

**The Transition of Students with Disabilities from High School to Post
Secondary Activities: A Prince Edward Island Perspective**

**A thesis
submitted to the Faculty of Education
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
Frank M. Costa
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Elizabeth who, by example, has encouraged in all of us an interest in lifelong learning, and to my parents, Francisco and Aldora who, like many other immigrants, view education as important.

F.M.C.

Abstract

This qualitative study explored the transition process for students with disabilities in Prince Edward Island, Canada when they transitioned from high school to post secondary activities. Information was obtained from 2 questionnaires. One questionnaire was submitted to each of the 12 high schools in Prince Edward Island. A second questionnaire was submitted to Disability Support Workers in the provincial Department of Social Services and Seniors. A third data collection was obtained from a focus group interview of parents of students with disabilities who had transitioned from high school. Although there are elements and pockets of some form of transitional planning occurring in educational and social services jurisdictions across Prince Edward Island, it is apparent from the research findings that it is not consistent. In fact, there is an absence of neither a common process nor a common practice when transitional plans are developed for students with disabilities.

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To adults with intellectual disabilities and their families, who have shared their experiences in my work and continue to shape my beliefs about their equal place in our communities.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

In each school year, the transition of students with disabilities from high school to adult role expectations such as employment, further vocational training, post secondary education, or to adult community services is a common occurrence in education jurisdictions and communities throughout North America. Transition is defined as a passage or movement from one state, condition, or place to another (Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged, 1993). Similar to students, who are non-disabled, the transition process for students with disabilities has to be viewed as more than just a single event. It is a comprehensive process. Planning for the transition from high school to adult life is also an individualized process simply because the adult role is not the same for each person. Each student may bring a distinct range of abilities to the process, which will enhance the transition, or each student may bring distinct limitations that will require more creative interventions.

During my experience as an administrator of a non-government organization, which provides support services to adult persons with an intellectual disability, the transition to such services for some persons and their families is not always a planned process, but rather one of happenstance. At present, the majority of students with disabilities and their families will turn to the Disability Support Program within the Department of Social Services and Seniors when they leave high school to address their needs for vocational training or employment, residential services, or other life skills and personal support services. There are also some private services which have been

established in the community. Very few will seek post secondary education as there are limited options, such as the Adult Continuing Education (ACE) program at the University of Prince Edward Island, or programs through Holland College. Within these educational options, there are limited seats available to students with intellectual disabilities.

The transition process is further complicated by the fact that support services provided in one jurisdiction do not necessarily follow the individual when they transfer from one jurisdiction (education) to a subsequent jurisdiction (community services). There have been situations where parents approach community services in the fall, following their children's graduations from high school, with the assumption that the previous support services available to their children while in the education system will continue to be available to them from community services. The new understanding for some of these families is the realization that adult community services have neither the political guarantee of government legislation that was available to their children as students, nor are they as adequately funded as education. These experiences need not be as startling for families who have a child with a disability. Part of the solution, I believe, would be evident if the transition process for these persons and their families were to be planned and consistent throughout Prince Edward Island.

In Prince Edward Island, the actualization of successful planning and the accessibility to effective transition services will require coordination and collaboration among students with disabilities and their families, the education system, and community services. In Prince Edward Island, this process will involve the Department of Education

and the three school boards which are accountable to this department: the Eastern School District, the Western School Board, and the French Language School Board. It will involve the newly formed Department of Social Services and Seniors. Prior to the provincial government reorganization in 2006, this responsibility was overseen by the Department of Health and Social Services and the four health regions which were accountable to the department: West Prince Health Region, East Prince Health Region, Queens Health Region, and the Kings Health Region. As well, the transition process will also involve non-government organizations and private businesses that provide disability support services.

The specific objective of this research is to conduct an exploratory qualitative research study, which examines the transition of students with disabilities from high school to adult role expectations, post secondary education, or adult community services in Prince Edward Island. Literature on best practices, and government policy and legislation, will reveal existing strategies, relative themes, and issues regarding philosophy, methodology, and pedagogy. It is necessary to examine the current status of transitional planning for high school students with disabilities in Prince Edward Island to construct a meaningful framework that will guide this transition process. The following questions have directed this research:

- What process do high schools and community services in Prince Edward Island utilize to determine a transitional plan for students with disabilities when they transition from high school to post secondary activities?

- What are the best practices to ensure successful transition for students with disabilities when they exit high school?

By addressing a general inquiry about what constitutes effective transition planning and transition processes, other related ideas emerged. Answers to the above questions addressed the need for understanding what is currently happening in Prince Edward Island and provided insight to future transitional planning. Ideas relative to the practices of education personnel and community services personnel became apparent. Ideas related to the working relationship between personnel in both of these jurisdictions became apparent. The above questions formed the foundation and focus of the research study.

Significance of Research

I believe this research is relevant to the Department of Education, the Department of Social Services and Seniors, and the community organizations that deliver disability support services in Prince Edward Island. It will contribute to an expanding knowledge and understanding of transitional issues for students with disabilities. It may or may not be generalizable to other educational jurisdictions. The educational jurisdiction in Prince Edward Island, (Department of Education, 2001) has promoted an inclusive philosophy for students with disabilities. The Department of Social Services and Seniors and community organizations recognize the importance of continuing inclusive practices and achieving interdependent outcomes for adult persons who receive disability related support services.

I believe that effective strategic planning for the transition of students with disabilities cannot be obtained if the responsibility is left solely to the education system. To improve transition outcomes, there needs to exist, a collective responsibility whereby schools, social services and other appropriate community agencies plan in a collaborative manner with individuals and families (Smith, Edelen-Smith & Stodden, 1995; Wehman, 1996). Both the education system and the social services system are currently experiencing funding and budget restraints (Province of Prince Edward Island, 2006). It seems apparent then that a coordinated and collaborative working relationship between both jurisdictions would develop a more seamless transition process for students with disabilities, achieve a more effective use of personnel resources, and achieve a more cost effective utilization of funding resources. This study may develop reliable methods used in transition planning for students with disabilities.

This research study will also evaluate current practices in Prince Edward Island and potentially identify innovative strategies, which could have significant implications for policy and decision-makers. Are current practices effective or can they be improved? Such information could also produce recommendations to enhance the transition process for students with disabilities when they exit high school. While this study is not concerned initially with generalizability, or theory development, it may have implications for developing such knowledge.

The introduction of the Prince Edward Island Disability Support Program, launched in October 2001 by the provincial Department of Health and Social Services,

was a new addition to the provision of disability related support services. It has had some impact on community based non-government organizations that have traditionally been, and continue to be, active stakeholders in the provision of disability related support services. The blending of best practices from both of these resource areas has had a combined impact on the transition process. This study will also examine the involvement of the Disability Support Program in the transition process for students with disabilities.

Another possible outcome for students with disabilities in Prince Edward Island is a transition to post secondary education. The Adult Connections in Education (ACE) is a four year inclusive post secondary education program for students with intellectual disabilities offered at the University of Prince Edward Island. In her Master of Education thesis, Leary (2002) defines this program as offering a model coherent approach. A model coherent approach refers to the manner in which an inclusive education program mirrors the general practices and policies of the university to ensure students who have an intellectual disability experience “university life” as similar as possible to the mainstream student population (p.11).

The answers to the issues raised above will be pertinent to this research study. These answers will increase the level of awareness, contribute to the existing body of knowledge, encourage new thinking, and offer new paradigm considerations that concern the transition of students with disabilities from high school to post secondary education and/or other adult role expectations such as employment, independent living, or leisure and social activities in Prince Edward Island.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

It is a truism that we are all going through continual transitions in our lives (The Roeher Institute, 2001, p.1). The transition of students with disabilities from high school to adult role expectations such as employment, further vocational training, post secondary education, or to adult community services is a common occurrence in educational jurisdictions and communities throughout North America. Even though some transitions are gradual and others more urgent, they all entail some degree of stress and uncertainty because some change will be evident. For students with disabilities, the transition phase from high school to adult life can be difficult to face without appropriate planning (Blalock & Patton, 1996; Clark, 1996; The Roeher Institute, 1996). If their dependency on supports and services are necessary for daily life, then they and their families need assistance with their transition planning to ensure for a successful transition experience.

Similar to students who are non-disabled, the transition process for students with disabilities has to be viewed as more than just a single event. Although for too many, the period of transition appears to take place over a period of less than a year, and usually in the last year of high school, it is a comprehensive process. Planning for the transition from high school to adult life is also an individualized process simply because the adult role is not the same for each person. For some students with mild to moderate disabilities, transitions can be made in a similar vein as to non-disabled students, for whom the system as it stands is sufficient for their needs. For students with more severe

forms of disability, preparation for periods of transition must begin much earlier. It may take years to properly prepare the necessary supports and develop the necessary strengths for independent living (The Roeher Institute, 2001). In either situation, it is necessary to consider what assets and what limitations are apparent when developing a transitional plan. Each student may bring a distinct range of abilities to the process, which will enhance the transition, or each student may bring limitations that will require more creative interventions.

Although my education background supported my initial professional interest to teach in the public school system, the majority of my work experience has been as an administrator of community based non-government organizations. Inherent to this position is responsibility for the provision of various disability support services to adult persons with a primary condition of intellectual disability, and relevant advocacy, both individualized and/or general in nature, on behalf of persons with disabilities and their families.

The experience which has had the greatest influence in shaping my perspectives and philosophy towards issues around disability was my volunteer experiences in different capacities with the Prince Edward Island Association for Community Living and its national organization, the Canadian Association for Community Living. It is the connections to the grass roots elements -- persons with disabilities and their families, local associations, rural and urban associations, common and diverse opinions, all

contributing to a common cause and vision -- that continue to challenge and reshape my thinking toward issues around disability.

Initially, many parents viewed inclusive education for their sons/daughters with an intellectual disability as a chance to experience social integration with non disabled students. Their expectations have expanded since, having evolved toward the recognition and value of interdependence. However, interdependence offers a valuable lesson and life learning reciprocal relationship for both students with disabilities as well as students without disabilities. If we expect students to understand global education principles, (Bunch & Valeo, 1996; Goldstein & Selby, 2000; Pike & Selby, 2000), that espouse such things as ethics, social values and tolerances to differences, they need to experience diversity within our school system. From this experience, they can expect it and defend it as adults within their communities and the wider world. In essence, our school system has a responsibility to both reflect and teach diversity. It offers an opportunity to develop in students the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of them to defend the rights of others in our society, which may be different. Also, to defend their own rights, and to recognize the value of collective rights as well as the connection to the indivisibility of all rights (Pike & Selby, 2000).

Like other marginalized groups, the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL), asserted the rights of persons with intellectual disability and the disability movement through community activism. To me, the transition moment for CACL that set the stage for its recent maturity as a constructive agent for the disability movement, was

the occurrence of two significant changes in the 1980s that moved the organization progressively forward. The first change was the acceptance of the name change from the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded (CAMR) to the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL). The name change was driven by the self-advocates movement within the association who were abhorred by the term “mentally retarded” and the derogatory significance to them as inferior persons. They wanted the name change to reflect their aspirations to be connected to the community, to become interdependent contributing members of their communities and not institutions, to signify themselves as persons first with abilities, and so on. The activism within the association at this time was both threatening (parents who wanted tradition versus parents wanting change, children [self-advocates] versus their parents), and progressive at the same time.

The second change was the publication of the document titled *Community Living 2000: A Time of Change, A Time of Challenge* (CACL, 1987). This document created a new vision for the CACL and continues to pass the test of time because the premise of its vision continues to hold meaning for the CACL movement. It characterized the lives of persons with disabilities around citizenship, membership, and self-determination. Like other marginalized groups, the framing of disability issues as social and human rights issues, justice issues, and citizenship rights, all strengthened the disability movement’s position to defend against individual and institutional forms of oppression. Such things as stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against persons with disabilities are now protected based on law and human rights legislation.

Literature Review

A review of various outcome data about successful transition processes for students with disabilities make comment on the type of educational experiences which these students are exposed to throughout their formal high school education. The most frequently cited “best practices” include interagency collaboration, vocational skill training, paid work experience during high school, individual transition plans and planning, and parental involvement in the transition process (Kohler, DeStefano, Wermuth, Grayson, & McGinty, 1994). The transition planning process is the foundation for providing effective transition services (Aspel, Bettis, Quinn, Test, & Wood, 1999). They also identify interagency collaboration, early and individual planning, and student and family involvement as key elements of effective transition planning. Wisniewski, Alper, and Schloss (1991) identify work experience and work-study programs for students with special needs as quality indicators of effective transition services.

Blumberg and Ferguson (1999) suggest two indicators of effective educational experiences which contribute to successful transitions. The first of these indicators suggest that inclusion in typical education, training, and community experiences results in improved transition outcomes. Outcome studies suggest for these students, a higher probability of competitive employment, higher earnings, and enrollment in post secondary education and training. The second of these indicators suggest that school based learning experiences are essential to successful transition. That is, experiences such as career awareness, exploration, and counseling services, help students to identify their interests, goals, and career majors.

If there is something unique that can be commonly attached to all of these authors, it is the fact that planning for transition is an individualized process. Although the consideration of best practices will result in more effective planning and outcomes, it is equally critical to recognize that each student with a disability brings abilities and limitations that have to be considered when designing a transition plan.

It is apparent that effective educational experiences for students with disabilities cannot be a haphazard occurrence, but rather become a component of the transition, which is a planned process. Planning for the transition from high school to adult expectations is essential to achieving success. Avoke (1998) cites Frank and Sitlington (1996) to comment on the significance of planning to achieve effective adult outcomes:

The change from the life of a high school student to life of an adult will occur whether we plan for it or not. Individuals with disabilities are much more successful in reaching their personal goals when they plan for this transition. Individuals who are not involved with transitional planning at various levels from middle school through high school are less likely to be receiving services, continuing their education, working full time or living independently. (Avoke, p. 8).

The relevance of appropriate planning at the high school level is echoed by Riches (1996) “the transition of students with disabilities from school to life after school has emerged as a particularly crucial one, often affecting later participation rates in employment and further education and training, as well as quality of life” (p. 72).

Legislation and Policy

In comparison to educational jurisdictions in Canada, educational jurisdictions in the United States have relied on federal legislation known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to secure the development of transition services on behalf of students with disabilities. In 1990, this act mandated the provision of transition services for youth with disabilities at age 16 or younger if appropriate. Its purpose “was to intensify the efforts of public education agencies to prepare students with disabilities for productive employment and full community participation” (Blumberg & Ferguson, 1999, p. 3).

Interestingly, the IDEA emphasizes transition planning as a part of a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP), thereby giving the transition process significant prominence. In fact, the IDEA defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that:

- Is designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post school activities, including post secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.
- Is based upon the individual student’s needs, taking into account the student’s preference and interests.
- Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate,

acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (Warger & Burnette, 2000, p. 3)

Pursuant to section 8 and 51 of the School Act of Prince Edward Island (1988), the Minister's Directive toward special education policy (Minister's Directive No. MD 2001-08 Special Education) is somewhat reflective of the concepts mentioned above in the IDEA legislation (Department of Education, 2001). In this directive, special education means programming and/or services designed to accommodate students within the public school system with educational needs which require interventions different from, or in addition to, those which are needed by most students (p. 1). The Minister's Directive further comments on inclusionary practices as a value system and makes mention of relevant terms such as transition, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Continuum of Supports, Assessment, School-Based Student Services Team, and so on (p.1-2). All of these education terms appear to support the notion of assisting students with disabilities with their transition from high school to post secondary experiences.

The Minister's Directive is elaborated under three parts. Part 1 refers to the Provision of a Continuum of Support, part 2 refers to Assessment/Intervention and part 3 refers to Accountability. This directive further assigns roles and responsibilities in each of the three parts identified above to three levels within the education system: The Department of Education, the school boards, and the principal and individual schools (Department of Education, 2001).

Under Part 1: Provision of a Continuum of Support, one of the roles and responsibility of the Department of Education is to “provide, in collaboration with other government departments, school boards and agencies, comprehensive support for students with special education needs to be delivered within public schools” (Department of Education, p. 3). Under the same provision, one of the roles and responsibilities of the School Board is to “ensure the development of Individual Education Plans and transition planning for students with special educational needs in public schools” (p. 4). Further within the same provision, two of the roles and responsibility of the school and principal is to “develop Individual Education Plans when required” and “implement a transition planning process and include details of the plan within the student’s IEP” (p. 5)

Yet the Minister’s Directive, emphasizing accommodations to students with special needs within the public school system, would serve much more effectively in the student’s transition process, if the directive would legislate the transition plan to continue in a seamless manner from one jurisdiction to another. To me, the directive professes accommodations in an insular manner within the educational jurisdiction and does not fully recognize the critical relevance of the transition process moving from one jurisdiction to another. The protection or politicization over jurisdictional boundaries between government departments places the individual/family in a vacuum. There appears to be an absence of a seamless connection from one jurisdiction to another. The Minister’s Directive does not clearly outline a compelling collaboration between government departments and agencies to fulfill the implementation of the transitional plan on behalf of the student.

The Minister's Directive toward special education is somewhat cognizant of the connection between human rights and education. The concept of global education illustrates this connection whereby global education lends itself to the ideals of special education, inclusive education, and the transition process:

Global Education advances the position that all members of any community, be it nation, city, village, or school, need to work together for the betterment of humankind. All is construed to signify that no difference traditionally seen in separating members of a community should be permitted to interfere with collaborative effort, whether the difference be one of ability, level, culture, gender, or race (Bunch & Valeo, 1996, p.37).

Undoubtedly, this position tends to support the interests of advocates for inclusive education in community schools and assisting students with disabilities with their transition from high school.

Yet, Bunch and Valeo (1996) would further suggest that there remains a struggle to fully accepting the principles associated with global education. So the need for more entrenched advocacy which promotes not just sound education principles and practices in support of inclusive education, but also that human rights protection and coalition building with other movements continues to be necessary. Marcia Rioux (1993) elaborates further,

For people with an intellectual disability, the wait is debilitating. They continue to face exclusion from schools, from employment, from decision making, from ordinary life experiences. Members of Associations for Community Living and

People First expend enormous energy telling Canadian citizens, politicians, policy makers and service providers of all kinds that people with intellectual disabilities are citizens too. Why do they have to keep doing that day after day, year after year? (p. 5).

Our belief system has to start from a premise that inclusive education should be available to all children in their community schools. Otherwise our strategies tend to not focus on inclusion, and instead, we allow for other considerations that promote less inclusive practices. Inclusive education is not a panacea if there is no collective responsibility to this concept beyond public education. It does not need to be complicated, but it takes dedication and hard work, and must be an initiative supported through the whole education system, not just a responsibility of Special Educators, as well as other jurisdictions beyond public education. School board policies, which promote equity for persons with disabilities, are also an important aspect of a system wide initiative. However, within this system there is an equal need to recognize differences and establish special programs and resources that enable students with disabilities to achieve success. Inclusive education is more than just closing segregated schools and allowing students with special needs into regular classrooms. It is not just a matter of “equal is fair” but that the “fair is not always equal” treatment applies here. We need to be wary of how opposition to inclusive education co-opts the “balance” argument (Goldstein & Selby, 2000, p. 45).

The notion that “equal is fair” is a misnomer for marginalized groups who require an additional consideration of human rights protection to achieve an equitable playing field which the rest of us enjoy from the get go. To marginalized groups, their preference from mainstream society is for consideration of the more balanced side of the notion that suggests “fair is not always equal.” For them, this promotes balance equilibrium and enables them to achieve equal footing with other mainstream groups. Parents/families fought hard to achieve inclusive education for their sons/daughters with special needs. I do not believe they accepted an inclusive model, which excluded special resources and procedures for their children to achieve success. With inclusive education under scrutiny, it opens the opportunity for opponents of inclusive education to unfairly argue that the pendulum has swung too far to the right. Special programs, resources, and procedures for students with disabilities need to remain an integral component of the educational environment for such students. Another key component is effective transitional planning at key intervals of their development through the education system and to adult life.

Person-Centred Planning

One of the key aspects of the transition planning process, which contributes to successful transitions for students with disabilities and their families, is the incorporation of the concept known as person-centred planning (Whitney-Thomas, Shaw, Honey, & Butterworth, 1998). The focus of transition planning should be centred on the goals those students and their families set for themselves, rather on the priorities of teachers and other professionals (Wehman, 1992). Person-centred planning refers to

approaches for empowering students with disabilities and their families to assume a more assertive position in their own program planning (Miner & Bates, 1997).

Person-centred planning has become a widely acceptable form of individualized planning adopted by not only educators, but also professionals in the health and community services field. In fact, person-centred planning is a cornerstone of the Prince Edward Island Disability Support Program (DSP) launched in October 2001 by the provincial department of Health and Social Services.

In relation to other more traditional approaches to case planning, person-centred planning focuses on the objectives that individuals and families set for themselves rather than on the priorities of other professionals, agencies, or programs. There is an explicit emphasis on personal empowerment, primary direction from the individuals for whom planning is being conducted, involvement of family and friends in the planning process, and a focus on preferences, talents, and dreams of the individual rather than needs or deficits (Whitney-Thomas et al., 1998, p. 119). However, there are several planning models developed by various researchers that encompass unique characteristics and similar objectives of person-centred planning. These have been identified in literature by Miner and Bates (1997) and Whitney-Thomas et al., (1998) and have been described with differing terminology. These models include Personal Futures Planning (Mount, Ducharme, & Beeman, 1991), Essential Life-style Planning (Smull & Harrison, 1992), the McGill Action Planning System (MAPS) (Vandercook, York, & Forest, 1989), Whole Life Planning (Butterworth et al., 1993), Lifestyle Planning (Wilcox & Bellamy, 1987), and Outcome-based Planning (Steere, Wood, Panscofar, & Butterworth, 1990).

Although unique characteristics are associated with each of these approaches, all of them share a common focus on enlivening the consumer's expression of his or her vision for the future and the development of needed supports for realizing the vision (Miner & Bates, 1997).

In Unison: A Canadian Approach

The Prince Edward Island Disability Support Program signaled a new approach by the province to coordinate the provision of disability support services. It was an effort to proceed further on the work developed by the federal, provincial, and territorial jurisdictions for social services which contributed to the document *In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues* (Human Resources Development Canada, 1998). With respect to persons with disabilities and their access to disability supports, this document supports policy direction that separates access to supports from eligibility for income and other programs. The Disability Support Program also supports a complementary policy direction with respect to "income" programs by separating access to disability supports from eligibility to financial assistance.

