A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS TOWARDS THESE PROGRAMS

by

EMMA SOPHIA ROUNDTREE

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DEDICATION

Heavenly Father, this is all because of you. None of this could have been possible without your grace and mercy. You are a wonderful provider of all things that I need and more. You knew I would be here way before I was created. You knew everything that would come along on this journey and provided the strength I needed. I am forever grateful to you and I love you.

This dissertation is also dedicated to four very important people in my life.

First, to my mom. No single word on earth can come close to describing the role you have played in every success in my life. You have believed in me. You alone prayed for my greatness to arise and stand boldly in me. You alone nurtured every bruise into a beautiful scar to remind me of how I overcame every obstacle on this journey. Mama, all of my accomplishments have been completed to make you smile. The prestigious lineage you have provided for me has made this possible. You have always been set apart for an outstanding reason. Remember, “You can’t be salt, tasting like everything else!” I love you and I appreciate EVERYTHING you have been for me! Smile Shell!

To Jamyen T. Williams, my first born. When you entered my life during my junior year of college, you singlehandedly taught me what womanhood was all about. You taught me the ultimate selfless sacrifice of love and responsibility. I could not have handcrafted a better child to enter motherhood with.
You are an awesome, amazing, and an outstanding mighty man of God. You are another central reason why I never gave up on my dreams. You have been my motivation to go above and beyond. No matter what punch life throws your way, you must keep rocking and rolling. I’m expecting even better things than this from you. I love you, first born!

To Mr. Brennan S. Williams, for always being a healthy distraction. You always know when to come and give mommy some love and make me smile. Your heart is so warm and you always find a way to pull me from the madness. Your bubbly personality and wise wit reminds me so much of myself. When I want to just throw it all in, your face reminds me that there is more to this accomplishment than myself. Brennan, you are such a model son and little brother. You bring such fulfillment to your brother and me. You know that there is nothing that we will not do for you. I love you and I hope that this dedication has made you smile.

To the sister I’ve always wanted, Moesha T. Coppock. You came into my life and made me a role model. It was you who reminded me to make sure that my name was good because there were people watching. It was you who encouraged me to make a mark in the road that someone could follow. It was you who gave me a glimpse into selfless love. I hold dear to my heart the excitement that you had as a little girl when you saw me. You made me feel as if I was a superstar. To see you as a grown woman, I must say that I am super proud of you. I hope that I have been a positive influential factor in where you are and where you are going. I love you Pebbles and I hope I have made you proud.
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In honor of Emma H. Scott. I hope this accomplishment makes you smile!!

In loving memory of Jake Scott, and Levan and Rosa Roundtree. I still love you!
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EMMA SOPHIA ROUNDTREE
A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION
PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND
PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS TOWARDS THESE PROGRAMS
Under the direction of SYBIL KEESBURY, Ed.D.

Research has shown there is a gap in access to postsecondary education (PSE) programs for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in Georgia. There is also a gap in the research literature concerning the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with ID towards these PSE programs. This study sought to examine these problems by using a qualitative case study research design. I found 30 institutions that offered PSE programs in Georgia. These institutions offered two-year and four-year degree and certificate programs. I explored ten of these programs in depth for this study. Six of these institutions offered programs for students with significant ID and allowed these students to participate in academic courses and other campus activities with their non-disabled peers. The other four programs served students with mild ID in an inclusive setting with appropriate accommodations.

Next, I investigated the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with ID toward these PSE programs. The survey consisted of demographic information, a Likert-type scale, and an opportunity to participate in a follow up interview. Twenty-four
parents and teachers of students with ID were recruited for this study; 22 participated. Six participants also completed follow-up interviews after the survey.

These participants possessed limited knowledge of PSE programs but perceived the programs to be beneficial for students with ID. Participants believed their lack of awareness of these programs was due to a lack of collaboration and undeveloped relationships between PSE representatives and K-12 personnel. Participants also expressed concerns about the viability of services, parental/teacher involvement, and the overall outcomes of these programs.

Future research concerning PSE programs for students with intellectual disabilities is recommended in order to investigate the ways in which these programs can aid a successful transition for these students from high school to independent adulthood.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

It is the end of May and students in the senior class of 2017 are prepared to walk across the stage and receive their diplomas. These students are in the process of ending their high school careers and entering a new level of adulthood. One can easily imagine the conversations they are having about their futures. Some will join the armed forces. Some will search for a job. Some will attend college. Now that high school is over, these graduates are focused on what comes next. There is, however, a stark difference in the future paths available to non-disabled students and their peers with disabilities.

According to Grigal and Hart (2010), students without intellectual disabilities (ID) typically seek services from the guidance counselor to assist with the transition from secondary to postsecondary life. In regards to postsecondary education (PSE) options, students without ID are provided a plethora of options that may meet the needs and desires of the students (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Students with ID, however, are not usually afforded the same access to the guidance counselor, or other school personnel, as students without intellectual disabilities (Uditsky & Hughson, 2012). Grigal and Hart (2010) reported that “individuals with intellectual disabilities were not provided the same expectation as students without intellectual disabilities to access adult learning after high school” (p. xiv). Grigal and Hart (2010) studied high school students with ID. Each student with ID was provided an individual education plan (IEP). The IEP document
included an option for educators to determine whether a student should receive access to transition services for PSE. Grigal and Hart (2010) reported that it was common practice for educators to address this area of the IEP as “not applicable” to the student. As a result, students with ID, along with their family members, were not provided access to all available services after high school. Secondary students with ID are often referred to vocational services in order to find transition options (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; Mock & Love, 2012).

**Intellectual Disability (ID) and Postsecondary Education (PSE)**

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2013) defined ID as “a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. This disability must have originated before the age of 18” (para. 1). Organizations such as the Office of Special Education Programs and the National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation Research provide consideration for ID, among other disabilities, during their review of grant proposals and other research initiatives (Moores-Abdool, 2010; Dymond, Smith & Kennedy, 2006; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Friedlander, 2008; Martinez & Queener, 2010; Spooner, Porter, Freeman, and Griffin, 2012).

Since the implementation of the term “intellectual disability” in initiatives supported by more mainstream organizations, the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 redefined the term “student with an intellectual disability” to mean:

A student - (A) with mental retardation or a cognitive impairment, characterized by significant limitations in:
(i) intellectual and cognitive functioning; and 

(ii) adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills; and 

(B) who is currently, or was formerly, eligible for a free appropriate public education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (para. 2).

Former President George W. Bush signed this Act into law to ensure that persons with ID were eligible for and protected as they entered into PSE. As a result, persons with ID are now provided access to Pell Grants, Federal Work-Study Programs, and Supplemental Educational Opportunity grants. The HEOA of 2008 also enforced the “development and expansion of high-quality, inclusive model, comprehensive transition and postsecondary programs” (Grigal & Hart, 2010, p. 2) for students with ID. These laws provided new viable transition options for persons with ID after high school.

In conjunction with the HEOA of 2008, other laws such as the IDEA of 1990 were amended to extend the access of services after high school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 (PL 108-446) made persons with disabilities eligible to continue to receive services until the age of majority, which is age 21 in most states and age 26 in Michigan. This new addendum extended services into the postsecondary education setting (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Mock & Love, 2012). The IDEIA of 2004 required the implementation of the alternate assessment in high school and the IEP or a certificate of attendance as a substitute for the high school diploma (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012; Grigal & Hart, 2010). Additionally, the IDEIA of 2004 mandated that proper planning and collaboration with appropriate persons
occurred to ensure that a student with a disability obtained proper access to postsecondary education (Grigal & Hart, 2010).

Background of the Study

Postsecondary transition options for students with ID are increasing in the state of Georgia. Grigal and Hart (2010) report that students with ID today have more options for community involvement, employment opportunities, and other facility-based programs. However, it is unlikely that a student with ID will be enrolled in postsecondary education programs on college and university campuses (Grigal et al., 2012).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 introduced the idea of students with ID continuing in educational programs after high school, including acceptance into colleges and universities (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Still, in the 1980s there was little progress towards implementation of PSE programs into the transition process (Grigal & Hart, 2010). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1983 required that all students with disabilities remain eligible to receive special education services until the age of 22 (Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; Mock & Love, 2012). Even with these laws in place, however, students with ID were not readily presented with this transition option. Instead they were conveniently transitioned into programs within their communities (Grigal & Hart, 2010).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, IDEIA of 2004, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 mandated that students with disabilities receive a rigorous education that promotes access to results-oriented life-long learning opportunities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act ensures that these civils rights for
students with disabilities are protected (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Unfortunately, many public-school systems have ignored this transition option and pushed students with ID into programs that are more convenient (Chambers, Hughes, & Carter, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Postsecondary education (PSE) programs for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) are becoming more popular throughout the Southeastern region of the United States. Literature in the field has shown that students with ID have increasingly gained access to educational opportunities on college campuses as this option has become more accessible to young adults with ID and their families (Thoma, Lakin, Carlson, Domzal, Austin, & Boyd, 2011). Even with this increase in PSE access, however, there is still a gap of awareness for teachers and parents in regards to PSE programs and their benefits (Thoma et al, 2011).

This gap is evident in the courses and expectations of students in public K-12 special education programs. Grigal and Hart (2010) reported the problem with this system is that students with ID are generally enrolled in a prescribed course of study. They have limited access to general education courses and fewer opportunities to interact with their non-disabled peers (Grigal & Hart, 2010). After the completion of high school, students with ID are generally not expected to pursue postsecondary learning (Grigal & Hart, 2010; Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; Mock & Love, 2012). However, new federal mandates and higher accountability laws require results-oriented transition planning for students with all disabilities (Mock & Love, 2012; Gillan & Coughlan, 2010; Grigal &
More awareness of PSE opportunities is needed for parents and teachers for students with ID.

**Research Questions**

Currently, research shows that the primary concerns for parents of students with ID include a lack of knowledge of what their child will do after high school graduation, apprehensions regarding the transition process, and limited knowledge of postsecondary education programs for their child to pursue (Grigal et al., 2012; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Griffin, McMillan, & Hodapp, 2010). In response to these concerns, the aim of this study was to address the following research questions:

1) What postsecondary education options are available for students with intellectual disabilities in the state of Georgia, and what do these programs offer?

2) What are the perceptions of teachers and parents of students with intellectual disabilities towards these postsecondary education programs?

**Perspective of the Researcher: Personal Connection to the Problem**

I believe that individuals with ID are vulnerable members of American families and American communities. I have personally witnessed the life of someone with an ID through my cousin. To protect his privacy, I will call him Todd. Todd is 55 years old. He has limited language skills and requires assistance with daily living. Todd is mobile but heavily relies on his parents to provide basic life essentials. As a child, I always closely interacted with him. I was intrigued by his way of living in our environment.

From time to time, Todd would go away on trips for a few hours with a local agency, but never overnight. It was not until Todd was about 40 years old that he was
taught to write his name. I often wondered why he did not participate in many things in
the community and why he was confined to his home most of the time. I always felt as if
Todd was restricted to what he was able to do instead of what he could possibly do. As a
teacher, I am continuously reminded of Todd’s life and I want to provide better
alternatives to adult living for persons with disabilities.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 made it possible for students with
intellectual disabilities to continue receiving educational services until the age of 22
(Grigal and Hart, 2010), but there were little options that aligned with this initiative when
Todd was 22. By the time these initiatives were formally implemented, Todd was 33 and
no longer eligible to receive these services. My aunt and uncle continue to struggle to
find options that will allow Todd to live as independently as possible, and unfortunately,
they know their options are limited.

Todd’s struggle motivates me to explore PSE opportunities on college and
university campuses as viable and attainable options for students with ID. I believe these
experiences can provide meaningful opportunities for disabled and non-disabled students.
I also believed this transition option can inspire families and professionals to encourage
other students with ID to explore PSE programs in their areas.

Perspective of the Researcher: Professional Connection to the Problem

As a special education teacher, I have experienced the highs and lows of
individual education plans (IEPs). I understand that IEPs are critical to the success of
students with disabilities. It is important that teachers create IEPs that reflect the needs
and future potential achievements of students with disabilities. Too often, I have seen
students with disabilities provided a convenient educational track instead of an IEP more individualized for them. Sadly, it has become common practice for special education teachers to procrastinate and approach the IEP process as nothing more than a formality, but I believe the IEP process is much more than a formality. Westling, Kelley, Cain, and Prohn (2013) defined an IEP as an individual, person-centered planning program used to develop learning activities for an educational experience in the least restrictive environment. This definition provides teachers with only vague guideline of how to develop an IEP, including the transition plan.

Contrary to this definition, I have experienced the production of IEPs that ignored the needs of students and instead served the purpose of simply meeting IEP mandates and deadlines. This approach to IEP writing generally produces a generic IEP that follows a script instead of addressing the individual needs of each student. A generic IEP provides students with limited exposure to the general education setting and with very limited interaction with their non-disabled peers. In the cases of generic IEPs written by teachers, students with ID are minimally involved. They often are given access to courses that do not conflict with the master schedule but may not be academically beneficial to them.

Grigal et al. (2012) described low expectations from teachers and other school personnel for students with ID pursuing learning opportunities after high school. This could explain why the “not applicable” box is so often checked under the PSE goals section of IEP transition plans (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Instead of PSE programs, many students with ID are presented with vocational rehabilitation (VocRehab) options (Grigal & Hart, 2010). In situations where the parents are knowledgeable of special education
law, students with ID may receive services from an adult service provider that will assist the student with ID in finding employment, but little adult learning opportunities (Westling et al., 2013). This is unfair for those students whose parents are not as knowledgeable of special education laws. I have witnessed conversations in which the special education teacher and/or administrator would preface a solution to a problem by saying, “Who is the kid?” or “We better do this so that we do not have to deal with the parent!” Individuals with disabilities have experienced great disadvantages from other groups in society. They should not experience such obstructions from “so-called” advocates such as teachers and school administrators.

I believe that in order for individuals with disabilities to continue to make needed gains in our society, they must have access to high quality postsecondary educational programs. Bringing the option of education after high school to the forefront of transition planning may provide educators with new and relevant information that they need in order to determine if a student with ID could benefit from participating in adult learning opportunities after high school.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine current postsecondary education (PSE) programs available in the state of Georgia in order to inform parents and teachers of students with intellectual disabilities (ID) of this transition option. This study also examined the perceptions of teachers and parents towards these programs.

Data collected in this study could be used to inform parents, teachers, administrations, and other parties involved in the IEP process of a non-traditional option
for students with ID after high school. This data can be used to perform a comparative analysis of similar studies that were done in the same or different regions of the United States in an effort to identify gaps and areas of weaknesses in currently available programs. K-12 personnel could use this information to develop and implement ways to continually inform teachers and parents of this option through workshops and seminars or simply at the annual IEP meeting.

Findings from this study could lend more knowledge and understanding to the field of special education for application during the transition from secondary education into postsecondary education. This information could be used to develop initiatives to increase the opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to attend a college or university and increase the knowledge of IEP committee members on this topic.

Theoretical Framework

This study’s theoretical framework, critical disability theory, is a lens which person with disabilities and advocates for this population use to view and justify issues concerning persons with disabilities (Giroux, 2003). Critical disability theory supports the need for deconstructing current perceptions of disabilities and reformulating a new paradigm towards individuals with disabilities (Yee, 2011). Critical disability theory also supports the need to defy social norms and unveil the levels of discrimination and exclusion this population has experienced that may have been invisible to society (Rocco, 2011). Pothier and Devlin (2007) presented the notion of mainstreaming disability rights to lawmakers, and other persons, in hopes of creating and modifying laws that enhanced the quality of life for persons with and without disabilities. Critical disability theory has
“been used to support separate regular and special education programs that assigned students oppressively marked by race, class and gender to lower transitions within the educational matrix” (Meekosha & Shuttlesworth, 2009, p. 62). I believe that this theory could be used to reconstruct the meaning of postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities, and used it in the context of this study as a lens through which to view and understand the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with ID.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to address the research questions. First, I collected data about current PSE programs in Georgia from the institutions’ websites. Next, I sought to uncover the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with ID towards these programs. Participants were asked to participate in a Likert-type survey that was disseminated via email. They were given the opportunity to pose any questions they may have had as well as the opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview. Descriptive analysis, including mean, median, and frequency, was used to analyze the data from the survey. Data from the interviews were analyzed using memoing, coding, and thematic analysis procedures.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was conducted in a small geographical area with a small, specific student population. Parents and teachers of students with ID had to meet specific criteria in order to participate in this study. In order to ensure the criteria were met, I used a purposive sampling method to recruit participants. Special education teachers were not required to actively provide secondary special education services but they were required
to be certified in the area in order to ensure that they were knowledgeable of basic transitions. General education teachers were not required to currently be teaching students with disabilities but were required to have experience serving on an IEP committee. The parents of the students with ID were not required to have a child currently in the secondary education setting, but were only recruited for this study if they had a child with an intellectual disability.

Definition of Key Terms

*Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*: This act was passed in 1990 as a supplement to the Rehabilitation Act. This act protects the civil rights and prevents discrimination against children and adults with disabilities in all publicly funded facilities (Porter, Freeman & Griffin, 2000).

*Disability*: a physical or mental impairment that significantly affects one’s ability to function in major activities of life. This definition also applies to individuals who have had a documented disability (ADA, 1990).

*Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE)*: “Publicly funded special education and related services that meet state education standards. The term encompasses preschool, elementary school, and secondary education provided in accordance with an IEP in the least restrictive environment” (Porter et al., 2000, p. 41).

*Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA)*: “Provisions to provide access to financial aid for student with intellectual disabilities and the establishment of a set of model demonstration programs called Transition Postsecondary Education programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID). The law also establishes a
National Coordinating Center to provide technical assistance and data collection related to postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities” (Think College, 2017, para. 3; Ross, Williams, & College, 2013).

*Inclusion:* “A policy that promotes the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream educational settings” (Abu-Hamour & Muhaidat, 2013, p. 34).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997:* This act “requires public schools to offer all eligible children with disabilities a free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their individual needs, through age 21. In 1997 IDEA was amended to include mandates that transition planning begin by the age of 14 years as a part of the individualized education planning for all students in special education” (Porter et al., 2000, p. 41).

*Individualized Education Plan/Program (IEP):* An individual, person-centered plan used to develop learning activities for an educational experience in the least restrictive environment. This document is also used in postsecondary education settings for an inclusive, on campus living and learning experience. It focuses on five areas personal development skills, community participation skills, vocational preparation skills, social participation and learning and elective course auditing (Westling et al., 2013; Porter et al., 2000).

