the present study is that it addresses a potential limitation in previous research that utilized the theory of planned behaviour and/or hypothetical questioning (Beyer et al., 2016; Fraser et al., 2011; Jasper & Waldhart, 2012; Nota et al., 2014). In these studies, employers shared whether they would hire people with disabilities, a hypothetical response that cannot be verified. In my research, I interviewed employers who have already hired individuals with ID, after the planned behaviour. This adds depth to the responses in the present study and will hopefully encourage other employers to learn from the participants in the current study who had actually hired and retained employees with ID. Additionally, specifically asking employers about difficulties they have overcome in hiring and retaining employees with ID helped to mitigate response
bias which was discussed as a limitation in most of the studies in the scoping review (i.e., Beyer et al., 2016; Luecking et al., 2006).

One of the strongest rationales for the present study is the teasing apart of disability and focusing solely on ID. The literature on employer attitudes is more plentiful for disability in general, yet it is difficult to decipher the findings in these general studies as there is so much heterogeneity within disability (Yamatani et al., 2015). Nota and colleagues (2013) discovered that there were differing attitudes toward a candidate with ID compared to two other types of disability; this needs to be examined more thoroughly. Shier et al. (2009) did not categorize disability in their study and stated that more research is required for each category (physical, mental, physiological and developmental) as different types of disabilities will have different experiences of ableism and have different barriers to employment. This was also echoed by Run Ren, Partzold, and Colella (2008) in their systematic review on human resource judgement and disability.

Hole, Corbett, Cook, and de Raaf (2015) put together a report on mapping the inclusive employment practices for individuals with ID. In this report, there was a small section on employers’ experiences with inclusive employment in British Columbia, Canada. In this section, Hole and colleagues (2015) identified five main findings extrapolated by employer data. The first finding is related to hiring a person with ID; Hole et al. (2015) found that previous contact with individuals with ID was related to additional hiring practices. Finding two described the positive benefits of social relationships fostered in the workplace: employers discussed the relationships employees with ID had with their coworkers and the inclusion they experienced.
Finding three is related to the benefits of having employees with ID. Some benefits related to the qualities of the employees in that they were dependable, reliable, thorough, conscientious, loyal, dedicated and followed directions and adapted quickly to change. Some employers also stated that their employees with DD brought great skills to the workforce and spoke to the employees’ sense of passion and loyalty, influencing efficiency of work. Additionally, these characteristics were stated by employers to bolster workplace morale and positive workplace culture and diversity. Additionally, employers’ spoke about giving back to the community and a desire to contribute to inclusive employment. Employers also stated that having employees with DD is a growing experience for both them and their other employees.

Finding four focused on factors for success such as involvement of a support worker as well as ongoing support and good communication. The final finding related to the advice employer participants would give to other employers. Participants suggested that employers be open-minded to inclusive employment and provide competitive wages. For example, one employer stated, “[A]ny employer is missing out if they don’t pursue this avenue” (Hole et al., 2015, p. 23). The report by Hole et al. (2015) in British Columbia is an excellent start to exploring employer attitudes regarding the employability of individuals with ID.

It is evident that this topic is important and that more research is needed in British Columbia and in Canada as a whole. Employment is an important milestone for all individuals, regardless of ability, as it positively influences one’s health and well-being (Raphael, 2006; Skellern & Astbury, 2012; Waddell & Burton, 2006). Unfortunately, individuals with ID experience lower employment rates than their non-disabled
counterparts (Domin & Butterworth, 2013). This is, in part, due to employers’ negative attitudes toward people with disabilities, rooted in a history of segregation and oppression that lingers today in the forms of normalcy, ableism and stereotyping (Watermeyer, 2013). There are practices in place such as transition programs and supported/customized employment, as well as policies in Canada and around the world to promote the employment of people with ID (Inclusion BC, n.d.; Minister of Justice, 1995; United Nations, 2007), yet employment rates remain low. The purpose of the present study was to speak with employers who have had one-year-and-a-half- to over 30 years’ experience with employees with ID. There was intentional attention on the benefits to hiring individuals with ID through an affirmative lens; that said, the present study did not solely focus on the positive experiences but included experiences that may have been difficult to overcome or accommodate. This was done in order to provide other employers with advice on how to train and retain employees with ID.
3 Methods

Informed by critical disability studies, the present study used interpretive description (Thorne, 2016) within an emancipatory framework that includes the social and affirmative models of understanding disability. The methodology of this study reflects intentions to empower disabled people and combat notions of normalcy and ableism. In the past, social research was typically conducted within a positivist lens, meaning that it was believed that the social world could be examined in the same way as the natural world: value-free (Oliver, 1992). Positivism was challenged by an interpretive paradigm that posits that all knowledge is socially constructed existing within its historical context. Although interpretivism recognizes that knowledge is socially constructed, this paradigm has been criticized for not providing people with a voice to discuss their own situation and experiences (Oliver, 1992). Both positivist research and the interpretive paradigm have acted to further perpetuate the problems faced by many oppressed groups, including (but not limited to) women, racial minority groups, and disabled people. Qualitative methods are able to focus on the lived experiences of the people at the center of the research when those who live the phenomenon of study are given a voice. Oliver (1992) described disability related research as alienating. He stated: “As disabled people have increasingly analyzed their segregation, inequality and poverty in terms of discrimination and oppression, research has been seen as part of the problem rather than as part of the solution” (p. 105). Research performed in this manner perpetuates a medical model (or individual model) of understanding disability, that locates disability within the individual and positions disability as a pathology, a defect of the normal human body needing a cure or rehabilitation. Stone and Priestly (1996) argue
that disability research has much to learn from feminist and anti-racist research and is why an emancipatory framework is needed within critical disability studies.

3.1 Research Paradigm

3.1.1 Emancipatory Framework. Emancipatory research serves to bring to the forefront, the lived experiences and struggles of those belonging to oppressed groups. One of the main goals of an emancipatory framework is to facilitate social change and policy change through analysis of power relations and through research strategies where study participants are the experts of their own situation (Oliver, 1992). In an emancipatory approach, disabled people are viewed as a heterogeneous group that experience society’s disabling environment in different ways (Stone & Priestly, 1996). This is in line with the social and affirmative models of understanding disability: disability is somewhat socially constructed, and disabled people have authority over their own lives (Stone & Priestly, 1996; Swain & French, 2000). Research within the emancipatory framework aims to battle institutional ableism and examine able-bodied society, not disabled people. This active battle means identifying and removing social and physical barriers faced by disabled people, engaging in emancipation, and social justice (Stone & Priestly, 1996). Within an emancipatory framework, it is recognized that anti-oppressive practice must begin with the research methodology and its products, including topic choice and considering the benefits for the oppressed group. Indeed, Stone and Priestly (1996) argued that research should only be conducted if it will have practical benefits such as the removal of disabling barriers and/or empowering disabled people, encouraging self-determination.
3.1.2 **Interpretive Description Strategy.** Complementing the emancipatory framework is the interpretive description strategy. Interpretive description is not to be confused with the interpretive paradigm previously discussed. Interpretive description, recently developed by Thorne (2008; 2016), serves as a modern approach to the interpretive paradigm. It complements emancipatory research through its intentional and practical purpose. Indeed, Thorne (2016) states that interpretive description was formed out of a need for an applied qualitative research approach that leads to greater knowledge in applied health fields. Thorne (2016) describes interpretive description:

> A strategy for excavating, illuminating, articulating, and disseminating the kind of knowledge that disciplines with an application mandate tend to need in order to enact their mandate – whether it be healing, educating, serving, or building something on behalf of society (p. 11).

Interpretive description involves attempting to understand social group behaviour and the nature of human existence through analysis of subjective realities that are socially constructed. This framework recognizes common human experience and the fact that there is sometimes contradictory individual expression. The purpose of this understanding is to contribute to an actual practice goal, typically derived from problems recognized in applied disciplines. The intent of these actual practice goals is so the research process reveals its primary objective to apply the results in the real world so positive change can occur (Thorne, 2016). This is not like former positivist or interpretive paradigms where the main purpose was to advance theory and where, arguably researchers used participants for their own gain (Oliver, 1992). In interpretive description, emphasis is placed on the dissemination of results in a meaningful manner.
Research within this framework reflects “a meaning-making activity, directed at a particular kind of audience (such as [employers]) toward the purpose of rendering a new, enriched, or expanded way of making sense of some problem or issue” (Thorne, 2016, p. 192).

Both an emancipatory framework and interpretive description encouraged me to bring attention to my disciplinary orientation in the current study’s methodology (Thorne, 2016). Just as study participants cannot remove themselves from their subjective realities, nor can I as a researcher. I, therefore, position myself as a social worker. I am in a helping profession that considers a holistic approach where all individuals are seen as persons in their environment, considering their bio-psycho-social-spiritual functioning and historical, environmental, and societal influences (Ives, Denov, & Sussman, 2015). Our purpose, as social workers, is to assist in improving social change, development and cohesion. Social workers seek social justice where all people feel respected and are free from oppression. We advocate for those who are oppressed, partnering with people so their voice can be heard (Ives et al., 2015). I have experience practicing within this field and this has instilled a passion for this topic as well as informs my study. I have experience working with individuals who are homeless. Many of these individuals were disabled and unemployed, and I was saddened by the many persistent barriers they faced. I have also practiced as an employment coach, performing disability related needs assessments and assisting people in obtaining and maintaining work. I also have experience in job coaching, providing hands on support in the workplace for people who desire and/or need it. This positioning and my experience explains why I believe this
topic to be important and complements the social and affirmative models of understanding disability.

I interpreted the literature in this field as a social worker using an emancipatory framework and interpretive description methodology. This contributed to the development of the current study’s methodology. It was identified in previous research that employment is important for all individuals, not only for monetary gain, but also for the health benefits and sense of identity and belonging (Prince, 2010; Raphael, 2006; Skellern & Astbury, 2012; Waddell & Burton, 2006). Therefore, not only is society excluding individuals with ID from the labour market, it is also robbing them of the many benefits to employment. Given this information, it was evident that an anti-oppressive framework was required. Further research reveals that employment is something that many individuals with ID desire, yet, despite efforts, experience societal barriers to gaining and maintaining integrated work (Lysaght et al., 2016; Scott et al., 2014). One of the largest barriers is employer attitudes (Duvdevany et al., 2016; Shier et al., 2009) and, despite the anti-discriminatory policies and procedures in place, employment rates for individuals with ID are still much lower than non-disabled people (Domin & Butterworth, 2013; Minister of Justice, 1995; United Nations, 2007). A review of literature in this field demonstrated that more understanding is needed.

In the present study, I interviewed employers from integrated employment settings in Kelowna, British Columbia, regarding the benefits that their employees with ID bring to the workplace. I also asked them about any barriers that were faced in training and retaining their employees with ID, and how they successfully managed to overcome these barriers. Additionally, the employers provided advice on how to train and
retain employees with ID. The goal in asking for advice from experienced employers is to advance policy and practice that improves employment outcomes and employment experiences for employees with ID and the employers who hire them. Additionally, the present study can contribute to creating a more effective education plan to educate employers on the benefits to hiring individuals with ID, empowering those with ID and encouraging self-determination. These are the types of goals specified in an emancipatory framework that takes up an interpretive description strategy. The actual practice goal and dissemination of results will be discussed in Chapter 5.

3.2 Research Method

3.2.1 Sample. Originally, I sought out employers who had three or more years of experience hiring and retaining employees with ID. Bennett and Gallagher (2013) differentiated between employers’ experience hosting students with ID and the majority of the employers had less than three years to five years’ experience. Bennett and Gallagher concluded via survey that many of these employers do feel comfortable in supporting students with ID and accommodating their needs. That said, three years’ experience seemed like an adequate amount of time for employers to feel they can speak confidently about their learning experiences and attitudes. Beyond this, I also sought out employers who had the same employee with ID for at least one year. Throughout an employment year, individuals with ID, or any employee for that matter, may experience barriers to maintaining employment. A one-year parameter was set, as barriers are typically worked through with the employee and employer in this length of time. This was found to be true for the employers interviewed in the present study and will be elaborated upon further in Chapter 4.
To reiterate, ID is defined as a disability with “significantly impaired intellectual functioning that a) manifests before the age of 18 years, [and] b) exists concurrently with impaired adaptive functioning…” (CLBCa, n.d.). Employees discussed in this study were not defined by IQ level or severity of disability. Employers knew if they had an employee with ID either by a rehabilitation worker or other community worker, and/or by the person with ID themselves. Three employers in the present study indicated that they had less than three years’ experience hiring individuals with ID. However, given they voiced interest in the study, each employer was assessed on an individual basis: each employer had had their current employee with ID for at least one-and-a-half- to two years and was, therefore deemed eligible to participate. Table 2 depicts the number of years’ experience employers had in hiring people with ID. Table 3 depicts employment longevity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Employers</th>
<th>Years’ Experience</th>
<th># of Employers</th>
<th>Employment Longevity (Years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 to 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 to 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11 to 15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6 to 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16 to 20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11 to 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21 to 25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Over 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some employers had more than one employee with ID; note in Table 3 that the number of employees is greater than the number of study participants (employers). Additionally, in some cases, the employers had many employees with ID (i.e., 15) and could not provide exact numbers regarding employment longevity; these employees are not included in Table 3.

Another parameter set was the field of work. I sought out employers from an array of different fields in order to provide a more illustrative sample. Previous research indicates a variety of fields in which employees with ID work, such as restaurants/cafés, retail stores, offices, horticulture, elder care (Feerasta, 2017; Fillary & Pernice, 2006; Gallagher & Bennett, 2013;). In the present study, the majority of employees with ID worked in retail and restaurant, and others worked in childcare, recycling, landscaping, law administration, and recreation.

Given the previous discussion on potential differences in response according to employer size, I sought an array of different employer sizes for the present study. Previous research defines employer size differently. Jasper and Waldhart (2012) define small employers as five to 14 employees, medium employers as 15 to 249 employees, and large employer having 250 or more employees. Lengnick-Hall et al. (2008) define small employers as zero to 49 employees, medium as 50 to 499 employers, and large as over 500 employees. Moreover, Fraser et al. (2011) define small employers as 30 to 100 employers, medium employers as 101-500 employees, and large employers as over 501. In planning for the research, I took the approximate average of these numbers and defined small employers as five to 50 employees, medium employers as 51 to 499 employees, and larger employers as having over 500 employees. Given Kelowna is a
smaller city that prides itself on small business, it was difficult to find employer sizes
greater than 500 employees. Where my aim was to have an equal representation of each
employer size, I decided to adapt the classification of employer size to have at least 2
employers defined as large for the purpose of discovering tentative themes for discussion.
The two employers classified as large did have in between 450 and 500 employees in the
Okanagan Valley. That said, employer sizes in between 51 and 449 were then considered
medium sized and five to 50 employees was still considered small. The majority of the
employer sizes were small, and three employer sizes were medium.

In addition, I aimed to have an equal distribution of employer gender; I
interviewed eight female employers and seven male employers. The employers also had a
variety of male and female employees with ID. Given the discussion on transitioning
youth, I also sought employers who had a variety of different aged employees with ID.
The age of employees with ID ranged from 14 to 55, with the majority of employees
being in their twenties and thirties.

Previous research includes a variance in the number of employers as study
participants (see Table 1). In the 11 studies used for the scoping review, there was a range
of one to 247 employers as study participants. Of those 11 studies, five included
interviews with employers; the number of employers in those studies ranged from one to
30. In the original research proposal for the present study, I used the median range of 13
to 17 employers as a recruitment goal. This aligned with interpretive description: Thorne
(2016) stated that the majority of studies using this approach vary from five to 30
participants. Thirteen employers voiced interest and participated in the present study.
During the interviews, two participants asked if a colleague could join in on the
discussion, these colleagues were also managers at the company/organization. In total, I spoke with 15 participants, but 13 employers (companies/organizations).

