

Running Head: NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

**Navigating Transition Planning for Students with Individual Education Plans:
Perspectives of Transition Coordinators**

by

Authors:

Levonne Abshire

BA, University of British Columbia, 1998
BEd, University of British Columbia, 1999

Benjamin Bondar

BA, University of Alberta, 2003
BEd, University of British Columbia, 2007

Gabrielle Brown

BA, University of British Columbia, 1999
BEd, University of British Columbia, 2002

Stephanie Sy

BA, University of British Columbia, 2006
BEd, University of British Columbia, 2011

A GRADUATING PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Educational Administration and Leadership)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

March 2019

© Levonne Abshire, Benjamin Bondar, Gabrielle Brown, Stephanie Sy, 2019

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Abstract

Transitioning to adulthood can be challenging for students with disabilities, who experience poorer post-high school outcomes compared to their non-disabled counterparts; yet transition planning is not well studied in Canada. This qualitative study examined the perspectives of transition coordinators, or the educators responsible for coordinating transition-planning services for students with documented disabilities necessitating Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Our two main research questions were: (a) What do transition coordinators believe to be best practices regarding transition planning? and (b) What are the actual practices of transition coordinators in high schools? To answer these questions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with four transition coordinators in independent high schools in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), and systematically coded the interview transcripts using thematic analysis. The main themes that emerged were (a) transition coordinator training and experience, (b) favourable conditions created by the independent school, (c) transition-planning process that starts in early high school and proceeds logically, (d) a student-centred approach to transition planning, (e) effective curriculum and instruction for students with disabilities, and (f) effective collaboration within the school and with external parties. It was found that the four transition coordinators' conceptions of best practices and actual practices were largely congruent with the practices recommended in the research literature; however, due to our small sample size these results are not generalizable to other contexts.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Preface

This capstone research is original, unpublished, independent work by the authors, Levonne Abshire, Benjamin Bondar, Gabrielle Brown, and Stephanie Sy. Ethics approval for this research was received by the University of British Columbia (UBC) Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) on January 3rd, 2019, and is covered by UBC BREB Number H18-03403.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Preface	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	x
List of Acronyms.....	xi
Glossary	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Problematic.....	1
1.2 Purpose.....	4
1.3 Context.....	7
1.3.1 Transition-planning policy in British Columbia.....	7
1.3.2 Independent schools.....	10
1.3.3 Personal motivation.....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	15
2.1 Purpose.....	15
2.2 Systematic Review Process.....	16
2.2.1 Inclusions and exclusions in our research	16
2.3 Defining Transitions and Transition Planning	17
2.3.1 Transition.....	18

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

2.3.2 Transition planning	19
2.4 Person-centred Planning	21
2.5 Relevant Student Skills and Preparation.....	23
2.5.1 Self-determination.....	23
2.5.2 Self-advocacy	24
2.5.3 Student-centred learning.....	24
2.5.4 Other relevant skills and preparation techniques	25
2.6 Timing of Transition Planning	26
2.7 Role of the Transition Coordinator.....	29
2.7.1 Role of the transition coordinator in BC	30
2.8 Roles of Other Educational Professionals.....	32
2.8.1 Role of the transition-skills teacher	33
2.8.2 Role of the counsellor	36
2.9 Caregiver Involvement.....	37
2.10 Interagency Collaboration.....	39
2.11 Views on Transition Planning from Support Organizations in BC	40
2.11.1 Inclusion BC	40
2.11.2 Community Living BC.....	40
2.11.3 Services to Adults with Developmental Disabilities.....	41

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

2.11.4 An overall look at transition support agencies in BC	42
2.12 Gaps in the Research.....	43
2.13 Conclusion.....	44
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	46
3.1 Overall Research Purpose and Design.....	46
3.2 Research Site	46
3.3 Population under Investigation.....	48
3.4 Research Paradigm	49
3.5 Participant Recruitment.....	50
3.6 Data Collection.....	51
3.7 Data Analysis	52
3.8 How Results Will Be Shared and with Whom.....	54
3.9 Ethical Considerations	55
3.10 Limitations of the Study.....	58
Chapter 4: Data Analysis.....	59
4.1 Introduction.....	59
4.2 Transition Coordinator Profiles.....	61
4.2.1 Roles and responsibilities.....	62
4.2.2 Not “transition coordinators”.....	63

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

4.2.3 Levels of experience and training.....	64
4.3 Context of Independent Schools in BC.....	67
4.3.1 Greater support for students with IEPs	67
4.3.2 High expectations placed on students	68
4.3.3 Lack of reference to policy documents or government agencies.....	70
4.4 Overview of Transition-planning Processes	71
4.5 Student-centred Approach to Transition Planning	75
4.5.1 Self-identity	75
4.5.2 Self-advocacy	76
4.6 Curriculum and Instruction	79
4.6.1 Literacy and numeracy skills.....	79
4.6.2 Executive functions.....	79
4.6.3 Emotional regulation/control.....	80
4.6.4 Career development	80
4.6.5 Life skills.....	81
4.7 Collaboration.....	82
4.7.1 The importance of collaboration.....	82
4.7.2 Collaboration between educational professionals within the school.....	84
4.7.3 Roles of school counsellors.....	84

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

4.7.4 Collaboration with caregivers.....	86
4.7.5 External agency collaboration	88
4.7.5.1 Postsecondary institutions	88
4.7.5.2 Between schools.....	89
4.7.5.3 External paraprofessionals.....	90
4.8 Discussion of Findings.....	90
4.8.1 Response to our problematic	90
4.9 Recommendations for Action and Further Research.....	93
4.9.1 One repository for transition planning documents with a consistent conceptualization	93
4.9.2 Development of a transition planning curriculum	94
4.9.3 Regularization of transition coordinator role and training.....	94
4.9.4 Greater collaboration.....	96
4.9.5 Research around mental health.....	97
4.9.6 Greater attention paid to inclusive education	98
4.9.7 Impact of caseloads on student outcomes	99
4.9.8 Research in both public and independent schools	100
4.9.9 Student follow-up studies.....	101
4.9.10 Summary of recommendations	101
Chapter 5: Conclusion	103

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

References.....	106
Appendix A.....	120
Appendix B.....	121
Appendix C.....	123
Appendix D.....	124
Appendix E.....	127
Appendix F.....	130
Appendix G.....	132
Appendix H.....	134
Appendix I.....	136

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

List of Figures

Figure 1. Systematic Literature Review Process. 17

Figure 2. Main themes, categories, and codes agreed upon after individualized coding..... 60

Figure 3. Chart of participant profiles: Anna, Beth, Cathy, and Dawn. 67

Figure 4. Timelines of the transition-planning process at School A and B. 73

Figure 5. Timelines of the transition-planning process at School C and D. 74

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

List of Acronyms

ASCA	American School Counselor Association
BREB	Behavioural Research Ethics Board
BC	British Columbia
CLBC	Community Living BC
CLD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
FISA	Federation of Independent School Associations
DCDT	The Division on Career Development and Transition
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual Education Plan
LISA	Longitudinal and International Study of Adults
MCFD	Ministry of Children and Family Development
MoE	Ministry of Education
NLTS	National Longitudinal Transition Study
NLTS2	National Longitudinal Transition Study-2
NLTS 2012	National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012
OLSit	Own it, Learn it, and Share it
SEP	Special Education Policy
SES Manual	Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines
STADD	Services to Adults with Developmental Disabilities
US	United States
UBC	University of British Columbia
VSBC	Vancouver School Board

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Glossary

Disability – a visible or invisible condition that prevents people from engaging in activities accessible to able-bodied or “typical” people.

Executive function – the different cognitive processes used to control behavior and to connect past experience with present action, such as planning, organizing, strategizing, managing time, and tracking details.

Self-advocacy – students’ ability to effectively communicate their strengths, weaknesses, needs, desires, interests, and rights, and negotiate on their own behalf.

Student-centred learning/Person-centred learning – an encompassing teaching and learning strategy which positions students as the owners of their learning.

Self-determination – students’ ability to make their own choices and determine the direction of their lives.

Transition – moving from one stage to another, or a development from one form to another. In our paper, this term refers to students’ change in status from high-school students to adults.

Transition coordinator – a person who provides organizational and administrative oversight of transition-planning processes.

Transition planning – the coordination of services that aid students in making major transitions during their lives.

Transition-skills teacher – a person who directly teaches transition skills to students.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Problematic

Transitioning to adulthood can be highly challenging for students with disabilities. They must not only make decisions about future living arrangements, education, employment, finances, and community and social involvement, but must also learn to navigate through a new set of bureaucratic, legal, and educational structures that offer support for adults with disabilities. Indeed, students with disabilities and their families may find themselves overwhelmed by the complexities of the transition process. Transition-planning activities include understanding and utilizing special education policies, finding and obtaining the services of a wide range of agencies, consulting with busy school counsellors and postsecondary admissions officers, collaborating with workplace mentors, and more. For many students with disabilities, this time of change is one of the most difficult parts of their lives (Newman et al., 2011; Turcotte, 2015).

Evidence suggests that many students with disabilities do not transition successfully from high school to adulthood. Despite policy and legislation to promote equity and inclusion, students with disabilities experience poorer post-high school outcomes compared to their counterparts without disabilities. According to the Canadian Survey on Disability (2012), a national survey conducted by Statistics Canada, 16% of adults with disabilities obtained university-level degrees compared to 31% of adults without disabilities (Arim, 2017, p.3). Additionally, in the same survey, it was found that the employment rate of Canadians with disabilities between the ages of 25 to 64 was only 49%, compared with 79% for Canadians without a disability (Turcotte, 2014, p. 1). Breaking these statistics down further, the employment rate for Canadians with a mild disability was 68%, compared with 54% of those

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

with a moderate disability, 42% of persons with a severe disability, and 26% among those with a very severe disability (Turcotte, 2014, p. 1). Canadians with disabilities are also more likely to have low incomes, as reported by the 2014 Longitudinal and International Study of Adults (LISA), which examined the relationship between low income and characteristics of Canadians aged 25 to 64 with a disability living in Canada or abroad. In 2014, 23% of Canadians with disabilities were in the low-income bracket (defined as earning less than half of the median Canadian income, adjusted for household size), compared with 9% of those without a disability (Wall, 2017, p. 1). The rate of low income was 17% for those with a physical-sensory disability, 27% for those with a mental-cognitive disability, and 35% for those with a combination of both (Wall, 2017, p. 1). These data imply the need for better design and implementation of transition-planning programs for students with disabilities, particularly those with severe or concurrent disabilities.

In the United States (US), similar inequalities exist. A survey commissioned by the United States Department of Education, the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 (NLTS 2012),¹ collected data from students and caregivers over two years, 2012-2013. It was found that 76% of youth 13 to 21 years old with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) planned to enroll in some type of postsecondary education or training compared to 94% of those without an IEP, a gap of nearly 20% (National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2018, p. ii). Actual enrollment figures have not yet been reported for this cohort, but in the earlier National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2, 2001-2009), it was found that participants

¹ National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 (NLTS 2012) is a study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. A summary of key findings can be found: <https://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=NCEE20184011>

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

with disabilities had enrolled in postsecondary school less frequently than those without disabilities (60% versus 67%) within eight years of leaving high school. Young adults with disabilities were more likely than their peers in the general population to enroll in a two-year college (44% versus 21%) or postsecondary vocational school (32% versus 20%); on the other hand, young adults in the general population were more likely to have attended a four-year college (40% versus 19%). Inequalities also persist in the United States in the area of employment; in 2017, among the 20 to 24 year-old age group participating in the labour force, 16% of those with disabilities were unemployed, compared with 7% of those without disabilities (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Because the transition-planning process is so complex and the outcomes so significant, it is critical that educators provide support to students with disabilities making the transition between high school and adulthood. There are many challenges, however, that educators must overcome in order to facilitate the transition-planning process. Key challenges for educators, as identified by researchers, include helping students to make decisions and advocate for themselves (Hitchings, Retish, & Horvath, 2005; Milsom & Hartley, 2005); conducting planning sessions so that student and parent voices are not only heard but central to the process (Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Thoma, Rogan, & Baker, 2001); helping students to develop career-related skills and experiences while still in school (Cummings, Casey, & Maddux, 2000); and helping students accrue the knowledge, experience, and connections required to successfully handle these various issues (Cummings et al., 2000). Considering the many challenges inherent to the transition-planning process, as well as the relatively poor outcomes of students with disability after high school, it is essential that educators in the transition-planning field arm themselves

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

with knowledge and enact effective practices. Our research study was developed in response to this problem.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to better understand the perspectives of transition coordinators, or those who coordinate transition planning for students with documented visible and invisible disabilities necessitating IEPs. Our research will be centred on four semi-structured interviews of transition coordinators in independent high schools in our context of Metro Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), the westernmost province of Canada. Transition planning is mandated as part of the BC Ministry of Education² *Special Education Policy (SEP, 2006)*, which states that IEPs must include “plans for the next transition point in the student’s education (including transitions beyond school completion” (p. 5). In order to achieve the goals of this policy, it is of paramount concern that transition coordinators have a clear conception of best practices as supported by evidence-based research; according to Park (2008), identifying best practices is critical in transition planning in order to effectively support students. It is also of paramount concern that best practices be enacted in fact, not only conceived of theoretically; in our lived experience, educators often feel unable to enact best practices due to a lack of time or resources. Thus, our research attempted to answer the following questions in our context of Metro Vancouver, BC: (a) What do transition coordinators believe to be best practices regarding transition planning? and (b) What are the actual practices of transition coordinators in high schools?

² Education is provincially mandated in Canada; thus, the educational policies relevant to our context are at the provincial rather than national level.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Our goal is to make a significant contribution to the field, as research on transition planning is not well developed in Canada. One group of Canadian researchers, Schwartz, Mactavish, and Lutfiyya (2006), in their qualitative study of several transition coordinators in the city of Winnipeg, even comment that the research in Canada is “sparse” (p. 76). There is a notable dearth of research on BC in particular, and we believe our study will help provide more knowledge regarding transition planning in relation to the specific contextual factors of our province’s educational system. What is more, knowledge needs to be shared and utilized among transition educators in this country. In the Canadian studies that do exist, a common theme is the need for more coordination and connections between different parties involved in transitions. To be more specific, researchers have identified a need for better knowledge of community options among educators (Goupil, Tassé, Garcin, & Doré, 2002), stronger community connections (Schwartz, et al., 2006), better coordination between agencies, and involvement of students and caregivers in transition planning in Canadian contexts (Park, 2008).

We limited our study to independent schools, that is, schools operating under the control of a private entity rather than the government (Frenette & Chan, 2015, p. 6). We chose to study independent schools because (a) independent schools have heretofore been almost wholly neglected in the research on transition planning, especially in Canada where much of the literature focuses on public schools (Park, 2008; Schwartz, et al., 2006); and (b) the number of special needs students enrolling in independent schools is rapidly rising in BC. According to the BC Ministry of Education (MoE), there was an increase of approximately 250% in the number of special needs students (60,067 to 66,543) enrolling in independent schools between 2012 and 2016 (BC Ministry of Education, n.d.-b). Overall enrollment in independent schools is also

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

increasing rapidly, with BC now having the highest percent in the country (MacLeod & Hasan, 2017).

In order to utilize the provincial *SEP* (2006) as a baseline for understanding of our province's context factors, we limited our study to independent schools that fall under the policy. In other words, our study only included schools that receive provincial funding for their special education programs (see Appendix A). We did not include schools enrolling students with disabilities that do not receive government funding for educating them. It should be noted that though both independent and public schools operate under the *SEP* in BC, there are unique factors affecting how independent schools operate their special education programs. One important difference is in how special needs funding is distributed; in the public system, funding for individual students with disabilities is given to public school districts (which then decide how to allocate the funding among schools), while in the independent system, the funding is given directly to the schools. A second important difference is that the BC MoE inspects independent schools, including their special education program, using a protocol that differs from the one used to inspect public schools. Thus, there are likely noticeable differences in the transition-planning programs of independent schools compared to those of public schools, despite the shared special-education policy framework. These divergences may provide a rich basis for discussion. We did not conduct any interviews in public schools, so a comparison of the two systems was beyond the scope of this study, but we believe that our research can lay the groundwork for cross-system studies in the future.

As mentioned previously, the first goal of our research was to identify current conceptions of best practices in transition planning among educators in independent schools. We compared these conceptions with the best practices espoused in the *SEP* (2006) and the research

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

literature, noting points of convergence and divergence. We noted conceptual and practical gaps, then analyzed their nature and attempted to provide reasons for why they exist. The second goal of our study was to research how transition planning actually plays out in practice in independent schools. We set out to learn how educators navigate their local contextual factors as well as the broader policy environment as they translate their conceptions about transition planning into practice. Studying this process helped us to shed light on factors that help or hinder transition coordinators as they attempt to fulfill their complex role. As we explored these two research questions, we examined how conditions specific to independent schools may impact the work of transition coordinators. We believe that examining the interplay between local factors at independent schools and the wider policy environment revealed fresh insights. Ultimately, we intend to make a contribution to the nascent field of transition planning for students with disabilities in BC, and thereby make a positive impact on the ability of educators and schools to effectively plan for and execute effective transition plans for their students.

1.3 Context

1.3.1 Transition-planning policy in British Columbia. Transition planning is defined vaguely in the special-education policy framework of BC. According to the BC MoE *SEP* implementation guide, *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines* (*SES Manual*, 2016b), transition planning is the “preparation, implementation and evaluation required to enable students to make major transitions during their lives” (p. VI). This is a broad definition compared to others found in academic literature. To some researchers, the term “transition planning” may only refer to the process of mapping out a transitions plan, and not include actual practical implementation steps (Morningstar, Trainor, & Murray, 2015; Rodriguez, Cumming, & Strnadová, 2017, p. 2). However, when we use the term “transition

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

planning,” we will follow the definition provided by the BC MoE. This definition mentions not only planning but also implementation and evaluation activities (*SES Manual*, 2016b, p. VI).

The BC MoE acknowledges that the transition process for a student with disabilities requires careful planning. The MoE’s *SES Manual* (2016b) recommends that transition planning involve individual transition goal development, student follow-up studies, and long-range planning. Furthermore, the manual states that it is essential for school districts and individual schools to establish procedures to support collaborative consultation during the transition into and from the school system. Collaboration in transition planning should involve school personnel, district staff, and representatives from community services such as pre-schools and postsecondary institutions, professionals from other ministries, caregivers, and the students themselves. For most transitions, the roles and responsibilities of personnel need to be formalized. Though the *SES Manual* does not mention the term “transition coordinator,” it does state that a carefully developed and coordinated transition plan will specify the supports and services necessary to enable the student to be successful at school and in the community. Transition plans should be written in the student’s IEP, a key document used to track the individualized learning program of a special education student. Transition planning should begin at least one year before entry into kindergarten, one year before the transition to another school, and two to three years before leaving high school. We will focus only on this third phase of transition planning that occurs in high school in preparation for adulthood. Planning should be specific to individual student needs and should address the specifics in meeting those needs. Plans should include the actions needed, the initiator for each action, and approximate date for the action and completion or follow-up dates (*SES Manual*, Appendix, p. 34).

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

The *SES Manual* is not the only governmental guide to transition planning in BC. Perhaps in acknowledgement of the complexity of transition planning and the need for coordination, the BC MoE has published a 205-page document entitled *Career/Life Transitions for Students with Diverse Needs: A Resource Guide for Schools* (2001). In addition, the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) has published the 38-page *Transition Planning for Youth with Special Needs: A Community Support Guide* (2005). Both documents outline principles and practices to support educators as they work with students and families during the transition process. The MoE resource guide advocates a team approach to transition planning, stating that a “team of individuals, including students and their parents, will develop an individual career/life transition plan that will prepare students for the post-school stage of their lives” (p.8). The term “transition coordinator” is not used. On the other hand, the MCFD support guide advocates the appointment of an individual as transition coordinator, stating:

The identification and use of a transition coordinator is viewed as a best practice. This role can be assumed by a variety of individuals including the youth transitioning to adulthood, the parent or guardian, another family member or a school-based employee. If the plan is not school-based, the youth and his or her family may choose a transition coordinator from the planning team. If the youth is attending school, a school-based employee typically assumes the role of the coordinator of the IEP/Transition Plan (p. 12).

To add to this complexity, the Government of BC has also published the 15-page Cross Ministry *Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Special Needs* (2009), which briefly advocates for the appointment of a transition coordinator (p. 9). The Government of BC document may carry the most influence, being the most recent (2009). It is a “protocol” rather than a “guide” or “resource,” published by the whole of the BC government rather than by a single ministry.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

It should be noted that public school districts and individual schools must also create their own local special education policies if they are to receive funding for their special education programs. Having a well-defined local policy is likely to help transition coordinators wade through the complex policy landscape. The Vancouver School Board (VSB), for example, has created a district policy (2015) synthesizing advice from a number of policy documents. It is a straightforward 29-page document, containing six best practices and six steps to transition planning (p. 5-7). In regards to transition coordinators, the VSB policy advocates first building a planning team for each student and then appointing a transition coordinator to organize the individual members of the team, dealing neatly with the contradiction between the MoE's team approach (2001) and the MCFD's single-coordinator approach (2005). At independent schools, special-education policies must be in line with the BC *SEP* (2006) and thereby the *SES Manual* (2016b), including its section on transition planning, according to the most recent inspection document produced by the MoE (2018).

Overall, the policy landscape around transitions in BC is complex and not easily accessible. It is quite possible that many transition coordinators in independent schools are not aware of all of the policy documents we have mentioned, as the documents are not gathered on one centralized website or in one office. It is our hope that policy makers may find our research helpful in determining the efficacy of the current policy, including our recommendations for future revisions to policy (found at the end of Chapter 4 of this document).

1.3.2 Independent schools. Independent schools in BC are highly varied. The Fraser Institute, a private research organization in BC, characterizes independent schools in the following way: “Contrary to the common caricature that they are enclaves for the urban elite, independent schools parents [sic] come in a wide variety of types and serve many educational

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

preferences. They address diverse religious preferences, pedagogical variations, and special needs” (Allison, Hasan, & Van Pelt, 2016). As the tone of the quotation suggests, there is tension in BC around the notion of independent schools being seemingly reserved for affluent families (Watanabe, 2008, p. 3). It is important to note, however, that there is no single default “type” of independent school. Transition planning is therefore likely to be highly varied in independent schools, with local factors being highly significant in how planning is conceived of and implemented. One researcher, Watanabe, writing a narrative account of her time as special-education learning assistant at two Catholic independent schools, points out this complexity, stating that “as complex as special education issues are in the public education system, the situation in the independent schools in British Columbia is even more intricate and convoluted” (2008, p. 3).

Yet independent schools are rarely studied in depth in BC. Characterizations of independent schools are mainly to be found in the media, often for political purposes. For example, those who wish to promote independent schools may state that these types of schools can provide greater services to students compared to the public schools. The publication *Our Kids Media*, a print and online magazine dedicated to promoting private education in Canada (including independent schools, camps, programs, and activities), claims, “Independent schools for children with special needs are especially adept at creating customized learning experiences that address the individual needs and maximize the abilities of each child” (n.d., para. 1). On the other hand, there are many commenters who disparage independent schools. One public school teacher, writing in the Vancouver newspaper *The Tyee*, expresses worries about the government “throttling our public-school system, turning it into a ghetto, [and] driving middle-class families towards private schools with their gated-community mentality and non-union staff” (Smith,

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

2012, para. 7). Discussions on schooling in BC are often politically charged; for example, in Watanabe's aforementioned narrative account (2008), she notes that BC's public versus private education contains "much rhetoric, misconception, and misunderstanding on both sides" (p. 3).