*Intellectual Disability (ID):* “A disability originating prior to the age of 18 and is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills” (Grigal et al., 2012, p. 225).
Postsecondary Education (PSE): “a two-year or four-year institution of higher education or a vocational/adult education institution” (Grigal et al., 2012, p. 225).

Transition Plan: “… a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training… independent living and community participation” (Porter et al., 2000).

Summary

Using a framework based on critical disability theory, the purpose of this case study was to examine current postsecondary education (PSE) programs for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) available in the state of Georgia and to examine the perceptions of teachers and parents towards these programs. Chapter One described the background, problem, and significance of the study, the perspective of the researcher, and an overview of the study’s methodology and theoretical framework. Chapter Two presents the study’s review of literature. Chapter Three describes the study’s research methodology, and Chapter Four presents rich description of the results of the data analysis. Chapter Five includes a discussion of the study’s findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Grounded in critical disability theory (Giroux, 2003; Yee, 2011), the purpose of this case study was to examine postsecondary education (PSE) programs currently available for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in the state of Georgia and to examine the perceptions of teachers and parents of students with ID towards these programs. The purpose of the critical disability theoretical framework was to bridge the foundational establishments of critical disability theory and the practical knowledge of teachers and parents of students with intellectual disabilities in regards to postsecondary education. This literature review presents the essential concepts of disability, critical theory, and critical disability theory, along with an overview of postsecondary education (PSE) options for students with ID, including Substantially Separate Programs, Mixed Model Programs, and Inclusive Individualized Programs. Related research concerning parental concerns about postsecondary options for students with ID is also included.

Defining Disability

In colonial American times, individuals with disabilities were categorized by their level of dependency on another to provide their daily living needs, and this population of citizens was to be pitied and hidden away from society (Feldblum, 2000). Philosophers struggled for many years to formulate a definition of disability (Feldblum, 2000). Courts and legal systems debated the significance of defining disability and specifying the
parameters that the definition would cover (Feldblum, 2000). Many defined a person with a disability as one who had a physical or mental impairment (Pothier & Devlin, 2006b). This definition restricted qualifications and left individuals with other disabilities defenseless and unprotected (Pothier & Devlin, 2006b). Advocates for individuals with disabilities pushed for a formal, legal definition of disability knowing that the specifics would greatly impact the civil rights protection of many individuals who would have otherwise been overlooked (Feldblum, 2000). With extensive differences of opinion on how this term should be defined, the American judicial system agreed that for legal purposes and intents, the system would adopt the Americans with Disabilities definition of disability (Feldblum, 2000; Pothier & Devlin, 2006a).

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, a disability is defined as (a) “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such an individual; (b) a record of such event; or (c) being regarded as having such an impairment” (Sec. 12102.3.1). To be considered a disability, these impairments must greatly impact an individual’s ability to participate in major life activities. The ADA (1990) described major life activities as self-care, manual tasks, the ability to “hear, speak, eat, sleep, walk, stand, lift, bend, breathe, learn, read, concentrate, think, communicate, and work” (Sec. 12102.3.2.A). Additionally, the term disability also covers the impairments of essential bodily functions that directly affect an individual’s major life activities (ADA, 1990, Sec. 12102.3.2.B). The lack of proper functionality of one’s “immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive” systems were specifically
described, but not limited to, as criteria in which one could be recognized as disabled under the ADA as well as within the American judicial systems (ADA, 1990, Sec. 12102.3.2.B).

Having an understanding of how a disability is defined according to current laws can help one realize that there are visible and hidden characteristics of disabilities within one’s community, culture, and society. Commonly accepted social stereotypes may portray individuals with disabilities as possessing a peculiar look or displaying abnormal behaviors (Pothier & Devlin, 2006a). Negative stereotypes and fear of social rejection may drive individuals with ID to pursue an identity of normalcy that challenges their current abilities in an adverse way known as passing (Pothier & Devlin, 2006b). Pothier and Devlin (2006a) defined passing as “a very deliberate attempt to pretend you are something you are not” (p. 15). Individuals with higher functioning disabilities may pursue passing to avoid appearing abnormal in comparison to their peers. According to Pothier and Devlin (2006a), negative social constructs confine persons with disabilities to an isolated box created by “non-disabled” persons who are unwilling “to adapt, transform and refusal to abandon their ‘normal’ way of doing things” (p. 13). Regardless of how past and current social constructs have identified persons with disabilities, it is important to remember that a person with a disability should not be viewed as a problem, abnormal, or flawed but as an individual worthy of respect (Vehmas & Watson, 2014).

Critical Theory

The foundations of critical theory can be traced back to the early 1920s in Germany at the Frankfurt School’s Institute for Social Research (McLaren, 1989). This
institution was popular during that time for optimizing the ideologies and philosophies of the political powers of Marxism (McLaren, 1989). While the intent was to enhance the teachings and beliefs of Marxism, it inadvertently revealed the exploitations across race, gender, class, and ability (McLaren, 1989). Marxist theorists slowly began to realize that domination, oppression, and transformation were the key concepts that needed to be closely examined in order to begin the conversation of the needed societal changes (Pothier & Devlin, 2006a). Domination, oppression, and transformation became the instrumental concepts on which critical theory would be formulated and implemented. In an effort to maximize Marxism, critical theory was born (Pothier & Devlin, 2006b; McLaren, 1989). McLaren (1989) posited that critical theory ideologies all had a level of oppression that was conditioned by hegemonic powers, societal values, and language usage. As a result, Marxist critical theorists posed the idea that humans could influence change over situations and conditions by reflecting and responding appropriately (McLaren, 1989). With the idea of reflection and response, theorists developed a theory that provided disability researchers a platform to legitimize the need for disability studies (Pothier & Devlin, 2006b).

Critical Disability Theory

Critical disability theory (CDT) postulates that disabilities can be categorized as a component of a social construct (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Social constructs vary considerably depending on the social context and culture one is affiliated with (Pothier & Devlin, 2006a). CDT emerged as a product of tensions between authoritarian Marxism and the economic social model (McLaren, 1989; Meekosha & Shuttleworth,
2009). The dominant structure of society did not afford individuals with disabilities opportunities to be viewed as a vital component of society (Pothier & Devlin, 2006a). Results from this control inspired demand for a theory that supported beneficial opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009).

According to Rocco (2011), CDT was a derivative of critical race theory in that individuals with disabilities had a distinct voice. CDT posits that the perceptions of disabilities are social constructs in which “ableism” is completely invisible (Rocco, 2011). CDT also posits that “disabled people had a right to self-determination and the commodification of labor” (Rocco, 2011, p. 3). Disability was seen as a business combine that supported a system of poverty and isolation (Rocco, 2011). These segments individually addressed the critical components pertaining to disabilities (Pothier & Devlin, 2007). Pothier and Devlin (2007) sought to challenge the perceptions of disabilities and examine how the current ideas of the concept needed to be molded to reflect the intended perception of disability. These conditions supported the key component of critical theory. CDT attempts to justify oppressive situations surrounding individuals with disabilities by redefining the barriers surrounding this population (Pothier & Devlin, 2007).

The all-encompassing purpose of critical disability studies was to provide a lens through which one could view issues concerning persons with disabilities (Giroux, 2003). It was also used as a vehicle that drove and supported effective change (Giroux, 2003). Many people believed that persons with disabilities, especially more severe disabilities, were afforded the luxury of having a loved one or caregiver that could advocate for them
and ensure that they were rightfully receiving all opportunities available for them (Hart, Grigal, Sax, Martinez, & Will, 2006). Contrary to this belief, researchers found that many loved ones and caregivers were not aware of the numerous possibilities that were available to these individuals (Grigal et al., 2012).

For decades, disability studies struggled to find its place in the world of research, more specifically educational research (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Critical disability theorists deemed it necessary to deconstruct the popular societal notions surrounding disabilities studies (Rocco, 2011). The focus of their efforts was to redefine the misconceptions among the hierarchies of disabilities as well as the relationship between disabled and nondisabled persons as descriptive terms (Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Yee (2011) explained critical disability theory as a factor that:

Seeks to deconstruct the binary duality in mainstream perceptions of disability (e.g., abled vs. dis-abled). In exploring how societal norms contribute to definitions and perceptions of disability, critical disability aims to illuminate how these hegemonic norms may, in fact, be the predominant socially dis-empowering, disabling component in the lives of persons with disabilities (p. 2).

This idea identified the active component of critical disability theory as the process of deconstructing the current perceptions of disabilities. Effective deconstruction would construct a new meaning of disability and provide a new lens for non-disabled persons to reformulate their current paradigm towards individuals with disabilities (Yee, 2011). This deconstruction could help defy the
irrelevance of the social norms as a measurement of what disabilities appeared to be (McLaren, 1989; Vehmas & Watson, 2014; Yee, 2011).

With the deconstruction of current norms, critical disability theory and practice was integrated into settings (i.e. schools, institutions, workplaces, community, etc.) in which individuals with disabilities dwelled (Giroux, 2003). Awareness of such integration assured that critical theorists thoroughly examined the structures in which knowledge was constructed and the degree to which the inequalities occurred (McLaren, 1989). Rocco (2011) suggested, “In order to theorize disability as a public issue it must become as visible as race, class, and gender” (p. 4). Individuals with disabilities are often discriminated against and excluded, which makes them invisible to society (Rocco, 2011). Disability rights needed to be front-lined and made visible to lawmakers and other persons that have power to create and modify laws that enhance the quality of life for persons with and without disabilities (Pothier & Devlin, 2007).

The emergence of critical disability theory was a direct reaction of the authoritarian role Marxism played in the economy and social model of the time. In response to this, critical theory examined the interactions between “capitalist systems of production, class and disability” (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009, p. 50). One controversial issue was the lack of continuity amongst the usage of language to define and construct meaning within the realm of disability studies as governments, higher education institutions, and other organizations debated the content within the language of disability studies (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009).
Corker (1999) acknowledged that disability was a form of social oppression in which current frameworks were disconnected from the disabled person. He suggested that issues concerning critical disability theory needed to be broadened to support the potential enabling powers needed to move the theory forward. He also reported that the binaries presented within the realm of disabilities led to a disjointed connection among the important concepts of disabilities studies which were critical to the overall development of the theory (Corker, 1999). The overarching goal of deconstructing these binary concepts was to eliminate the powers that critically overshadowed the true nature of what disabilities were. This deconstruction was also set to display the true problems that individuals with disabilities faced when forced into the constraints of impairments and oppression (Corker, 1999). Much of Corker’s (1999) ideas were drawn from the seminal works of Foucault and Derrida. They all sought to redefine the terms disability and impairment and to reconstruct the ideas of disability and normality in regards to disability studies.

Foucault was known to many theorists during his life span as the “middle man” between structuralism and poststructuralism, although he always denied both as his theoretical camp, and his work was instrumental in transitioning from the popular controls to ones that challenged the current notions (Peters & Burbles, 2004). Foucault’s works were pivotal to the evolution of disability studies being applied in institutions that catered to the needs of persons with disabilities (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009).

Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) describe Foucault’s position on power and relations in reference to critical disability theory as a “set of procedures and practices that
objectivized and attempted to measure, predict and manage phenomena and processes having to do with the life of the human species and its individual variances in terms of a norm” (p. 57). This stance urges one to acknowledge the relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault viewed power as being productive because power has the potential and force to produce new knowledge and to influence desired changes (Peters & Burbles, 2004; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009).

Tremaine (2005) reported that Foucault addressed the importance of providing provisions for persons with disabilities, especially when attempting to facilitate communication. Tremaine (2005) reported that Foucault believed that facilitating communication could help individuals overcome other physical challenges that may have impeded on their ability to excel (Tremaine, 2005). As this idea became prominent within the field of critical theory, relative theorists adopted this notion to support the need for a founding position for critical disability theory (Peters & Burbles, 2004; Tremaine, 2005).

Critical disability theorists began to employ and maintain the reformulated meanings of the terms and ideas that Foucault addressed (Peters & Burbles, 2004). One of the prominent theorists during this time was Jacques Derrida (Peters & Burbles, 2004). At a time when Americans were heavily receptive to the deconstruction movement and the development of poststructuralism, Derrida introduced his 1970 essay *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* (Derrida, 1970). In this essay, Derrida pushed for the notion of decentering the social structures during a time when structuralism possessed the oppressing powers in society. This decentering, or finding a new center, was shifted from the “structures within the structures” concept to a more
humanism perspective. Derrida (1970) defined the contrasts between the two concepts as the *differance*. He defined *differance* as the “movement that consisted in deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving; and the unfolding of difference” (Peters & Burbules, 2004). According to Peters and Burbules (2004), the essence of Derrida’s argument was that humanism is not a fixed concept that could be easily and readily generalized from human to human. Instead, Derrida believed that one should inquire of the human characteristics and qualities that were once devalued and decentered and make these the center of social reform (Peters & Burbules, 2004).

Derrida’s fundamental question of the “structurality of structure” or the notion of a “center” was an influential factor during the movement of deconstruction (Derrida, 1970, p. 2). His mission for deconstructing the present powers was to reveal the injustices and disconnect faux illusions from the reality of the people (Peters & Burbules, 2004). Derrida took this notion and made it applicable to the field of education (Peters & Burbules, 2004). He posed the task of imagining the educational systems that were focused around learners and imagining the development of new, relatable pedagogies (Peters & Burbules, 2004).

The principles that Derrida presented as essential keys to the transformation of society were also essential to the development of disability studies (Peters & Burbules, 2004). Approaches and works to transform the way disabilities were understood within the social construct was the goal of CDT (Peters & Burbules, 2004). This theory can also be applied in the attempt to reconstruct the meaning of postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities (Peters & Burbules, 2004).
Critical Disability Theory and Postsecondary Education

In public K-12 schools, postsecondary transitions for students with ID are usually comprised of community volunteering, low-income employment, or an assisted living facility, if available (Peters & Burbules, 2004). It is less common for this population of students to be presented with the opportunity to attend a college or university (Peters & Burbules, 2004). While investigating postsecondary education (PSE) options for students with intellectual disabilities (ID), I learned that this population of students has experienced many levels of discrimination. I also believed that there were not many colleges or universities that offered appropriate PSE programs for individuals with ID. Critical disability theory “had been used to support separate regular and special education programs that assigned students oppressively marked by race, class and gender to lower transitions within the educational matrix” (Meekosha & Shuttlesworth, 2009, p. 62). This statement supported and justified the need for a study to explore PSE programs for students with ID. It also verified the need to investigate the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with ID. The transformative paradigm of critical disability theory was used to support the research design and data analysis of the study.

PSE Programs for Students with ID

Postsecondary education (PSE) programs for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) have become increasingly popular across the United States (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Grigal et al., (2012) reported that for nearly 30 years, colleges and universities have served students with ID in a variety of settings. In the 1990s, there was great emphasis enforced through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to encompass
all students for PSE, including those with ID (Grigal et al., 2012; Grigal & Hart, 2010).
Transition options on college campuses, and throughout the community, became more accessible in the areas of education, vocation, and recreational activities which were defined by the level of involvement provided for students with ID to participate in academic and campus-wide experiences (Papay & Bambara, 2011).

In the United States, students with ID were eligible to receive federally funded special education services until they reached the age of 22 as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 (Grigal et al., 2012). IDEIA was one of the most recent legislatures that strongly influenced, and would continue to influence, PSE programs for students with disabilities (Grigal et al., 2012; Grigal & Hart, 2010). Such laws ensured that students with ID had equal access to PSE programs alongside their peers without disabilities.

Another law, the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008, is a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965. In collaboration with a national coordinating center, this legislation developed provisions to increase access to PSE for students with intellectual disabilities. An initial result of this law was the funding of 27 transition PSE programs for students with ID (Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008). The HEOA made available federal funds so that students with ID could receive financial aid to cover the expenses of attendance if students met two mandated requirements. First, the student must have an ID as defined by the HEOA “…cognitive impairment characterized by significant limitations in adaptive behavior, conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills…” (Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008, p.1). The second
requirement was that the student attended an approved comprehensive transition program.

The Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) Act, an additional law that supported PSE programs for students with ID, was a derivative of the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) that ensured that funding was provided for students with disabilities that had an individualized education plan/program (IEP) (Porter et al., 2000). Students with intellectual disabilities, whether mild, moderate, severe, or profound, were also protected under this law and were eligible to receive an education that was suitable and appropriate for them (Madaus, Banerjee, & Hamblet, 2010; Porter et al., 2000; Uditsky & Hughson, 2012).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) were laws that worked cohesively to protect the civil rights of individuals with disabilities (Madaus et al., 2010; Uditsky & Hughson, 2012). These laws extended to the placement of students with disabilities in the appropriate learning environment (Madaus, Banerjee, & Hamblet, 2010; Porter et al., 2000; Uditsky & Hughson, 2012). Advocates heavily relied on these laws to support and drive their efforts to full inclusion for all students (Porter et al., 2000). The policy umbrella called for advocates to push current legislature to unveil the approval of funds, by IDEIA, that were to be used to assist with the financial expenses for students with ID transitioning to a PSE program (Grigal & Hart, 2010; Westling et al., 2013). Policy makers modified and aligned current legislature to support greater access for students with ID in PSE settings (Hart et al., 2006; Westling et al., 2013).
One approach to maximizing special education services until the age of 22 was to allow students to dually enroll in PSE programs. Dual enrollment occurs when students are enrolled in college courses while also receiving services in the K-12 setting (Papay & Bambara, 2011). This transition option was categorized as the community-based transition (CBT) and was fairly new among the transition options at this time (Grigal et al., 2012; Papay, & Bambara, 2011). Students ages 18 and older who participated in PSE programs and were not receiving K-12 services could access PSE services via the adult program path (Grigal et al., 2012).

Currently, there are over 160 PSE programs in the United States for students with ID (Grigal & Hart, 2010). These programs offer a variety of formats that accommodate the needs for a varying range of intellectual disabilities (Grigal et al., 2012; Westling et al., 2013). The three models of PSE that students with ID typically participate in are substantially separate, mixed, and inclusive (Grigal et al., 2012; Westling et al., 2013).