A range was included in the original research proposal as it was determined that the final number of participants would be determined on the depth and quality of the interviews (Morse, 2000). For example, when some of the interviews turned out to be less extensive than anticipated, I used that data, but I also searched for another employer who could provide a more in-depth interview (Thorne, 2016). The 13 employers in which I interviewed provided adequate information for an in-depth analysis of content and recurring themes. Time was also a consideration in determining when the sample size was adequate, although this was not the primary motivator. The present study was a project that I did in order to fulfil my requirements for a thesis in the Master of Social Work program at the University of British Columbia Okanagan. That said, in making the study feasible to complete, I had to consider that I had limited time and resources. Within interpretive description, saturation is not an adequate reason for determination of sample size and, therefore, was not considered an adequate reason in the present study. Indeed, Thorne (2016) posits that it is difficult to discern when one fully understands a clinical phenomenon, and that this is not possible to achieve given the theoretical position of ‘probable truths’, that study participants share their socially constructed, subjective realities. Positioned within previous research in this field, I believe that 13 employers (15 participants) began to reveal common themes in employer attitudes.

3.2.2 Human Ethics, Sampling and Consent. Given the parameters mentioned, I recruited employers using purposive convenience sampling, as the intent was to identify key informants on employers’ attitudes and experiences with employees with ID. Before
recruitment occurred, I applied for human ethics approval through the University of British Columbia Okanagan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). Human ethics is required for any research that involves human participants. In this application, I outlined the current study, including proposed number of participants and recruitment strategies. As part of human ethics, I ensured that my study participants provided informed consent and that their identity remained confidential. That being said, any employer or employee names mentioned in this report are pseudonyms.

Once my human ethics application was approved, I began to recruit my study participants. Recruiting included standard third party recruitment methods as well as snowball sampling. I began by contacting different organizations and companies via e-mail with general company e-mail addresses available online. A copy of the recruitment letter, as well as a more formal recruitment brochure, can be found in Appendix A. In this letter, potential participants were invited to forward recruitment materials and my contact information to other employers they think would be interested. I also took advantage of the connections I had in Kelowna, not only as a student but also as a practitioner. I connected with my previous employers and other colleagues to see if they could contact any employers who would be qualified and interested in my study. Additionally, my supervisor, Dr. Rachelle Hole, had community connections given her participation in the TYDE Project as well as the nature of her community-based research for the Centre for Inclusion and Citizenship at the University of British Columbia Okanagan. I asked her for advice in identifying employers in our community. As previously mentioned, employers were screened for three years’ experience hiring individuals with ID (a flexible
requirement) and at least one-year experience hiring the same person with ID (a mandatory requirement).

As employers indicated their willingness to participate, I provided them with a copy of the consent form to read over and sign. This consent form explained the interview process, stating that there are no right or wrong answers and that I was seeking to get to know their experience and opinions. Participants were provided with a beverage gift card as an honorarium of a value of five dollars. This was not an incentive to participate but rather a token of gratitude. Participants were not made aware of the honorarium until they had already indicated a willingness to participate and were reading over the consent form. See Appendix B for a copy of the consent form. Upon returning a signed consent form, I organized a time best suited for my study participants to perform an interview. I provided the option of doing an in-person interview or a phone interview in order to ensure I was not inconveniencing the people who were willing to participate. For some participants, I organized an interview time before they signed the consent form as they requested I go over it with them in person. In these situations, the interview did not commence until the consent was signed. All interviews were completed in-person except for one. After the one phone interview, the honorarium was mailed to the participant.

3.2.3 Interview Guide. I conducted semi-structured interviews using a written guide provided in Appendix C. The questions developed for the semi-structured interview were informed by the employer question guide that Hole and colleagues (2015) used for their report on mapping the inclusive employment practices for individuals with DD, from the TYDE project (The TYDE Project, n.d.), and from previous research in this
field. In order to obtain background information and to get to know my study participants, I started by asking participants to tell me about how they came to hire their employee(s) with ID. This started the interview with storytelling which added value to what the employers shared next, and it gave background information in helping me to understand and interpret their experience and opinions (Thorne, 2016). On average, the interviews lasted 46 minutes, with the longest interview lasting 87 minutes and the shortest lasting 22 minutes.

Provided below are some examples of how I developed my interview guide using past research. Kaehne and Beyer (2013) asked employers about the likelihood of them hiring individuals with ID again in the future. I asked a similar question but in an interview format where employers had the opportunity to elaborate why they would consider hiring additional individuals with ID. Kaye et al. (2011) surveyed employers and asked why other employers might not hire or retain individuals with ID. Their intention was to ask about other employers as to increase credibility of their study. I asked a similar question but gave the opportunity for employers to explain if they agreed with these reasons. Additionally, Zappella (2015) emphasized the importance in understanding how employers define disability, it is for this reason, I asked the open-ended question, “How do you define disability?” Additionally, given the research leading to the application of intergroup contact theory, I asked about the extent to which my study participants have interaction with disabled people outside of the workplace. Beyond these examples, I asked items such as, “What do you value about your employee with ID?” and “What advice would you provide to other employers?” Study participants were provided with a copy of the questions beforehand, so they had the time to think about their answers.
and reflect ahead of time on the conversation. This provided more enriched data as many of the study participants had reflected on their experiences with their employee(s) with ID, bringing these experiences to the forefront of their minds. This reflective exercise for participants, instead of promoting social desirability bias, actually enhanced the quality of the data as participants reflected on their answers and readily presented examples to complement their opinions. Appendix D includes a version of the interview guide that I gave to the study participants. This version omits the introductions, as these were demographic fields filled out with the study participant during the interview.

The interview guide was used for what it is, a guide. In the semi-structured interview, I left room for the participants to discuss what was important to them while remaining on topic (Lysaght et al., 2009). In addition to this, I encouraged the participants for clarification when needed, this included asking questions that were not specifically outlined on the guide.

**3.2.4 Data Analysis and Validity.** As an attempt to minimize confirmation bias, I acknowledged my biases as a social worker working within an emancipatory framework. I used reflexivity in creating my interview guide and in interviewing my study participants. To increase the credibility of the findings from my interviews and to decrease confirmation bias, I practiced my interviewing style before completing the interviews; I attempted to veer from what is natural to me, social and clinical work. This is a caution mentioned by Thorne (2016) given the type of researchers that desire a more practical methodology like interpretive description. Thorne (2016) stated that research topics within an interpretive description strategy typically derive from the clinical field, and researchers from this field need to have caution when performing research.
interviewing, recognizing its differences from clinical interviewing. I attempted to avoid the following typical practices with clinical interviewing in order to improve the credibility of the interviews; these included asking questions to assess the individual in hopes to make positive change, empathic responding, agreeing with the client, and notions of “leading the witness” (Thorne, 2016). If responding with prompts such as, “I agree”, I would have been encouraging study participants to provide me with similar information and discouraging oppositional information. Similarly, if I had responded with prompts such as, “I understand”, I would have discouraged elaboration, a chance to glean more information from the study participants (Thorne, 2016). Thorne (2016) suggests that researchers enter interviews as curious learners, staying focused on the interview itself and what you may learn from the process of speaking with your study participants. During some of the interviews, employers indicated that they thought it was strange that I was asking certain clarifying questions as they knew that I could have assumed what they meant by what they were saying. One employer stated, “…the…individual that came in, you know, just treat them as normal. There’s no real problem there. Kind of a weird question (Employer 11).” This demonstrates that I was able to avoid aspects of clinical interviewing when interviewing my study participants.

During the semi-structured interviews, I took paper notes on what I interpreted to be the main points and themes. Thorne (2016) cautions researchers about impatience and not fully listening to what the employer has to say. I was aware of this and made sure that I focused on my participant, actively listening to what they had to say, expressing curiosity. The field notes assisted with this curiosity as I jotted down ideas and questions to return to for further clarification. My interview notes were part of the ongoing data
analysis, which is a crucial component of the interpretive description framework (Thorne, 2016). Thorne (2016) posits that data construction and analysis should occur concurrently. In line with Thorne, I considered the interviews not only as data collection but also as data analysis (Thorne, 2016). It was during these interviews that I began to form my interpretation of what the employers were describing to me.

This ongoing analysis helped to prevent coming to conclusions and making associations too quickly. That said, the notes I created from the interviews were part of my audit trail; I used them as field notes that I returned to when the interviews were completed and when I was piecing together the main findings. Thorne (2016) describes this as constant comparative analysis and asks that researchers using an interpretive description strategy assume that the aspects of reality gleaned from data are viewed as socially constructed, and that in order to discover knowledge from them, the researcher must compare and contrast the different manifestations of reality. The interview notes assisted in this constant comparative analysis, as I “confirm[ed], test[ed], explore[d] and expand[ed]” on the manifestations of reality that I saw as soon as I started interviewing (Thorne, 2016, p. 109). The first interview informed the next and so forth; as I saw potential themes in the first interview, I explored and challenged these themes in the subsequent interviews, and in my field notes. This process helped in identifying major themes once all interviews were completed and I was writing my findings.

With participant permission on the consent form, I recorded the interviews using Voice Record Pro by Dayana Networks Ltd on an iPhone 6s. This app allowed for unlimited recording length and output in AAC/MP4/M4A format. I then emailed myself the recordings through a password protected link, as to download onto my password
protected laptop. This app was tested for quality of sound. Interviews were audiorecorded for later transcription. Two employers did not consent to audio recording. In this case, I took more intensive paper notes during the interview and attempted to write some of the employers’ comments word-for-word.

Transcription included typing word-for-word all interviews from the Voice Record Pro recording. This was completed and inputted into QSR International’s NVivo, version 11.4.2 (2081) for Mac, a qualitative data analysis software. Thorne (2016), as part of an interpretive description strategy, recommends that researchers performing the data analysis should be the ones to transcribe the data as it is a meaningful component of the data analysis. As I re-listened to the recordings while reading the written transcriptions, I began to document common themes and important, relevant information. I recorded on paper these reflections, as part of my audit trail. I also re-read and typed the notes that I took during the two interviews that were not audio recorded. While rereading these notes, I also documented common themes and important, relevant information. After reading the notes I made in my audit trail, I began to identify my major themes.

I inputted the transcriptions and two typed interview notes into NVivo and I coded them for relevant themes and differences. Coding is the process of assembling similar material, or material that speak to a theme in the data. In NVivo, the coding process included the creation of ‘nodes’. Nodes allow you to select text from a transcribed interview or typed interview notes and drag that selected text into a separate labelled folder (node). This allowed for greater ease in looking for emerging patterns and ideas, and for when I wrote up my findings. The process of transcription and re-listening to the transcriptions while looking over the interview notes ensured that I was not coding
too quickly. I also focused on the broad coding schemes as identified through my audit trail. Focusing on the broad themes helped in avoiding overdetermination of pattern as described by Thorne (2016). I ensured that I did not identify themes too easily, and that I challenged them when I identified them too quickly. Thorne (2016) cautions of quickly emerging themes, stating that theoretical positioning and knowledge of past literature could cloud any new and/or conflicting information that may be present. I was also aware of misinterpreting frequency; creating ‘nodes’ made this easier to avoid. When something was jarring and stood out to me in the data, I could confirm its frequency by looking at the node created. In some cases, this is when I realized that I could combine certain themes and create sub-themes. I reread through all ‘nodes’ before writing my findings to ensure that the themes perceived were frequent enough to deem a major theme. Indeed, Thorne (2016) states that research is a “meaning-making process” and that process takes time (Thorne, 2016, p. 192).

I was able to discern when my analysis was complete when I was able to create a detailed “table of contents” that portrayed the major headings and minor subheadings that formed my analysis. Thorne (2008) explains that when researchers are able to create this “table of contents” they are able to write their findings. However, even when writing the findings, I returned to the raw data to confirm themes and rearrange and combine some minor subheadings and the order in which I presented the major subheadings. I wanted to ensure that I did not miss any relevant information. As a general guideline, Thorne (2016) posits that for most research projects completed within an interpretive description strategy, two to five major themes are identified. When I identified four major themes, I was able to discern that I did not have too few or too many major themes. To ensure
accountability throughout my analysis, I also used peer debriefing: I shared two
transcribed interviews and my coding framework with my thesis supervisor. I also sought
support and presented my findings to my thesis supervisor and my thesis committee who
reviewed the final draft reporting of my findings.

Thorne (2008) explains that readers of interpretive description studies should
know what the researcher knows by seeing what the researcher saw (description)
throughout the interviews, and understanding what the researcher understood
(interpretation) from the interviews (Thorne, 2016). This is what you will find described
in the following chapter. Thorne (2016) suggests that researchers write their findings and
then weave in the study participants’ voices that complement what was extrapolated. This
is how I wrote the following chapter; the main themes and examples from my interviews
are presented in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I discuss how my findings relate to previous
research in the field as well as limitations of the present study and dissemination of
results. In writing up Chapter 4 and 5, I reminded myself of the purpose of the paper. The
purpose of any social research, described by Crotty (as cited in Thorne, 2016) is to look
for “culturally-derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world”
(p. 224). The purpose of an emancipatory framework and the interpretive description
strategy is to fulfill an actual practice goal that facilitates social change and policy
change. That being said, the goal of the present study was to identify the benefits that
individuals with ID bring to the workplace, and to provide this knowledge and
employment advice to other employers, with the hope of increasing the employment rate
for those with ID.
4 Findings

After analyzing the 13 interviews performed for the current study, I came up with four major findings speaking to the benefits to hiring people with ID. According to the collective responses of the 15 participants, employing individuals with ID lead to a more positive workplace environment, better business and greater employer job satisfaction. Additionally, most employees with ID were accompanied by community support and expertise, which employers identified as a benefit to hiring people with ID as it contributed to the employees’ success in the workplace. These findings will be discussed with reference to sub-themes below. After presenting the benefits to hiring people with ID, I share the collective advice provided by my study participants to share with more hesitant employers.

Before presenting the four major findings, I will further explain the diversity in my sample. As previously mentioned, there was diversity in employer/employee gender, employer number of years’ experiencing hiring individuals with ID, employer size, employer type and employee age. There was also diversity in employer interaction with disabled people outside of the workplace. Seven participants had family members who they described as disabled, five employers had interactions with disabled people in the community, two employers had friends who they described as disabled, and three employers had no interaction with disabled people outside of the workforce. The diversity in my sample contributed to differences in the benefits explained by the employers, as well as different hiring concerns and advice to other employers. In the present study, I discuss the collective responses of these employers, but it is important to remember their heterogeneity, just as it is important to remember the heterogeneity of the
population that identify as intellectually disabled. To further set the stage for my results, I would like to paraphrase the employers’ definitions of disability, as well as present some of their hiring concerns. My hope in doing this is to demonstrate individual differences and my participants’ transparency throughout the interviews. Although I cannot claim that my study participants are representative of the general population, other employers may be able to identify with some of the employers in my sample and learn from their experiences.

In defining disability, employers interviewed had an array of definitions covering topics such as physical versus intellectual disabilities, invisible disabilities, limitations, ‘diversabilities,’ and much more. Eight participants described that there are different types of disability such as physical disabilities, mental illness, and intellectual disabilities. Typically, employers followed this with a discussion on how “we will all be diverse people at some point in our life (Employer 5)”, or a reflection on how all individuals learn concepts differently. One employer explained:

…not everyone starts walking on [the same day]. All of us take a different time.