The potential for political disagreement may explain why the government's special-education policy documents do not make special reference to independent schools. The introduction of the BC *SES Manual* (2016b), for instance, states that the manual is a resource to "support the delivery of special education services in British Columbia's *public schools* [emphasis added]" (p. iii). Following this introduction, the manual does mention independent schools frequently, but it does not portray independent-school special education programs as being distinct from those of public schools, despite the differences between the two systems. Rather, public and independent systems are portrayed as simply operating alongside each other, as evidenced by variations on the phrase "public or independent schools" (p. 69, 83, Appendix, p. 6, 27) or "school board or independent school authority" (p. 80, Appendix, p. 18). As for the *SES Manual*'s two-page section on transition planning (Appendix, p. 34), neither type of school system is mentioned, implying that there is no difference between the two in regards to how they handle transition planning (Appendix, p. 34-35).

By contrast, in the United States, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act³ (IDEA) (2004) differentiates between public and private systems. It states that public agencies may refer a child with a disability to an independent school, at no cost to caregivers, if deemed necessary

³ IDEA was originally passed as the Education of Handicapped Children Act in 1975. It was amended in 1990 to include the changing population, inclusion of transition planning, research, cultural diversity and to put the individual first rather than the disability. Further amendments were made in 1997 and 2004. We will use the year 2004 as the year of reference to maintain consistency in our research paper.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

as a means of carrying out the requirements of the act (Section 1412), including the requirement for transition services (Section 300.43). Public schools in the United States, in other words, may sometimes rely on independent schools to provide transition planning services beyond what is available in the public system. To illustrate this notion at a lower jurisdictional level, in the US state of New Jersey, an organization named ASAH (formerly the Association of Schools and Agencies for the Handicapped) provides consultative services to public school districts to assist students with transition planning and implementation (Fingles, Hinkle, & Van Horn, p. 2).

ASAH is an association of special-education private schools and agencies. By comparison, BC government policy on transition planning does not highlight private institutions as a supplement to the public system, and public schools are not told that they may refer students to the independent schools in order to fulfill a specific need (*SEP*, 2006; *SES Manual*, 2016b). Instead, the policy manual recommends that public schools turn to resource programs hosted by public institutions such as universities or hospitals (p. 93-96). The special-education policy landscape in BC, then, is oriented toward the public system more than the private sector.

1.3.3 Personal motivation. The critical transition period out of high school is of interest to our research group for both professional and personal reasons. Within our group, we have family members and students with special needs who have experienced the critical transition period out of high school or who will do so in the future. We are concerned about the future prospects of our family members and students as they attempt to become independent adults, and interested in the curriculum and life skills that are taught at different schools. Since we all work in independent schools in Metro Vancouver, we would like to know more about what the term “best practices” in transition planning might entail in our system. When we teach students with special needs, we find transition planning to be challenging due to a lack of knowledge, skills,

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

and resources to effectively prepare students for life after high school. We have seen how early diagnosis of disability and timely intervention can positively impact the transition out of high school. Thus, we undertook this study in order to better understand the transition-planning process to better support our students with special needs and their families, as well as people in our personal lives who would benefit from the knowledge we gained.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this literature review is to provide information about the research-based theories and practices being utilized in transition planning for students with disabilities moving from high school to adulthood in schools in Canada and the United States. Using our findings from the literature review, we compared the practices recommended by researchers to those that are advocated and implemented by transition coordinators in British Columbia (BC). The terminology and themes we found in our research provided us with the language and knowledge to create research questions, engage in informed discussions, and perform detailed analysis.

The literature around transition planning revealed several recurring themes, the most important of which we used to organize our literature review. These themes are:

1. Person-centred Planning;
2. Relevant Student Skills and Preparation;
3. Timing of Transition Planning;
4. Role of the Transition Coordinator;
5. Roles of Other Educational Professionals;
6. Caregiver Involvement;
7. Interagency Collaboration;
8. Views on Transition Planning from Support Organizations in BC;
9. Gaps in the Research.

Most of our research is sourced from academic journals, though we also refer to some websites and guides designed by educators and support organizations for lay people, as well as policy documentation in BC. Prior to discussing our themes, we explain our systematic review process,

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

criteria for excluding and including studies in our review, and definitions related to transition planning.

2.2 Systematic Review Process

We conducted a systematic review of academic literature to become familiar with the field of transition planning for students with disabilities. To initiate our review, we carried out a search using the following keywords excerpted from our main research question: “transition planning” and “students with learning disabilities.” Using the *Education Source* database through the University of British Columbia (UBC) Library, we generated 42 results. We then limited the publication-date range to the years 2000 to 2017, after which 29 articles remained.

2.2.1 Inclusions and exclusions in our research. We set exclusionary boundaries on our literature review in order to narrow in on our particular area of research, that is, the conceptions and practices of transition coordinators. Transition planning is a widely researched topic of inquiry in the United States (US) due to the impetus provided by the American government since the amended version of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, which ensures that students with a disability are given an education appropriate to their individual needs. Practices around Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and disabilities have changed quite significantly in the years following the implementation of IDEA in 1997, so we chose to focus on research published since that year. However, when appropriate, we have traced the origins of some key definitions and concepts to seminal research published prior to this legislation. Our research has remained focused on work from Canada and the US, where the educational systems tend to have similar goals of inclusion and support services. We found less grounds for comparison to our context in other countries and parts of the world, such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand; thus, we excluded studies from outside of Canada and the US.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Finally, we restricted the amount of research we have done on the teaching of transition skills, as this is a full topic of its own. Our literature review is focused on the areas of planning and coordination, which precede the instructional teaching of skills needed for successful transition. In certain instances, we discuss the teaching of transition skills where it is discussed in related literature, but we do not fully explore the literature and research on this topic. These boundaries were designed to focus our literature review on our research questions regarding the conceptions and practices of the transition coordinator. Figure 1 below lays out our process.

Source	<i>Education Source Database</i>	
Keywords from research questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Transition planning” • “Students with learning disabilities” 	Results = 42
Publication date range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2000 - 2017 • Prior to 2000 when key concepts or definitions needed to be traced or verified. 	
Exclusionary boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excluded countries outside of Canada and the US • Specific publications about teaching of transition skills rather than coordinating or planning. 	
Inclusionary boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada and the US only • Publications focused on transition planning and coordinating rather than teaching transition skills. 	
		Results = 29

Figure 1. Systematic Literature Review Process.

2.3 Defining Transitions and Transition Planning

Our literature review covers research from several states in the US and provinces in Canada, with an acknowledgement that each context is influenced by differing federal and provincial/state legislation. With this variation in mind, it is important to ensure that the language we use is clear and understood across educational bodies. This section defines the terms of transition and transition planning to establish a common understanding for the purposes of this research project.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

2.3.1 Transition. In the US, the term transition was strongly adopted by the Division on Career Development of the Council for Exceptional Children, a professional association of educators, in 1987. By 1994, the division changed its name to the Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT), as it is currently known, to reflect the importance of the transition process in career development for students with disabilities. In 1994, Halpern wrote a position paper for the DCDT to emphasize the progress made in research and support of transition planning for youth with disabilities since the inception of the division seven years prior. The position paper provides us a contextual definition:

Transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in postsecondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships (p. 117).

Halpern goes on to explicate the four major components of a successful transition, which are as follows:

- an emerging sense of student empowerment which eventually enhances student self-determination within the transition-planning process;
- student self-evaluation, as a foundation for transition planning;
- student identification of post-school transition goals that are consistent with the outcomes of their self-evaluations; and
- student selection of appropriate educational experiences to pursue during high school, both in school and within the broader community, that are consistent with their self-evaluations and their post-school goals (p. 117-118).

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

The DCDT definition implies that high standards of achievement should be set for students undergoing transition. After leaving high school, students with disabilities should not be summarily shuffled into whatever sort of employment, schooling, or other form of occupation is most convenient while remaining dependent on others. The student should be empowered and able to make their own decisions wisely, and to lead a meaningful, fully realized life, which includes social and emotional fulfillment in the broadest sense.

This high standard of achievement necessitates a high degree of support. The term “transition services” is sometimes used to refer to the programs provided by organizations, including schools, in order to enhance transition support for students. The IDEA legislation (US Department of Education, 2004) defines transition services as:

a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; [and] is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests (see Sec. 300.43).

Notable within this definition are the descriptors “results-oriented,” which implies expectations of effectiveness and accountability, and “based on the individual child’s needs,” which demands a high degree of personalization from service providers. We discuss this concept of personalization more in section 2.4 Person-centred Planning.

2.3.2 Transition planning. The term “transition planning” is typically defined as the process of coordinating the broad range of transition services provided by schools and other

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

organizations (Park, 2008). One of the most influential uses of the term is found in Kohler's widely cited "Taxonomy for Transition Programming: A Model for Planning, Organizing, and Evaluating Transition Education, Services, and Programs" (1996), a guide for organizations regarding transition planning activities such as creating goals, holding meetings to plan supports, doing assessments, and making referrals to adult services. Kohler's "Taxonomy" explains transition planning as a specific part of a broader category of "transition programming" (a term used to describe organizational capacity to offer transition services), and those who cite Kohler tend to see transition planning as one part of a larger range of services. Thus, transition planning is differentiated from the teaching of transition skills in much of the research. A study on transition teacher skills by Morgan, Callow-Heusser, Horrocks, Hoffmann, and Kupferman (2013), for example, refers to transition planning as one among many transition teacher skill areas; others include assessment, instructional planning, curriculum and instruction, and communication and collaboration.

However, in some research, transition planning not only includes coordinating a set of activities, but also to the realization of those activities. For example, in their survey study of transition practices in three American states, Rodriguez, Cumming, and Strnadová (2017) state that "Transition planning includes assessment, planning, and direct instruction related to the student's transition needs" (p. 2). A similar definition is used in *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines (SES Manual)*, the policy manual on special education published by the BC Ministry of Education (MoE, 2016b). According to the manual, "Transition planning is the preparation, *implementation and evaluation* [emphasis added], required to enable students to make major transitions during their lives" (p. VI). Since our research focuses on BC, in our literature review we follow the guidelines of the BC MoE and use

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

the term transition planning to refer broadly to the support services provided by educators who coordinate with families, various professionals, and external agencies in preparation for a student's transition from high school to adult life.

In the sections below, we discuss the aspects of transition planning that are frequently mentioned in the literature. Research in these areas provided a framework of relevant knowledge that allowed us to engage in informed discussions with transition coordinators and analyze data meaningfully in the course of our research.

2.4 Person-centred Planning

According to the literature, one of the most important ways in which schools can develop a successful transition-planning program is to utilize a person-centred planning framework. This is an approach in which the individual with special needs is placed in a leadership role during the transition-planning and service-delivery process (Milsom & Hartley, 2005; Thoma et al., 2001). A leadership role includes attending and leading IEP meetings, communicating with external agencies, having knowledge of one's own disability, having knowledge of postsecondary support services, having knowledge of disability legislation, and having the ability and opportunity to self-advocate (Milsom & Hartley, 2005).⁴ Person-centred planning puts an emphasis on self-determination and personal involvement as the youth makes choices around planning for his or her future. This approach to transition planning has been shown to enhance individualized service planning and outcomes for the individual (Malette et al., 1992). Students who are engaged in their own transition planning are more likely to pursue postsecondary education and

⁴ This approach is also known as student-centred planning. However, the term person-centred planning may be more appropriate than student-centred planning among non-school agencies.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

find success with other adult-related transitions (Milsom & Hartley, 2005). The ultimate goal of a person-centred planning approach is to create supports and opportunities that enable a person with special needs to experience an informed and self-directed life.

The research we reviewed suggests that a person-centred approach to transition planning begins with the involvement of both the student and the caregivers, as these individuals are the focus of the support plan (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). The student and the caregivers have the best insight into the individual's goals and needs for adult life, and they are permanent members of the planning team while educators might come and go. The most significant outcome of person-centred planning is that the goals are reflective of the interests and dreams of the individual rather than the goals that educational professionals believe should be set (Thoma et al., 2001). Transition coordinators, ideally, are situated as supporters rather than ultimate decision-makers on transition teams. Their role is to ensure that all aspects of transition planning are covered, to ensure that the student's voice is heard, and to support the caregivers in connecting with adult agencies and services. The ultimate decision-maker should be the person (student/youth) and his or her caregivers, which is the essence of person-centred planning.

Person-centred planning, however, can be difficult to implement. In a 2002 study attempting to quantitatively assess the processes and outcomes of person-centred planning, Holburn states, "it is likely that a high percentage of person-centered planning ventures end in failure" (p. 252). He points out that failures to implement person-centred planning effectively are not necessarily rooted in the concept itself, but rather due to flaws in implementation. Barriers to successful implementation include time and resource constraints (Michaels & Ferrara, 2006); the need for highly skilled, culturally sensitive facilitators who are able to re-examine myths and stereotypes (Callicott, 2003); the tendency of adults to take over the process (Mason, Mcgahee-

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Kovac, Johnson, & Stillerman, 2002); safety concerns when allowing youths to test their limits (Michaels & Ferrara, 2006); and excessive optimism leading to unrealistic goal-setting and rejection of the process when it does not produce satisfactory results (Holburn & Cea, 2007, p. 170). Simply put, person-centred planning is highly complex, and organizations should provide sufficient support and training if they hope to implement it successfully. Person-centred planning, as an overall strategy, can be broken down into the teaching and learning of specific skills, as discussed in the following section.

2.5 Relevant Student Skills and Preparation

With students at the centre of the planning process, it is important that transition planning include the development of skills that will help individuals with disabilities take or maintain a leadership role and allow them to be more prepared for life after school. The necessary skills can be laid out at developmentally appropriate stages of a student's school career. Amongst the skills reviewed below, self-determination and self-advocacy were most often identified as key skills needed for students to successfully transition from high school into their adult lives, whether it be into postsecondary programs, vocational training or community living (Cummings et al., 2000; Hitchings et al., 2005; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Thoma et al., 2001).

2.5.1 Self-determination. One of the key transition skills identified by researchers is self-determination. Wehmeyer's (1996) definition of this term, referenced in multiple articles, states that self-determination means being "the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence or interference" (p. 282). Another definition can be found within Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory, which states that competence (the belief in the ability to accomplish a task), autonomy (choosing for oneself), and relatedness (how one relates to adults) will result in

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

greater self-motivation and mental health (2000). According to this theory, students who experience competence, autonomy, and relatedness towards their transition goals are likely to have more intrinsic motivation towards achieving them. Ryan and Deci (2000) also state that educators who arm themselves with knowledge in regards to positive motivation and experience will have students with enhanced performance and well-being. Self-determination theory, which was developed by Ryan and Deci as part of their work on human motivation at the University of Rochester, is potentially a useful theory for transition coordinators to consider, when looking at student-centred learning and its importance to transition planning.

2.5.2 Self-advocacy. Self-advocacy, as another key element of adult life, is defined by Van Reusen (1996) as “the ability of an individual to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert one’s own interests, desires, needs and rights[,] the ability to make informed decisions [and] taking responsibility for those decisions” (p. 49-50). The literature consistently states that attaining high levels of success after high school requires students with disabilities to have a clear understanding of how they will use, manage, and articulate their strengths and weaknesses as they transition into new environments and begin working and learning from new people (Cummings et al., 2000; Hitchings et al., 2005; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). As students become adults, they are required and expected to speak more frequently on their own behalf and discuss their needs and accommodations directly with others. As a minimum condition, schools and educators need to plan how and when students will be learning and developing both self-determination and self-advocacy skills in different environments.

2.5.3 Student-centred learning. According to Lee and Hannafin (2016), student-centred learning “identifies students as the *owners* [emphasis added] of their learning” (p. 707). This sense of student ownership is seen as an extremely important component of successful transition

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

planning. Lee and Hannafin have synthesized current theories in the field of student-centered learning and identified three key constructs to assist students: autonomy, scaffolding, and authentic audience. Using these constructs, Lee and Hannafin (2016) have developed a practical framework that can benefit the field of transition planning: Own it, Learn it, and Share it, or OLSit. Applying OLSit to transition planning meetings may not only give students with IEPs an accessible strategy that is clear and concise but also, more significantly, help them to greatly improve their understanding of their role in the transition-planning process, as well as provide a more student-centred approach to learning.

2.5.4 Other relevant skills and preparation techniques. Furthermore, Hitchings et al. (2005), discuss a number of other ways that students need to be prepared for adult life upon finishing high school. The first is *self-knowledge*. During their transition-planning process, students need to contemplate and discuss questions about what they want to do after high school, what their dreams are, and where and how they want to live (Hitchings et al., 2005). The second is *experiences in mainstream classes* (Hitchings et al., 2005, p 33). Students who want to continue their education or training need to spend a significant amount of their secondary school career in general education classes to authentically experience general social expectations and dynamics (Hitchings et al., 2005). These students must also actively participate in *career development* (Hitchings et al., 2005). For typical students, much of the appropriate career development happens while watching and imitating professionals and role models that they encounter in their daily lives. However, students with disabilities, even those with “mild” learning disabilities, do not absorb this type of information as consistently or effectively as students without disabilities. Therefore, an important aspect of transition preparation is *explicit teaching and practice of skills*. When information is taught and practiced more explicitly, the

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

transition process tends to go more smoothly and lead to better outcomes. In her article “Nine Strategies to Improve College Transition Planning for Students With [sic] Disabilities,” Hamblet (2014) additionally recommends explicitly teaching students strategies for learning, organizing themselves, and using assistive technology. Students benefit from learning ways to help with test preparation, time management, written expression and tracking assignments (Hamblet, 2014). If students struggle with reading, academic writing, note taking, and/or exam preparation, assistive technology can support them in being independent in a postsecondary environment (Hamblet, 2014).

With these skills and strategies, students will be more likely to experience successful transition to their postsecondary education (Hamblet, 2014). Cummings et al. (2000), Hitchings et al. (2005), Shogren and Plotner (2012), Thoma et al. (2001), and Hamblet (2014) all describe self-determination, self-advocacy, self-knowledge, career development, authentic learning experiences, and explicit teaching as essential aspects of transition programs preparing students for adult life, whether it be in postsecondary education or otherwise. By providing opportunities to learn the knowledge, social expectations, tangible skills, and general abilities needed for success after high school, transition-planning programs can better prepare students for the rigours of adulthood.

2.6 Timing of Transition Planning

Learning the necessary skills for adult life requires a well-structured plan, and students with disabilities may need extra time and more explicit development of the key skills related to transitioning from high school to adult life compared to students without disabilities. Thus, starting the planning process early is a pivotal element of a successful transition-planning program. The BC MoE’s *SES Manual* (2016b) recommends that transition planning for

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

adulthood begin two to three years before school leaving, which typically means between the ages of 14 and 16. In other BC government documents, such as the MoE's resource guide on transition planning (2001), the Ministry of Child and Family Development's (MCFD) community support guide (2005), and the Government of BC's cross ministry protocol (2009), age 14 is consistently stated as an appropriate age to start transition planning.

However, beginning transition planning for adulthood at age 14 can be difficult, as students at that age may already be overwhelmed by other transitions in their lives, such as the move into more academically demanding courses, changes in their physical bodies, and the need to meet rapidly shifting social expectations. To a student who is still struggling to transition into high school and adolescence, starting a conversation about transitioning out of high school may feel premature and counterproductive. The academic literature, unfortunately, does not provide much advice on how to start transition planning with resistant students, or whether it is truly advisable to start transition planning at age 14 for all students with disabilities, or only the majority of them.

On the other hand, some sources state that transition planning should begin even earlier than age 14 to provide students with enough time to develop the skills they need for adulthood. Cummings, Maddux, and Casey, in the article, "Individualized Transition Plans for Students with Learning Disabilities" (2000), state that development of self-determination, self-advocacy, and career maturity can and should begin early in life in an ongoing process with developmentally appropriate skills at each age. Skills development or transition planning can be organized into a progressive curriculum spanning from elementary school through to high school leaving (Cummings et al., 2000). Similarly, Hitchings, Retish, and Horvath (2005), after analyzing the results of over 100 high school students with disabilities in the US, suggest that transition

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

planning should be a sustained program from upper elementary school. The impetus is that students with disabilities often need more time to develop the skills and maturity needed for successful transitions to adulthood.

However, starting transition planning in elementary school may present several difficulties. One major challenge is a potential lack of communication between different levels of schooling, or between different agencies that serve different age groups. Additionally, after each transition to a new setting, the new transition team must spend time learning about the student and assessing their needs about their career development and progression towards school leaving and adult life. The final and perhaps most important challenge with starting transition planning at an early age is the possibility of unduly influencing a student toward particular academic areas or career tracks. Students who spend extra time being taught transition skills may end up spending less time in the mainstream academic program, which can make it difficult to earn course credits and thereby limit postsecondary or career options following high school. What is more, students in transition-planning programs may be steered away from other areas of personal development if they are encouraged to spend a great deal of time working toward postsecondary or career goals. In almost all of the academic literature we encountered for this review, researchers focused on transitioning into either postsecondary programming or career-related development. There was little discussion of quality of life, active citizenship, or engagement in sociopolitical issues that might be of interest to individuals with disabilities as they grow and develop into adulthood. Thoma et al. (2001) advocate for supporting the interests and dreams of youth, but overall there remains a trajectory towards career selection rather than seeking out social change. At times, well-meaning researchers and educators might make assumptions about the needs and wants of students with disabilities. Transition coordinators should, then, keep the interests of

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

their students at the forefront of their minds and avoid closing off opportunities for personal or social development.

2.7 Role of the Transition Coordinator

A robust and stable person-centred framework for transition planning for students with disabilities needs to be effectively carried out by an individual who can work closely with students, families, other educators, paraprofessionals, and relevant agencies. This individual, the transition coordinator, is an essential member of the transition planning team. As such, the conceptions and practices of the transition coordinator are the focus of our research.

The main responsibility of the transition coordinator is to bring the different elements of a transition program into a harmonious and efficient relationship. If students with disabilities are to learn complex skills such as self-determination and self-advocacy before leaving high school, it is essential that different people involved in the transition plan communicate and work together well. The transition coordinator role is usually not connected directly to teaching. Rather, the transition coordinator performs mainly administrative and organizational tasks, such as identifying and developing job and community opportunities, identifying and developing post-school options, identifying student competency requirements, coordinating referrals to adult service providers, holding meetings, choosing and overseeing personnel, and monitoring fulfillment of IEP requirements (Blalock et al., 2003; Blanchett, 2001; Division on Career Development and Transition, 2013; Kohler, 1996; Morningstar et al., 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2017). The transition coordinator is, in fact, someone who might have the authority to delegate tasks and delineate roles for others. Because transition planning is a dynamic process involving many parties, delineating roles can be “an extremely complex yet important task” (Morgan et al., 2013, p. 149), so it is critical that the transition coordinator have strong administrative capacity.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

2.7.1 Role of the transition coordinator in BC. The descriptions of the transition coordinator role are somewhat confusing in BC MoE special-education policy documents. The term “transition coordinator” itself is not even mentioned in the MoE’s *SE Policy* (2006) and *SES Manual* (2016b). The term is only mentioned in the citations of the MoE’s *Career/Life Transitions for Students with Diverse Needs: A Resource Guide for Schools* (2001).