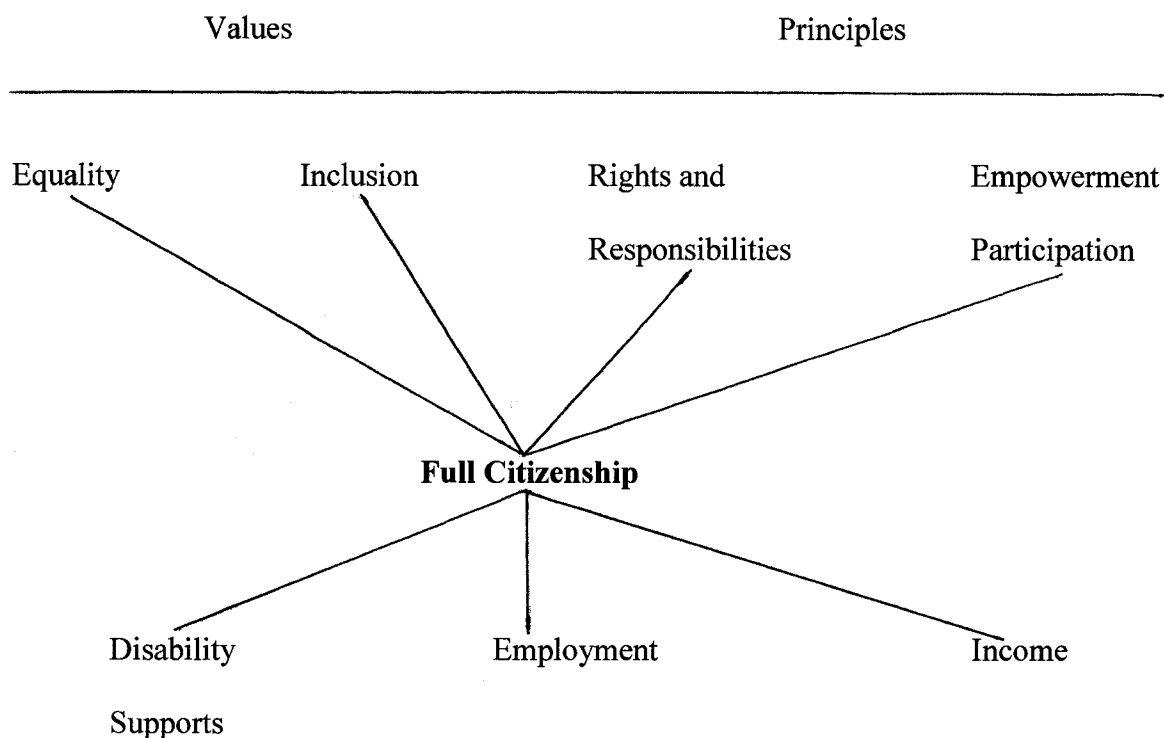
In Unison established a fresh paradigm vision. It is a blueprint for promoting the integration of persons with disabilities in Canada based on an overarching theme of citizenship and outlines a guide for future policy and program reform in the area of disability:

Persons with disabilities participate as full citizens in all aspects of Canadian society. The full participation of persons with disabilities requires the

commitment of all segments of society. The realization of the vision will allow persons with disabilities to maximize their independence and enhance their well being through access to required supports and the elimination of barriers that prevent their full participation (In Unison, Human Resources Development Canada, 1998, p.13).

Undoubtedly, the notion of human rights for all citizens and further education of this concept within our society is having an impact on how models for social well being and disability support services are being developed. Inherent in these is their framework from a disability perspective. The model presented by *In Unison* illustrates a Canadian vision. Strengthened by the cornerstone of full citizenship, it equalizes the status of persons with disabilities as citizens similar to persons who are able bodied. It entrenches that rights and responsibilities, equality, inclusion, and empowerment are afforded to persons with disabilities to achieve self-determination in the development of three interrelated building blocks: disability supports, employment, and income (In Unison, Human Resources Development Canada, 1998, p.14).

A Canadian Vision



Prince Edward Island Disability Support Program

For those students with disabilities in Prince Edward Island, whose transition from the school system will require some form of disability related supports and services, the implementation of the Disability Support Program would have a direct impact on them. Primarily, the design of the Disability Support Program offers a significant change in the delivery of disability-related supports and services (Working Document, Department of Health and Social Services, 2000). Previously, such supports and services were provided under the Welfare Assistance Program. Proponents of disability rights and greater accessibility to disability supports and services have voiced their criticism toward

policy which tied such supports and services to welfare programs because this association tended to attach a stigma of welfare to disability. The removal of such disability supports and services from under the Welfare Assistance Program helps to eliminate this specific stigma. Persons with disabilities can still access income supports under welfare assistance programs as all persons can irrespective of whether or not they have a disability. Advocates within the disability movement have applauded the separation of eligibility for disability-related supports and services, from eligibility for financial assistance.

The Disability Support Program also has some impact on community based agencies that have traditionally been and continue to be active stakeholders in the provision of disability support services. Where the philosophy of the Disability Support Program is to develop individualized supports and services within a person-centred planning approach, the philosophy also espouses the development of individual funding arrangements to persons with disabilities and their families. This concept of individual funding arrangements reinforces certain principles of person-centred planning such as empowerment, autonomy, and self-determination for individuals and families. However, to some extent, these principles are limited if funding arrangements are restricted and insufficient to meet the needs of necessary supports and services, or if services are not available for families to purchase. Nevertheless, individuals and families have some decision making allowances not only on how to tailor disability support services to suit their requirements, but also where they want to purchase services. In response, agencies and other entities that provide disability support services have to recognize the changing

climate in service delivery expectations and adapt their provision of services to the request of their clients and families.

Certain guiding principles which were incorporated in the design of the Disability Support Program -- key features such as person centred planning, self determination and autonomy with decision making and case planning -- are at risk of fragmentation since the implementation of the program in October 2001. The program did receive an evaluation at the request of disability organizations and the former provincial Department of Health and Social Services supported this. This is now known as the Baker Report (Baker, 2003).

Baker (2003) acknowledged criticism of certain practices and key elements within the program that threatened the initial program design principles and the delivery of the program to persons with disabilities and their families. Key among these criticisms was a concern over the development of a systemic corporate culture described as a cost containment/cost avoidance attitude in the delivery of the disability support program. Another criticism was the absence of a meaningful appeal process, which recognized the due process of participants. There was criticism of the inappropriateness and ineffectiveness of the program's assessment tool to determine the eligibility of clients/families for funding support levels. A further criticism was the exclusion of an appeal on the program's financial ceiling. This is especially critical for people with multiple disabilities and high risk needs. A final criticism was the fact that the financial

rates/levels approved for disability support services have not allowed for cost inflationary increases and remain frozen since the program inception in 2001.

Broad implementation issues related to person centred planning are addressed briefly by Whitney-Thomas, Shaw, Honey and Butterworth (1998). One concern addresses how facilitators may be most effective in supporting a focus person to participate more fully in planning. The second concern addresses the ability of systems to sustain the values of person centred planning on a large scale (p. 120). This is a pressing issue currently faced by the Disability Support Program. The challenge to the Disability Support Program is how well they can measure up against the benchmark raised by this second concern over a longer period of time. How long can the program continue to sustain the important principle of person centred planning in a fiscal environment with budget restraints and a cost cutting culture?

Supporting Self Determination in Teacher Education

As identified earlier, there is much agreement in the literature which supports the concept of person-centred planning as a best practice when conducting transition plans on behalf of students with disabilities from school to adult life. While this approach emphasizes student preferences and interests, there is evidence that suggests students are not involved in or even present for many of their transition plan meetings (Thoma, Baker, & Saddler, 2002). This suggests that a contradiction exists in that the focus person of the transition plan is not provided an opportunity or is limited in exercising their self-determination skills to drive their plan. Thoma et al., offer one hypothesis for this

occurrence which suggests that teacher preparation programs have not included instruction of strategies in this area for the majority of special educators to help support self-determination. Where this appears to be evident in the education system, I would also hypothesize it to be evident in adult community services. The allowance of self-determination in the transition planning process presents both a change and a challenge. In order to meet this new student demand, educators need to attain knowledge about this topic, including how to facilitate student participation in self-determination practices.

Thoma et al. (2002) attribute a widely accepted definition of self-determination to Wehmeyer (1992). Wehmeyer defines self-determination as acting as the primary causal agent in one's life free to make choices and decisions about one's quality of life, free from undue influence or interference. Where it used to be acceptable for professionals to make decisions in the best interests of their students, self-determination practices would expect that students would learn or be supported to make choices or decisions, and professionals would learn how to support students to demonstrate this skill. Therefore a different set of skills are necessary to be learned, otherwise teachers could continue to engage in behaviors that act as barriers to student self-determination. Some of these behaviors include interrupting students. Asking questions that students are not prepared to answer. Using prompts to ensure a preconceived answer from a student. Not giving students an opportunity to share information until the end of the meeting after everything was decided. Not using information they knew about student preferences and interests to guide annual and/or transition goals. Finally, not allowing students' opportunities to

experience employment or community living opportunities, for fear that they might make unwise decisions (Thoma et al.).

Transition Planning Strategies

Effective strategic planning for the transition of students with disabilities cannot be obtained if it is left to the sole responsibility of the education system. To improve transition outcomes, there needs to exist a collective responsibility whereby school and appropriate community agencies plan in a collaborative manner with individuals and families. (Kaufman & Herman, 1991 as cited in Smith et al., 1995) have identified seven common pitfall associated with transition planning strategies. They suggest how to avoid the seven pitfalls of systemic planning as follows:

1. Planning at the individual or school level rather than from the community reference level. It is critical then to utilize a planning team, which is representative of critical roles found in the school and in the community settings.
2. Measuring objectives in terms of means rather than ends. Clarify the difference between means and ends.
3. Transition planning without the input of representative partners or personally involved participants. Include parents, caregivers, outside agencies, the student, and other relevant “outcome partners” in the transition planning process.
4. Selecting programs and materials before identifying program destinations. Ensuring that team members have determined “where they are going” before discussing “what they will use to get there”.

5. Setting objectives that are based on the internal historic perceptions of the planning team while failing to take into account evolving future trends, opportunities, or threats. Recognize that transition teams have members which represent roles and people currently involved in the process and also include members that could be affected in the future.
6. Being unaware of or skipping some of the process elements of strategic outcome planning. Strategic planning is a complex undertaking and requires that all transition team members have a working knowledge of both the philosophy behind the planning process and the steps involved in the actual planning process if quality transition programs are going to evolve.
7. Assuming that all transition planning approaches are basically the same or rely on nothing more than common sense or tuition. It is not simply a matter of adapting or replicating a model program. (Kaufman & Herman, 1991 as cited in Smith et al., 1995, p. 42-46).

The following quote is attributed to Glickman (1990)

People need to understand that these [model] programs work not because they are so meticulously crafted and engineered but because the faculty in these schools will not let them fail. They developed these programs and they are determined to make them work. The “process” of how a school came to such decisions is more transferable than the program.” (Glickman, 1990 as cited in Smith et al., 1995, p. 72).

Curricular Features of Transition

Sometimes lost in the multi-faceted process of transition are the curricular features that ensure that important knowledge is covered and requisite skills are taught (Patton & Cronin, 1997). How well are students with disabilities able to adjust to the varied demands of adulthood? How well do they adjust to general areas such as employment and living arrangements? The relevance of these questions is not only the ability to master functional tasks and competencies related to certain employment, daily living such as meal preparation, personal hygiene, money management, and communication skills, but also how to be able to discern when access to supports and service are needed. Lent & Worthington (1999) propose applying career development theories to the school to work transition process. They identify four theoretical positions that include social learning, person-environment fit, developmental, and social cognitive (p. 294). These would encourage school to work opportunities with interconnected programs of school and work based learning that provide students with education and training to instill work skills and values. It would necessitate a supported employment type approach for students with disabilities. It would provide them with a gradual exposure to a variety of challenging work experiences in combination with classroom learning, goal setting, and community support throughout their high school period.

The relevance of appropriate curriculum development has to be supported within the education system because it is essential to successfully preparing persons with special needs for adulthood. Such curriculum needs to reflect the consideration of both the current and future needs of these students. Patton & Cronin (1997) identify curricular

options that have typically been identified as a basis for programming for students with mild disabilities, and also acknowledge other authors who support this concept (Edgar & Polloway, 1994; Masters, Mori, & Mori, 1993; Vergasson, 1983; Zigmond, 1990 as cited in Patton & Cronin). These options include four general types of curricular options and are identified as follows:

1. academic content mastery e.g., teaching general education content in special education settings;
2. remedial e.g., teaching basic skills and or social skills that have not been mastered;
3. general education classroom support e.g., assisting students who are in general education classes through tutorial instruction, learning strategies instruction, and/or collaborative teaching;
4. adult outcomes e.g., preparing students for the demands of adulthood by providing vocational training and/or life skills instruction. (Patton & Cronin, 1997).

Patton & Cronin (1997) further suggest that any curricular models must be assessed in terms of functionality for students. They define functionality as relevance in preparing students for success in subsequent environments. In reference to the above options, they would suggest that any of these options would have functional value for students with mild disabilities as long as the students' needs in subsequent environments are considered. In essence, they are proposing then that the needs of the student should guide program content and subsequently this decision should influence appropriate

curriculum placement. This approach, likened to how person-centred planning defines adult community services, supports the emphasis on student needs to drive education programming rather than trying to place or fit the student in an established program.

With the above approach, the learning and mastering of functional life skills is fundamental for preparing students with disabilities for adulthood. It is first a responsibility of family and home to introduce such instruction and for schools to reinforce such instruction so that students can achieve degrees of competencies and independence with these skills and have confidence applying these skills in real-life situations within their communities. Patton & Cronin (1997) comment that their transition education model provides a basis for applying important scholastic and social skills. The combinations of such skills are relevant to students with disabilities and these skills assist them with real-life situations. The scholastic/social skills need to be regularly taught and practiced in the context of adult-referenced situations. In consideration of this advice, it seems worthwhile to teach students with disabilities the knowledge and skills they will need to function successfully as adults. It seems critical to initiate this instruction early in their school curriculum and increasingly develop these skills as they advance throughout their school experiences.

It is evident from the literature that the transition of students with disabilities from high school to adult role experiences is an important issue and an expectation that is common to educational jurisdictions. Transition programs are the means of achieving valued and valuable outputs and outcomes for students with disabilities who are entering

the adult community (Smith et al., 1995). Transition is a process, which requires relevant planning and input from a range of committed stakeholders, who include in particular, students, and family, education personnel, and other community professionals. Transition is a collective responsibility of our schools, social services jurisdictions, and our communities. Students with disabilities in Prince Edward Island will benefit from the implementation and delivery of effective transition programs and services

CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

The intent of this research study was to focus an inquiry of the transition process that is evident for students with disabilities in secondary schools and gain insight into the current collaboration between the education system, social services, and the adult community services system. Furthermore, the research aims to assess any possible linkages, which are apparent between these various areas. In the Minister's Directive (Department of Education, 2001), transition is identified in a broad sense as the passage of a student from one environment to another at key points in his or her development from childhood to adulthood (p. 2). This research study focused on the transition process, which is meant to assist students with disabilities as they transition from high school to various post secondary activities in Prince Edward Island. These could include post secondary education, vocational options, residential options, or other adult community activities in Prince Edward Island.

Students with disabilities are evident within the student populations of the three school boards in Prince Edward Island: the Eastern School District, the Western School Board, and the French Language School Board. When these students exit high school, those that continue to require support services would most likely be supported through adult community services funded by the provincial Department of Social Services and Seniors. Other than block funding which is directed to non governmental organizations to provide disability support services, the other source of funding arrangements are individualized through the department's Disability Support Program. For students with

disabilities who may aspire to pursue post secondary education opportunities other than the traditional college or university option, the only other supported educational alternative in the province is the Adult Continuing Education (ACE) program offered at the University of Prince Edward Island. The ACE program is an inclusive post secondary education program for students with intellectual disabilities.

Prince Edward Island is a small province with a population of approximately 139,000 people. As a provincial jurisdiction, Prince Edward Island provides the researcher with a unique opportunity to view data from a representative provincial viewpoint. Subsequently, research findings may have application to enhance current practices and policies at a provincial level.

Design

The methodology employed in this study was qualitative in nature. It is deemed an appropriate method of inquiry for the social sciences and applied fields such as education, social work, and community development (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.1). Denzin & Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative research as multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This suggests that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 2).

When considering my research, what became apparent to me was the relevance of expressing the experiences of students with disabilities through the lens of their families,

educators, and social service workers. It was important not only to understand these perspectives, but also to promote the necessary changes that best respond to their context and their realities. The theoretical position of my research was based on constructivism, although some elements of constructionism also co-exist.

By utilizing a constructivist approach to this research, it enabled me to establish my own path of discovery (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Both authors would describe this as seeking out groups, settings, or individuals where (and for whom) the processes being studied are most likely to occur (p. xiv). Patton borrows the following statement on constructivism. He states,

Constructivism begins with the premise that the human world is different from the natural, physical world and therefore must be studied differently. Because human beings have evolved the capacity to interpret and *construct* reality -- indeed they cannot do otherwise -- the world of human perception is not real in an absolute sense, as the sun is real, but is “made up” and shaped by cultural and linguistic constructs (Guba & Lincoln as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 96).

Crotty (2004) makes a further distinction between the terminology of constructivism and constructionism. He states, “It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term *constructivism* for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the ‘mean - making activity of the individual mind’ and to use *constructionism* where the focus includes ‘the collective generation (and transmission) of meaning’ (p. 58). He further elaborates,

Whatever the terminology, the distinction itself is an important one.

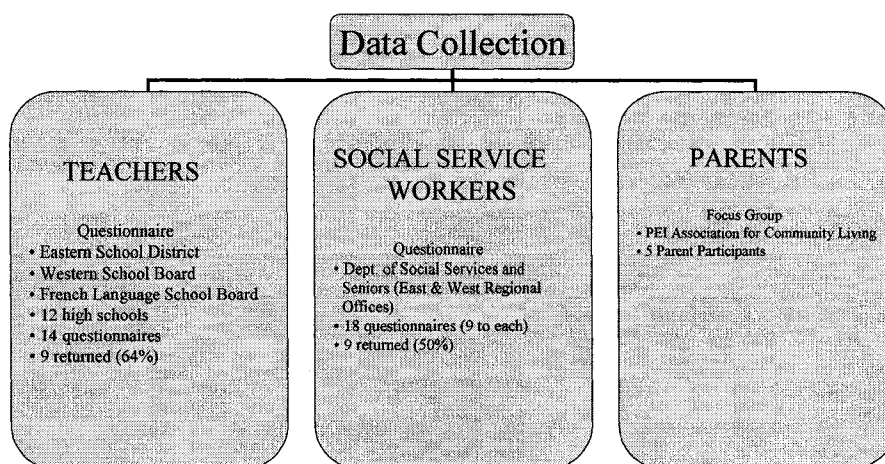
Constructivism taken in this sense points up the unique experience of each of us. It suggests that each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other, thereby tending to scotch any hint of a critical spirit. On the other hand, social constructionism emphasizes the hold our culture has on us: it shapes the way in which we see things (even the way in which we feel things!) and gives us a quite definite view of the world. This shaping of our minds by culture is to be welcomed as what makes us human and endows us with the freedom we enjoy. (p. 58).

Patton (2002) comments on how community and culture have an effect on an individual's worldview. He uses the term social constructivism to describe how people's perceptions are shaped by interactions with other people in their lives and the experiences they encounter within their community. Such perceptions were apparent in the parent focus group interview. Constructivism emphasizes the dialogic nature of the interview and the mutuality of the research experience (Hiller & DiLizio, 2004). They comment that in contrast to the traditional approach where the interview process is seen as a conduit of information that the researcher seeks, "constructivism understands the interview as a mean-making experience and as a site for producing knowledge through the 'active' collaboration of both interviewer and interviewee (thus the designation as the 'active interview')" (p. 3). There were differences in how these parents perceived the transition planning process for their children. The type of interactions they experienced in the transition process emphasized the differences. The interactions provided context for

the parent's perspective on transition planning and each perspective was unique to them. Through the parent focus group interview, I was able to gain insight to these parents' perspectives from their experience with the transition planning process.

In congruence with the theoretical framework of constructivism and the choice of data collection methods employed by the researcher, it allowed the researcher to uncover the lived experiences of the key stakeholders in the transition process for students with disabilities. The researcher wanted to link the questionnaire to the educators and the social service workers in order to examine both ends of the transition process from high school. That is, as students with disabilities depart from high school and as students with disabilities enter post secondary activities. An additional link was the parent focus group interview. It provided a bridging factor because the parents' perspectives reflected their children's participation in both ends of the transition process.

Methods



Methods

Two data collection methods were employed. The first method was a questionnaire. The researcher's lived experiences from employment in the disability field provided insight to the development of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was created during the Qualitative Methods course offered by the University of Prince Edward Island. The class cohort and the instructor provided feedback and guidance to the structure and scrutinized the questions of the questionnaire. The opening few questions of the questionnaire, see figures 3 to 5 and 17 to 19, collected data about the demographics of the respondents. It was important to collect this background information to determine whether there was a connection between work experience, and education, to the practice of how the participants conducted the transition process. The questionnaire was reviewed by the researcher's supervisor and was approved by the Research Ethics Board at the

University of Prince Edward Island. The questions posed by the study in a questionnaire format are essentially inductive type questions. They are intended to explore transition practices and outcomes, and the lived experiences of educators, social service workers, students with disabilities, their families, and advocates.

There were two participant groups that were respondents to the questionnaires. The first participant group was high school educators who worked with students with disabilities and were directly involved with planning for their transition. Principals identified 14 educators in the 12 high schools in Prince Edward Island and each educator received the questionnaire package. The second participant group was social service workers who were directly involved with receiving students with disabilities when they left high school. Eighteen questionnaire packages were distributed evenly to the east and west regional offices to all social service workers. Each of these participant groups represented a comprehensive sampling. "This type of sampling applies when the number of units is small. Comprehensive sampling includes all units with specified characteristics in the sample" (Wiersma, 2000, p. 285-286).

