

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
CHARACTERISTICS, COMPETENCIES, AND
STRATEGIES OF TRANSITION STAFF
WORKING WITH URBAN LATINO/A YOUTH
WITH DISABILITIES

Omayra Muñoz-Lorenzo, Doctor of Philosophy,
2012

Dissertation Directed by: Dr. Ellen Fabian
Department of Counseling, Higher and Special
Education

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore characteristics, competencies, and strategies of transition program employment representatives who attain successful employment outcomes for urban Latino/a youths with disabilities. This study employed in-depth interviewing as a method of data collection. The central research question guiding the study was: What factors are characteristic of employer representatives who achieved successful transition outcomes with urban youth with disabilities who participated in a multi-site vocational intervention? In addition, the following sub-questions were investigated: (a) Which specific characteristics and perceptions of employment representatives are associated with successful job attainment for urban youths with disabilities? (b) What competencies of employment representatives are associated with successful job attainment for urban Latino/a youths with disabilities? (c)

What job development strategies are associated with successful job attainment for urban youths with disabilities?

Data collection involved two main sources of information: (a) secondary analyses of the national Bridges Program database, which includes information about employment representatives and the outcomes they achieved for students they served; and (b) in-depth structured individual interviews with 15 Bridges employer representatives. Participants were a diverse sample from six different sites of the Bridges School-to-Work program. The data were analyzed using the method developed by Thomas (2006) and similar to the Miles and Huberman (1994) steps of data reduction, data displays, and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis yielded nine staff-related factors influencing successful outcomes for Latino/a youths with disabilities participating in Bridges School-to-Work program. These categories were labeled: (a) high level of commitment, (b) instilling-hope, (c) entrepreneurial skills, (d) cultural sensitivity (skills and knowledge), (e) awareness of youth needs and challenges, (f) networking and relationship building, (g) teamwork, (h) on-going support, and (i) family systems focus. This study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the staff characteristics, competencies, and strategies associated with the successful transition outcomes for Latino/a youth with disabilities.

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CHARACTERISTICS, COMPETENCIES, AND
STRATEGIES OF TRANSITION STAFF WORKING WITH URBAN LATINO/A
YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

By

Omayra Muñoz-Lorenzo

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy
2012

Advisory Committee:

Professor Ellen Fabian, Chair
Professor Gary D. Gottfredson
Affiliate Professor Jo Ann Hutchinson
Assistant Professor Victoria-María MacDonald
Associate Professor Hanna Mawhinney
Professor Debra A. Neubert

©Copyright by
Omayra Muñoz-Lorenzo
2012

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my family, I feel blessed to be surrounded by so much love, encouragement, and support. I also want to thank Dr. Raquel Gonzalez for your friendship, encouragement, and support. Most importantly, thank you to my husband and friend Dr. Luis A. Tosado (Tony) for your endless love, support, and for always having faith in me. Thank you for making this a much more enjoyable and enlightening journey.

I would also like to give special thanks to Drs. George Tilson and Ellen Fabian for allowing me to make the TransCen study part of my dissertation. The larger study, a joint venture between the University of Maryland (UMD) and Virginia Commonwealth University, was conducted with the help of a multi-year grant awarded to TransCen Inc., in 2010, by the U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). I participated in the "The Personnel Factor" study under the leadership of Dr. Tilson, senior vice president at TransCen, and Dr. Fabian, advisor and PI for the subcontract at the UMD. TransCen is a non-profit organization with a mission of improving the educational and employment outcomes for people with disabilities. TransCen assisted the Marriott Foundation for people with disabilities (MFPD) in designing and implementing the Bridges School to Work program and from 1989-1997 MFPD contracted TransCen to operate the Bridges program. Dr. Tilson assisted in piloting the Bridges program and became its director in 1989.

While my dissertation was not funded by this grant, I was granted access to the Bridges program dataset and access to interview the ERs. As a student investigator on one of the NIDRR funded studies part of my work included interviewing ERs to determine their characteristics and perceptions. Interviews were conducted in

collaboration with Dr. Tilson, senior researcher. My dissertation built on this work, in which I was allowed to modify the existing interview protocol and include items related to ERs experiences (characteristics, competencies, and strategies) with Latino/a youth with disabilities.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	ii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables	v
List of Figures.....	vii
Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	3
Description of Bridges School-to-Work Program	5
Contribution of the Study.....	6
Research Questions.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	7
Summary	9
Chapter 2: Review of Literature	11
Transition Services.....	11
Policies and Laws Defining and Regulating Transition	14
Latino Population in the United States	16
Latino Cultural Factors and Transition Services	18
Factors Associated with Employment Outcomes	20
Person Factors.....	21
Individual & Contextual Factor	25
Behavioral Factors	26
Summary of Factors Associated with Employment Outcomes	28
Research on Staff-Related Factors.....	30
Characteristics of Staff.....	30
Competencies and Strategies	32
Summary	40
Chapter 3 Methods.....	43
Design of the Study.....	44
Site Selection	45
Sample Selection.....	46
Participant Recruitment	47
Data Collection	49
Data Analysis.....	53
Chapter 4 Findings.....	60
Personal Attributes/Belief Domain.....	65
High Level of Commitment.....	65
Instilling Hope	68
Entrepreneurial Skills.....	70
Summary	72
Competencies Domain.....	73
Culturally Minded (Skills and Knowledge).....	74

Awareness of Youth Needs and Challenges	82
Summary	86
Strategies Domain.....	87
Networking and Relationship Building	87
Teamwork	89
On-Going Support.....	90
Family Systems Focus	91
Summary	95
 Chapter 5: Discussion	 97
A Conceptual Model: ERs performance with Latino/a Youth.....	97
Research Question One.....	100
Research Question Two	102
Research Question Three	105
Summary	107
Limitations	108
Implications for Practice.....	110
Implications for Future Research.....	114
 Appendix A Informed Consent.....	 117
Appendix B Research E-mail Announcement	118
Appendix C Staff Interview Protocol	119
Appendix D Categories or Themes That Emerged From the ER’s Interviews	122
References.....	125

List of Tables

Table	Page
2.1 Summary of Research on Variables and their Sources Associated with Employment Outcome for Transitioning Individuals with Disabilities. . .	29
2.2 Current Research on Staff characteristics, competencies and strategies that facilitate successful outcomes for youth with disabilities.....	41
3.1 Matrix Table for Data Organization.....	56
4.1 Participant Profiles and Sites Listed by Race/Ethnicity and Gender.....	62
4.2 Employment Outcomes by All Youth and Latino/a Youth in participating ER Caseloads.....	63
4.3 Participants Attributes Listed by Spanish Language.....	73

List of Figures

Figure	Page
4.1 Model of Success: Employer Representatives Attributes, Competencies and Strategies influencing Employment Outcomes.	96

Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

Over the past several decades, policymakers have recognized the importance of successful transition for youths with disabilities from high school to work, post-secondary education, and adult roles. As a result, efforts have been made to improve the delivery of transition services for these youths. Several programs have been developed to assist them to achieve a successful transition to adult life. Moreover, several laws were enacted that influenced educational policies and practices designed to prepare youths with disabilities for productive employment and success in adult roles.

Despite these efforts, studies have shown disparities in post-school outcomes for ethnic minority youth with disabilities compared with their non-minority peers with and without disabilities (Fabian, 2007; Gil-Kashiwabara, Hogansen, Geenen, Power, & Power, 2007; Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; Povenmire-Kirk, Lindstrom, & Bullis 2010; Velcoff, Hernandez, & Keys, 2010). Several researchers have suggested that ethnic minority youth with disabilities encounter additional challenges during their transition to adult life (Fabian; Gil-Kashiwabara et al., 2007; Hasnain & Balcazar). In addition, ethnic minorities tend to have more disabling conditions at higher rates than the majority population (Whitfield, Venable & Broussard, 2010) and they also are more likely to receive inadequate supports and vocational services (Velcoff at al., 2010).