The term is, however, used in the MCFD’s *Transition Planning for Youth with Special Needs: A Community Support Guide* (2005) and the Government of BC’s Cross Ministry *Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Special Needs* (2009). Both documents call the transition coordinator a “key role” (p. 10; p. 9), and mainly describe it as being administrative or organizational in capacity. Instructional responsibilities are not mentioned in BC policy documents. The 2005 MCFD document, which uses the term “transition coordinator” 19 times, describes the role in the most detail; however, this level of detail can actually create some confusion since various options are provided for implementation, but not all of those options are fully described. For example, on the page about transition coordinators, the document states that the role “can be assumed by a variety of individuals including the youth transitioning to adulthood, the parent or guardian, another family member or a school-based employee” (p. 10). Yet, further down on the same page, the MCFD give two different possible interpretations for what the transition coordinator actually does that do not seem to be in line with assigning the role to a student or caregiver: (a) “The transition coordinator provides organizational and administrative support for the team,” and (b) “The term transition coordinator is also used to identify an individual who is working at a ‘systems level’ to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the transition-planning process within a particular community or district, including the development and use of common transition planning tools” (p. 10). We would

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

argue that the rest of the instances of “transition coordinator” in the MCFD support guide imply that the transition coordinator is a school staff member, not a student, caregiver, or district- or community-level employee. In the Appendix of the MCFD support guide, for example, the duties of the transition coordinator are listed as follows:

- Coordinate and schedule meetings.
- Manage the paperwork and maintain a transition file that contains assessments, the IEP/Transition Plan and related materials.
- Keep the planning session focused.
- Resolve conflicts.
- Monitor the progress of the IEP/Transition Plan.
- Obtain commitment for follow-up action and ensure that all participants are clear on the specific tasks/actions they are to undertake.
- Coordinate the writing and implementation of the IEP/Transition Plan (p. 24).

It seems likely that these types of school-based administrative duties would be assigned to a school staff member rather than to a student, caregiver, or employee of the district or community. The MCFD document, then, though containing the most detailed description of transition coordinators, provides somewhat conflicting information about the role.

On the other hand, the Government of BC’s *Cross Ministry Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Special Needs* (2009) only mentions the term “transition coordinator” three times, but provides some clarity about the role. Likely drawing on the earlier MCFD document (2005), the Government of BC states, “The Transition Coordinator plays a key role by providing organizational and administrative support to the team” (p. 9). Accordingly, the duties of the transition coordinator are “overseeing the composition of the transition planning team and

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

adjusting membership as needed” and “organiz[ing] and gather[ing] information that will assist in: understanding the youth and family’s support needs, and developing the transition plan” (p. 9). Clearly, the transition coordinator is meant to be a school staff member in this document, not a student, caregiver, or employee of the district or school. Thus, the Government of BC did not clearly define the transition coordinator role as a school-based administrative position in 2009. It is unclear, however, whether this planning protocol document must be followed or if it only provides guidelines. It is not part of the protocol used to inspect independent schools (*External Evaluation Report for Brick and Mortar Independent Schools: School Year 2018-19*, n.d.-a). At independent schools, special education policies need only be in line with the MoE *SEP* (2006) to pass inspection. Furthermore, the duties of the transition coordinator in BC government documentation are somewhat limited when compared to the descriptions of the role in the academic literature, many of which focus on the importance of the transition coordinator as someone who connects the student with outside agencies and other educational professionals—which brings us to our next section.

2.8 Roles of Other Educational Professionals

Other educational professionals rely on the guidance and assistance of the transition coordinator. Teachers and counsellors support specific aspects of the student’s development, and may work with the student closely on a day-to-day basis. The transition coordinator connects these professionals to the bigger picture of the transition plan.

For transition planning to be effective, educators other than the transition coordinator must be well-versed in a large number of skills and in the knowledge related to transition planning. This need for expertise is a recurring theme in the literature. Educators—transition coordinators, school counselors, and special education teachers—require “rigorous training” in

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

order to teach all of the strategies that the students need to learn (Hamblet, 2014). In this section, we will discuss two particularly important types of educational professionals, transition-skills teachers and counsellors, as well as their roles in the transition process and problems identified in the literature.

2.8.1 Role of the transition-skills teacher. In the academic literature, the transition coordinator (the planner/facilitator) and the transition-skills teacher (the person who teaches transition skills directly to the student, hereafter shortened to “transition teacher”) are seen as two distinct, though sometimes overlapping, roles. Blanchett (2001), in her survey of 74 Pennsylvania special educators’ rankings of the importance of various transition-related competencies, found that “the competencies needed by teachers to prepare students with disabilities for transition are somewhat different from those needed by transition specialists [coordinators] to facilitate transition” (p. 11).⁵ In a similar survey of 100 participants in five American states, Morgan et al. (2013) found that, “Transition teachers and coordinators/specialists are likely to require different sets or rankings of competencies” (p. 159). However, in practice the transition coordinator and transition teacher are often collapsed into a single role. This likely accounts for the findings of Blanchett (2001) and Morgan et al. (2013) in their surveys of transition personnel in the US; both studies found that the person primarily

⁵ The terms “transition coordinator” and “transition specialist” are essentially synonymous but have slightly different connotations. “Specialist” implies a greater degree of required knowledge and experience than “coordinator.” The DCDT, in its document “Transition Specialist Competencies” (2000) and its more recent update “Transition Specialist Standards” (2013), classify transition specialist knowledge as “Advanced Study” and advocate for a high level of knowledge and skills in the categories of (a) Assessment; (b) Curricular Content Knowledge; (c) Programs, Services, and Outcomes; (d) Research & Inquiry, (e) Leadership and Policy; (f) Professional and Ethical Practice; and (g) Collaboration. Teaching skills are noticeably absent.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

responsible for transition planning was, in most cases, the special education teacher. Park's 2008 study of Manitoba special education teachers offering transition services found that "[a]ll of the teachers defined their major role as that of a coordinator or manager. Their job descriptions had often changed in recent years and they were no longer confined to the typical duties of classroom teaching" (p. 101). Park's participants were still identified as teachers and given instructional duties, despite also having administrative duties and time in their schedules to visit outside agencies. A dedicated transition coordinator, free to administrate and organize, appears to be something of a luxury.

Transition teachers, who often have the most direct contact with students on a day-to-day basis, should ideally have strong knowledge and experience in the transition-planning process and their role in it. According to the literature, teachers who teach transition skills to students need a high number of competencies across many different domains. For example, Blanchett (2001) outlines 30 competencies in seven domains⁶ required of transition teachers. Morgan et al. (2013) outline 67 competencies in six domains.⁷ In both studies, transition teachers indicated that most of the competencies they were surveyed about were highly important, and that their training—even transition specialist training in a Master's program—did not adequately prepare them in the large number of competency areas required to fulfill their role successfully. Using data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Shogren and Plotner (2012)

⁶ The domains identified by Blanchett are: (a) Employment/vocational, (b) Communication, (c) Student interpersonal skills, (d) Professional, (e) Community, (f) Residential/daily living, and (g) Leisure/recreational.

⁷ The domains identified by Morgan et al. are: (a) Assessment and evaluation, (b) Transition planning (referring to administrative skills), (c) Instructional planning, (d) Curriculum and instruction, (e) Communication and collaboration, (f) Family involvement.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

found that teachers felt ill-prepared to effectively manage a person-centred approach to transition planning. For example, teachers who felt ill-prepared reported that their students were not able to take lead roles in their IEP meetings; the teachers did not know how to help them become stronger self-advocates and demonstrate self-determination. This gap between training and practice is an important theme, which Hitchings et al. (2005) note in a study based on the IEPs, transition planning guides, and final transcripts of 110 students with disabilities from two different high schools in the US. Hitchings et al. point out the need for special education teachers, school counsellors, and administrators to see transition planning as an essential part of education rather than another item on their student's checklist.

Some researchers, rather than attempting to provide comprehensive lists of competencies required of transition teachers, choose to focus only on what they see to be the requisite key skills. Shogren and Plotner (2012), for instance, state that the educator's role in transition planning should be that of a problem solver rather than a planner. The educator should start with the goals and dreams of the student and work out the detailed steps required for that student to achieve these goals and dreams. Levinson and Ohler (1998), on the other hand, focus on assessment. They suggest that successfully developing career maturity in students with disabilities would, at minimum, include a process of assessing students' skill levels in various related domains. Following that, the transition teacher must then make time for experiences such as building routines, extra-curricular activities, part-time jobs, and learning from the work habits of role models. These learning opportunities should ideally be made explicit parts of transition planning from an early stage of schooling. Without explicit attention, even students with mild disabilities may not appropriately develop skills necessary for productive adult life experiences. However, one question that the authors do not address is how to find time to teach these

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

important transition skills while also teaching mainstream academic content. In some cases, both sets of curricula might be necessary for the student to make a successful transition to adult life.

2.8.2 Role of the counsellor. School counsellors, who are often highly knowledgeable of and experienced in postsecondary and career planning, are an important component of a transitions team. Milsom (2007), in “Interventions to Assist Students with Disabilities Through School Transitions,” goes so far as to state that school counsellors are the most important factor in transition planning and need to collaborate with all stakeholders (p. 277). Hitchings et al. (2005), in “Academic Preparation of Adolescents with Disabilities for Postsecondary Education,” likewise states that counsellors are a primary source of transition planning.

In the academic literature, school counsellors are identified as advocates and advisors for students with learning disabilities. Because they often have information on postsecondary institutions and programs, and may even be in contact with postsecondary personnel, counsellors can provide greater awareness of the supports and services available to students in addition to the standard requirements for admission (Milsom & Hartley, 2005). Counsellors can also play a key role in helping students to examine their strengths and weaknesses (Milsom & Hartley, 2005). Milsom (2007) recommends using the “academic, career, and personal/social competencies outlined in the ASCA National Model (American School Counselor Association, 2005) as a starting point” (p. 276). In transition planning, students need to see the connections to successful postsecondary education/adult living and skills such as time-management, study habits, and organization (Milsom & Hartley, 2005). Counsellors can be helpful in making these connections. However, because school counsellors often perform multiple functions in a school environment and typically advise a large number of students, defining a clear set of transition tasks for the school counsellor is essential in order to avoid role confusion. It is difficult to ensure a smooth

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

transition for students with disabilities if counsellors, a key point person on a transition team, are in demand by many people, fulfilling tasks related to everything from mental-health counselling to course-planning paperwork. There were no solutions for this type of problem in the literature reviewed in our research.

2.9 Caregiver Involvement

While educational professionals are expected to know what research-based practices are best suited to transition planning for individuals with disabilities, it is usually the caregivers who best know the individual youth. A student's caregivers are the continuous participants that can act as informers, supporters and advocates for the student, while other participants (educators, paraprofessionals, etc.) are subject to change. In fact, research conducted by Park (2008) in Manitoba indicated that students with more caregiver involvement gain stronger self-advocacy and self-determination skills and achieve better post-school outcomes.

In order to encourage and develop caregiver involvement, educators need to be aware of how culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) caregiver backgrounds impact a child's transition needs. For example, Cote, Jones, Sparks, and Aldridge (2012) did a review of literature and found that certain cultures place more emphasis on the benefits of the group or family, while other cultures emphasize the benefit of the individual. These differences can have a significant impact on the goals and interests to be explored in transition planning, and even on whether the transition plan should be developed to benefit the student alone or the caregivers and extended family as well. Through surveying (CLD) families of students with disabilities, Geenen, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez (2001) found that many families from non-European-American cultures put a great deal of emphasis on transition planning with their children, but might do this outside of the educational institutions (namely, within their families and communities).

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Though caregiver participation has many benefits, it presents many challenges as well. Geenen et al. (2001) found that caregivers encountered barriers to participation due to many factors, including “parental fatigue; lack of parental knowledge regarding their rights, school procedures or policies; logistical constraints, such as a lack of child care or transportation; rigid or limited options for parent involvement in educational planning; and language” (p 279). Additionally, CLD caregivers experienced barriers regarding actual or perceived cultural bias and, or discrimination. Gothberg, Greene, and Kohler (2018) used data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS, 1985-1993) and National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2, 2001-2009) and then conducted a survey of schools, CLD youth with disabilities, and their families. They found that many areas of research-based practices were not effectively being used to support CLD youth with disabilities and their caregivers in the transition process. School structural inequalities that impacted transition planning for CLD students included: a lack of acknowledgement of caregiver goals and dreams, immigration issues and language proficiency, and CLD caregivers feeling intimidated by special education teachers and professionals (Gothberg et al., 2018). Minimum conditions that would improve the outcomes of CLD youth with disabilities would include quality teacher training in supporting CLD youth with disabilities and their families, more effective educational experiences for CLD youth with disabilities that target self-determination in the transition-planning process, engagement with translators that have special education experience and/or backgrounds, and sufficient resources for special education teachers to access the preceding recommendations (Gothberg et al., 2018).

It should be noted that the definition of CLD is contested. Cote et al. (2012) suggests that CLD families share similar values which are different from the dominant culture. Gothberg et al. (2018), however, state that cultural diversity is not in reference to individual cultures, but to the

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

diversity of culture (and language) within a local population (typically a school district or school population). Gothberg et al. (2018) do not state generalized ideas about CLD values, but rather suggest that professionals need to be sensitive to these possibilities and able to effectively communicate with such awareness. We anticipate that working with CLD families will be an important aspect of transition planning in Metro Vancouver, a highly diverse region.

2.10 Interagency Collaboration

Agencies support students and families during the move into adulthood, and cooperation between them is important for smoothing the transition process. In 1996, interagency collaboration was identified by Kohler as one of five key practice areas in her seminal work, the “Taxonomy for Transition Programming” (Kohler, 1996). In 1999, Morningstar, Kleinhammer-Tramill, and Lattin considered interagency collaboration as one of four critical elements for improving outcomes for youth with disabilities. In 2002, Agrin, Cain, and Cavin argued that “by definition transition planning is an interagency and interdisciplinary endeavour” (p. 141), and that without such collaboration, effective transition efforts are severely compromised.

Collaboration between organizations allows students, families, and professionals to make plans for the future while still having the support and guidance of high school professionals. Yet, the literature shows that interagency collaboration is not prioritized despite its important role. This lack is seen, for example, in McCall’s interviews with four college-level students with disabilities, where only one student mentioned an awareness of interagency collaboration (2015).

Barriers to implementation include a lack of human resources, information, and support from governing bodies that can aid in establishing relationships between agencies. Successful interagency collaboration requires staff on both the high school and adult sides to make time to work together and include the students and families in the process.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

2.11 Views on Transition Planning from Support Organizations in BC

In BC, interagency collaboration sometimes involves publicly funded organizations that serve adults with disabilities. These organizations contribute to the discourse on transition planning, either explicitly through published documents or implicitly through the types of services they offer. Rather than describing all of the views on transition planning espoused by relevant organizations in BC, we will discuss two representative organizations, Inclusion BC and Community Living BC (CLBC), as well as a cross-organizational program called Services to Adults with Developmental Disabilities (STADD).

2.11.1 Inclusion BC. Inclusion BC is a provincial federation and charity that provides support, education, and advocacy for inclusion of people of all abilities. Members include people with intellectual disabilities, families, and community agencies. Overall, Inclusion BC's recommendations on transition planning mirror many of the recommendations in the academic literature. Inclusion BC advocates for a person-centred planning process that empowers people to define the direction for their lives, focus on their gifts and desires, and take control of their own futures. Inclusion BC states that transition planning should begin in Grade 9 or 10 (ages 13-15), and that the IEP should incorporate new goals to prepare students for upcoming life changes. The IEP should include the following elements: plans for learning opportunities in postsecondary or other programs, development of employment objectives (if appropriate), and ways to access adult community living supports and opportunities through agencies such as CLBC.

2.11.2 Community Living BC. Similarly, CLBC provides transition planning services consistent with those recommended in the academic literature. CLBC is the provincial crown corporation that funds supports and services to adults with developmental disabilities, as well as individuals who have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Disorder. CLBC's role in transition planning includes helping adults with disabilities access community supports and services, develop support networks, and connect with other government organizations and ministries. CLBC provides a range of community living supports and services to eligible adults once they turn 19 to assist them in living as independently and fully as possible in the community. Though CLBC's mandate is to support adults with disabilities, transition planning with CLBC may start after a child's 16th birthday according to the web document "Preparing to Access CLBC Supports" (n.d.), implying that schools are welcome to make contact with CLBC well before a student turns 19.

2.11.3 Services to Adults with Developmental Disabilities. The STADD program aids people between the ages of 16 and 24 years old with a developmental disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder, or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in transition planning ("Transition Planning for Youth & Young Adults," n.d.). Started in 2013 in four BC communities, the program currently serves 116 communities and will continue to expand. It is provided through a partnership among a number of government ministries, schools, school districts, and community organizations. CLBC is noted as a key partner of this program ("Expanded transition planning support for youth with developmental disabilities," 2016). STADD connects youth with disabilities to a "Navigator," a person who can help "form a planning team and coordinate supports and services from government and agencies" ("Expanded transition planning support for youth with developmental disabilities," 2016). According to a 2013 draft discussion document produced by the Ministry of Social Development, the STADD program is meant to embody many of the best practices espoused in the academic literature, including person-centred planning, self-determination, early planning for transitions, specialized competencies and knowledge for the coordinator, coordination across service agencies, and organizational

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

accountability (Ministry of Social Development, 2013). The STADD website consistently utilizes diction that implies an ethos of person-centred planning, stating, “A Navigator can help *you* plan for the future and on *your* journey to becoming an adult. Everyone is different, and *your* Navigator can help *you* meet *your* own goals and needs [emphasis added]” (“Transition Planning for Youth & Young Adults,” n.d.). Clearly, the youth is meant to captain his or her own ship in transition planning, while the Navigator, is “like a hub in a wheel: a centre point of access to all systems and services” (Ministry of Social Development, 2013). Additionally, the STADD website advocates for interagency coordination and provides steps for it to happen; on the program website, it advertises a centralized phone number and an online tool called “Collaborate,” which young people can use to share ideas, goals, plans, assessment results, and so on with the Navigator and the rest of their planning team.

2.11.4 An overall look at transition support agencies in BC. Generally, the public organizations and programs supporting people with disabilities in BC, as represented by Inclusion BC, CLBC, and STADD, explicitly or implicitly support the views on transition planning seen in the academic literature. What is more, coordination among these agencies appears to be improving. The Government of BC’s document *Cross Ministry Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Special Needs* (2009), which describes how youth and their families and the nine government organizations work together, gives descriptions of Inclusion BC and CLBC and the supports they offer. It does not, however, mention the Navigator program, which was started four years after the cross-ministry protocol was produced. Meanwhile, Inclusion BC reproduces the cross-ministry protocol on its website, implying a recognition of the need for interagency cooperation and coordination. However, there are still many gaps. The MoE’s *SEP* (2006) and *SES Manual*, (2016b), both key documents in provincial policy, do not

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

contain up-to-date information on outside agencies supporting transitions. New transition coordinators, therefore, may find it difficult to obtain the information they need on these outside agencies. These gaps might also create some confusion about the transition coordinator and the Navigator, both of whom are meant to act as point persons; however, the Navigator only serves those between 19-24 with certain disabilities. Notably, there is no mention of transition coordinators on the official STADD website, brochure, and info sheet.

Non-school organizations are not our main object of study, but because transition planning involves making connections between schools and outside agencies, the views of these agencies are an important part of the transition planning discourse in BC. The transition coordinator acts as the link or liaison between schools, students and families, and outside organizations, so we wished to know whether transition coordinators in independent schools connect with agencies such as Inclusion BC and CLBC, and programs such as STADD, and share similar views with them.

2.12 Gaps in the Research

In order to better serve British Columbians, whether it be through adult programs or educational systems, it is important to be aware of certain noticeable gaps in the body of research on transition planning. One of our critiques of the literature involves the dearth of Canadian research. American studies, perhaps due to the powerful influence of IDEA legislation (2004), are plentiful and varied, and show a progression of conceptual development over time. In the US, experts such as Paula Kohler, organizations such as the DCDT, and journals dedicated to transition planning such as *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals* have emerged. As mentioned in Chapter 1: Introduction, the US Department of Education has conducted three country-wide longitudinal studies on transition, the National Longitudinal

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Transition Study (NLTS), the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), and the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 (NLTS 2012). Canadian research, on the other hand, has been called “sparse” (Schwartz, Mactavish, & Lutfiyya, 2006m p. 76). In Canada, there are few noted experts, specialists, or organizations dedicated to transitions. While the federal government agency Statistics Canada does conduct large-scale surveys of those with disabilities, such as the Canadian Survey on Disability, 2012, it has not conducted studies specifically on transitions.

The second gap is not in the academic research itself, but rather in the policies around special education in BC. As described in more detail in the subsections above 2.3 Defining Transitions and Transition Planning and 2.7.1 Role of the transition coordinator in BC, our province’s policy documents can create confusion due to their use of inconsistent definitions and recommendations. For example, the term “transition coordinator” is defined inconsistently and does not even appear in some ministry documents (Government of BC, 2009; MCFD, 2005; MoE, 2016b; MoE, 2001). In addition, official policy documents often provide rather limited information on transition planning and few references to the academic literature for educators to follow up on to learn more. More investigation into the Canadian context, including the BC context, needs to be done if the situation is to be improved.

2.13 Conclusion

The explicit requirements of transition planning in the IDEA (2004) in the US has created a growing arena for current research and documentation in regards to preparing students with disabilities for adult life. With this knowledge, we hope that our research will contribute to an expansion of awareness around the importance of effective transition planning for students with disabilities in the context of schools in BC.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

In order to lay the groundwork for our discussions with local transition coordinators, we researched the literature from Canada and the US from 1998 onwards and determined the definitions of terminology most appropriate for our context. We found that the vast majority of the research around transition planning is from the US. We conducted this literature review in order to discover whether the practices of transition coordinators in BC are informed and influenced by this body of research and knowledge. We found the most common and important themes in the literature to be person-centred planning, relevant student skills and experiences (self-advocacy, student-centred learning, self-knowledge, authentic learning experiences, career development, explicit teaching and practice of skills), timing of transition planning, role of the transition coordinator, roles of other educational professionals, caregiver involvement, and interagency collaboration. These themes uncovered in our literature review informed our methodology, as explained in the next chapter. Though we found a consistent set of themes in the literature, we remained open to discovering other conceptualizations born out of the lived experiences of transition coordinators in Metro Vancouver. By connecting research to on-the-ground practice, we were able to enhance the possibilities for cohesive and generative discourse and analysis specific to independent schools in our region.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Overall Research Purpose and Design

As demonstrated in our previous section, the literature regarding transition planning suggests that transition coordinators play a critical role in the development and implementation of transition-planning processes for students with visible and invisible disabilities (Cummings et al., 2000; Hitchings et al., 2005; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Yet despite this important role, transition coordinators are not well researched in Canada, and even less so in our local context of Metro Vancouver, British Columbia (BC). This study was conducted in order to examine and articulate transition coordinators' understanding of what constitutes best practices regarding the transition-planning process, as well as how transition planning is actually implemented in independent high schools in Metro Vancouver. In this methodology section, we will provide more details about our (a) research site, including the population under investigation; (b) interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm, (c) qualitative data collection methods, (d) interview questions, (e) data analysis using thematic coding, (f) dissemination of results, (g) ethical considerations, and (h) limitations of our study. The interview protocol questions, phases of thematic analysis, and informed participant consent form can be found in Appendices B, C, and D.

3.2 Research Site

According to the BC Ministry of Education (MoE), independent schools provide an alternative to public school education in this province ("Independent Schools," 2018). Caregivers and students often choose independent schools for their specific philosophical, religious, or educational approaches. The MoE mandates specific procedures, policies, funding formulas, inspection protocols, and teacher certification protocols for independent schools that differ

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

significantly from those of the public system. Independent schools are regulated by the Independent School Act (1996/2018) rather than the School Act (1996/2018) and must meet the requirements of their classifications as Group 1, 2, 3, or 4 schools. These classifications determine how much funding, if any, independent schools receive per pupil (MoE, 2017). Our study will focus on Group 1 and 2 independent schools, which respectively receive 50% and 35% per-pupil provincial funding compared to public schools. Group 1 and 2 schools may also receive additional funding for students with certain documented disabilities, at 100% of the per-pupil funding rate of public schools.⁸ We did not include Group 3 and 4 schools in our study, as these schools are not eligible to receive funding for special education programs and are therefore not governed by the MoE's *Special Education Policy (SEP, 2006)*.