A secondary method of data collection was a focus group of parents of students with disabilities who are currently experiencing or have experienced a transition process from high school to various post secondary activities. It was critical to give a voice to the parents of students with disabilities. The parents' perspective provided the researcher with insight into parents' lived experiences throughout their children's education and transition process from high school. The parents are the only constant factor who can

assess and provide feedback about whether there is cohesion between the jurisdictions of education and community services. Is there a bridge or is there a chasm between the jurisdictions of education and community services during the transition process? This provided the researcher with a phenomenological perspective. “The purpose of this type of interviewing is to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 112). Focus groups are fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them (Morgan, 1998). They create lines of communication between the moderator and the participant group and among the participants themselves, providing the researcher with valuable information.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) comment on studies which inquire about individuals’ lived experiences obtained through focus group interviews. “This method assumes that an individual’s attitudes and beliefs do not form in a vacuum: People often need to listen to others’ opinions and understandings in order to form their own” (p. 114). Krueger (1994) further comments on the important significance and value which focus groups bring to qualitative research. The focus group interview is created to accomplish a specific purpose through a defined process. The purpose is to obtain information of a qualitative nature from a predetermined and limited number of people. Focus groups provide an environment in which disclosures are encouraged and nurtured, but it falls to the interviewer to bring focus to disclosures through open-ended questions within a permissive environment (p.14).

The interview is considered a reliable method to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world. Bodgan and Biklen (2003) offer that good interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives. They suggest the technique of using probing questions as an exploratory strategy to obtain further particulars and details. Probing questions assist the researcher to gain clarification and accuracy of the information received from the respondents (p. 97). Hiller and DiLuzio (2004) also describe how and why the interview plays the unique role that it does for the interviewee. They term this concept as event validation and refers to "the role that the interview plays for the interviewee in confirming the significance of the respondent's experience as not only important on a personal level, but also of wider significance to warrant closer examination across a broader number of cases by a researcher" (p. 15).

Participants and Settings

Participants in this study were comprised of the following groups. The first group were high school teachers, who teach students with disabilities, and other educators, who have been directly involved with planning for the transition of students with disabilities within the three school boards in Prince Edward Island. The researcher submitted a letter of introduction to the superintendent of each school board and requested permission to conduct the study in their respective high schools. Upon approval, packages were addressed to the respective principals and high schools, delivered to each of the school board's and distributed to the principals through the school board's inter-office mail. There were a total of 12 high schools located across Prince Edward Island. Principals

indicated that each high school had at least one teacher/educator involved in the transition planning process of students with disabilities. For their information, principals received a sealed package containing a letter of introduction, a copy of the questionnaire that would be completed by the educator, and a copy of the informed consent form for the educator. A separate sealed package for the educator included a letter of introduction, a questionnaire, an informed consent form and a self-addressed, postage paid return envelop. The principal delivered the educator package to the teacher directly involved with planning for the transition of students with disabilities. This first participant group consisted of 14 persons. The four participatory high schools were located in the Western School Board and include Westisle Composite High School, Three Oaks Senior High School, Kensington Intermediate Senior High School, and Kinkora Regional High School. Six were located in the Eastern School District and included Bluefield High School, Charlottetown Rural High School, Colonel Gray High School, Morell Regional High School, Montague Regional High School, and Souris Regional High School. Two were located in the French Language School Board and included Ecole Evangeline and Ecole Francois Buote.

The second group was Social Service Workers, or Disability Support Workers, employed by the Department of Social Services and Seniors in the east and west regional offices in the province. This staff is directly involved with receiving students with disabilities when they transition from high school to post secondary activities within their communities and request some type of disability related support services. The second participant group consists of 18 persons representing the two regional offices. The

researcher sent a letter of introduction to the Department of Social Services and Seniors requesting permission to conduct the research. Upon approval, sealed packages were provided to each supervisor of the west and east regional offices for their information. Each package contained a letter of introduction, a copy of the questionnaire, and a copy of the informed consent form. In addition, supervisors received sealed packages for the social service workers containing a letter of introduction, a copy of the questionnaire, a copy of the informed consent form, and a self-addressed, postage-paid return envelope. Supervisors delivered the social service worker package to employees directly involved with planning for the transition of students with disabilities.

The third group included 5 parents of students with disabilities. They were invited to voluntarily participate in focus group interviews. Parents were identified primarily from requests to the Prince Edward Island Association for Community Living, a provincial advocacy organization for persons with intellectual disability and their families. The researcher strived to include a cross sampling of parents of students with disabilities. This was accomplished by requesting the Prince Edward Island Association for Community Living to identify parents of students with disabilities who represented the following criteria:

- a) At least 2 parent representatives of children who have transitioned from each of the three school boards.
- b) At least 2 parent representatives of students with mild disabilities, 2 parent representatives of students with moderate disabilities, and 2 parent

representatives of students with severe disabilities. c) At least 2 parents who represent students with disabilities from a French language background.

This selection of parents, although small, attempted to obtain as broad a representation as possible. This inclusive stratified random sample represented the following general criteria such as socioeconomic status, gender of parents and children with disabilities and degree of disability of children. The focus group interview process presented both semi structured and open ended questions to the parents. Discussions from the parent focus group were tape recorded and transcribed following the interview to find consistent patterns of response. The focus group interview was conducted in a non-threatening and comfortable environment using a round table discussion format.

Analysis of Data

“All in all, analysis in qualitative research is a process of successive approximations toward an accurate description and interpretation of the phenomenon” (Wiersma, 2000, p. 203). Marshall and Rossman (1999) identify data analysis as a process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to the mass of collected data (p. 150). This process enabled the researcher to bring meaning to respondent’s information collected by the questionnaire and the focus group interview. Questionnaires were sent to educators and social service workers at the same time. Within 6 weeks, questionnaires were being returned from educators and from social service workers from the east regional office. The researcher conducted follow-up phone calls as a reminder. When no questionnaires were forthcoming from the west regional office, the researcher made an

additional contact with the west region and was asked to resend the questionnaires.

These were returned within a 2-week period. All questionnaires were analyzed at the same time.

The data from the questionnaires and the focus group interviews were synthesized to recognize common themes and patterns. Creswell (2007) suggests that researchers explore the data by “reading through the data, making memos, and developing a preliminary understanding of the data base...it means recording initial thoughts by writing short memos in the margins of transcripts or field notes” (130-131). The data was hand coded in this fashion. These were organized into categories for careful examination and identification of critical patterns and emergent themes. During the moderation of the focus group interview, it was also important for the researcher to be sensitive to the unfolding of diverse themes. To achieve this, I encouraged the parents to elaborate further on their comments. Patton (2002) refers to this intervention as probing by the interviewer as a means to ask the participant to clarify a particular topic that was presented during the interview. It enhances the accuracy of the information received by the researcher. These can also illuminate the lived experiences of the participants and can make valuable contributions to understanding the diversity of issues.

Ethical Considerations

A request to conduct this research was submitted to the Western School Board, the Eastern School District, and the French Language School Board (see Appendix A). Once approval had been received, a letter was addressed to the school principals (see

Appendix B) and also included a package of the information that was to be sent to educators. Once approval had been received from principals, a letter was addressed to educators (see Appendix C), and within their package, was an informed consent form (see Appendix D), an introduction letter to the questionnaire (see Appendix E), and the questionnaire (see Appendix F).

A similar request was made to the Department of Social Services and Seniors. Upon approval from the department, a letter was sent to each of the Administrators in the east and west regional offices (see Appendix G) and also included sealed packages that were to be distributed to each of the Disability Support Workers in their regional offices. Included in these packages was a letter to the Disability Support Worker (see Appendix H), an informed consent form (see appendix I), an introduction letter to the questionnaire (see Appendix J), and the questionnaire (see Appendix K).

Participation in the study was completely voluntary. Each participant signed an Informed Consent Form before they participated in the study. The Informed Consent underlined the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity. All information was returned in a self-addressed envelope with prepaid postage.

Parents participating in the focus group were informed that the discussion will be audio taped and that a transcribed audio copy of the focus group discussion will be available upon request. At the outset of the interview, the researcher discussed the issues of confidentiality and anonymity. Since a focus group interview is a shared experience,

confidentiality could not be guaranteed, however, effort to maintain the participants' anonymity was achieved by using pseudonyms for names. The researcher transcribed the focus group interview and deleted all information which might identify the participants. Following the interview, parents were debriefed and were given an opportunity to participate in member checking the transcribed tape. Parents preferred to have the results of the study available to them upon the completion of the research study. Parents were recruited with the assistance of the PEI Association for Community Living. Although parent participants came from different geographic regions they did not know each other well. Their commonality was their membership in the PEI Association for Community Living. Parent participants in the focus group interview received a letter of introduction (see Appendix L), an informed consent form (see Appendix M). Also included in the Appendixes is an outline of the parent focus group interview (see Appendix N)

Researcher's Role/Biography

As a researcher, my role varied dependant on the specific research inquiry. With respect to data collection received through the questionnaire, participants completed the questionnaire independently. My involvement with the questionnaire was to design and review it. I also coded the data from the questionnaire as explained earlier in the chapter. In respect to the focus group interview with parents, my role as a researcher was combined with my role as a facilitator. This allowed me the flexibility to explore unanticipated issues as they arose in the discussion (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 115). During the research study, various inputs were solicited from educators, social service workers, and parents. Participants were listened to and their comments were analyzed.

These perspectives were interpreted by the researcher. The researcher must listen to “in vivo concepts that reflect actors’ own deep concerns; or its procedures force researchers to question and skeptically review their own interpretations at every step of the inquiry itself” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 172). Throughout this study I tried to remain open to divergent information and practiced self-monitoring for potential biases.

Although my early background is in education, the majority of my work experience for the last 20 years has been in the disability field as an administrator responsible for the provision of support services and program development for adult persons with intellectual disabilities. During this period, there has been a realizable and increasing shift within the disability field from sheltered and segregated environments toward inclusion and interdependence with communities. However, it has been predominantly my volunteer experience with disability organizations such as the Canadian Association for Community Living, my association with consumer and self-advocate groups, and my experience with parents and families that has shaped my perspectives and belief systems toward the disability field. These experiences have heightened my advocacy lens toward human rights and citizenship for persons with disabilities.

CHAPTER FOUR – RESEARCH FINDINGS

The analysis of the research findings are presented in Chapter Four. Three methods of data collection were employed and consisted of the following methods.

A questionnaire was submitted to social service workers with the Department of Social Services and Seniors as identified in chapter three. These staff positions were employed within the department's Disability Support Program. A total of 18 questionnaires were sent out -- 9 to Social Services Workers in the West Region and 9 to Social Service Workers in the East Region of the Disability Support Program. Those who participated in the questionnaire are referred to as respondents.

A second questionnaire was submitted to a high school teacher/educator in each of the 12 high schools in Prince Edward Island as identified in chapter three. Six high schools are located in the Eastern School District: Bluefield High School, Charlottetown Rural High School, Colonel Gray Senior High School, Montague Regional High School, Morell Regional High School, and Souris Regional High School. Four high schools are located in the Western School Board: Westisle Composite High School, Kensington Intermediate Senior High School, Three Oaks Senior High School, and Kinkora Regional High School. Two high schools are located in the French Language School Board: Ecole Evangeline and Ecole Francois Buote. Those who participated in the questionnaire are referred to as respondents. All high schools received one questionnaire with the exception of 2 high schools in the Western School Board who identified that 2 staff positions at

their high school shared the responsibility for students with disabilities. A total of 14 questionnaires were sent out to high schools across the province.

The third method of data collection consisted of a focus group interview with parents of children with intellectual disabilities who have transitioned from high school. The parent focus group interview complemented the data gathered from the questionnaires. Three parents participated in a scheduled focus group interview. This interview was transcribed and coded to identify emergent themes and categories. Two parents experienced a schedule conflict on the date of the interview. They submitted a written response to the focus group interview questions and also participated in a telephone interview. Those who participated in the focus group interview are referred to as parents.

Questionnaire Social Service Workers – Analysis

Figure 2 shows the distribution of returned questionnaires from the East Region of the Department of Social Services and Seniors.

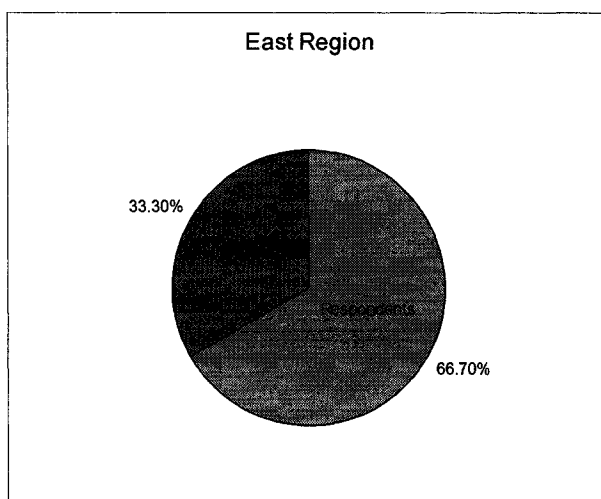


Figure 2. Distribution of returned questionnaires from the East Region.

Figure 2 shows the return rate of questionnaires from the East Region was 66.7%. In total, there were 18 questionnaires ($n=18$) sent to the Department of Social Services and Seniors. Nine questionnaires were distributed to the East Region and 9 questionnaires to the West Region. Provincially, there was a 50% return rate of the questionnaire.

Figure 3 shows the returned questionnaires from the West Region of the Department of Social Services and Seniors.

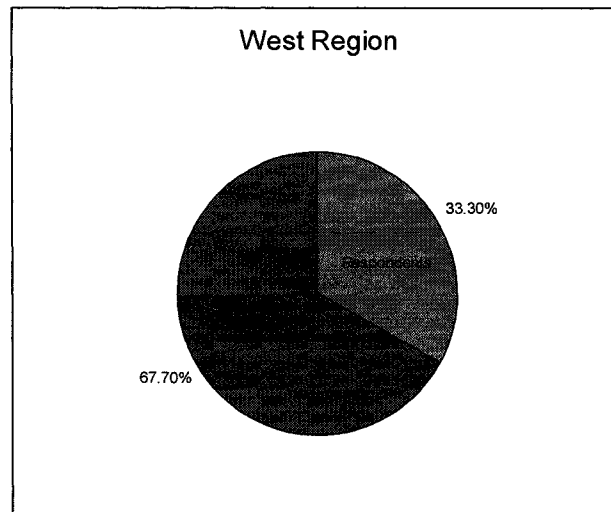


Figure 3. Distribution of returned questionnaires from the West Region.

Figure 3 shows the return rate of questionnaires from the West Region was 33.3%. In total, there were 18 questionnaires ($n=18$) sent to the Department of Social Services and Seniors. Nine questionnaires were distributed to the East Region and 9 questionnaires to the West Region. Provincially, there was a 50% return rate of the questionnaire.

Figure 4 identifies the number of years working in the social services field.

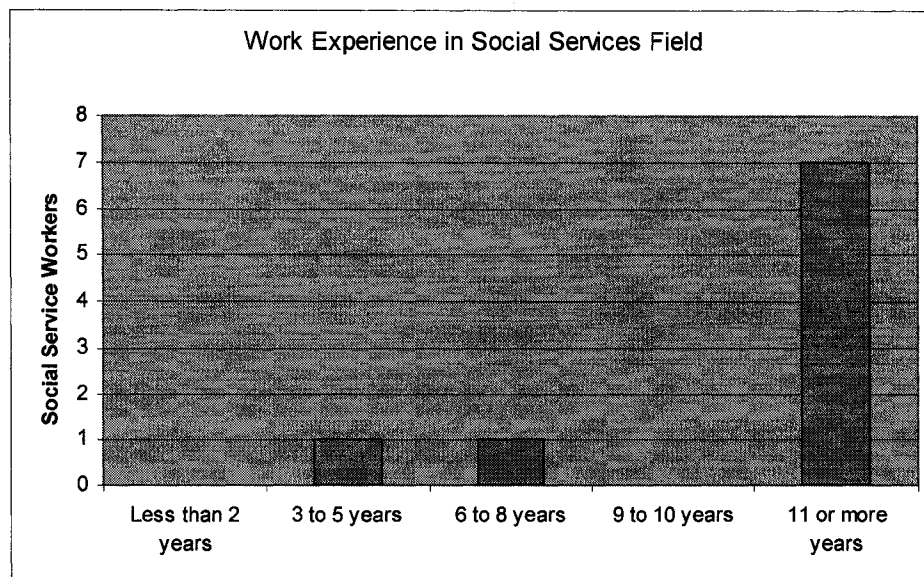


Figure 4. Work Experience in Social Services Field.

Figure 4 indicates seven of the respondents ($n=9$) have been employed in the social services field for more than 10 years. The other 2 respondents have between three to 8 years experience in the social services field.

Figure 5 depicts the number of years working in support of adults with disabilities.

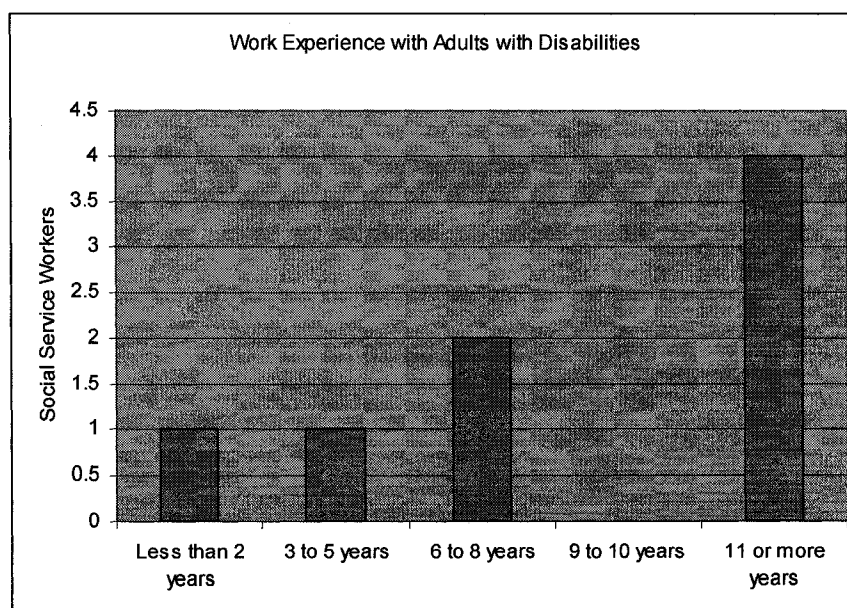


Figure 5. Work Experience with Adults with Disabilities.

Figure 5 indicates 6 respondents ($n=9$) have more than 10 years of experience working in support of adults with disabilities. Two respondents have 5 years or less experience. One respondent did not answer the question.

Figure 6 identifies the educational qualifications of Social Services Workers.

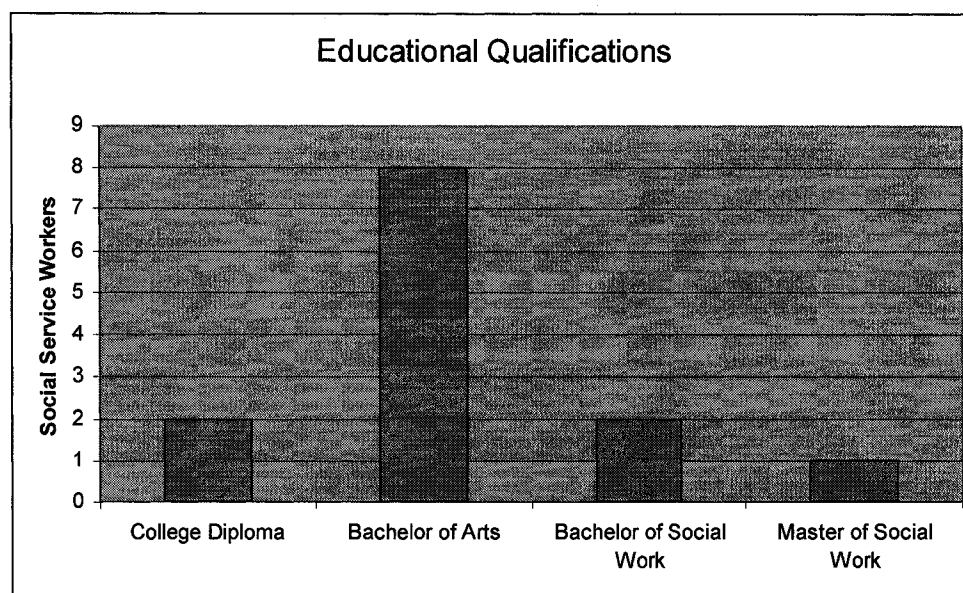


Figure 6. Educational Qualifications

Figure 6 indicates 8 of 9 respondents ($n=9$) had completed a Bachelor of Arts degree.

One of the 9 respondents completed a 2-year college diploma in Human Services. Of the 8 respondents who had a Bachelor of Arts degree, one also had a 2-year college diploma in Human Services, one also had a Bachelor of Social Work degree, and one also had Bachelor and Master of Social Work degree.

Figure 7 identifies how Social Service Workers received their work assignments.

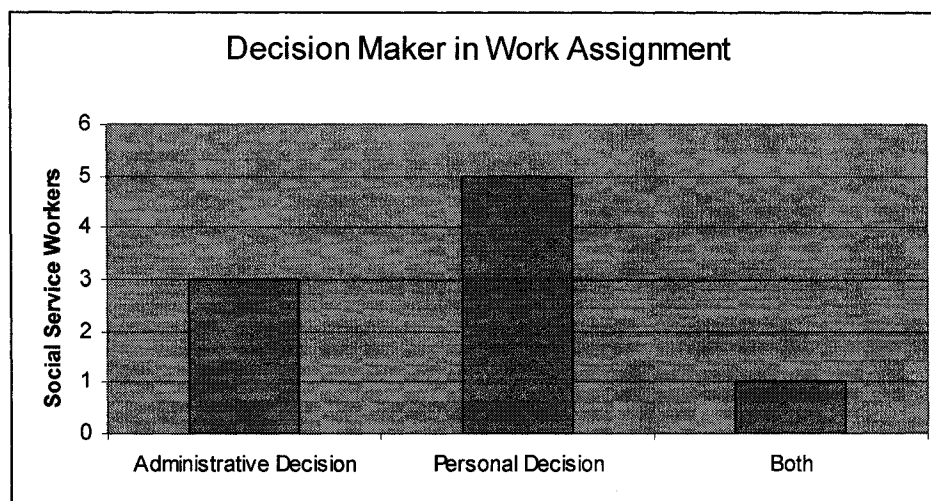


Figure 7. Decision Maker in Work Assignment.