The United States' demography is rapidly changing. According to Whitfield et al. (2010) more than one third of the U.S. population identify themselves as minorities. This increase of ethnic minority populations has resulted in additional challenges for transition professionals, who might not be familiar with ethnic minorities' cultural beliefs and values. This may lead to transition services and interventions that are not congruent with

the transition needs of these young adults and their families. Moreover, the growing number of ethnic minorities has resulted in additional demands for transition professionals to develop culturally sensitive and effective transition services without the benefit of research-based practices.

Several authors have noted some of the disparities in the effectiveness of transition services for ethnic minority youth (Fabian, 2007; Geenen, Powers, Lopez-Vazques, & Bersani, 2003; Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2010; Velcoff et al., 2010). Ethnic minority youth with disabilities, in general, experience poorer post-school outcomes than white youth with disabilities, i.e., lower rates of employment, lower wages, and higher school dropout rates. For example, the overall unemployment rate for persons with disabilities was 15% compared to 9% for persons without disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Among those with a disability, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) revealed that the unemployment rate was higher for African American (22%) and Latinos (18%) than among whites (14 percent). Youth from households with incomes of more than \$50,000 were almost twice as likely than their peers from lower household incomes (\$25,000 or lower) to have been employed since leaving high school (81% vs. 61%) or enrolled in two-year colleges (57% vs. 30%) (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009).

Ethnic minority youths are also disproportionately placed in special education classes and more frequently diagnosed with learning disabilities than are their non-minority peers (Fujiura & Yamaki, 2000; O'Connor & DeLuca-Fernandez, 2011; Park, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2002). In general, youth placed in special education settings exhibit poorer academic performance and lower high school completion rates (Loprest &

Maag, 2007). According to Ferguson and Blumberg (2006), more than one third (36%) of all youth in special education programs drop out of high school prior to graduation. A higher percentage (37%) of students with disabilities in urban school drop out of high school compared to 24% in suburban and 21% in rural schools. Additionally, youth with disabilities who drop out of high school are less likely to obtain employment (Loprest & Maag, 2007).

Outcome data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS-2) indicate that African American (42%) and Latino/a youth (36%) with disabilities experience significantly lower employment rate than white youth (62%) with disabilities (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006). When employed, African American and Latino youths are also more likely to earn lower wages than are white youth (Wagner et al., 2006). Latino/as with disabilities, in particular, also have less access to vocational training or workforce options and they also are overrepresented in low-skill jobs associated with lower wages, instability, lack of benefits, and poor prospects for advancement (Velcoff et al., 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Researchers have directed increased attention toward identifying and understanding the disparities experienced by ethnic minority youth with disabilities regarding achieving positive post-school outcomes (Fabian, 2007; Geenen, et al., 2003; Gil-Kashiwabara, 2007; Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009, Velcoff at al., 2010). As a result, studies have investigated an array of variables and predictors of post-school outcomes for young adult with disabilities (Blackbory & Wagner, 1996; Fabian, 2007; Fabian, Lent & Willis, 1998; Geenen, et al., 2003; Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; Martz & Xu, 2008;

Rabren, Dunn, & Chambers, 2002; Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2010; Velcoff, et al.). Despite the increased focus on the disparities of post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities, little is known about what staff-related factors are associated with the transition to adult life for Latino/a youth with disabilities. Although there have been several studies over the years of the national Bridges program (Fabian, 2007; Fabian et al., 1998; Garcia-Irriarte, Balcazar, & Taylor-Ritzer, 2007) no study has yet explored staff characteristics, competencies, and strategies as predictors of successful post-school outcome for youth with disabilities.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the characteristics, competencies, and strategies of employment representatives (ERs) who achieve successful employment outcomes for urban Latino/a youth with disabilities participating in a national multi-site transition program, the Bridges School-to-Work program. The employer representatives in the Bridges program are the staff responsible for recruiting participants, preparing them to participate in the program, assisting them in obtaining a job, and providing ongoing support. They follow up with a broad network of employers to develop specific job opportunities and then match participants' skills, abilities, and interests with these positions.

To identify Bridges School-to-Work program ERs who achieve successful employment outcomes with Latino/a youth with disabilities, an outcome analysis of the national Bridges' database was conducted to identify ERs who achieved "high" or "low" placement rates. Throughout the study, I refer to the Bridges employment specialist staff by their position titles: employer representatives or ERs.

Description of Bridges School-to-Work Program

The Marriott Foundation and a group of experts in the field of education, employment and disability founded the Bridges School-to-Work program in the 1990s (Donovan & Tilson, 1998). The Bridges school-to-work program is a highly standardized community-based vocational intervention (Fabian et al., 1998) that has provided vocational intervention services to approximately 15,000 youth with disabilities (Fabian, 2007; Garcia-Irriarte et al., 2007). The program seeks to enhance employment opportunities for youth with disabilities in their last year of high school or have just existed. The program consists of three phases: (a) career counseling and job placement; (b) paid work experience; and (c) ongoing support provided by an ER. The Bridges program is based on a comprehensive approach that involves long-term vocational planning and development and is guided by three fundamental principles:

1. An employer-driven-model to achieve lasting employment success.
2. A focus on abilities rather than disabilities and the belief that all youth who want to work can, and
3. Provision of longer-term supports to stabilize the employment relationship in order to achieve long-term employment success, not merely job placement (<http://www.bridgestowork.org>).

Bridges program is non-categorical as to whom they serves. The criteria for youth participation in the Bridges program are: (a) students must be between 17-22 years old; (b) have a valid social security card number (or other U.S. citizenship document); and (c) documentation of a disability through an office of vocational rehabilitation, an IEP or medical professional. Students who have a physical or mental impairment, which

substantially limit their educational or learning ability, and the impairment is documented by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) are eligible to participate in the program. The youth also need to express an interest in working after high school.

The program is funded by a variety of public and private sources. Given the urban settings of the Bridges sites, approximately 80% of Bridges participants are ethnic minority youth. Additional information on Bridges program will be provided in the methods section in Chapter 3.

Contribution of the Study

There is little research on transition staff factors that influence successful outcomes of young Latino/a adults with disabilities, so the results of this study will help improve transition practices and potentially influence transition policy. In addition, the results of the study will provide transition professionals with more information to help them evaluate the appropriateness of their intervention approaches. As Greene et al., (2003) and Kim and Morningstar (2005) indicated, even well-meaning professionals might struggle or fail to provide transition interventions that are appropriate or congruent to the needs of Latino/a youth with disabilities. Harry (2000) suggested that the central issue in serving ethnic minority or diverse populations is “not that professionals should change their own beliefs, but that they must learn ways of understanding and respecting the beliefs of the families they work with” (p. 135). The findings of this study should provide information for transition professionals working with Latino/a youth with disabilities to support them in achieving a successful transition to adult life.

Research Questions

The overall aim of this qualitative study is to explore employer representatives' characteristics, competencies, and strategies influencing successful employment outcomes for Latino/a youth with disabilities participating in Bridges School-to-Work program. To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following broad research question: What factors characterize employer representatives who achieve successful transition outcomes with urban youth with disabilities participating in a multi-site vocational intervention? In addition, the following sub-questions were investigated:

1. Which specific characteristics and perceptions of employment representatives are associated with successful job attainment for urban youth with disabilities?
2. What competencies of employment representatives are associated with successful job attainment for urban Latino/a youth with disabilities?
3. What job development strategies are associated with successful job attainment for urban adults with disabilities?