Independent schools with special education programs are governed by not only the *SEP (2006)* but also by the school's local policies. According to sections 5.1 to 5.3 of the Educational Standards Order, a subsection of the Independent School Act (1996/2018), independent schools must have local policies in place for special education program admission and delivery in order to receive additional funding. There are many requirements for special education policies, according to the MoE's *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines (SES Manual, 2016b)*, which provides guidance to schools and school districts in regards to interpretation and implementation of the *SEP*. For example, a school or school district's special-education policy must outline requirements for the awarding of a School Completion Certificate ("Evergreen Certificate") to special education students for achieving

⁸ In both public and independent schools in BC, this additional funding is not, generally speaking, awarded directly to specific students with disabilities, but rather to the district (public system) or the school (independent system).

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

personal learning goals rather than the mainstream BC Certificate of Graduation (“Dogwood Diploma”) for reaching provincial curricular standards. Each independent school’s special-education policy should also include a section on transitions. According to the *SES Manual* (2016b), it is essential that school districts and individual schools establish procedures to support collaborative consultation in the transition into and out of the school system (Appendix, p. 34). Collaboration in transition planning should involve school personnel, district staff, and representatives from community services such as pre-schools and postsecondary institutions, professionals from other ministries, caregivers and the students themselves. In order to provide accountability, the roles and responsibilities of different parties should be clearly delineated and tasks delegated in early stages of transition-planning process. Whether it is through direct services, advocating for support services, or coordinating the services of others, transition coordinators need the skills and knowledge to make a positive impact in the transition of students with disabilities out of high school to adulthood. As stated in the literature, the role is not an easy one to fulfill. The special-education policy at each school, then, should not only outline the requirements for the transition coordinator but also provide protocols for guidance, training, and support.

As highlighted in Chapter 1: Introduction, independent schools in British Columbia are highly diverse; while the four schools under investigation in our study did employ similar policies and practices in regards to transitions, our results are not generalizable.

3.3 Population under Investigation

We utilized purposeful sampling for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to transition planning. Purposeful sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are especially knowledgeable about a phenomenon of

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

interest (Creswell & Clark Plano, 2011). We chose purposeful sampling because our topic is a complex and relatively under-researched one in BC, making it essential that we consult with those with actual experience in the field if we wish to access a meaningful pool of knowledge. In addition to having knowledge and experience, participants had to be available, willing to participate, and ideally able to articulate their experiences and opinions in an expressive and reflective manner (Bernard, 2002).

3.4 Research Paradigm

Our approach to research was interpretivist/constructivist. In their book *Research Methods in Education*, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison define this paradigm through the evocative phrase “the world of human experience” (2007), noting the highly personalized and experiential ways in which conceptions are built within a particular context. This approach was appropriate for understanding the breadth of individual experiences we encountered while interviewing transition coordinators who work with many types of students at different schools. In keeping with an interpretivist/constructivist approach, we emphasized the participants' views of the situation being examined rather than our own views, and recognised how our background and experiences impacted the research. Unlike post-positivists, we did not begin with a theory; instead, we inductively worked to develop a theory or pattern of understandings throughout the research process (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007).

We utilized multiple-case-study design, in which an issue was investigated by analyzing more than one case in order to illustrate multiple perspectives. According to Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales (2007), case-study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information such as interviews,

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

audio material, and documents and reports. In the final product, the researcher reports a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2013). In order to obtain thick data that would help us to interpret the specificities of our chosen sites, we formulated our case studies in such a way that would allow us to examine, articulate, and analyze the four transition coordinators' understanding and implementation of transition-planning best practices. These four cases were chosen specifically to help illuminate our central problem; this method is called an instrumental approach. The four cases were formulated within bounded systems, that is, Grades 8-12 (time bounding) and independent high schools (place bounding). We selected only four transition coordinators to study so that we could develop a sufficiently in-depth understanding of the four participants and their contexts. This was done within the two months of time allotted by the timeline of our Master of Education program to conduct our interviews and analysis. In order to make meaningful comparisons, data collection procedures were replicated for each case (Yin, 2003).

3.5 Participant Recruitment

Most independent schools in BC are members of the Federation of Independent School Associations of BC (FISA BC) which acts as the umbrella organization for the five independent school associations in the province. We began our search for participants by sending a letter to FISA BC informing them of our research intentions (Appendix E). FISA BC is a liaison between independent schools, the government, and other organizations rather than a governing body; thus, while we informed FISA BC of our study, we were not required to obtain their approval.

Following approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) of the University of British Columbia (UBC), we shared our invitation with 56 school administrators that met our criteria (Appendix F), specifically those in Metro Vancouver, BC. Upon receiving

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

approval from the school administrator, we sent an invitation to be distributed to the educators responsible for IEPs and transition planning at that school (Appendix G). During the recruitment phase we were informed by one of the school administrators that our study required the approval of their association's Superintendent's Office. We sought approval from the Superintendent's Office and were able to include participation from that association. Of the 56 schools that were invited, two declined and six accepted. Four schools were randomly selected for our study. The schools and participants were assigned the pseudonyms Anna (School A), Beth (School B), Cathy (School C), and Dawn (School D).

3.6 Data Collection

Because this study aimed to obtain detailed and descriptive information of the current perspectives and practices of transition coordinators, we collected data using in-depth semi-structured interviews. We developed interview questions that provided us with insight into participants' understanding of best practices, minimum conditions required for transition plans to be enacted, actual conditions in their schools, and any gaps between theory and practice, or between participants' conceptions and the best practices found in our literature review. One member of our research group interviewed all four participants, while another member of our research team acted as an assistant and made the audio recordings. The interview questions were provided to the participants in advance of the interview. We interviewed each transition coordinator in person at her school for up to 60 minutes during school hours. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form to affirm their agreement to the interview being audio recorded and the data utilized in our study. The informed consent form can be found in Appendix D. Interviews with other school personnel, students, and families were beyond the

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

scope of our research, as our study is but an initial foray into the realm of transition planning in BC.

We aimed to fulfill the following goals during our interviews: (a) record in-depth qualitative descriptions of transition practices that can be analyzed in order to answer our research questions, (b) obtain knowledge of the school context and the background of the participant in order to gain relevant contextual data to interpret the results, and (c) draw out conceptual understanding and ensure that our usage of terms was consistent with those of the participant. Interview questions were open-ended and an effort was made not to lead the participants toward preconceived, close-ended responses. We asked follow-up questions that flowed naturally from our main pre-written questions, gently steering the conversations toward our research goals if they went off track. Questions were organized into themes in order to provide a sense of organization to the conversation. The interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

3.7 Data Analysis

We used a thematic analysis method to analyze the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within a data set. Through this inductive approach, we identified patterns or themes embedded in the data without using a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions to drive the process, allowing for the language and experiences of the participants to be emphasized (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). In an inductive approach to analysis, themes should be strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990). In other words, inductive analysis involves building meaning from the bottom-up rather than from the top-down. Braun and Clarke (2006) differentiate between thematic analysis and those analytical processes

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

that begin from the standpoint of a specific theory. Thematic analysis “minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p. 79) and is a “more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in a qualitative research career” (p. 81) compared to processes that begin from a specific theory. This method was also flexible enough to provoke interesting discussions among us due to the rich descriptions generated. Grounding our analysis in data rather than a theoretical presumption helped us to avoid making any assumptions that could bias our results, a potential pitfall. That said, despite being data-driven, thematic analysis does not allow researchers to completely remove their own views from the process of identifying themes. We often referred to our own lived experiences in our discussions and formal written analysis. Nor is it “wrong” in thematic analysis to eventually construct a theory or set of principles based on the analysis of data, though unlike in grounded theory it is not required to do so.

Regarding the actual process of thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined six phases of thematic analysis that we followed in our research study: (a) becoming familiar with the data through transcription and reading the transcript, (b) systematically coding the data set, (c) identifying potential relationships and themes among the different codes, (d) reviewing and refining the themes and their credibility in relation to the data as a whole, (e) naming and defining themes to capture the essence of each theme, and (f) writing up the findings of thematic analysis in a concise and coherent manner. The process was not a linear one that simply moved from one phase to the next; rather, thematic analysis was a recursive process, where movement back and forth occurred as needed throughout the phases.

Data was checked for accuracy in several ways. Our two main transcribers made sure to read over each other’s work, and the two members of the interview team were consulted when necessary. Transcripts were sent to the four interviewees for feedback and comments. The

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

purpose of this participant check was to allow us to verify the construction of the data collected with the participants and account for the credibility of the data collected (Mertens, 2010). Only one of our participants responded, requesting that we conceal the name of a postsecondary institution mentioned in the interview. No other feedback from the participants was received. Additionally, we triangulated the data analysis across all four research members to see where there were points of agreement and where there were significant differences. According to Denzin (1978), data source triangulation refers to using the same approach or method, but gathering data at different points in time and/or from different sources, such as by the use of multiple interviewees, field sites, cases, observations, or ways of measuring a variable. This type of triangulation helped us to verify or falsify trends or themes detected in one data set, and to see if what we observed extended the same meaning when found under different circumstances (another case).

Our research team followed Braun and Clarke's thematic-analysis phases. Each member read the transcripts and systematically coded each data set, identifying potential relationships and themes among different codes. We then came together in person to further review and refine the themes, and finally named and defined the themes based on our data. We synthesized and wrote up our findings in Chapter 4: Data Analysis.

A more detailed description of the process entailed for each phase can be found in Appendix C. A table of preliminary codes for data analysis can be found in Appendix H.

3.8 How Results Will Be Shared and with Whom

The findings of our research will be published in a completed capstone project and presented on Saturday, April 13th, 2019, at UBC in fulfillment of our Master of Education degree. We will invite participants to the capstone presentation and share a copy of the brief

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

summary of findings (see Appendix I). A summary of the results will also be provided to FISA BC and individual schools that participated in our study; and we will ask that they share our findings more broadly with their networks. Additionally, these findings may be presented at professional development conferences and/or published in a scholarly journal and UBC cIRcle, a database of material created by the UBC community and its partners (“cIRcle,” 2018).

Participants and schools will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study; pseudonyms will be used in this process to maintain privacy as much as possible.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

We considered the ethical implications of this study and were continuously reflective about how our study will affect participants’ lives. Having completed a course on ethical research (Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics, or TCPS 2: CORE), we recognize that researchers occupy a position of power over participants. Therefore, the protection of participants is ultimately our responsibility. During the process of preparing our research protocol, we considered ethical issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, data generation and analysis, researcher/participant relationships, and reporting the final outcomes (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). We recognized that these ethical considerations are especially important when researching vulnerable populations such as children and individuals with visible and invisible disabilities (Agee, 2009).

Informed consent and ethically sound researcher/participant relationships are key to successful interviews. Kvale (1996) states that an interview is a moral endeavour, as the participant is influenced by the relationship established by the researcher and the intention that their information will contribute to the development of knowledge from the study and benefit others. At the same time, the purpose of the interview and the data collection must remain clear

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

so that the participant does not share information that might negatively impact their personal and professional reputation or the school and individuals that they describe. We began our interviews by having participants read and sign our Participant Consent Form, which is included in Appendix D. We aimed to create comfortable and open conversations that encouraged sharing detailed and relevant information. We were also careful to lead our participants away from responses that could misrepresent others, reveal private information, or otherwise harm the participant or others. We continually reflected on questions such as the following:

- Will the interview compromise the participants' welfare, such as if they share information that could jeopardize their employment?
- How do we ensure that the participant is unidentifiable, especially if there is only one participant to interview at each participant site?
- How do we ensure the privacy of students that participants may speak about?
- Will questioning and responses bring up emotional distress regarding the participants' practices?

Furthermore, maintaining confidentiality after the interviews was a paramount ethical concern. This was relevant in two significant ways: (a) avoiding revealing unique identifiers such as names, places, or specific details; and (b) safe storage of data during the generation and analysis stages. Protecting information that could be used to identify participants or related individuals was reasonably straightforward, as we used pseudonyms and generalized (or outright excluded) personal details. However, unique details that might be used to identify a school required careful attention, as we requested interviews from the relatively small number of Group 1 or 2 independent high schools in Metro Vancouver. At times, it was difficult to obscure identifying information without omitting relevant contextual information. For example, naming a

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

school's specific affiliation (religious, academic, or otherwise) could make it easy to identify the school, yet at times the affiliation was relevant to how transition planning is done at the school.

We had to consider whether a specific combination of seemingly innocuous details might identify a person or school. Thus, we asked our participants to look for these types of identifiers when they were reviewing our transcription notes of their interview. In cases where we, or our participants, were not sure whether certain details could lead to identification of the school, we erred on the side of caution and chose to omit that information from our analysis.

Data security was an important consideration. During our interview and analysis process we used encrypted and password-protected portable file storage devices. After final presentation of our research, the remaining electronic data will be stored for five years at UBC by our research advisor in a locked filing cabinet.

By keeping ethical questions at the forefront of our minds and prioritizing participant welfare, we were able to balance the presentation of new and empowering research with the wellbeing, confidence, and security of our participants, schools, students, and related people or organizations. Our goal was to discover knowledge that may help improve the practice of transition coordinators in BC and elsewhere, within ethically appropriate bounds. In order to be of benefit, we followed the requirements for ethical conduct set out in this proposal, and abided by all decisions made by UBC's BREB. Passing ethical review was a prerequisite to inviting participants, requesting documents and information, conducting interviews and observations, and finally sharing our findings at our capstone presentation and on UBC's public "cIRcle" website ("cIRcle," 2018).

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

3.10 Limitations of the Study

An important limitation inherent in case study research design is the extent to which the research findings can be generalized to other settings because the findings are embedded within a particular research context. We consider this limitation also a strength of the research because we wish to generate in-depth knowledge in areas that have heretofore been neglected in the research, namely independent schools in BC. That said, we recognize that our small sample size and use of case study design will mean that our results will not be generalizable across all independent schools in Metro Vancouver.

Timing was also a limiting factor. Due to the design of our graduate program, we had approximately two months to formally invite and secure participants, obtain participants' approval, conduct our interviews, analyze data, and report our findings.

Finally, the use of thematic analysis can have limited interpretive power beyond mere description if it is not used within an existing theoretical framework that anchors the analytic claims that are made (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, using a case study design did have its limitations, including difficulty in replicating results, the short time frame, and the potential for the researchers' biases to influence the case study.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we present our findings and analyze them in relation to our research goals. To reiterate, the purpose of our study was to answer the following questions: (a) What do transition coordinators believe to be best practices regarding transition planning? and (b) What are the actual practices of transition coordinators in high schools?

To answer our research questions, we interviewed participants, generated transcripts, and analyzed the data using thematic coding. During the coding process, each researcher familiarised herself or himself with the transcriptions and recordings, generated initial notes and codes, and searched for themes. This work was done independently in order to mitigate bias and to ensure that data was analyzed thoroughly. We then met as a group and compared codes. Through discussion, we agreed upon six overall themes, named them, and checked them over in relation to the initial codes and overall data set. We then used the six themes and an agreed-upon format to systematically code the data. Following this, we came together again to organize the themes, categories, and codes into Figure 2 below:

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

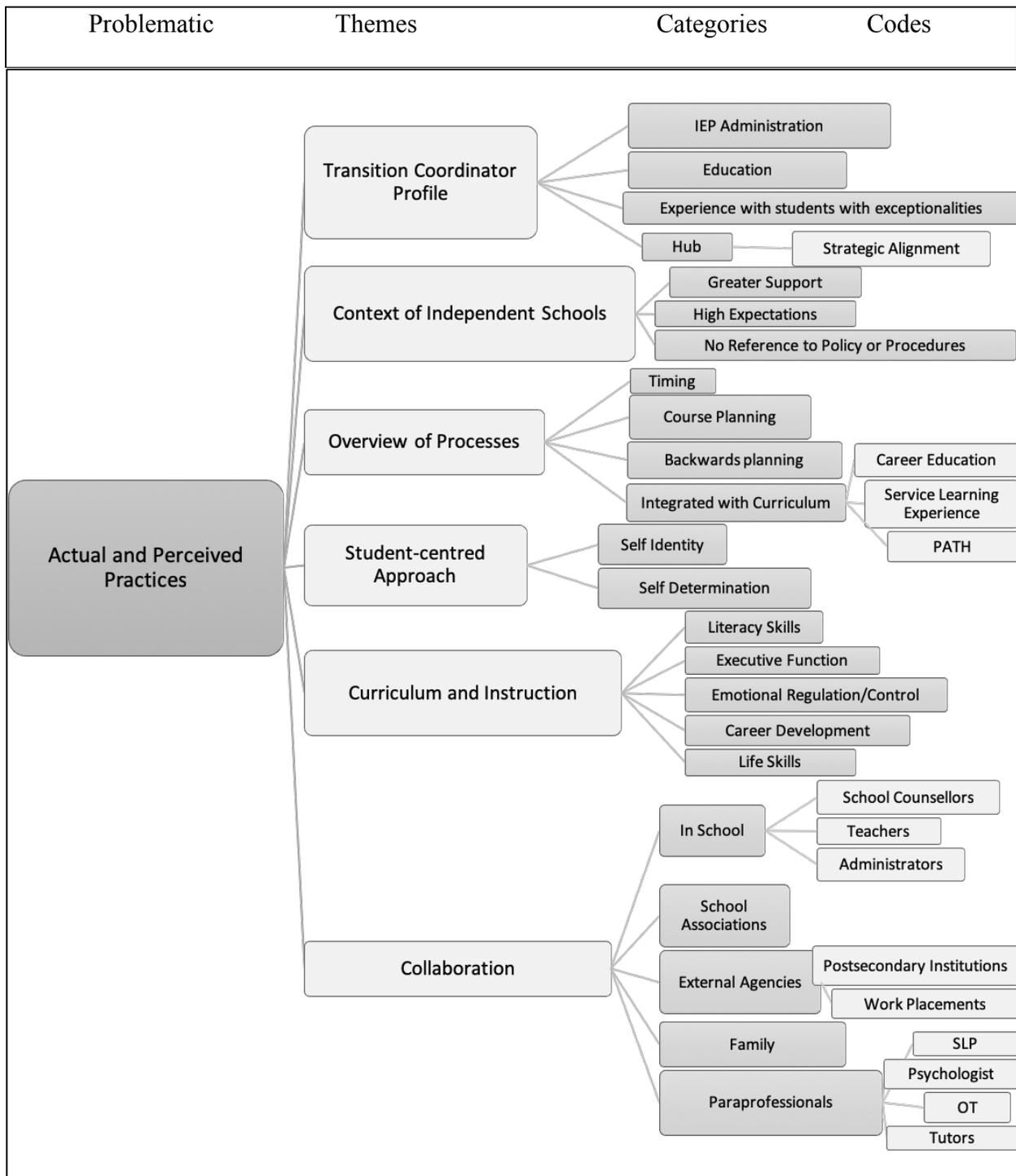


Figure 2. Main themes, categories, and codes agreed upon after individualized coding.

We used our synthesis of the coded data to help us answer our research questions in a systematic fashion. In general, analysis of our codes revealed that there was congruence between

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

the four transition coordinators' conceptions of best practices and their actual practices. In other words, the participants reported that their schools are able to deliver effective transition-planning programs. In addition, participants' practices corresponded closely to those espoused in the academic literature. Participants utilized much of the same terminology we discovered in our literature review, despite the fact that Canadian research on transition planning is rare and dwarfed by the volume of literature produced in the United States (US).

Our discussion of the data is organized according to our six overall themes, which are:

- 4.2 Transition Coordinator Profiles,
- 4.3 Context of Independent Schools in British Columbia (BC),
- 4.4 Overview of Transition-planning Processes,
- 4.5 Student-centred Approach to Transition Planning,
- 4.6 Curriculum and Instruction, and
- 4.7 Collaboration.

Following the discussions of themes, we present the final sections of this chapter, which are:

- 4.8 Discussion of Findings,
- 4.9 Recommendations for Future Research and Action, and
- 4.10 Conclusion.

4.2 Transition Coordinator Profiles

In this section we summarize the salient commonalities we discovered among our four participants, and relate these commonalities to the academic literature. Before we begin the discussion, however, it should be noted that our findings may have been influenced by volunteer bias. This type of bias occurs when the people who choose to participate in a study are not

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

representative of the general population—in this case, the general population of transition coordinators at independent schools (“Volunteer Bias,” 2010). Notably, three of our four participants work at schools focused on preparing students for university. These schools typically have high tuition fees and may have more resources available for transition-planning programs compared to other independent schools; thus, it is possible that our participants volunteered to be interviewed because they had unusually positive experiences with transition planning at their schools. One of the participants, in fact, specifically mentioned that her principal encouraged her to share information about the transition-planning activities at her school, in part because “there was a lot of modeling that can be [done] here for other schools.” Our results, then, should be viewed with the possibility of volunteer bias in mind, and it should be stressed that our analysis is not generalizable to the overall population.

We refer to the four participants by the pseudonyms Anna, Beth, Cathy, and Dawn, and the four research sites as School A, School B, School C, and School D respectively. Names were assigned in chronological order of interviews, with Anna’s interview being held first and Dawn’s interview last. In addition, names of other organizations were changed to pseudonyms when related to specific individuals, but not when referred to in general.

4.2.1 Roles and responsibilities. All four participants currently occupy senior roles—“department head” or “coordinator”—in the department that supports students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) at their schools. Participants’ roles vary somewhat, as Anna coordinates learning support for senior students only, Beth leads learning and social-emotional support for all grades, Cathy handles mainly administrative matters for all grades, and Dawn handles a combination of all roles. All participants aside from Cathy mentioned providing academic support directly to students. Most participants reported that they support students having a wide

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

range of disabilities, particularly learning disabilities. Anna was an exception, as most of her students are of one type (gifted/learning disabled). Cathy supports the largest range of disabilities as well as the largest number of students. Similar to the transition coordinators in Park's study in the province of Manitoba (2008), most of our participants perform both managerial tasks and teaching tasks. Blanchett (2001) and Morgan et al. (2013) suggest that the transition coordinator (the planner/facilitator) and the transition-skills teacher (the person who directly teaches transition skills directly to the student) be two distinct roles; however, our participants did not report that having multiple roles was a hardship, perhaps because at their schools the majority of transition skills are taught to students by other educators, such as counsellors and Career Education teachers.

4.2.2 Not “transition coordinators”. Notably, none of the participants in our study referred to themselves as “transition coordinators.” When describing their current and previous roles, participants reported working in “special education” or “learning assistance,” but never “transitions” specifically. This finding was consistent with our expectations, since it is not required that independent schools designate an individual as transition coordinator in order to operate a special education program, according to the BC *Special Education Policy (SEP 2006)*. In general, our participants indicated that they provide broad assistance and not only transition support to students with disabilities. To illustrate this phenomenon numerically, Anna said “support” 14 times and “transition” only twice. Beth said “support” 49 times and “transition” six times, and Dawn said “support” 41 times and “transition” 11 times. While these numbers are only rough indicators, this finding was consistent with studies by Blanchett (2001) and Morgan et al. (2013) in the US, and Park (2008) in Canada, all three of which found that the person in charge of transitions usually had multiple duties within the special education departments of

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

schools and were not only transition coordinators. Our participants are those who “wear multiple hats,” as Dawn described herself.

4.2.3 Levels of experience and training. Our participants vary greatly in terms of experience and familiarity with coordinating transitions from high school. All were experienced in special education, with between 5+ and 20+ years of experience in the special-education field; however, not all of this experience was closely related to transitions from high school to adulthood. For example, Cathy’s previous special education experience was at the elementary level and this was her first year working at a high school. Additionally, three out of the four participants have occupied their current role for less than a year, suggesting a state of flux for both the transition coordinators and their schools. Anna mentioned that when she came into her position it had been empty for several months, requiring her to do some catch-up work on IEPs. Beth’s position is a new one that was created this school year; one of her responsibilities is to help organize and expand the department.