Figure 7 indicates 6 of the respondents ($n=9$) identified that it was their decision to receive a work assignment to work with adults with disabilities.

Figure 8 identifies whether Social Service Workers are provided with professional development specific to adults with disabilities.

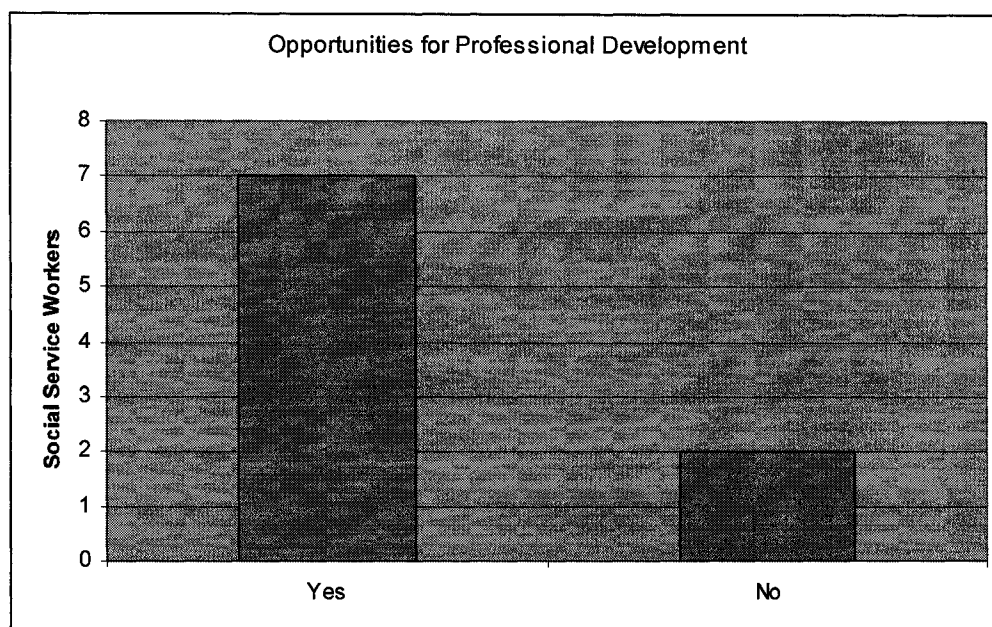


Figure 8. Opportunities for Professional Development.

Figure 8 shows 7 respondents ($n=9$) indicated that opportunities for professional development specific to adults with disabilities were made available. The types of professional development opportunities were qualified as yearly professional development days/workshops, education funding opportunities, case conferences, and union training. One respondent qualified that management is supportive of training. Of the 2 respondents who indicated there were no opportunities for professional development specific to adult with disabilities, one qualified by explaining that the majority of training/workshops available have been specific to children with disabilities, not adults.

Figure 9 represents two questions. 1) Are written transitional plans for students with disabilities a requirement of the regional office when students leave high school? 2) Are written transitional plans for students with disabilities an expectation of the Department of Social Services and Seniors when students leave high school?

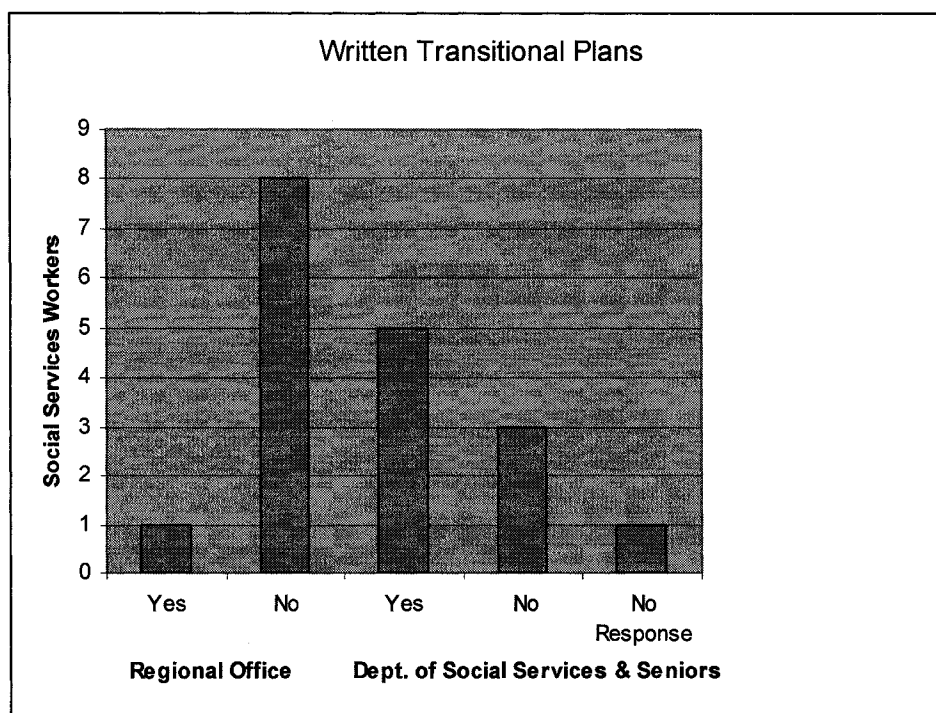


Figure 9. Written Transitional Plans.

Figure 9 indicates 8 of the respondents ($n=9$) replied that written transitional plans for students with disabilities are not a requirement of the regional office. Three of the 8 respondents qualified their “no” response with “not a written requirement but always a business practice, and that the Disability Support Program (DSP) had their own tools for assessment and develop their own support plans; and that plans that have been made are usually part of the general DSP support plans. The one respondent who answered yes to

this question qualified their response by stating a support plan must be completed for each individual who receives services through the DSP. On the second question, five respondents ($n=9$) indicated that written transitional plans for students with disabilities are an expectation of the Department of Social Services and Seniors. Three respondents said they were not an expectation. One respondent did not specifically answer the question but had qualified his/her response referring to the previous question -- that the DSP has their own tools for assessment and develop their own support plans.

Figure 10 identifies whether Social Service Workers complete written transitional plans on behalf of students with disabilities when they enter the health region / department for support services.

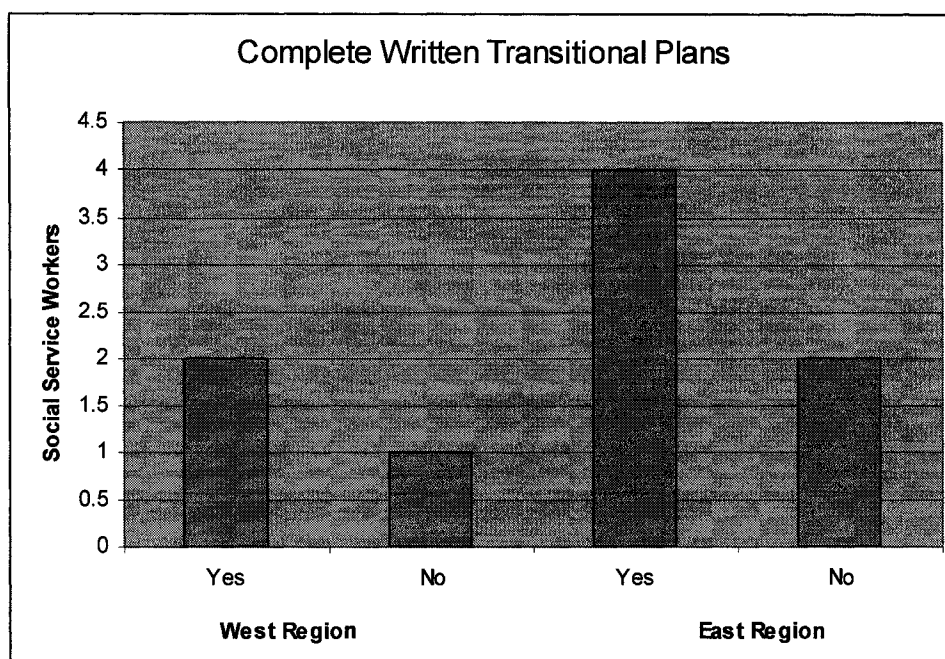


Figure 10. Complete Written Transitional Plans.

Figure 10 shows that across the province, 6 respondents ($n=9$) indicated that they complete written transitional plans on behalf of students with disabilities when they enter the health region / department for support services. Three respondents indicated a “no” response. On a regional level, one third (one out of three in the West Region / 2 out of 6 in the East Region) of the respondents indicated that written transitional plans were not completed.

Figure 11 identifies whether Social Service Workers utilize a specific planning model(s) to develop transitional planning for students with disabilities.

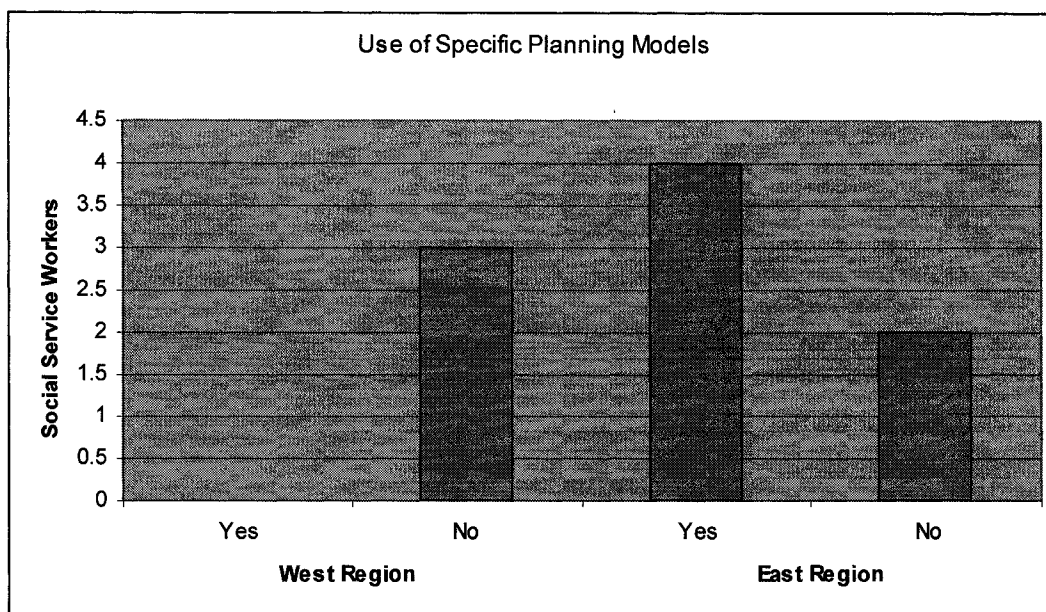


Figure 11. Use of Specific Planning Models.

Figure 11 shows that across the province, 5 respondents ($n=9$) indicated that they did not utilize specific planning model(s) to develop transitional planning for students with disabilities. Four respondents indicated that specific planning models were used. On a regional level, all respondents in the West Region indicated “no” to the question. In the East Region, 2 out of 6 respondents indicated a “no” response.

Figure 12 identifies whether the transitional planning for students with disabilities is developed internally or in collaboration with other persons/services.

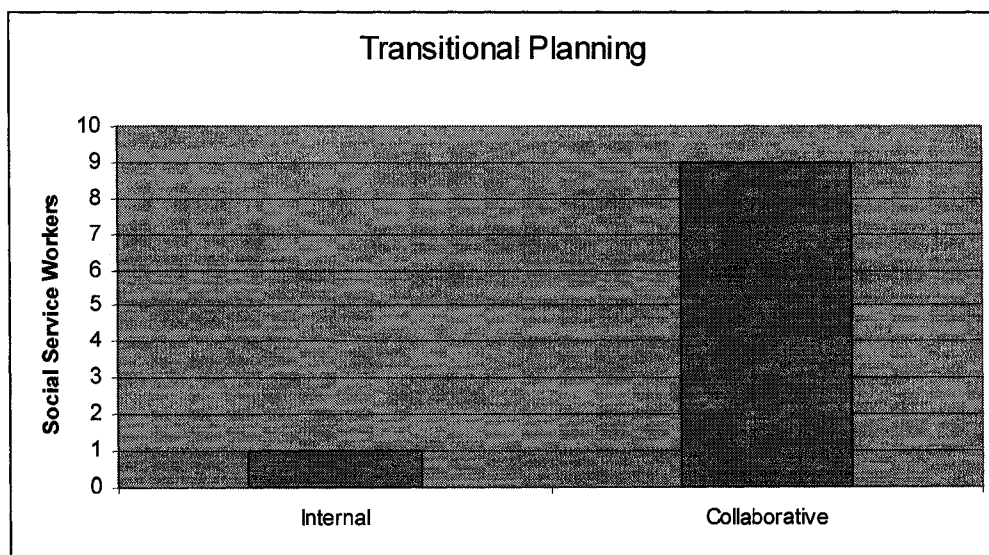


Figure 12. Transitional Planning.

Figure 12 shows irrespective of whether they worked in the West Region or East Region of the province, 100% of the respondents indicated that they develop transitional planning for students with disabilities in collaboration with other persons/services. One respondent stated that transitional planning is developed in both areas -- internally and in collaboration with other persons/services.

Figure 13 identifies the frequency of transition plan meetings for students with disability throughout their high school tenure and in their last year of high school.

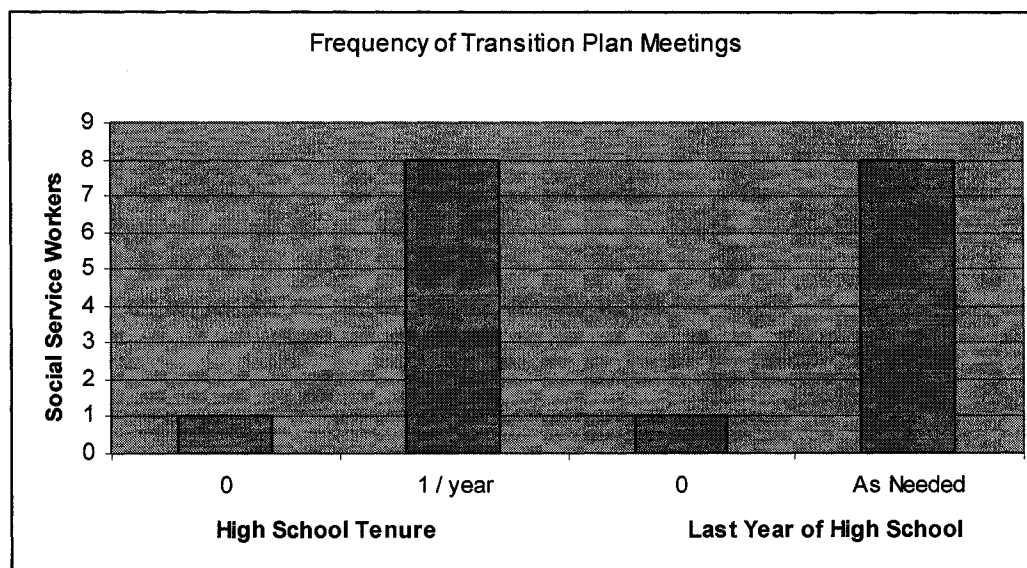


Figure 13. Frequency of Transition Plan Meetings

Figure 13 shows that across the province, respondents indicate strong evidence which supports the occurrence of transition plan meetings for students with disabilities during their high school years. On the first question about the frequency of transition plan meetings from high school to the health region/department for support services, 8 respondents ($n=9$) indicated that at least one meeting per year occurred throughout the students' high school tenure. One respondent did not indicate a choice. On the second question, 8 respondents indicated that as many meetings as were required took place during their final high school year. Once indicated that no meetings took place.

Figure 14 depicts the type of post secondary support options that the health region/department make available to students with disabilities when they leave high school.

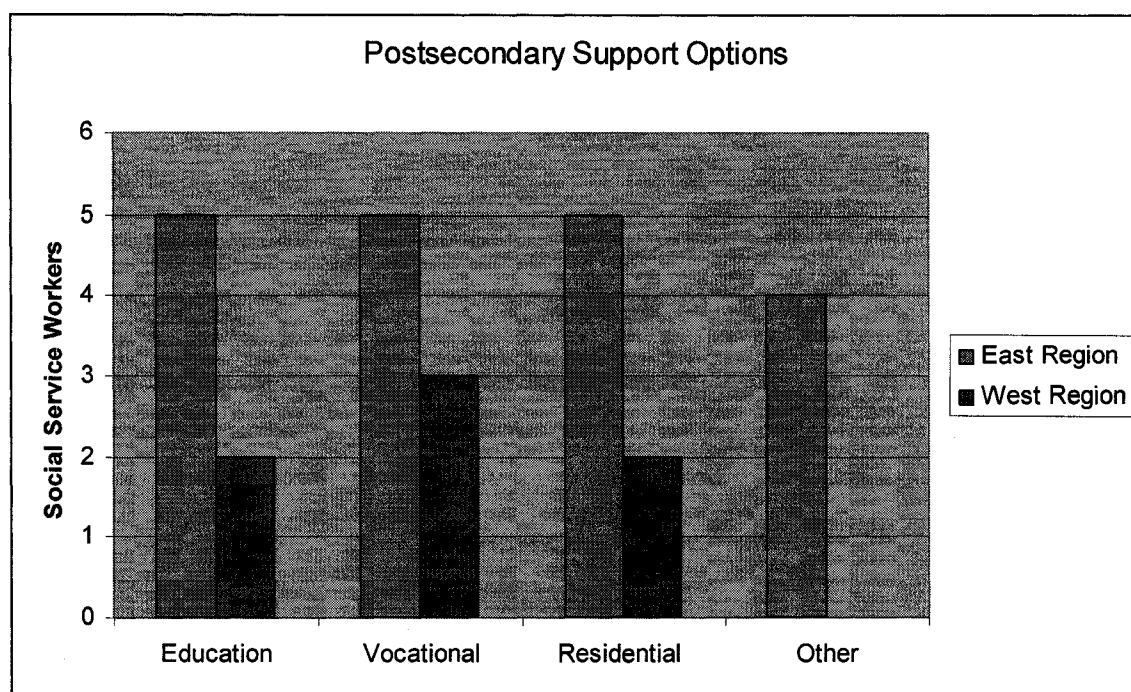


Figure 14. Post Secondary Options.

Figure 14 indicates one respondent did not respond to any options presented in this question ($n=9$). Based on the remaining 8 respondents, 7 identified education as a post secondary support option and 8 identified vocational as a post secondary support option. Four respondents identified the category “other” as post secondary support options, but only one respondent qualified their answer to include life skills and short term government sponsored programs.

Figure 15 indicates who social service workers invite to participate in the transition meeting.

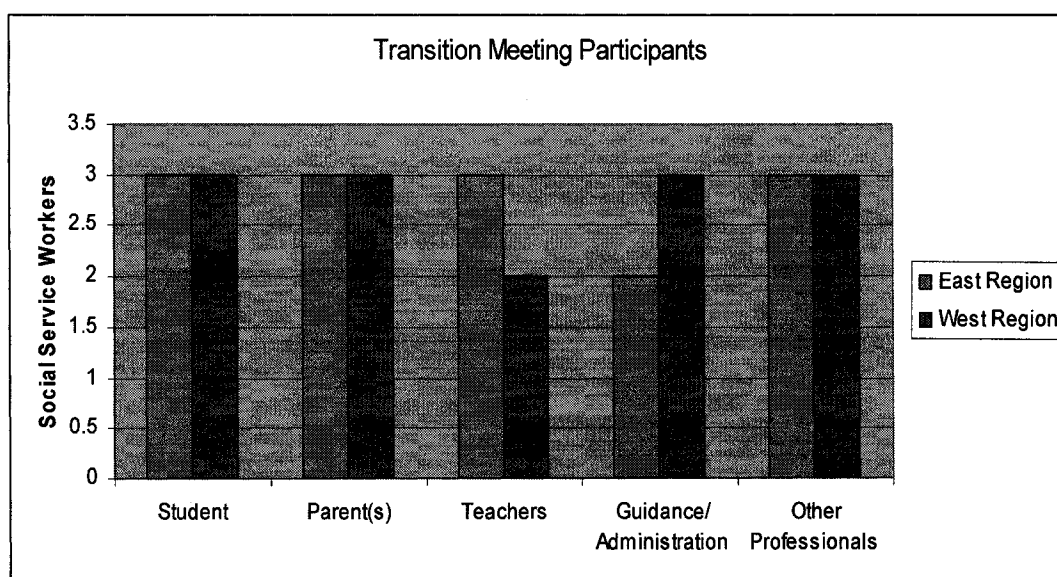


Figure 15. Transition Meeting Participants.

Figure 15 indicates there were 3 respondents from the West Region and 6 respondents from the East Region ($n=9$). Of the six respondents from the East Region, 50% did not indicate an answer to any of the options presented. Two of the 3 respondents commented as follows: the individual /family decide who should be present and, representatives from DSP are invited by the schools to transition meetings. The comment that, “the school coordinates the transition meetings and I attend upon invitation” was also shared by a respondent from the West Region. Two respondents (one from each region) stated that it was the decision of the student/family to decide who would be involved in the transition meetings.

Figure 16 shows the rate of return of questionnaires from the three school boards in Prince Edward Island -- Eastern School District, Western School Board and the French Language School Board.

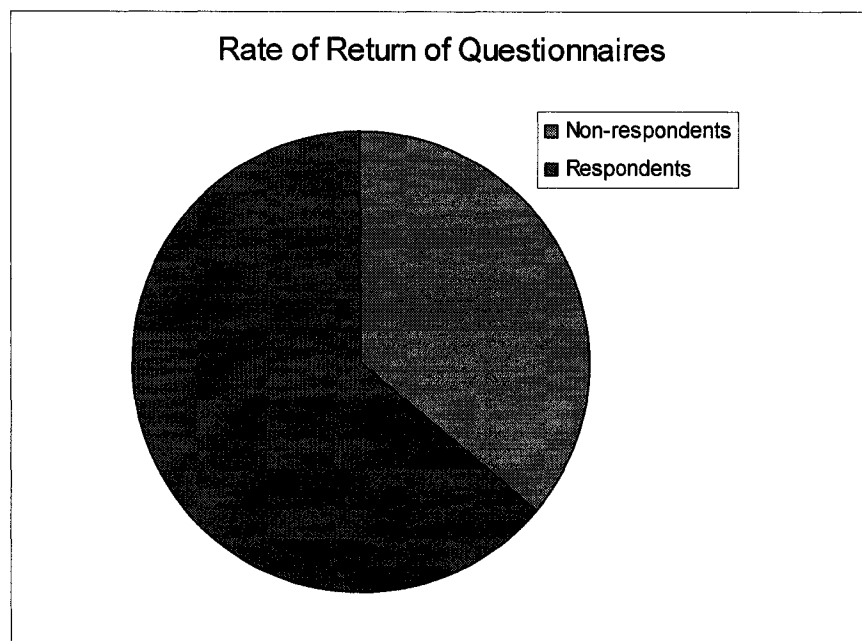


Figure 16. Rate of Return of Questionnaires.