Substantially Separate Programs

Substantially separate PSE programs provide very limited or no access to activities and/or courses for students with ID and their non-disabled peers (Papay & Bambara, 2011). This model was designed to focus on life skills and community-based/vocational training for students with ID (Papay & Bambara, 2011). Students who access PSE programs through this model are typically offered employment experiences via pre-established employers on and off campus. Employment options are structured to better assist students with more severe intellectual disabilities (Hart et al., 2006).
Mixed Model Programs

Mixed model programs, or hybrid programs, afford students with ID inclusive opportunities to participate in college courses with students without disabilities (Grigal et al., 2012). In conjunction with participating in college courses, on the audit track, students with ID access courses that discretely enhance life skills and community/vocational skills (Papay & Bambara, 2011). This model generally supports and provides students with ID employable work experiences that are sited on and off campus (Hart et al., 2006). Skills learned in this setting are vital to the individuals’ overall level of independence and productivity once they exit the PSE program (Grigal et al., 2012; Grigal & Hart., 2010; Hart et al., 2006).

Inclusive Individualized Programs

Inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) was initiated in the late 1980s (Westling et al., 2013). IPSE began as an attempt to justify the need, and effectiveness, of a theoretically supported approach to developing a “good life for individuals with ID and a commitment to gathering evidence as to the effectiveness of this approach” (Uditsky & Hughson, 2012, p. 299). During this time, the separate and mixed pathways to PSE for students with ID were not yielding positive responses and the growing literature suggested something different was needed for this population of students (Grigal et al., 2012; Uditsky & Hughson, 2012; Westling et al., 2013).

IPSE promoted the involvement of students with ID on a normative pathway with students without disabilities (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Uditsky and Hughson (2012) described normative pathways as avenues for students with ID to matriculate through
PSE programs with their non-disabled peers (Grigal et al., 2012; Papay, & Bambara, 2011). Students who access college via this path are provided a course of study that directly aligns with the students’ post-school goals and that specifically relates to their employment goals (Papay and Bambara, 2011).

**PSE Awareness and Access**

As interests in PSE programs for students with ID became more popular and accessible, families of students with ID became more curious about it and desired more information regarding this transition option (Griffin et al., 2010). Griffin et al. (2010) suggested that since parents were critical components in the transition process, it was vital that educators understood their perspectives in order to provide a post-school plan that was reflective of the entire committee’s desires for the student with ID. To raise awareness for the PSE transition option, researchers suggested that advocates should develop and/or enhance public media messages and push for state departments of education to share information about exemplary PSE programs and other services in the postsecondary environment (Hart et al., 2006).

Capacity building efforts suggested that further research should be funded to increase the number of current PSE programs for students with ID (Hart et al., 2006). A study conducted by Kraemer and Blacher (2001) questioned the expectations of parents of students with ID after high school. Findings revealed that parents’ primary concerns were in the area of vocation, residential options, social networking, and access to assistance when needed (Kraemer & Blacher, 2001). Hart et al. (2006) suggested that advocates collaborate with organizations and community stakeholders to develop
strategies that could increase awareness of PSE programs for students with ID, support national accreditation efforts for PSE programs, and start the talk about PSE programs for students with ID in teacher preparation programs (Hart et al., 2006). One way to increase access to these programs was to determine the available programs and explore the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with intellectual disabilities towards these programs; consequently, this study was designed in order to raise awareness of PSE programs available to students with ID in the state of Georgia.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Postsecondary education (PSE) programs for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) have been possible transition options for decades (Grigal et al., 2012; Hart, et al., 2006; Pothier & Devlin, 2007). Federal laws mandate that students with disabilities are eligible to receive special education services until the age of 22, including access to lifelong learning opportunities after high school (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Unfortunately, many parents, teachers, and advocates of students with ID are not aware of these PSE options.

Problem and Purpose of the Study

Teachers and parents of students with ID know little about PSE options in Georgia. (Thoma et al., 2011). In an effort to provide teachers and parents of students with intellectual disabilities (ID) with the accurate and relevant information, this study explored postsecondary education (PSE) programs available for students with ID. Using critical disability theory (Giroux, 2003; Yee, 2011) as a framework, the purpose of this study was to identify postsecondary education (PSE) programs currently available for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in the state of Georgia and to examine the perceptions of teachers and parents of students with ID towards these programs.

Research Questions

1) What postsecondary education options are available for students with intellectual disabilities in the state of Georgia, and what do these programs offer?
2) What are the perceptions of teachers and parents of students with intellectual disabilities towards these postsecondary education programs?

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative methodologies are widely accepted by researchers today. The purpose of qualitative research is to examine and investigate how individuals interact with and experience the world. Qualitative researchers are specifically interested in how social or political situations influence the reality of individuals (Merriam, 2002). Merriam (2002) stated, “All qualitative research was characterized by the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and a richly descriptive end product” (p. 6). Qualitative researchers seek to uncover data pertaining to research questions that vividly illustrate the meaning of participants’ responses.

One benefit of qualitative research is that it supports the use of any philosophical or theoretical framework (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative researchers provide a rich description of the phenomenon being studied and deliver a holistic presentation of the collected data from the participants’ point of view (Merriam, 2002). A qualitative approach supported this study’s goal of understating and sharing participants’ perceptions of PSE programs for students with ID and also supported the study’s critical disability theory framework.

Several approaches can be used to conduct a qualitative study. Merriam (2002) identified these as basic interpretative qualitative, phenomenology, grounded theory, case
study, ethnographic study, and narrative analysis. This study was conducted using the case study qualitative approach.

Case Study Design

A qualitative case study methodology was utilized to gather data in order to address this study’s research questions. According to Creswell (2013), case study research is “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system or multiple bounded systems…” (p. 97). This approach to research required the use of multiple sources to collect data (i.e. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) (Creswell, 2013). This research approach affords the researcher the opportunity to authentically explore the case in the context in which it occurred and the essence of the phenomenon that was revealed (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Traditional, quantitative research methods provide an answer to the research question but do not always provide an understanding of the problem (Chein, Cook & Harding, 1948). Chein et al. (1948) described the issues concerning traditional research as a disregard of the importance of the participants from the beginning to the end of the study. Yin’s (2003) beliefs (as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008) on participant participation were rooted in the views of constructivism. Yin (2003) posited that this paradigm “recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but does not reject outright some notions of objectivity” (Baxter & Jack, 2006, p. 545). Yin (2003) reported that constructivism was established based on the ability to socially construct reality. He found this idea to be one that afforded a “close collaboration between the
researcher and the participant, while enabling participants to tell their stories” (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I believed this description directly supported the need for seeking the perspectives of the participants and utilizing their personal experiences to explain the phenomenon within this study’s case.

According to the Human Development Report of 1997 (United Nations Development Programme, 1997), participation should be an act greater than providing input. Participation should be a critical component of the foundation and frame of the activity (Creswell, 2014; Palys, 2008; Patton, 2003). With respect to this, I believed that the study should be developed in a way that allowed participants to have active voices in the study. The Human Development Report of 1997 (United Nations Development Programme, 1997) also supports the notion that collaboration between the researcher and the participant is best practices for authentic action research and recommends a holistic approach to research in comparison to traditional research. Participation should be an interactive component of the study that increases the validity of the data. Larsen and Cottrell (2006) observed, “Participation meant ownership in the production of knowledge/information and improvement of practice and should be intrinsic to a project’s development and not simply used from time to time to provoke interest from potential beneficiaries” (p.9).

Case study methodology allows the researcher to present “descriptive or explanatory questions and aims to produce a first-hand understanding of the people and events” (Yin, 2004, p. 3). The participants have the insider knowledge that made the data valid and supportive of the researcher’s expertise and general knowledge about the study
(Creswell, 2014; Palys, 2008; Patton, 2003). The role of the researcher is to be the “facilitator of inquiry” which directly allowed all pertinent parties to engage in the active process of analyzing the current target and devising a plan of action to improve it (Wadsworth, 1998, p. 3). As a facilitator, the researcher should present the plan of study to the participants to gather data based on their perspectives (Creswell, 2014; Palys, 2008; Patton, 2003). Even though participants’ collective perspectives were critical to this study, I believed it was also important to be mindful of the level of knowledge each participant brought to the study individually.

Karlson (1991) reported that it is acceptable to limit the participants to areas in which they were experts (data input), and advises that not every participant will demonstrate the same level of competency in a study. Karlson (1991) suggested that participants should be active during the data collection phase and phased out during the data analysis process. Although the participants are active elements of a study, ultimately, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure the validity and reliability of the study (Creswell, 2014; Karlson, 1991; Palys, 2008; Patton, 2003).

Case study research includes more than data collection (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2004). The researcher and the participants collaborate succinctly to provide a vivid expression of the perspective during the study (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). The case study approach has the capacity to support simple to complex research studies (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2004). A case study can provide the opportunity for novice researchers to explore and learn how to gather data from a variety of sources and integrate the data to illustrate a
case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This methodology does not follow one specific format; consequently, unique research initiatives can include the individual subjective views of the participants as valid and reliable data to enhance the content of the study (Yin, 2004).

Setting

This first phase of this study was conducted by gathering information from websites of PSE programs in Georgia for students with ID. Once these data were collected, the study continued by collecting data via a Likert-type survey that was disseminated to participants via e-mail. All participants in the study were public educators of Ram County (a pseudonym) schools in southeast Georgia. The geographic area of this study was rural, impoverished, and labeled as a low socioeconomic status community. During the time of the study, Ram County’s population was 14,593. The average income was $16,189. Ram County’s racial make-up was 55% white, 43% black and two percent other. There were a total of 2,434 students that attend Ram County Schools. 52% were black, 45% were white, one and a half percent was Latino or Hispanic and one percent was of two or more races. 80% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Because of this, Ram County’s Food Service program offered a Provisional II meal plan that provided free breakfast and lunch for all students that attend.

Participants

The study began by investigating ten PSE programs for students with intellectual disabilities in Georgia. I explored each of the college or university’s website to complete a program survey sheet (See Appendix A). Five 2-year programs and five 4-year programs were examined in-depth to uncover the specific dynamics of each program.
This study also targeted 24 teachers and parents of students with intellectual disabilities. In order to participate, teachers had to hold a valid Georgia teacher’s certificate and parents must have a child that had an intellectual disability. Teachers who did not hold a special education teacher’s certificate must have experience teaching students with ID and had served as a part of a student with ID’s IEP committee.

Before dissemination of the survey, participants were invited, via email, to participate in the survey. This invitation introduced the researcher, explained the role of the researcher, the purpose of the study and how the data would be used. Participants were informed that their participation in this study was completely confidential and optional (Murthy, 2008). Of the 24 respondents, 22 completed the entire survey.

Eighteen (81%) of the participants were teachers and three (14%) were parents. One did not report a relation to the student with ID. Although the survey did not ask if the participant played a dual role in the life of a student with ID, the follow-up interview revealed that there was at least one participant that was both a parent and an educator to a student with ID. Additional descriptions of the study’s participants are included in Chapter Four.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with six of the participants. The participants were all white educators that served in the same rural low socioeconomic school system. All names listed in this study are pseudonyms for the participants.

Tom was a paraprofessional, parent, and a relative of an individual with ID. Roxy was a novice general education early childhood teacher. Forest was a football coach who taught special education at the high school and elementary school. Becca was a self-
contained special education teacher who has taught in the inclusion setting. Nelly was a postsecondary education representative who was also a former K-12 special education teacher. Susanne was a special education director for a school district.

All participants represented at least one roll in the IEP committee, i.e. parent, special education teacher and general education teacher, and local education agent (LEA). It was important to understand how they perceived PSE programs for students with ID in order to determine the need for more research in this area.

Ethical Considerations

This study required the participation of human subjects. To ensure that all processes and measures followed ethical guidelines, I sought approval from the Mercer University Internal Review Board (IRB).

In addition to the approval of Mercer University’s IRB committee, I was trained in ethical research practices through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification process. The participants’ identities were protected throughout the study. They were not required to produce identifiable information to participate in the study. Participants consented to participation in the survey as well as the follow-up interview, if selected. During the study, when the data were not being analyzed or reviewed, I stored all collected data on a media device that was locked away in a filing cabinet that required a key to access.

Data Collection

In an effort to provide the participants with current and accurate information, I began the study by exploring current PSE programs for students with ID in Georgia. The
Georgia Department of Education provided the Georgia Transition Manual for Students with Disabilities (Georgia Department of Education, 2014) as a guide to assist with the transition process. This manual was used to identify the three central locations that housed general information about available PSE programs for students with ID in Georgia. Once identified, I compiled a list of all of the PSE programs for students with ID in the state of Georgia. I noted whether the program was a two-year and/or four-year PSE program. The Regents Center for Learning Disabilities (RCLD) with which each program was affiliated was identified as well.

Using the purposive sampling method (The Pennsylvania State University, 2016), I sought to examine programs for students with significant ID first and then programs for students with mild ID. Six programs for students with significant ID and four programs for students with mild ID were explored. Collectively, there were five 2-year programs and five 4-year programs. A survey was used to explore the available PSE programs for students with ID in Georgia.

Once the program review was completed, I wanted to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with intellectual disabilities towards these programs. To effectively and efficiently do this, a Likert-type survey was used to gather data on their current perceptions of these programs (see Appendix D). A Likert-type scale was used instead of a Likert scale because the responses from the survey would not be combined to create a composite score (Boone & Boone, 2012).

The survey consisted of basic demographic questions (i.e. relationship to student, ethnicity, gender, etc.). It included statements in which the participants were asked to
determine their level of agreement on a scale of one to five (with one being “I strongly disagree” and five being “I strongly agree”). Participants were given the opportunity to ask specific questions they had concerning PSE programs for students with ID. They were given the opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview as well. Initially, four participants agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. Only three provided contact information. These interviews were 15 minutes in length, on average.

After conducting three follow-up interviews, I realized that more data were needed from other participants in the study. I reviewed the email list that was used to send the survey to the original participants. Purposive sampling (The Pennsylvania State University, 2016) was used to identify one self-contained teacher, one PSE representative, and one special education county director. I believed that the self-contained special education teacher would provide a different perspective on transition options for students with more significant intellectual disabilities; the PSE representative would offer the insight from the postsecondary perspective; and the special education director would provide a perspective from an administrative perspective.

Participants were e-mailed or recruited in person to participate in a follow-up interview, and each agreed to participate. Each interview was between 15 to 30 minutes in length. I used a semi-structured interview approach to conduct the interviews (see Appendix A). This allowed participants to freely respond without pre-set guidelines (Ahr, Holly & Kasten, 2001). After all of the interviews were completed, I had collected data from all required members of an IEP committee and beneficial members during the
transition process (i.e., parent, general education teacher, special education teacher and local education agent (LEA))

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis occurred continuously throughout the study (Creswell, 2014). This study was case-centered which provided for an individual case analysis that would be combined with other case analyses to form thematic frameworks for the study (Wadsworth, 1998). Before the themes could be formed, a process called memoing was completed. Memoing is “the writing of memos to oneself regarding insights one derives from coding and reflecting on the data” (Bailey, 2007, p.133). This process required me to ask specific questions and seek answers that were grounded in the data (Creswell, 2014; Palys, 2008; Patton, 2003).

Another process that may occur simultaneously with memoing is coding (Creswell, 2014). During coding, the researcher seeks to consolidate large amounts of data into smaller manageable parts (Bailey, 2007). For this study, I used memoing to identify key descriptive words and phrases and to create the codes based on the data. After the initial codes were formulated, focused coding occurred to “further reduce the data by identifying and combining the initial coded data into larger categories labeled during initial coding…” (Bailey, 2007, p. 129).

I reviewed the data until 229 descriptors were identified individually across the interviews. Once the descriptors were combined, I re-reviewed the data and 185 descriptors were isolated collectively. From here, 15 codes were developed. These codes
ranged in context from available services, preparations, postsecondary options to transitions, relationships, and parental involvement.

Thematic analysis was used to determine common themes among the identified codes from the unstructured interviews (Glense, 2016). When analyzing the data to determine themes, I looked for patterned codes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested six steps when beginning to analyze themes from the data which include “becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report” (p.94). These steps were used during the thematic analysis process to ensure that the data were analyzed meticulously and the themes accurately reflected what the codes presented. After reviewing and re-reviewing the 15 identified codes, seven themes were developed. In an effort to ensure validity during the data analysis process, I triangulated the data by labeling the codes and referencing the participants’ responses (Creswell, 2014). To increase the validity of the data, the transcript was reviewed and re-reviewed several times to ensure that the codes were accurately defined and reflected in the themes (Creswell, 2014; Karlson, 1991; Wadsworth, 1998).

Summary

The qualitative case study approach allowed participants to be active in the research in an effort to gain their perspectives to narrate their experiences. By first exploring currently available PSE programs, I was able to provide accurate information to the participants about PSE programs for students with ID in Georgia. I believed this approach provided me the opportunity to actively and relevantly disseminate information
about these programs to appropriate K-12 and PSE representatives to be readily used and dispersed to appropriate personnel.

The critical theory lens afforded me the opportunity to be the change agent needed to actively inform teachers and parents about PSE opportunities available for a marginalized group of students with ID, who typically experience significant disadvantages in the area of educational opportunities (Pothier & Devlin, 2007). I believed that information gathered during this study could positively impact the lives of individuals with ID and their families. If even one parent or one teacher uses the findings from this study, it could beneficially impact the life of a student with ID.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

This study was designed to explore current postsecondary education (PSE) programs for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in the state of Georgia and to investigate the perceptions of parents and teachers concerning these PSE programs.

I used a qualitative case study methodology to guide this study. This approach provided me the opportunity to answer the following research questions in collaboration with the study’s participants:

1) What postsecondary education options are available for students with intellectual disabilities in the state of Georgia, and what do these programs offer?

2) What are the perceptions of teachers and parents of students with intellectual disabilities towards these postsecondary education programs?

I chose a case study research approach because I believed that the findings from this study could be used by K-12 teachers in an effort to offer an additional academic transition option for students with ID. In order to raise awareness of PSE transition options, I needed to learn as much as possible about PSE programs available in Georgia.

Procedures

To address Research Question One, I used the 2014 Special Education Transition Manual (Georgia Department of Education, 2014) to identify regional centers with information about PSE programs for students with ID in Georgia. This manual
described three Regents Centers for Learning Disabilities (RCLD) in Georgia, located on the campuses of Georgia Southern University, Georgia State University and the University of Georgia. I examined each of the three RCLD’s websites, which listed institutions that each RCLD serviced. I created a table containing the institution names, type of program(s)/number of years for the program, and the RCLD servicing institution.

I then selected ten of the programs to survey. I sought to explore all of the mixed-model inclusive programs first. There were a total of six mixed-model inclusive programs in Georgia that offered two-year or four-year certificates. Next, I selected four inclusive programs to survey. In order to acquire the most accurate information about these programs, I studied the website for the ten selected programs and compiled data using the Program Survey (see Appendix B). Next, I compared each section of the survey to identify differences and commonalities between the programs.