All participants had received formal training in special education, but when asked about what had prepared them for their role in transition planning specifically, none of the participants mentioned that their degree or certificate programs included transition training. Beth stated that “experience” was the main thing that had prepared her for her role. Cathy stated there was not enough information available on transitions from high school to adult life, and that she needed help from other staff in the school when she started in her role. However, Cathy also reported that she receives ongoing support for transitions from a larger association to which her school belongs. Dawn, likewise, stated that she receives support from her school association, and has reached out to public school districts regarding support around mental-health issues.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Training, experience, and support for educators are important factors in the success of a transition-planning program, as described in our literature review. Hamblet (2014) notes the importance of “rigorous training”; Blanchett (2001) and Morgan et al. (2013) point out that a transition coordinator needs a large number of competencies to be successful, and that this position is generally a senior one. However, Blanchett and Morgan et al. also found that teachers who received formal training in transitions, even transition-specialist training in a Master’s program, often did not feel adequately prepared in all of the areas required for their work.

Profiles of our participants are summarized in Figure 3 below:

	Anna (School A)	Beth (School B)	Cathy (School C)	Dawn (School D)
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Coordinates learning support for students in the senior school -Provides academic support in areas such as learning strategies, writing, high-level Mathematics and Sciences -Helps students develop transition skills for postsecondary life (almost always universities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Head of student-support services (learning support) -Provides academic and social-emotional counselling and support -Strategically aligns various programs in the school under the student-support umbrella 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Head of student-support services -Provides administrative and learning support for students with disabilities -Handles IEPs, scheduling, obtaining psycho-educational assessments, work placements, postsecondary scholarship applications, and other paperwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Head of student-support services -Oversees programming across all grades -Provides learning support for students with disabilities in Grades 6-12 -Leader of initiatives in Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) and Safe Schools -Supports counselling, marketing, admissions, and senior-school administration
Not Responsible For	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Does not oversee social-emotional counseling or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Does not teach career education or oversee university- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Does not teach or oversee social- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Does not teach career education

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

	university-transitions counseling	transitions counseling	emotional counseling	
Student Caseload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Gifted/Learning Disabled (main) -Learning Disabilities -Autism -Mental Health -Visually Impaired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Learning Disabilities -Autism -Cerebral Palsy -Moderate Behaviour Support/Mental Health -Intensive Behaviour Interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Learning Disabilities (many students) -Autism Spectrum -Deaf or Hard of Hearing -Intensive Behaviour Interventions or Serious Mental Illness -Moderate to Profound Intellectual Disability -Physical Disability or Chronic Health Impairment -Visual Impairment Disorder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Learning Disabilities -Autism Spectrum -Gifted -Mental Health -Visually Impaired
Collab-orates with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teachers -Outside agencies -Psychologists -Students -Caregivers -Senior-school vice principals -Staff of junior school -Assistant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Caregivers -Students -Teachers -Counsellors -Support service staff -University-counselling department -Other staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Counselors -Caregivers -Students -Educational assistants -School's association -External specialists -Workplace agencies -Administrators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Learning-support staff for junior and senior school -Personal counsellor -University/course counsellor -Students -Caregivers -Teachers -Grade advisors -Administrator -Outside support-team members (specialists)
Years in Special	-20+ years	-10+ years	-5+ years at elementary level	-10+ years

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Education			-5+ months at secondary level	
Credentials	-Bachelor of Science -Bachelor of Education -Master's Degree -Doctorate Degree -Qualified to administer psycho-educational assessments in another Canadian province	-Bachelor of Arts -Special Education Diploma -Courses in support strategies	-Bachelor's Degree -Bachelor of Education -Master's Degree (pending)	-Bachelor of Arts -Bachelor of Education -Master's Degree

Figure 3. Chart of participant profiles: Anna, Beth, Cathy, and Dawn.

4.3 Context of Independent Schools in BC

Each participant was asked about how working in the context of an independent school influenced their work in transition planning. A number of trends emerged in their responses. It should be noted that the numbers of students our participants work with and descriptions of disabilities have been generalized in order to protect the identities of schools, participants, and students.

4.3.1 Greater support for students with IEPs. All of the participants emphasized that the high ratio of support staff to students at their schools meant greater support for students with disabilities than at a large public high school. For example, the fairly small number of Grade 12 students at Anna's school have access to two university guidance counsellors and a full-time social-emotional counsellor. She compared her workplace to the public high school her son attended, which employed one university counsellor for 110 Grade 12 students. Likewise, Beth stated that her current school has a greater number of staff members available to support students compared to the public school she worked at in her previous role. During her support blocks,

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Beth now supports half as many students as she did in her previous public school. Cathy commented that students “don’t just fly under the radar,” which she stated can happen at larger schools. She noted that each grade has a grade-level coordinator that moves from Grade 8 to 12 with them: “So that person travels for the five years with those kids so they get to know each other.” Dawn commented that she and her team in the senior school work with a small number of students with IEPs and that the number of staff in her department has grown significantly over the past two years. In general, all participants highlighted the fact that their schools have small overall populations and that the transition team can work with students and families closely because caseloads are manageable. Caseload was not a theme that came up in our literature review on transition planning. However, it is relevant to our discussion around the high levels of support that these independent schools offer to students, and will be addressed further in 4.9 Recommendations for Future Research and Action.

4.3.2 High expectations placed on students. High expectations from caregivers and levels of involvement were a notable influence on transition planning at the participants’ schools; this was consistent with our expectations of those who choose to send their children to independent schools. Both Anna and Beth stated that caregivers at their current schools generally expect that their children will attend a prestigious academic university after high school. Anna pointed out that some caregivers become involved in the transition process as early as Grade 3 at her school. As a concept, transition planning itself may mainly mean “university transition planning” to some caregivers, even for those whose children have significant disabilities. At Cathy’s school, on the other hand, some students go into work placements or to vocational schools rather than university. Cathy also reported that some caregivers at her school do not involve themselves at all in transition planning, a notable contrast with Anna and Beth’s schools.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Cathy herself, however, seemed to conceive of transition planning as “university transition planning,” as in her description of her work with a student who asked for help with transition planning:

He's the only one so far that has asked me for any kind of transition planning, the other ones, a lot of them are *just* [emphasis added] doing a workplace apprenticeship...he's getting an updated psych-ed. And then the *university* [emphasis added] wanted that so we got that for him.

According to our study, then, it appears that university admittance is the goal of transition planning-programs at many Group 1 and 2 independent schools, and students with disabilities are included in these expectations.

This high-pressure atmosphere can have both positive and negative effects on students with disabilities at independent schools. On the one hand, the combination of high expectations and high levels of support may result in increased rates of acceptance to universities and more equitable outcomes for students with disabilities in this region. Anna, for example, spoke about her and her principal being “proud” of the work her school was doing, and felt that they were providing “a positive atmosphere for kids to...start looking at their futures and their postsecondary stuff.” On the other hand, a high-pressure atmosphere can create negative effects as well. Beth and Cathy underscored the fact that some caregivers need to be more “realistic” about what is best for their child. Beth also discussed how students themselves need to overcome the desire to compare themselves with others so that they can make the best choices for themselves. Part of the work of transition coordinators at independent schools may be to help families temper their expectations. Anna, for example, mentioned a student with a disability whose mother expected her to go to an Ivy League business school, but who eventually—after

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

many discussions with Anna and other school staff—realized that other business schools could provide similar opportunities and would be better suited for the student. High expectations being placed on students are in line with the definitions of transition planning espoused by the Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), both from the US.

4.3.3 Lack of reference to policy documents or government agencies. All participants frequently referred to IEPs as important documents that helped in organizing and communicating students' transition plans. Because schools are required to create and update IEPs in order to receive funding under the BC *Special Education Policy (SEP)*, these documents must be carefully maintained. Our participants spoke of the IEP as being a central document of the transition-planning process, with meetings being held with students, caregivers, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other stakeholders to discuss, amend, and act on the IEP many times over several years. On the other hand, the participants did not mention school policies, the *SEP* itself, or other government policy documents, except for Beth who mentioned briefly that “there are some documents on the Ministry [of Education] website so there's a little bit.” She went on to say, though, that she could not think “off the top of [her] head” of any particular forms that she uses for transition planning, indicating that she does not regularly refer to one plan or template specifically for transitions. Cathy, meanwhile, downloads IEP and PATH⁹ templates from her school's association. PATH is a person-centered planning tool used with students to ensure a

⁹ PATH is not an acronym.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

successful future. She reported that these templates are helpful because she has attended workshops given by her school association explaining how to use the documents.

Furthermore, when asked about external agencies they could draw upon for support, participants did not mention government-funded agencies such as Inclusion BC and Community Living BC (CLBC), or programs such as Services to Adults with Developmental Disabilities (STADD). Many of them did, on the other hand, mention services for students with disabilities at postsecondary institutions. This was likely due to the focus on university admissions at our four participants' schools.

4.4 Overview of Transition-planning Processes

Most participants suggested there are general timelines for transition planning at their schools; many of these activities are done by all students, not only those with disabilities. Students with IEPs, however, usually engage in extra activities and receive additional support from staff. For example, Beth explained that the Career Education program at her school allows Grade 8 and 9 students to discover themselves in terms of their personality and learner type. This falls in line with the strength-based approach she uses in her support block, which provides extra help to students with disabilities to understand their learning profile and needs. Likewise, Anna's school requires that students complete an inquiry-based project as a part of the Grade 10 curriculum, which leads students to discover what they are passionate about. This in turn, aids her students with IEPs in selecting courses and planning for their futures wisely. At Cathy's school, students with disabilities may be supported through the PATH program, which involves meeting with the student early in their high school career and prompting them through specific methods to visualize where they see themselves in five years in order to create a plan. Dawn's school has students attend IEP meetings beginning in Grade 6, with the intent that students will

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

lead their IEP meeting by the time they are in Grade 12. Also, Dawn's school hosts an advisor program which teaches all students executive function skills—such as time management, planning, and organization—through explicit teaching. Figure 4 and Figure 5 below summarize the overall transition-planning process at the four schools in our study.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

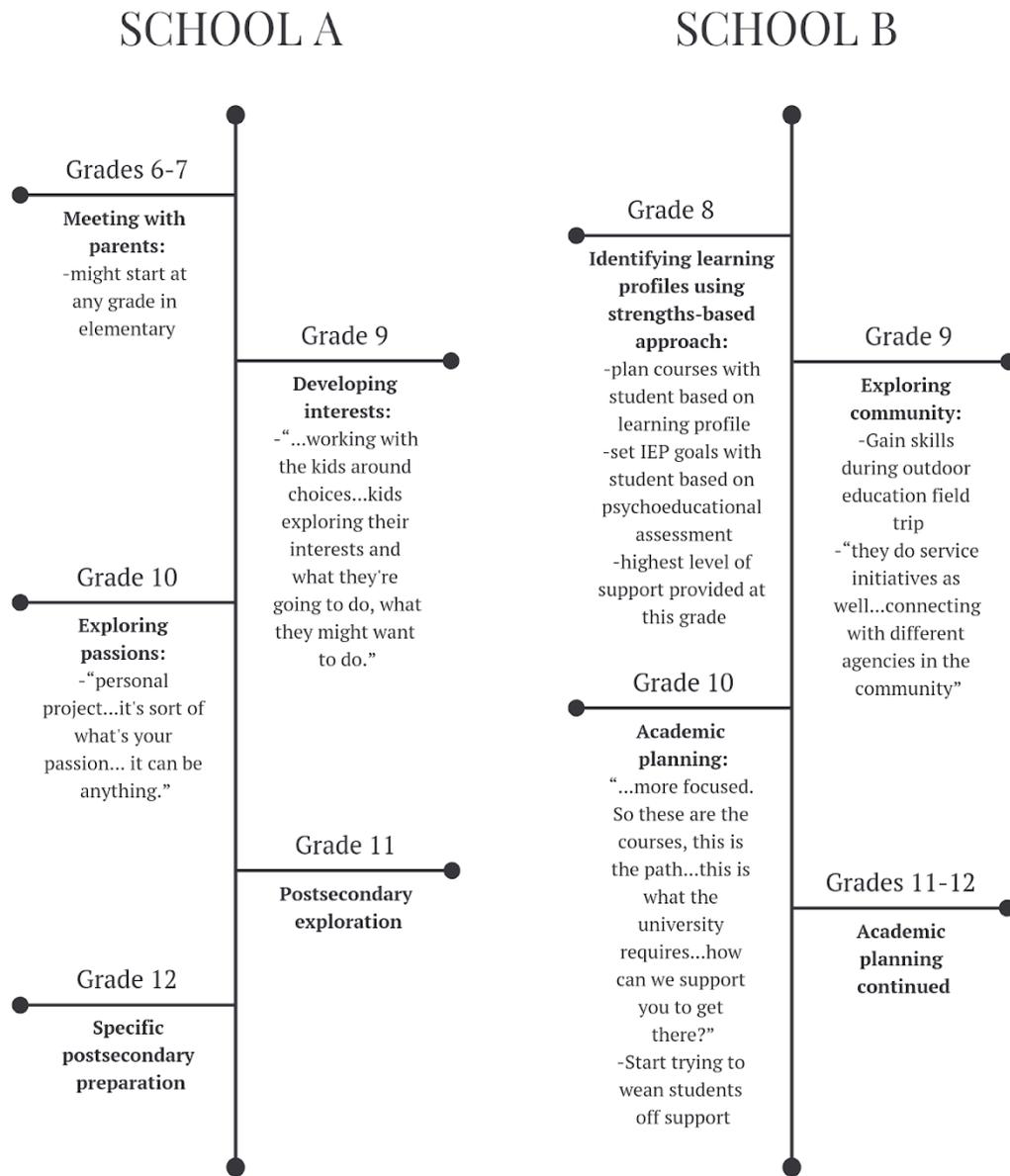


Figure 4. Timelines of the transition-planning process at School A and B.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

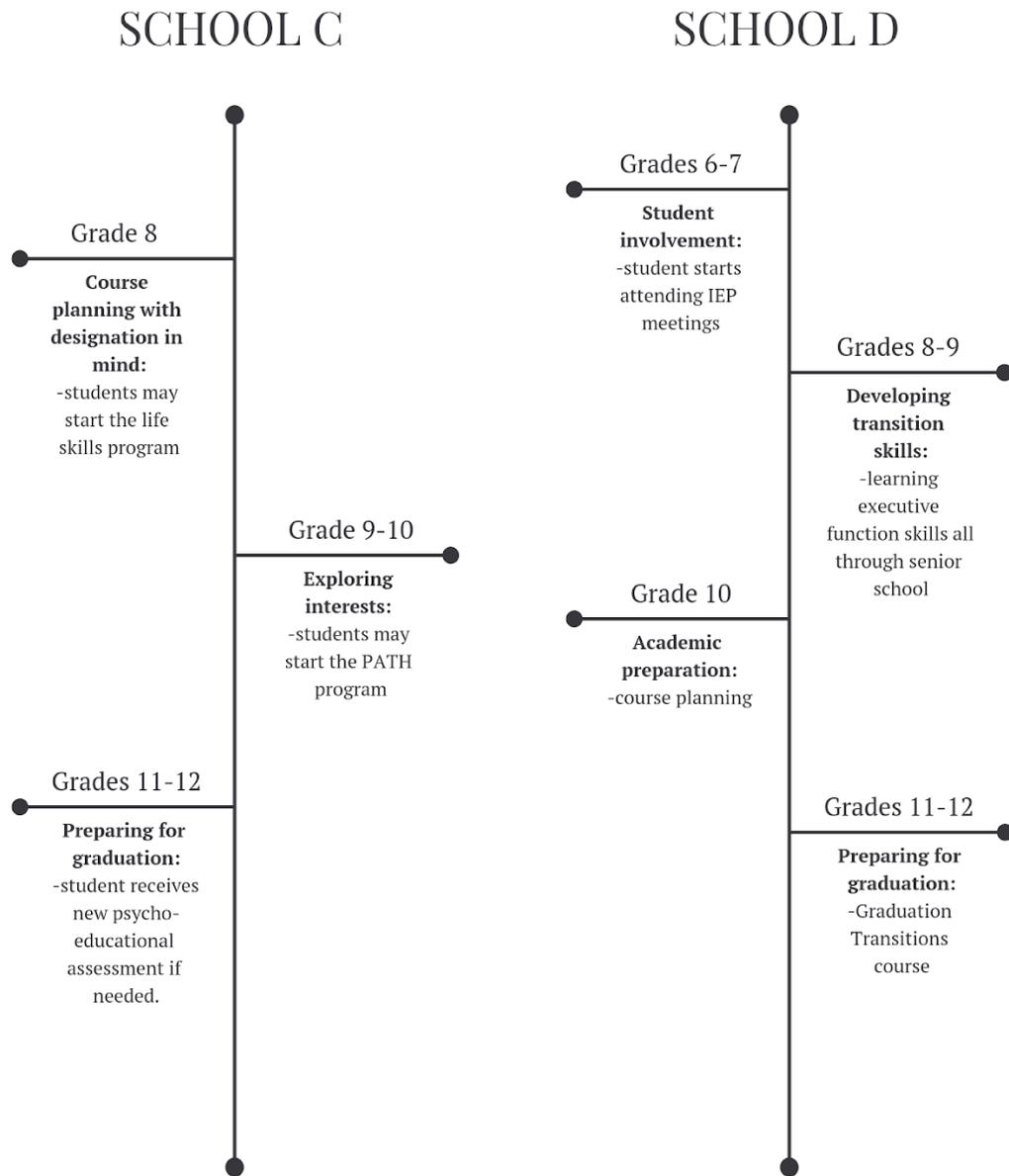


Figure 5. Timelines of the transition-planning process at School C and D.

Despite there being general processes for transition planning at their schools, most participants also noted that transition activities can be very different depending on needs of the

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

individual. In fact, Beth stated, "...it's so individualized, it's hard to sort of make one statement for all of the students that we work with." However, there were certain common practices reported by all or most of the participants. These will be discussed in the following sections, 4.5 to 4.7, on the themes of Student-centred Approach to Transition Planning, Curriculum and Instruction, and Collaboration.

4.5 Student-centred Approach to Transition Planning

Embracing a student-centred approach to transition planning was a consistent practice among all of our research participants.¹⁰ All participants stated that transition-planning support plans are created based on student interests. Two concepts emerged as participants discussed adopting a student-centred approach: self-identity and self-advocacy.

4.5.1 Self-identity. The theme of self-identity was described by Anna and Beth as a student's ability to identify their strengths and interests. For example, Beth shared that "Grade 8 and 9 is very much about the kids kind of discovering themselves, their personality type, their learner type...what's your learning profile, where are your strengths and what do you enjoy the most." Anna echoed similar thoughts about her practice, stating, "...we're trying to get them as far as they can and to help them investigate what their, their strengths and their interests are and that kind of thing."

Working with an interest-based model takes time, however, and may not be suitable for all schools and students. All of the participants noted that in order to build on a student's

¹⁰ Much of the literature uses the term person-centred rather than student-centred, particularly when non-school organizations dealing with adults are involved. In our literature review, we used the term person-centred. However, because our participants consistently used the term student-centred in our interviews, we decided to adopt their terminology in this chapter in order to preserve their voices.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

interests, educators must work with students to set goals, plan backwards, and provide rich opportunities for students to explore their own interests. For students with IEPs, this can be a time-consuming process that needs to begin early and move through many stages before leaving high school. Cummings et al. (2000) presents the structure of organizing transition planning in three levels, beginning in late elementary school, but this is much easier to enact at schools where the elementary school is joined to the upper grades. Cathy also commented that “student-centredness requires a student have the capacity and readiness to do so...[it] depends on the actual level of the child, how involved they can be.” Because Cathy supports students with a large variety of disabilities, and more students overall, she may have a harder time enacting a student-centred program compared to the other participants.

4.5.2 Self-advocacy. Van Reusen (1996) defined self-advocacy as “the ability of an individual to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert one’s own interests, desires, needs and rights[,] the ability to make informed decisions [and] taking responsibility for those decisions” (p.49-50). All four of the participants spontaneously used the term self-advocacy and highlighted it as an important skill for students to develop as they transition out of high school. When asked to elaborate on the importance of self-advocacy, Cathy responded, “If you don't self-advocate for yourself, nobody will care. Harsh to say, but if you don't do it, nobody else will. So I think that skill has to be really, really pushed.” Dawn, similarly, stated:

...[self]-advocacy and independence is a big part of the transition plan, certainly leaving Grade 12...when they're out there in the big world, and whatever postsecondary they're at, or wherever they are in their life, if they need support to help them get to where they need to be [it's important] that they're comfortable telling whoever it is that they need to about those supports.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Both Cathy and Dawn emphasize that students will be at a disadvantage if they cannot advocate for themselves. Their comments imply that self-advocacy is partly a skill and partly a character trait; when self-advocating, students must not only be able to communicate well but also have the courage to talk about their disabilities in the larger world outside of high school.

The teaching of self-advocacy at our participants' schools tends to start with student involvement in IEPs. With the exception of Cathy, all participants reported involvement of students in the development of their IEPs in Grades 8 and 9 or earlier, with many students taking charge of IEP meetings in the upper grades. In other words, our participants connected the concept of student leadership, or self-determination, to self-advocacy. However, they did not use the term self-determination itself, though the term is used in the research literature (Halpern, 1994; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Wehmeyer, 1996).

Beyond involving students in IEP development, our participants did not provide a consistent set of methods on how to teach self-advocacy, but based on the examples participants shared, it would appear that self-advocacy is taught to students in a highly personalized way. Anna discussed how one of her students is developing self-advocacy skills in the following example:

My young man with the [physical disability], he's in [Grade level] right now and what we're doing with him right now he's, he has to keep records of all of those accommodations. How often he uses them, what he's doing in the classroom, what the teachers are doing that's beneficial, what teachers are doing that is awful...and he has to keep records of that over the next [specific number of] years, so that he can prove to his profs and to the university office that this is what he needs. Because some people look at him and say, oh, he's not [physical disability], he's riding his bike to school.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Anna's anecdote highlights some of the challenges of teaching self-advocacy, a highly personalized and in-depth process; this particular student must be taught many different skills such as observation, writing, and organization of records over a number of years. Anna's anecdote also highlights the particular importance of self-advocacy for students with invisible disabilities, who may, unfortunately, be faced with a greater onus to provide documentation and speak on their own behalf.

Teaching self-advocacy is also challenging if a student lacks self confidence, which is often the case for students with disabilities. Dawn stated that "students don't realize their own potential, or they don't, they don't see how great they are." She went on to say that students can gain an understanding of themselves by reviewing their own psycho-educational assessments and realizing that their designation indicates that their mind is not better or worse than others, just "different." In other words, the teaching of self-advocacy is tied to the idea of teaching self-identity. The approach of helping students to see how their minds work and giving value to their interests allows students to eventually see how capable they are rather than reminding them of the barriers they face. This practice is supported in the research literature; Cummings et al. (2000), Hitchings et al. (2005), and McCall (2015) explain the importance of working from the student's interests as a starting point in transition planning in order to attain successful postsecondary outcomes.

Despite these challenges, the benefits of teaching self-advocacy are quite clear. In the research literature, Hitchings et al. (2005) found that students with self-advocacy skills developed in high school are more successful. Additionally, Cummings et al. (2000), Hitchings et al. (2005), and Park (2008) all discuss the need for students to gain self-advocacy skills in order to ensure the provision of support and services later in life.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

4.6 Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and instruction emerged as a theme for all participants when describing transition-planning activities. Curriculum and instruction were connected to general grade-level learning outcomes, as well as specific IEP goals of students with disabilities. The areas of curriculum and instruction that were identified fell into the following categories: literacy and numeracy skills, executive functions, emotional regulation/control, career development, and life skills.

4.6.1 Literacy and numeracy skills. Direct instruction/explicit instruction of literacy skills and numeracy was directly related to the students' needs and often took place outside of the classroom, such as in the resource room. Participants shared that they would provide direct support in various areas such as reading/writing, mathematics, and presentation skills. Anna noted that in instances where students' needs necessitated that they take a specific course not offered in a normal classroom setting in the school, the transition coordinator would guide the student through the entire course, as in the case of Beth who shared that she supported a student through a two-year program of Apprenticeship and Workplace Mathematics 10 and 11.