So to me defining what disability is, for 1) society disabling you as an individual, but it has nothing to do with where your upbringing is or what challenges or cards you’ve been dealt. Right? We can’t help what we’re born into and we can’t help that we’ve been born with certain traits. So, I think too many people are scared of that word and they don’t know how to handle it, and just like I said…people are people. (Employer 10)

This excerpt also mentions our disabling society, and several employers spoke to the importance of making accommodations so that individuals can best perform at work. One
employer stated: “I hope that at some point in time in my life that if I’m diverse…I hope that people are empathetic to my situation and…that they make accommodations for me (Employer 5).”

Four employers defined disability as someone who performs below average and are “a little less able to function as the larger population (Employer 7)”. Whereas other employers posited that everyone has challenges, and everyone has diverse abilities. Six employers discussed disability with reference to diverse abilities and situations. Three employers used the term ’diversability’ and all mentioned that they did not like the word ‘disability’. One employer stated:

I hate the word disability. It implies that someone is not able…and that’s why we reference…diversability, because people are diverse and…they may have something…going on but that’s okay, because if we are all diverse in how we think, then the world becomes a better place. So I’m not a fan of the word disability because I do believe that the word ‘dis’ is a dis. It is a dis to the individual and it’s a disservice to that person who has a diagnosis…(Employer 5)

Another employer explained:

It’s not disability, it’s diversabilities and what it is, is people that are challenged by certain parts of their intellect. That doesn’t mean they are stupid, it just means that they have a challenge in learning things, they have a challenge in how they approach things, they have a challenge in their memory. Whatever they have a challenge with, it doesn’t mean that they have a disability. It just means that they learn or they speak or they communicate in different ways; so I always try to look at it that way…if you can find what they do, what they want to do, what their
strength is, then that’s what they need to do, is find tasks that embrace their strengths. (Employer 8)

Similarly, employers discussed disability with reference to how it takes some people longer to understand or learn certain concepts, and that individuals are trying to “navigat[e] life with the tools that [they] have (Employer 6).” One employer defined their employees or job applicants with ID as “Ready, Willing and Able (Employer 6).”

It is likely that the way in which employers define disability contributes to the way in which they view their employees with ID. I will now present some concerns that my study participants had in hiring and retaining their employees with ID. I present this before presenting the benefits to hiring those with ID to demonstrate that my study participants are real employers with similar concerns to those as more hesitant employers.

There were some mutual hiring concerns voiced by study participants. Two small-sized employers voiced concern of greater supervisory time, and two other employers voiced safety concerns. Two other small-sized employers mentioned concerns with whether the employee with ID could cope with high workplace stress. Similarly, two employers discussed concerns with how to interact with people with ID and how to build trust. For some of these employers, these concerns are still present, and for others, they have been challenged and overcome. For example, when discussing whether safety was still of concern, one medium-sized employer with 16-20 years’ experience hiring people with ID stated: “No, because… [the employee with ID] follows the safety rules and he understands it (Employer 12).” Similarly, another medium-sized employer with 11 to 15 years’ experience hiring people with ID stated that he overcame his uncomfortableness in interacting with his staff with ID by spending time and communicating with these
employees (Employer 11). One large-sized company discussed barriers in hiring those with ID as many of their applicants did not know how to apply for jobs online and did not have access to a phone to schedule interview times.

In retaining employees with ID, a small-sized employer voiced that they felt like they were missing support (Employer 1). They explained that they would appreciate if a community support professional would check in with their company and offer assistance, even after the hiring and training process was complete. Another small-sized employer with less than three years’ experience hiring those with ID who did not have support stated that their employee with ID was not making their company more profitable and that if the minimum wage increases, they will not be able to keep their employee with ID (Employer 9). Six employers (two large-sized employers, 1 medium-sized employer and 3 small-sized employers) voiced no hiring or retaining concerns, especially when the person with ID is accompanied by community support. These employers ranged from less than three years’- to 20 years’ experience hiring people with ID. One of these employers voiced that “everyone’s employable (Employer 5)” but that assessment is key and that job candidates need “to understand the concept of work (Employer 5)” to be successful.

Although some of the employers interviewed still had concerns in retaining their employees with ID, all 13 employers discussed the benefits to hiring people with ID. Indeed, when asked if the employers would consider hiring another person with ID in the future, all 13 employers stated they would. When asked why they would consider hiring another person with ID, employers made comments such as:

Because I’m an employer and that’s what employers do and … everybody deserves to be a tax paying citizen. (Employer 1)
There’s always room for more. (Employer 2)

I just believe it’s … good for everybody; we’ve had nothing but positive 
[experiences] so there’s no reason why we wouldn’t and again…checking with 
resources, with my management team, to make sure they can handle 
everything…because I have to make sure that the person is set up to succeed and 
that I’m not overwhelming the management team at the same time. So yes, 
absolutely. (Employer 4)

If there was another opening or another job that we needed done that fits the bill, 
100 percent, absolutely. (Employer 8)

All the reasons I just [mentioned]…it’s been good. It’s been good for us, it’s been 
good for everybody. (Employer 9)

It’s just been a good experience and…he’s an ideal employee. (Employer 12)

Why do these employers retain their employees with ID and consider hiring more? 

Because there are benefits to hiring this population.

4.1 Benefits to Hiring People with ID

4.1.1 Workplace environment. Employers interviewed in this study discussed 
their workplace environment. Employees with ID bolstered a more positive workplace 
environment; the employees’ personalities contributed to happier staff and a sense of 
teamwork. Employers also experienced a perspective shift as they began to see the 
benefits to a more positive workplace environment when they hired and retained 
employees with ID.

4.1.1.1 Employee personality. All 13 employers commented on the positive 
personalities of their employees with ID and used descriptor words such as, “kind…,
passion[ate], social, dedicated, humor[ous], thankful, and hardworking”. Employers explained how their employees’ personalities contributed to their success in the workplace in that they have an appreciative attitude and are eager to do a good job and please their supervisors and coworkers. Seven employers also mentioned their employees’ social and caring nature and how this contributed to a more positive workplace environment.

One employer with 15 employees with ID explained that one of their employees with ID has received the most compliments than all other cashiers, stating that she has the best customer service (Employer 2). This employer also stated that he values the honesty of his employees with ID in that they do not say what they think you want them to hear; this employer appreciates this honesty because he knows the employees are also honest with his customers. Additionally, another employer with 25 years’ experience hiring those with ID states that most of her former and current employees with ID are outgoing and are happy to assist customers in taking groceries out to their vehicles (Employer 4). An employer of a daycare explained how her employees with ID are “love[d] by the children” and explained that “it would be nice to see if we had somebody like [the employee with ID] in every program, because there is a lot of affection attached to [him]: [it’s] relationship [building] (Employer 1).” This employer described her other employee with ID as “careful and nurturing” and a “caregiver’s caregiver.” This social nature is also found in office environments. For example, one small-sized employer stated about their employee: “She is very social…she comes about half an hour early for every shift and the first thing she does is walks around [and] says good morning to everyone, which is charming for everybody (Employer 3).” Similarly, a large-sized employer explained
how one of their employees with ID sees other employees’ nametags and initiates conversation with them. This employer stated, “Many other employees don’t do that (Employer 3)” and explained that this adds to their workforce’s family environment.

Six employers discussed their employees’ positive attitudes and desire to come to work. These employers also mentioned how appreciative their employees are for the opportunity to demonstrate their worth and to be “praised for their work (Employer 5).”

A large-sized employer stated:

…for your average person it could just be another job … whereas with someone that’s excited to come to work…they’re ‘gonna’ be your best workers. And, in a lot of ways…the roles that they’re doing are the less desirable ones, sweeping floors, doing dishes … it’s hard for us to find someone satisfied to do that.

(Employer 10)

This same employer mentioned their employees’ constant positive attitude and energy and explained that there is one employee with ID that when you ask her how she is doing that day, she will respond with “Today’s a work day! It’s a great day! (Employer 10)”

Other employers shared that their employees with ID are “always smiling (Employer 11)” and having fun. Several employers explained how they can tell that, for their employees with ID, their job is more than a job to them as they are passionate, dedicated, and hard-working. In fact, several employees with ID have requested to do more at work, requesting a challenge. A small-sized employer stated:

I feel like she loves doing [her work] so much and has such a good attitude doing it… For example, some of our employees, when you ask them to do stuff…[they]
are negative and [say] it’s tedious and boring but for Lisa, she is so excited to come and do that stuff. (Employer 3)

When you have employees with these personality characteristics, it shifts workplace culture and promotes greater work ethic in employees. Four employers discussed the happiness that their employees with ID bring to the workplace and how this is instilled in their other employees, creating a more positive atmosphere. One employer explained how “most of [her colleagues] say that it brightens their day when she comes and says hi to them (Employer 3)”, and another employer explained that “everybody comes together; if there’s someone in the back who’s always got a smile on their face, it changes things (Employer 4).” This positive atmosphere promotes team-building and a perspective shift, which will be discussed next. Additionally, the employees’ dedication and eagerness to do well not only contributes to a more positive workplace environment but also to better business. This will be discussed in a following section.

4.1.1.2 Team-building. Positive work environments are seen when employees work as a team. Three employers – one of each employer-size – discussed the family environment in their workplace. A large-sized employer stated that this family environment contributes to their employees’ success in the workplace (Employer 6). Additionally, all 13 employers discussed teamwork in some regard, and that this team-building more readily emerges with having an employee with ID.

The most prevalent theme across the data was a sense of teamwork. Seven employers discussed how their staff is willing to work together and help each other. This extended beyond non-disabled employees helping those employees with ID, but with all staff helping each other. One employer explained that with the mentorship of two or three
other employees, one employee with ID was able to complete a diploma in college (Employer 1). Another employer stated that one of his employees with ID volunteers to train other staff (Employer 2). Similarly, another employer explained that one of their employees with ID volunteers to help other staff:

If I walked in and said, “Hey Jack, I was just going to show Jill the process of what we do when we recycle a bike but I’ve got to go,” and, he is like, “I got that.” And, he will take over and do that. We have that ability to sort of chunk it down and…get other people to support and make people feel like it’s not just a manager that’s … showing and doing something. It’s really cool because it’s a real team concept. People take direction really well. (Employer 5)

In hiring an employee with ID, one small-sized employer who has mostly adolescent female staff stated that they wanted “not better employees, but better people…I wanted the girls here to kind of adopt her if you will, and they have (Employer 9).”

A sense of teamwork provides employees with greater purpose and greater responsibility. It encourages employees with a desire to come to work. One employer with 15 employees with ID explained, “All of our restaurant managers have worked with us for over seven to eight years. That doesn’t happen without the strength of culture, and it’s only growing from there (Employer 10).” Another employer explained how their employees with ID contribute to a greater sense of purpose for the rest of the staff:

…it’s a fantastic team-building exercise for people that run businesses, if they want to build teams. How many people work towards a common goal? If the common goal is ‘we’re going to work with…people [with ID] and we’re going to see them succeed and go forward and see the changes that happen,’ I mean I’d go
to work for that…that would make my day at work a lot better. (Employer 13)

A small-sized employer explained that their employee with ID “brings out so much fun (Employer 7),” encouraging other staff to enjoy being at work.

Employees enjoy coming to work when their work is being recognized and they are appreciated. Seven employers discussed the increased respect staff members have for their colleagues. Firstly, employees without disabilities understand how employees with ID contribute to the workforce. One employer explained:

[The staff can] see what…people [with ID] bring to the table…It’s good for people to see that and understand it. What it also brings is a lot of respect. Respect for fellow co-workers. I see that…respect level for everyone on the team…I see them treat each other in a more positive manner. So, there’s all those real good side benefits. (Employer 10)

Three employers realized the importance of encouragement and recognition of hard work. This contributed to a greater sense of teamwork, job ownership and job satisfaction. One employer exclaimed:

…do you know how many employers in this world don’t acknowledge their employees? Don’t say ‘hello’, don’t say ‘good morning’, and don’t say ‘thanks for a great job today.’ [Employees] work and they feel like they are overworked and underpaid. So I make sure that I do. I’m an absolute freak about that because I came from a very corporate background where that didn’t happen…when I transitioned my career, I said, I will not allow people to not feel worthy of what they do every day…The encouragement is just so important. And the thanks, just to say ‘thank you.’ It goes a long way… (Employer 5)
When colleagues recognize and appreciate each other’s work and respect each other, they are more likely to want to work together. One small-sized employer explained how their non-disabled employees keep their colleague with ID in mind for certain projects (Employer 3). They know that this employee is willing to assist in whatever she can and is constantly requesting a challenge. There is a sense of team-building in this workplace as colleagues “keep her in mind for work (Employer 3).” Two employers provided tangible examples on how their employees with ID contribute to more positive work environment by instilling a sense of teamwork in their workplace. In one example, a medium-sized employer with an employee with ID, who has worked for their company for 11 to 15 years, was being consistently harassed by a new employee. This employer explained:

The employees stepped up and rallied around him…they approached that individual, the bullier, and basically told him, “Like you can’t talk to Patrick like that, he’s part of our team.” They said, “We’re reporting it to our supervisor.” They were just all over it…that’s also part of our company bullying and harassment policy. (Employer 12)

The new employee’s employment was terminated in this situation. When colleagues have a sense of teamwork, it is easier for employers to maintain a more positive work environment as the staff approaches their supervisors in support of one another. This is also true for a small-sized employer who has an employee with ID who has been working with them for 12 years. This employer explained how she and her supervisors are attuned to how new employees interact with their employee with ID:
…If Stacy is stressed or hurt by an employee, that employee never stays. If they’re going to hurt the [employee with ID], are they going to hurt [a] child [in the daycare]? So, it’s amazing what we find out about people’s personalities when they spend a few months working in Stacy’s room. Stacy is steady, steady, steady...You know she has the skills to do what she’s doing. (Employer 1)

This assessment of team-building and workplace culture requires a perspective shift in how employers view work environments. This is something that employees with ID promote in their employers.

4.1.1.3 Perspective shift. Hiring individuals with ID provides the opportunity to see employment and company operation through a different lens. First, it encourages employers to realize the importance of a more positive work environment, and how this contributes to better, more hard-working employees. Three employers discussed how they assess or how they promote happiness in the workplace. One small-sized employer explained how their employee with ID helps them define problems in the workplace that are stress inducing (Employer 1). Another employer described how workplace culture can be successfully assessed by speaking and listening to employees (Employer 5). Similarly, in discussing contributors to success in the company, one employer explained how they “just…really make sure that their [employees with ID] are taken care of, but that’s the same for everyone; that’s the same for Jackie [employee without disabilities] … making sure she’s okay too (Employer 4).”

Additional shifts in perspective included seeing the benefits to job customization and the importance of flexibility. Seven employers brought this to attention by discussing employee roles and/or supervisory style. Employers discussed how “we all are who we
are (Employer 6)” and that people with disabilities are…people; people who have strengths, interests and desires. This is a shift in perspective as employers learned to “treat [employees with ID] like anybody else (Employer 6).” Other employers explained this perspective shift by stating that everybody should be treated differently, like individuals, regardless of ability. When employers recognize this, they can see the benefit to job customization and the importance of flexibility. All employers interviewed stated some or all of their employees with ID had customized positions. One large-sized employer stated:

We might get one employee doing pieces from this job, pieces from this job, pieces from this job because [the community support professional] recognized that this is a skillset this person can have. They have a skillset that they love talking to people and they can show some efficiency in that. Great! Let’s get ‘em’ in there. (Employer 10)

When all employees are given tasks that are suited to their strengths, workplace operations run more smoothly. For example, one employee’s role could be to ensure the restaurant is clean, another employee could be focusing on serving the guests. One employer described this as harvesting what is already good:

If [my employees] are doing something really good and it’s getting a good result, why not harvest that a little bit more? And, I think that applies more here because we create the jobs that are best for the skillset. And it makes them successful because they’re good at it and we just keep building upon that. You’re ‘gonna’ see success. It’s hard not to… (Employer 10)
Job customization can also lead to better business, which is discussed in more detail below. When employment roles were viewed with a lens of customization, employers saw more positive workplace environments. One employer stated:

I think that anybody in [the] community who is hiring inclusively needs to recognize that they have to not only change their day-to-day practices with that individual that has [a] diverse situation, they have to practice that with their regular mainstream employees, and as soon as they do that, I think you are going to see a swift change in the whole structure of how people perceive their employers: the happiness piece in the workplace. (Employer 5)

In asking one large-sized employer if they have made any accommodations for their employees with ID, they stated that they had not made any accommodations, however, upon further reflection, they stated that they actually have made accommodations but that they do that for all of their employees (Employer 6).