To address Research Question Two, I conducted a survey with 22 participants and follow-up interviews with six of these participants. With the exception of the County Coordinator and PSE Representative, all of the survey participants worked for the same school district in Southeast Georgia. The geographic area of this study was rural, impoverished, and considered to be a low-socioeconomic-status community. During the time of the study, the county’s population was 14,593. The average income was $16,189. There are 2,434 students that attended the county’s public schools during the 2016-2017 academic year. 52% of students were black, 45% were white, one and a half percent was Latino or Hispanic and one percent was of two or more races. Eighty percent of the
students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Each participant in this study was a parent and/or teacher of an individual with ID.

The survey was designed to determine their current knowledge and awareness of PSE programs in Georgia and to gain an understanding of their perceptions of these programs. I disseminated the survey, *Perceptions of Education after High School*, to participants via email (see Appendix D). The survey consisted of four demographic questions, six Likert-type scale questions, one open-ended response and the option to participate in a follow-up interview. Participants were asked their gender, ethnicity, zip code, and their relationship to a student with ID. Next, participants were asked to rate their knowledge and awareness of PSE programs in Georgia by using a Likert-type scale ranging from one (Strongly Disagree) to five (Strongly Agree). Participants were then given the opportunity to ask specific questions for which they wanted answers about students with ID accessing PSE programs. Lastly, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

To analyze the data, I averaged the responses the participants provided for each question. Based on the scores, I was able to summarize the participants’ responses using the description in the Likert-type scale. For instance, if the participants averaged a 2.36 for question 3, I was able to determine that as a whole, they did not agree with the statement.

After the survey was completed, I conducted individual follow-up interviews with six participants. Each interview was conducted at a cafe located near each participant. Each interview lasted 15-30 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded with
participants’ permission. A semi-structured (Creswell, 2013) interview approach was used to conduct the interviews (see Appendix A). This method allowed participants to share their perceptions in their own words without coaching from the researcher. Participants were encouraged to provide a realistic understanding of what they understood about PSE options for students with ID. They were encouraged to ask questions and to provide suggestions on how the PSE transition option could be better implemented.

To analyze the data, descriptive words and phrases were identified. Next, the descriptors were grouped into codes (Creswell, 2014). Once codes were established, themes were developed (Creswell, 2014). The data were reviewed and re-reviewed to ensure that developed themes accurately reflected the data.

Presentation of Findings

Findings from the program surveys, participant survey, and participant interviews are organized into two following sections in order to present rich descriptions of data related to the study’s two research questions. Findings on current PSE programs for students with ID in Georgia are presented first so that readers can learn about the PSE options that were available in Georgia at the time of this study. Then, findings from the participant survey and interviews are shared in order to illustrate the perceptions of these parents and teachers of students with ID.

Collectively, data collected and analyzed to address both research questions provide a comprehensive discussion of the realities of college or university options, concerns, and barriers for students with ID.
Addressing Research Question One

This study’s first research question was: What postsecondary education options are available for students with intellectual disabilities in the state of Georgia, and what do these programs offer?

I found 30 institutions in the state of Georgia that provided disability services for students with ID on campus under the supervision of a RCLD. Among these 30 programs, there are 27 four-year inclusive PSE programs and 13 two-year inclusive PSE (IPSE) programs. Of the 27 institutions that offer 4-year inclusive PSE programs in Georgia, 17 offered programs that allow students to earn a Bachelor’s degree. Among the 13 institutions that offer two-year inclusive PSE programs in Georgia, only three institutions offer programs that allow students to earn an Associate’s degree or certificate. There are ten institutions that offer both two-year and four-year programs in the form of certificate programs, associate degrees, and bachelor’s degrees. Four of these institutions have multiple campuses that provide disability services across multiple sites. I chose to focus on the ten programs that offered certificate and degree programs.

When investigating these PSE programs, I noticed that there was not much variance in the types of programs that were available to students with ID in Georgia. All of the programs that were monitored by a RCLD center were categorized as inclusive PSE programs. Hart et al. (2006) defined inclusive postsecondary education as the ability for students with disabilities to receive specific services during their pursuit of college courses for audit or credit. After further investigation, I found six PSE programs that fell into the mixed model category but were not labeled as such. According to Grigal et al.
mixed model PSE programs afford students with ID opportunities to access mainstream college courses, on the audit track, while still participating in courses that will enhance their overall daily living and employability skills. The difference between inclusive PSE and the mixed-model approach to PSE is that the mixed-model approach will not offer students who participate in this program the option for a degree. Instead, they will receive a certificate of completion. Also, students on the mixed-model track will audit college course and receive additional courses to aid in developing their independent daily living skills. None of the PSE programs in Georgia currently provide substantially separate programs for students with ID. For the purposes of this study, I grouped the ten PSE programs that offered certificate and degree programs into two categories: Four of the programs followed the traditional inclusive approach and six followed the mixed model. Table one describes these programs.

I gathered specific information on recruitment, admission criteria, supports and accommodations, costs and funding, K-12 collaboration, and peer engagement for the ten PSE programs that offered certificates, Associate degrees, or Bachelor degrees. After compiling and organizing the program data, I shared it with the six interview participants in order to inform them about these PSE transition options. I believed these categories to be critical in the implementation of this transition option at the K-12 setting.
Table 1

*PSE Certificate / Degree Programs Selected for this Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSE Program Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th># of 2-year programs</th>
<th># of 4-year programs</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>Students receive services and a degree upon completion.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed-Model</td>
<td>Students receive services but will not receive a degree upon completion.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inclusive PSE Programs

Inclusive PSE (IPSE) is designed to provide appropriate accommodations and services for students with disabilities who desire to receive a college degree (Grigal et al., 2012). Students on this track are fully immersed in traditional college courses where they receive specific accommodations and services, alongside their non-disabled peers, based on their documented disability. Students with mild intellectual disabilities may benefit best from this form of PSE (Grigal et al., 2012). For the four IPSE program that I studied, I found that students are required to meet all general admission criteria for the institution, i.e. GPA, SAT/ACT scores, and are required to possess a college preparatory diploma. Once accepted, students are required to present their documented disability to the Office of Disability Services before they enroll in classes. Students are then advised of the accommodations they can receive and how they will be served. Students are then
permitted to enroll in college credit courses and receive required accommodations and supports based on the details described in their documented disability report.

On average, the cost of attendance for these institutions ranged from $8,000 to $20,000. Financial aid, Pell Grants, scholarships, and other supplemental grants were available to students with ID. Students were not required to have jobs but on-campus work-study opportunities were available to them. Internships were only required if the student’s specific degree program required it.

Only one of these five institutions displayed a definitive relationship with K-12 schools. This institution required that students work with the guidance counselor at their school to ensure they met all of the criteria needed to be accepted into the institution. This institution also offered dual enrollment services for eligible students. The other IPSE four-year programs did not describe how they collaborated with K-12 institutions.

Mixed-Model PSE Programs

Students with more significant ID are provided access to college courses via the audit track. Students in these mixed-model PSE programs are offered services such as a peer mentor and other supports to assist them. In some cases, students with ID may have the assistance of a peer mentor as well as a transition teacher with them in the academic setting to make the experience less stressful and more successful. Students with significant ID in these mixed-model programs are also included in all campus clubs, organizations, functions, activities, sporting activities and all available amenities. In addition to participation in college courses, students with significant ID are required to
enroll in life-skills courses that teach them fundamental skills needed to live independently, including money management, housekeeping, and other daily living skills.

The six PSE programs that offered a more mixed-model approach to inclusion that I studied were all Comprehensive Transition Programs, meaning that they were federally funded to some extent. Students enrolled in these programs are eligible to receive federal and state funds to offset the cost of attendance. Students are also able to participate in work-study programs on campus to earn funds to support other expenses while attending the university.

Themes from Program Data Analysis

Once I completed an in-depth investigation of the ten selected PSE programs, I used an inquiry method (Creswell, 2013) to begin the memoing process on the data collected through the program survey. The pre-generated themes embedded in the program survey allowed for a consistent analysis of data within and across institutions.

Two themes that lacked sufficient data were the recruitment process and the relationship between K-12 and PSE programs. After evaluating these two related themes, I believed there needs to be an established relationship between K-12 schools and PSE programs in order to have an effective operative recruitment process. I began to scrutinize possible explanations for why these two areas were undeveloped. My first question was: Is the recruitment process really non-existent for encouraging students to attend these programs? If recruitment programs did exist, why was the recruitment information missing from the program websites where parents, teachers and students could readily access it? The idea of students with intellectual disabilities being denied equal access to
the services that are made available to them immediately arose. It also reminded me of Marxist theorists’ notions of being disadvantaged and oppressed (Horkheimer, 1972).

Two additional questions that remained in my mind related to recruitment relationships were: How does the lack of developed relationships directly contribute to the lack of knowledge that parents and teachers possess about these PSE transition options? Could this lack of relationships directly contribute to opportunity gaps for students with intellectual disabilities? As a public education teacher, I realized that parents are more likely to participate in school activities when they are well informed about the event. During the transition years, it would be beneficial to have a recruiter or a document that represents PSE programs available to parents and students so that they can be made aware of the option.

Another theme that lack sufficient development was the relationships between the PSE programs and K-12 schools. I believe that if PSE programs and K-12 schools work together to encourage this transition option for students with intellectual disabilities, parents, teachers, and students could more easily see this as a viable option.

Addressing Research Question Two

This study’s second research question was: What are the perceptions of teachers and parents of students with intellectual disabilities towards these postsecondary education programs? To address this question, I conducted a survey with 22 participants who were teachers and/or parents of students with ID, and then conducted follow-up interviews with six of these participants.
Results of the Participant Survey

The participant survey was designed to uncover the surface knowledge of parents and teachers of students with intellectual disabilities towards PSE programs available to their students. The first survey questions gathered basic demographic information for the participants, including gender, ethnicity, and relationship to individuals with ID. Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 describe the participant demographics.

Table 2

*Participant Demographics: Relationship to Individuals with ID*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>85.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

*Participant Demographics: Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>81.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

**Participant Demographics: Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American (non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>59.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next six questions asked the participants to rate their knowledge and awareness of education after high school for students with ID on a Likert-type scale of one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Overall, participants could not definitively report their awareness of PSE programs for individuals with disabilities in Georgia or their awareness of opportunities in high school that prepared students with disabilities for education after high school. Participants believed that it would be beneficial for students with ID to access education opportunities after high school and believed that students with ID would find educational opportunities after high school beneficial as they transitioned into adulthood. They also believed that education experienced on college or university campuses would be beneficial for students with ID. Participants are not aware of available funds to assist students with ID in participating in education programs after high school. Overall, participants presented limited knowledge of PSE programs for students with ID. Table 5 displays the participants’ responses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2 Disagree</th>
<th>3 Neutral</th>
<th>4 Agree</th>
<th>5 Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of education programs for individuals with disabilities in Georgia after high school.</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school has helped or will help prepare students with disabilities for education after high school.</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>36.36%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities would benefit from education programs after high school.</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>54.55%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational opportunities after high school would help students with disabilities transition to adulthood.</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>68.18%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational opportunities on a college or university campus would be beneficial for students with disabilities.</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>54.55%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of available funds that support students with disabilities in education programs after high school.</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Six participants responded to the open-ended question option and posed the following questions about PSE programs:

- Why aren't more resources and information provided to teachers regarding these educational programs?
- Since students with disabilities need more support, will the programs cost a lot more? How long will or can a SWD [student with disabilities] stay in the program? When SWDs are three years old they transition into the school system. Is there a transition period from high school into a post school?
- What are programs in my state and local region and what funds are available for assistance? How can teachers and parents gain access to this information in middle school?
- What are some of the current programs being offered? How effective are these programs at helping students with disabilities after high school?
- For students with disabilities who do not receive a high school diploma due to inability to pass an End of Course assessment what is there for those students?
- Are these 'special needs' students able to have accommodations in college just as they do in high school?

Results of the Participant Interviews

Follow-up interviews were conducted as the final data collection procedure of the study. There were two phases of this data collection process. The first consisted of me interviewing the participants who provided contact information during the survey. Four (18.18%) participants agreed to participate in a follow-up interview, but only three
provided contact information. These three interviews were conducted in cafes located close to each participant, and each interview lasted 15-30 minutes.

After these interviews were conducted, I sought to interview three additional participants from the list of survey responders. I sought the perspectives of participants who were experienced in the world of transition services for students with special needs and who were critical components of the IEP committee. I used purposive sampling (The Pennsylvania State University, 2016) to identify one self-contained teacher, one PSE representative, and one special education county director from the list of survey participants, and called or emailed them to request their participation in a follow-up interview. They agreed, and the interviews were conducted in cafes located close to each participant. Each interview lasted 15-30 minutes.

The six interview participants represented each possible member of an IEP committee that could directly influence the path a student with ID would continue on during the transition years, including a parent, general education teacher, inclusion special education teacher, self-contained special education teacher, PSE representative, and special education director. These six interview participants worked at the same school within the district in a rural, low-income county in southeast Georgia that was the setting for this study. They willingly participated in the semi-structured interviews. All participants thoroughly answered all questions based on their knowledge of the topic. In most cases, the participants added additional feedback beyond what was asked. Table 6 describes the interview participants, and excerpts of each interview are included in the following sections.
Table 6

*Description of Interview Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Relationship to individual(s) with ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Parent and relative of individuals with ID; also, a paraprofessional in a severe and profound classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Special education teacher and football coach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roxy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>General education teacher</td>
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<td>Becca</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Self-contained special education teacher</td>
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<td>Nelly</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Former K-12 special education teacher; current PSE representative for a local university</td>
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<td>Susanne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Special education director for the school district</td>
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I began each interview by thanking the participant for being willing to be part of the study and for sharing their time with me. Then I shared the information I had compiled about three regional centers for learning disabilities in the state of Georgia and ten PSE certificate/degree programs available to students with ID. I also shared an overview of the findings from the participant survey. This approach allowed me to welcome each participant’s input into the study as I informed them of findings I have uncovered through the study so far. This approach also allowed me to easily disseminate findings to the participants so that they could immediately begin to use the information to help students start implementing this transition option.

Tom: Parent, Relative, and Teacher of Individuals with ID
I conducted the first interview with Tom, a paraprofessional, parent, and a relative of individuals with ID. I began the interview by asking him to describe his relationship with an individual with ID. He explained:

I have a daughter who has Williams Syndrome. I had a brother who had Down’s Syndrome. I work in a severe and profound classroom. [Also], I am the local coordinator for Special Olympics-Georgia.

I asked Tom to express how he balanced working with students with disabilities in his professional and personal life and how this affected him. He responded:

I think the key to working with a child with a disability is to treat them normally. The problem you get with a lot of parents of children with disabilities is that they want to baby that child and not hold them to a standard. The only [way] for me was to treat my daughter the same way I treated my other two children who did not have disabilities. [By doing this], I made her rise to the bar. She is now in high school getting ready for her senior year. She is looking to go Clemson University in the Clemson Pride program. That is all because we pushed her to do better. I told her, it may take a normal child five times to get this right and it may take you 50 times. But you have to keep trying until you get it right.

I noticed that Tom specifically mentioned the Clemson Pride. I asked him to elaborate on how he discovered this program, and he replied:

I did research on special needs colleges and [I found that] Clemson Pride is the number one program in the nation right now. Georgia Southern is looking to develop a similar program. East Georgia has a program [in our area]. I just want
her to go to a program that I know is going to [provide] the best [opportunities] for the type of education she needs.

He reported that he initiated his research simply googl[ing] “Special Needs Colleges”. He added:

It brought up [many options], like the [University of] Georgia. I wanted one that [that offered her the opportunity to live] on campus and an [adult] would be [living with her], just like an RA. [He/She would] make sure she was [accessing services from] community based learning to a job.

I was interested to know how much K-12 resources aided in helping him find this information and preparing his daughter for this transition process. Tom reported that he initiated the conversation with his daughter’s teacher and county coordinator. He also reported that he asked questions like:

Does she need to be retested? Do we need to go ahead and get her IEP updated?
Are there any other evaluations she needs to have? [I] gave them the list of requirements they needed to have so we could all be on the same line? Then the school got in contact with the department of rehabilitation. They help with all of the students that are juniors and seniors to get a plan in place [for them after high school]; whether it is to further their education or [seek employment].

He reported that rehabilitation services were something that would have been offered to his daughter without him initiating it. They would have had to agree or disagree with the services they wanted to offer and proceed from there. I asked Tom what advice he would
give to other parents of individuals with disabilities to assist them in the transition process. He responded by saying:

You’ve got to get [information] to parents. There are some kids that are going to plateau. What about those [who have the potential to develop] daily living skills? [Who is going to be able to answer questions like] “Does she know how to fold up clothes? Does she know how to warm up food? Does she know how to take care of herself?” As a parent, I think that you owe it to [your] child to make sure they have everything they need, including an education. The school system has been really compliant about getting us whatever we needed. I think this is what we need [push for from the schools]. The parent has to be more proactive. They have to be like “Hey! Junior year, what needs to be done?” The requirements are so different depending on what that child is [capable of doing]. An IEP has to be in place that accurately reflects what the child [abilities and] needs.

Tom appeared to be enthusiastic about this topic. He spoke passionately about the topic and provided many details about what he knew. When asked to provide specifics about the requirement that Clemson Pride required for new enrollees, he stated:

..a third or fourth grade reading level. They have to be self-sufficient; [have a current] psychological [evaluation]…

He also reported that the cost of attendance was approximately $39,000 per year. When asked if he thought the program was worth the cost, Tom stated:

I mean, I do. If it does what I need it to do in turns of the community based learning. I think we are setting her up with the football coach and she is going to
be able to go and help do stuff [for the team]. So she is going to have a job. She is going to be responsible for making her bed. She is going to be responsible for maintaining her hygiene. She will be responsible for going out. And with technology, she can FaceTime and say “Hey! This is what I am doing”. She will have four other students living with her and a RA to make sure they are doing what they are supposed to be doing. [She] also [will have] a financial planning account. So they are building those skills within a community based learning setting.

I noted that Tom was very engaged when he spoke about his daughter attending this PSE program. I asked Tom if he was excited. He replied:

Excited and scared. As a parent and you have a kid with you for 18 years and all of a sudden you are pushing them out and they will not be like right next door so you can be like “Hey, what’re you’re doing?” makes [me] anxious. We are talking four and a half to six hours away. As a parent, you want the absolute best for your child and you want to give it to them.