4.6.2 Executive functions. Executive functions refer to the many different cognitive processes used to control behavior and to connect past experience with present action. Executive functions help students to perform activities such as planning, organizing, strategizing, paying attention to and remembering details, and managing time and space. Hamblet (2014) additionally recommends explicitly teaching students strategies for learning, organizing themselves, and using assistive technology. Students benefit from learning ways to help with test preparation, time management, written expression and tracking assignments. Although most of our participants mention working on some of the executive function skills with students, only one

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

mentioned how and when these are taught to students. Dawn stated that her school's executive function program is integrated with homeroom classes/advisor check-ins, which take up 20 minutes of each school day. Similarly, some of the academic research also discusses developing time-management and self-management skills; however, the term executive function was not often used (Cummings et al., 2000; Hitchings et al., 2005; Park, 2008).

4.6.3 Emotional regulation/control. Three of our participants mentioned concerns about their students' mental health and the importance of providing their students with social-emotional support in their practice. Stress often resulted when students with disabilities compared their academic performance or future plans to those of students without disabilities. Despite having counsellors at their schools, our participants stated that they still need to provide direct social-emotional support to their students. Anna, for example, shared that she was teaching relaxation therapy to a student to relieve tension and to take breaks during exams, since the student is allowed to take breaks without incurring time penalties. Though our participants emphasized the importance of teaching emotional regulation/control, this topic did not surface in our academic research on transition planning. The closest connections come from discussions around teaching social skills to students as a part of transition planning (Cummings et al., 2000; Hitchings et al., 2005; Park, 2008). However, this is not the same as supporting students with issues around mental health and emotional regulation.

4.6.4 Career development. The career-development program was identified by all participants to be the primary responsibility of a classroom teacher or teachers. Participants provide support in this area of curriculum and instruction rather than taking a lead role, and the support is mainly connected to the administration of the student's IEP. Career development is, however, critical to transition planning. In our research, Hitchings et al. (2005) explained the

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

need for career development, and Cummings et al. (2000) extended this finding by asserting that students with disabilities benefit from further career development to ensure that they learn the skills that most typical students gain without being explicitly taught.

4.6.5 Life skills. Cathy was the only participant to mention having a formal life-skills program at her school. According to Cathy, students who were in the life-skills program also have a PATH developed. She stated that “we've been teaching them transit skills, basic life skills, so transit, laundry, cooking, buying groceries, budgeting, things like that. So we're focusing on more realistic goals for them.” On the other hand, Anna, despite not having a specific life-skills program at her school, spoke about teaching travel planning to a visually impaired student. Beth described supporting a student through courses in Apprenticeship and Workplace Mathematics, a BC subject area that focuses on math skills used in the trades and in daily life rather than in preparation for university. Dawn stated that she wished the students had “more of those real-life skills... like how to file your taxes and like how to, how to iron your clothes... there should be more focus on those sorts of hands on, real skills [across BC].” Park (2008) discussed a number of life skills that were important to intertwine in the curriculum for students with disabilities, and these skills were similar to those mentioned by our participants. However, in our professional experiences, it is challenging to establish a manageable balance between the academic demands of meeting postsecondary admissions requirements and the time needed to effectively develop life skills. This is especially true when a student is already in need of additional support or instruction in one or more areas of transition planning, such as academics or social-emotional learning. It may be that life-skills support is an essential component of transition planning, but, depending on the school, formalization of the program

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

may not always be necessary if support staff can flexibly provide the necessary training in life skills.

4.7 Collaboration

4.7.1 The importance of collaboration. A significant role of the transition coordinator is collaboration with others. If students with disabilities are to learn complex skills such as self-determination and self-advocacy before leaving high school, it is essential that different people involved in the transition plan communicate and work together well (McCall, 2015). Kohler (1996), McCall (2015), and Shogren and Plotner (2012) emphasized the need for the transition coordinator to be able to collaborate with other stakeholders. These may include professionals within their school, other agencies and postsecondary institutions, and of course families.

All of our interview participants identified collaboration as a key element of transition planning. Beth, for example, stated that “it really is all about relationships, and connection with so many different stakeholders that will hopefully lead to more success for the child.” Out of all the participants, Beth was the strongest proponent of collaboration. When asked what recommendations she would give regarding transition planning, she stated that the “team approach” involving not only staff but also caregivers can strongly support students. In fact, she used the term “team approach” five times in her interview, and noted that strong collaboration provides the following: (a) the building of trusting relationships, (b) a greater variety of expertise for the student to draw on, (c) a greater availability of help for the student, so that if one team member is away the others can fill in; (d) better communication, efficiency, and alignment of strategies; and (e) more chances for the student to learn self-determination and self-advocacy due to having to ask for help from many people, rather than “lean on” one person. Beth’s views, and those of the other participants, connect well with Kohler (1996) and McCall’s (2015) research

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

around the improved outcomes of students who have had more coordination within the school and between agencies. McCall (2015) further suggests that students be involved in the collaborative process in order to foster their self-advocacy and self-determination skills. In addition, all four of our participants' views on collaboration were in line with the BC MoE's document *Career/Life Transitions for Students with Diverse Needs: A Resource Guide for Schools* (2001), which advocates for a team of individuals rather than a single transition coordinator to support students in their transition to adulthood.

Building productive relationships, however, requires time, energy, and skill. Anna emphasized the difficulty and complexity of the process, stating that “you have to work in collaboration in order to find the best fit. And it's not best fit just academically. It's emotionally and personally and socially and family-wise.” Beth, meanwhile, informed us that enhancing collaboration at her school is one of her main duties this year, as she has been tasked with re-organizing and expanding her department. She described the lengthy process required to improve the “strategic alignment” of programs at her school as such:

...we're only a number of months in. So we're still kind of in the discovery, discovery phase of what are our needs, where have we been, where we're going? So quite recently, we did a department retreat day off campus where we got into that. I'm trying to kind of dig a little bit deeper as to where we've been as a department and what opportunities are there for the future.

Evidently, according to our participants, each transition team needs to be built relationship by relationship over time; there is no one-size-fits-all model that can be imposed on a group of people to make them work well together.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

With this complexity in mind, we will now discuss the different types of stakeholders with whom our participants collaborate. We would like to emphasize, however, that though we discuss each type of stakeholder separately, our participants implied that collaboration works in a highly organic and fluid manner. Over the course of the student's high school years, the students' supporters come together at various times, working on different aspects of the transition plan according to needs. The job of the transition coordinator is to make sure that these different parties work together smoothly, and to connect the student as much as possible to those whose expertise can be of benefit.

4.7.2 Collaboration between educational professionals within the school. According to Hitchings et al. (2005) and Milsom and Hartley (2005), transitions are most successful when the education professionals within the school have a strong working relationship with the student and each other. It is important that the members of a transition team draw on each other's contacts, relationships with students and families, and areas of expertise. This is because while the transition coordinator should have a strong understanding of the students' transition plans as a whole, the school counsellors, classroom teachers, and other parties may have intimate knowledge of specific areas. School counsellors in particular were mentioned frequently and will be discussed further in the next section. As these educational professionals work in collaboration with each other, they are able to maintain a consistent person-centred support plan.

4.7.3 Roles of school counsellors. All of our interview participants commented on their close relationships with their school counsellors. The participants discussed the role of the counsellors in the student's preparation for life after high school. The counsellors are involved in teaching career lessons, providing essay writing support, preparing students for interviews and campus visits, and even evaluating postsecondary programs for alignment with individual

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

personality, academic suitability, levels of independence, and social needs. Most of our participants emphasized the valuable expertise and connections of postsecondary counsellors, who can help students in ways that our participants cannot. Anna, for example, stated that she cannot successfully advocate for students with disabilities by communicating directly with university admissions officers, while the counsellors at her school sometimes can due to their connections. Anna also reported that the postsecondary counsellors take a deep look at how the students will fit into postsecondary programs from many perspectives. These counsellors are even involved in teaching Career Education in Grade 10, connecting them with students two years before the end of high school. Anna also said that at an independent school, students have much greater access to the postsecondary counsellors compared to public schools; she and Cathy both commented that many independent schools allow for closer relationships by nature of their smaller population and ratios of students to educators. At School B, Beth shared that the counsellors work one-to-one with students starting in Grade 11 to ensure that the right fit is found. Additionally, the school has counsellors for both Canadian and American postsecondary programs. Beth discussed the desire to have the postsecondary counselling department under the same umbrella as her student-support department. Both departments appeared to be heavily involved in different aspects of transition planning.

In the research, Milsom and Hartley (2005) emphasized the importance of the school counsellor in transition planning. Their work similarly identifies the value in the transition coordinator having a close relationship with both the students and the postsecondary agencies. These researchers also noted that it is advisable for these counsellors to be well-informed about the disabilities and IEPs that are associated with their students. For this to happen, the transition coordinator and the counsellors should be strong collaborators. Thus, it is not only training and

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

strategies that are required of members of transition teams, as noted by Hamblet (2014), but also experience, connections, and trusting relationships. The role of the transition coordinator is, ideally, to bring these professionals together so that their various skills and connections are utilized maximally.

4.7.4 Collaboration with caregivers. Caregivers play a role in all of the participating schools, but to different degrees. In Cathy's school, the caregivers are invited to join IEP meetings and thereby become part of the transition-planning process; however, some caregivers choose not to attend. In Anna and Beth's schools, on the other hand, caregivers are usually actively involved in the transition-planning process and often have clear ideas of what they want their children to do and where they want them to go after high school. As Anna stated, the caregivers are not always "realistic," but they are often the ones to initiate the IEP or university planning process, sometimes to the displeasure of students. Anna informed us that she sometimes needs to act as a mediator between the student and their caregivers if there is disagreement about what the student wants to do after high school, or if the student is unable to achieve the academic goals set by the caregivers. Beth, conversely, stated that the caregivers at her school are "right on board" with the planning process. She works with caregivers who typically agree with the approach of the school and are very supportive of the postsecondary plans made by their children. Both Anna and Beth felt that they played a significant role in coordinating communication to ensure alignment of information and goals among stakeholders. Cathy emphasized that whatever schools may recommend, it is the families that make the final decisions about what courses of action to take. Anna, Beth, and Cathy recognized that while dealing with caregivers can be challenging, it is essential that the caregivers' voices be heard.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

As discussed in our literature review, Shogren and Plotner (2012) highlight the fact that the caregivers are the primary support for the student and suggest that transition planning begin with the caregivers along with the individual student. It is our experience, however, that caregivers are not always included from the beginning in transition planning in BC. It is therefore significant that all of our participants' schools at least attempt to include caregivers at various stages of the transition process based on the situation and the dynamics. In some cases, the caregivers initiate the transition planning, while in other cases, the transition coordinator initiates the planning and the caregivers either do not become involved until a later stage or remain mostly uninvolved throughout. It may be that Shogren and Plotner's suggestion of involving caregivers at the beginning of the transition-planning process is a difficult one to implement in all cases. Beth, Cathy, and Dawn also alluded to caregivers sometimes not wanting to be involved at all, preferring to leave transition planning to the school.

All of the participants alluded to occasional conflicts arising between caregivers and students in the process of student-centred transition planning, due to differences in opinion regarding students' futures. In general, participants stated that caregiver involvement is both necessary and complicated. Cathy summed up the situation well by saying, "I think a lot of parents have been fighting for their child for so long that when it's that time to step away, they can't." In our lived experiences, we have seen that caregivers often have to work hard to convince educators and professionals of their children's needs long before their children become aware of their disability and gain the skills necessary to advocate for themselves. Thus, it can be difficult for caregivers to step back and allow their children to make their own decisions, even if it is with the support of educators and related professionals.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Despite these challenges, it is important for schools to actively attempt to collaborate with families. Cathy mentioned that her school's association does this by organizing a "transition night" for caregivers, during which they can learn about postsecondary options and meet with school staff and representatives of postsecondary institutions. This type of event is in line with the practices advocated by Geenen, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez (2001), who caution against putting up barriers against parent participation. This event specifically targets the caregivers, provides them with plenty of choices, and is considerate of their daytime schedules.¹¹

4.7.5 External agency collaboration. Collaborating with external agencies is given great importance in the literature (Hitchings et al., 2005; Milsom & Hartley, 2005). Below we discuss the different types of agencies the four participants in our study mentioned.

4.7.5.1 Postsecondary institutions. Only Anna mentioned direct connections between her school's counsellors and postsecondary institutions. She attributed her counsellors' close working relationships in part to the fact that they regularly visit postsecondary institutions based on the paths of their school alumni. These visits and relationships, in turn, allow School A's counsellors to contact and communicate directly with the individuals who can provide insight into the transition and application processes to specific institutions. By contrast, Cathy, who is new to transition planning for high school students, explained that she felt under-informed by postsecondary institutions in regards to the types of support services offered to new students with

¹¹ Interestingly, none of our participants mentioned that they experienced challenges working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families, which was an issue pointed out in the literature (Cote, Jones, Sparks, and Aldridge, 2012; Geenen, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez, 2001). However, it may be that the four independent schools in our study enroll fewer CLD students than other schools; Anna mentioned that her school used to have more students with English as a second language, but now has very few.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

disabilities. Both she and Dawn professed that postsecondary institutions do not make enough of an effort to inform students, families, and high schools about their support programs. The information, Dawn stated, is available but hard to find: “sometimes I have to click, click, click [on postsecondary school websites] and search through and like, push back the curtains to find like, what does support look like in postsecondary.” Furthermore, Anna suggests that universities could offer a more authentic experience for high school students to participate in university events while still in high school in order to have a better understanding of what university life may be like in their future.

4.7.5.2 *Between schools.* When schools collaborate, they gain opportunities to streamline programs and share “best practices” amongst educational professionals. Cathy, for example, discussed the benefits of having connections between the schools in her association. This connection allows for further professional development around transition planning and also provides her with a network for providing transition services such as the PATH program. Dawn, likewise, explained the benefits of her school association, which provides member schools with professional development specific to different educational roles and programs. She said,

I find that really helpful, we get together and it’s people from across the [association] that come together for a day [and] we talked about whatever issues [we] feel are important at that time. Sometimes it would be about like, how to support students who are high potential or gifted or things about the IEP, transition planning can be a part of that as well... Those are one of the most beneficial meetings that I have all year... And so having that support and we have a common language and we can ask each other these questions that some, some other people may not really grasp and understand. I think that’s really important, and especially being a small school.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

In our research, we did not find academic literature that discussed the ways in which associations can provide support for schools through professional development or by helping them connect with one another.

4.7.5.3 External paraprofessionals. Transition coordinators frequently work with external paraprofessionals. While all of our participants discussed the use of psycho-educational assessments, two of the four discussed direct collaboration with psychologists and two mentioned using reports written by psychologists. Anna specifically elaborated on communicating with psychologists and families in order to determine what type of assessment should be used to identify a student's needs and eventually provide them with suitable supports. Dawn, similarly, explained that she includes psychologists or therapists in school-based team meetings or in meetings with students and their families. Additionally, Dawn mentioned collaboration and involvement of other professionals such as vision teachers, speech language pathologists (SLPs), and occupational therapists (OTs). A number of researchers identify the need for transition coordinators to include time and flexibility to meet with other professionals and outside agencies (Kohler, 1996; McCall, 2015; Park, 2008; and Shogren & Plotner, 2012).

4.8 Discussion of Findings

4.8.1 Response to our problematic. At the beginning of our research project, we asked the following questions: (a) What do transition coordinators believe to be best practices regarding transition planning from high school to adulthood? and (b) What are the actual practices of transition coordinators in schools? Through our four interviews, we discovered that our participating schools do not identify one person to officially occupy the role of the transition coordinator, nor do they work from a written policy or procedural document for transition planning. With that said, our participants had similar backgrounds and roles in their schools, and

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

were able to articulate what they believed to be key practices for the role of transition coordinator. The participants essentially named six best practices for transition coordinators in schools: (a) employing a transition coordinator with training and experience in special education, and assigning duties appropriately; (b) providing supportive environments for students with suitable staffing, (c) utilizing a unified transition-planning process that begins early, progresses logically, and includes students with disabilities in career/postsecondary planning activities done by all students in the school; (d) taking a student-centred planning approach, including the development of self-identity and self-advocacy; (e) providing effective curriculum and instruction involving literacy and numeracy skills, executive-function development, and emotional regulation; and (f) collaborating between educational professionals, families, external agencies, and other stakeholders.

Our second question aimed to identify our participants' actual practices and compare them to best practices, as developed in their own minds through professional experiences and also as found in evidence-based research. Our interviews revealed that the four transition coordinators' conceptions of best practices and actual practices were largely congruent with the practices recommended in the research literature. When prompted, participants did mention challenges in their actual practices, such as the difficulties in teaching self-advocacy, lack of information about support services in postsecondary institutions, and conflicts between caregivers and students; however, none of our participants indicated that the challenges they face are insurmountable or a result of a lack of resources. They also tended to report that many of their students have successfully achieved their goals (usually admission to postsecondary institutions) thanks to the collaborative efforts of all those involved in the transition plan. The overall attitudes of our participants were positive in regards to transition planning at their

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

schools. This does not mean that all of their experiences with transition planning have been positive, of course. Nor should their experiences be taken to be representative of all independent schools, which are highly diverse.

There was a general alignment between the practices of our participants and the best practices advocated in the evidence-based research suggests that the experiences of our participants reflect recurring situations. While the transition coordinators did not refer to academic research at all, they did espouse practices similar to those found in our literature review, even using much of the same terminology. The academic research does appear to have affected their conceptual understanding of transition planning. That said, our participants did not mention doing their own research, academic or otherwise, beyond downloading a few transition planning guides from government websites. Nor did they emphasize their years of schooling; they did not refer to mentor figures or particular lessons they had learned, for example, as being helpful in transition planning. Rather, they highlighted the knowledge developed through their experiences and from the support of other educational professionals who work closely with them. As working educators ourselves, we did expect to hear that educators would give a substantial amount of weight to their experiences and professional resources over their studies, which were many years ago. It might be reasonable to infer that there is much research behind their practice, regardless of what was explicitly articulated in the interviews. The fact that all four participants used the term “self-advocacy” indicates that the academic research on transition planning has permeated into Metro Vancouver, even though studies done in this region’s schools are minimal.

In light of the practices of our participants and our own research, there does seem to be an opportunity to deepen the professional practices of transition coordinators and educators working with students who have IEPs in independent schools in BC. Based on these interviews, transition

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

coordinators often develop their own practices rather than working from a shared provincial model. The fact that these four transition coordinators are quite well-informed may not be reflective of all transition coordinators. Therefore, many students may experience transition support that is not based on research, depending on the school and the educators connected to them. A structured and clearly articulated set of guidelines, skills, and general “best practices” could help educators ensure that they are committing enough time and preparation along with a common set of practices to helping students with disabilities prepare for completion of high school, postsecondary education, and adulthood. While the provincial government has created a number of guides and there are mentions of transition planning on IEP templates and in the *SEP*, these are highly confusing (as described in Chapters 1 and 2 of this paper), and not in wide use, as indicated by our participants and as seen in our own practice.

4.9 Recommendations for Action and Further Research

Transition planning is still a nascent field, and as such there are many ways in which educators, researchers, organizations, and government can contribute to it. The following recommendations are those we judged most likely to produce positive change.

4.9.1 One repository for transition planning documents with a consistent conceptualization of transition planning. We recommend that the MoE develop a repository of updated guiding documents to improve the flow of information in the area of transition planning. At present, there are multiple stakeholders, including ministries, school districts, and social service agencies that have their own guiding documents or procedural documents on transition planning. Unfortunately, these texts are not consistent and, in some places, contradict each other in their conceptions of the practice of transition planning and the roles needed to ensure successful transition planning. It is vital that a thorough environmental scan/review of the

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

various guiding documents be conducted, and that these be combined with a province-wide consultation process with various stakeholders invested in transition planning. Doing so may help to ensure the development of a consistent definition of transition planning informed by evidence-based best practices.

4.9.2 Development of a transition planning curriculum. Transition coordinators may not always be the ones who explicitly teach skills related to transitioning out of high school, yet they are aware of the need for these skills. The literature and our participants clearly indicated a need for specific skills to be taught. Kohler (1996), Levinson and Ohler (1998), and Thoma et al. (2001) are examples of researchers whose work can guide BC teachers or other educational professionals in developing principles, tools, and developmentally appropriate curriculum materials for transition planning. Further research could be focused around how these skills are already being taught in BC schools and whether or not students with IEPs are developing these skills in time for life after high school. Moreover, researchers could investigate whether teachers, support staff, and educational professionals are aware of how students with disabilities often do not naturally develop skills such as self-determination, self-advocacy, or self-awareness through typical schooling and social experiences compared to typical students, as suggested by Cummings et al. (2000) and Milsom and Hartley (2005).

4.9.3 Regularization of transition coordinator role and training. The BC MoE *Special Education Services: A Manual for Special Needs Students* does not define the role of the transition coordinator nor the need for a person who is responsible for transition planning; however, there are various stakeholder documents that do. It would be in the best interests of the MoE to regularize the role of transition coordinator to ensure consistency of practice and professional qualifications necessary to perform the responsibilities associated. Formal training

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

programs at universities may not be ideal for providing educators with the competencies needed to implement transition planning, since transition coordinators need to learn to work with such a diverse range of students, parents, and locales, and must form collaborative networks in their specific contexts. Special-education training, though, is necessary for transition coordinators to have a thorough understanding of the diverse needs of the students in their care, as well as to coordinate the work of the many educators who collaborate to support those needs. Due to the complex and collaborative nature of the role, the majority of transition-planning training should perhaps be done through flexible in-school programs, on-going support, professional development, and mentorship.

Though we recommend that the transition coordinator role and training programs be regularized in order to promote understanding and collaboration, we do not recommend that this regularized framework be made too restrictive. Further research could be carried out to determine ways to disseminate research-based practices without prescribing a one-size-fits-all solution through a single document or accountability measure. Based on the responses of our participants (who did not report using government resources) and our own professional experiences, it would not be helpful for a government ministry to put out yet another guide that may simply be ignored by the professionals it is intended to support. Nor would it be helpful to simply require all schools to appoint a transition coordinator and prove that they have done so through documentation; this would likely lead to schools going through the motions rather than making sincere efforts to improve transition-planning programs. A concerted, sustained effort is necessary in order to effect lasting change, and this can best be accomplished by providing a balanced mixture of regularization and flexibility in order to disseminate best practices in a way that meets local needs.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

4.9.4 Greater collaboration. Many schools may not know how to go about starting or strengthening their transition-planning programs. Rather than having each school “reinvent the wheel,” it would be beneficial to tap into the expertise of schools and school associations, particularly those where collaborative networks are already strong. Creating a centralized website for transition coordinators at the high-school level, organizing professional-development activities, and developing mentorship opportunities are possible ways to create a community of practice for transition coordinators. Among independent schools, the Federation of Independent School Associations of BC (FISA BC), or certain associations within it, could take a leadership role in this area.

Collaboration with external organizations is also essential. Linking students with outside agencies is undeniably important, but it is also time-consuming and often dependent on individual educators and families to make connections if the school does not have strong existing networks or resources. To improve or develop interagency relationships, it is necessary for schools to support transition coordinators and school counsellors so that they can allot time to do research, paperwork, site visits, safety checkups, coordination of schedules, and adjustment as needed. Comments made by both Cathy and Anna about the need to connect more closely with postsecondary institutions resonated with us. Cathy said that she would like to see postsecondary institutions promote their student-support services (disability services) more effectively. Anna would like to see postsecondary institutions provide students with more authentic experiences prior to applying or enrolling in their programs. Further research might be valuable in shedding light on ways that high schools and postsecondary institutions can create closer collaborative working relationships that make student-support services more visible and provide ways for high school students to experience postsecondary schooling in some capacity before they are formally

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

enrolled. Doing so would greatly ease the difficult transition into postsecondary schooling for many students with disabilities, and potentially reduce first-year attrition rates.