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used in the present document:

Disability. A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (i.e. abilities such as (but not limited to) self care, breathing, walking, seeing, performing schoolwork, speaking, and learning); has a record of such impairment; or are regarded as having such impairment (Section 504). In terms of school youth, the critical question is whether a student's impairment substantially limits the ability to learn.

Transition Services. A coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that (a) is designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (b) is based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests; and (c) includes instruction, related services, community services, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (IDEA, 2004)

Bridges School-to-Work Program. A highly standardized community-based vocational intervention that provides vocational intervention services to youth with disabilities.

Employment outcomes. Enter and retain full-time or part-time competitive employment.

Employer Representatives (ER). Person responsible for assisting an individual with a disability in obtaining a job through on-site assistance and other workplace support in the Bridges program.

Hispanic or Latino/a. A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.

Attributes/Beliefs. A self-described prominent attribute or personal traits reported by ERs to be related to effective transition services to Latino/a youth with disabilities.

Competencies. Abilities to provide services and support in a sensitive and appropriate manner in the full range of situations associated with cultural values, and beliefs of youth and families. This includes knowledge and skills to effectively provide services and supports Latino/a youth and their families (e.g. culture, ethnicity, language, or other salient variables).

Strategies. Employer representative's approaches and interventions to assist youth with disabilities in securing and retaining successful employment.

Summary

This study focused on the characteristics, competencies, and strategies of ERs that are related to successful transition to employment for urban Latino/a youth with disabilities participating in the Bridges School-to-Work program. Using data from Bridges School-to-Work program and interviewing ERs in the Bridges program, this study explored the characteristics, perceptions, and cultural competencies of ERs who achieved both “high” and “low” employment outcomes for urban Latino/a youth with disabilities participating in the Bridges School-to-Work program, a national multi-site transition program.

The study identifies staff-related factors that appear either to facilitate or hinder the successful transition to work for Latino/a youth with disabilities. The study provides information related to the needs of Latino/a youth with disabilities as well as the competencies, cultural aspects of transition, and additional job development strategies

associated with successful transition to employment. This study highlights the importance of promoting culturally responsive transition services and interventions as a way to help reduce the disparities between ethnic minorities with disabilities and non-minority youth with disabilities and promote successful post-school outcomes.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This literature review begins with a brief overview of transition services followed by an explanation of specific legislation relevant to transition services and its influence on post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities. Next, the review examines the experiences and challenges identified in previous research of Latino/a youth with disabilities during their transition to adult life. Then, current research studies that have examined a number of factors influencing employment outcomes are discussed. The final section highlights current research findings on transition specialists' or transition staff characteristics, competencies and interventions that may influence post-school outcomes for ethnic minority youth with disabilities and Latino/a youth in particular.

Transition Services

Since special education and rehabilitation law (IDEA, 1990) mandated transition services, major transformations have occurred in educational, social, political, and economic areas (Kochhar-Bryant & Greene, 2009) that have affected the lives of many youth with disabilities. Several definitions of what constitute transition exist in the literature. Levinson and Ohler (1998) defined transition within the educational environment as the process of facilitating the post school adjustment of students with disabilities through a broad array of services and experiences that leads to, among other goals to employment. According to Hasazi, Furney, and DeStafano (1999) transition services is defined as:

a series of purposeful activities designed to make sure that students with disabilities have the skills, opportunities and support to locate and maintain employment, to pursue postsecondary level education and training, to participate

in the social fabric of the community, and to make decisions about their lives. (p. 556).

Improving outcomes for special education youth leaving high school became a national priority in the 1980s, and post school outcomes was also an indicator of the effectiveness of the educational system for preparing youth with disabilities to successfully transition to adult life (IDEA, 1990).

As a result of this national priority, transition models and programs were created (e.g., Halpern, 1985; 1993; Kohler, 1996; Will, 1984) to support students with disabilities in the process of reaching their potential and succeeding in their adult life. Many of these transition models and their services have helped shape research and address a broad range of best practices for effective transition interventions (Kohler, 1996). Evidence suggests that best practices that significantly contribute to successful post school outcomes include vocational training, parental involvement, interagency collaboration, social skills training, paid work experience, and individualized transition plans (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Kohler, 1993; NLTS-2, 2006).

There has also been a great deal of practice-based research on demonstration transition projects. Findings specific to which types of practices have proven most effective will be reviewed later in the chapter. In a national effort to describe the underlying principles of effective transition models, the National Collaborative for Workforce and Disability (NCWD/Y), in collaboration with the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), developed five transition principles to promote efficient and effective delivery of services for youth with disabilities (Wills & Mack, 2009). These principles also called the *Guideposts for Success* include:

1. Education-based preparatory experiences, regardless of setting, that provide clear performance expectations based upon meaningful, accurate, and relevant indicators of student learning and skills;
2. Career preparation and work-based learning experiences to allow youth to make and develop aspirations and informed choices about careers;
3. Youth development and leadership opportunities to prepare young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them gain skills and competencies;
4. The coordination of interagency connecting activities, services, and supports that help young people gain access to chosen post-school options; and
5. Family involvement and supports to promote the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth (Wills & Mack, 2009, p.7).

One of the most frequently studied aspects of transition included in the “*Guideposts for Success*” is career preparation, such as career awareness, career exploration and career assessment (Lindstrom, Paskey, Dickinson, Doren, Zane, & Johnson, 2007). Youth transition programs should have a strong career-oriented focus (Lindstrom et al., 2007; Luft, 2008; Szymanski, 1994; Schultz, 2002; Wehman, 2006) including special attention to early experiences, practical transition planning for career-related experiences during high school (Schultz, 2002; Szymanski, 1994; Wehman, 2006), and an individualized educational program focusing on a career development continuum (Szymanski, 1994). The transition services broadly described in this section

have been largely generated as a result of federal laws and policies. The next section discusses the most important of these laws and policies.

Policies and Laws Defining and Regulating Transition

Several policies and laws were enacted that eventually led to transition services during public school for youth with disabilities. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P. L. 93-112) mandated equal opportunity without discrimination in school and work settings (e.g., college, university, public system of higher education, or other post-secondary institution) that received federal funds. Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act stipulated that:

No otherwise qualified person with a disability...shall, solely on the basis of disability, be denied access to, or the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity provided by any entity/institution that receives Federal financial assistance.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL-94-142) required a free and appropriate public education for all children ages 5 to 21 in the least restrictive environment. PL-94-142 is considered the cornerstone for special education and has been amended over the years to include transition services. The 1990 Amendments renamed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 to the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; PL 101-476). Through IDEA, transition services became mandatory. IDEA 1990 defined and required transition services no later than age 16 as part of students' Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs). Transition services were based on four essential elements:

- a coordinated set of activities;
- designed within an outcome-oriented process;

- based on the student's needs, considering their preferences and interests; and
- promoting movement from school to post-school activities.

More recently IDEA, amended in 1997, established that the purpose of the law was not only to provide equal access of youth with disabilities to the general academic curriculum but also to prepare these youth for employment and independent living. To achieve these outcomes, transition planning was identified as a core strategy for successful transition (Kochhar-Bryant, 2009). In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (PL 108-446, IDEIA) was signed into law and added new requirements to address successful post-school outcomes for secondary school youth with disabilities. IDEIA required that students with disabilities have transition services as part of their IEP planning with a summary of performance (SOP) requirements to help them adjust to the transition from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education (Madaus & Shaw, 2006).