I asked what he expected the ultimate outcome to be for his daughter attending this program, and he answered:

Our hopes are that she could live independently close by, only requiring someone to check in on her. [I want] to make sure she is self-sufficient, safe and has not burnt the house down (we laugh). If not, she will always have a room with us. But my goal is that she is able to have some independence with some oversight.
At the conclusions of the interview, I thanked Tom for his time and willingness to participate in the follow-up interview. I asked if there were any other questions he would like answered. He replied:

I think this is great. I also think that this is something we can educate our school counselors on. We need to make sure that those 504 plans are carrying over into the college settings. We all just have to be proactive and make sure that we are giving our kids the best shot.

Forest: Special Education Teacher

I conducted the second follow-up interview with Forest. Forest was a high school football coach who taught special education at the high school and elementary school.

I began the interview by asking Forest about his relationship to an individual with ID. He explained:

I’m a special education teacher at an elementary school and I teach inclusion with ten kids on my caseload. I go into two different classes of ELA and Math and assist them and accommodate them with all the things they have in their IEP.

I then asked him to provide his thoughts on students with ID attending college. His response was:

I feel like they should be accommodated in college the same way, if not more than, how they were accommodated in high school because it only gets harder as they go to college and it is going to, kind of, determine the rest of their lives. (depending on how they perform and the degree they get and what they want to
do with themselves). Those disabilities are real and they need any help they can get to really reach their full potential.

Forest and I began discussing the transition process and I asked if he thought that the transition was the responsibility of high school educators or if should it start as early as elementary school. He stated:

I think the high school level is very important. I taught there for a year and I know that a lot of transition meetings and discussions go on there. I think that the earlier you can start the conversation about that kind of stuff, the better.

He described the transition process, from his experience, as:

Students getting on different websites, like Georgia 411, and other websites to research jobs and figure out what kind of schools they would have to attend to get those jobs. If it did not require school after high school, they would research what they needed to do to get the job they wanted.

Forest reported that to his knowledge, students were not looking for schools that would accommodate their disability. He also reported that students primarily looked for jobs as their involvement in the transition process. I asked Forest if he had any suggestions or recommendations for parents of students with ID during the transition years towards entering a PSE program, and he stated:

…just stay in contact with the teachers they have at the high school and do as much research to find out what schools will help them the most. I think the more they know about the options, the better.
When asked if there were any questions that he would like pursued regarding PSE programs for students with ID, he requested:

Yes, can you report back to me which schools have what and what are the best colleges for kids with ID. I am a football coach and a lot of our players have IEPs. It would be good to know which schools would help them the most.

Forest was informed that before this portion of the study began, PSE programs in Georgia were investigated. I explained to him that there were different programs that were more on the daily living and employment aspect of PSE- the mixed-model and that there were programs that provided accommodations and supports to aid in the student successfully attaining a two-year or four-year certificate or degree. I told Forest that students with ID had the opportunities to live on campus independently with or without direct supervision, and students who lived on campus with direct supervision were more significantly intellectually disabled. These programs were designed to teach them functional life skills as well as provide access to academic courses.

At the end of our discussion, I thanked Forest for his willingness to participate in the follow-up interview.

Roxy: Teacher of Students with ID

I conducted the third interview with Roxy, a novice general education early childhood teacher. I began the interview by asking Roxy about her relationship to an individual with ID. She stated:

I would be their teacher – general education teacher, that is.
I asked Roxy to describe how she handled teaching students with ID in the past. Her response was:

There is a sped [special education] teacher that comes in my room. If there is no sped teacher, I give them accommodations on their work based on their needs and abilities.

She reported that she would read the student’s IEP and rely on the special education teacher to provide guidance on how to meet the student’s needs. From there, she would do her best to meet the needs of the students in the general education setting. She believed it would be a good idea for students with ID to attend a college or university.

When asked what aspect of PSE she thought would be most beneficial, she stated:

I believe that going off and having [the] opportunity to further their education and if they could receive help while they are in college would make them more successful.

I asked Roxy if she had any questions concerning students with ID pursuing an education after high school. She asked:

Is it possible for students with ID to attend college? Are there any accommodations that are offered to them as they were offered in early childhood and secondary education? Can they still receive those accommodations even in postsecondary?

I informed her that many times, teachers and parents are unaware of these services. In regards to accommodations in college for students with ID, if the IEP is written to extend into the college years, those same accommodations that were needed to
access the curriculum were still applicable at the college/university level. So it is very important for the student with an ID to visit the disability services center to figure out what documentation is needed to prove their disability so that they are able to receive services and accommodations at the collegiate level. This must be handled before they enroll any courses. This is a critical skill that students with ID must learn in order to advocate for themselves. Roxy had no further questions at this point. I thanked her for participating in the follow-up interview and it ended.

Becca: Special Education Teacher

I conducted the fourth interview with Becca, a self-contained special education teacher who has taught in the inclusion setting. I asked Becca to describe her experiences of the transition process and how she perceived it to work. She explained:

I thought it was very disjointed because we really didn’t know what we could. A lot of the children, like the kids with learning disabilities, knew that they could go to the local technical school and have accommodations. Or, if they wanted to go to the other institution, as long as their IEP was current, they knew they could receive services there as well. As far as more severe intellectual disabilities, I don’t know if we were ever really made aware of this transition option that would develop their daily living skills on a college setting. I actually learned more about it while studying for a vision impairment endorsement. For the visually impaired, there is a significant population that has no other disability aside from the visual impairment. They can go to college. The question was how were they going to function in this setting? Within this population, there was a population that had
more significant disabilities along with their vision impairment. I learned more about that and the services that were available to all students with disabilities through the vision program than I ever knew just as a special education teacher.

I then asked Becca to recall how the vision impaired endorsement program described these institutions to the cohort. She remembered the instructors giving them pamphlets of information on the available institutions before they actually enrolled in the transition service course. The course ultimately enlightened them on the major role that VocRehab played in the successful transition process, a topic that was never introduced to her in her work environment as a special education teacher.

We discussed the survey participants’ perception of a disconnect between K-12 programs and the PSE programs, and the presence of several institutions in our area that offer these services. Neither of us could identify why there was not an established relationship between the programs in our areas. Was it the undeveloped forms of communication, or was it the issue of unavailable funds to support needed resources? As we discussed reasons why this was needed in our area, I stumbled on the idea of students with ID experiencing opportunity gaps when it came to advancing education after high school. When I asked Becca her perceptions on this notion she replied:

I would definitely agree with that. One of the things they talked about in the VI program was that as the students get older, they will have access to the expanded core curriculum. The job of the deaf and hard of hearing teacher is to look at the expanded core, which is outside of the general curriculum. It focuses more on daily living skills. For instance, the ability to count money is a critical daily living
skill for a person who is blind. There is a certain way you have to count your money. People who are blind can be tricked. They have to know how it is folded and all. Assistive technology, recreational leisure activities were some of the things that you were suppose be addressing with them. Most times, you just did not have time to tackle these skills in the K-12 setting. VocRehab addresses these things to a greater extent after they have graduated. Things like learning how to cook, how to bank, how to travel are all functional skills that can enhance their quality of life. Most vision students will receive orientation and mobility services and learn how to travel with a cane. But VocRehab services can go a little more in depth once the student is older, like riding the bus if you live in a metro area. Students could be taught how to properly use the Marta system to get to where they need to be.

As we continued to the discus how VocRehab would be beneficial for students with ID, I was interested to know how the vision impaired instructors prepared Becca’s cohort on proper transitions into this setting. She stated that they were provided with a list of contacts and institutions that provided services to students with more severe disabilities in the area. They also suggested that:

… by the end of the junior beginning of the senior year you start working more closely with those folks in the college setting or the job setting. If it was going to be a college kid that could attend on the inclusive track, we would need to start working with the university the child would possibly be attending. For the mixed-model, you would need to work with the VocRehab representative for that
specific program. I think that a nearby county had a mixed-model of PSE. The advisor from that institution would start coming to the IEP meetings…

Becca added that these services would have to be initiated by teacher to get the VocRehab representative involved. I was impressed with her knowledge about these services. I wanted to know, from her perspective, what could be done to generalize this information to more teachers so that we could get this information to more students, parents and staff. She explained:

I really think that it comes down to having one person to house the information. I think within the larger systems, like Gwinnett County, maybe the information does get disseminated a little more readily. With us being smaller, nobody knows. In my case, I probably should go to the director of special education and ask if I could share this information with the high school teachers who were going to be leading your transition services and just give them the information. It would be nice if the colleges would contact us. You know everyone has a [special education] director. Swainsboro [could] contact the director and let them know what is going on. If you have students you think would be a great fit, here is our process. Each institution has its own process and requirements. They will only take a certain number of students with certain disabilities. The student is expected to function independently with little to no support.

I agreed with her and told her that the mixed-model programs that were investigated for this study required students to be able to read and perform mathematically at a certain level. They also required students to be able to function independently and possess little
to no emotional behavior problems as criteria for acceptance in the program. The overarching goal of these institutions was to help the students become independent, so students could not be admitted if they had maladaptive behaviors that would limit their ability to navigate the campus appropriately. Becca added that some of these institutions required students to live on campus. She believes it is important that teachers understand the requirements for each institution so we are adequately preparing and recommending students that are suitable and would benefit from the program.

I then began to express to Becca that the biggest gaps that I found in the investigation of the institutions were an undeveloped recruitment process and a weak relationship between the K-12 programs and the PSE programs. I expressed to her how critical I thought these gaps were and asked for her thoughts on it. She replied:

Some of that comes from lack of professional development within that area from the school level. I would imagine, I mean I don’t know because I have never been to these director meetings, but I would think that if we are talking about it at a vision conference with just vision teachers, that the directors at some point would have been made aware of what is going on. Maybe they know and it is just not communicated well.

Professional development was an area that Becca believed could contribute to the lack of knowledge. I asked her to elaborate on this idea, and she shared:

I don’t know that if one day of professional development would be enough. I think that it may be a good start to [present] the resources; kind of give people contact information and then you would have to develop it from there. It should
probably be an ongoing thing. It should answer questions like, how do you write a good transition plan? You have to build contacts with the people at the institutions [in order to] provide this service. Having that person on the IEP team, in the last semester of their junior year on to their senior year, that can come to IEP meetings and be actively engaged in what is going on with that kid and provide guidance of if this option will work or not [would be beneficial]. Sometimes, we as special education teachers are like, I know they can do it, I know they can. But sometimes they really cannot. It is like, I see the potential but they are not fulfilling it at a certain level. The institution representative can be there to say this is tough. They are in the 12th grade and they are reading on a 3rd grade level and we need them at 5th grade, or whatever the requirement is.

We both believed that ongoing professional development in the area would be a good start to increasing the knowledge of teachers which would be delivered to parents. As an advocate for students with disabilities, I was interested to know how Becca could help mold the perceptions of teachers and parents about this transition option. She stated:

> From a teacher’s point of view, we really need to believe, honestly speaking, that students with disabilities can do it. Sometimes teachers possess the mindset that, oh you are in special education, you cannot [do this]. You are not going to college, you are just going to work. Maybe the kid has a lot more to offer than bagging grocery, which is still a needed job. This doesn’t mean that each child has to settle for this option. I have a kid that has really bent the corner from second grade to third. He brought his Lexile level up from a beginning reader 35 to a 435
Lexile. These are the types of things general education teachers need to be aware of. These children are sometimes being labeled so early that you do not know what they can do. They may process things slower but this does not mean they do not know [the information]. Sometimes the general education teachers do not know or understand what the labels mean. A child may have an ADHD diagnosis. This does not mean that they have an intellectual disability, it just means that I cannot pay attention if I am off my meds [icines]. [Teachers] take those labels and push [the] child to the side. The sad reality is, it is not just the general education teachers that do this, it is the special education teachers as well. With working with this [specific] student this year, I [have] realized that when [a] student is given the chance to rise to the bar, they will try their best to meet it.

We discussed other celebratory moments that students with disabilities have experienced and we realized that if we do our part with the knowledge that we have, we could make PSE a realistic and viable option for the students with disabilities in our district. I asked her to describe the benefits she believed these programs would have for students with ID. She said:

From my personal experience of having a cousin with mild Down’s syndrome in another county, I see that the earlier you start talking about these programs, the more beneficial it can be. My cousin is in the 9th grade and her family is already preparing for the transition. They are looking for institutions that can help her develop her theatrical talents. She has already performed in plays and her family
has really found this to be something that would be an area that would make life
more meaningful for her. This reminds me not to limit my students.

As Becca continued to share her thoughts on what she has witnessed with her cousin, it
was evident that she has had a firsthand encounter of proper transitions into the programs.
The interesting thing was that she described the preparation for the program as being as
beneficial as the actual attendance. She accredited this benefit to the involvement of her
cousin’s parents and the relationship they developed with the institution they wanted her
to attend. As the interview came to an end, we examined our expectations as special
education teachers and discussed ways we could do more to support students in each of
our own professional settings.

Nelly: PSE Representative and Former Special Education Teacher

The next interview was conducted with, Nelly, a PSE representative from a local
university who was also a former K-12 special education teacher.

The PSE program that was being developed at the university where Nelly worked
was designed for students with more significant intellectual disabilities who would be
accessing college courses on the audit track. Students would receive a certificate of
completion once done. Currently, the program had not started but the institution was
looking to accept it is first cohort for the Fall of 2017. I shared the findings from my
investigation of the PSE programs that were available in Georgia with Nelly, and then
asked her to explain her relationship with students with disabilities. She reported:

In the past, I have been public special education teacher for 28 years. I taught
everything from preschool to high school in that setting, both as a classroom
teacher and a building coordinator. Programs were created to service them appropriately and try to think outside of the box for the kids that don’t fit the round peg that the law creates. Now, my role is creating that environment on the college level. As I am doing that, I am working with K-12 [personnel] to let them know what these programs are about and what they need to do to prepare the students [for] the programs. There is still a gap because there are kids who graduated in the past few years, before these programs started blossoming, that I think need to be reached by our program. So we are looking at some creative ways of doing that. But ultimately, our goal is to parallel what every general education student can do. They can hunt and shop for colleges just like their siblings and be able to make that choice on what will meet their needs. Every program has a slightly different focus, but the ultimate goal is to really have them be employable and become productive citizens in their community. This approach will work for your students with ID and developmental delays. For students with more significant disabilities than these, there really is not much out there for them educationally after high school. At our academy, our goal is to get them to live independently, that does not mean totally by themselves. It may be with a roommate or a house mate. Some may still need to reside with a parent or someone in close proximity. They will also be offered a job in the community. They will begin with internships on campus with us. As they work through the stages of the programs, they can begin transition opportunities in the community.
It was obvious that Nelly had great experience in the special education setting. I informed her that as a special education teacher, I never knew about these PSE programs until now. I asked her to share her knowledge of these programs as a K-12 special education teacher. She stated:

Having been at the high school for part of my time, I was always looking at what could happen next. At one point, we had some very progressive directors that were actually into what happened to these students after high school. At the high school, they were offered opportunities to [participate in] different trades that they could easily generalize in their communities. Then a new director came in and said oops, we are not allowed to do this anymore, we have to do traditional. There was no explaining that they were still getting the content concepts in these skills. My concern at that time became, what are these kids going to do? There was never any training about the programs existing and this is what is out there. These are the things that we should have been teaching students and preparing parents for. So now that I am immersed in the world, I was pulled my last two years as a K-12 teacher to help develop the program at the local university, then I started becoming more aware of it. But still, that information was not made available for the high school staff.

I told her that her experiences were consistent with the data collected from the participant survey. There were a few participants that were knowledgeable about this transition option but as a group, they did not know much about it. At this point, my biggest questions for Nelly were: What can be done to bridge this gap between K-12 and
PSE programs? With your knowledge from a K-12 perspective and now a PSE program developer, and knowing the needs of the teachers and what the programs offer, what can we do to better service these students? Nelly explained:

The PSE programs that are up and going are a part of a consortium. So whenever we are out at conferences and workshops, we represent the consortium. So if what my institution has to offer is not for the student, we are able to recommend them to other services at other institutions. We have started teacher training sessions. The roadblock that we are having there is that teachers are not being released to attend the session. It is an all-day session. For example, in this county, the transition coordinator attended and four high school staff. There was no middle school staff that was allowed to come. This process really needs to start at elementary.

I shared with her the idea of the transition process beginning at the elementary level as it was brought up in an interview with another participant who believed that we should begin early to start adequately identifying students that would benefit from PSE programs. I asked Nelly to describe how the teachers that attended the session responded to information presented at the all-day training. How did she perceive their perceptions? She responded:

They were thrilled. They can’t wait. We have been in communication with them informally, not through any direct channels just because we were in the schools so much supervising students. I also have two students with ID that volunteer with me at the soup kitchen whose parents are also excited about the program.
beginning. So, until we get permission to do something formal, we are using these informal chances to get the word out. Teachers were ecstatic to hear about this. We have also presented to the regional parent mentors. After that presentation, I started receiving phone calls from parents and I was able to give them information on what the child needed and documents to ask for at her school. We also go to all of the resource fairs in the surrounding counties. As we finalize steps for our programs, I am going to start scheduling time to go out into the schools to disseminate this information.

I asked Nelly if there was anything else she could think of to minimize this gap. She said:

I think people like you who are starting to do dissertations and research on the programs [are needed]. The data were still very limited; the programs are not that old. There are about 250 programs across the United States. So, the word is spreading. We do a State of the Art conference and inclusive postsecondary education is the focus that is open to K-12 teachers, parents and students that may be eligible for the program or are currently in the program. They run concurrent training for PSE staff, parents and teachers to participate in.

In closing of the interview, I asked Nelly to describe how services in the K-12 setting compared to what the student could receive at the college level. She explained:

Students that access college courses for credit will receive accommodations based on regulations of the RCLD and the institution and based on the needs in the documented disability. For the mixed/inclusive approach, they had staff and peer
support, and the course could actually be modified. My job is to go the professor and ask the professor what the student needs to complete for audit. They may say this research paper. Then we can weed out the other things. Maybe the student needs an alternate format, or can the child do an oral presentation or video presentation and to work with the professor to get them to accept this as an alternate form of the research paper. I think at the collegiate level they will be able to get exactly what they need. We do not have to focus on those state mandated tests that K-12 has to. So, we can play around and be creative with their accommodations. They will still have to demonstrate understanding on the concepts. We are able to be more flexible with them and provide something for them that is in their realm of possibilities. There are all kinds of assistive technologies that are available to them.