For those students who are not immediately pursuing postsecondary education, government agencies such as Inclusion BC and CLBC and programs such as STADD may also be able to provide guidance to schools. Their informational vehicles for transition planning (such as their websites and brochures) are generally well-organized and, importantly, specific to BC.

Furthermore, the MoE in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction could provide funding to support the convening of a transition-planning community of practice that would involve various stakeholders including education, social service agencies, postsecondary, health, caregivers, and young adults with disabilities.

4.9.5 Research around mental health. Mental health is not always given recognition as a disability compared to learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, or physical disabilities. The province recently reported that approximately 84,000 school-aged children experience one or more mental-health disorders at any given time and only one-third receive the specialized treatment they need (Zussman, 2019). These statistics coupled with the high incidence of the co-occurrence of disabilities and mental-health problems and disorders can highly affect student learning and transition planning. According to our own professional experiences and the reported experiences of all of our participants, the mental health of students appears to be worsening in a school system that grows more competitive each year. Further research can be conducted around adopting a whole school transition-planning program that focuses on mental-health literacy, and not only for students with IEPs; mental health should be a priority in the mainstream BC curriculum. Research can focus on the relationship between mental health and the attainment of

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

transition-related skills, as well as on training for administration, staff, and caregivers so that they may better support students' mental health.

4.9.6 Greater attention paid to inclusive education. Researchers and educators are embracing a philosophy of inclusive education as the best research-based approach to working with students of every level of ability and need. Inclusion, according to the BC MoE's *SES Manual*, ensures that "students with special needs are fully participating members of a community of learners" (2016b). Within our research parameters, we encountered information specifically around inclusive practices of transition planning from Hitchings et al. (2005), Kohler (1996), and McCall (2015). Furthermore, our participants all identified inclusion as a key element of their school's processes; transition planning activities for students with IEPs were integrated with those of other students, allowing those with disabilities to experience enriching activities and to reach for high standards while receiving high degrees of support.

However, it would be prudent to do further research around best practices for inclusion with regards to transition planning for students with IEPs that goes beyond our currently defined research boundaries, particularly for students with severe disabilities. Cummings et al. (2000) stated that students with IEPs need more support than typical students when learning about themselves in preparation for adulthood. Further research could help uncover methods for balancing these needs and goals in the regular classrooms and ensuring that teachers are aware of the range of needs of all of their students with regards to transition planning.

Further research should also be done around the role of peer-to-peer relationships in inclusive settings where transition planning is done. Dawn stated, "we had some students [a] couple years ago... the students really looked up to these kids... they were in the music program, there was really smart [students], they were really out there." Thanks to the peer support they

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

received, these students became comfortable speaking about their own disabilities and experiences with support services. In our lived experiences as educators, we know that it is often most effective when students are able to work with and learn from each other in developing the tools and skills needed for adulthood. Research around peer-to-peer support could also incorporate ideas around peer pressure with regards to academic performance and postsecondary plans. All of our participants found this type of peer pressure challenging to manage in their schools.

4.9.7 Impact of caseloads on student outcomes. Russ, Chiang, Rylance, and Bongers (2001), surveying the extant literature on caseloads, state that educators working with smaller groups of students with disabilities can help improve educational outcomes. Smaller ratios of students to educators may also result in higher retention rates of staff, which is important when building up collaborative networks. The researchers do note, however, that caseloads in special education are not well studied, and that optimal ratios are difficult to determine. Factors such as the types of programs utilized at the school (inclusionary classrooms versus pull-out support) and the severity and variety of students' disabilities affect workloads in such a way that mere numbers do not capture.

In our study, this matter is also influenced by the fact that independent schools serve a select group of students, not the general population. This selectiveness is especially pertinent at three of our four participating schools, where academic assessments are used to determine whether a student is eligible for admittance. Students with severe disabilities may find it difficult to meet these entrance requirements compared to those with mild disabilities. Our participants' caseloads, then, are not only smaller than those at public schools, but also more likely to be controlled in terms of variability of disabilities. This may help account for why the four

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

transition coordinators we interviewed do not currently work with students in the most heavily funded category of disability, Level 1, which includes Physically Dependent and Deafblind students (though it should also be noted that Level 1 disabilities are low-incidence). Anna, in particular, works with a select group; she reported that students in her school generally have high academic abilities, and that her students with IEPs are “almost without exception” in the category of gifted while also having a disability. Other contextual factors also influence the way we view caseload at this school; for example, Anna herself was likely hired due to her extensive experience and training in gifted education, and the special academic program utilized at her school may be particularly well-suited to supporting gifted/learning disabled students. Students with severe disabilities would not necessarily be able to benefit to the same degree if they were in the same program. Thus, while our participants made it clear that having a large number of support staff for students with IEPs is beneficial, it is important to consider other factors particular to each independent school. Creating a successful transition-planning program is a complex endeavour, and having adequate numbers of staff is only one piece of the puzzle.

4.9.8 Research in both public and independent schools. It is recommended that more studies be done to examine the transition-planning processes being utilized at other independent schools. Because our sample size was small, our findings are not generalizable to other contexts, and it is recommended that more work be done in order to verify our results. Additionally, it is recommended that researchers conduct studies of transition-planning programs in public schools, and eventually conduct studies that include both public and independent schools. We believe that public and independent schools offer different strengths, and that the two systems may be able to learn from each other and provide each other with aid. The two systems should ideally complement each other, in terms of servicing students with disabilities.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

4.9.9 Student follow-up studies. We cannot fully know the impact of transition planning without conducting student follow-up studies after school leaving. Longitudinal studies combined with anecdotal accounts from students and caregivers are necessary to better understand the transition-planning practices that support students achieving greater post-high school outcomes in the areas of education, employment, and independent living. In the US, three long-term, nationwide studies of the effect of transition planning have been conducted using funds from that country's Department of Education—the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS, 1985-1993), National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2, 2001-2009), and the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 (NLTS 2012, 2012-2013). These studies include a wide variety of collection methods (interviews, surveys, student assessments, teacher surveys, etc.) and make comparisons regarding any number of factors, including postsecondary education, employment, social and community involvement, caregiver and student expectations, general health, club involvement, bullying, poverty, use of social media, transition-planning activities done in schools, and so on.

Canada's educational landscape is quite different from that of the US, being provincially mandated, and there is no federal educational ministry to conduct national studies. However, considering the cross-ministerial nature of transition planning, a national study could be conducted in our country by a non-educational federal agency, such as Statistics Canada. In addition, provinces can conduct their own studies of transition planning, and these should be done as a cross-ministerial endeavour, rather than within the mandate of a single ministry. Transition planning, as we have found, goes beyond the borders of the MoE.

4.9.10 Summary of recommendations. Our research has allowed us to see a number of areas that need continued attention as educators and other professionals aim to create better

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

transition plans for individuals. We have suggested the following actions and research avenues: creation of a repository for transition-planning documents, development of a transition-planning curriculum, regularization of the transition-coordinator role and training, greater collaboration, research around mental health, greater attention paid to inclusive education, research on the impact of caseloads on student outcomes, research in both public and independent schools, and student follow-up studies. These are just some of the areas where action and further research could improve outcomes for students with disabilities as they transition out of high school. It is our hope that agencies and individuals will use our research as groundwork to continue the pursuit of better outcomes for our students, children, and members of society as they transition from youth to adulthood.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In British Columbia (BC) high schools, transition coordinators are responsible for overseeing the transition plans for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) leaving high school and moving into the adult world. Our study attempted to discover transition coordinators' conceptions of best practices as well as the actual practices of transition coordinators in independent high schools in the Metro Vancouver area of BC. In the four schools where we conducted our research, the transition coordinators' conceptions of best practices and actual practices were largely congruent. In addition, our participants' conceptions and actual practices matched many of the best practices advocated in the research literature. This congruence may have been due to contextual factors shared between the four schools, but there is not enough evidence to construct a unified theory that explains the phenomenon as a whole. We can conjecture that the following factors were conducive to creating effective transition-planning programs: (a) transition-coordinator training and experience, with appropriate assignment of duties; (b) favourable conditions created by the independent school, such as lighter caseloads and high-support environments; (c) use of a transition-planning process that begins in early high school and proceeds logically; (d) a student-centred approach to transition planning; (e) effective curriculum and instruction involving necessary skills for students with disabilities; and (f) effective collaboration within the school and with external parties. We arrived at these six factors through a thorough coding process, and these themes capture the data from our four interviews in a comprehensive manner.

We conducted this study because we are concerned about the relatively poor outcomes of students with disabilities after high school. We believe that now is an ideal time for educators, particularly those in positions of leadership, to take action in order to improve transition-

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

planning programs within the province, which will in turn improve the prospects for students with disabilities. Currently, the BC education system is undergoing major changes, including a curriculum overhaul and a major review and update of the Special Education Policy (SEP). The province is also experiencing a teacher shortage, particularly of special education teachers, prompting many educators to move to new schools or districts in search of new opportunities; and, many educators from outside of BC are moving into our province, providing an influx of new knowledge that is going largely unremarked. As educators move into new roles, schools may experience confusion and unfilled roles, but this may also give rise to opportunities for positive reforms in school communities. The fact that many of the participants of our study are new to their roles or even to their schools reflects the general atmosphere of flux in the province.

It is hoped that educators who take on responsibility for transition planning as part of a new role will *not* have to create brand-new transition-planning programs; existing staff and structures should provide robust support so that no educator (or student or parent for that matter) has to implement the multifarious elements of a transition plan alone. In our experience, however, the support structure for transition-planning programs in BC is still limited. In fact, the term “transition planning” is hardly even heard in teacher-education programs, staff rooms, or professional-development conferences. For those who try to educate themselves, they may find the government documentation confusing, the Canadian research lacking, and the experts and outside agencies difficult to access. Situations vary, of course, but among our research group, we do not find much evidence of strong support for transition-planning programs in BC. We believe that transition planning is a nascent field in BC, and much of the knowledge and expertise required to implement it successfully may reside more in certain individuals than in institutions as a whole. It is of paramount importance, then, that the knowledge of these experienced

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

transition coordinators be utilized wisely so that the structural support for transition planning can be expanded and improved.

This study is an initial attempt to navigate the largely uncharted, yet frequently travelled, waters of transition planning in BC. Strong transition-planning programs do exist, such as in our participant schools, but these successes are not being documented in the academic literature or shared among educators or families in a clear and efficient manner. This lack of communication is unfortunate, since, as we discovered through our study, collaboration is one of the key factors in creating a successful transition-planning program. Students with disabilities should ideally be supported by many people with different areas of expertise as they move through high school, but in many schools, transition planning is a mega-project left to special education teachers to figure out on their own—or to simply tick off as a to-do item on IEP forms. If we are to better serve our students with disabilities, whose outcomes still lag far behind those of their peers, we as a province need to start charting a steadier course for our most vulnerable young people. We can start by helping our educators to understand and navigate the complexities of transition planning in a well-supported manner.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

References

- Agee, J. (2009). Developing qualitative research questions: a reflective process. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(4), 431–447.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390902736512>
- Agrin, M., Cain, H., & Cavin, M. (2002). Enhancing the involvement of rehabilitation counsellors in the transition process. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 25, 141–155.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/08857288020250020410.1177/088572880202500204>
- Allison, D. J., Hasan, S., & Van Pelt, D. (2016, June). A Diverse Landscape: Independent Schools in Canada. The Fraser Institute. Retrieved from
<https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/a-diverse-landscape-independent-schools-in-canada.pdf>
- An overview of special needs schools: Most special needs schools provide services for children who don't fit into the mainstream system. (n.d.). Retrieved from
<http://www.ourkids.net/school/special-needs-schools-disabilities>
- Anderson, C. (2010). Presenting and Evaluating Qualitative Research. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 74(8), 1–7.
- Arim, R. (2017). *A profile of persons with disabilities among Canadians aged 15 years or older, 2012* (Canadian Survey on Disability, 2012 No. Catalogue no. 89-654-X) (pp. 1–29). Statistics Canada. Retrieved from https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2015001-eng.pdf?st=_fiGQ5ao
- Bernard, H. R. (2002). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (3rd ed.). Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

- Blalock, G., Kochhar-Bryant, C. A., Test, D. W., Kohler, P., White, W., Lehmann, J., ... Patton, J. (2003). The Need for Comprehensive Personnel Preparation in Transition and Career Development: A Position Statement of the Division on Career Development and Transition. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 26(2), 207–226.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/088572880302600207>
- Blanchett, W. J. (2001). Importance of Teacher Transition Competencies as Rated by Special Educators. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 24(1), 3–12.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development. (2005). Transition Planning for Youth with Special Needs: A Community Support Guide. Retrieved from
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/support_guide.pdf
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2001). Career/Life Transitions for Students with Diverse Needs: A Resource Guide for Schools. Retrieved from
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teaching-tools/inclusive/career-life-transitions-for-studnets-with-diverse-needs.pdf>
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2002). *K-12 Funding - Special Needs*. Retrieved from
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/k-12-funding-special-needs>
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. Special Education Policy (2006). Retrieved from
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/special-education>

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2016a). *Special Education Programs and Funding - Independent Schools*. Retrieved from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/independent-schools/special-education-programs-and-funding-independent-schools>

British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2016b, 1995). *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines*. Retrieved from https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/inclusive/special_ed_policy_manual.pdf

British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2017). *Classification of Independent Schools*. Retrieved from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/independent-schools/classification-of-independent-schools>

British Columbia Ministry of Education. (n.d.-a). External Evaluation Report for Brick and Mortar Independent Schools: School Year 2018-19. Retrieved from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/independent-schools/documents>

British Columbia Ministry of Education. (n.d.-b). Ministry of Education - Independent Schools: Enrolment and Funding Data (p. 2). Retrieved from https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/independent-schools/enrolment_funding_summary.pdf

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Bureau of Labor Statistics - U.S. Department of Labor. (2018). *Persons with a disability: Labor force characteristics - 2017* (News Release No. USDL-18-1028) (pp. 1–11). Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>

Burr, V. (1995). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.

Callicott, K. J. (2003). Culturally Sensitive Collaboration Within Person-Centered Planning. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 18*(1), 60–68.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/108835760301800108>

Canadian Human Rights Commission, & Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies. (2017). *Left out - challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Canada's schools: monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Retrieved from http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/ccdp-chrc/HR4-41-2017-eng.pdf

cIRcle. (2018). [digital repository]. Retrieved from <https://circle.ubc.ca/>

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education* (6th ed.). New York;London [England]: Routledge.

Cote, D. L., Jones, V. L., Sparks, S. L., & Aldridge, P. A. (2012). Designing Transition Programs for Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Students with Disabilities. *Multicultural Education, 20*(1), 51–55.

Creswell, J. W., & Clark Plano, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed method research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, John W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative Research Designs: Selection and Implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(2), 236–264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006287390>

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

- Cummings, R., Casey, J., & Maddux, C. D. (2000). Individualized transition planning for students with learning disabilities. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 49(1), 60–72.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: a theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Division on Career Development and Transition. (2013). *CEC Transition Standards*. Division on Career Development and Transition. Retrieved from <http://community.cec.sped.org/dcdt/cec-transition-standards>
- Expanded transition planning support for youth with developmental disabilities. (2016, February 20). Retrieved December 5, 2018, from <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2016SDSI0006-000257>
- Fingles, I. M., Hinkle, H. D., & Van Horn, D. (n.d.). Planning the Transition from School to Adult Life: Considerations for Students with Disabilities. ASAH. Retrieved from http://www.asah.org/pdf/asah_transition.pdf
- Frenette, M., & Chan, P. C. W. (2015). *Why Are Academic Prospects Brighter for Private High School Students?* (Economic Insights No. Catalogue no. 11-626-X — No. 044) (pp. 1–8). Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2015044-eng.pdf>
- Geenen, S., Powers, L. E., & Lopez-Vasquez, A. (2001). Exceptional Children. *Exceptional Children*, 67(2), 265–282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290106700209>
- Gothberg, J. E., Greene, G., & Kohler, P. D. (2018). District Implementation of Research-Based Practices for Transition Planning With Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Youth With Disabilities and Their Families. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143418762794>

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

- Goupil, G., Tassé, M. J., Garcin, N., & Doré, C. (2002). Parent and teacher perceptions of individualised transition planning. *British Journal of Special Education, 29*(3), 127–135.
- Halpern, A. S. (1994). The Transition of Youth with Disabilities to Adult Life: A Position Statement of the Division on Career Development and Transition, The Council for Exceptional Children. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 17*(2), 115–124.
- Hamblet, E. C. (2014). Nine Strategies to Improve College Transition Planning for Students With Disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 46*(3), 53–59.
- Hitchings, W. E., Retish, P., & Horvath, M. (2005). Academic Preparation of Adolescents With Disabilities for Postsecondary Education. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 28*(1), 26–35.
- Holburn, S. (2002). How Science Can Evaluate and Enhance Person-Centered Planning. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 27*(4), 250–260.
<https://doi.org/10.2511/rpsd.27.4.250>
- Holburn, S., & Cea, C. D. (2007). Excessive Positivism in Person-Centered Planning. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 32*(3), 167–172.
<https://doi.org/10.2511/rpsd.32.3.167>
- Inclusion BC. (2018). Retrieved from <http://inclusionbc.org/become-a-member/>
- Independent Schools. (2018). [government]. Retrieved from
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/ways-to-learn/classroom-learning/independent-schools>
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, § 1412 (a) (10) (B). Retrieved from
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-II/1412/a/10/B>

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Individuals with Disability Education Act, § 300.43. Retrieved from

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.43>

Inter-Ministerial Protocols For the Provision of Support Services to Schools. (2013). Ministry of Education, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teaching-tools/inclusive/provision-of-support-services-to-schools.pdf>

Kohler, P. D. (1996). *Taxonomy for Transition Programming: A Model for Planning, Organizing, and Evaluating Transition Education, Services, and Programs*. Western Michigan University and Transition Research Institute University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Lee, E., & Hannafin, M. J. (2016). A design framework for enhancing engagement in student-centered learning: own it, learn it, and share it. *Education Tech Research Dev*, 64, 707–734. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-015-9422-5>

Levinson, E. M., & Ohler, D. L. (1998). Transition from High School to College for Students with Learning Disabilities: Needs, Assessment, and Services. *The High School Journal*, 82(1), 62–69.

MacLeod, A., & Hasan, S. (2017). *Where our students are educated: Measuring student enrolment in Canada, 2017* (pp. 1–54). Fraser Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/where-our-students-are-educated-measuring-student-enrolment-in-canada-2017.pdf>

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

- Malette, P., Miranda, P., Kandborg, T., Jones, P., Bunz, T., & Rogow, S. (1992). Application of a Lifestyle Development Process for Persons with Severe Intellectual Disabilities: A Case Study Report. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 17(3), 179–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/154079699201700306>
- Mason, C. Y., Mcgahee-Kovac, M., Johnson, L., & Stillerman, S. (2002). Implementing Student-Led IEPs: Student Participation and Student and Teacher Reactions. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 25(2), 171–192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088572880202500206>
- McCall, Z. A. (2015). The Transition Experiences, Activities, and Supports of Four College Students With Disabilities. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 38(3), 162–172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143414537679>
- Mertens, D. M. (2010). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Michaels, C. A., & Ferrara, D. L. (2006). Promoting Post-School Success for All: The Role of Collaboration in Person-Centered Transition Planning. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 16(4), 287–313. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532768Xjepc1604_4
- Milsom, A. (2007). Interventions to Assist Students with Disabilities Through School Transitions. *Professional School Counseling*, 10(3), 273–278.
- Milsom, A., & Hartley, M. T. (2005). Assisting Students with Learning Disabilities Transitioning to College: What School Counselors Should Know. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(5), 436–441.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

- Ministry of Social Development. (2013, April). Services to Adults with Developmental Disabilities (STADD): Navigator Model. Retrieved from <http://posabilities.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/STADD-Navigator-Model-Report.pdf>
- Morgan, R. L., Callow-Heusser, C. A., Horrocks, E. L., Hoffmann, A. N., & Kupferman, S. (2013). Identifying Transition Teacher Competencies Through Literature Review and Surveys of Experts and Practitioners. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 37(3), 149–160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143413481379>
- Morningstar, M. E., Kleinhammer-Tramill, P. J., & Lattin, D. L. (1999). Using successful models of student-centered transition planning and services for adolescents with disabilities. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 31(9), 1–19.
- Morningstar, M. E., Trainor, A. A., & Murray, A. (2015). Examining outcomes associated with adult life engagement for young adults with high incidence disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 43, 195–208. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-150769>
- National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. (2018). Preparing for Life after High School: The Characteristics and Experiences of Youth in Special Education. Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012. Volume 3: Comparisons Over Time [Government]. Retrieved December 3, 2018, from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20184007/>
- Navigator Support for Youth and Young Adults with Developmental Disabilities. (2017, October). Government of British Columbia. Retrieved from https://www.communitylivingbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/NavigatorSupportYouth_broch-17.pdf

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Newman, L., Wagner, M., Wei, X., Knokey, A. M., Shaver, D., Marder, C., & Nagle, K. (2011).

The post-high school outcomes of young adults with disabilities up to 8 years after high school. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.: National Longitudinal Transition Study-2.

Retrieved from <https://nlts2.sri.com/reports/>

Noy, C. (2008). Sampling Knowledge: The Hermeneutics of Snowball Sampling in Qualitative

Research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(4), 327–344.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701401305>

Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2000). Ethics in Qualitative Research. *Journal of*

Nursing Scholarship, 33(1), 93–96.

Park, Y.-Y. (2008). Transition Services for High School Students with Disabilities: Perspectives

of Special Education Teachers. *Exceptionality Education International*, 18(3), 95–111.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Povenmire-Kirk, T., Diegelmann, K., Crump, K., Schnorr, C., Test, D., Flowers, C., & Aspel, N.

(2015). Implementing CIRCLES: A new model for interagency collaboration in transition planning. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 42(1), 51–65.

<https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-140723>

Preparing to Access CLBC Supports. (n.d.). Retrieved November 11, 2018, from

<https://www.communitylivingbc.ca/what-support-is-available/preparing-access-clbc-supports/>

Rodriguez, C. D., Cumming, T. M., & Strnadová, I. (2017). Current practices in schooling

transitions of students with developmental disabilities. *International Journal of*

Educational Research, 83, 1–19.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Russ, S., Chiang, B., Rylance, B. J., & Bongers, J. (2001). Caseload in Special Education: An Integration of Research Findings. *Exceptional Children*, 67(2), 161–172.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290106700202>

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.

<https://doi.org/10.1037110003-066X.55.1.68>

Schwartz, K., Mactavish, J., & Lutfiyya, Z. M. (2006). Making community connections: Educator perspectives on transition planning for students with intellectual disabilities.

Exceptionality Education Canada, 16(2/3), 73–99.

Shogren, K. A., & Plotner, A. J. (2012). Transition Planning for Students With Intellectual Disability, Autism, or Other Disabilities: Data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2. *Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities*, 50(1), 16–30.

<https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-50.1.16>

Smith, N. (2012, September 5). My Public Investigation. Retrieved December 4, 2018, from <http://theyee.ca/Opinion/2012/09/05/My-Public-Investigation/>

Statistics Canada. (2013). *Canadian survey on disability* (No. Catalogue no. 89-654-X — No. 001). Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2013001-eng.pdf?st=ce0yQNlq>

Statistics Canada. (2016). *Longitudinal and International Study of Adults (LISA)* (No. 5144).