Figure 16 indicates that questionnaires ($n=14$) were sent to educators in the 12 high schools across Prince Edward Island -- 6 high schools in the Eastern School District, 4 high schools in the Western School Board, and 2 high schools in the French Language School Board. Provincially, there was a 64% return rate of the questionnaire.

Figure 17 shows the distribution of returned questionnaires from each of the three school boards in Prince Edward Island.

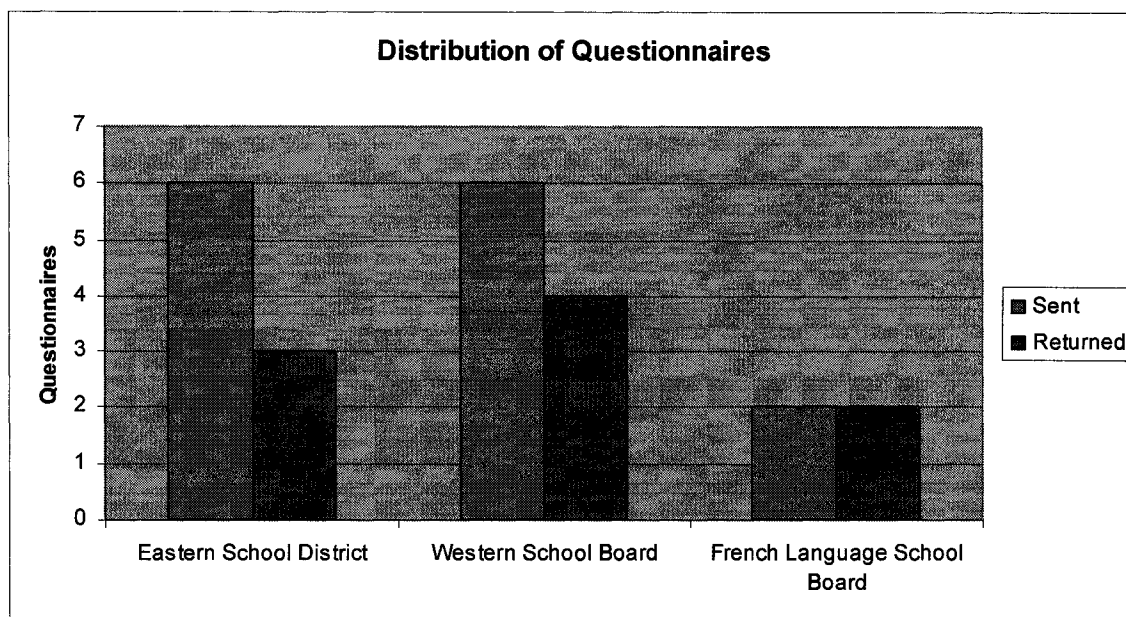


Figure 17. Distribution of Questionnaires.

Figure 17 indicates provincially, there was a 64% return rate of the questionnaires ($n=14$) sent out to educators. The Eastern School District had a return rate of 50% -- 3 out of 6 questionnaires returned. The Western School Board had a return rate of 67% -- 4 out of 6 questionnaires returned. The French Language School Board had a return rate of 100% -- 2 out of 2 questionnaires returned.

Figure 18 identifies the number of years working in the teaching profession and the number of years with a teaching assignment with students with disabilities.

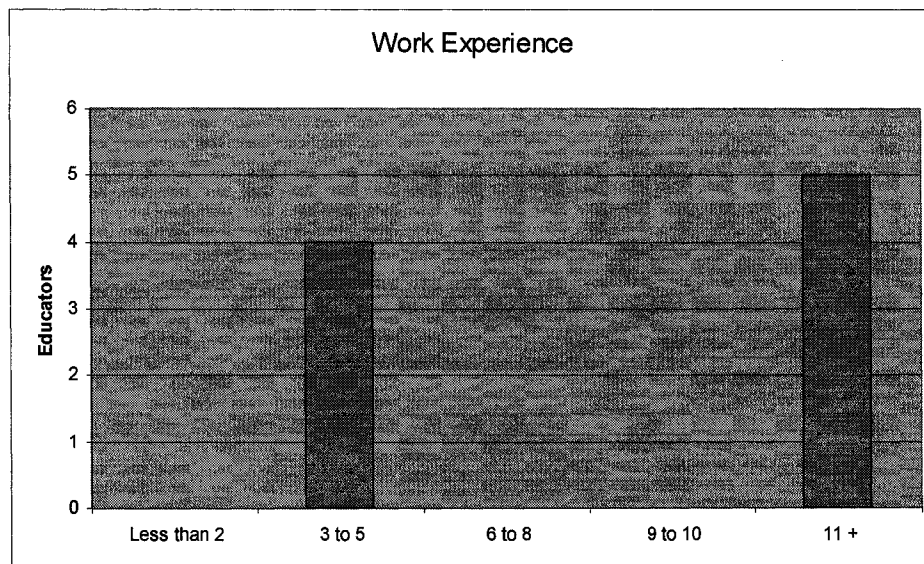


Figure 18. Work Experience

Figure 18 indicates 5 respondents ($n=9$) have more than 11 plus years of work experience in the teaching profession. The other 4 respondents have 3 to 5 years of teaching experience.

Figure 19 identifies the number of years with a teaching assignment with students with disabilities.

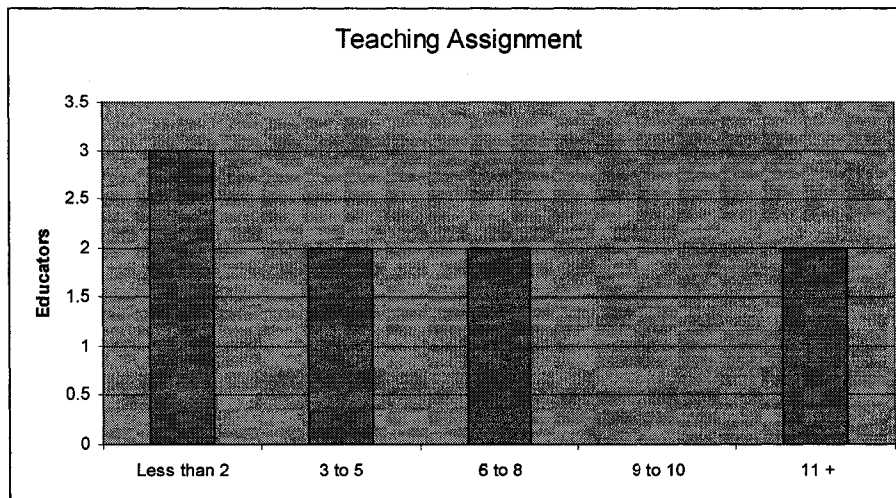


Figure 19. Teaching Assignment.

Figure 19 indicates 2 respondents ($n=9$) have 11 plus years experience in a teaching assignment with students with disabilities. Two respondents have 6 to 8 years experience. Two respondents have 3 to 5 years experience. Three respondents have less than 2 years experience.

Figure 20 identifies educational qualifications.

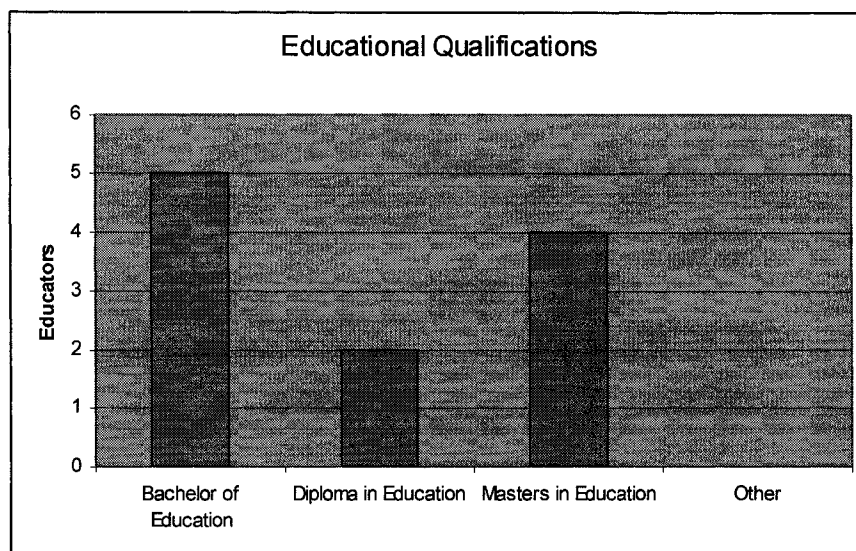


Figure 20. Educational Qualifications.

Figure 20 indicates 4 respondents ($n=9$) had completed a Masters in Education degree.

Five of the respondents had completed a Bachelor of Education degree and, within this group, 2 also had completed a Diploma in Special Education.

Figure 21 identifies how educators received their teaching assignments.

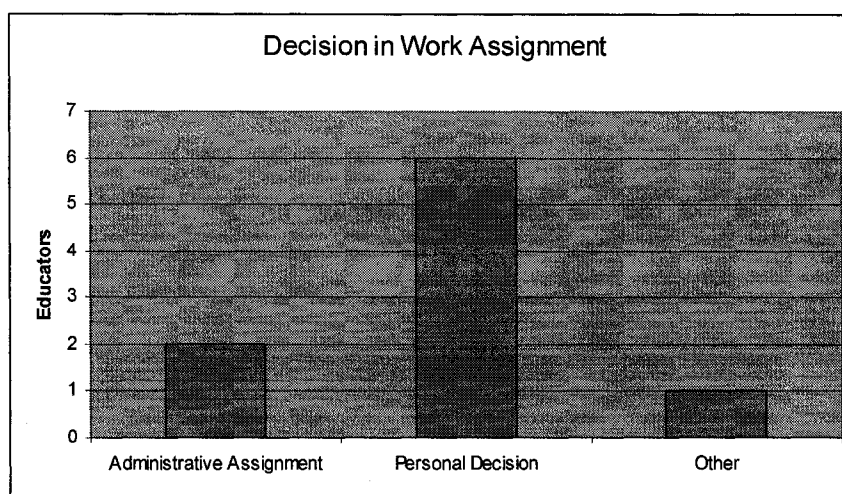


Figure 21. Decision in Work Assignment.

Figure 21 indicates 6 respondents identified that it was their decision to receive a teaching assignment to work with students with disabilities. Two respondents stated it was an administrative decision. One respondent identified "other" as how they received the assignment.

Figure 22 identifies whether educators are provided opportunities for professional development specific to students with disabilities.

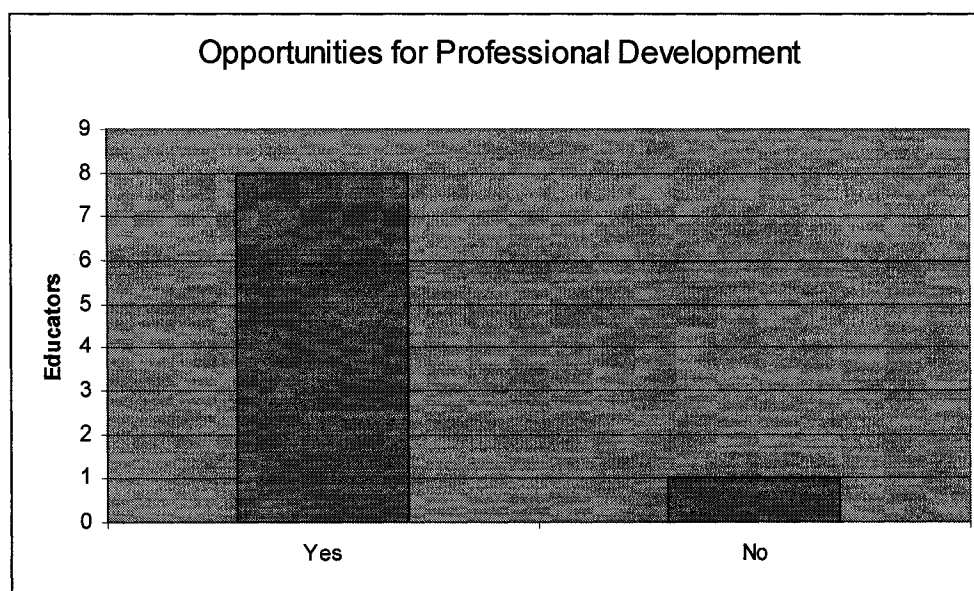


Figure 22. Opportunities for Professional Development.

Figure 22 shows 8 respondents ($n=9$) indicated that opportunity for professional development specific to students with disabilities were made available. Professional development opportunities were qualified as focusing on various types of exceptionalities, and technology relevant to student use. Professional development opportunities occurred annually. One respondent commented that their board also had two Special Education Consultants who provided one-on-one professional development as needed. The respondent who indicated “no” had commented that opportunities were low because the number of students with disabilities is low and it was more a question of resources.

Figure 23 represents two questions. 1) Are written transitional plans for students with a disability a requirement of the school board when they leave high school? 2) Are written transitional plans for students with a disability an expectation of your high school when they leave high school?

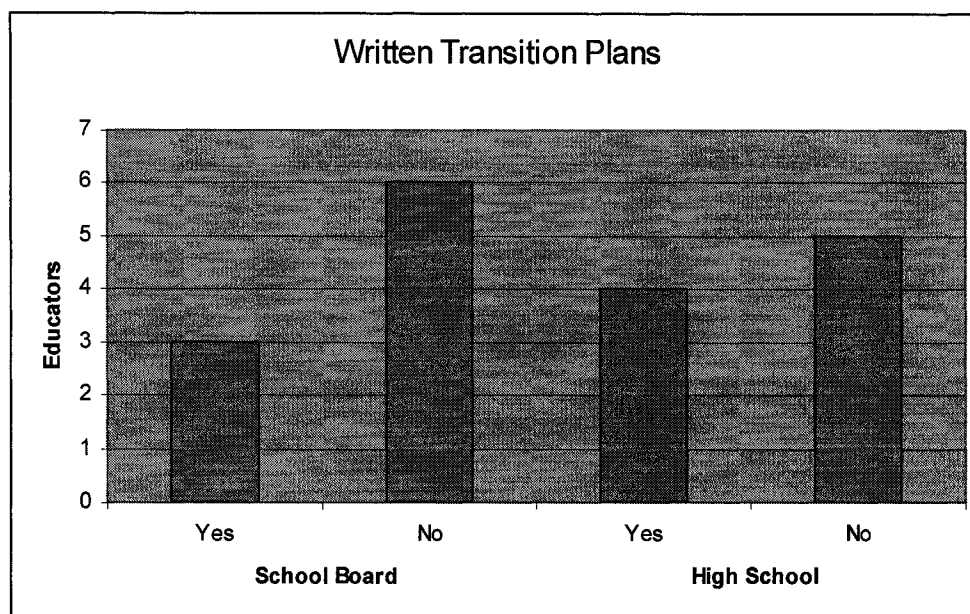


Figure 23. Written Transitional Plans.

Figure 23 indicates that on the first question ($n=9$), whether written transitional plans for students with a disability are a requirement of your school board when they leave high school, 6 respondents answered they were not a requirement. Two of the 6 respondents qualified their "no" answer with the expectation that transition planning will happen for students with disabilities, and that transition plans for special needs students are expected for transition from Grade 9 to Grade 10. Three of the respondents answered "yes" to the question. One of the 3 "yes" respondents also commented that students who have a diagnosis do require a transition plan.

On the second question ($n=9$), whether written transitional plans are an expectation for students with a disability at your high school when exiting high school, 5 respondents indicated plans were not an expectation. Within the same school board, contradictory remarks were indicated. Once respondent indicated that the board is attempting to have all schools complete transitional plans and to use the same procedure and formats. Another respondent indicated it was up to the school administration and teachers as to which students would require a plan. Four of the 9 respondents indicated transition plans were an expectation.

Figure 24 identifies whether educators complete a written transitional plan on behalf of their students with disabilities when they leave high school.

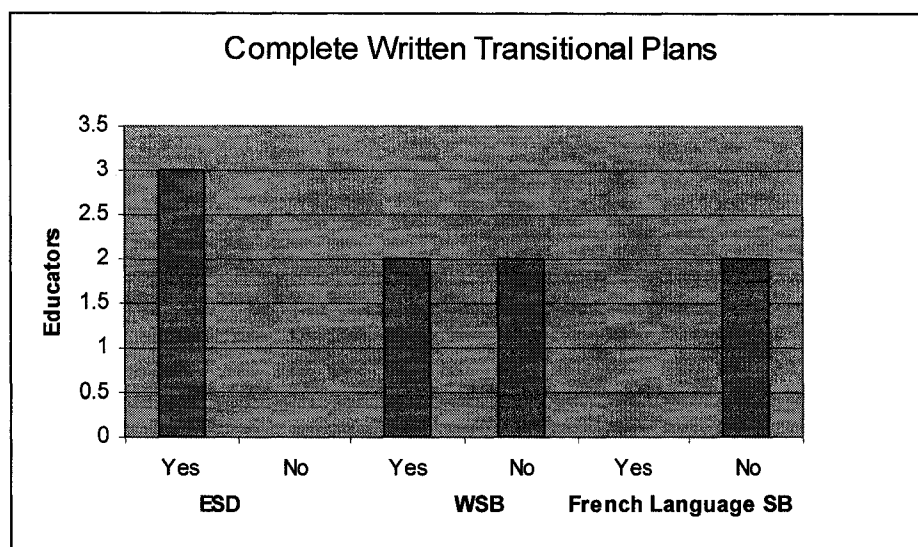


Figure 24. Complete written Transitional Plans.

Figure 24 shows across the province, 5 of the respondents ($n=9$) indicated that they complete a written transitional plan on behalf of their students with disabilities when they leave high school. Of the 5 “yes” respondents, one commented they may or may not be specifically written, but are certainly discussed with parents and outside support agencies. Another “yes” respondent commented there are students who I do not teach but should have a transitional plan and do not. Four respondents indicated a “no” response to this question. On a school board/district level, there was much variation in the responses. The Eastern School District (ESD) indicated a 100% “yes” response. The Western School Board (WSB) indicated a 50% “yes” response and the French Language School Board (SB) indicated a 0% “yes” response.

Figure 25 identifies whether educators utilize a specific planning model(s) to develop transitional planning for students with disabilities.

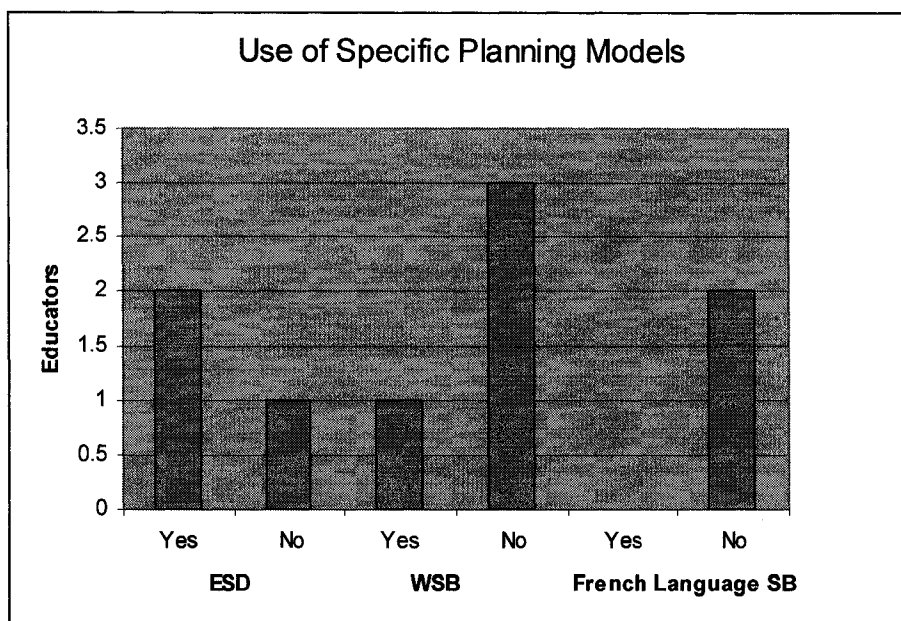


Figure 25. Use of Specific Planning Models.

Figure 25 shows across the province, 6 of the respondents ($n=9$) indicated “no” they do not utilize a specific planning model(s) to develop transitional planning for student with disabilities. Three respondents indicated “yes” to this question and 2 of the “yes” respondents identified MAPS (McGill Action Planning System) as their specific planning model. There were 3 “no” respondents who qualified their answer. One commented that every situation needs special planning depending on needs. The 2nd commented that plans would include a summary of the student’s high school career as well as a general description of the type of experience / program required upon leaving high school. The 3rd commented it is the teacher’s discretion and that there is a transitions planning binder but high school teachers have not been trained to use it.

Figure 26 identifies if the transitional planning for students with disabilities is developed internally or in collaboration with other persons / services.