All of these initiatives suggested a more inclusive approach in which all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, economic, social or disabilities are to be educated in an integrated school (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). Moreover, these initiatives mandated specific elements of the IEP that include transition services, career exploration, and vocational training as components of special education and school-to-work programs (Lindstron & Benz, 2002) to help youth assume adult roles in their community, especially in achieving post-secondary goals. Despite these initiatives and a few significant gains made for some youth with disabilities, substantial disparities persist in post-school outcomes for Latino/a youth with disabilities (Gil-Kashiwabara, et al., 2007; Povenmire-

Kirk et al., 2010; Velcoff et al., 2010). The next section provides a brief overview of the Latino population and post-school outcomes for Latino/a youth with disabilities.

Latino Population in the United States

The Latino/a population is the largest, fastest growing ethno-racial minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). According to the 2011 Census, there are 50.5 million Latinos compose 16% of the total U.S. population. The Latino population increased 15.2 million between 2000 and 2010, which accounted for over half of the increase in the total population. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the Latino population is projected to increase to 59 million people by the year 2025, representing 24% of the U.S. population. The term Hispanic or Latino refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. Of the Latinos in the U.S., about 63% are Mexican; 9% Puerto Rican; 4% Cuban; 13% Central and South American, and 24% other Latino (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Despite the commonality of Spanish-language among Latino/a youth and families, they are quite heterogeneous. These youth are of different national origins; some are illegal immigrants, and others are documented residents or US citizen with different levels of acculturation and different levels of identification with their Spanish-language heritage. Accordingly it is important for staff working with Latino/a youth to recognize this heterogeneity when working with these youth and their families.

The Latino population tends to be younger than the general U.S. population. In 2010, Latino/as were 23% of the U.S. population aged 17 years or younger (Pew Hispanic, 2011). Latinos are also the fastest growing segment of working age individuals

with disabilities. The prevalence of disability for Latino/as in the U.S. is much higher compared to non-Latino Whites. According to Wagner (2005), Latino families had a disability rate of 33% compared to 27% of non-Latino Whites families. At all ages, the prevalence of disability was higher for women (24%) compared to men (19%). One third of Latino families reported having a family member with a disability and more than half of these families were living in poverty. Young Latino adults with disabilities face an uncertain future and experience the lowest employment outcomes when compared to non-minority youth with disabilities. In 2010, the unemployment rate for all persons with disabilities was 14.8% compared to 9.4% for those without disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). The unemployment rate was higher among those with disabilities who were Black (22.0%) and Latino/a (18.4%) than among those who were White (13.6%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). In 2009, approximately, 30% of Latino/a youth aged 16 to 19 were unemployed in the U.S. and were also more likely, when working, to earn lower salaries than African American and White youth (Department of Labor, 2009).

In 2003, a report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (Cameto, Marder, Wagner, & Cardoso, 2003) also found that Latinos and African American youth with disabilities were significantly less likely to find employment than white students and, if they worked, they also earned significantly less. One reason is the higher high school dropout rate (17.6 %) for Latinos, which is twice as high as the dropout rate for non-Latino whites (Pew Hispanic, 2011). Students who drop out of high school are more likely to be unemployed and to earn less than those who graduate (Christle, Jolivette & Nelson, 2007). For example, Newman et al. (2009) in their national sample of disabled youth, found that 61% of students who completed high school were employed, compared

to only 41% of those who did not. These outcomes are likely to be even lower in the current U.S. economic climate.

Several studies have noted the disparities in post-high school outcomes for Latino youth with disabilities (Fabian, 2007; Fabian et al., 1998; Geenen et al., 2003; Hasnain & Balcazar; Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2010; Velcoff et al., 2010). Moreover, Latino youth with disabilities encounter greater challenges and barriers to successful transition than non-minority youth with disabilities. Some of the challenges identified in the literature include different cultural expectations regarding disability, high rates of poverty, discrimination, immigration status, and limited English proficiency, lack of education, lack of workplace accommodation, and lack of culturally-responsive transition services (Geenen et al., 2003; Hasnain & Balcazar; Salas-Provance, Erickson, & Reed, 2002; Velcoff et al., 2010). In addition, Velcoff et al. (2010) found that lower levels of acculturation and cultural mistrust have a negative impact on employment outcomes for Latino/as with disabilities.

Latino Cultural Factors and Transition Services

Several examples exist of how transition services may represent cultural anomalies for Latino youth. For example, transition to adulthood is typically based on a framework of individualistic goals, self-determination, independency, centrality of work (Geenen et al., 2003; Kim & Morningstar, 2005; Harry, 2008) and separation between work and family. This framework may be conflicting and difficult to understand for Latino/a youth and their families. Another example is that Latino families may have varying ideas about causes and cures of disabilities (Geenen et al.; Harry, 2008;

Povenmire-Kirk et al. 2010). Therefore, Latino families' expectations regarding transition may differ from the expectation of the dominant culture.

Latinos also view families as central sources of support for coping with a disability and major collaborators during the transition process. Latino/a youth with disabilities come from collectivistic cultures, which place more value on the needs of the collective or group than the individual. Family members tend to possess a deep sense of obligation to each other for economic assistance, encouragement, and support (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002; Blue-Banning, Turnbull, Pereira, 2002). Some Latino families expect that youth with or without disabilities stay with the family if they are unmarried. Approximately 90% of foreign-born Latinos and those for whom Spanish is their dominant language believe it is better for children to live in their parents' home until they are married (Waldan & Perlman, 2010).

The concept of *familismo* is the most strongly connected value for Latino families (Arredondo, 2002; Blue-Banning et al., 2002). In general, Latinos have a strong familistic orientation, in that they value close relationships and stress interdependence, cohesiveness, and cooperation among family members (Arredondo, 2002). Ties go beyond the nuclear family and extend to relatives including aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, as well as close friends. According to Morningstar, Turnbull, and Turnbull (1995) family involvement in the transition process encourages the Latino/a youth with disabilities to be more successfully engaged in the transition planning. Blue-Banning et al., found that Latino parents have a diversity of hopes and expectations concerning future living, employment and free time options for their children with disabilities.

Spirituality and religious beliefs are another important value in many Latino families. Religious belief and spirituality provides a fundamental mechanism for Latino/a youth and families for coping with trauma and any difficulties the family encounter, including disability and migration issues. Latino religious institutions (e.g. churches) function as supporter and extension of the family. These institutions re-enforce family solidarity, respect, and are places where families can get in contact with others of similar ethnic origins to achieve ethnic integration and solidarity. Therefore, the youth in the family are expected to go with the family to church on Sundays, which can create conflict with employment schedules. ERs working with Latino/a youth and families must understand and take into consideration the values and expectations of these families to achieve successful outcomes with the youth.

In relation to culturally responsive transition services, Szymanzky (1994) argued that transition services for ethnic minorities may offer a risk of disempowerment by providing assessment practices and interventions that might not be culturally valid or do not recognize cultural diversity. Several researchers have suggested that transition specialists must consider the challenges and factors influencing employment outcomes and they must evaluate their transition programs and interventions to determine if they are effectively meeting the needs of Latino young adult with disabilities (Geenen et al., 2003; Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; Velcoff et al., 2010).

Factors Associated with Employment Outcomes

Having a job is one key marker of the transition to adulthood. The literature on factors associated with employment outcomes for young people with disabilities is plentiful (Benz, Yovanoff & Doren, 1997; Benz et al., 2000; Fabian, 2007; Fabian et al.,

1998; Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Wagner et al., 2006).

Despite the abundant studies, limited information exists concerning the factors contributing to the employment outcome for Latino/a youth with disabilities. Most of the factors that have been considered as predictors in employment outcome studies for youth with disabilities are related to person, behavioral, and structural factors. This section describes studies that have examined these factors in terms of their relations to post-school outcomes for ethnic minority youth with disabilities.