Retrieved from

<http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=5144>

Table of Contents - School Act. (n.d.). Retrieved December 4, 2018, from

http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96412_00

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

TenHouten, W. D. (2017). Site Sampling and Snowball Sampling - Methodology for Accessing

Hard-to-reach Populations. *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de*

Méthodologie Sociologique, 134(1), 58–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0759106317693790>

The Government of British Columbia. (2009, November). Cross Ministry Transition Planning

Protocol for Youth with Special Needs. Retrieved from

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/children-teens-with-special-needs/2012_ytpp_protocol.pdf

Thoma, C. A., Rogan, P., & Baker, S. R. (2001). Student involvement in transition planning:

unheard voices. *Education & Training in Mental Retardation & Developmental*

Disabilities, 36(1), 6–29.

Transition Planning for Youth & Young Adults - Province of British Columbia. (n.d.). Retrieved

December 5, 2018, from [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/services-for-people-with-disabilities/transition-planning-for-youth-young-adults)

[supports/services-for-people-with-disabilities/transition-planning-for-youth-young-adults](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/services-for-people-with-disabilities/transition-planning-for-youth-young-adults)

Turcotte, M. (2014). *Persons with disabilities and employment* (Insights on Canadian Society

No. Catalogue no. 75-006-X) (pp. 1–15). Statistics Canada. Retrieved from

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2014001/article/14115-eng.pdf>

Turcotte, M. (2015, November 27). Persons with disabilities and employment [Government of

Canada]. Retrieved from [https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2014001/article/14115-eng.htm)

[x/2014001/article/14115-eng.htm](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2014001/article/14115-eng.htm)

United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018). *Persons with a disability: Labor force*

characteristics - 2017 (News Release No. *USDL-18-1028*) (pp. 1–11). Bureau of Labor

Statistics - U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from

<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Van Reusen, A. K. (1996). The Self-Advocacy Strategy for Education and Transition Planning.

Intervention in School and Clinic, 32(1), 49–54.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/105345129603200110>

Vancouver School Board. (2015). VSB Transition Planning Guide. Retrieved from

<http://go.vsb.bc.ca/schools/templeton/Programs/LifeSkills/Documents/Transition%20Planning%20Guide%20-%20november%202015.pdf>

Volunteer Bias. (2010). In N. Salkind, *Encyclopedia of Research Design*. 2455 Teller

Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States: SAGE Publications, Inc.

<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412961288.n492>

Wall, K. (2017). *Low income among persons with a disability in Canada* (Insights on Canadian

Society No. Catalogue no. 75-006-X) (pp. 1–15). Statistics Canada. Retrieved from

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/75-006-x/2017001/article/54854-eng.pdf?st=ILfN7bpp>

Watanabe, Y. (2008). *Navigating through educational organizations in learning assistance*

services : a personal narrative of a learning assistance teacher in an independent school system in British Columbia (Graduating Project). University of British Columbia.

Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2429/59872>

Wehmeyer, M. L. (1996). Student Self-Report Measure of Self-Determination for Students with

Cognitive Disabilities. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 31(4), 282–293.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA:

Sage Publications.

Zussman, R. (2019, February 4). B.C. government launching new school-based mental-health

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

programs. *Global News*. Retrieved from

<https://globalnews.ca/news/4923204/bc-government-mental-health-fleming/>

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Appendix A

Funding

In BC, students receive different levels of funding support based on their special education designation. Below are the different funding levels as outlined in the BC Ministry of Education 2018/19 Operating Grants Manual (MoE, 2018).

Supplement for unique student needs.

	2018/19 per student
Table - Special Needs Students	
For each Level 1 headcount student (includes students identified as Physically Dependent or Deafblind)	\$38,800
For each Level 2 headcount student (includes students identified as Moderate to Profound Intellectual Disability, Physical Disability or Chronic Health Impairment, Visual Impairment, Deaf or Hard of Hearing, Autism Spectrum Disorder)	\$19,400
For each Level 3 headcount student (includes students identified as Intensive Behaviour Interventions or Serious Mental Illness)	\$9,800

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Appendix B

Interview Protocol Questions

Category	Interview questions	Justification for questions	Possible themes
Profile of Research Participant	<p>Tell me about your professional background.</p> <p>What past experiences guide your professional practice in transition planning? (Teaching experiences? Personal experiences? Training and professional development?)</p> <p>Tell us about the students you support with transition planning. What special education categories do they fall under?</p>	<p>Develop rapport with interviewee. Create a comfortable space for engaging in discussion.</p>	<p>Competencies, skills, training, professional development for role</p> <p>Diversity of students</p>
School Transition-planning Policies and Procedures	<p>What is transition planning?</p> <p>How does your school develop and implement transition services for students with disabilities?</p> <p>What resources and/or policy and procedural documents guide your work in transition planning?</p>	<p>Create a baseline for shared understanding</p> <p>Gain understanding of how the organizational setting and organizational culture impact transition coordinators' understanding and implementation of transition planning</p>	<p>Definition of Transition Planning</p> <p>The role of transition coordinator</p> <p>Minimum conditions: challenges and opportunities present in current context and setting</p> <p>Policy and procedures</p>

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

	When does the transition-planning process begin?		Timing of transition planning
Implementation of Transition planning	<p>Who is involved in the transition planning for a student with an IEP? (Families? External agencies? The student herself/himself? Other school personnel? To what extent are different parties involved?)</p> <p>What, if any transition skills are taught or part of the student's curriculum?</p> <p>What do you consider to be the best or most important practices in transition planning?</p>	<p>Gain an understanding of the practices implemented in transition planning.</p> <p>Uncover the challenges and opportunities in implementation and congruence between what the literature suggests and what transition planning coordinators in the field are experiencing.</p>	<p>Actual practices</p> <p>Person-centred planning</p> <p>Caregiver involvement</p> <p>Interagency collaboration</p> <p>Roles of other educational professionals</p> <p>Relevant skills</p> <p>Best practices</p>

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Appendix C

Phases of Thematic Analysis according to Braun and Clarke, 2006

Phases of Thematic Analysis	Description of the process
1. Familiarising ourselves with the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a “thematic map” of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Appendix D



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Educational Studies
Faculty of Education
Education Centre at Ponderosa Commons
6445 University Boulevard
Vancouver B.C. V6T 1Z2
CANADA

Tel: 604-822-5374
Fax: 604-822-4244

Web: <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca>

Participant Consent Form

Navigating Transition Planning for Students with Individual Education Plans:
Perspectives of Transition Planning Coordinators

This research is being conducted towards the completion of the researchers' graduate degree in Educational Administration and Leadership at the University of British Columbia. The information received through the interviews will form the basis of research in the researcher's graduating paper. A copy of the graduating paper will be forwarded to the participants upon the completion of the study. The graduating paper will be accessible to the educators, faculty, researchers, and fellow university students upon publishing.

Research Supervisor: Dr. Gerald Fallon, Associate Professor
Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia
Email: gerald.fallon@ubc.ca

Principal Investigator: Dr. Marilynne Waithman, Adjunct Professor
Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia
Email: marilynne.waithman@ubc.ca

Co-Investigators:
Levonne Abshire, Student, M.Ed. (Educational Administration & Leadership)
Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia
Email: levonne.abshire@ubc.ca

Benje Bondar, Student, M.Ed. (Educational Administration & Leadership)
Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia
Email: bbondar@alumni.ubc.ca

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Gabrielle Brown, Student, M.Ed. (Educational Administration & Leadership)
Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia
Email: gabrielle.brown@alumni.ubc.ca

Stephanie Sy, Student, M.Ed. (Educational Administration & Leadership)
Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia
Email: ssy@alumni.ubc.ca

Research Purpose:

The purpose of this research project is to examine and articulate how field-based educators navigate the problematics of transition planning and facilitate successful transitions for students with Individual Education Plans in Metro Vancouver independent high schools. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to identify: 1) What do transition coordinators believe to be best practices regarding transition planning? and 2) What are the actual practices of transition coordinators in schools? This study will extend understanding of the transition planning process in relation to the specific contextual factors of British Columbia's educational system.

Research Procedure and Participation:

The study will consist of four interviews conducted by the co-investigators. The study participants will be transition coordinators from four individual Group 1 and/or Group 2 independent high schools in Metro Vancouver, BC. These self-selected transition coordinators will be invited to participate in a single face-to-face interview wherein they will be asked open-ended questions. There are minimal risks to participants of this study as all participation is completely voluntary and participants may choose to withdraw from the study at any point with no repercussions. Participants do not have to answer questions that they do not feel comfortable answering.

Participants may benefit from participating in this study because they will have the opportunity to explore the topic of transition planning processes for students with Individual Education Plans while sharing their perspectives with educational researchers.

Interviews will be approximately one hour in length. The venues for these interviews will be determined based on what is comfortable for participants and what is mutually convenient for participants and researchers. The interviews will be audio recorded. Following each interview, the audiotapes will be transcribed verbatim and transcripts will be sent to the participants to be checked for clarity and accuracy. This may take an additional hour of the participants' time.

Confidentiality and Data Storage:

Participants and their schools will be identified both during and after the study by a pseudonym. All organizations or communities described by the participants in their interview will also be given pseudonyms. All interviews will be confidential. All information that may identify the subjects will be removed from the transcripts. Participants will be sent a copy of the transcript before it is analyzed to check for accuracy, clarity, and the preservation of confidentiality.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

The information from the interviews, and audio recordings, in compliance with the UBC research and ethics policy, will be transferred to a disk and stored at UBC in the Research Supervisor's office for five years. All computer files will be password protected and encrypted. Once data collection is complete, the encrypted data will be stored on a flash disk in a locked cabinet in the Research Supervisor's office. Paper documentation will be stored with the Research Supervisor in a locked cabinet along with the digital data.

Contact:

If you have any further questions or concerns, you are encouraged to contact the Research Supervisor, Gerald Fallon at gerald.fallon@ubc.ca, or the Co-Investigator, Levonne Abshire at levonne.abshire@ubc.ca.

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 Ethics at (604) 822-8598 or if long distance email to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Consent:

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

I am aware that the interview will be audio recorded.

I have retained a copy of this consent form for my own records.

I consent to participate in the study:

Navigating Transition Planning for Students with Individual Education Plans in British Columbia: Perspectives of Transition Coordinators

Participant's Full Name (please print) _____

Participant's Signature

Date

*Please return the consent form to Levonne Abshire via email at levonne.abshire@ubc.ca.
Or kindly bring the signed Consent Form to the interview.*

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Appendix E



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Educational Studies
Faculty of Education
Education Centre at Ponderosa Commons
6445 University Boulevard
Vancouver B.C. V6T 1Z2
CANADA

Tel: 604-822-5374
Fax: 604-822-4244

Web: <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca>

Letter to FISA Informing of Research Study

Seeking Organizational Support for Conducting Academic Research Federation of Independent Schools Associations in British Columbia

November 29, 2018

Mr. Shawn Chisholm, Executive Director
Federation of Independent School Associations in British Columbia
4885 Saint John Paul II Way
Vancouver, B.C.
V5Z 0G3

Dear Mr. Shawn Chisholm:

We are Master's students in the Educational Administration and Leadership Program in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. We are writing to seek the approval and support from your association to conduct a research study entitled *Transition Planning for Students with Individual Education Plans in British Columbia: Perspectives of Transition Coordinators*. We, LeVonne Abshire, Gabrielle Brown, Benjamin Bondar, Stephanie Sy (Co-Investigators), will be supervised by Dr. Marilynne Waithman (Principal Investigator) and Dr. Gerald Fallon (Research Supervisor) who are our Professors in the Department of Educational Studies at UBC. We hope to receive your approval for the study and request that you share our invitation with Administrators of independent schools in the Metro Vancouver region.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

The purpose of this research project is to examine how educators support students with identified disabilities in the transition planning process from high school to adulthood in Metro Vancouver independent schools. We wish to interview four educators responsible for transition planning of students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in Group 1 and 2 schools with special education programs. Our research questions are:

- 1) What do transition coordinators believe to be best practices regarding transition planning in transition planning?
- 2) What are the actual practices of transition coordinators in schools?

This study will extend understanding of the transition planning process in relation to the specific contextual factors of British Columbia's independent school system.

Research Procedure:

Upon the UBC Ethics Board's issuance of a research certificate of approval and the approval of your organization and administrators, we will invite educators who are responsible for coordination of transition planning for students with IEPs, to participate in an in-person interview. We intend on interviewing four educators. The invitation will request teachers interested in participating to contact a designated member of the research team to confirm their interest. The in-person interview is an opportunity to engage in a discussion about perspectives and practices of transition planning. Each individual interview will be approximately one hour long. The interviews will be audio recorded. Participants will be forwarded a copy of the interview questions in advance of the interview. The venues for these interviews will be determined based on what is mutually comfortable and convenient for both the participants and researchers. Later in the study, participants will be given an opportunity to review their transcripts; this may call for an additional hour of their time. Participants will be required to sign a consent form prior to the commencement of the study. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and participants do not have to answer questions that they do not feel comfortable answering and may withdraw at any point.

Confidentiality:

Participant confidentiality will be respected. The research team will ensure that participants will be assigned pseudonyms or will be identified by a code number. All data will be encrypted and password protected and held in a password-protected file space accessible only to the research team.

Reporting:

We will share a copy of our findings with your organization and with all administrators and participants who request a copy.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Please accept this letter as a request for FISA BC to provide organizational support to conduct the aforementioned research study by emailing the attached invitation on our behalf to Administrators of Group 1 and 2 independent high schools.

Should you have any questions or concerns, we will be glad to answer them. Alternatively, you may contact our Research Supervisor, Dr. Gerald Fallon, at gerald.fallon@ubc.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

We look forward to learning from you.

Sincerely,

Levonne Abshire, University of British Columbia
Gabrielle Brown, Fraser Academy
Benjamin Bondar, King David High School
Stephanie Sy, Canada Royal Arts High School

Appendix F



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Educational Studies
Faculty of Education
Education Centre at Ponderosa Commons
6445 University Boulevard
Vancouver B.C. V6T 1Z2
CANADA

Tel: 604-822-5374
Fax: 604-822-4244

Web: <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca>

Letter of Invitation to School Administrator/Principal

Dear School Administrator,

We are conducting a study on the coordination of transition planning for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in Group 1 and 2 independent high schools in Metro Vancouver entitled *Navigating Transition Planning for Students with Individual Education Plans in British Columbia: Perspectives of Transition Coordinators*. We are seeking your approval to interview the transition coordinator at your school or the educator responsible for coordinating Individual Education Plans and transition planning.

The purpose of this research project is to examine how educators support students with identified disabilities in the transition planning process from high school to adulthood in Metro Vancouver independent high schools. We wish to interview four educators responsible for transition planning of students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in Group 1 and 2 high schools with special education programs. Our research questions are:

- 1) What do transition coordinators believe to be best practices regarding transition planning in transition planning?
- 2) What are the actual practices of transition coordinators in schools?

This study will extend understanding of the transition planning process in relation to the specific contextual factors of British Columbia's independent school system.

Dr. Marilynne Waithman (Principal Investigator) and Dr. Gerald Fallon (Research Supervisor), instructors in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, supervise the research team of Levonne Abshire, Gabrielle Brown, Benjamin Bondar, and Stephanie Sy, who are Master's students in the Educational Administration and Leadership Program in Educational Studies at UBC. Levonne is a

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

parent of a child with an invisible disability attending an independent school, Gabrielle and Benjamin are teachers in independent schools, and Stephanie is an administrator in one.

If you approve of our conducting this study in your school, please forward the following participant letter of invitation (enclosed) to your high school transition coordinators inviting them to participate in an in-person interview. The interview will be approximately one hour long and take place at a time and location mutually convenient to the participant and interviewers. Later in the study, participants will be given an opportunity to review their transcripts; this may call for an additional hour of their time. Participants will be required to sign a consent form prior to the commencement of the study. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and participants may withdraw at any point.

Participants and their schools will be identified both during and after the study by a pseudonym. All organizations or communities described by the participants in their interview will also be given pseudonyms. All interviews will be confidential. All information that may identify the subjects will be removed from the transcripts. Participants will be sent a copy of the transcript before it is analyzed to check for accuracy, clarity, and the preservation of confidentiality.

The information from the interviews, and audio recordings, in compliance with the UBC research and ethics policy, will be transferred to a disk and stored at UBC in the Research Supervisor's office for five years. Paper documentation will be stored with the Research Supervisor in a locked cabinet along with the digital data.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Levonne Abshire at levonne.abshire@ubc.ca or our Research Supervisor, Dr. Gerald Fallon, at gerald.fallon@ubc.ca.

It is our hope that the findings of this study will assist us to understand transition coordinators' perspectives and best practices in the transition planning process for students with IEPs. Thank you for your time and consideration of this request. We ask that you please forward our letter of invitation to your transition coordinator(s).

We appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

Levonne Abshire, Gabrielle Brown, Benje Bondar, Stephanie Sy

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

Appendix G



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Educational Studies
Faculty of Education
Education Centre at Ponderosa Commons
6445 University Boulevard
Vancouver B.C. V6T 1Z2
CANADA

Tel: 604-822-5374
Fax: 604-822-4244

Web: <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca>

Letter of Invitation to Educator

January 8, 2019

Dear Educator,

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled *Navigating Transition Planning for Students with Individual Education Plans in British Columbia: Perspectives of Transition Coordinators*. Dr. Marilynne Waithman, in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC), is our principal investigator and Dr. Gerald Fallon supervises our research team consisting of Levonne Abshire, Gabrielle Brown, Benje Bondar, Stephanie Sy, who are Master's Students in the Educational Administration and Leadership program in the Department of Educational Studies at UBC.

Research Purpose:

The purpose of this research project is to examine how educators support students with identified disabilities in the transition planning process from high school to adulthood in Metro Vancouver independent high schools. We wish to interview four educators responsible for transition planning of students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in Group 1 and 2 high schools with special education programs. Our research questions are:

- 1) What do transition coordinators believe to be best practices regarding transition planning in transition planning?
- 2) What are the actual practices of transition coordinators in schools?

This study will extend understanding of the transition planning process in relation to the specific contextual factors of British Columbia's independent school system.

We are seeking to interview high school teachers who are directly responsible for coordinating the transition planning processes for students with Individual Education Plans, who are employed in a Group 1 or 2 independent school. The in-person interview will be one hour long and will take place at a location of your choice at a time that is

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

convenient to you and the interviewer. You will be required to sign a consent form prior to the interview. We expect to transcribe the interviews in two weeks, following which, the transcriptions will be forwarded to the participants. We will ask you to review the transcripts in two or three days and return them via email with corrections or clarifications included. We expect that this will require an additional 60 minutes of your time.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any point without repercussions. You may also choose not to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

If you are interested in being a participant in the study, please contact Levonne Abshire at levonne.abshire@ubc.ca.

Participants and their schools will be identified both during and after the study by a pseudonym. All organizations or communities described by the participants in their interview will also be given pseudonyms. All interviews will be confidential. All information that may identify the subjects will be removed from the transcripts.

The information from the interviews, and audio recordings, in compliance with the UBC research and ethics policy, will be transferred to a disk and stored at UBC in the Research Supervisor's office for five years. All computer files will be password protected and encrypted.

If you have any questions, please contact levonne.abshire@ubc.ca, our principal investigator: Dr. Marilynne Waithman at marilynne.waithman@ubc.ca, or our research supervisor: Dr. Gerald Fallon at gerald.fallon@ubc.ca.

We would appreciate it if we could hear from teachers interested in participating by February 9, 2019. Randomly selected participants will be contacted to arrange an interview date and time. You will receive a copy of the interview questions and a copy of the informed consent form in advance of the interview.

This study will assist us in understanding educators' perspectives and lived experiences with the transition planning process for students with Individual Education Plans. It is our hope that the findings of this research will contribute to Independent Schools in Metro Vancouver's ongoing efforts to improve the development and understanding of how to support educators in the process of transition planning.

We look forward to learning from you,

Levonne Abshire, Gabrielle Brown, Benje Bondar, Stephanie Sy

Appendix H

Data Analysis: Preliminary Codes

Preliminary List of Codes	Definition
Person-centred Planning	The individual with special needs is placed in a leadership role during the transition planning and service delivery process (Milsom & Hartley, 2005; Thoma et al., 2001). A leadership role includes attending and leading IEP/Transition Planning meetings, communicating with external agencies, having knowledge of one’s own disability, having knowledge of postsecondary support services, having knowledge of disability legislation, and having the ability to self-advocate (Milsom & Hartley, 2005). ¹²
Transition Coordinator Profile	The transition coordinator is expected to perform mainly administrative and organizational tasks, such as identifying and developing job and community opportunities, identifying and developing post-school options, identifying student competency requirements, coordinating referrals to adult service providers, holding meetings, choosing and overseeing personnel, and monitoring fulfillment of IEP requirements (Blalock et al., 2003; Blanchett, 2001; DCDDT, 2013; Kohler, 1996; Morningstar et al., 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2017).
Caregiver Involvement	A student’s caregivers are the continuous participants that can act as informers, supporters and advocates for the student while other participants (educators, paraprofessionals, etc.) are subject to change.
Interagency Collaboration	Collaboration between organizations that support students with disabilities allows students, families, and professionals to make plans for the future while still having the support and guidance of high school professionals who can contribute to

¹² This approach is also known as student-centred planning. However, the term person-centred planning may be more appropriate than student-centred planning among non-school agencies.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

	the planning for the adult-level agencies and institutions as a means to minimize the challenges with starting adult life
Relevant Student Skills	The development of skills that will help individuals with disabilities take or maintain a leadership role and allow them to be more prepared for life after school, such as self determination and self advocacy.

Appendix I

Summary of Findings

Through our findings, we want educators to deepen their practice and support of students with IEPs transitioning into adulthood. In summary, the following table presents the key ideas from the six themes of our interviews.

1. Transition Coordinator Profiles. Transition coordinators that participated in our research are in senior positions and with a high level of experience and qualifications relevant to IEPs and exceptional learners. They do not call themselves “transition coordinators.” The dedication of these educators is evident in their practice as it reflects research-based practices, yet are described as developed out of their own professional experiences. The transition coordinators in our study had senior roles and were given adequate support to fulfill their many duties.

2. Context of Independent Schools in BC. The schools in our study provide a high level of support to students with disabilities. Due to volunteer bias, however, our participating schools are likely not representative of independent schools in BC as a whole; one should take caution when assessing the success rates reported by our participants. Participants noted that high-achieving independent schools may face unique challenges in transition planning due to the high academic expectations placed on students. We found that more can be done in independent schools and in the broader school system with regards to supporting transition-planning programs for students with IEPs. Our four participants were either unaware of

government resources and agencies or made little use of them, relying instead on support from school associations.

3. Overview of Transition-planning Processes. At our four participant schools, transition activities for students with IEPs are intertwined with activities for all students. Timelines around providing transition services exist but are flexible, based on the development, needs, and interests of the students and their families. We found that some students need to start earlier than Grade 8; caregivers might initiate the planning process in these instances, but educators might see a need to initiate the process as well. Again, the processes of transition planning described in our study are not necessarily reflective of the broader trends in BC.

4. Student-centred Approach to Transition Planning. A student-centred approach ensures that transition planning and support services begin with the interests of the student. Self-identity and self-advocacy were emphasized in all four schools. The schools provide many opportunities for students to explore their own interests to create self-identity. Self-advocacy was identified as very important after high school. All participants agreed that the onus is on students to obtain support once they reach adulthood.

5. Curriculum and Instruction. The teaching of skills related to transition planning occurs in a number of areas, such as literacy and numeracy skills, executive functioning (learning strategies/emotional control), career development, and life skills. These skills are formally taught by classroom teachers and counsellors. Transition coordinators may provide additional support or informal instruction in these areas.

NAVIGATING TRANSITION PLANNING

6. Collaboration. The use of collaboration is important but challenging. It involves collaboration between educational professionals within the school, with the caregivers, and with external agencies and professionals. Transition planning is not one person's job; it is a coordinated team effort. Effective collaboration is needed between all stakeholders to provide the most effective and empowering support services to the individual students as they prepare for life after high school.