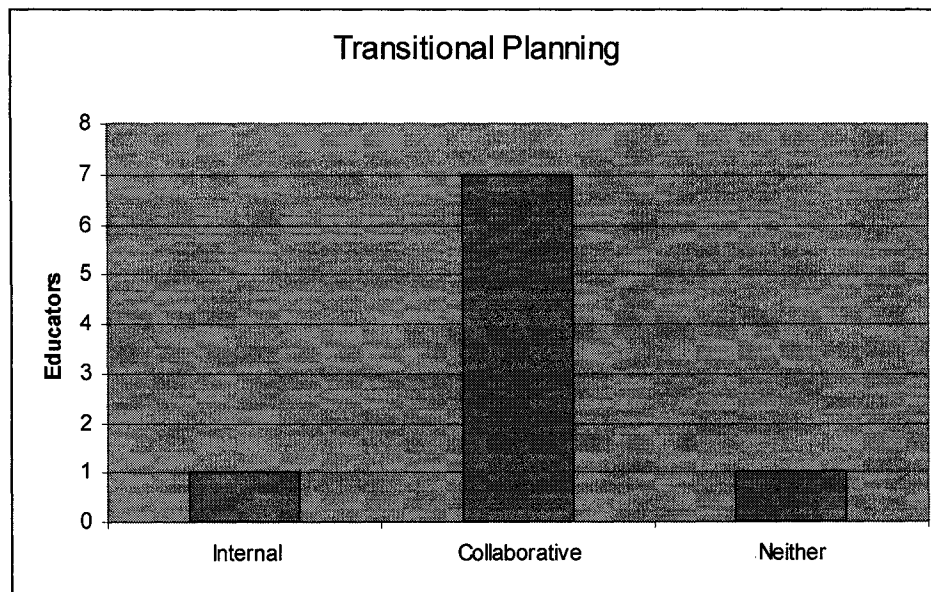


Figure 26. Transition Planning.

Figure 26 shows that irrespective of their employer, seven respondents ($n=9$) indicated that they develop transitional planning for students with disabilities in collaboration with other persons / services. The comments identified that the collaboration process varied because of the participant mix, but generally identified students, parents, internal personnel (school and within the board), external agencies and professionals, where necessary. The one respondent who indicated an “internal” response had qualified that most of the time; the transitional planning was internal with the school team and other services that are available. The one respondent that answered neither of the options qualified their response by stating there is no plan for the moment.

Figure 27 identifies the frequency of when transitional plan meetings for students with disabilities occur throughout their high school tenure and in their last year of high school.

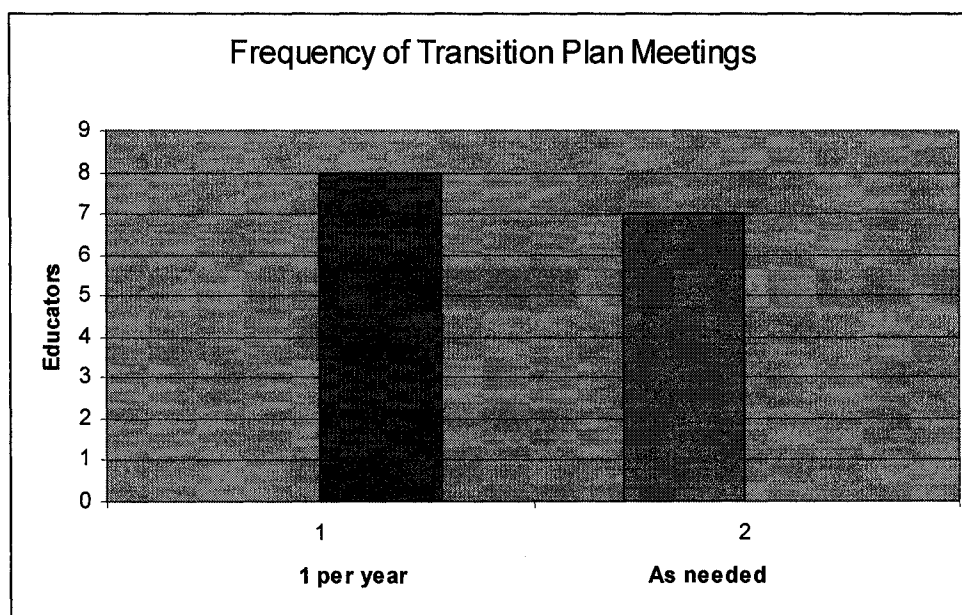


Figure 27. Frequency of Transition Plan Meetings.

Figure 27 shows across the province, respondents ($n=9$) indicate strong evidence that supports the occurrence of transition plan meetings for students with disabilities during their high school years. On the first question regarding the frequency of transition meeting throughout the students' high school tenure, 7 respondents indicated at least one meeting per year. Two respondents did not indicate a frequency of scheduled meetings, but provided comment. One indicated there were no students with disabilities at the high school level and the 2nd commented they were unsure because it was their first year of assignment at that school. On the second question, 8 of the respondents ($n=9$) indicated

that as many meetings as needed are scheduled for transition plan meetings in the students last year of high school. One respondent did not indicate a frequency of when meetings were scheduled but commented there was no student with a disability in the last year of the high school level.

Figure 28 depicts the type of post secondary that are considered by educators for students with disabilities when they leave high school.

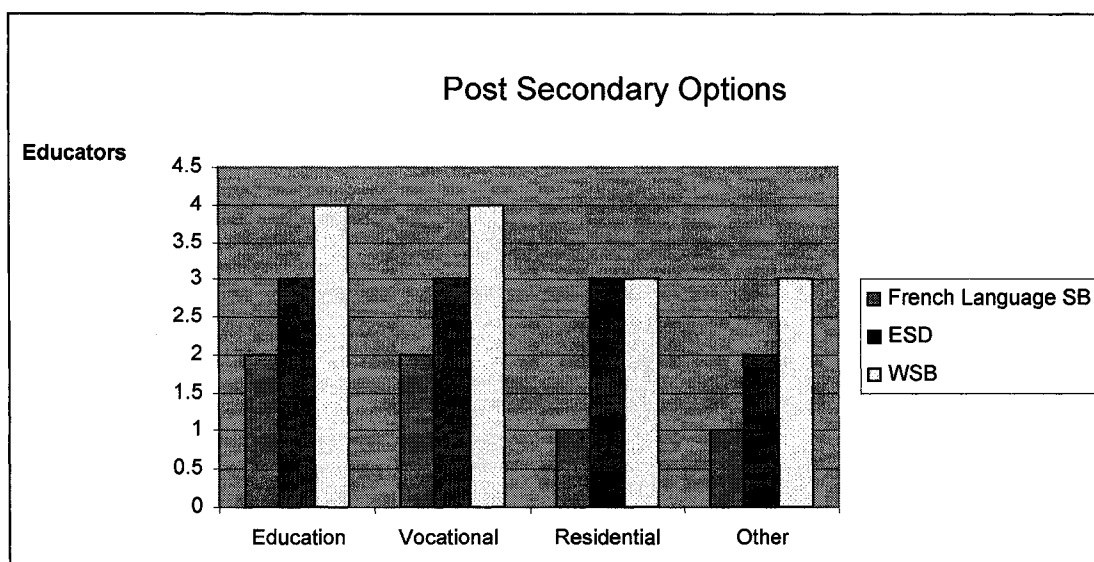


Figure 28. Post Secondary Options.

Figure 28 shows 9 respondents indicated education at a post secondary level is an option for students with disabilities when they leave high school. Nine respondents indicated vocational training as a post secondary option. Seven respondents indicated that residential options are considered for students with disabilities. Six respondents indicated “other” post secondary options are also considered for students with disabilities when they leave high school. “Other” options were qualified as social/recreation options, independent living, and generally, what is deemed appropriate to individual and personal goals. One respondent commented the amount of money available dictates the amount and type of program that will be carried out.

Figure 29 identifies who educators invite to participate in transition meetings on behalf of students with disabilities.

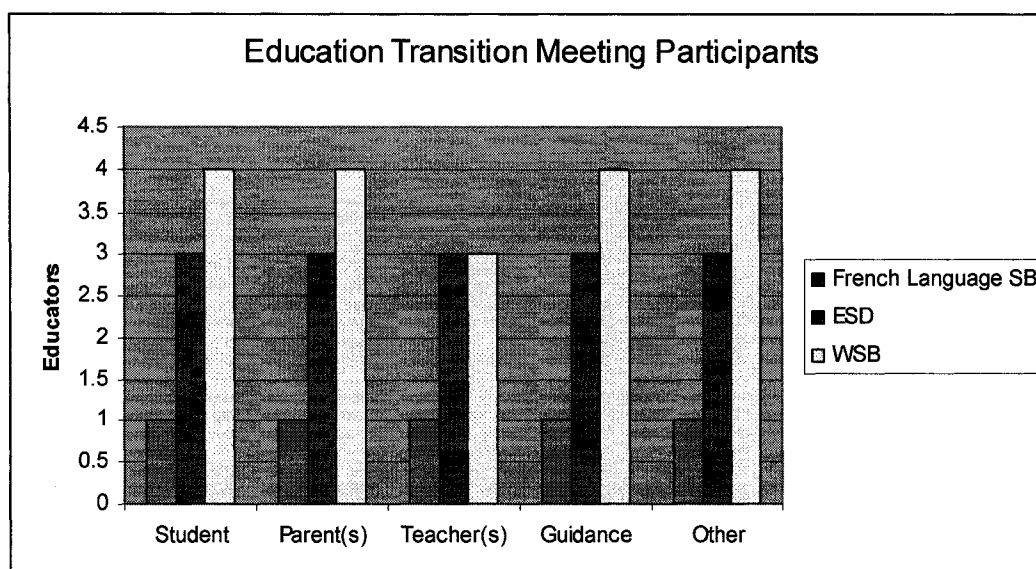


Figure 29. Education Transition Meeting Participants.

Figure 29 shows all respondents ($n=9$) indicated a diversity of participants would be invited to participate in transition meetings on behalf students with disabilities. Two respondents qualified student participation with the words “depending” and if “appropriate.” One respondent did not qualify who is invited to participate because they do not have students who require transition meetings at the present time.

Figure 30 identifies how students with disabilities are prepared by educators for exiting their high school.

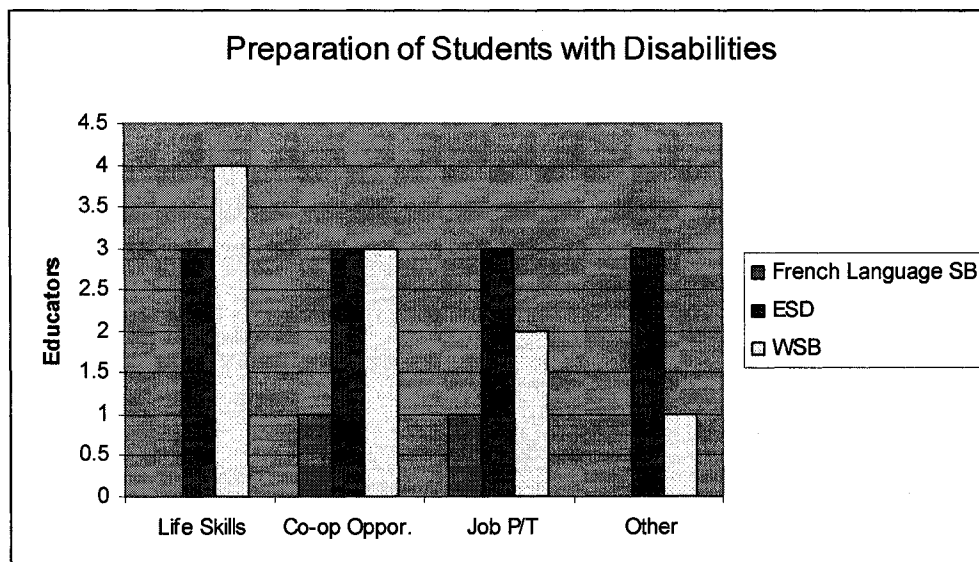


Figure 30. Preparation of Students with Disabilities.

Figure 30 reflects the educator's response to the question: How are students with disabilities prepared for exiting their high school? Qualifiers offered were life skills, co-op opportunities, job training/placement, and other. A space for further comment to this question was also provided to the respondent. Figure 29 shows seven respondents ($n=9$) indicated that "life skills" is one component used to prepare students with disabilities for exiting high school. Seven respondents indicated "co-op opportunities" as a preparation option. Six respondents indicated "job placement / training" as a preparation option. Four respondents indicated "other" as a preparation option. The "other" option was qualified as follows: Going to post secondary institutions and becoming familiar, use of IEP (Individual Education Plan) to identify specific objectives to address areas of need, visit supported living and work environments. One respondent did not indicate any of the

categories listed in this question because they do not have students with disabilities at the secondary level.

Parent Focus Group

The Prince Edward Island Association for Community Living identified potential parents for the focus group and 5 parents participated in this process. Their children range in ages from 22 years old to 27 years old and have transitioned from high school during the years 2000 to 2004. In reference to the description of the child's disability, all parents identified their children as having a certain degree of intellectual disability and 2 of the parents identified their children to also have other multiple disabilities.

Several themes emerged from the parent focus group interview. These themes are described in the following paragraphs.

Years in the public education system:

In the description of their child's school program, all parents indicated their children attended community schools, were exposed to inclusive practices, and integrated to some degree in the regular classroom, and received various amounts of resource support. In most situations, they expressed a general satisfaction of the public education system and the quality of life that was provided for their children.

Basically grade four until he graduated, this was the best time of his life...we had 100% cooperation from the board or the teachers or any TA within the school system. We always knew that and we always appreciated the school system and we have doubly appreciated it since he has left.

In contrast, the post secondary school years altered the perception of these parents' quality of life and vision for their children. They described feelings of vulnerability for

themselves and their children. In part because they are no longer part of a traditional support system which they had access to in the school system and now feel more isolated. In part because there are limited post secondary school options and supports available to them as parents, and for their children. “As parents, we assumed that since they have been integrated all their lives in the school system, surely services will be available to them as adults. However, parents of children with autism are recognizing this is not the case.”

Transition planning:

In response to the question, “was a written transitional plan developed for your child before they finished high school”, 3 of the parents indicated there was no written transitional plan developed. One parent commented “... so there is nothing in writing and it was not a thought that the school was responsible for having a plan ... so whose responsibility is it?” The 2 parents who indicated a “yes” response had qualified their response with a lack of confidence in the plan and the viable options presented for their children. Although some form of planning had transpired, there still existed with these parents a lack of faith in the process, “It wasn’t really a plan. There was no accountability”. Parents were generally dissatisfied in the manner of how their children exited the school system. One of these parents commented, “Yes, but that is all I can say about it.” “Was it effective for you?” “Not really, there is really nothing out there for him so what did it have to offer ... transition to what?” Another parent commented that they were completely dissatisfied with the support he/she received in planning for their child’s future and offered a stark feeling of hopelessness. “Completely dissatisfied. At

graduation, it felt as though we were attending a funeral instead of celebrating his successes.”

Parent initiative:

In spite of the lack of an entrenched and reliable transition planning process, these parents pressed forward with their own self-initiative and perseverance to achieve viable outcomes that were meaningful to them and for their children. Their actions demonstrated to me the value of parent involvement and collaboration in the planning process. They utilized their natural support system of family and friends or whatever connections they had to move their plans forward. One parent commented that her daughter’s employment was the result of intervention by her daughter’s boyfriend rather than a job coach, “That’s how the job fell from the sky, that’s how she happened to get this from McDonalds and she’s been fortunate that they have been very good to her.” Some of these parents had sufficient skill sets to navigate through the formal network of support services such as the health regions and the Disability Support Program. One parent has been instrumental in establishing the Stars for Life Foundation to benefit her son and other persons with autism. It is a not for profit organization established in Prince Edward Island to build supported housing to achieve independent living options and community inclusion for persons with autism. Some had access to an informal network of connections to people that would support them to achieve specific objectives. They realize connections are imperative to people, irrespective of where you are in life, and whether or not you have a disability. As one parent stated “and so since he left school, anything that had to be done, I did myself ... as far as for employment ... with the city of Charlottetown I heard a

rumor there was an election this fall, and there was money in the budget for a job, I was right in there.” Parents were also intuitive to recognize that not all parents had the skills, or initiative, or the understanding of how to navigate, “We attempted to do some things ourselves from the community because I knew the process of things we could be doing, but what about the parents who didn’t have.”

Resource adequacy and the supply side of services:

In response to the question, what type of post school options were considered, or planned, for your child when they finished school, parents talked about limited resources (funding) to purchase services and the limited availability of appropriate services to purchase. “First thing they (DSP) told me, last month, is that the department is in debt \$600,000 ... there is no money for anything ... that is an encouraging way to start this meeting.” Further, they expressed frustration and despair of the fact there is an increasing number of persons with disabilities, some with complex needs, who have been previously supported by the school system for their pre-adult years and are about to transition to an adult system that is inadequately funded in comparison. It highlights a double-edged sword, which they face. Why develop a plan to be discouraged by a lack of commitment to funding resources to support the plan? Yet, without developing a plan, how do you justify your need for funding resources and the development of appropriate services? One parent shared this dilemma, “There has to be services to transition to. Without services, there is no point in planning.” This parent’s situation described the high school years as “traumatic times for families” (with autism) because post secondary services for persons

with autism are either limited or do not exist. A similar feeling was expressed by another parent:

You go through the school for 12 or 13 years, you know what they are going to do in September ... you arrange for a summer program or something, and then all of a sudden, you don't know ... there is nothing. Apprehension was felt every year that was closer to Grade 12.

Two parents commented on the issue of portability of support services from one health region to another. [The five health regions which existed in the Department of Health and Social Services have since been disbanded. Disability support services have since been transferred to the Department of Social Services and Seniors]. One parent commented on the frustration with securing consistency in care for their child (personal care). The expectation was placed on the parent to secure and train respite caregivers and continues to be the primary care giver to their adult son. Another parent had investigated post secondary education at Holland College for their child but the child faced a barrier because the age eligibility to receive independent funding from the Disability Support Program was established at 25 years old. Traditionally, the age of eligibility for independent income supports is 18 years of age.

So to come out of our health region, this was the year the Disability Support Program changed so that she wasn't eligible for any funding because it was going to be age 25 ... she had no funding ... to come to the Charlottetown area to have any help in related to her disability and she could have had income support, like

welfare, really, but we couldn't set all of that up without having a Charlottetown address."

Parent suggestions:

In response to the question, what suggestion would you like to make about transition plans, or programs, for students with disabilities in high school, parents commented on having adequate resources allocated to provide opportunities and choices for their children. "There needs to be opportunities for continued education, social skills training, job opportunities, opportunities to live outside family homes even for severely disabled adults." These parents have demonstrated their responsibility to planning but want to see a process that is coordinated. "We need a coordinator who would be hired to work and their full time job would be planning, starting in Grade 11, working with parents." One parent suggested a process that is collaborative "less hearing -- more listening to the parent/guardian and/or client." Another parent suggested a process that "needs to be mandated, regulated ... a process written out as to what to do." One parent reflected on the challenges of continuing with inclusive practices beyond the school years.

Part of the problem it took years to get kids into the regular school system and become included ... and everybody sat back and said whew that's done now ... we got them through school and all of a sudden now we have these kids who have left school and there is a gap there ... these kids are wanting to move on and do something more and have challenges."

One parent offered their reflection on being complacent as parents. “I think the mistake we made is that we thought that ACL (Association for Community Living) would be our bridge and it has had trouble getting this thing through, years ago.” To me, this comment emphasizes the need to ensure that parents retain their position in the planning process, but continue their collaboration with key stakeholders.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to explore the transition process for students with disabilities in Prince Edward Island from high school to post secondary activities. My involvement with disability organizations and my professional experience receiving students with disabilities who were requesting services following their graduation from high school, led me to the assumption that the transition process for these students was inconsistent in high schools and social service regions. The data collection and analysis in the study confirmed these assumptions and showed evidence in the inconsistency with the transition process for students with disabilities in Prince Edward Island. The research was guided by two questions to examine the current status of transitional planning in the province for high school students with disabilities. The two questions were as follows:

1. What process do high schools and community services in Prince Edward Island utilize to determine a transitional plan for students with disabilities when they transition from high school to post secondary activities?
2. What are the best practices to ensure successful transition for students with disabilities when they exit high school?

The above questions provided the framework for the development of a questionnaire for educators in each of the high schools in Prince Edward Island who were involved with planning for the transition of students with disabilities from high school to

post secondary activities. A second questionnaire was developed for Social Service Workers within the Department of Social Services and Seniors who were involved with receiving students with disabilities when they transition from high school to adult disability support services. The third area of data collection was the focus group interview with parents, which provided a retrospective disclosure of their experiences with transitional planning for their children with disabilities when they left high school.

In this chapter, the themes that emerged from the questionnaires and focus group interviews will be discussed. Although this research was specific to the current status of transitional planning for high school students with disabilities in Prince Edward Island, suggested recommendations are presented in the hope to construct a meaningful and collaborative transition process for both education and social services jurisdictions. It is also anticipated that this study may engage further research, policy implementation, and effective practices that will enhance the outcomes for students with disabilities when they transition from high school to post secondary activities.

Consistency with Transition Planning

Although there are elements and pockets of some form of transitional planning occurring in educational and social services jurisdictions across Prince Edward Island, it is apparent from the research findings that it is not consistent. In fact, there is an absence of neither a common process nor a common practice when transitional plans are developed. Unfortunately there is much research (Beresford, 2004; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Collett-Klingenberger, 1998; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997; Ward, Mallett,

Heslop, & Simons, 2003) which confirms the inconsistency in planning and gaps in services that are experienced when persons with disabilities transition from high school.

In reference to the two questions posed in the questionnaire to Social Service Workers about transitional planning (see Figure 8), the inconsistency is evident. Eight of the 9 respondents indicated that written transitional plans are not a requirement of the regional office when students with disabilities leave high school. Three of the 9 respondents indicated that written transitional plans were not an expectation of the Department of Social Services and Seniors when students with disabilities leave high school. In reference to two similar questions posed in the questionnaire to educators about transitional planning (see Figure 22), the inconsistency is also evident. Six of the 9 respondents indicated that written transitional plans for students with disabilities are not a requirement of the school board when they leave high school. Five of the 9 respondents indicated that written transitional plans for students with a disability were not an expectation of their high school when they left high school.

The absence of consistency toward the transitional planning process and practice for students with disabilities when they leave high school has implications in many areas. As mentioned previously, my research indicated there are situations where written transitional plans are completed. Figure 9 identified that 6 of 9 respondents (Social Service Workers) complete some form of written transitional plans for students with disabilities when they enter the health region / department for support services. The practice however was inconsistent from one regional office to another. Although this is a

positive practice, these plans are more relevant to determine eligibility criteria for the Disability Support Program, rather than a holistic and multi-disciplinary approach (Collett-Klingenberger, 1998). Without collaboration with the education system, without allowing for the participation of parents (Ward et al., 2003) and consumers and for self-determination by consumers in the planning process (Thoma, Baker, & Saddler, 2002; Wehmeyer, 1992), the planning is limited from receiving input from other valuable multi-disciplinary sources. As a result, planning objectives and general outcomes to be achieved are constrained from the get go for the person with a disability. Furthermore, when jurisdictions proceed on their own and do not collaborate with each other in transitional planning, this practice is also not cost effective. Transitional planning in isolation does not take advantage of the expertise, knowledge, information, and cost already invested by previous jurisdictions. Instead, reoccurring costs are incurred when we “reinvent the wheel” and we lose cost efficiencies by not collaborating and building upon previous opportunities.