Person Factors

Studies have investigated person variables (e.g., type of disability, gender, SSI) and the role they play in influencing the post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities. Evidence has shown that disability type, gender, and supplemental security income (SSI) significantly affect employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.

Type of disability. Several researchers have found that disability type significantly influences employment outcomes (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Newman et al., 2009; Wells, Sandefur, & Hogan, 2003). Disability type is associated with rates of high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, competitive employment, and wages. Heal and Rush (1995) and Blackorby and Wagner found that individuals with mild disabilities were employed most and had higher salaries, followed by students with hearing impairments, visual disabilities, physical disabilities, and intellectual disability. Individuals with severe disabilities are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed, and placed in segregated jobs after high school than those with mild disabilities.

Newman et al. (2009) found that youth with learning disabilities were more likely to be employed than youth with orthopedic impairments, mental retardation, or emotional

disturbance. Similarly, Luecking and Fabian (2000) found that transitioning youth in the Bridges program with severe emotional disorders (SED) had lower employment rates than youth with other types of disabilities. In 2007, Fabian found that, for a sample of youth participating in the Bridges School-to-Work program, those with orthopedic disabilities were less likely to obtain employment than youth of other disability groups.

In another study, Wells, Sandefur and Hogan (2003) investigated factors associated with early transition to adulthood using the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) and National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) data. Findings reveal that the type of disability profoundly affects youths' immediate post-high school activities. Males with a learning disability, speech impairment, visual impairment and other physical disabilities were more likely to be full-time students than employed individuals. Moreover, youth with either intellectual disabilities or multiple disabilities were more likely to become totally dependent on their families after exiting high school. In another study, Rabren, Dunn, and Chambers (2002) found that 62% of students with learning disabilities were employed compared to 39% of students with other disabilities (primarily intellectual disabilities).

Gender. Gender inequities among those with disabilities have been the focus of numerous studies which have shown that women have higher disability rates than men, are less likely to be employed, and, if employed, work in lower paying and lower skilled jobs (Belting, Timmons, & Butterworth, 2009; Fabian, 2007). Overall, being male is associated with a better employment outcome when compared to females with disabilities (Fabian, 2007; Heal & Rusch; 1995). Women with developmental disabilities also worked fewer hours in lower-wage jobs and earned less money than their male

counterparts (Belting et al., 2009). Benz et al., (1997) found that females with disabilities were five times less likely to be employed one year after high school than all other groups. Rabren, Dunn, and Chambers (2002) and Fabian (2007) also found a significant relationship between employment status and gender, disability, and setting (urban or rural). Both studies reveal that being male with a learning disability rather than other disabilities, from an urban school and with a job at the time of school exit increases the probability of being employed one year after high school (Rabren et al., 2002).

Fabian's 2007 study revealed that Latinas had the lowest employment rates after participation in Bridges School-to-Work program compared to other minorities and non-minorities with disabilities. Wagner (1992) found similar results in a national study of special education youth, and she also found that the employment gap between men and women with disabilities was increasing. Martz and Xu (2008) found that, among individuals with visual and other disabilities, males were more likely to be employed than females. Heal and Rusch (1995) used hierarchical regression modeling to examine factors that influence employment. Major findings were that gender (male), severity of disability (mild versus severe), family background characteristics, and cognitive ability (intelligence, self-care, living skills, and high school completion) were associated with higher employment rates.

Two studies explored the goals and career decision-making processes of females with disabilities (Lindstron & Benz, 2002; Powers et al., 2008) related to vocational outcomes. Lindstron and Benz used case studies with young females with learning disabilities to analyze their career decision-making. They suggested that young women with disabilities have limited opportunities, and they must have a variety of experiences

in order to make informed choices related to occupational options. They also suggested that short-term goals and the ability to persevere despite obstacles contribute to positive post-school employment outcomes for young females. Likewise, Powers et al., (2008) investigated factors that influence the transition goals and experiences for young women with disabilities. Powers et al. (2008) argued that an examination of gender differences in transition for youth with disabilities is incomplete without exploring the way in which gender differences may impact culturally and linguistically diverse youth with disabilities. As findings from previous studies suggest, males and females might differ in terms of goals, transition-training opportunities they have received and access to transition professionals to assist them.

Supplemental security income (SSI). Researchers have identified supplemental security income (SSI) as one factor that might hinder successful employment outcomes (Berry, 2000; Fabian, 2007; Hemmeter, Kauff & Wittenberg, 2009; Loprest & Wittenberg; 2007). In 2010; 7.9 million people in the U.S. were receiving SSI benefits. On this total, 1.2 million (15%) were younger than 18 years old (Social Security Administration (SSA) Report, 2010). Among persons aged 14 and older, Latinos represent an estimated 14% of the SSI population compared to (48%) whites and (47%) African Americans (SSA, 2007; Loprest & Wittenberg, 2007). Reports on SSI beneficiaries by the SSA indicate that the majority of youth receiving SSI move directly to SSI-adult programs without attempting to seek employment (Burkhauser & Daly, 2010).

In another study, Berry (2000) investigated the employment characteristics of youth with disabilities and found that SSI recipients with disabilities were less likely to

be employed than non-SSI recipients with disabilities. Loprest and Wittenburg (2007) found similar results when they examined the differences between youth without SSI benefits after age 18 and those who continue on SSI benefits after age 18. Findings revealed significant differences in demographic and human capital development across the two groups. Males were more likely to be no longer receiving SSI at age 18 (67%) than females (55%). Findings also showed that young adults no longer receiving SSI were more likely to work (41 %) than those who stay on SSI (15%). Fabian (2007) also found that receipt of social security benefits was a significant factor in predicting lower employment outcomes for a predominately ethnic minority sample of youth with disabilities.

Individual & Contextual Factor

Socio economic status (SES). Researchers have recognized the correlation between poverty, race/ethnicity, and disability (Emerson, Shahtahmasebi, Lancaster, & Berridge, 2010; Geenen et al. 2003; Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; Palmer, 2011). Evidence suggested that working age individual with disabilities are much more likely than people without disabilities to have lower incomes and higher rates of poverty (Stapleton, O'Day, Livermore & Imparato, 2006; Loprest & Maag, 2007). Moreover, some researchers have argued that poverty is the single greatest factor contributing to contextual barriers among ethnic minority youth with disabilities (Geenen et al., 2003; Palmer) and significantly impacts their career development and work opportunities.

In 2006, Stapleton et al. found that the income poverty rate for individuals with disabilities was 23% compared to 9% of those without disabilities. In 2010, the poverty rate for working people with disabilities was 27% versus 12% of working age people

without disability (Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, 2011). The poverty rate for Latino youth with disability is higher than whites and other minority youth (Geenen et al. 2003; Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; Palmer, 2011). Many Latino youth come from families with low household income and live in high poverty neighborhoods which places these youth at greater risk of dropping out of high school, or needing additional services and support to succeed academically and in preparing for post secondary transition. In relationship to post school outcomes, two aspects of poverty: attending a high-poverty school and individual household income needs to be considered (Blackordy & Wagner).

Evidence suggests that youth with disabilities from families with higher income also had higher employment rates and higher wages (Geenen et al., 2003). Likewise, Heal and Rush (1995) found that family income significantly contributed to post-school outcomes. Similarly, Newman et al. (2009) found that youths from a household with an income of \$50,000 were more likely to be employed than those from a household income of \$25,000 or less. In another study exploring employment outcomes for females with disabilities, Doren and Benz (1998) found that females who came from a family with low household annual income were much less likely to be competitively employed than females from high incomes families.