Nelly stated that services that students could receive in the mixed-model approach would provide a more authentic experience for students as they stride towards completion of the program. We discussed our hope that as advocates continue to get the information to parents, more parents will want this educational experience for their children. At the end of the interview, Nelly stated that PSE representatives from the local institutions are diligently pursuing the K-12 programs to make sure they are visible and available to them. I thanked her for her time and the interview ended.

Susanne: School District Special Education Director

I conducted the final interview with Susanne, the special education director from a local school district. I briefly explained my investigation of the available PSE programs
in the state and presented the findings to her. I then presented one of the questions that 
the participant posed during the survey, and asked her to share her perspective of how 
services at the PSE level compared to those received at the K-12 level. Susanne replied: 

I cannot speak for the college setting; I can only tell you what my perception of 
these services is. I know they have a learning center that provides 
accommodations like books on tape and extended time periods, but as far as a 
teacher sitting one on with you in the class was not offered. To receive these 
services, you would have to actually go to that facility to get the service. I do not 
think there is anybody that actually comes into a classroom and works with the 
student unless the student has like a high disability, maybe a physical disability. 
And I am not sure if the school provides that as much. May be a medical waiver 
could provide that service.

During my investigation of the available services for students with mild to significant ID, 
having an additional support person in the classroom was only offered at a few of the 
institutions for students with significant ID who were auditing courses. Since this was not 
a ready support for most students with ID at the college setting, I asked Susanne how 
comparable the services truly were between the two settings. She responded: 

I just have never heard of anyone going into a college classroom and sitting with a 
student to aid them with that type service. Now, I would think that with 
disabilities such as vision impaired, their services might be a little more in depth. 
But, I think if you are just talking about a mild intellectual disability or learning 
disability, like reading or math, I think you are going to have to take the services
that are suitable to you. I do think that the disability services center does work
with that professor to see what services could be provided to help the student
successfully complete the course. I just don’t think that an additional person
comes into the classroom and helps that one student. I may be wrong, but I don’t
think that happens.

Susanne and I discussed how her limited understanding of comparable services
aligned with the limited knowledge that participants reported during the survey. I
continued the interview by informing her of how I used the transition manual provided by
the state to help me identify the RCLDs and to identify institutions that provided services
for students with significant forms of ID. I asked how she approached this transition
option for this population of students. Susanne explained:

…what really goes on here is that we have a crew that actually comes in and
evaluate the students. More of the severely intellectually disabled students and
students with autism, and disabilities as such, are specifically evaluated to
determine what would be the best setting for them after high school; assess what
their postsecondary options are going to be. For about three or four years, there
was hardly anything available to us. We could barely get them to come. But now,
they have become really involved with the process. They evaluate the students
and sit in on their transition IEP meetings, talking with the parents, the whole nine
yards. I think they are revamping the program with the state. VocRehab services
is really focusing on our students with ID and trying to either get them into a
program, like our training center, or get them into Warm Springs, which is more
of a college setting for students with more significant forms of ID. The students live there and they receive training for a career. Now, it will not be like a doctor or something like that, but it is like culinary art and daily living skills. So that is one big thing that has been pushed with us. I will tell you that I have received numerous emails from different rural colleges that are starting scholarship programs for our kids that have autism or mild/moderate forms of ID in which these students can attend these colleges and universities. The thing is, they are not going to earn college credit. They are attending to enhance their life skills; to learn how to live more independently; and to learn an employable [skill].

Susanne added that the last transition option that they like to explore is the local training center. The center provided services that could enhance their daily living skills and make them employable. She reported there are a few assisted living facilities in the area that allow this population to live in apartments and be somewhat independent. There are people there to oversee the facility and aid them as needed. The local training center provided this option for students with ID and also educated their parents. I asked Susanne to explain her perceptions of how parents responded to transitioning into another area outside of the work community. She stated:

We have a group of parents that will receive this transition option with open arms. They are going to push their child to get whatever it is they can get. They want as much information to be fed to them so that they can be fully informed about what is available to their child. Then we have a group of parents that are scared to death to let their child out of their sight. Some do not even believe that their child could
work in the local grocery store for an hour. This is one of the primary goals of VocRehab. They are trying to ensure that parents are educated. With VocRehab attending the transition meetings, they are able to directly inform parents. As I stated before, for about three or four years, VocRehab was not very resourceful. I think the state has revamped the program which has been for our benefit. There is a VocRehab representative at the transition meetings to aid in a successful transition for the students. Every year I have to turn in a postsecondary report. It shows the status of students that graduated a year or two ago and what they are currently doing. It is my job to call and remain in contact with them to see if the child is working or if the child is in school or if the child is just sitting at home. I have to complete these follow ups every year or two.

Susanne expressed full agreement with having the PSE present at the meeting. She added that an outside person could have a better chance at convincing parents of the benefits of the programs than the teacher that has been interacting with the student and parent for the past four years. The PSE’s knowledge and firsthand experience is what is needed to present this transition option as tangible and realistic and to help parents see the bigger picture.

We continued to discuss the tunnel vision that teachers sometimes possess when it comes to the reality of what the student can and cannot do. We both agreed that having someone from VocRehab present and/or a PSE representative present will be very beneficial to properly transitioning the student. I asked Susanne to describe what
initiatives could be developed to better the relationship between PSE programs and K-12 programs, parents and student involvement. She replied:

The number one thing is parent involvement. We can provide VocRehab, we can do it with the colleges, but if we cannot get the parents to recognize that this thing could work and that their child can receive this kind of service… And I am not talking about your learning disabled kids that are completely aware of this, I am talking about your students that are better fitted for a place like Warm Springs or a mixed-model approach to PSE… If only I could get the parents to see it. Once they see it, then they will want it. I think that if we can get it where people can actually see the training and the things that are going on, then it will be more realistic for them. One thing I would like for us to get in our district is a parent mentor. Currently, we do not have one, but I think this will aid in helping us make all transition options known and available to our students and families. The parent mentor would be involved with what is trending in the world of disabilities but also be on the school side with knowing what you cannot push because the funding is not there- and PSE really has nothing to do with funding. The parent initiative would be a great asset to our program. We have been in discussion with a surrounding county about sharing the cost of a parent mentor program since we work so closely with them. Of course you would have to have two parents to represent each county. They will each have separate duties and responsibilities but the ability to link up and work together would be much more productive for both parties. I have been in contact with other parent mentors in surrounding counties.
From speaking with them, they are able to head off several projects that the director does not have to directly oversee, which is what I am doing now. It is not that I have a problem with this, but I want to give each project the attention that it needs. I just don’t have time to do that currently.

I agreed with the need of having a parent mentor. This position expands outside of PSE placement but all services that are available for all students with all disabilities. Not only would the parent mentor provide information to the teachers but they would educate the parents as well. We discussed the importance of having support professionals that are resources for the parents but also know the rules and regulations of the school district. These services could be beneficial to parents and teachers who are not as well-versed in special education processes. Susanne and I discussed the reality of how teachers, both special education and general education teachers, are often times blocked by the student’s ID label and are not really providing the interventions that are needed. She shared:

I see that a lot. We have a group of parents that think that if their child has an IEP that they are going to pass. They are going to pass and they are not going to have to worry about testing and all of that kind of stuff. Then you have parents that completely want their child out of special education. Our special education population is like 18% which is really high- one of the highest in the state. The average is 10%-12%. We are working on that. Our problem is we are over-identifying students who do not need to be in special education and we are not evaluating them enough to get them out. Just because you were eligible early on under the category of significant developmentally delayed (SDD), does not mean
that you will continue to meet eligibility criteria. We need to make sure that we are doing our part in the area of testing to see if any of those gaps have been closed.

Susanne identified testing as one of the critical actions in closing the opportunity gaps for these students. By the time the student is ready to transition from elementary to middle school, testing should have been updated to determine if the child is still eligible for services. Susanne described how she directs transition services for her district:

In our district, we have two major transitions before they get to high school and then of the course the big one once they get to high school. In eighth grade you really start working on the transition plan and you build on it ninth grade and forward. We start with a career inventory in the eighth grade. Now, our fifth grade group has to have a transition meeting from elementary school to the middle school. During these transition meetings, we were determining how the student could get more services at the middle school to help. This plan of action has been revamped. Now, we focus on keeping the student in the general education setting as much as possible before trying alternate services. In this meeting, the committee also discusses the changes in expectations from elementary to middle school. No one is going to be there to hold your hand. It is important for parents to understand that there will be a big difference in expectations once they make it to the middle school. And research has shown that resource classes are not the best setting for students as they matriculate through K-12 schooling. If the child is functioning on a third grade math level in a resource setting, they will never be
exposed to the sixth grade math standard to even attempt to master it. In the eighth grade transition meeting, the eighth grade and ninth grade teachers get together for an advisement night at the high school. It is designed to have the committee transition the child to the next level at the next level. They are able to present and discuss the challenges the child may face. The final transition occurs when the child is ready to leave the high school. We try to make the transition into a PSE program as smooth as possible as well as the transition into other postsecondary options.

I noticed that this approach to transition services seemed to prepare students for educational opportunities after high school. As students’ educational level demands more and more independence, it is critical that we are preparing our students to become as independent as possible. Susanne explained:

In the 11th and 12th grades, the teachers get together to do a summary of performance for the students. They discuss all of the services that are available at the high school and discuss what their options for after high school. VocRehab comes in during this process as well. 12th grade is the year that you have to sit down with the kids and determine what their plans are for after high school. You are not going to the NFL so what is your back up plan. Even though you have the transition meeting, you still have to sit down with that the child and their parents to have the real talk with them about what it is their child is to do after high school. I do think if we had a parent mentor, it would help us tremendously. Most times, parents will listen to other parents before they listen to teachers. The good
thing about the parent mentor is that they have to have a child with a disability. This makes them more empathetic and relatable to other parents of students with disabilities. We do have a great parent advocacy group that comes to some of our events to help parents. She comes in to the meetings for the purpose of providing understanding to the parents. She wants to make sure that they fully understand what has been communicated to them and where to go from there.

As the interview continued, we discussed the available programs in our area. I informed her about the mixed-model institutions in Georgia and the general services they provided. I offered to send her the list of institutions that were serviced under a RCLD in Georgia in an effort to get this information to parents, teachers and students immediately. At the end of the interview, I thanked Susanne for her time and participation.

Thematic Analysis

After the interviews were completed, I began the thematic analysis process. I used memoing and coding to initially analyze the data. This process allowed me to identify the commonalities in perceptions among the participants and develop themes within the data. Tom was knowledgeable because he was actually undergoing the transition process with his daughter. Tom had done extensive research on this transition option which made the knowledge he added very beneficial to the study. Forest and Roxy were novices on the subject. A common thread between these two participants is that they were both concerned about the feasibility of students with ID attending a college or university and being successful. They questioned how students with ID would be served in this setting compared to how they are served in the K-12 setting. Another common thread was their
desire to know how beneficial these programs could be for students with mild and significant ID. Becca, Nelly, and Susanne presented extensive knowledge and understanding of PSE programs for students with ID. Becca and Nelly reported that their knowledge of these programs was obtained from other services outside of the K-12 setting. When comparing Becca, Nelly, Forest, Roxy and Tom’s limited gain of knowledge from the K-12 program to Susanne’s depth of knowledge, it was evident that there was a definite disconnect in information from the special education administrators to the teachers.

Emergent Themes

During the data analysis process, I identified 229 initial descriptive words and/or phrases (descriptors) in the data among all interviews. Once combined, there were a collective total of 185 descriptors. I organized these descriptors into 14 codes: available services, PSE programs, collaborations, perceptions, level of knowledge, preparations, benefits of PSE, postsecondary options, relationships, transitions, needs, use of IEPs, gaps, and parental involvement. Once the data were coded, I determined six emergent themes to be representative of the participants’ perceptions of PSE programs:

1. Collaboration
2. Postsecondary Options/Available Services
3. PSE/K-12 Disconnect
4. Perceptions of PSE Programs
5. PSE Preparation and Needs
6. Potential PSE Benefits for Students with ID.
Parental involvement, collaborations, and relationships were the codes combined to develop the theme Collaboration. During the interviews, participants reported a lack in collaborative efforts between critical persons of the transition process. All participants expressed disconnects among PSE programs, K-12 programs, teachers, and parents. For instance, Tom, a parent of a child with an ID, had to initiate the transition process for a PSE program for his daughter. He was not given any information about this transition option from his daughter’s teachers or other personnel. Forest, Nelly, and Becca were all once high school special education teachers but they reported that they were not given information about PSE programs to use as a transition option. Becca reported that she gained superficial knowledge of these programs while she was obtaining a Vision Impaired endorsement through a regional center. Roxy, the general education teacher, was completely oblivious to this opportunity for students with ID.

However, the special education director for the county reported a wealth of knowledge on PSE programs. She was aware of local institutions’ processes for students who needed services in the inclusion setting. She offered information on available services from these institutions, such as books on tape and extended time for exams. The services that she reported were some of the same services that I found during my investigation. She also offered information on a well-known facility, Warm Springs, which offered similar services as a college or university for students with significant forms of ID. She informed me of the waiver process that students who did not obtain a traditional diploma could undergo to seek admission into these institutions. She also
mentioned that institutions in the area often send her emails about programs and services they provide for students with disabilities, including ID.

While it is fitting for the special education director for a school system to be well-versed in the many areas concerning special education processes, including PSE programs, the wealth of this knowledge should not be stored solely at the central office. Special education administrators should actively collaborate with their teachers and parents so that they are continually disseminating information as they receive it. The sharing of information impacts the relationships that PSE representatives could have with teachers at the K-12 setting. The relationship that one has with another directly impacts their ability to collaborate.

The IEP committee is usually comprised of the parent, student, special education teacher, general education teacher, related service personnel and a local education agent (LEA) – who is typically another teacher, a coordinator, or someone in leadership. Participants in the interviews expressed notable disconnects in parent to parent relationships, parent to teacher relationships, special education to general education teacher relationships, and PSE to K-12 relationships.

For instance, Nelly has experience teaching students with disabilities at the elementary, middle, high and now postsecondary level. She has transitioned students with disabilities at each level of transition. She reported that she was not made aware of the possibility for students with ID to attend college. She was under the impression that these programs were not available. The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 was developed to ensure that students with disabilities were afforded the opportunity to access
educational pursuits on college and university campuses. This Act passed during the time when Nelly was working for a public K-12 school system. Could this gap in knowledge be contributed to lack of knowledge by the special education administrators or could it be that the information was not disseminated from the administrators to the teachers? The lack of information dissemination seems to be a critical inhibiting factor that is impacting how teachers collaborate with special education administrators.

The lack of collaboration among these individuals directly impacts the knowledge that special education teachers have to disperse to general education teachers, parents, and students. This lack of information could directly impact the input that novice teachers may provide as members of an IEP committee. Teachers new to the world of special education rely on the special education teacher to provide the expertise needed to meet the needs of the students with ID. For example, Roxy was a novice general education teacher who was not knowledgeable of special education processes. She heavily relied on the special education teacher’s ability to provide appropriate accommodations for the students in her class in order to meet their needs. During the interview, she was asked to communicate her thoughts on students with ID accessing PSE opportunities on college campuses. She was unaware of this possibility and the role she could play in the transition process, yet she believed that this option could be beneficial for students.

As a special education teacher, I have witnessed IEP meetings and committees that functioned solely for the purpose of meeting the deadline, and where the special education teachers were savvy in producing the required paperwork and conducting the meeting but there was little to no collaboration between the special education teachers
and other committee members. The most obvious disconnect I have seen is between the special education teacher and the general education teacher. I have observed that some general education teachers provide superficial input for the sake of maintaining a perception of participation. I have also noticed the lack of collaboration between parents and other members of the committee.

My experiences have shown me that parents are often the least involved members of the IEP committee. I have witnessed IEPs that were already written by teachers and then presented to the parent, but laws such as IDEIA (2004) required teachers to ask for parental input. From my experience, this requirement has been vague and lacking in substance. However, this was not the case for Tom. Tom was very active in his daughter’s IEP meetings and transition process. He reported that he initiated the direction in which he wanted his daughter to transition after high school. He also reported that there was little support from teachers and other personnel from the K-12 setting. His situation demonstrated a lack of collaboration between parents and teachers.

Lack of collaboration, undeveloped relationships, and insufficient parental involvement are factors that contribute to the injustices students with disabilities often experience. These factors also contribute to this marginalized group not accessing all opportunities available to them. As an advocate for students with disabilities, I now understand that the success of students with disabilities accessing available services is heavily impacted by the willingness of the IEP committee members to collaborate and develop authentic relationships that involve parental input, in an effort to provide appropriate and meaningful services for the student during all levels of transitions.
Postsecondary Options /Available Services

The Postsecondary Options /Available Services theme consisted of codes concerning the use of IEPs, transitions, available services, and PSE programs. I believe that IEPs are critical components of a student with a disability’s success in any educational setting. I also believe that it is important that members of the committee work collaboratively to develop an IEP that is reflective of the student and the set expectations for them. This document is one that follows the student in all academic settings and community settings.

Becca, a self-contained special education teacher, reported that how and when the IEP is developed greatly influences how teachers approach and perceive a student with a disability. One concern that she brought up was the early identification of students, also known as labeling. She reported that often times the IEP did not explicitly explain the nature of the disability. There were sections of the IEP that asked for the special education teacher to describe the student’s present level of performance and how it related to the identified disability, but it did not provide details about the disability itself. I believe that this is one of the factors that contributed to teachers’ lack of knowledge and understanding of disabilities and appropriate identification. I also believe that the IEP process is an area that can be revamped to include categories that can educate parents and teachers on the isolated disability.

As a special education teacher, I can recall providing information on how students’ behaviors may align to the identified disability to describe how they meet eligibility criteria. But I do not ever recall explicitly writing in the IEP characteristics of
the disability to show how a student’s behaviors coincide with the disability. I truly believe that creating a category for the explanation of the disability would be a great step in continually educating the parents as well as the teachers. My experiences have taught me that in order to properly identify a student, the student must be properly evaluated.