This research also indicated inconsistency with process and practice in transitional planning within all levels of the province’s education jurisdiction. Yet, there are pockets where educators complete written transitional plans on behalf of their students with disabilities when they leave high school. Figure 23 indicates that 5 of 9 respondents answered “yes” to this question. In reference to the use of a specific planning model (Figure 24), 6 of the 9 respondents indicated they do not utilize a specific planning model to develop transitional planning for students with disabilities. However, the inconsistency is evident in both these questions and exists from teacher to teacher, from school to

school, and from school board to school board. There appears to be an absence of a clear policy from the Department of Education to ensure that the transitional planning process and practice is consistent in all education jurisdictions within the province. The absence of clear policy has implications on parents and their children with disabilities. It confirms the existence of inequity for certain parents and their children with disabilities. There is not parity in how transitional planning for students with disabilities is conducted in certain education jurisdictions across the province.

Three of the parents from the focus group interview indicated that there was no transitional plan developed for their child when they left high school. Gerg (2006), in her Master of Applied Health Services Research thesis, also identified parent unease in her research in Prince Edward Island, “All of the families were concerned about their child’s eventual transition from high school to the adult world. Some families had a plan for their child whereas others were reluctant to discuss what was going to happen after their child finished school. This unease and possible fear is a testament to the fact that programs at schools are not preparing children with disabilities for the workforce” (p. 95). It is obvious that the current situation is not acceptable. A written transitional plan should not be an optional entity. It provides a critical framework and direction for a student with a disability when they leave high school. It is analogous to a report card that all other students receive when they leave high school to embark on their post secondary options.

Accountability and Commitment to Transition Planning

Within the meaning of the word transition, you have an understanding that there is movement from one place to another. Transition planning defines parameters and expectations of how this movement will take place. For me, it encompasses intent, sufficient resources, defined goals and objectives, implementation, accountability, commitment, achieved outcomes and success, collaboration, and collective responsibility. Planning for the transition from high school to adult expectations is essential to achieving success (Avoke, 1998; Frank & Stilington, 1996). Without appropriate planning, the transition from high school to adult life can be difficult to face for students with disabilities (Blalock & Patton, 1996; Clark, 1996; The Roeher Institute, 1996). The transition planning process is the foundation for providing effective transition services (Aspel et al., 1999) and frequently cited best practices include interagency collaboration (Kohler et al., 1994; Aspel et al.)

Although there is inconsistency among educators in developing written transition plans, where transition plans were developed, there was not always an accountability and commitment to implement the transition plan. This situation was expressed by parents in the focus group interview. They had a lack of faith in the process because there was no accountability by either government or a community agency to implement the plan. "It wasn't really a plan. There was no accountability." A similar frustration was expressed by an educator in the questionnaire. In spite of the fact that he developed transition plans on behalf of his students, some students were without services in subsequent years after leaving school. The efforts and energies which that educator directed into that student's

transition plan are wasted if there is no action on the plan. How efficient and effective are our use of resources when applied in this manner? A parent from the focus group interview who had a plan verified this frustration, “Not really, there was nothing out there for him so what did it have to offer ... transition to what?” The dilemma expressed by this parent comment is twofold. One is that support services are not available, or if available, are not deemed appropriate by the family for their child with a disability. Second, the dissemination of information to parents is not necessarily coordinated and parents are not aware of the full range or intent of available support services in the community.

All stakeholders involved in transition planning have to have a belief that the process is authentic, and share a confidence that the plan will be followed through. To improve transition outcomes, there needs to exist a collective responsibility whereby education, social services, and community agencies plan in a collaborative manner with families and students with disabilities when they transition from high school and maintain a collective ownership for the plan. It becomes too easy for jurisdictions to accept they no longer have a responsibility because the individual has simply moved on to another jurisdiction. Beresford (2004) makes a succinct point about this, “Fundamentally, it is vital that the purpose of transition planning and transition services is not seen as a means by which an individual is moved from one service to another. Rather, it should be seen as a way to enable and support a young person move towards and onto a new life stage” (p 584). Collaboration strategies to achieve a seamless transition are supported by previous

research (Beresford, 2004; Smith, Edelen-Smith, & Stodden, 1995; Ward et al., 2003; Wehman, 1996;).

This research raises the question as to why there is a lack of consistency and accountability to transition planning even though the intent is politically specified in the Minister's Directive 2001-08, Special Education (Department of Education, 2001). The Department of Education is to "provide, in collaboration with other government departments, school boards and agencies, comprehensive support for students with special education needs to be delivered within public schools." The school board is to "ensure the development of Individual Education Plans and transition planning for students with special educational needs in public schools." The school and principal are to "develop Individual Education Plans when required," and "implement a transition planning process and include details of the plan within the student's IEP." Clearly, there is intent to develop and implement transition planning, albeit specified only to the public school system. However, there is no evaluation component in the Minister's Directive to monitor and assess the intervention and success of transition planning.

Part of the answer to why there is some consistency and accountability to transition planning may lie in the belief systems of certain educators and certain schools. To conduct and develop effective transition planning reflects the personal belief systems of certain educators. This belief system was evident in one of the educator's response to the questionnaire. These educators espouse a perceived self- efficacy which is "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce effects" (Bandura, 1994, p. 1). It is also

reflected in a school culture where there is a collective belief by people that transition planning is vital for preparing students with disabilities for their transition from school to adult life. Certain schools in the questionnaire reflected a similar belief about transition planning, “Teachers operate collectively within an interactive social system rather than as isolates. The belief systems of staffs create school cultures that can have vitalizing or demoralizing effects on how well schools function as a social system” (Bandura, 1994, p. 10).

Coordination and Collective Efficacy

This research has found that transition planning is inconsistent in Prince Edward Island. Where transition planning is evident, it has been a benefit to the successful transition of some students with disabilities from high school to post secondary options. Generally though, it is occurring in a haphazard manner. It is apparent that there is disconnect in the accountability and commitment between the jurisdictions of education, social services, and community agencies. The working relationship between these jurisdictions is perfunctory. Some coordination exists in the working relationship between these jurisdictions, but there is not a binding mechanism, which holds these jurisdictions to a collective commitment to the transition plans that are developed for students with disabilities. Phelps and Hanley-Maxwell (1997) found that programs with documented transition outcomes for graduates are well connected to institutions and agencies beyond the school.

For transition plans that are developed, but not implemented, it is a waste of the resources that were invested in the planning process. It is neither cost effective nor cost efficient for these jurisdictions to continue to conduct business in this manner. It is also an unacceptable predicament in which to place families. It is a stressful enough time for them because they are searching for answers to some unknowns for their children's future. They experience at this time being reassessed for services once again in hope that they are eligible, or even that services exist. They have to invest time and build new relationships with different organizations and a new set of staff. For some, it is an anxious time because they are confronted with the possibility that subsequent opportunities may be more constrained than the opportunities the former education system provide for their child.

So for these families, they experience unfair treatment when they have invested time and hope to have a transition plan developed, only to realize it is not to be implemented, and must then deal with the consequence of not having support services in place for their adult child. It demonstrates an inequity in the availability of support services as well as the lack of portability of support services from region to region and from one jurisdiction to another. The despair in leaving the security of the public education system and the hopefulness of moving to adult community services was stated in a parent comment from the focus group interview. "As parents, we assumed that since they have been integrated all their lives in the school system, surely services will be available to them as adults." However, this is the current reality of transition planning for some families and their child with a disability.

Support services provided in one jurisdiction do not necessarily follow the individual when they transition from one jurisdiction (education) to a subsequent jurisdiction (social services). A sudden reality for some families is that adult support services obtained from the Department of Social Services and Seniors have neither the political guarantee of government legislation that was available to their children in the Department of Education, nor is the resource allocation as adequately funded.

So, what needs to change within these jurisdictions to achieve a greater cooperation between them and their efforts on behalf of students with disabilities? One first step is to not allow students with disabilities to transition from high school to post secondary options without an agreeable transition plan. By themselves, transition plans will not guarantee outcomes. Two parents in the focus group commented “why bother” if there are no services to transition to. It is a valid comment that I will address in the next section. Yet without a transition plan -- a written, concrete plan of action -- how do you start somewhere, let alone measure the progress you hope to achieve? What can all stakeholders -- families, students with disabilities, government, and agencies -- hold accountable if there is no transition document? How would you identify gaps in services or evaluate the effectiveness of existing services? From all of these perspectives, a completed transition plan is a vital document for all students with disabilities before they leave high school.

Another step is to bind the commitment between relevant jurisdictions (education, social services, community agencies) so there is a commitment to each

others work on transition plans in order to achieve a collaborative and more seamless transition process for students with disabilities. Legislation, in itself, is not enough to guarantee change or improvement in the transition process. The current legislation within the Minister's Directive 2001-08, Special Education (Department of Education, 2001) emphasizes this point. Nevertheless, good legislation combined with other mechanisms will strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of the transition process. With this in mind, the current legislation has to be strengthened beyond the education jurisdiction so that it compels collaboration and commitment between the relevant government departments and community agencies to fulfill the implementation of transition plans. A third step is to develop transition plans along a person-centred model that provides effective transition programming that is tailored to the needs of people with disabilities (Beresford, 2004). Instill a collaborative transition planning process from a disabled person's lens. The various jurisdictions come to the table on behalf of the student with a disability with a collective interest, ownership, and responsibility to achieve the transition plan outcomes.

A final consideration revolves around the concept of collective efficacy. It is a component of social cognitive theory attributed to Bandura. Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy (2006) describe that perceived collective efficacy in schools "is the judgement of teachers that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the actions required to have positive effects on students" (p. 428). This sense of collective efficacy is a leadership concept that has to be promoted between the jurisdictions of education, social services, and community agencies throughout the transition process

to achieve positive effects and outcomes for students with disabilities and their families.

Resource Allocation and the Supply Side of Services

The issue of a sufficient resources allocation to provide disability support services was raised during the parent focus group interview. The expression by some parents on their specific situation, or on the situation of other families they knew, identified the inadequacy in the funding levels provided by the Disability Support Program to purchase services. These concerns were documented earlier in this research. Two predominant concerns were that the funding levels have been frozen since the inception of the program in fiscal 2001 and the purchasing power of these resources have diminished over time because of inflationary and other factors. The second concern questioned the effectiveness of the screening tool to adequately assess the needs of persons with intellectual disabilities and autistic disabilities. The screening tool determines eligibility for levels of funding. If needs are not effectively identified by the screening tool, families are assessed to receive lower levels of funding support to purchase services. The consequence to families when they do not receive enough money from the Disability Support Program is that they reduce or eliminate certain support services from their needs. From the perspective of the Disability Support Program, they suggest these families are free to make choices about what support services they obtain. From the families' perspective, these decisions are not "true" choices in the sense that they can ignore to obtain necessary

support services. For these families, there is also no meaningful appeal process to address the funding inequities within this program.

If the Disability Support Program is to remain the primary program source of funding to purchase support services, it is apparent that the Department of Social Services and Seniors needs to increase their dollar investment in the Disability Support Program. More funding in itself is not going to resolve all issues, but there has to be a greater balance to what many believe is currently an insufficient resource allocation in an emerging field. Families are more knowledgeable and have higher expectations for what they perceive to be appropriate support services. There is also a growing demand in the number and eligibility of consumers who request support services as well as in the various types of support services. However, a sufficient resource allocation is necessary to support the supply side of services and service delivery. In fact, I believe an insufficient resource allocation will diminish the market growth of the supply side of services. If the financial enticement is not reasonable, then it becomes increasingly difficult to engage people and agencies to commit the necessary resources to establish and provide appropriate services. Otherwise, it leads to the establishment and provision of inappropriate services.

Furthermore, the department has to remain cognizant of the fact that the Disability Support Program was developed, promoted, and implemented along a person-centred philosophy that, if not guarded, will gradually continue to revert to an income based program. There is a sense of clairvoyance among all stakeholders -- be

it families, government, community agencies, disability organizations -- that this will become the situation unless there is a commitment by all stakeholders, followed by action, to prevent this program from regressing solely to an income support program. The gap in the current contradiction between policy and practice within this program model has to be narrowed or it will continue to fester the conflict and confusion in service delivery.

It is somewhat puzzling though that some families remain in a predicament where their children with disabilities are without support services. Why is this so? Particularly when the Disability Support Program was designed with a person-centred focus to develop strategies and tailor support services specific to the individual with a disability and their families. One reason, as identified by some parent participants from the focus group interview, is that they have been left solely with the responsibility to find the support services they require. For these parents, it becomes too much of a daunting task in lieu of all their other parent and family responsibilities. Without having to be said, they need assistance, and the process of obtaining support services should not be without coordination and collaboration with government and community services personnel. I believe another factor is whether there is a sufficient supply side of services in the community to meet the current and future demand by consumers and families for disability support services. Non governmental organizations which are funded by government to provide disability support services need to be open to expand their mandates and tailor their support services along a person-centred philosophy. The Department of Social Services and

Seniors has to continue to take the primary role as an active partner to encourage this change among community based services and provide sufficient financial resources to address current and growing demands that continue to emerge in the disability field.

Since this research was initiated, there has been a shift in government department responsibility for disability support services from the Department of Health and Social Services to the Department of Social Services and Seniors. One possible benefit of this shift is that disability support services, which tend to be community type services, will no longer have to compete directly with acute health services within the same department for adequate levels of funding resources. Within the competition for recognition and funding resources, community disability support services were always considered, at best, a poor second cousin. The shift in government responsibility to the new Department of Social Services and Seniors offers some hope in that disability support services will receive a renewed focus and independent ministerial support at the cabinet level of the provincial government for additional resources.

Limitations of Research

One limitation of this study was that there was a change in the structure for the provision of disability support services during the period of data collection. The responsibility for disability support services was shifted from the Department of Health and Social Services to the Department of Social Services and Seniors. A consequence of the shift was the disbanding of the former health regions within the

Department of Health and Social Services. Due to this reorganization, permission to conduct research was initially requested and granted by the former health regions and subsequently had to be obtained by the Department of Social Services and Seniors. Although this shift caused a delay in data collection, it had a minimal effect on the retrieval of data. This created some change in the reporting structure and line authority. However, based on the researcher's work experience with the Disability Support Program, changes in front line positions (disability support workers) was minimal and is not considered to be a significant factor.

Another limitation occurred during the scheduling of the parent focus group interview. Two parents were unable to attend the scheduled meeting due to last minute family responsibilities. This necessitated follow-up telephone interviews with these parents. Both parents also submitted a written response to the focus group question outline. It is unknown to what extent their presence and interaction with the other parents might have influenced the discussion and their personal responses. Nonetheless, the data which they provided closely reflected the concerns and experiences expressed by the other focus group parents.

A third limitation of the research may have been the return rate of the questionnaire to social service workers. Although there were 9 out of 18 respondents provincially, they demographically represented the province. Additional returns may have strengthened or weakened the conclusion that there are inconsistencies in the transition process for students with disabilities. However, by triangulating the data, the

inconsistency found in this group was also evident in the data collected from the educator questionnaire and the parent focus group interview. The researcher believes that the findings of inconsistency are valid and reflect the current challenges of students with disabilities when they transition from high school to post secondary activities.

Suggestions for Further Research

Since this research is the initial study of the transition of students with disabilities from high school to post secondary options, the following are areas of research for further exploration.

1. Research and development of a consistent transition plan model that can be used collaboratively between the jurisdictions of education, social services, and community agencies.

This research has found that a transition plan process and model for students with disabilities when they leave high school are inconsistent throughout the jurisdictions of education, social services, and community agencies in Prince Edward Island. Although there is some practice of collaboration efforts based on the questionnaire to educators and to social services workers, and the parent focus group interview, these jurisdictions tend to address the transition process in isolation of one another rather than in a collaborative manner with each other.

2. The Department of Education in Prince Edward Island adheres to an inclusionary model for students with special needs in the public school system. The Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island needs to include in their education program a course offering on the transition process for students with disabilities when they leave high school.

The transition process is evident at various stages for students with disabilities during their tenure in the formal education system and a vital requirement when they transition from high school to post secondary activities. Teachers in training need to understand the critical importance of why a sound transition process and transition plan provides an essential framework for assisting students with disabilities to experience a seamless transition from the school system and to achieve success in adult life expectations. It provides a basis for these teachers in training to become effective advocates of this knowledge and their understanding can be further promoted and encouraged with other educators and school cultures they become involved with in subsequent professional experiences.

3. Once a transition model is developed and collaboratively implemented, that a replicate research study be conducted to re-evaluate the transition process for students with disabilities when they transition from high school to post secondary activities.

It would be valuable to follow students with disabilities through their grade 12 year and the following year to better understand the reality of the transition process. The province has a policy and financial investment in the provision of disability support services to students with disabilities when they transition from high school to post secondary activities. The absence of consistent collaborative planning between relevant jurisdictions, without a commitment to each other's efforts in the transition process, results in redundancy, frustration, and unintended outcomes for consumers and families. It creates neither a cost effective nor a cost efficient process and is a poor use of existing resources. The replication of this study is necessary to evaluate changes and to help guide future direction of the transition process.

4. Conduct further research to examine the correlation between quality transition planning and the implications on the quality of life for persons with disabilities and families.

My research has found that transition planning is inconsistent in all regions of Prince Edward Island for students with disabilities when they leave high school. This inconsistency has caused frustration and stress for students with disabilities and their families. This has negatively impacted on their quality of life.

Concluding Remarks

Prince Edward Island has a history of community and caring for persons with disabilities and it has embraced the concept of inclusion for these citizens. One benefit of this research is that it was able to obtain a provincial snapshot of the transition process for students with disabilities when they leave high school. Being a provincial jurisdiction, Prince Edward Island has an added advantage over other larger geographic areas without provincial jurisdiction in that it can enact legislation and, with it, the responsibility to do so.

It is a truism that we are all going through continual transitions in our lives (The Roeher Institute, 2001). For persons with disabilities and their families, effective transitional planning is essential for them to achieve meaningful disability related supports and services at different stages of their life span. For government, effective transition planning is essential to achieve the most cost effective and viable use of staff resources and disability support services. Consistent and effective transition planning is a crucial process for persons with disabilities when they leave high school and needs to become a mandated process to assist them to pursue post secondary options that are meaningful to them and continues to provide for their quality of life.

The demographics show changing patterns for persons with disabilities and their families in Prince Edward Island. Inclusion in the education system is resulting in the graduation of students with a wide spectrum of special needs, many of whom will need to transition to some type of adult community services. Within the

current population of persons with disabilities who access community services, there is a growing trend of an aging population of consumers and a correlating aging population of parents who continue to be the primary care giver for their adult children with disabilities (MacLellan, Norris, MacPherson & Flowerdew, 2002). This phenomenon is apparent in Atlantic Canada and probably the rest of the country. In any event, these changing patterns bring new requirements and expectations on community and residential services. The trend to place persons with disabilities in institutions appears to be growing in Prince Edward Island (PEI Association for Community Living, 2006). The problems associated with aging has led to an increasing number of aging adults with intellectual disabilities being placed in manors and community care facilities, institutions which were not designed to serve them. It is an alarming signal that signifies something is not right and that transition planning is not happening. Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities outlines the right of living independently and being included in the community (United Nations, General Assembly, Sixty-first session, December 6, 2006).

It is critical then that effective transition planning is conducted in a manner that is coordinated and collaborative, and where there is a binding commitment to the planning process and identified outcomes for persons with disabilities and their families. It has to be consistent in all regions of the province and for all persons with disabilities when they transition from high school to post secondary options. The transition process must include these high standards. The

product offered by community services need also to adapt to the changing patterns and be consistent with a high standard of service provision.

Partners for Change, a coalition of various disability organizations in Prince Edward Island, believe that the primary responsibility for care of persons with disabilities rests with families. Resources which families cannot provide should next come from the community. Finally, it is the responsibility of government to ensure that all necessary resources are provided when families and the community is unable to provide on their own (Partners for Change, 2007). The provincial government has a responsibility to meet the needs, which are identified through a transition planning process, and encourage the capacity building within the jurisdictions of education, social services, and community services. The provincial government can also improve the formal process by mandating the process with binding interdepartmental policy.

Transition planning for students with disabilities when they leave high school will be a necessity for as long as there are students with disabilities included in the inclusive education system in Prince Edward Island. Changes to the transition process and practice at the high schools in Prince Edward Island are necessary. If you keep doing what you're doing, you'll keep getting what you're getting (Stephenson, 1994). It is imperative that all stakeholders commit to changes, which will result in the development and implementation of an effective transition model and process for students with disabilities in Prince Edward Island.

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APPENDIX A

Sample Letter to School Boards

Re: Research Proposal

Dear

The purpose of this correspondence is to obtain the participation of the Eastern School District in a research proposal which I am completing for the requirement of the Masters of Education program at the University of Prince Edward Island.

Objectives, Methodology and Procedures:

The hypothesis is that the coordination and collaboration among students with disabilities and their families, the education system, and community services will enhance successful planning and the accessibility to effective transition services in Prince Edward Island. In Prince Edward Island, this process will involve the Department of Education and the three school boards which are accountable to this department; the Eastern School District, the Western School Board, and the French Language School Board. It will involve the Department of Health and Social Services and the four health regions which are accountable to the department; West Prince Health Region, East Prince Health Region, Queens Health Region, and the Kings Health Region. As well, the transition process will also involve non-government organizations and private businesses which provide disability support services.

The specific objective of this research is to conduct an exploratory qualitative research study, which examines the transition of students with disabilities from high school to adult role expectations, post secondary education, or adult community services on Prince Edward Island. Literature on best practices, and government policy and legislation, will reveal existing strategies, relative themes, and issues regarding philosophy, methodology, and pedagogy. It is necessary to examine the current status of transitional planning for high school students with disabilities on Prince Edward Island to construct a meaningful framework that will guide this transition process.

- What process do high schools and community services on Prince Edward Island utilize to determine a transitional plan for students with disabilities when they transition from high school to post secondary activities?
- What are the best practices to ensure successful transition for students with disabilities when they exit high school?
- What is the belief system of teachers/administrators and community services personnel regarding their responsibility and accountability to achieve successful transitions for graduating students with disabilities?