Behavioral Factors

Prior work experience. Evidence suggests that youth with disabilities who have a vocational experience during their school years have more positive post-school outcomes. Moreover, prior vocational experience, a frequently studied variable, has been shown to be the strongest predictors of post-school outcomes (Benz et al., 2000; Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011; Fabian, 2007; Fabian et al., 1998; Luecking & Fabian, 2000;

Wagner, et al., 2006). Work experiences during high school have been shown to enhance student learning and work habits (Hagner & Lounsbury, 2008; Lindstrom et al., 2007) and to promote vocational development. In addition, these "real life" experiences improve motivation and social skills (Burgstahler, 2001; Panagos & DuBois, 1999). Moreover, work-based experiences promote better time management, interpersonal skills, and knowledge of a particular work task (Greene, 2007; Hagner & Lounsbury, 2008).

Carter et al. (2011) examined factors associated with employment for students with severe disabilities two years after high school. They found a significant correlation between having a job during high school and post-school employment success. They also found that male students with disabilities who were more independent, had good social skills, and had parents who had higher expectations, had a greater likelihood of better employment outcomes after high school. Fabian (2007) investigated a sample of 4,571 urban youth with disabilities participating in the Bridges program and found that previous work experience during high school was a significant predictor of getting a job after school. Similarly, in a study of summer employment of 136 students with severe disabilities, Carter, Ditchman, Sun, Trainor, Swedeen and Owns (2010) found that the most prominent predictor of employment was holding at least one previous job experience during the spring semester.

Doren and Benz (1998) and Bentz et al. (2003) found that students with two or more paid jobs during high school were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment. Rush and Heal (1995) found that students who were more involved in occupational courses were also more likely to obtain employment. Evidence suggests that students who complete high school and also participate in a paid work experience or

an internship during high school increase their post-school employment outcomes (Benz et al., 1997; Fabian, 2007; Fabian et al., 1998; Hagner & Lounsbury, 2008; Luecking & Fabian, 2000). Overall, findings in these studies show that employment outcome was higher among white male with disabilities with a prior vocational experience and who are high school graduates.

Summary of Factors Associated with Employment Outcomes

These previous studies have advanced research on factors influencing employment outcomes for youth with disabilities, and shed some light on person, and behavioral factors that influence post-school outcomes. Despite the numerous studies on factors associated with employment outcomes, there are some limitations. First, most of the current research focuses on youth with disabilities but not particularly on the group that is having the poorest outcome-Latino/a ethnic minority youth with disabilities. Second, little research has focused on employment specialist characteristics, competencies and implications on post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities. Some studies investigating employment representatives or transition specialist staff and their relationship on post-school outcome for youth with disabilities are reviewed in the next section. Table 2.1 displays a summary of research on variables that influence employment outcomes along with prior research on these variables.

Table 2.1

Summary of Research on Factors Associated with Employment Outcome for Transitioning Individuals with Disabilities

Predictor Factors	Summary of Findings	Studies Reviewed
Gender	Major findings show that gender (being male) was associated with higher employment rates.	Benz, Yobanoff, & Doren, 1997; Boeltzig, Timmons & Butterworth, 2009; Fabian, 2007; Lindstrom & Benz, 2002; Heal & Rusch, 1995; Martz & Xu, 2008; Powers, Hogansen, Powers, Geenen & Gil-Kashiwabara, 2008; Rabren, Dunn & Chambers, 2002; Wagner, 1992.
Type of Disability	Findings revealed that type of disability significantly impact employment outcomes. For example transitioning youth in the Bridges School-to-Work program with SED have lower employment rates.	Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Levine & Wagner, 2003; Luecking and Fabian 2000; Rabren, Dunn, and Chambers, 2002; Wells, Sandefur & Hogan, 2003;
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	Students who received SSI were less likely to be employed.	Berry, 2000; Davies, Rupp and Wittenburg, 2009; Fabian, 2007, Hemmeter, Kauff & Wuttenburg, 2009
Socio Economic Status (SES)	Youth with disabilities from families with higher income also had higher employment rates and higher wages. Family income significantly contributed to post-school outcomes.	Doren & Benz, 1998; Geenen et al. 2003; Hasnain & Balcazar; Emerson, Shahtahmasebi, Lancaster, & Berridge, 2010; Stapleton et al. 2006; Palmer, 2011.
Work Experience	Previous work experience/paid internship was found to be a significant predictor of employment outcomes.	Bentz et al. (2003); Fabian, 2007; Fabian, Lent & Willis, 1998; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Wagner, et al.; Benz et al. 2000; Hagner & Lounsbury, 2008; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Burgstahler, 2001; Panagos & DuBois, 1999; Rojewsky, 1999; Carter, Ditchman, Sun, Trainor, Swedeen and Owns, 2010; Doren & Benz, 1998.

Research on Staff-Related Factors

ERs or transition staff play an important role in the successful transition outcomes of youth with disabilities; however, few studies have investigated the characteristics, competencies and interventions of ERs and the effect on employment outcomes for Latino youth with disabilities. Authors of some studies have suggested a need for more culturally competent transition personnel (Harry, 2008; Lichtenstein, Lindstrom, and Povenmire-Kirk, 2008; Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2010). Despite the need for more research on this area, only a few studies have examined the categories of transition specialist characteristics, competencies and strategies relate to post-school outcomes for young adult with disabilities.

Characteristics of Staff

In the most recent study, Whitley, Kostick, and Bush (2010) examined the self-reported characteristics and competencies of 22 supported employment specialists and supervisors as related to performance. Interviews revealed that eight dimensions represented the characteristics and competencies of supported employment specialist that were central to their successful functioning. These dimensions were labeled: initiative; outreach; persistence; hardiness; empathy; passion; team orientation and professionalism. This Whitley et al. study, the first addressing the current gap in the literature on staff-related factors influencing successful outcomes, suggests the need for more evidence-based research on recruitment, training, and supervision of employment specialists.

In a qualitative study investigating the perspectives of professionals, youths, and parents on the transition experience, Cooney (2002) found that transition professionals planned and implemented strategies they believed reflected adequate transition supports.

Staff performed these tasks from a “different vantage point” than the youth or their parents. For example, professionals approached transition by identifying programming needs, relying on available resources, and looking at viable options. They focused on areas of discrepancy and access. Parents, on the other hand, focused on their sons’/daughters’ strengths and potentials. Findings suggest that professionals controlled and planned the transition process by matching participants’ needs to available programs. Moreover, they found that these transition programs often promoted dependency and denied students a genuine opportunity to accomplish successful adult roles. The researchers concluded that the inability of parents and professionals to recognize each other’s perspectives damaged the quality of the transition process. In another study, Benz, Lindstrom and Yovanoff (2000) investigated participants’ perceptions of staff characteristics that affected their education and transition goals. Findings suggested that individualization of services related to student goals and personalized attention from staff were highly valued by participants.

In a more recent study, Povenmire-Kirk et al. (2010) conducted focus groups and interviews with Latino youth, their parents and transition specialists in Oregon to understand the values and behaviors of the staff members. Findings revealed a “dichotomy between two directions” in staff values and behavior. Some staff felt affection and solidarity with the Latino community and others felt resentment at having to learn new skills to be effective educators. Newly hired staff members were more open to learning and improving their skills and taking courses related to multicultural or diverse population, and they consequently reported being more prepared to work with ethnic minorities. The study also revealed that some staff embraced the use of

multicultural staff as interpreters and used their language skills and cultural fluency; other staff described being resentful, suspicious, and afraid that the interpreters might overstep their authority with the families. Some concerns were related to non-certified staff translating at IEP meeting and conducting assessment in Spanish.