Being flexible, in making accommodations for all employees, for example, is a key perspective shift in having a more positive work environment. Flexibility is not only important for greater acceptance and patience, but also in supervision. Understanding that everyone is an individual with differing abilities in strengths, leads employers/supervisors to customize their supervision. An employer explained:

…So by us empowering [employees with ID] to be themselves, [other staff members] are ‘gonna’ see ‘oh they’re just someone else.’ So, they may not learn the same way, they may not be able to handle certain things; okay, well some of us don’t like tomatoes, you know? … I think our managers have learnt…basic skills, basic people skills…you do have to… not treat everyone different but have
different types of conversations. Same message, you just ‘gotta’ say it differently. (Employer 10)

A medium-sized employer with over 30 years’ experience hiring people with ID explained how employers need to think about longevity. He stated that when hiring people with ID, there is a learning curve where even more flexibility is necessary, but it is worth investing the time for the “amazing employees (Employer 2)” you receive. This employer explained how instant gratification is not necessarily the most advantageous business decision. Similarly, in asking what an employer learned from her employees with ID, she stated, “that anything that is a concern can be addressed…so I’m definitely looking at hiring [people with disabilities] again in the future (Employer 13).”

Many employers interviewed demonstrated out-of-the box thinking and a perspective shift when describing how their employees with ID contribute to their workplace. The employers interviewed in this study realized the importance of a more positive work environment and how this contributes to better and more hard-working employees. These employers also viewed employment as customizable, playing to people’s strengths and having flexibility in learning, roles and supervision. The overarching benefit to hiring people with ID identified thus far is a more positive work environment; the employees’ personalities contributed to happiness in the workplace which promoted team-building, as well as a perspective shift. The second overarching benefit to hiring people with ID is better business.

4.1.2 Business. The employers interviewed in the present study not only discussed a more positive workplace environment when hiring people with ID but also stressed that these employees also contribute to better business. Their contributions were
described in several ways. First, employers described how having dedicated and hard-working employees who enjoy coming to work and feel ownership of their job leads to a more positive work environment. This was discussed in the previous section. Additional ways employers described employees with ID contributions in their workplace were as follows: employees with ID are filling roles in their workplace, they have strong work ethic, their presence contributes to greater work ethic among their colleagues, and the diversity they bring to the workforce promotes customer loyalty.

As a preface, it is importance to note that I am stating that employees with ID contribute to better business, not that they alone are the reason for better business. All employers interviewed in the present study spoke to an aspect of business when discussing the benefits to hiring individuals with ID, but not all employers stated that hiring people with ID is an advantageous business decision. When asked if it makes business sense to hire people with ID, a small-sized employer with two employees with ID explained: “I don’t know why it doesn’t. But I mean, it’s not saying it does. It’s just saying, you know, there’s no reason it doesn’t… (Employer 8).” This is an opportunity to stress the importance of acknowledging the heterogeneity among the employers and their employees. This employer’s two employees with ID do not necessarily create more business; that said, in most employment settings, it is unreasonable to expect one or two people, regardless of ability, to solely create more business for a company/organization. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to expect that all your employees contribute to better business in some way; employees with ID are no different.
4.1.2.1 Filled roles. Employees with ID are filling roles that need to be filled; they are completing tasks that need to be completed. All 13 employers discussed the roles and responsibilities of their employees with ID. Employers made comments such as:

It’s not like we’re just paying her to come and say hi to everyone. She does work that someone would have to do. (Employer 3)

[Receiving subsidies for disabled workers] doesn’t change if I’m going to hire them or not: if I get it, it’s great. If I don’t, it’s fine…because I still need to have those roles filled and…to be totally honest, I have less challenges sometimes with people that have intellectual disabilities than the…[other] people. (Employer 4)

We’re not making roles for them. (Employer 6)

It’s not taking away from somebody else. It’s getting stuff done that wasn’t getting done. (Employer 8)

The employers described a variety roles and responsibilities. As examples, the employees with ID were cooks, cashiers, cleaners, early childhood educators, dishwashers, courtesy clerks, sales representatives and much more. They completed tasks such as stocking shelves, recycling, checking and ordering inventory, shredding, performing sweep logs, training other staff, shoveling, heavy lifting, and much more.

Employees also ranged from working one half-day a week to 40 hours a week. This was based on both employee and employer needs. One employer explained:

[it’s] not [about] trying to create a full-time job, but create a couple hours a week…create four hours a week, and I think people just don’t do it, you know? There is a lot of jobs out there that nobody else likes to do that someone with needs would be really pleased to do. (Employer 8)
Some of the employees with ID had the same job descriptions and qualifications as employees without disabilities. One small-sized employer explained: “Stacy is just like any other ECE [Early Childhood Educator]…she’s just equal to them all… (Employer 1).” A large-sized employer stated: “We have minimum requirements that anybody needs to meet to work here, and these individuals [with ID] meet this requirement (Employer 6).” Similarly, another employer with an employee with ID of four years stated:

Charlotte has been here long enough that she is really just a part of the staff…I don’t even look at Charlotte [and] go, “Where is your support?” …No, Charlotte is just a staff member. And I barely think of her as any way other than that. (Employer 8)

Some of the employees with ID had more customizable positions where they were filling a gap in service and/or completing certain tasks so other employees could focus solely on completing their tasks. One large-size employer explained:

[Hiring people with ID] is worth it for us ‘cause we like to come in and we want clean restaurants, we want…smiling people…I’m a fan of the dish area being clean and everything put away and there’s no dishes in the sink and there’s no garbage at the back door and all the cardboard is broken down… So [our] preference…is that we like the restaurant to look really good. And so it’s worth it for us to have that…We would still ask for it to be done, but it would be done [by] the people that are serving the guests, and at the end of the day, we want our people that are serving guests to be focused on serving the guests. And that wasn’t the case 10 years ago. Ten years ago, we would have staff multitask and someone would be doing dishes while taking orders, for example. So [we] have broken
down the jobs so that we can do our best services. So there’s more benefit than just being clean. (Employer 10)

A small-sized employer has the same perspective, she stated:

[The employee with ID] will make sure…the infants get their meals on time and he makes sure that everything gets taken away and the dishes are washed...which is huge for an organization like us because the early childhood educator usually does that…we can’t afford enough [early childhood educators], but he does that and he is…able…Chris has made himself very needed…they fast become indispensable. (Employer 1)

Additionally, other employees with ID were hired to work during companies’ busier hours to ensure similar efficiency as on slower days. All in all, the individuals with ID are filling roles similar to the general population. Additionally, several employers explained how the roles of the employees with ID have changed over time as they became more competent and comfortable in the job. This is an aspect of the work ethic of employees with ID and is discussed next.

**4.1.2.2 Employee work ethic.** As mentioned, the employers described how the personalities of the employees with ID contributed to a more positive work environment. Aspects of their personalities also contributed to better business in that the employees with ID are loyal and dedicated to their work and eager to do well and to do more.

Twelve employers underscored the work ethic of their employees with ID. Seven employers discussed how their employees’ roles changed over time, increasing in number of tasks and greater responsibility. Many of the employees with ID requested a challenge and were excited to take on new tasks. As an example, one employee with ID had been
working for the same organization for twelve years. While working there, she attained her early childhood educator diploma and is now working on her infant-toddler designation. Her employer stated, “She was always so willing to do what was asked of her…[the change in work tasks for her] is significant. It really is significant (Employer 1).” Another employer explained how all of his 15 employees with ID are doing more than what they started with, and he provided examples of how his employees with ID requested challenges in their roles (Employer 2). For example, one employee, who was a courtesy clerk, requested to become a cashier. He explained that she now is the cashier with “the best customer service (Employer 2).” One small-sized employer noted that “as [her employees’] …responsibility levels increased, so did the engagement (Employer 13).” In fact, this employer explained that the employees with ID begin to identify tasks that are not being completed and start completing them on their own.

Nine employers spoke about their employees with ID in terms of their dedication to work. The employees with ID take ownership of their jobs. One employer explained how he noticed that many of the employees with ID use “us” sentences when talking about the company (Employer 2). Many of the employees with ID want to complete their tasks to the best of their ability. An employer described his employees with ID as “willing to take on whatever they can (Employer 4).” Another employer explained that “yesterday, he didn’t want to leave work because he knew he had to get the rubbish and recycling out and he couldn’t do that until almost 4:00 P.M. So, to me, that’s working (Employer 1).” Another employer explained that she has an employee with ID that requested more shifts:

Had he not made me aware of that I might have hired somebody else, but he is
already there. He is already trained. He’s working. He’s showing his dedication. Why wouldn’t I give him an extra half a day a week?... He’s getting a little extra income that he needed. (Employer 5)

This same employer stated that she most appreciates the dedication of her employees with ID:

I feel bad when we have closures … so often the individuals who aren’t working for those two weeks are like, “But I really want to work. I don’t want to take a vacation.” “But, sorry, you have to.” So, I think it is the dedication, I really do. I can’t even tell you. I don’t think Jack has ever called in sick. I know Sam hasn’t. They are just so dedicated to their work. (Employer 5)

Another employer explained that his employees with ID are the ones that always come in when someone calls in sick (Employer 2). This is echoed by another employer who described his employee with ID by stating, “His attendance is impeccable. He’s never sick. He never complains and…he’s like the perfect employee (Employer 12).” Finding dedicated employees is difficult for many employers, and it makes good business-sense to seek out employees who are ready, willing and able. A small-sized employer explained:

…that is one of our biggest challenges…to have the employees that are dedicated…lots of them are just a bit flaky and you know, it could a server, a kitchen person, it could be anybody, just kind of “Oh, I’m really sick today” or … “Oh, I have to go out of town,” but with [my employee with ID]… it’s not…the responsibility that he has, he recognizes that as a responsibility. (Employer 7)
With dedication, also comes longevity. It is difficult for many employers to find employees that are committed to their employment and stay with a company for more than two years, especially in some of the roles that the employees with ID fill. This is how one of the employers came to hire a person with an ID. She explained that she met a community support professional at an unrelated workshop:

[I] mentioned our struggles with the rotating door of all of these people coming in and going out and he said, “well I may have some possibilities to help you out with that.” So it started the conversation and we carried it on from there.

(Employer 7)

In the present study, eight employers had at least one employee with ID who has worked for them for over three years, with some of the longest employments ranging from eight to 15 years.

A large-sized employer with 15 employees with ID provided one explanation for this work ethic, dedication and longevity. He stated:

These people [with ID] have the best work ethic ever, and in my opinion…it’s unfortunate why…people let them go, they haven’t given them the time and given them the energy and …the leadership really to help them, [to] encourage them…Now there just seems to [be] that attitude that you can always be replaced or your job can be replaced, whereas these individuals [with ID] don’t think like that. They see it as “wow these guys are giving me a chance. I ‘wanna’ bring my worth. I feel valued as part of that.” For your average person it could just be another job…whereas with someone that’s excited to come to work…they’re ‘gonna’ be your best workers. (Employer 10)
This work ethic encourages others to work to the best of their ability as well. For some of the employers interviewed, they noticed a shift in colleagues’ work ethic when they hired someone with an ID.

4.1.2.3 Colleague work ethic. Another benefit to hiring employees with ID is an increase in staff’s work ethic. Eight employers discussed a change in staff members’ work ethic with having a co-worker with ID. These changes were two-fold: 1) colleagues demonstrated emerging leadership and supervisory skills, and 2) colleagues’ work ethics were challenged due to the strong work ethic of the employees with ID. First, employers discussed that they and/or their staff have learned greater supervisory skills. One medium-sized employer stated that he expects a lot from his supervisors, which provided supervisors with a sense of purpose and ownership in the job, promoting harder working employees (Employer 2). Another employer stated:

Regular staff that you have working for you all of a sudden recognize that “this is pretty cool, I’m working for an employer that is hiring diverse individuals” and all of a sudden you see people come up with leadership. They’re [saying], “I’ll help that person do that” or whatever. People that never showed any leadership skills all of a sudden come out of the closet and go “I’m all over this, what can I do to support? What can I help with?” We are always working on building natural supports in the workplace. (Employer 5)

Three employers discussed how their staff’s work ethic increased due to the influence of their employees with ID. This was seen with emerging leadership and supervisory skills, but also in efficiency. One large-sized employer explained:

I’m thinking of Bob. Every single day that he’s there, he’s the only employee I’ve
had to say slow down to… This guy just goes nuts, but what does he do? He shows everyone else that it can be done. So now you’re praising him and saying “c’mon [to the rest of the staff].” (Employer 10)

Conversely, one small-sized employer voiced that hiring people with ID does not promote more hard-working staff. They stated, “The girls [the rest of the staff], well you know, people say they’re more efficient, but they’re not (Employer 9).” This is yet another reminder about individuality. Each person with ID is different and each staff member and staff dynamic is different. In most cases, it is unreasonable to expect one staff member to promote greater work ethic in all other staff members. Indeed, the same small-sized employer quoted directly above stated that they sometimes have to remind their employees to complete their job duties: “…it’s not so different from the rest of the girls either. You know, everybody [needs reminders to get back to work], it’s just human, right? (Employer 9).” Nonetheless, for some employers interviewed, they found that colleagues’ work ethic improved with having an employee with ID, making this a possible benefit to hiring individuals with ID.

4.1.2.4 Diversity. Another benefit to hiring individuals with ID is diversity. Social benefits to having a diverse workforce was previously touched upon when discussing the more positive work environment that individuals with ID bring to their workforce. Additionally, three employers discussed how this diversity can make good business-sense as well. Some employers noticed that customers enjoy seeing the diversity in their workplace. This can draw customers to the company/organization and increase business. One medium-sized employer with 15 employees with ID stated that he gets constant feedback from people saying, “I love your staff (Employer 2).” This employer
explained that customers are drawn to the store because they hire inclusively and/or because the customer identifies with the diverse group that works there. A small-sized employer with one employee with ID explained that it means a lot to her customers to see that they have an employee with ID. This employer stated, “I don’t know if you noticed when you came in but there is a bar right there and he has to come from the back and he will come and introduce himself … ‘I’m John, I’m the dishwasher!’ (Employer 7).” She explained that customers will interact with John, saying, “Hello, nice to meet you! (Employer 7).” Another small-sized employer summarized diversity as a business decision by stating:

We are [who we are] because of that fact that [our employees] are diverse, and that community comes in and they support us because they know that we are employing diverse individuals and giving them an opportunity to be skilled in a certain field. (Employer 5)

Having a diverse staff can make business-sense, drawing in customers. Additionally, a diverse workforce and the benefits that diverse individuals bring to the workplace can lead to greater employer job satisfaction. This will be discussed next.