I was trained to write IEPs based on the results of psychological evaluations that described the strengths and weaknesses of the student and described how the needs of the students should be met. These evaluations continue until a child exits the K-12 setting or no longer met eligibility criteria. Tom was a very active member of his daughter’s IEP committee and expressed the importance of having his daughter evaluated and results communicated thoroughly and accurately in his daughter’s IEP, especially while she transitioned from the K-12 setting into the PSE setting. He reported that he contacted the school psychologist to have his daughter evaluated because he knew that updated testing was a requirement for her to be accepted into the PSE program. He understood the IEP process and how proper use of the IEP could grant him the results he was looking for as his daughter continued the transition process.

Tom knew how the IEP was to be used during the transition meetings and this is what he expected. Nelly, a former K-12 special education teacher now a PSE program instructor, expressed the need for educational opportunities for teachers and parents on the transition process. She believed that transition meetings should not begin at the high school level. Instead, she believed that transitions should be a vertical process that begins at the elementary school and continues after the child exits the K-12 setting. She also believed that early exposure to the transition process would produce greater benefits as
the child pursued his/her educational endeavors. Forest shared similar thoughts on the need for transition education and awareness among teachers and parents. This lack of knowledge on the transition process could directly contribute to the lack of knowledge teachers and parents possessed towards the PSE setting. I believe that if advocates were informed about the transition process and available applicable transition options there could be an influx of students with disabilities participating in PSE programs on college campuses as well as other relevant transition options and available services.

All participants reported concerns regarding available services for students with ID once they exited the K-12 setting. The most prominent concern regarding these services was available/comparable accommodations at the PSE setting. I hope that some of the PSE program information I shared with these participants will be shared with more teachers and advocates. For example, now that Nelly was a PSE representative, it would be ideal for her to remember the lack of information she had as a K-12 teacher and begin to establish authentic, professional relationships with teachers and collaborate on ways to increase access to PSE programs for this population of students.

PSE/K-12 Disconnect

The *PSE/ K-12 Disconnect* theme evolved from a collection of codes surrounding the disconnect between PSE and K-12 programs and the level of knowledge participants displayed about these topics. During the interviews, all participants were provided opportunities to express their level of knowledge concerning PSE opportunities for students with mild to significant intellectual disabilities. Roxy offered no input on the idea of students with ID attending a college or university. This option was completely
new to her. Despite this being the first time that she heard of this possibility, she expressed great optimism for students with ID accessing these programs. Forest reported very basic knowledge of students with ID attending college based on his experiences as a high school football coach. The idea of students with more significant forms of ID attending college was new to him and he was eager to know more about this possibility.

Tom was very knowledgeable of this possibility for students with ID, due to his self-initiated research on the topic, but he received no information from the K-12 representatives or his daughter’s IEP committee members. Becca displayed a low level of knowledge on this transition option based on a course that she had taken at a regional center while obtaining her Vision Impaired endorsement. Again, she received no information from the K-12 setting where she worked. Nelly was well-versed in this transition option for students with ID. Her new profession required her to retain adequate amounts of information regarding specifics to PSE programs. She also served on the developing committee to initiate a mixed-model approach to PSE programs for students with significant forms of ID. Nelly reported that the information she possessed about these programs were not offered to her as a teacher in the K-12 setting. Susanne reported a wealth of knowledge about these programs and what they could offer students with ID. When discussing the PSE option for students with significant forms of ID, she was able to offer names of programs like Warm Springs and Georgia Southern University for students with mild forms of ID. She also added that Georgia Southern University was in the process of developing a program for students with significant forms of ID. She was able to express her concerns about the financial strains families may experience when
sending their child with significant ID to college. She presented the idea of the waiver process and the developing special education scholarship.

On an initial study of the trends in the interview data, I compared the difference in knowledge from Forest, Roxy, Tom, Becca and Nelly to that of Susanne, I initially thought there was not a disconnect between K-12 and PSE programs and attributed Susanne’s bank of knowledge to her career. After extensive reviews of the data, however, it became clear that information was not being disseminated from the special education administrators to the classroom teachers. As I reviewed and re-reviewed this finding, I just could not settle for a lack of dissemination of information from the special education administrator as the true cause for this gap. I believed if PSE representatives were actively seeking to inform teachers and parents of this option for students with ID, they would take more aggressive steps to share this information. If the institution representative evaluated the responses they received once the information was dispersed to schools, they could determine which systems needed a different approach to receiving the information. The cause of the informational disconnect seemed to stem from undeveloped relationships between the K-12 and PSE programs. Information sharing could also be inhibited by the lack of collaboration between the two parties.

While investigating the available PSE programs for students with ID, only one of the institutions reported a clear recruitment process. I believed that an adequate recruitment process could enable the two parties to foster a meaningful, ongoing collaborative relationship that will directly benefit the students. This could also increase the knowledge level of special education teachers, general education teachers, and
parents towards the transition process. PSE representatives should be more visible in the K-12 setting in order to build trust from administrators, teachers, students and parents.

Perceptions of PSE Programs

Before this study, most of the participants possessed limited knowledge of PSE programs. During follow-up interviews, I shared the information I compiled on PSE programs in Georgia with participants in order to raise their awareness and provide current information that I hope they will also share with their students and colleagues.

Roxy had not heard of the PSE transition option, but after learning about the PSE programs, she felt that they could be beneficial for students with ID.

Forest was aware that it was possible for students with a mild ID to attend college and receive accommodations. He believed that information about PSE options should be widely available in the K-12 setting and also believed it was important for parents and students to research this transition option for themselves. He said, “The more you know, the better”. He believed that the PSE program information could help him support students in the classroom as well as on the football field.

Tom communicated a positive attitude towards PSE programs for students with ID, but the travel distance required for attendance caused concerns for him about his daughter, who has ID. He used words like ecstatic and excited to describe how he felt about his daughter attending a PSE program. He recommended that parents become proactive and remain active in their child’s transition process.

Becca presented her personal experiences with a cousin who has a mild form of Down’s Syndrome. She reported that her cousin is currently in ninth grade and her
parents have already contacted representatives at PSE programs to start preparing her for the transition process. She expressed that her cousin is working on developing her soft skills and navigating throughout the school independently. Becca noticed that early preparation for the programs had been beneficial for her cousin, her cousin’s parents and her cousin’s teachers. Becca expressed positive expectations for her cousin as she prepared for and hoped to attend a PSE program.

Nelly believed PSE programs can be beneficial for students with ID. She shared that she had begun to attend resource fairs and make herself more visible throughout the K-12 schools. When I asked her how she perceived teachers’ reactions to this transition option, she said that most teachers were thrilled and they could not wait to learn more about these programs. Susanne was very open to receiving additional information about available PSE programs in Georgia. Her only concern was the cost of attendance for students with significant forms of ID.

I believe that teachers want students with disabilities to have access to the same services and opportunities as their non-disabled peers. My initial beliefs were that many teachers had not heard of or knew very little about PSE programs for students with ID. I also believed that as they learned more about these programs, they would be optimistic about the options and share information to support students with ID participating in this educational setting.

PSE Preparations and Needs

The *PSE Preparations and Needs* theme consisted of codes that addressed preparations and current needs, from the participants’ point of view, in order to make the
PSE transition option a tangible one. Forest and Becca expressed the need for teachers to be better informed on the transition process to adequately prepare students for PSE programs. Roxy and Susanne felt that parent and teacher education on the option would be beneficial to prepare students for PSE programs.

Tom and Nelly believed that the K-12 setting should provide educational opportunities for parents and teachers to better inform them on the available PSE programs for their child with a disability.

When analyzing the needs the participants presented, all participants expressed the need of having continuous updated information on PSE programs disseminated to them. I believed this break in information directly contributed to lack of knowledge the teachers possessed towards this transition option. Susanne reported that she received emails from institutions in the area. It was evident that this information had not been dispersed from her to her teachers. Forest and Becca, teachers who work under Susanne’s direction, reported not knowing much, if anything, about these programs. Becca reported that the information she possessed was gained from an outside source.

Forest and Roxy reported the need for defining the roles that teachers play in the transition process. This need could be addressed through ongoing professional developments, as suggested by Becca and Nelly, to ensure that all teachers were aware of their positions in the context of PSE transitions and how they impact the success of the student. Susanne suggested the need for a parent liaison or mentor to help parents buy into the idea of their child attending a PSE program on a college campus. This person could be responsible for finding the most current information on these programs and
disseminating it to interested teachers and parents. If teachers and parents would like more information on these programs, the parent mentor could be a person of contact to aid in the successful transition into these programs.

Potential Benefits of PSE Programs for Students with ID

The *Potential Benefits of PSE Programs for Students with ID* theme described ways in which students with ID could benefit from attending PSE programs. Each interview participant expressed hopeful outcomes for students with ID completing one of these programs. Forest reported that he believed if students with ID were to gain access to these programs, it would help them to reach their full potential. He also believed that it would develop them into responsible members of society. Becca hoped that students would develop soft skills needed to function in social settings and develop skills to enhance their self-confidence. Tom and Nelly believed that PSE programs could provide equal access at colleges and universities and ensure that students with ID were offered more opportunities for admission and equitable services as their non-disabled peers.

Tom, Nelly, Becca, and Susanne hoped that through PSE programs, students would learn skills that would allow them to function as independent, productive, functioning adult members of society. Roxy was very optimistic about the benefits of PSE programs. She believed that with encouragement from adults and peers, students with ID could learn to become self-advocates.

I believe that this is one of the most beneficial skills that an individual with a disability could learn. Self-advocacy is one skill that can help minimize the inequality gap for students with ID.
Summary

Georgia has made access to PSE programs possible for students with mild to significant ID. Students with ID have the option of continuing their education on a college or university campus alongside their peers without disabilities. Courses may be offered to this population for credit or audit purposes. Students with significant ID are able to transition to a Comprehensive Transition Program in which they access to financial aid and grants in addition to supplemental scholarships that may be needed.

Findings from this study revealed that the majority of participants possessed limited knowledge of PSE programs in Georgia. Participants could not rate the level of involvement of K-12 services that prepared students with ID for education after high school. Participants were unsure of available funds that could assist students with ID with this educational option. The majority of participants perceived that access to education after high school on a college or university campus would be beneficial for students with ID as they transition into adulthood, but perceived a disconnect in relationships and information sharing between PSE programs and K-12 schools. These inadequate relationships impact teachers’ and parents’ ability to collaborate and provide appropriate transition options for students.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This study was designed to address two primary concerns: A gap in access to postsecondary education (PSE) programs for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in the state of Georgia, and a gap in the research literature concerning the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with ID towards these PSE programs. Postsecondary education (PSE) programs for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) offer transition options (Grigal et al., 2012; Hart, et al., 2006; Pothier & Devlin, 2007), and federal laws mandated that students with disabilities are eligible to receive special education services until the age of 22, including access to life-long learning opportunities after high school (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Regrettably, many parents, teachers, and advocates of students with ID are not aware of these PSE options. Without increased awareness, students with ID will not have access to the PSE programs that may be greatly beneficial to them as they transition to independent adulthood (Thoma et al., 2011).

This study was conducted in a small, rural region in southeast Georgia in which much of the population experience life at or below the poverty line. I believe that if students with ID are afforded the opportunity to experience postsecondary education on college campuses, it will not only bring a sense of fulfillment to the individual, but it will foster a sense of honor for the community. I also believe that if students with ID in this
community were to actually enroll and attend a college or university, it will encourage their non-disabled peers, and others in the community, to pursue their goals.

In an effort to provide teachers and parents of students with intellectual disabilities (ID) with the accurate and relevant information, this study examined postsecondary education (PSE) programs available for students with ID. Using critical disability theory (Giroux, 2003; Yee, 2011) as a conceptual framework, the purpose of this study was to identify postsecondary education (PSE) programs currently available for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in the state of Georgia and to examine the perceptions of teachers and parents of students with ID towards these programs. This study addressed two research questions:

1) What postsecondary education options are available for students with intellectual disabilities in the state of Georgia, and what do these programs offer?

2) What are the perceptions of teachers and parents of students with intellectual disabilities towards these postsecondary education programs?

First, I investigated ten current PSE programs, including six that offered programs for students with significant ID and four that served students with mild ID in an inclusive setting with appropriate accommodations. Next, I shared the PSE program information with parents and teachers of students with ID, and examined their perceptions toward these PSE programs. Data were collected using a program survey to identify and organize information about the PSE programs, a Likert-type scale survey to collect feedback from 22 parents and teachers of students with ID, and follow-up interviews with six of these
participants. Data analysis included memoing, coding, developing and refining themes, and interpreting findings through the lens of critical disability theory.

Limitations

The first notable limitation is the region in which this study was conducted. This study only focused on available PSE programs for students with ID in the state of Georgia. Only colleges/universities managed by one of the three Regents Centers for Learning Disorders that provided services to students with disabilities under its guidelines were explored. The study did not research every institution registered with the University Systems of Georgia to determine if there were other institutions in the state that offered services to students with ID. There could possibly be additional institutions in Georgia that offer PSE programs for students with ID.

Additionally, this study was limited to parents of students with ID and teachers who have had experience serving as a member of an IEP committee for a student with ID. The study’s focus was the knowledge parents and teachers of students with ID had concerning PSE transition options. This study was limited to 22 participants from one school district in Georgia. Consequently, findings cannot be generalized to other regions or populations. However, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into the unique perceptions of the participants in this particular case, so a qualitative case study methodology was used to create rich descriptions and allow participants to have an active voice in the study.
Relationship to Literature

American society has made advances toward normalizing and equalizing opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have become mainstreamed into pertinent areas of society and have been included as needed members of today’s culture. Laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, formulated an official definition of the term “disability” which has greatly impacted their civil rights protections. It is my belief that such notions toward clarity has thrust the advancements of civil rights and accessibility into the era that we are in today.

Critical Theory provided philosophers with the lens to view the new possibilities for persons with disabilities (Pothier & Devlin, 2006b; McLaren, 1989). Institutions, such as the Frankfurt School’s Institute for Social research, heavily relied on the teachings of Marxism to influence their perceptions and approaches to the world around them via concepts such as domination and oppression (Pothier & Devlin, 2006b; McLaren, 1989). As this movement became more and more prominent, many philosophers began to realize that this model of power created oppressive situations for marginalized groups, i.e. persons with disabilities, women, and minorities (McLaren, 1989). In response to this realization, Critical Theory was developed to expose these issues and to bring possible justification to these groups (Horkheimer, 1972). Initially, critical theory was influenced by teachings and powers induced by Marxism (Horkheimer, 1972). This notion carried over much of the oppressive and dominant characteristics that limited the resources and progressions for persons with disabilities (Horkheimer, 1972).
One of the biggest obstacles that impacted the pace in which disabilities was transformed into cultural dynamics was the way that disabilities were viewed by society (McLaren, 1989; Pothier & Devlin, 2006b). Marxist critical theorists believed that humans, as change agents, had the power to influence conditions in the environment through effective reflection and response (Horkheimer, 1972; McLaren, 1989; Pothier & Devlin, 2006b). This idea was found to be true through the progression of civil rights and access for persons with disabilities (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). I believe this once oppressed population has transformed the way they are viewed within modern society as their voices have become loud and notable.

Critical disability theory helped solidified their voices and created a platform for advocates to utilize to support their stance (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). The needs of persons with disabilities had a voice that was viable and relevant to the movements within social justice (Horkheimer, 1972; McLaren, 1989; Pothier & Devlin, 2006b). The works of critical theory and critical disability drove the push for equalizing and normalizing persons with disabilities (Pothier & Devlin, 2006b; McLaren, 1989).

One area in which this ID population has made great advancements is in the area of postsecondary education. Students with disabilities are able to use federal and state funds to offset the cost of tuition and other fees associated with these college opportunities (Chambers, 2004). IDEIA (2004), HEOA (2008), ADA (1990) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) are laws that were enhanced to specify rights for students with disabilities to access education opportunities after high school at the same level as their non-disabled peers. These laws have been found to be effective at ensuring
that students with disabilities had access to this transition option (ADA, 1990; HEOA, 2008; IDEIA, 2004; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 1973).

Postsecondary education (PSE) programs for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) have blossomed in the state of Georgia (Chambers et al., 2004). Colleges and universities across Georgia have made efforts to include students with disabilities into academic and social settings (Grigal & Hart, 2010). These changes have afforded students with disabilities with equal opportunities to an inclusive education as their non-disabled peers (Chambers et al., 2004; Grigal & Hart, 2010).

PSE programs have become a viable transition option for students with ID as they exit public K-12 education (Chambers et al., 2004). According to the findings in this study, teachers and parents of students with ID perceived these programs to be potentially beneficial for students with ID. With limited knowledge and awareness of how these programs functioned with the transition process (Thoma et al., 2011), participants in this study were willing to learn more about these PSE programs.

A few of the participants from the follow-up interviews in the study reported the need for having more parental involvement at the elementary school level in order to inform parents of this educational opportunity early in the K-12 setting. I believe that if the transition process started at the elementary level and continued from grade to grade, it would increase the awareness and understanding of PSE programs for parents and teachers of students with ID. I also believe that proper transitions from grade to grade would better familiarize the student and parent of the transition process and prepare them for the ultimate transition into adulthood. As PSE programs become more prominent
within K-12 schooling, I believe more students with ID will have access to education across college and university campuses in Georgia.

Interpretation of Findings

This study was designed to investigate available PSE programs in Georgia and the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with ID towards these programs. Data collected during this study revealed that currently, there were 30 colleges and universities that offered state-approved accommodations and services for students with disabilities, including ID. These institutions were supervised by one of three Regents Centers for Learning Disorders (RCLD). It was the responsibility of the RCLD to ensure that institutions were provided the supports needed to offer appropriate services to students with disabilities based on their documented disability.

The three RCLD centers in Georgia, Georgia Southern University, Georgia State University, and University of Georgia, supervised 30 inclusive PSE programs across the state. Based on the literature of PSE programs reported by Grigal et al., (2012) I found that six of these programs fit the mixed-model of inclusion. These six programs offered access to college audit courses in the general academic setting. These courses were combined with courses that focused on the development of students’ daily living skills as well as employment enhancement. Students who were enrolled in the mixed-model of inclusion obtained a certificate upon completion.

Comprehensive Transition Programs were also available for students with more significant ID. Students enrolled in one of these programs were able to attain the same financial opportunities as their non-disabled peers. Federal and state funding and suitable
grants and scholarships were available to assist with financial needs related to tuition and other fees. Work study was an option to support additional financial needs as well as training for off-campus employment. All programs in this study required employment training and/or internships as a component for program completion.

Students with milder forms of ID inclusively accessed college credit courses with appropriate accommodations based on their documented disability. Students with ID who enrolled in an inclusive PSE program were able to fully participate in all campus activities and take advantage of all clubs, organizations, and other amenities that were offered by the college or university.