Geenen et al. (2003) and Kim and Mornigstar (2005) argued that Latino/a young adult with disabilities and their families might be receiving transition interventions focused on more individualistic goals, resulting in the families' feeling misunderstood and disrespected. The researchers found that family's encountered insensitivity, discrimination and generally reported being treated poorly by professionals. They also found lack of access to disability accommodations and family concerns about their children's' social relationships and self-sufficiency. Povenmire-Kirt et al. (2010) found that families reported having limited information about and access to the transition process; and they also reported not knowing where to go for support.

Competencies and Strategies

Lysaght and Alttschuld (2000) defined competencies as the capacity of individuals in a particular position to apply knowledge and skills in an effective manner in the full range of situations associated with that position. According to Coursey et al. (2000) competencies include knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that personnel need in order to deliver effective services. Coursey et al., identified twelve specific competencies for staff working with consumers with mental health illness: (a) basic attitudes, values, knowledge and behavior that are the foundation of consumer-oriented services; (b) services for the consumer's family; (c) best practices for intervention and support; (d) biological and pharmacological knowledge, (e) psychosocial interventions;

(f) developing individualized interventions; (g) resources, entitlements and advocacy; (h) pertinent law, (i) collaboration with other agencies; (j) staff member development; (k) cultural competency; and (l) evaluation. The researchers also identified five critical limitations: limited range of services, narrow base of viewpoints, lack of focus on staff member attitudes and values, lack of specification, and lack of documentation.

Several studies have examined staff competencies related to performance in a more comprehensive nature (Aubry, Flynn, Gerber, & Dostaler, 2005; Coursey et al. 2000; Hanger, Noll, & Donovan, 2002). These studies emphasized the need to focus on more specific competencies that take consumers needs into consideration. In a study examining staff competencies of employment personnel in relation to positive outcomes for students with disabilities, Morgan, Ames, Loosli, Feng and Taylor (1995) found that the top priorities noted included: (a) matching the job to the applicant; (b) gathering information about job prospects; (c) encouraging family support; d) marketing the student; (e) strengthening appropriate social behavior, and (f) strengthening job skills.

In another study, Hagner et al., (2002) conducted a qualitative study with personnel experienced in community employment to identify general competencies needed by job development and employment specialist roles. Findings from this study revealed a list of 87 staff competencies for job development and job support. These competencies were clustered into three major domains and are explained below:

1. ***Employment process competencies***: The employment process competencies relate to job development, job analysis, job matching, job training and related supports, behavior and communication assistance beyond work, and ongoing career planning.

2. ***Stakeholder interaction competencies***: The competencies relate to interactions and relationships with groups that can be considered stakeholders in the employment process. The stakeholder interaction competencies include relating to consumers, working with families, working with employers, and working with professionals and agencies.
3. ***General competencies***: General competencies skills relate to the areas of consumers rights (knowledge of consumer rights and protective services) and several other general competencies involved in communication and problem solving (p. 47).

In a study intended to identify core competencies for community support providers, Aubry et al. (2005) surveyed 18 consumers receiving services and 16 staff members from two mental health community support programs. The researchers identified 68 competencies that included personal attributes, knowledge, and skills. Based on a card sort task, consumers and support workers from six mental health community support programs rated 59 of the 68 competencies as being either *absolutely necessary* or *desirable*. Findings revealed that a majority of pre-employment competencies addressed personal attributes consistent with adopting a person-centered approach. Those competencies categorized as learned-on-the-job involved special knowledge and skills specific to working with people with psychiatric disabilities. The researchers concluded that a need exists for specialized training and supervision that has not been typically available in the community mental health sector. Previous studies on work competencies recognized a need to focus on staff competencies with specific

populations or clientele. As stated by Coursey et al. (2000), most competencies “reflect the unique skills and perspectives of their own limited constituencies” (p.379).

Despite the extensive literature on staff competence related to performance, in general, limited studies have examined transition personnel competencies and strategies specifically that influence the post-school outcomes for Latino/a youth with disabilities. Several studies have recommended a need for more culturally competent transition personnel and services (Blalock, et al., 2003; Harry, 2008; Kim & Morningstar, 2005; Matrone & Leahy, 2005; Lichtenstein, Lindstrom, & Povenmire-Kirk, 2008). Moreover, some researchers have suggested that one of the major challenges to providing adequate transition services is the preparation of qualified transition personnel (Blalock, et al. 2003; Hagner, et al., 2002). Therefore, the development and evaluation of cultural competences are areas in the transition field that need to be improved (Harry, 2000; Povenmire-Kirk, 2008).

Coursey et al. (2000) noted that the best incentive for focusing on staff member competencies is the input from consumers about the need for systemic change including “our understanding, our attitudes and values, our behavior, our intentions and our belief” (p. 378). According to Hanger, Noll, and Donovan (2002), achieving high quality employment outcomes requires that service staff have adequate in-service training, and cultural competencies (i.e., knowledge and skills).

Cultural competencies have been defined in several different ways. According to Haines, Lynch and Winston (2000), cultural competencies are the ability to relate and communicate effectively when the individuals involved in the interaction do not share the same culture, ethnicity, language, or other salient variables. When applied to

organizations rather than individuals, cultural competence refers to the organization's ability to be responsive to the unique cultural, ethnic, or linguistic characteristics of its clientele. Research in transition has identified staff cultural competence as an integral aspect of the transition process (Harry, 2000; Kim & Morningstar, 2005; Matrone & Leahy, 2005; Lichtenstein, Lindstrom & Povenmire-Kirk, 2008).

Several other studies investigating cultural competencies and services related to employment outcomes have focuses on client-counselor ethnic/racial match (Matrone & Leahy, 2005; Whitfield, Venable, & Broussard, 2010) and training in disability services. However, most of these studies have focused on vocational rehabilitation counselors and not specifically to cultural competencies of ERs. Moreover, none of the competency studies has focused on ER cultural competencies specific to working with Latino/a youth.

Matrone and Leahy (2005) examined the relationship between client employment outcomes and cultural counseling competencies of 118 rehabilitation counselors employed in a large mid-western public rehabilitation program. The researchers also examined counselor-client racial similarity and dissimilarity in relation to outcomes. Findings revealed that cultural competencies were not significant in clients' outcomes; however, the characteristics of the clients were significant predictors in explaining outcomes. Counselor-client race was found to be a significant variable in explaining client outcomes. The researchers suggest that qualitative research studies, specifically individual interviews, are a more appropriate method to further explore the perception of cultural competencies (Matrone & Leahy).

Whitehead (2003) also investigated the perceived cultural competence of 148 rehabilitation counselors working with African American clients with mental health

disorders. Findings revealed that rehabilitation counselors perceived themselves to be culturally competent. In particular, ethnic minority women other than African American women reported greater multicultural knowledge. Counselors also related increased years of experience in their position to increased multicultural awareness, but they did not perceive multicultural training as a significant predictor of any aspect of multicultural competence. Findings suggest no significant difference in the way African American and White rehabilitation counselors provided services for different racial/ethnic groups (Whitehead, 2003).

Harry (2008) stated that a clear understanding of parents' views should be an integral aspect of professional preparation and practice. Moreover, she suggests that professional underestimation of culturally diverse parents' participation in transition produces limited interaction and lack of awareness of community and other cultural contexts. Harry concluded that deficit views of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families, cross-cultural misunderstanding of the meaning of disability, differential values in setting goals for individual with disabilities, and culturally-based differences in caregivers' views of their role may result in negative outcome.

Several researchers have also investigated key strategies used to support individual with disabilities in achieving competitive employment (Carter et al., 2009; Leake, & Black; 2005; Unger, Parent, Gibson, Kane-Johnson, & Kregel, 1998). Leake and Black (2005) developed a comprehensive tool with several guiding principles for working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) youth with disabilities. The guiding principles included:

- being culturally competent which means that services and supports are provided in ways that are appropriate and sensitive to the cultural nuances and expectations of youth and their families;
- individualizing which means that cultural competence must be redeveloped individually with each youth and family;
- emphasizing natural supports that are provided by relatives, peers, community, clubs, and religious organizations; and
- building on strengths in order to address challenges.