4.1.3 Employer Job Satisfaction. Ten employers interviewed in the current study discussed aspects of greater employer job satisfaction as another benefit to hiring individuals with ID. Employers themselves also reap the benefits of a more positive workplace environment that is promoted by the personality and contributions of those with ID and the team-building that it ensues. When employers shift their perspectives, it can also promote greater job satisfaction and happiness not only at work but also outside of work.
Employers described a personal shift in perspective in how they define success. One employer with eight to 10 years’ experience hiring people with ID stated that she learned the definition of success from her employees with ID: “Their level of work is so to be admired, and it’s so easy to miss that in a person (Employer 1).” In a similar vein, a medium-sized employer with 25 years’ experience hiring people with ID stated, “There’s no limitations to what we can do. All of us can do more than we think we can (Employer 4).”

Employers discussed learning life lessons, not just lessons applicable to their work. Two employers stated that they learned the importance of listening and getting to know the people around you. One employer provided this advice:

> Spend the time to get to know the individual [with ID]. Know your people.

> Promote their welfare first, like you would do with anybody else. Because in the end of the day, you will actually probably benefit more yourself, you’ll learn more. (Employer 11)

When asked if they had learned anything from their employees with ID, one large-sized employer returned to an example he previously mentioned where one of their employees always states, “It’s a great day! It’s a work day! (Employer 10).” This left an impression on the employer and speaks to the culture that people with ID can bring to the workplace. This employer added, “I mean…how many people do you hear saying that? (Employer 10).” Employers also voiced greater comfort and knowledge in interacting with diverse individuals. One employer explained:

> It’s just another lesson in learning at work that you can apply at a personal level – sometimes that goes unnoticed…I think that’s a benefit [to having employees with
ID]. I know for me, I am more comfortable speaking to [diverse] individuals then I was 15 or 20 years ago…more respectful and mature. Just more knowledgeable, and knowledge changes the way you’re able to do anything really. (Employer 10)

Employers also have greater job satisfaction when their company/organization is doing well and making better business decisions, by filling roles, seeing greater staff work ethic, and promoting diversity. Furthermore, employers have greater job satisfaction by making a difference, by hiring people who are not often given the chance to show their worth. By doing this, employers described feeling like they are a part of their community. Employers personally learned from their employees with ID and are excited to tell others about their experience.

Eight employers interviewed discussed satisfaction in investing in people and making a difference. An employer stated, “It’s an investment on people and on our business…so it makes sense (Employer 10).” Employers voiced being proud of their employees with ID and described the satisfaction they get from the gratitude they receive from their employees with ID. One employer voiced how he feels fortunate to be part of his company’s diversity and how he gets “to celebrate it every day (Employer 2).” He stated, “I’m not supposed to feel this much joy at work! (Employer 2).” Another employer stated, “There’s nothing that makes me feel better than thinking that I’ve changed someone’s life in a positive way (Employer 13).” Echoing this sentiment, another employer voiced:

When these people [with ID] leave [the company], they leave on good terms: maybe it’s because they’re moving, maybe it’s because they’ve gone on to something else. Sam down in Penticton, he retired. If we’ve been a good part of
their life, just like everyone, then you know what, that’s great. (Employer 4)

4.1.3.1 Community Connection. Seven employers voiced job satisfaction related to the fact that their company/organization is connected to the community. Employers stated how they strive to be community-oriented and serve the community, and how there is great satisfaction in that. This is similar to the discussion of diversity mentioned above and how the community appreciates seeing diversity in the stores where they shop, in the restaurants where they eat, and in the spaces they go for recreational activities. Similarly, people with disabilities are seeing their social group represented in the workforce and in the community. One small-sized employer stated:

It gives the rest of the staff, and the [employees with ID]…a sense of community. I mean, you see someone who isn’t like them, and that’s what I like. I love seeing [that], you know, and I love them…I look at us as being community-building…We’re here to make sure [the recreational activity] exists in the community…It’s [about] seeing other parts of the community involved and active…and that’s one of the reasons I do it…that’s what we are. We do all kinds of things like that, to be community-oriented. (Employer 8)

Another small-sized employer described her organization:

It’s a community-based endeavor…there’s so many reasons to [hire people with ID]…You get people [with ID] out into the community…so they mix with other community members, and then suddenly people with disabilities, no matter what they are, all of a sudden, they’re real because they’re in your community… and it’s the fellow that’s mowing the lawn and you see him there once a week and you kind of get used to it…and it’s like, “Hey, he’s not as different as I thought”…it’s
like a social learning component. (Employer 13)

A couple of the employers interviewed have been recognized in the community as employers that hire inclusively. This is something that employers are proud to share. One small-sized employer who has one employee with ID explained that her company received an award. She stated that it “…was in recognition of us as the employers, taking the time to consider having someone with a disability work for us… (Employer 7).” She stated that it was “fantastic…it was just really neat to receive that award (Employer 7).”

Employers are also connected to their community by receiving community supports for their employees with ID. Many employers interviewed were connected to community employment support services and accessed their expertise to ensure the most successful employment for their employees with ID. When employers and social service providers come together, each bringing their expertise, they work towards building a sense of community. The final benefit to hiring individuals with ID is community support and expertise.

4.1.4 Community Support and Expertise. Another benefit to hiring people with ID is that they are typically accompanied by complementary community support and their expertise. As will be explored, anyone can benefit from one-on-one support, regardless of ability. Therefore, when employees with ID are accompanied by a one-on-one support worker with expertise, this can be interpreted as a benefit to hiring people with ID. When asked what they thought contributed to their employees’ success in the company/organization, employers stated:

Their external help contributes to their success. I think [being] able to narrow down the jobs to things that they are comfortable with and their skillset is best
adapted to. It is helpful. (Employer 10)

The support, just being there for them. (Employer 11)

One hundred percent that initial support. We couldn’t have done it without them because we are not trained, we are not professionals in mental or physical disabilities. (Employer 12)

Eleven employers spoke at length about the assistance they received from community supports and these workers’ expertise in supporting employees with ID. Employers described how this alleviated hiring, training and/or retention concerns. Twelve employers received an employment support worker with specific expertise for at least one phase of the employment process. I will break this section down into three sub-sections to discuss community support and their expertise in the hiring, training and retaining processes, and how this illuminates the benefits to hiring people with ID. The employers interviewed received different types of support from different organizations. That said, their experiences with community support and expertise will be different.

4.1.4.1 Hiring Support. Nine employers discussed the advantage to having an employment support worker and their expertise in hiring individuals with ID. These employers discussed how their community support professional assisted in finding the best person for the job, by performing assessments and discerning individuals’ likes and strengths. The community support professionals had discussions with the employers about company/organization needs and/or gaps in service. Through this dialogue and through the community support workers’ expertise in assessment, the community support professionals provided employers with job candidates who could perform the required tasks. One employer explained the “discovery process” where individuals with ID are
given the “opportunity to present themselves and their skills so that [they] get paid employment in an area where [they] are going to [succeed] (Employer 5).”

One medium-sized employer explained how she has “never had any problems (Employer 4)” with the hiring process, and had no concerns in hiring someone with an ID. This employer explained how the employment support workers not only described the job candidates’ likes and strengths, but also limitations and possible concerns: “I had spoken with my management team and we knew what the limitations were and [so we had] no concerns [in hiring someone with an ID] (Employer 4).” This provides employers with a sense of clarity in knowing their employees’ strengths and weaknesses. A small-sized employer with one employee with ID of one-and-a-half- years explained how the employment support worker provided the option of a trial period. She described the hiring process as “excellent,” stating that the support person “was the liaison with…his client. And he said, you know, ‘This person would be a good fit…[let’s] see how he does with that’ (Employer 7).”

Community support professionals also provided their expertise in customization, helping employers to think outside the box when delegating work tasks. One small-size employer explained:

When the opportunity came up [to hire someone with ID], we talked about [possible] jobs…The person who brought [the job candidates with ID] in, he said, ‘Here are some jobs that I think you could [use].’ And I’m like, ‘Yeah!’ That’s legit…it’s not taking away from somebody else, it’s getting stuff done that wasn’t getting done. You know, which was really good…because he actually identified jobs that weren’t getting done as often as we wanted. (Employer 8)
One large-sized employer with 15 employees with ID also explained how his community support professionals assisted in customization:

[We determine the skillsets of our employees with ID] with [them] … and [with] the external support that we’re getting … We took 5 or 6 different jobs and gave them all to [the external support to decide], and we might get one employee doing pieces from this job, pieces from this job, pieces from this job, because [the support worker] recognized that this is a skillset this person can have. They have a skillset that they love talking to people and they can show some efficiency in that. Great! Let’s get ‘em in there. (Employer 10)

When this type of support was provided, employers had no problems with the hiring process. Some employers explained how they did not have to perform an interview because they knew the community support professional had performed their assessments and determined that the individual with ID was qualified for the job. Another employer explained how their community support professionals accompany the job candidates to their interviews in case the employer has any questions for them. One small-sized employer described her unique partnership with two community support providers:

I’m kind of a third hand. I work with [community organizations] and let them know I have two positions available so they will send me names of qualified candidates. [The hiring process] was good…mainly because we contract through the two organizations who actually have the persons who are working for us on staff. They make them employees and then I contract them to provide the services…That part of the hiring process is awesome, again because it removes a lot of work from me which is very valuable for me…If we didn’t have the
support…[it] would be very challenging for me as a nonprofit person to evaluate, because it would be very hard to evaluate the skills and abilities of someone with an intellectual disability…I find it would be very challenging for me to ascertain and make any kind of informed hiring decision… when you have adequate support that removes a lot of the difficulty. (Employer 13)

When employers had community support and expertise, it shone light on the benefits to having employees with ID. These employers were able to hire individuals who have the particular skillsets they need and also employees who have an interest in the tasks. This underscores the value of community support workers and their expertise in the hiring process, which is a good step toward ensuring employment success.

**4.1.4.2 Training Support.** Community support and their expertise was also voiced as an advantage in training employees with ID. Employers described the community support professionals as typically realistic in the additional supports that some people with ID require in starting a new position. Ten employers discussed the advantage to having a community support professional in the training process. Community support professionals provided complementary individualized hands-on support in teaching the new employee with ID the most effective methods to perform their new job (typically referred to as ‘job coaches’). This alleviated any training concerns with having a new employee with ID and gave the employers and managers time to focus on their other roles within the company/organization. One medium-sized employer stated that there is “no incurred labour [to] bring someone in to support (Employer 11).” When asked what they most benefitted from with respect to external support, one large-size employer stated:
It eliminates the pressure because obviously these people will need a little bit more attention than all the other employees…Right now there’s 15 to 17 employees [with ID] working. As managers, if you ‘gotta’ spend more time with one, it might take away from serving guests, or if something happens I need to attend to. (Employer 10)

This training support not only alleviated time concerns, but also concerns in how to interact with and train people with ID, especially if it was an employer’s first time training an employee with ID. The employers sometimes had to orient the job coach to the workplace, so they could effectively train the employee with ID, but employers found this to be a swift process that alleviated any confusion in the training process. One large-sized employer explained, “[The job coaches] were trained…and then they helped train [the employees with ID], so any challenges that we had, we just filtered to [the job coaches] so…it wasn’t so confusing to the [employees with ID] (Employer 10).”

One small-sized employer echoed this statement by saying:

[Training the support person] was great. Perfect actually, because as we would go over the site, [the support person] would assess it for his [client] to come and work in. So he would ask the relevant questions... It was really simple to train the support person. If one employee didn’t work out, the support person could just go and train someone else. (Employer 13)

Not only are job coaches quickly oriented to the employers’ workplaces, they have expertise in how to effectively train someone with particular communication and learning styles, setting the employees with ID up for success. Three employers discussed this
expertise directly, acknowledging that they themselves did not have the education to best
train employees with ID to their workplace. They stated:

Our general managers and some of our department managers…most of them
wouldn’t have the teachings to properly communicate [with people with ID] as
well, whereas externally, they’ve gone through … school and training and classes
and … my people have not gone through all that same training and certification so
… that would be a struggle. So that’s where the external really is a huge benefit.
(Employer 10)

[Without the support], I don’t think that the person [with ID]…would have got as
much care. It was a good education experience for us, for the supervisors, to have a
professional that [is] trained [to work with] people with disabilities, because we’re
not, right? We have operations backgrounds. We don’t even have HR backgrounds.
They just did a really good job on, again, educating us. They one hundred percent
took care of them, brought them to and from break, made sure that they were
trained, that they were being taken care of. (Employer 12)

So [the job coach] will bring said person [with ID] to the [workplace], work with
them for a couple of … two-hour shifts and let me know how they feel about it. So
I’m pretty hands off with it…I don’t have any idea, I’m in food and gardening and
programming, and I would prefer that the organizations that know the particular
needs of these individuals the best to let me know…I think it’s in the best interest
of everyone if I stand back and go “okay you tell me”. (Employer 13)

Having community support and their expertise in training employees with ID is a benefit
to hiring people with ID as it provides one-on-one support in the training process,
ensuring that the employee is adequately prepared to work independently. One employer explained how this would be beneficial for all of his employees, regardless of ability:

If I had someone standing side-by-side with every single one of my employees when they started for 2 to 3 weeks, they would be exceptionally better than they are today…I think that goes [for the employees with ID] as well, [for] anybody really…[if] you can give them the time and…one-on-one attention, [they will get it]….That external piece…makes it really beneficial for [the employee with ID] and for us. (Employer 10)

Another employer explained how the job coach helped to create a more organized and efficient workspace for all employees, regardless of ability:

[The support worker] actually helped us implement some things that we hadn’t thought of, like he did a lot of pictographs and you know big signs that would say, ‘These are dirty dishes…these are clean dishes’… Like, you know, that’s for everybody, it’s not just for a person with challenges but that helps everybody, so he definitely helped with all of that. (Employer 7)

When asked if anything would have improved the early employment experience, this same employer replied:

Not that I can think of. Like I am trying to think of something but, honestly, you know, just knowing we had the support from the support worker, who was fantastic in knowing his client and being able to help him with those pictographs and giving him suggestions…giving him advice to make it faster, to make the process faster. (Employer 7)
The community support professionals also provided continual assessment. For example, employers communicated with the job coach before increasing employee responsibility at work. Assessment also occurred when job coaches started to wean off their support; they assessed when their clients were able to work with less support, or with no support, providing retaining strategies to the employer, stating they were available to assist whenever needed.

4.1.4.3 Retaining Support. Employers found advantage to having community support when addressing employer retention for their employees with ID. Seven employers interviewed discussed the assistance they received from community support workers in retaining their employees with ID. For some employers the community support professional would perform reviews. For others, they made themselves available for check-ins if necessary. Some employers found that they did not need any assistance with retaining their employee with ID as the employee with ID was adequately trained and knew how to do their job. Additionally, some employers felt capable to retain their employees themselves, just like any other employee. One employer with 19 years’ experience hiring people with ID spoke of her first experience hiring people with ID:

I really liked the one-on-one support [the community support person] provided those individuals. So, they would come to the work site and they did annual reviews with them, plus we did our own annual reviews; so, they would get two separate reviews. They were also there if we had behavioral problems that maybe myself or staff weren’t equipped to deal with, they would come in and deal directly with the individuals. They were also a really good liaison between ourselves and the families. (Employer 12)
When asked how it was when the support stepped back, this employer stated, “It was fine, totally fine (Employer 12).” The community support professionals would also typically assess if/when retaining services would commence. Two employers specifically discussed this process and how it worked well:

The case worker contacted me and said, “I’m not coming back for another week, ‘cause they’re doing good,” and I checked in and management team said, “yeah if they’re fine we’ll check in on them. We’ll work with them, don’t worry about it”.