Based on the PSE programs overseen by one of the three RCLDs in Georgia, all institutions required that students completed and exited high school. A few of the mixed-model inclusive programs required that students were able to read on a third- to fourth-grade level. Students must have been able to function independently with some to no direct supervision. Although most programs offered peer support as a social aid in the program, it was critical that students were able to navigate the college/university campus with little to no support. Many programs also stated that students with ID must not possess significant emotional or behavior conditions that required intense interventions from personnel.

I used the survey, *Perceptions of Education after High School*, to collect data in order to determine how participants perceived these PSE programs for students with ID. Findings revealed that the participants possessed limited knowledge of these programs. Collectively, participants could not provide much insight of these programs and how
students with ID could access this transition option. All of the participants were professional educators, with at least a bachelor’s degree. They have first-hand knowledge of collegial opportunities. None of the participants had a disability, but each participant was a teacher or parent of student with ID.

As I reflected on my own college experience, I could not recall encountering a peer that was identified as intellectually disabled. It was not common to see this population of students on campus. Why was this? Research showed that in the 1980s, there was a great push for compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It “protected otherwise-qualified persons with disabilities from exclusion, denial of benefits, or discrimination by PSE institutions or programs that received federal benefits” (Thoma et al., 2011, p. 112). As an advocate for students with disabilities, I am grateful for these provisions. I believe that these advances have made numerous opportunities available for students with ID.

The data from the survey could not holistically explain why there is still a notable gap in college access for students with ID, but results showed that teachers and parents of students with ID at the K-12 level possessed limited knowledge of this transition option. The follow-up interviews were critical to helping me understand the true disconnect. During the memoing, coding, and thematic analysis process of this study, there were a few ideas that struck me as being the core to this issue (i.e., missed opportunities, lack of knowledge, dissemination of information, etc….). These ideas were potential or perhaps partial explanations as to why we still experienced a significant gap in PSE access for students with disabilities in comparison to their non-disabled peers.
As I reviewed and re-reviewed data collected from the survey and interviews, it seemed that a greater issue was contributing to this gap. The thematic analysis process revealed the participants perceived that their lack of knowledge of these programs was due to undeveloped relationships and collaborations between PSE representatives, K-12 representatives, teachers, parents and students. Six themes emerged:

1. Collaboration
2. PS Options/Available Services
3. PSE/K-12 Disconnect
4. Perceptions of PSE Programs
5. Preparations and Needs
6. Potential Benefits of PSE Programs for Students with ID.

While analyzing the codes within each theme, the connections all related to a lack of collaborative efforts and undeveloped relationships. Governmental authorities have made provisions for students with disabilities to access these PSE programs. Findings from this study revealed that legal restrictions were not the prohibiting factor impacting students with ID access to this transition option. Instead, it was the lack of knowledge and awareness of the available PSE programs among K-12 personnel. This could be directly contributed to the lack of disseminated information from special education administrators. According to Susanne, the special education director for the school district in this study, the PSE representatives were dispersing information about the programs. However, there appeared to be a lapse in the information being transmitted to teachers and parents.
Inadequate relationships between PSE and K-12 representatives directly influenced the success of these programs becoming tangible options for students with ID after high school. The less teachers knew about these programs, the less they had to offer parents and students. The development of authentic relationships, with the success of the student as the focus, among PSE representatives, K-12 representatives, parents, and students could greatly impact the level of cohesiveness that is demonstrated across an IEP committee.

These improved relationships could establish trust and interdependence among committee members who could then support transitions that are suitable and relevant to students’ abilities. I believe that stronger relationships can minimize the opportunity gap for students with ID across college campuses. I also believe that solid relationships can create advancements in the community that will decrease the level of oppression that this marginalized group has experienced. In order to develop stronger relationships, collaborative efforts from pertinent members of the community (i.e., individual with ID, family members, teachers, service providers, community stakeholders, etc.…) will be required. I believe that we can witness a positive shift in the awareness of and access to PSE opportunities for students with ID if advocates work together to provide more information, resources, and encouragement concerning PSE options.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

When analyzing the data from the interview component of this study, several themes emerged that could be well-suited topics for further investigation. One major area was the lack of parental and teacher awareness of PSE programs. Further research is
needed to explore how K-12 systems could bring more awareness to teachers and parents about PSE programs for students with ID. It is recommended that this be done using qualitative research methods, such as questionnaires and interviews, to acquire recommended suggestions from teachers, administrators and parents.

Studies should also be conducted to compare the accommodations and services that are offered in K-12 systems to those offered on the collegiate level. Interview participants demonstrated great concern about how students with disabilities could be served and what role their IEP played in determining which services they would receive. Exploring this option explicitly would present specific protocol of how one is granted accommodations and services. In this area, a study should be conducted to compare available services at the PSE setting and the K-12 setting. Within this study, the researcher could explore possibilities of aligning services during the transition years to better prepare students for this option.

The benefit of PSE programs for students with ID is another area for future studies. Interview participants inquired about the benefit of these programs for students with ID. It is recommended that future studies explore the benefits of PSE programs for students with ID from the perspective of parents and students with ID once the student has completed a PSE program. An extensive study could be conducted that observed a student with ID before, during and after entering a PSE program. The researcher could perform a comparative analysis of changes noted in the students’ skills and determine how well they were prepared for adulthood based on the advancements offered in the PSE program of choice.
In addition to further research, the study presented several initiatives that PSE programs and local school districts could develop to start increasing access to this transition option. School districts should begin to work collaboratively with PSE programs and develop professional training opportunities for teachers and parents. PSE representatives should be present at local conferences that teachers and parents attend so that they are available to answer questions and provide the most accurate information about these programs. PSE programs should collaborate with local school districts to develop or participate in resource fairs in order to recruit students to attend their college or university. PSE representatives should be present in K-12 schools as this would make them accessible to students, parents, and teachers, and build ongoing relationships between K-12 schools, advocates for students with ID, and PSE programs.

Conclusion

This study concluded that PSE programs for students with ID were readily available in the state of Georgia. These programs were designed to meet the needs of students with mild to significant forms of ID. Programs were created to provide inclusive access for students with ID alongside their peers without disabilities. Although parents and teachers possessed limited knowledge of PSE programs for students with ID, they perceived that these programs could possibly be beneficial for their students.

The critical discrepancy identified between PSE programs for students with ID and actual participation was not due to availability or legal barriers. Participants’ perceived that inadequate relationships and collaborative efforts between PSE programs, K-12 programs, and parents to be the inhibiting factors. This disconnect enabled the
opportunity gap to remain, and restricted access to these programs. These discrepancies must be rectified in order to minimize the opportunity gaps that this marginalized group experiences.

As a whole, participants hoped that students with ID would be offered appropriate accommodations and services that would help them succeed as they matriculated through the college experience. Opportunities granted to them on college and university campuses could help transition students with ID into productive adult lives. As reported by the participants in the survey and the follow-up interviews, the ideal outcome is for students with ID to live as independently as they possibly can and to become active, accountable and responsible members of society. PSE programs may be the solution to this goal for many students with ID, so awareness of and access to these programs should become a vital part of IEP planning and discussions with teachers, parents, and advocates.

Dissemination

Currently, there are 30 comprehensive transition programs for students with intellectual disabilities in Georgia. These programs offer a combination of two-year and four-year postsecondary programs in which students with ID can earn a diploma or a certificate of completion. In an effort to employ the findings from this study, I would begin by asking the special education director for the district if I could present this information to the special education teachers, first, and then general education teachers, one day during pre-planning. Once permission is acquired, I would ask if she and I could collaborate and develop a checklist to formatively assess students for PSE programs. I would recommend that this checklist be used at each annual review, or transition
meeting, to compare the student’s academic performance year to year. If this checklist is properly developed, it could be used as a component to determine if the student is fit for a PSE program at a college or university. I would ask the PSE representative from the study for her input on the checklist to verify we are accurately assessing the areas that need to be addressed in order to better the chances for a student with ID successfully transitioning to a PSE collegial program.

When speaking with the special education director about this new initiative, I would emphasize the importance of starting the transition process at the elementary level. I believe this is important in aiding in the proper transition into adulthood. I would share with her that some teachers and parents in the district believe that early transitions, from grade to grade, would be beneficial in preparing the student for the next level and familiarizing them with the transition process. I realize that this may be an added responsibility on the teacher, but it is for a good cause and could benefit the student. Finally, I would recommend that a bi-annual professional development course be implemented to update teachers on new programs, changes in requirements, and fluctuations within nearby institutions that may impact their ability to transition a student into a PSE program. The course should also be a tool that supports, educates, and aids teachers in areas they need to successfully transition students into PSE programs.

To begin the initial professional development, I would define PSE programs for teachers, inform them about the different types of programs, and share the information I curated about the PSE programs currently available in Georgia. Next, I would share the perceptions of parents and teachers towards these programs in this district based on the
findings of this study. As a group, we would explore the list and identify institutions within our area that we may be able to visit and collaborate with effectively. I would also share the PSE checklist created by the special education director and myself and model how this form should be used.

Next, I would disseminate the table from this study that displayed the 30 institutions in Georgia. This table includes the name of the institution, website, address, contact information, type of programs offered, and the name of the regional center that services it. I would color-code the institutions to indicate which institutions offer an inclusive model, a mixed-model and both types of programs. Teachers would have the opportunity to ask any questions.

For the general education teachers that currently serve students with disabilities, I would provide an in-depth explanation of postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities and emphasize the importance of having these students having access to this option. I would give these teachers the same table as the special education teachers and explain each section of the table. I would walk through a few of the programs’ website and explain any terms or concepts that may be foreign to them. Teachers would have the opportunity to ask any questions.

To inform the parents, I would set up a table during open house to disseminate the information. I would create a pamphlet with pertinent information about PSE programs for students with ID in Georgia. I would also include contact information for the special education coordinator at each school in the county so that parents could access additional information when needed.
I believe this approach would be the most practical approach to disseminating findings from this study. It provides opportunities for special education teachers, general education teachers, and parents of students with intellectual disabilities.

Final Thoughts

As a teacher, I have witnessed college recruiters at my high school recruiting students for a specific sport. It would be nice to live in a world where students with ID were being pursued in the same manner. It is encouraging to know that education does not have to stop at the secondary level for students with intellectual disabilities. Thanks to PSE programs, students with an array of disabilities can continue to interact with their non-disabled peers in an academic and social setting on college campuses if their IEP committees are informed and empowered to determine whether or not the student will benefit from and thrive in PSE programs.

As an advocate for individuals with disabilities, I am glad to know that the cost of PSE attendance does not have to be an obstruction for students to access this opportunity. Although the cost of attendance is higher for students on an alternate path than the traditional bachelors diploma, colleges and universities in Georgia have successfully certified PSE programs so that students with ID are eligible for funds to offset tuition and other related costs. This support could make the possibility of furthering their education at a college or university a tangible reality for many students with ID.

As a general education and special education teacher, my hopes are that my students will desire to further their education after they leave high school. I do not want students with ID to be denied access to this opportunity because of what society deems as
inhibiting characteristics. PSE programs represent important society steps towards equalizing access opportunities for persons with disabilities. As information about PSE transition options is shared with teachers, I hope all advocates work together to adequately prepare those students who are able to transition into this setting.

Students with intellectual disabilities have legal access to transition options after high school and are capable of pursuing educations that lead to jobs other than simply bagging groceries. However, students with ID are able to continue their educational endeavors at a college or university only if they are given the opportunity and information needed to do so. PSE programs for students with ID can open the doors to many possibilities after high school. I believe if persons with intellectual disabilities are adequately trained and prepared, we would begin to see them employed in more diverse areas, such as a doctor’s office, a bank, or a local school. I believe that if students with ID are afforded the opportunity to experience postsecondary education on college campuses, it will not only bring a sense of fulfillment to the students, but it will also foster a sense of honor for the community. I also believe that if students with ID are able to attend a college or university, it will encourage their non-disabled peers, and others in the community, to also pursue their goals.
REFERENCES


The Pennsylvania State University, (2016). 3.5 Simple random sampling and other sampling methods. Retrieved from https://onlinecourses.science.psu.edu/stat100/node/18


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Parents and Teachers of Students with Intellectual Disabilities

1. Describe your relationship to an individual with an intellectual disability (ID).

2. Are you aware of college opportunities for a student with an ID? If so, describe your perceptions of these programs. If not, how do you think these programs could operate for a student with ID?

3. Describe your perception of the transition process, exiting high school, for students with ID. Do you believe college options should be an option for the transition? Why or why not?

4. What suggestions do you have for better informing special education and general education teachers of this transition option?

5. Do you think that college opportunities would be beneficial for students with ID? Why or why not?
APPENDIX B

PROGRAM SURVEY
Program Survey

<table>
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<th>Program Profile (<em>insert number here</em>)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Type (s) of Program</td>
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<td>How are students recruited and what are the admission criteria?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What supports and accommodations do the PSE programs make available to students with an ID?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent are students with an ID participating in academic courses and campus-wide activities with peers without disabilities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How are PSE programs funded?</td>
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<tr>
<td>To what degree are PSE programs collaborating with the host institutions of higher education and across K-12 and adult service systems?</td>
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<td>To what extent are students with ID involved with paid and unpaid employment activities, what are the locations of these employment activities, and the types of employment supports that are provided while attending the PSE program?</td>
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<td>Comments:</td>
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2015 Special Education Transition Manual

Regents Centers for Learning Disabilities

There are three centers in Georgia that assist students with intellectual disabilities in transitioning from high school to college. They are:

Regents Center for Learning Disorders at Georgia Southern University
Statesboro, Georgia 30460
http://services.georgiasouthern.edu/

Regents Center for Learning Disorders at Georgia State University
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
http://www.gsu.edu/rcld

Regents Center for Learning Disorders at University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602
http://www.rcld.uga.edu/

Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Georgia:

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<td>877-462-3878</td>
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<td>3705 Brookside Parkway Alpharetta, Ga 30022</td>
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<td>Clarkston</td>
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https://drc.uga.edu/  
https://ung.edu/student-disability-services/ Dahlonega  
https://www.westga.edu/assets/docs/catalogs/archive/html/Grad-full-2010/5289.htm
APPENDIX D

PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION AFTER HIGH SCHOOL SURVEY
Please select the appropriate responses that best represents you:

1. Gender (Drop Down)
2. Ethnicity (Drop Down)
3. What is your relationship to the individual with an intellectual disability? (Drop Down)
4. Zip Code

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

(1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neither Agree or Disagree; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly Agree)

5. I am aware of education programs for individuals with disabilities in Georgia after high school.
6. High school has helped or will help prepare students with disabilities for education after high school.
7. Students with disabilities would be benefit from education program after high school.
8. Educational opportunities after high school would help students with disabilities transition to adulthood.
9. Educational opportunities on a college or university campus would be beneficial for student with disabilities.
10. I am aware of available funds that support students with intellectual disabilities in education programs after high school.
11. What questions do you have about education programs after high school for individuals with intellectual disabilities?
12. Would you like to participate in a follow up interview? If so, please list your telephone number and good time to call.
Informed Consent

Where do we go from here? A Qualitative Examination of Postsecondary Education Programs for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities and the Perceptions of Parents and Teachers

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators
Emma S Thomas, Ed S
Tift College of Education
Mercer University

Sybil A Keesbury, Ed D
1501 Mercer University Drive
Macon, Ga 31207
478-301-2579

Purpose of the Research
This research study is designed to explore current postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities in Georgia and to uncover what teachers and parents know about these programs. The data from this research will be used to perform a comparative analysis of similar studies that were done in the same or different region. Findings from this study will lend more knowledge and understanding to the field of special education for application during the years of transitioning from secondary schooling to postsecondary education.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey to communicate their level of understanding of postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities. Subjects may also be selected to participate in a follow up interview.
Your participation will take approximately 10-15 minutes.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be selected from a list of general education teachers, special education teachers and parents. You would have to have had experience teaching students with intellectual disabilities or be the parent of a child with an intellectual
disability. You will be invited to complete a survey in which you are to rate your level of knowledge for each question on a scale of 1 to 5. You will also be asked if you would like to participate in a follow up interview. If selected for the interview, you will be contacted to schedule a day and time that works for you.

**Potential Risks or Discomforts**

There are no foreseeable risks associated with the study.

If you volunteer for this study and you are selected for a follow-up interview, you agree to the use of audio taping.

**Potential Benefits of the Research**

Findings from this study will lend more knowledge and understanding to the field of special education for application during the years of transitioning from secondary schooling to postsecondary education. The information in this study can be readily used for secondary/postsecondary educators, administrators, parents and families to assist in providing all possible PSE programs for the individual with intellectual disabilities. Collectively, this information can be beneficial for providing more fitting postsecondary education programs for students with ID, not just in this area but across the state as well.

**Confidentiality and Data Storage**

All information obtained will be held in strict confidentiality and will only be released with your permission. The results of this study may be published but your information such as your name and other demographic information will not be revealed. The results of this study will be kept in a locked file within Georgia for 3 years in Dr. Sybil Keesbury’s office.

**Incentives to Participate**

There are no incentives for participating in this study.

**Participation and Withdrawal**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a research subject you may refuse to participate at anytime. To withdraw from the study please contact Emma Thomas at Emma.S.Thomas@live.mercer.edu or Dr. Sybil Keesbury at keesbury_sa@mercer.edu.

**Questions about the Research**

1501 Mercer University Dr • Macon, GA 31207-0001
APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
Friday, October 14, 2016

Ms. Emma S Thomas
1400 Coleman Ave
Tift College of Education
Macon, GA 31207

RE: Where do we go from here? A Qualitative Examination of Postsecondary Education Programs for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities and the Perceptions of Parents and Teachers (H1610271)

Dear Ms. Thomas:

On behalf of Mercer University’s Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 10-Oct-2016 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.110(b) and 45 CFR 46.110(b) (for expedited review) and was approved under category(ies) 6, 7 per 63 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 14-Oct-2016. The protocol expires on 13-Oct-2017. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:

New study to examine current post secondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities and to obtain the perceptions of parents and teachers of students with intellectual disabilities towards these programs. Use of online surveys, interviews, and audio recordings.

NOTE: Please report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and all accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our Satisfaction Survey and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

Ava Chambliss-Richardson, M.Ed., CIP, CIRM
Associate Director of Human Research Protection Programs (HRPP)
Member
Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization's (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."