By addressing a general inquiry about what constitutes effective transition planning and transition processes, other related ideas will emerge. Answers to the above questions will address the need for understanding what is currently happening on Prince Edward Island

and provide insight to future transitional planning. Ideas relative to philosophy and belief systems of education personnel and community services personnel may become apparent. Ideas related to the working relationship between personnel in both of these jurisdictions may become apparent. These types of inquiries will be further refined as the research evolves. They will impact on the emerging focus of the research study as the data is collected and analyzed

Extent of School Based Participation:

Two data collection methods will be employed. The first method will be a questionnaire. The questions posed by the study by a questionnaire format are essentially inductive type questions. They are intended to explore transition practices and outcomes, and the lived experiences of educators, social service workers, and students with disabilities, their families, and advocates. The questionnaire will also facilitate the exploration of belief systems communicated by two of the participant groups involved in the transition process; namely educators and staff employed as social service workers within the health regions or community organizations.

A secondary method of data collection will be a focus group of parents of students with disabilities who are currently experiencing or have experienced a transition process from high school to various post-secondary activities. This will provide the researcher with a phenomenological perspective. "The purpose of this type of interviewing is to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share (p. 112). Focus groups are fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them (Morgan, 1998). They create lines of communication between the moderator and the participant group and among the participants themselves, providing the researcher with valuable information.

Participants in this study will be comprised of the following groups. The first group will be all high school teachers, and other educators, who are directly involved with planning for the transition of students with disabilities within the three school boards on Prince Edward Island. The second group will be social service workers employed by the Department of Health and Social services through the four health regions within the province, who are directly involved with receiving students with disabilities when they transition from high school to post-secondary activities within their communities. The researcher will contact of these participant groups through their employers and request their voluntary participation through a questionnaire format.

The third group will include approximately six to eight parents of students with disabilities. They will be invited to voluntarily participate in focus group interviews. Parents will be identified primarily from requests to the Prince Edward Island Association for Community Living (a provincial advocacy organization for persons with intellectual disability and their families), or through referrals from high school educators identified above and social service workers identified above. The researcher will strive to include a cross sampling of parents of students with disabilities. This will be accomplished by requesting the Prince Edward Island Association for Community Living to identify parents of students with disabilities who represent the following criteria:

a) At least two parent representatives of children who have transitioned from each of the three school boards; b) at least two parents of students with mild disabilities, two parents of students with moderate disabilities, and two parents of students with severe disabilities; c) at least two parents who represent students with disabilities from a French language background.

This inclusive stratified random sample will represent the following general criteria such as socio-economic status, gender of parents and children with disabilities and degree of disability of children. The focus group interview process will present both semi structured and open ended questions to the parents. Discussions from the parent focus group will be tape recorded and transcribed following the interview to find consistent patterns of response. The focus group interview will be conducted in a non threatening and comfortable environment using a round table discussion format.

Please find enclosed samples of a letter of introduction, a questionnaire, and a consent form. Upon your approval, and the approval of the research ethics board of UPEI, I will distribute packages to high school principals in your school district.

Thank you for your consideration to allow me to conduct research in the Eastern School District. Should you have any further questions pertaining to my research, please contact me at (902) [REDACTED] (H), or (902) 436-7576 (W).

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX B

[REDACTED]

Dear Principal,

I am an administrator of a non-government organization, which provides a range of support services to adult persons with disabilities. Currently, I am enrolled in the Master of Education program at the University of Prince Edward Island. I am writing this letter to request permission to invite high school teachers who teach students with disabilities to participate in answering this questionnaire and any other educator at the school who is involved with the transition process.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate the transition process for students with disabilities on Prince Edward Island. This questionnaire will be submitted to teachers of all three school districts: the Western School Board, the Eastern School District and the French Language School Board.

All students benefit from counselling and guidance as they make future plans, be it further education, employment, or other support services. Students with disabilities also need assistance to plan their options as they exit the public school system. I have chosen to study the transition process for students with disabilities on Prince Edward Island, as a requirement for my thesis.

The questionnaire is composed of two parts: background information and the transition process. It will take participants approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete. They do not need to answer any question, which they do not want to complete. The return questionnaire need not be signed. I give you my assurance that all responses will remain anonymous and confidential.

I would appreciate if you would pass the questionnaire to the teacher/s at your school who are involved with the transition process for students with disabilities. If they are willing to participate in the survey, I request them to sign a consent form prior to completing the questionnaire. The consent form can be faxed to me at (902) 436-4247 or mailed to me at my return address in an envelope, which has been provided to them.

Thank you for your cooperation. Should there be any questions concerning the questionnaire, please contact me at (902) [REDACTED] (H) or (902) 436-7576 (W) or by email at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Frank Costa

APPENDIX C

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Educator,

This questionnaire will be sent to high school teachers, who teach students with disabilities, and other educators, who may be involved with their transition process. All students benefit from counselling and guidance as they make future plans, be it further education, employment, or other support services. Students with disabilities also need assistance to plan their options as they exit the public school system.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine the transition practices for students with disabilities attending high schools on Prince Edward Island. I am an administrator of a non-government organization, which provides a range of support services to adult persons with disabilities. I am enrolled in the Master of Education program at the University of Prince Edward Island and I have chosen to pursue this topic for the thesis requirement of my degree.

The questionnaire is composed of two parts: background information and the transition process. It will take participants approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete. You do not have to answer any question, which you do not want to complete. The return questionnaire does not need to be signed. If there are concerns or comments not addressed in the questionnaire, please attach any additional information, which you believe is relevant to the transition process.

You need not sign your name to the questionnaire and you are assured that your response will be kept confidential. Your contribution will remain anonymous. A self-addressed, stamped envelope to return your questionnaire is included for your convenience.

I request that you sign a consent form prior to completing the questionnaire. The consent form can be faxed to me at (902) [REDACTED] mailed to me at my return address in the second envelope provided.

Thank you for your cooperation. Should there be any questions concerning the questionnaire, please contact me at (902) [REDACTED] (H) or (902) 436-7576 (W) or by email at [REDACTED]. You can also contact me at any of the above should you have an interest in the results of the research after it has been completed.

Sincerely,

Frank Costa

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form - Educators

Topic: The transition process from high school for students with disabilities on Prince Edward Island.

I, _____, hereby give my consent to participate in a study about the transition process, from high school, for students with disabilities on Prince Edward Island. I understand that my participation is voluntary. The purpose of the research is to explore transition processes in place in Island high schools. It will identify practices, which are common to the transition process. Permission has been secured from the Western School Board, the Eastern School District and the French Language School Board.

I understand that the information provided will be used in a research study about the transition process for students with disabilities when they leave high school. At any time during the research process I can withdraw my contributions without question. By signing the informed consent form, I am provided with the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. I may retain a copy of this form for my personal records.

I understand that I will be asked to complete a questionnaire, which will be sent to high school teachers who are responsible for the transition of students with disabilities from the public school system.

Approval for this research proposal has been granted by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Prince Edward Island. Further details can be obtained from Lynn MacPhee at lmacphee@upei.ca or (902) 566-0637.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E

Questionnaire - Educators

The Transition Process For Students With Disabilities When They Leave High School: Prince Edward Island.

This proposed research aims to examine the transitions of students with disabilities from high school to adult role expectations, post-secondary education, or adult community services on Prince Edward Island. It will focus on the way in which collaboration among students, their families, the education system, and the community service system can enhance and support the transition process.

Questions posed in the survey are intended to describe the experiences for students with disabilities in high school and when they transition from high school. Also to identify your experiences from working with students with disabilities and their families when they transition from the education system to post secondary activities. Furthermore, to identify your comments and suggestions which will contribute to creating a more effective transition process.

Although your participation is valued and appreciated, your participation in the study is voluntary. As participants, you do not have to answer any question, which you may find uncomfortable, and there are no right or wrong answers. You will not be identified from any of your responses to the survey and I want to assure you that your responses will remain confidential and anonymous.

Thank you again for your assistance and contribution to this research study.

Sincerely,

Frank Costa

APPENDIX F

Questionnaire - Teachers

(Please feel free to elaborate further on page four)

The Transition Process For Students With Disabilities When They Leave High School:
Prince Edward Island.

Background:

How many years have you taught?

0 - 2 ____ 3 - 5 ____ 6 - 8 ____ 9 - 10 ____ more than 10 ____

How many years has your teaching assignment been with students with disabilities?

0 - 2 ____ 3 - 5 ____ 6 - 8 ____ 9 - 10 ____ more than 10 ____

Which school board are you employed with?

Western School Board ____ Eastern School District ____

French Language School Board ____

What are your education qualifications?

Bachelors of Education ____ Diploma in Special Education ____ Masters in Education ____

Other (please specify):

How did you receive your teaching assignment to work with students with disabilities?

Administrative assignment ____ Your decision ____ Other (please specify):

Are there opportunities for professional development specific to students with disabilities made available to you? Yes ____ No ____

Describe:

Transition Process:

Are written transitional plans a requirement of your school board for students with disabilities when they leave high school?

Yes ____ No ____

Comments:

Are written transitional plans an expectation of your high school for students with disabilities when they leave high school?

Yes ____ No ____

Comments:

Do you complete a written transitional plan on behalf of your students with disabilities when they leave high school?

Yes ____ No ____

Comments:

Do you utilize a specific planning model(s) to develop transitional planning for students with disabilities?

Yes ____ No ____

Describe:

Is the transitional planning for students with disabilities developed internally or in collaboration with other persons/services?

Internally ____ Collaboration with others ____

Please describe:

For students with disabilities, how many meetings about their transition plan from high school would occur throughout their high school tenure?

0____ 1____ 1 per year____

Comment:

How many in the last year of high school?

0____ 1____ as needed____

Comment:

What post secondary options are considered for students with disabilities when they leave high school?

education____ vocational____ residential____

other____

Please describe:

Who is invited to participate in the transition meeting on behalf of students with disabilities?

student____ parent(s)____ other teachers____

guidance/admin____ other professionals____

Comment:

How are students with disabilities prepared for exiting their high school?

life skills____ co-op opportunities____

job training/placement____ other____

Comment:

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX G

[REDACTED]

Dear Administrator,

I am an administrator of a non-government organization, which provides a range of support services to adult persons with disabilities. Currently, I am enrolled in the Master of Education program at the University of Prince Edward Island. I am writing this letter to request permission to invite staff employed as Disability Support Workers, or other social service workers, to participate in answering this questionnaire.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate the transition process for students with disabilities on Prince Edward Island when they leave high school. This questionnaire will be submitted to the above staff employed with the Department of Social Services and Seniors, (the former health regions: West Prince Health, East Prince Health, Queen's Health Region, and the King's Health Region).

All students benefit from counselling and guidance as they make future plans, be it further education, employment, or other support services. Students with disabilities also need assistance to plan their options as they exit the public school system. I have chosen to study the transition process for students with disabilities on Prince Edward Island, as a requirement for my thesis.

The questionnaire is composed of two parts: background information and the transition process. It will take participants approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete. The return questionnaire need not be signed. I give you my assurance that all responses will remain anonymous and confidential.

I would appreciate if you would pass the questionnaire to these staff in your health regions/offices who are involved with the transition process for students with disabilities when they leave high school. If they are willing to participate in the survey, I request them to sign a consent form prior to completing the questionnaire. The consent form can be faxed to me at (902) [REDACTED] or mailed to me at my return address.

Thank you for your co-operation. Should there be any questions concerning the questionnaire, please contact me at (902) [REDACTED] (H) or (902) 436-7576 (W) or by email at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Frank Costa

APPENDIX H

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Disability Support Worker,

This questionnaire will be sent to Disability Support Workers, or social service workers, who are involved with students with disabilities as they enter the health regions for various disability support services. All students benefit from counselling and guidance as they make future plans, be it further education, employment, or other support services. Students with disabilities also need assistance to plan their options as they exit the public school system.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine the transition practices for students with disabilities attending high schools on Prince Edward Island. I am an administrator of a non-government organization, which provides a range of support services to adult persons with disabilities. I am enrolled in the Master of Education program at the University of Prince Edward Island and I have chosen to pursue this topic for the thesis requirement of my degree.

The questionnaire is composed of two parts: background information and the transition process. It will take participants approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete. You do not have to answer any question, which you do not want to complete. The return questionnaire does not need to be signed. If there are concerns or comments not addressed in the questionnaire, please attach any additional information, which you believe is relevant to the transition process.

You need not sign your name to the questionnaire and you are assured that your response will be kept confidential. Your contribution will remain anonymous. A self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the questionnaire is included for your convenience.

I request that you sign a consent form prior to completing the questionnaire. The consent form can be faxed to me at (902) [REDACTED] or mailed to me at my return address in the second envelope provided.

Thank you for your cooperation. Should there be any questions concerning the questionnaire, please contact me at (902) [REDACTED] (H) or (902) 436-7576 (W) or by email at [REDACTED]. You can also contact me at any of the above should you have an interest in the results of the research after it has been completed.

Sincerely,

Frank Costa

APPENDIX I

Informed Consent Form - Health

Topic: The transition process from high school for students with disabilities on Prince Edward Island.

I, _____, hereby give my consent to participate in a study about the transition process, from high school, for students with disabilities on Prince Edward Island. I understand that my participation is voluntary. The purpose of the research is to explore transition processes in place in the health and social services sector. It will identify practices, which are common to the transition process. Permission has been secured from the Department of Social Services and Seniors, (the former health regions: West Prince Health, East Prince Health, Queen's Health Region, and the King's Health Region).

I understand that the information provided will be used in a research study about the transition process for students with disabilities when they leave high school. At any time during the research process I can withdraw my contributions without question. By signing the informed consent form, I am provided with the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. I may retain a copy of this form for my personal records.

I understand that I will be asked to complete a questionnaire which will be sent to Disability Support Workers, or social services workers, who are involved with students with disabilities when they enter the health regions and request various disability support services.

Approval for this research proposal has been granted by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Prince Edward Island. Further details can be obtained from Lynn MacPhee at lmacphee@upei.ca or (902) 566-0637.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

APPENDIX J

Questionnaire - Social Service Workers

The Transition Process For Students With Disabilities When They Leave High School: Prince Edward Island.

This proposed research aims to examine the transitions of students with disabilities from high school to adult role expectations, post-secondary education, or adult community services on Prince Edward Island. It will focus on the way in which collaboration among students, their families, the education system, and the community service system can enhance and support the transition process.

Questions posed in the survey are intended to describe the experiences for students with disabilities when they transition to adult community services. Also to identify your experiences from working with persons with disabilities and their families when they transition from the education system and request various support services from the community service system. Furthermore, to identify your comments and suggestions which will contribute to creating a more effective transition process.

Although your participation is valued and appreciated, your participation in the study is voluntary. As participants, you do not have to answer any question, which you may find uncomfortable, and there are no right or wrong answers. You will not be identified from any of your responses to the survey and I want to assure you that your responses will remain confidential and anonymous.

Thank you again for your assistance and contribution to this research study.

Sincerely,

Frank Costa

APPENDIX K

Questionnaire – Social Service Workers
(Please feel free to elaborate further on page four)

The Transition Process For Students With Disabilities When They Leave High School:
Prince Edward Island.

Background:

How many years have you worked in the social services field?

0 – 2 ____ 3 – 5 ____ 6 – 8 ____ 9 – 10 ____ more than 10 ____

How many years of your employment have been working in support of adults with disabilities?

0 – 2 ____ 3 – 5 ____ 6 – 8 ____ 9 – 10 ____ more than 10 ____

Which of the former four health regions are you working in?

West Prince Health ____ East Prince Health ____ Queen's Health Region ____ King's Health Region ____.

What are your education qualifications?

College Diploma (Human Services) ____ Bachelor of Arts ____ Bachelor of Social Work ____

Other (please specify):

How did you receive your work assignment to work with adults with disabilities?

Administrative assignment ____ Your decision ____ Other (please specify):

Are there opportunities for professional development specific to adults with disabilities made available to you? Yes ____ No ____

Describe:

Transition Process:

Are written transitional plans a requirement of your health region / department for students with disabilities when they leave high school?

Yes ____ No ____

Comments:

Are written transitional plans an expectation of the Department of Social Services and Seniors for students with disabilities when they leave high school?

Yes ____ No ____

Comments:

Do you complete a written transitional plan on behalf of students with disabilities when they enter the health region / department for support services?

Yes ____ No ____

Comments:

Do you utilize a specific planning model(s) to develop transitional planning for students with disabilities?

Yes ____ No ____

Describe:

Is the transitional planning for students with disabilities developed internally or in collaboration with other persons/services?

Internally ____ Collaboration with others ____

Please describe:

For students with disabilities, how many meetings about their transition plan from high school to your health region / department for support services would occur throughout their high school tenure?

0____ 1____ 1 per year____

Comment:

How many in the last year of high school?

0____ 1____ as needed____

Comment:

What post secondary support options would the health region / department make available to students with disabilities when they leave high school?

education____ vocational____ residential____ other____

Please describe:

Who does the health region invite to participate in the transition meeting on behalf of students with disabilities?

student____ parent(s)____ other teachers____

guidance/admin____ other professionals____

Comment:

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX L

March 2006

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Parent,

This letter is being sent to parents of students with disabilities who have made the transition from high school to post secondary activities. All students benefit from counselling and guidance as they make future plans, be it further education or future employment. Students with disabilities also need assistance to plan their options as they exit the public school system.

I am requesting your participation to be part of a focus group interview with other parents of students with disabilities who have made a transition from high school. The purpose of this interview is to obtain information on the transition practices for students with disabilities attending high schools on Prince Edward Island. I am an administrator of a non-government organization, which provides a range of support services to adult persons with disabilities. I am enrolled in the Master of Education program at the University of Prince Edward Island and I have chosen to pursue this topic for the thesis requirement of my degree.

The parents focus group interview will last approximately one hour. Parents will participate in a focus group discussion of approximately thirty (30) minutes in duration. The location will be the office of the PEI Association for Community Living, 156 Belvedere Avenue, Charlottetown. Upon your agreement to participate, you will be notified of a time and date for the meeting, and you will be reimbursed for travel expenses.

This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Vianne Timmons, who may be contacted at vtimmons@upei.ca or (902) 566-0412. The Research Ethics Board of the University of Prince Edward Island has approved this research. Further details can be obtained from Lynn MacPhee at lmacphee@upei.ca or (902) 566-0637.

There are some potential risks in a focus group format. Focus group discussions will be audio-taped. Audio-tapes will be later transcribed, and recordings destroyed immediately after transcription. Transcription notes will be securely retained for a period of five years, after which time they are destroyed by shredding. Participant anonymity will be protected by the use of pseudonyms or number referral only. Although anonymity cannot be ensured, every effort is made to protect anonymity.

I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential, kept in a secure location, and only accessible to me. Your participation in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time without prejudice.

A self addressed, stamped envelope is included for your convenience. I request that you sign a consent form prior to the focus group interview. The consent form can be mailed to me at my return address.

I have also included a copy of a Focus Group Facilitator Form (facilitator) and a Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement (focus group participants) for your information. These consent forms will be signed prior to the focus group discussion and attempt to ensure that focus group sessions remain confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation. Should there be any questions concerning the focus group interview, please contact me at (902) [REDACTED] (H), or (902) 436-7576 (W), or by email at [REDACTED]. You can also contact me at any of the above should you be interested in the results of the research after it has been completed.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Frank Costa

APPENDIX M

Parent Informed Consent Form

Topic: The transition process from high school for students with disabilities on Prince Edward Island.

I, _____, hereby give my consent to participate in a study about the transition process, from high school, for students with disabilities on Prince Edward Island. I understand that my participation is voluntary. The purpose of the research is to explore transition processes in place in Island high schools. It will identify practices, which are common to the transition process.

I understand that the information provided will be used in a research study about the transition process for students with disabilities when they leave high school. At any time during the research process I can withdraw my contributions without question. I may retain a copy of this form for my personal records.

I understand that I will be asked to participate in a focus group interview with other parents of students with disabilities. The size of the focus group will be approximately eight parents. Parents will participate in a focus group discussion of approximately thirty (30) minutes in duration. Parents are free to not answer any question, they can withdraw from the focus group at any time, and have any comments they make been taken "off the record".

There are some potential risks in a focus group format. Focus group discussions will be audio-taped. Audio-tapes will be later transcribed, and recordings destroyed immediately after transcription. Transcription notes will be securely retained for a period of five years, after which time they are destroyed by shredding. Participant anonymity will be protected by the use of pseudonyms or number referral only. Although anonymity cannot be ensured, every effort is made to protect anonymity.

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I have read and understand the material in the information letter.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

APPENDIX N

Parents Focus Group Interview

The Transition Process For Students With Disabilities When They Leave High School :
Prince Edward Island.

Background:

What year did your child leave school?

2004-05 ____ 2003-04 ____ 2002-03 ____ 2001-02 ____
earlier than 2001-02 ____

When your child left the school system, what school level were they enrolled in?

High School ____ Intermediate ____ Other ____

Name of your child's school? _____

Name of school board or district?

Western School Board ____ Eastern School District ____

French Language School Board ____

Description of child's disability

Intellectual disability ____ (mild ____, moderate, ____ severe, ____)

Physical disability ____ (mild ____, moderate, ____ severe, ____)

Other type of disability ____ (describe _____)

Focus Group Questions - Guideline:

Please provide me with some background information about your son or daughter?

Describe your child's school program?

Was a written transitional plan developed for your child before they finished high school?

Who was involved in the development of the transition plan?

Was the transition plan implemented after the child finished school?

What type of post school options were considered, or planned, for your child when they finished school?

In what ways were you satisfied / dissatisfied with the support you received in planning for your child's future?

What suggestions would you like to make about transition plans, or programs, for students with disabilities in high school?



UNIVERSITY of
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

550 University Avenue
Charlottetown
Prince Edward Island
Canada C1A 4P3

**University of Prince Edward Island
Research Ethics Board
Certificate Of Approval**

Title of Proposal : **The transition of students with disabilities from high school to post secondary activities: A Prince Edward Island perspective**


Protocol Number : **1000667**

Name of Investigator: **Mr. Frank Costa**

Date Submitted : **12 September 2005**

Effective Date : **28 November 2005**

End Date : **28 November 2006**

Signature :  Date : Nov. 28/05
Chair, Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Katherine Schultz, Vice President, Research &
Development, UPEI

Dr. Vianne Timmons, Education