(Employer 4)

[The support person] weaned himself off...letting [the employee with ID] know that “ok, well I’ll just come a little bit later next time”, right, and then “I’ll leave a little bit earlier” and then so he weaned himself off...so [the employee with ID] could actually feel responsible and know that he had to do that job. (Employer 7)

Two other employers explained how they felt confident in supporting and retaining their employees with ID without the support person, but still felt welcome to contact the community support professional if ever needed. One of them stated, “I’ve never had to [contact the support person] but I know I could if I needed to do that (Employer 7).”

Some employers appreciated the “check-backs (Employer 4).” An employer with 25 years’ experience hiring people with ID explained:

[The support person] would come and check back in with us [to] make sure everything was okay, and also check-in with the employee…When we had an issue come up… I could contact a case worker … “Hey, this is what’s happening,” so that they could help me or they would go directly to [the employee with ID] and say, “Hold on. You know this is how it has to be”. (Employer 4)
A medium-sized employer with over 30 years’ experience hiring people with ID stated that he does not access retention support as it is not needed. (Employer 2)

Similarly, a small-sized employer with an employee of eight years explained:

[The employee with ID] has been here for a really long time, so [the support] is not really needed. We have a good relationship with [the employee with ID]. She knows she is comfortable here and loves coming here, so it’s pretty easy to train her with things… She is very independent and good at coming in and doing her thing. (Employer 3)

Regardless of whether the retention supports were needed, employers found comfort in knowing that they had community support if needed. The community support professionals have expertise in placement and assessment, and have an idea of which employer-employee partnerships will be successful. They assess whether the job candidates can perform the jobs, and whether they will like the tasks. Additionally, community support professionals use their expertise in training employees with ID at work, providing tips for communication and efficiency. After that, community support professionals provide retaining strategies and check-ins if needed. From the experiences of the employers interviewed, free support in the community can ensure successful employment for those with ID, so employers can more readily see and reap the benefits of having an employee with ID.

Eleven employers in the present study discussed the benefits of the community support. Of the remaining two employers, one employer, who did not discuss community support, discussed how they wanted the support and did not know where to get it (Employer 1), while another employer stated that they did not want to support (Employer
9). The employer requesting more support recognized that the early employment process “would be better if [they] had support (Employer 1),” and stated that check-ins would be helpful. Two other employers discussed examples of when their community support professional could have weaned off earlier than they did, encouraging autonomy in their clients. Nonetheless, these two employers found great advantage to the community support professionals. All in all, community support was overwhelmingly discussed among the employers interviewed in the present study, illuminating for them the benefits to hiring people with ID.

The interviews from the 13 employers in the present study brought forth four major findings that describe the benefits to hiring people with ID. First, according to the collective responses of the 15 participants, employing individuals with ID lead to a more positive workplace environment. Secondly, employers described that an employee with ID can contribute to better business demonstrating a business case to hiring employees with ID. Thirdly, employers discussed high employer job satisfaction in knowing that they were making a difference by hiring inclusively and connecting to the community. Finally, employers commented on the benefits of community support professionals who assist with hiring, training and retaining employees with ID.

### 4.2 Advice to Other Employers

Before relating my findings to previous literature in the field, I will discuss the findings to the question: “What advice would you provide to hesitant employers in hiring, training and retaining employees with ID?” Collectively, the employers interviewed stated that more hesitant employers should seek education on disability and inclusivity as well as seek contact with persons with disabilities. Additionally, employers should access
support, whether for hands-on support in hiring, training and retaining, and/or financial support. Participants also mentioned the importance of having a strong management team at work and provided definitions of effective leadership. In discussing hiring people with ID, one large-size employer stated: “It’s easy to do, and it’s easy not to do. So, it’s easy to hire these people [with ID] – bring them on, get their energy, get them showing what they can do, or it’s easy not to. Choose the easy to do (Employer 10).” Four employers explicitly stated that hesitant employers should hire people with ID, because after you try it, you’ll begin to learn their value. For example, one small-sized employer stated, “Try it! Give it a chance…Just see what it does, how it helps, what they can do (Employer 4).” A large-sized employer suggested that employers could begin hiring people with ID by providing a seasonal position to an employee with ID (Employer 6).

Eight employers interviewed stated that more hesitant employers should seek education on the benefits to hiring people with ID. An employer discussed breaking social stereotypes through education, taking the “fear factor” away (Employer 5). Five employers discussed how the fear could be diminished by talking to employers like themselves, who have had success in retaining employees with ID. For example, one medium-sized employer with 16 to 20 years’ experience hiring people with ID stated that “[We need] to connect them with somebody like myself that has had a good experience…to actually have an example of an employer that can say…these are the benefits (Employer 12).” One employer posited that hesitant employers should talk to people who know someone with ID or talk with someone who has an ID. He stated, “It’s just that one connection to that special person and you’re hooked (Employer 2).” Another way stereotypes can be broken is through diversity training. One medium-sized employer
discussed the diversity training he had received and how it broke the stigma associated with disabled workers (Employer 11).

Another method of breaking down stereotypes and hesitations in hiring people with ID is by seeking education and support from organizations who provide support to employees with ID. Seven employers interviewed directly advised hesitant employers to access community support professionals. As previously mentioned, a benefit to hiring people with ID is that an employment support expert accompanies the employee with ID. Hence, if hesitant employers first seek this support, they are setting themselves and their future employees up for success. Community support professionals can share their expertise in describing the benefits to hiring people with ID, can connect hesitant employers to experienced employers, and can assist with assessment, hiring, training and retaining employees with ID. Community support professionals can also make employers aware of funding opportunities. For example, one medium-sized employer stated, “[This] makes good business sense and you get good training [from the support] (Employer 11).” Two employers interviewed explicitly discussed the expertise of community support professionals. One small-sized employer stated:

During the hiring, we need to partner up with organizations that are supporting people with disabilities because they have the expertise and the training to assess and evaluate different kinds of disabilities. Whereas I know nothing, and most employers won’t know anything. So, I would say to find a nonprofit that runs this type of employment service and investigate them and see if you could use them. And then during the training process again make your expectations really clear to
the support worker as to what you expect. Raise your concerns in advance and then collaborate with the agency to try and find a fit. (Employer 13)

Above and beyond accessing support, employers interviewed suggested that hesitant employers have a strong management team at work. This is advice for any workplace, regardless of the employees’ abilities. Nonetheless, the employers interviewed stated that effective leadership is evidenced by continual assessment, clear communication, transparency, approachability, patience, and flexibility. In the case of hiring people with ID, community support professionals can assist with continual assessment, but employers with strong management are able to continually assess all staff: how they are adjusting to the workplace, if they are enjoying their job, and if they are fitting in with the rest of the team. For example, one employer stated, “Spend the time to get to know the individual. Know your people. Promote their welfare first, like you would do with anybody else (Employer 11).” Continual assessment is important in determining whether your employees can handle more tasks at work or are overwhelmed. One medium-sized employer advises to pay attention and correct issues before they become habits (Employer 2). A small-sized employer stated that she knew she could add more tasks to her employees’ job descriptions “through conversations [and] through monitoring (Employer 4)”.

My management team is really strong…so generally I would say within six months you can kind of see [that they are ready for more roles], three to six months, and that’s normal for anybody right. Can they take on more, depending on their capacity, do they want to take on more…? (Employer 4)

In addition to continual assessment, the participants emphasized clear
communication and transparency as important tools that their management team uses. The employers interviewed stated that employers should provide concrete expectations and clear instructions. They should ask relevant questions and provide constant encouragement. This too should be for all employees, regardless of ability. For example, one large-sized employer stated, “That’s what it should be with every employee and I think because of that, that’s where we’re seeing some success with some long-term people (Employer 10).” In using epilepsy as an example, one small-sized employer discussed the importance of clear communication and transparency in assessment and in voicing concerns:

I would hope that [employers] would ask [disabled job candidates] questions in the interview process. ‘So I understand that you have identified with me that you have epilepsy… and I see that you have your guide dog with you. We are okay with the guide dog, but can you tell us, what would we do?’ So I think the employer needs to be comfortable in knowing what to do, the questions to ask, and ‘who’s your go to? So if you are having a rough day and we are sort of feeling like you are off … who is your emergency call person?’ [Employers] need to do their due diligence to make sure they are very clear and concise on what the procedure is. (Employer 5)

This assessment piece was something typically done by community support professionals, but to be able to communicate clearly with or without a support professional is indicative of effective leadership. Additionally, employers interviewed discussed the importance of constant encouragement and positive reinforcement. One medium-sized employer explained that it is important to compliment rather than
repetitively critique (Employer 2). One small-sized employer uses a method called “stop, start, continue.” He explained that he states to his employees and athletes: “We should stop doing this because it’s not working…we should continue doing this because we’re being very successful (Employer 8).” When clear communication and transparency are done effectively, employers are seen as approachable, which is important for strong management teams.

Employers also suggested that hesitant employers be patient and flexible and provided practical examples. For example, some employers provided advice on how to train employees with ID through modeling and leading by example. One small-sized employer stated that she draws diagrams for her employee with ID so he has a visual reminder of the tasks at hand (Employer 1). Another employer explained that he follows up with his employee with ID to ensure that he understand what was explained, asking him to “mirror it back (Employer 12).” One medium-sized employer stated that it can be as simple as “showing different ways to do the same thing (Employer 2)” Another employer stated, “I’ll do things with her the first time and then the next time she is good on her own (Employer 3).” This patience and flexibility is a great mindset for management teams for all employees as everyone has their strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles.

In conclusion, the participants provided advice to more hesitant employers. They stated that hesitant employers should seek education on disability and inclusivity as well as seek contact with persons with disabilities. Furthermore, they advised employers to seek community support for hiring, training, and retaining employees with ID, and to seek information about financial supports, if needed. Employers interviewed emphasized
the importance of having a strong management team at work such as effective leadership in the provision of continual assessment, clear communication and transparency, approachability, as well as patience and flexibility. This was discussed as not only advantageous to hiring people with ID, but advice for employing all individuals, as everyone has their unique strengths and weaknesses. In the final chapter of this thesis, I relate my findings to the literature previously discussed in this field. I will also discuss limitations of the present study as well as additional real-world applications of the findings.
5 Discussion

The employers interviewed in the present study shone light on the benefits to hiring people with ID. They also provided tangible advice to hesitant employers. The conversations I had with my participants directly relate to real-world applications to better improve the employment rates for those with ID. In this present chapter, I relate the findings in my study to past literature in this field, and then discuss the dissemination of results.

5.1 Previous Research and the Present Study

Employer discrimination and negative employer attitudes toward the employability of those with ID was cited as the main barrier to employment for people with ID (Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Duvdevany et al., 2016; Shier et al., 2009; Zappella, 2015). Previous research has found that employers believe employees with ID to be associated with high accommodation costs, greater supervisory time, safety risks and emotional problems, fearing lawsuit regarding discipline or termination (Amir et al., 2009; Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Hernandez et al., 2008; Jasper & Waldhart, 2012; Kaye et al., 2011; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008; Zappella, 2015). Past research also indicates that employers have aesthetic anxiety when it comes to hiring people with disabilities and believe that people with disabilities lack necessary knowledge and job skills (Brostand, 2006; Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Jasper & Waldhart, 2012; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008). Finally, past research indicates that many employers’ reason for hiring people with ID is solely for altruistic/socially desirable motives (Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Ellenkamp et al., 2016; Simonsen et al., 2015; Skellern & Astbury, 2012). Furthermore, Gallagher and Bennett (2013) explained how their study participants recognized the importance of job
coaches but there was no discussion on how this is actually a benefit to hiring people with ID.

The negative opinions of employers in past research was challenged by participants in the present study. Past research in this area summarizes many negative attitudes held by employers while the present study focused on the benefits to hiring people with ID. The employers in the present study directly disputed some negative views. Indeed, employers interviewed in the present study stated that their employees with ID had low (if any) accommodation costs and there was no mention of fearing lawsuit with regard to discipline or termination. In fact, a couple employers mentioned that when their employees with ID did leave their workforce, they were either changing careers or retiring, meaning they left on a good note.

There are some similarities present between past research and the current study in that some employers interviewed for this research mentioned concerns with safety risks and emotional problems. The difference between these similarities is that the current study’s participants challenged these concerns as they actually hired people with ID. A couple employers interviewed mentioned that they were no longer concerned about safety risks as their employees with ID understand work policies and procedures. When employers interviewed in the present study had concerns, they discussed the advantage to having a support person with expertise in how to communicate with and support their employees with ID, and the underscored importance in having a strong management team at work.

Employers in the present study also discussed the concern of greater supervisory time mentioned in past research. That said, my participants explained how this was less
of an issue as they were able to reap the benefits of having a support person and effective leadership, with some stating that every employee, regardless of ability, could benefit from one-on-one training support. Finally, no employers interviewed in the present study discussed aesthetic anxiety and most did not discuss altruistic/socially desirable motives as the sole reason for hiring people with ID. For some employers who did mention altruism as a motivation for hiring an employee with ID, they also pointed to increased employer job satisfaction along with other benefits.

With regard to the benefits of hiring individuals with ID, both past research as well as the current study found that employees with disabilities have been described as loyal, reliable, and hard-working. In both past research (e.g., Luecking et al., 2006) and in the present research, employers mentioned that their employees with ID have low absenteeism for shifts and long tenures contributing to better business. That said, both past researchers and myself found ambivalence in whether employees with ID increase the productivity level of all employees (Beyer et al., 2016; Kaehne & Beyer, 2013). This speaks to one of the main cautionary notes of the present study: one needs to keep in mind the individuality and heterogeneity of people with disabilities, as well as the workplace.

There were other similarities between the previous literature and the responses from the employers in the present study. In the scoping review (Chapter 2), I summarized 11 studies that included employers as participants who discussed job candidates or employees with ID. In this review, I discussed three main themes: 1) Intergroup Contact Theory, 2) Employer size, and 3) Importance of employer education. These three main topics were also apparent in my research and are discussed in more detail below.
5.1.1 Intergroup Contact Theory. Contact with a particular population group can reduce prejudice and negative attitudes, especially when common goals and intergroup cooperation are present (Pettigrew, 1998). This is why research in this field has shown that employers’ contact with people with disabilities, especially in the workplace, contributes to greater positive attitudes towards the employability of individuals with disabilities (Ellenkamp et al., 2016; Kaye et al., 2011; Zappella, 2015). Given these previous findings, I asked employers about their interaction with disabled people outside the workforce as well as the employers’ number of years’ experience hiring people with ID and the length of employment of their employees with ID. Although the present study included a limited number of participants and diversity, I determined that intergroup contact theory applied to the findings in the present study.

Employers with greater years’ experience hiring people with ID and a greater number of employees with ID were able to see the diversity and abilities of their employees with ID. These employers readily discussed several benefits to hiring people with ID. Moreover, it seemed that as employers had greater years’ experience hiring multiple people with ID, they more readily identified the unique competencies and abilities of their employees with ID above and beyond their kind and warm-hearted personalities. However, there were exceptions that may have been mediated by employer size, type of community support, and interaction with disabled people outside of the workplace. For example, one large-sized employer, with three to five years experiences hiring employees with ID, readily discussed many benefits to hiring people with ID. Notably, the two participants from this company had close family members with Down Syndrome. Similarly, a small-sized employer, with less than three years’ experience
hiring people with ID in seasonal employment, also readily discussed many benefits to hiring people with ID. This employer described extensive community support and stated that their spouse is disabled. Further findings point to a relationship between employer attitudes and Intergroup Contact Theory. Five employers discussed how their interaction with disabled people outside of the workforce contributed to their decision to hire someone with a disability and/or impacted their supervisory skills with employees with ID. That said, Intergroup Contact Theory was not the primary topic explored in the present study and is something that needs to be further explored as it could contribute to real-world applications in promoting the employability of people with ID.

5.1.2 Employer Size. Previous research in this field has documented different hiring concerns and benefits to hiring employees with disabilities dependent on employer size. Jasper and Waldhart (2012) found that openness to hire people with disabilities increased with employer size. Fraser et al. (2011) found differences in many areas according to employer size. To reiterate, in their sample, larger companies believed that workers with disabilities would be committed and loyal to their company, however small- and medium-sized companies were concerned of the loss of potential revenue stating they would need financial incentive to hire people with disabilities. Although the studies completed by Jasper and Waldhart (2012) and Fraser et al. (2011) asked employers about their likelihood of hiring people with disabilities, rather than their experience with employees with disabilities, some of their findings ring true in the present study.

I found a trend in employer responses based on employer size. Again, the present study had a limited number of participants and reflected minimal diversity; therefore, future research is recommended for this topic. Nonetheless, in the present study, some
small- and medium- sized employers discussed that they would take financial support in retaining their employees with ID if the funding was available, whereas others did not discuss financial incentive. In fact, one medium-sized employer stated that they do not accept financial incentive as they want to keep funding available for more hesitant employers to use. The large-sized employers in the present study did not discuss financial incentive and both emphasized the importance of flexibility and accommodation. It is suspected that large-sized employers are able to afford greater flexibility because of their size; for example, scheduling shifts may be easier, lending to greater ease in meeting standards of customized employment. Analyzing different responses from employers according to employer size was not the primary focus of the present study. That being said, the findings suggest that this is an important topic for future research: future findings may contribute valuable insights into the kinds of resources that may motivate and benefit employers in relation to different employer size and successfully employing individuals with ID. It is important to note that there were many similarities between employers interviewed, regardless of employer size. In fact, the employers interviewed collectively discussed similar benefits to hiring people with ID.

5.1.3 Importance of Employer Education. Findings from previous research and the present study, both underscore the importance of employer education. Shier et al. (2009) discuss how employers require education on stereotyping and discrimination. Similarly, Houtenville and Kalargyrou (2012) and Jasper and Waldart (2012) state that disability awareness training for employers is needed. Recommendations from previous studies involved including information on the capabilities of people with disabilities (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012); providing recommendations on how to provide
accommodations, effective communication skills, and performance reviews (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012); offering improved training on how tasks in their company could be completed differently (Kaye et al., 2011); and, incorporating testimonies from successful employee-employer partnerships (e.g., Kaye et al., 2011; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008). The findings of my research resonate with these previous recommendations. For example, some employers in the current study suggested that hesitant employers speak to them. The employers also suggested that hesitant employers seek community support services to provide them with education and/or to show them where to find disability awareness training. The goal of the present study was to shine light on the benefits to hiring people with ID from the perspective of those who hire and retain employees with ID. This contributes to employer education and is part of the dissemination of results. Employer education and other ideas for dissemination will be discussed below. First, I will briefly touch on some limitations of the present study.

5.2 Limitations

One of the limitations of this research was the limited number of participants and the types of participants I was able to recruit. I was not able to recruit employers from all fields of work, and different fields of work may have had different experiences, opinions, and advice. I did attempt to recruit employers from different fields, but it is difficult to have such large representation with 15 participants from one location. As was mentioned previously when discussing Intergroup Contact Theory and employer size, it is also difficult to posit supplementary themes when the representation was small. In this case, when not directly related to the benefits to hiring people with ID, I was only able to propose general trends for further exploration.
There are limitations inherent with any study conducting interviews, in that what
dividuals share are their subjective realities. This is unavoidable as is the individuality
of each employer and each employee. Thorne (2016) explains that individuals, when
interviewed, are likely to direct the interviewer’s attention to what they think the
interviewer will understand, as opposed to what fully represents the density of their
opinions and experiences. This is why I do not claim that my sample is representative of
all employers. Nor do I recommend this study be replicated to provide more reliability to
my findings; similar studies may provide more information on understanding employers’
attitudes on the employability of individuals with ID, but it will not ‘prove’ that my
findings are ‘correct’ (Thorne, 2016). Additionally, my study participants volunteered to
participate in the study based on their desire to speak on this topic. For the current study,
this is not a limitation, as these were the employers that I was looking for. I sought
employers who had experience in hiring and retaining people with ID, who had longevity
in employing at least one person with ID, and who had tangible advice based on these
successful experiences. It is for this reason that I was able to provide the benefits to
hiring people with ID as well as tangible advice from experienced employers. It could
have been beneficial to also interview the employees with ID and their coworkers, as well
as community support professionals. This would have provided a more in-depth analysis
and given the employees with ID the opportunity to voice their experiences as well. This
is a suggestion for future research.

5.3 Dissemination of Results

The present study contributes to the Employment First initiative in its attempts for
systemic change, including competitive integrated employment for disabled people
Emphasis is placed on autonomy, career development, and community integration. No one, who wants to work, should be excluded from the labour market, and with the right assessment, tools, support, and welcoming employers, this is achievable. The dissemination of results is the whole purpose of a study such as this one. Thorne (2016) states that “because the practice mandate is the ‘so what’ of the applied world, reporting back to your community what you think ought to be done differently in such domains as education, practice, service delivery, or even policy seems essential” (p. 230).

One of the primary goals of the present study is to educate employers on the benefits to hiring people with ID. Lengnick-Hall et al. (2008) suggest four ways in which employers can be educated on these benefits. They are as follows: 1) identify success stories and utilize them in marketing to other employers, 2) advertise what disabled people can do, including that they are hard-working and loyal, 3) encourage rehabilitation professionals to take charge in expressing the benefits of hiring disabled people to employers, and 4) encourage more intergroup contact where non-disabled employers/employees have personal experiences with persons with disabilities. The present study begins to address these recommendations. The employers in the present study identified benefits to hiring people with ID and their experiences with successful employee-employer partnerships. They also described the abilities of their employees with ID and what they contribute to the workplace.

The responses from the employers in the present study should be shared with more hesitant employers. Above and beyond a thesis defense, I created a report on the main findings of this study as well as a condensed brochure. I also plan to submit
academic publications on the benefits to hiring people with ID extrapolated from my data. This will be provided to the employers who participated in the study but also to other employers who are more hesitant to hire people with ID. Methods in doing this include providing the report/brochure to community support organizations as well as online, such as through the TYDE Project website (The TYDE Project, n.d.). The report/brochure reflects demand-side approaches, demonstrating that employers can benefit from hiring this population group. Previously discussed was a study completed by DuPont de Nemours and Company (1993) where employers consistently provided positive ratings for their employees with disabilities, stating they were just as, or more productive than their non-disabled coworkers. The meaning behind this report was positive but it was used in employer recruiting materials that sold people with disabilities as “super achieving workers” and failed to recognize the diversity in the heterogeneous group (Luecking, 2008, p. 4). This serves as a caution in the dissemination of results in the present study. I cautioned throughout the current study that the results should be viewed with the lens of individuality, that each employee uniquely contributes to the workplace and each employee may have different challenges. The employers’ experiences and opinions in the present study contribute to addressing the demand-side approaches to creating positive employment outcomes, while also recognizing that most of their employees with ID meet their full potential with the assistance of community support professionals. Instead of “selling” people with disabilities as “super achieving workers”, employers can be informed about the real expectations and benefits to hiring people with ID.
It is through the interviews with my study participants that I noticed a disconnect between academia and the real-world. Although I use the term ‘disabled people’ as a positive affirmative method of looking at disability and reassigning meaning (Eisenhauer, 2007; Linton, 2006), employers in the present study seemed to more readily receive the term ‘diversability’. The term ‘diversability’ captured the experiences of the employers in the present study as many of their employees with ID learn and communicate differently. The employers recognized their employees with ID as having diverse strengths, interests and support needs. This is reflected in the report and brochure. It is important to note that the report, brochure and academic publications are just a first step in promoting the employability with ID.

Given that community support and expertise was seen as a benefit to hiring people with ID, it is paramount that communities have effective community support. Above and beyond creating awareness on the benefits to hiring people with ID, it is important that community support services have the funding to hire qualified and passionate service providers who are community focused and trained to adequately support people with ID and employers. That being said, although the primary intended audience for the current study is employers, they are not the only intended audience. The hope is that the findings from this study will empower individuals with ID and potentially assist them when job searching. Additionally, the findings can assist community support organizations who advocate for people with ID and who speak to employers about the benefits to hiring people with ID. Furthermore, job coaches may be able to use this information to inform their job coaching and the way they approach and support employers. Finally, studies such as the present one can be used to inform policy such as
financial assistance and program curriculum, like transition programs and adult job readiness programs. Indeed, transition programs and adult job readiness programs are important in providing people with ID the tools to succeed in the workplace and a confidence to demonstrate one’s competencies in competitive integrated employment.

Transition programs and adult job readiness programs are important in providing people with ID the tools to succeed in the workplace. It is at these programs where people with ID can learn greater time management, the importance of work and fundamental tasks that are seen in most employment settings. Past literature describes effective transition plans as including individualized assessment of ability and interests, and practical experience with employer connections (Kumin & Schoenbrodt, 2016; Gormley, 2015; Lysaght et al., 2009). Through transition programming, employers can begin to experience the benefits to hiring people with ID. This is why projects such as the TYDE Project are so important (The TYDE Project, n.d.). Practical experience with employer connections can also exist for adults with ID through job readiness programs and customized/supported employment. With job placement experiences, employers can begin to experience the benefits to hiring people with ID while also understanding the type of supports that are in place. The present study can also help community support professionals and job coaches recognize what type of supports are needed. As an example, one employer in the present study provided tangible advice in that a barrier to hiring people with ID was the fact that many job applicants with ID did not know how to apply for jobs online and did not have access to a phone to schedule interview times. This is something that can be taught in job readiness programs.
Studies such as the present one can also be used for policy making. Some employers in past research and the present study stated that they would hire people with disabilities if there was funding available (Beyer et al., 2016; Fraser et al., 2011). Albeit controversial, providing financial assistance may promote the employment rates for those with ID by giving employers the opportunity to reap the benefits of hiring people with ID. The present study speaks to the importance of having effective community support organizations. Many of these types of organizations are non-profit and depend on government assistance. The employers in the present study discussed the importance of support and follow-up. More funding could help organizations in hiring more qualified support workers who can provide effective assessment and support to employers for as long as desired. More funding can also assist community support people in hosting conferences and training to educate employers on the benefits to diversifying their workplace.

I previously mentioned the limitations of the present study in that the sample cannot fully capture the experiences of all employers. More research is needed in further identifying positive employee-employer partnerships and on educating hesitant employers. Other researchers can use these findings, to assist them in considering approaching the topic of disabled workers with a different lens and theoretical approach. Because this study interviewed 13 employers from the Okanagan Valley in Canada, the commitment of other scholars in engaging in research for raising awareness and for policy and practice change is needed.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, past research has identified that employment is an important
milestone for all individuals, regardless of ability, as it is a social determinant of health and promotes better life satisfaction (Raphael, 2006; Skellern & Astbury, 2012; Waddell & Burton, 2006). The employment rate for individuals with ID are much lower than those without disabilities (Domin & Butterworth, 2013), despite their desire for meaningful community participation and motivation to work (Lysaght et al., 2016; Scott et al., 2014). No one who wants to work, should not be excluded from the labour market. Negative employer attitudes are one of the main barriers faced by individuals with ID in finding employment. These negative attitudes are rooted in the historical maltreatment of disabled people and viewing them with the lens of the medical model – as impaired, abnormal and unemployable. Programs and policies exist to promote the employability of those with disabilities such as the Employment Equity Act, Accessibility 2024, Ready, Willing & Able, transitional programs and supported/customized employment, yet employment rates for people with disabilities are still low (Grant, 2008). Addressing negative employer attitudes through education and awareness is one way to increase the employability of those with ID.

There are employers in past research who have described positive attitudes towards those with disabilities and express a willingness to hire disabled people (Hernandez et al., 2008; Kaehne & Beyer, 2013; Luecking et al., 2006; Skellern & Astbury, 2012; Zappella, 2015), however after completing a scoping review of literature in this field, I noticed that many studies regarding people with ID do not include qualitative interviews with employers (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013; Beyer et al., 2016; Duvdevany et al., 2016; Gallagher & Bennett, 2013; Kaehne & Beyer, 2013; Nota et al., 2013). Informed by critical disability studies, the present qualitative study used
interpretive description (Thorne, 2016) within an emancipatory framework (Priestly, 1996) that includes the social and affirmative models of understanding disability (Olive, 2009; Swain & French, 2000; Watermeyer, 2013). I performed 13 semi-structured interviews with 13 employers (15 participants) who have had three years’ experience hiring individuals with ID (a flexible requirement) and at least one-year experience hiring the same person with ID (a mandatory requirement).

From these interviews I extrapolated four major themes speaking to the benefits to hiring people with ID. They were categorized as follows: 1) Workplace Environment, 2) Business, 3) Employer Job Satisfaction, and 4) Community Support and Expertise. Employees with ID contributed to a more positive workplace environment, bolstered by their personalities, contributing to happier staff and a sense of teamwork. Employers also experienced a perspective shift when they hired and retained employees with ID as they began to view the impact of a more positive workplace environment, the customization of roles and greater flexibility. This more positive workplace environment was posited to contribute to better business and employees with ID were also filling roles in their workplace and showing their skillset through dedication and strong work ethic. Sometimes this work ethic promoted stronger work ethic in their colleagues, and their presence promoted leadership and supervisory skills in others. Furthermore, employees with ID brought diversity to the workforce that promoted customer loyalty and more business. Employers voiced greater job satisfaction in hiring and retaining employees with ID as they shifted their perspectives and felt like they were making a difference by hiring inclusively and connecting to the community. Finally, community support and their expertise was defined as a benefit to hiring people with ID as community support
professionals provided complimentary hands-on support in hiring, training and retaining qualified individuals with ID. With the community support, employers were able to more readily benefit from all that their employees with ID had to offer.

Past research in this field and in the present study illuminates the importance of educating hesitant employers on the benefits to hiring people with ID (Lengnick-Hall et al, 2008). The employers interviewed in the present study provided advice to more hesitant employers stating that they should seek education on disability and inclusivity as well as seek contact with persons with disability. Additionally, the employers interviewed in the present study stated that hesitant employers should access support in discovering disability awareness training and funding opportunities as well as hiring, training and retaining support for employees with ID. The employers interviewed in the present study also voiced the importance of having a strong management team at work and stated that effective leadership is based on continual assessment, clear communication, transparency, approachability, patience and flexibility. This advice and the benefits to hiring people with ID will be voiced to more hesitant employers through a report and brochure outlining the study’s findings; it will also be distributed to community support organizations as well as online. Additionally, awareness on this important topic will be raised through a thesis defense presentation and through academic publication. The findings in the present study speak to the demand-side approach and in remembering individuality when discussing the benefits to hiring people with ID. The present study marks the urgency of providing effective community support services. The intended audience for the present study is first and foremost employers, but also community support professionals, job coaches, people with ID, scholars and policy makers. All in all,
this research is intended for everyone. It is important for our society to recognize and respect the abilities of disabled people, and to assist in working toward inclusion for everyone.
References


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The purpose of this e-mail is to ask you if you would be willing to participate in a research project through the University of British Columbia Okanagan.

Title of Research Project: The Benefits to Hiring Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities: Employers’ Perspectives

Are you the employer I am looking for?
- Do you have three or more years’ experience with having at least one employee with an intellectual disability?
- Has one of your current employees with an Intellectual Disability worked for you for over one year?

My name is Taylor Wells and I am a student in the Master of Social Work program at the University of British Columbia Okanagan, completing a thesis under the supervision of Dr. Rachelle Hole. The goal of this project is to increase understanding of how best to support employees with intellectual disabilities. For this project, I am looking to interview employers who have an employee with an intellectual disability and who answer “yes” to the questions above. I would like to ask you about your experience of hiring employees with intellectual disabilities. For example, I am interested in learning: what has worked well? What are the benefits of hiring employees with intellectual disabilities? And, what lessons can you share about enhancing the employment experiences in the workplace for all, and, in particular, what lessons you have learned about how best to support your employee(s) with intellectual disability so they can successfully perform their job?

Can I borrow 30-90 minutes of your time either in-person or over the phone in February of 2018? I would be honoured to learn from your experiences.
If you are interested in participating in this project, you can contact me via email or telephone. I will answer any questions you may have, and from there, provide you with a consent form before organizing an interview time. Please find attached a brochure with more information on this study.

If you are unable to participate, but know of an employer who may be able to, would you mind passing along this email/letter with my contact information?
Employer Information Brochure

Title of Research Project: The Benefits to Hiring Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities: Employers’ Perspectives

Principle Investigator and Supervisor: Dr. Rachelle Hole, School of Social Work University of British Columbia Okanagan Email: rachelle.hole@ubc.ca Phone: 250-807-8741

Co-Investigator: Taylor Wells, Master of Social Work Student University of British Columbia Okanagan Email: taylor.wells@alumni.ubc.ca Phone: 250-469-1888

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to critically examine employers’ attitudes toward the employability of persons with intellectual disabilities. The includes identifying employers’ opinions on the benefits to hiring individuals with intellectual disabilities, as well as, learning from employers’ experiences with hiring and retaining workers with intellectual disabilities. This study is part of a Master’s thesis in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO).

Prerequisites: Employers/supervisors from any field. Participants of this study must have at least 3 years’ experience with at least one employee with an intellectual disability. Additionally, one of your current employees with an intellectual disability must have worked for you for over one year. Employers with less than 3 years’ experience will be assessed for eligibility on an individual basis by the investigators.

Background: Employment is beneficial for everyone, not only for monetary gain, but for a sense of identity, purpose and community. Many individuals with intellectual disabilities desire employment and are willing to work hard to maintain employment. One of the barriers that individuals with intellectual disabilities face in obtaining
employment, is negative employer attitudes. Research exists in this field to try and remove this barrier and the current study will contribute to this research.

Procedure: I would like to ask you some open-ended questions about the benefits of having employees with intellectual disabilities and whether there were any challenges overcome so that your employee(s) could successfully perform their job. I would like to take notes during and after the interviews. Interviews will take place during February 2018, at a time a place that is convenient for you. Interviews can be completed in person or over the phone, whichever you prefer. The conversation will be about 30 to 90 minutes. With your consent, our conversation will be digitally recorded. If you agree to participate in the study, I will ask you to sign a consent form, then I will provide you with the interview guide I will use so you can prepare for the interview ahead of time, if you wish.

Benefits: One of the benefits of participating in the study is increasing your awareness of the benefits to hiring individuals with intellectual disabilities as well as the lessons you and your employee have learned that enhance the employment experience for all. The information you provide may not contribute to any immediate changes for you but may help to promote greater understanding of the barriers that individuals with intellectual disabilities face in obtaining and maintaining employment. Participating in this study may bring you the satisfaction that you are helping to improve the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Risks: There are no perceived risks to participating in this study except perhaps the time involved, and the potential discomfort of honestly sharing one’s experiences about the employability of persons with disabilities.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You may ask me not to use the digital recorder and/or to take notes. You may refuse to answer any question. You may withdraw from the study at any point in time.

Confidentiality: All information will be held in private, except when professional codes of ethics or the law requires reporting. I will keep recordings and written material from the study in a locked filing cabinet, or digitally protected via password. Only my supervisor, Dr. Rachelle Hole, my master’s thesis committee of two other UBCO professors, and myself will have access to the data. I will delete all identifiable information from all records. I will assign a number to each recording, to each transcript, and to any other material that results from your participation in this study. The data will be stored for at least five years following publication to ensure accordance with UBC Policy. Consent forms will be stored separate from the recordings.

Future use of Data: I may present findings from this study in conferences. I may also publish some or all of the findings. Your name will not appear in any report.
Information collected in this study may be used in future studies. If so, I will request permission from a research board.

**Study Results:** Upon completion of this study, if you would like, you will receive a summary of the results. These will be sent to you at your workplace, via mail or e-mail.

**Additional Comments:** For additional information or information any time during the study, please contact Taylor Wells or Dr. Rachelle Hole with the contact information provided above. If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-877-822-8598 or the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office at 250-807-8832. It is also possible to contact the Research Participant Complaint Line by email (RSIL@ors.ubc.ca). Please reference the study number (17-02777) when contacting the Complaint Line so the staff can better assist you.

If you are interested in participating in this project, you can contact me via email or telephone. I will answer any questions you may have, and from there, provide you with a consent form before organizing an interview time. I will be in the Okanagan and **scheduling in-person interviews for January 30, 2018 to February 7, 2018.** If you are unavailable during January 30, 2018 to February 7, 2018 for an in-person interview, but are still interested in participating in this study, please inquire about a phone interview.

Taylor Wells, Master of Social Work Student
University of British Columbia Okanagan
Email: taylor.wells@alumni.ubc.ca
Phone: 250-469-1888
Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Research Project: The Benefits to Hiring Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities: Employers’ Perspectives

Principle Investigator and Supervisor: Dr. Rachelle Hole, School of Social Work
University of British Columbia Okanagan
Email: rachelle.hole@ubc.ca
Phone: 250-807-8741

Co-Investigator: Taylor Wells, Master of Social Work student
University of British Columbia Okanagan
Email: taylor.wells@alumni.ubc.ca
Phone: 250-469-1888

Study Information and Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate employers’ experiences of successfully employing individuals with intellectual disabilities. The includes identifying the lessons that employers have learned regarding how best to support an employee with intellectual disability (hiring and retention) as well as understand the benefits of hiring individuals with Intellectual disabilities. This study is part of a Master’s thesis in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia Okanagan.

Who Can Participate? Employers/supervisors from any field of employment are invited to participate. Participants of this study must have at least 3 years’ experience with a least one employee with an Intellectual Disability. Additionally, participants must have a current employee with intellectual disability who has worked for you for a minimum of
one year. Employers with less than 3 years’ experience will be assessed for eligibility on an individual basis by the investigators.

What Does the Study Involve? I will ask you questions about your experiences employing an individual(s) with intellectual disability, the benefits of having employees with Intellectual Disabilities, and whether there were any challenges overcome so that your employee(s) could successfully perform their job. You will also be asked about your role within your company/organization. With your consent, I will audio-record and take notes during and after the interviews. Interviews will take place during February 2018, at a time a place that is convenient for you. The conversation will be about 30 to 90 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers.

Benefits: One of the benefits of participating in the study is increasing your awareness of the benefits to hiring individuals with intellectual disabilities as well as the lessons you and your employee have learned that enhance the employment experience for all. The information you provide may not contribute to any immediate changes for you but may help to promote greater understanding of the barriers that individuals with intellectual disabilities face in obtaining and maintaining employment. Participating in this study may bring you the satisfaction that you are helping to improve the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Risks: There are no perceived risks to participating in this study except perhaps the time involved, and the potential discomfort of honestly sharing one’s experiences about the employability of persons with disabilities.

Confidentiality: A number of measures will be used to keep your identity confidential. Printed notes and forms will be kept in a locked cabinet. Any digital materials (e.g., recorded interviews, transcribed interviews) will be password protected and encrypted electronically. All identifying information will be removed from the transcribed interviews and a participant ID number will be assigned to each participant so that no names are used. Data will be made available only to members of the research committee and destroyed 5 years following the publication of the findings. If you should choose to withdraw from the study at any time, all of your data will be destroyed.

The information you provide will be shared with other employers and others who study and work within the realm of employment and intellectual disability. This will be communicated in written papers, reports and/or oral presentations. The end project will be made publicly available on cIRcle, the University of British Columbia’s digital repository for research and teaching materials. We are asking your permission to communicate your information in this way without personally identifying you. It is anticipated that results from the study will be used to guide future research in this area. If you would like a report of the findings please include your e-mail and/or mailing address in the space provided at the bottom of this form. You will also be provided with a copy of the signed consent form.
Contact for information about the study: If you have any concerns or questions, or if you would like further information about the study, you may contact Taylor Wells or Dr. Rachelle Hole with the contact information provided above. Signing this consent form in no way limits your legal rights.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects: If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-877-822-8598 or the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office at 250-807-8832. It is also possible to contact the Research Participant Complaint Line by email (RSIL@ors.ubc.ca). Please reference the study number (17-02777) when contacting the Complaint Line so the staff can better assist you.

Consent: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time during the course of this study.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

All participants will receive a beverage gift card as an honorarium up to a value of $5.00 whether or not the study is completed.

Participant Signature __________________________ Date __________

Printed Name of the Participant __________________________

Optional - Address and/or E-mail of Participant (For Sending Study Results)

**Do you consent to be audio recorded during the study interview? □ Yes □ No

Thank you for your time!
Appendix C: Interview Guide for Interviewer

Interview Guide
Interviewer’s copy

Employer #: _______ Gender: _______

Introductions

Purpose of study: to learn from employers on the benefits to hiring individuals with ID as well as to glean advice on how to train and retain employees with ID

Consent form and review of confidentiality: Participants may have already signed the consent form prior to setting up an appointment time. Take the time during the interview regardless to answer any questions participants still may have, and re-explain confidentiality. For those participants who have not already signed the consent form, go over the form, answer any questions they may have, and obtain signature before continuing.

Introductions

- Company/Organization name:
- Field of Employment:
- Employer role within the Company/Organization:
- Number of years in this role with the Company/Organization:
- Total number of employees:
- Number of years’ experience hiring people with ID:
- Number of employees with ID:
- Initial of employee(s) with ID:
- Gender of employee(s) with ID:
- Number of years with current employee(s) with ID:
- Age of current employee(s) with ID:
- Responsibility regarding employee(s) with ID:

**Questions**

1. Tell me about how you came to hire your employee(s) with ID
   
   a. How was this process for you?
      
      i. What worked?
      
      ii. What were some challenges?
   
   b. Did you have any assistance or support in the hiring process, whether internal or external?
      
      i. If so, what did you and your employee(s) most benefit from this support? What could have improved with this support?
      
      ii. If not, would you find this helpful? Do you know of the supports available in Kelowna?
   
   c. Did the employee(s) have any previous employment experience or training?
   
   d. Overall, what would have improved the hiring process?
   
   e. Did you have any concerns with hiring someone with ID?
      
      i. If so, what did you do about these concerns? Are these still of concern?

2. Thinking back to when your employee(s) was first hired, how was the early employment experience?
   
   a. Did you train your employee(s)?
   
   b. Did you have assistance or support in training your employee(s), whether internal or external?
      
      i. If so, what did you and your employee(s) most benefit from this support? What could have improved with this support?
ii. If not, would you find this helpful?

c. In early employment, what were the employee(s) roles and responsibilities?
   i. Have these roles and responsibilities changed over time?

d. Did you make any accommodations for your employee?
   i. If so, which accommodation was the hardest to make?
   ii. Were there any additional financial costs?
   iii. Did your employee(s) receive any type of subsidy? What do you think of subsidies for disabled workers?

e. Were you ever concerned about your employee(s) not being able to maintain their employment?
   i. If so, what did you do to mitigate these concerns? Are there any concerns around this presently?

f. Were there any challenges that had to be overcome so that your employee(s) could successfully perform their job?
   i. If so, how did your employee(s) deal with those issues? How did you and your colleagues deal with those issues? How were you involved in those issues?

g. What would have improved the early employment experience?

3. Can you tell me about your employee(s) with ID?

   a. What do you value about your employee(s)?
   i. What do they contribute to your workplace?

   b. What have you learned from your employee(s)?
   i. What have other colleagues learned?

   c. Do you have current assistance or support in retaining your employee(s), whether internal or external?
   i. If so, what do and your employee(s) benefit most from this support? What could improve this support?
   ii. If not, do you feel like you would benefit from assistance or support?
d. What do you think contributes to your employee(s) success within the company/organization? (examples: education, experience/skills, personality/attitude)

4. Overall, what has your experience been like with your employee(s) with ID?

5. Would you hire another person with ID again in the future? Why?

6. Why do you think other employers are not as eager to hire or retain people with ID?
   a. Do you agree with these reasons? Why or why not?
   b. What advice would you provide to other employers?
      i. During the hiring process
      ii. During the training process
      iii. In retaining workers with ID

7. Have you received any training regarding disabled workers?

8. How would you define disability?
   a. Do you have much interaction with disabled people outside of the workplace?

Conclusions

9. Before concluding, is there anything you would like to add that we have not talked about?

Thank participant and acknowledge value of participation
Appendix D: Interview Guide for Participants

Interview Guide
Participant’s copy

Questions

1. Tell me about how you came to hire your employee(s) with ID
   a. How was this process for you?
      i. What worked?
      ii. What were some challenges?
   b. Did you have any assistance or support in the hiring process, whether internal or external?
      i. If so, what did you and your employee(s) most benefit from this support? What could have improved with this support?
      ii. If not, would you find this helpful? Do you know of the supports available in Kelowna?
   c. Did the employee(s) have any previous employment experience or training?
   d. Overall, what would have improved the hiring process?
   e. Did you have any concerns with hiring someone with ID?
      i. If so, what did you do about these concerns? Are these still of concern?

2. Thinking back to when your employee(s) was first hired, how was the early employment experience?
a. Did you train your employee(s)?

b. Did you have assistance or support in training your employee(s), whether internal or external?
   i. If so, what did you and your employee(s) most benefit from this support? What could have improved with this support?
   ii. If not, would you find this helpful?

c. In early employment, what were the employee(s) roles and responsibilities?
   i. Have these roles and responsibilities changed over time?

d. Did you make any accommodations for your employee?
   i. If so, which accommodation was the hardest to make?
   ii. Were there any additional financial costs?
   iii. Did your employee(s) receive any type of subsidy? What do you think of subsidies for disabled workers?

e. Were you ever concerned about your employee(s) not being able to maintain their employment?
   i. If so, what did you do to mitigate these concerns? Are there any concerns around this presently?

f. Were there any challenges that had to be overcome so that your employee(s) could successfully perform their job?
   i. If so, how did your employee(s) deal with those issues? How did you and your colleagues deal with those issues? How were you involved in those issues?

g. What would have improved the early employment experience?

3. Can you tell me about your employee(s) with ID?
   a. What do you value about your employee(s)?
      i. What do they contribute to your workplace?
   b. What have you learned from your employee(s)?
      i. What have other colleagues learned?
c. Do you have current assistance or support in retaining your employee(s), whether internal or external?
   i. If so, what do and your employee(s) benefit most from this support? What could improve this support?
   ii. If not, do you feel like you would benefit from assistance or support?

d. What do you think contributes to your employee(s) success within the company/organization? (examples: education, experience/skills, personality/attitude)

4. Overall, what has your experience been like with your employee(s) with ID?

5. Would you hire another person with ID again in the future? Why?

6. Why do you think other employers are not as eager to hire or retain people with ID?
   a. Do you agree with these reasons? Why or why not?
   b. What advice would you provide to other employers?
      i. During the hiring process
      ii. During the training process
      iii. In retaining workers with ID

7. Have you received any training regarding disabled workers?

8. How would you define disability?
   a. Do you have much interaction with disabled people outside of the workplace?

Conclusions

9. Before concluding, is there anything you would like to add that we have not talked about?