The researchers noted that building on youth strengths means identifying and nurturing interests, skills, and personal relationships that help youth with disabilities achieve their transition goals. They also provided some tools to use with ethnic minority youth and their families (Leak & Black, 2005). One tool, a “circle of friends,” provides a visual representation of the youth’s network of social support. Once the youth identify the support members, the transition staff brings them together to examine their hopes and dreams. They also recommended a process called “making action plans” (MAPS). The MAPS process involves asking questions to gather important background information about the youth and family. This information is then used to create an action plan to achieve the transition goals of the youth and family (Leake & Black, 2005).

In another study, Garcia-Irriarte et al. (2007) investigated employment-related support provided by staff in the Chicago Bridges program. The researchers analyzed case notes of 65 youth participating in the program and found that two types of employment-related supports (job specific support and off-site-work) provided by case managers predicted higher employment retention for youth with disabilities. Staff who provided

off-site support for these youth (such as addressing community issues) achieved better outcomes. Fabian et al. (1998) also examined the predictors of post-school success for youth with disabilities participating in the national Bridges Program and also found that off-site support from transition staff was associated with better employment outcomes.

In a recent study to identify effective strategies to expand employment opportunities and outcomes for youth with disabilities, Carter et al. (2009) developed a project called community conversations. The purpose of the project was to foster dialogue centered on ways that schools, business, agencies, organizations, families, youth and others could work together to broaden the job opportunities in their local communities and identify new partners willing to participate. The strategy of bringing stakeholders together to generate solutions to common challenges encountered by the community can significantly improve youth employment outcomes. In a more recent study, Murry and Tood (2010) provided four strategies as the foundation for positive transition into early adulthood for students with emotional behavioral disorders EBD. The four strategies were (1) to promote students' engagement with school to achieve retention, (2) to promote youth self-advocacy and self-regulation skills during social skill use, (3) to provide student support through collaboration between school personnel and community service providers, and (4) to integrate community-based mentorship programs with students' educational and transitional processes. These strategies might also apply to transition from high school to employment for Latino/a youth with disabilities.

Teamwork and collaboration strategies have been shown to be significant in employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities (Carter et al., 2009; Leake & Black, 2005; Unger et al., 1998). Fabian et al. (1995) studied employers and

rehabilitation personnel and found that employers and rehabilitation staff view the process of job development and placement from different perspectives. The researchers indicated that these differences might interfere with the development of collaborative relationships.

Summary

Previous studies have documented several factors that affect the successful transition to employment of youth with disabilities. We know that disparities exist regarding previous work experience, gender, SSI, severity of disability, and socio-economic status. A limited number of studies have investigated the characteristics, competencies and strategies of transition personnel and their influence on employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. Moreover, several studies have suggested a need for more culturally competent transition personnel. Although there have been a few studies of the national Bridges program (Fabian, 2007; Fabian et al., 1998; Garcia-Irriarte et al., 2007), there is a need to more fully investigate the myriad of factors that influence employment for one subset of program participants – Latino/a youth with disabilities. Moreover, important contributors to outcomes for this population have not been fully explored. The present study addresses this gap by exploring staff characteristics, strategies, and competencies and their association with successful employment outcomes for Latino/a youth with disabilities. Table 2.1 includes a summary of the research included in this review.

Table 2.2

Current Research on Staff characteristics, competencies and strategies that facilitate successful outcomes for youth with disabilities

Research Article	Type of Research and Purpose	Research Findings
Whitley et al., 2010. Desirable characteristics and competencies of supported employment specialists: An empirically grounded framework	Qualitative study-Examined supported employment specialist self-reported characteristics & competencies as influential to proficient performance in the field. The researchers conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with 22 supported employment specialists and supervisors. (Characteristics and Competencies)	Identified 8 dimensions/factors that accurately represented supported employment specialist characteristics and competencies need for successful functioning in their field: (1) initiative; (2) outreach; (3) persistence; (4) hardiness; (5) empathy; (6) passion; (7) team orientation and (8) professionalism. This study is the first step to gather information related to the current gap in the literature on staff-related factors influencing successful outcomes. Findings suggest a need for more evidence-based research on employment specialist recruitment, training and supervision.
Garcia-Irriarte et al.,2007. Analysis of case managers' support of youth with disabilities transitioning from school to work..	Qualitative study -Analyzed case notes of 65 youth in the Chicago Bridges program to study employment-related support provided by the case managers. (Strategies)	Findings suggest two types of employment-related supports (job specific support and off-site-work) provided by case managers predicted higher employment retention for youth with disabilities. Staff who provided off-site support for these youth (such as addressing community issues) achieved better outcomes.
Morgan et al., 1995. Training for support employment specialist and their supervisors: Identifying important training topics.	Qualitative Study-Examined employment personnel to determine the relative importance of training topics by ranking training priorities and identifying variables related to positive outcomes for students with disabilities. (Competencies)	Findings revealed the following top priorities: a) matching the job to the applicant; b) gathering information about job prospects; c) encouraging family support; d) marketing the student; e) strengthening appropriate social behavior, and, f) strengthening job skill.

Research Article	Type of Research and Purpose	Research Findings
Aubry et al., 2005. Identifying the core competencies of community support providers working with people with disabilities.	Qualitative study- Identified core competencies for community support providers working with people with psychiatric disabilities. Using multiple methods developed from previous research in the field of developmental disabilities, 18 consumers and 16 staff members from two mental health community support programs. Identified 68 competencies that included personal attributes, knowledge, and skills. Six mental health community support programs rated 59 of the 68 competencies as either absolutely necessary or desirable. (Characteristics & Competencies)	Results of a second card sort task found most competencies needed pre-employment were personal attributes consistent with adopting a person-centered approach. Competencies to be learned on the job involved special knowledge and skills specific to working with people with psychiatric disabilities. The range of personal attributes, knowledge, and skills in the identified competencies reflects the complexity of contemporary mental health community support. Findings indicate a need for specialized training and supervision not typically available in the community mental health sector.
Hagner et al., 2002. Identifying community employment program staff competencies: A critical incident approach	Qualitative study- using critical incident techniques to identify competencies needed to prepare individuals for job development and employment specialist roles. They analyzed 44 narrative descriptions from employment program staff to determine their ability to respond appropriately as indicative or critical to effective job performance. (Competencies)	Results generated 87 staff competencies for job development and support and were placed in 12 areas. Competencies clustered into three major domains: 1) Employment process competencies; 2) Stakeholder interaction competencies; 3) General competencies.
Leake & Black, 2005. Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CLD): Implications for transition personnel. Essential tools: Improving secondary education and transition for youth with disabilities.	Summarizes current research on transition issues for ethnic minority or culturally and linguistically diverse youth with disabilities. Provided transition staff with information to support youth by building on their strengths and enhancing natural support available within the families and communities. (Strategies & Competencies)	The article highlights the important strategy of building on strengths to address challenges. Explores the collectivistic values on CLD vs. individualistic American values and how the transition process and goals of youth and families may be shaped by cultural values and how values may influence the concept of self-determination. Competencies of culturally sensitive individualization services and supports and how staff can achieve this through proven strategies such as cultural reciprocity, person-centered planning, and resource mapping.

Chapter 3 Methods

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the employer representatives (ERs) characteristics, competencies, and strategies that influenced the successful transition from high school to employment for urban Latino/a youth with disabilities participating in the Bridges School-to-Work program. In achieving this aim, the study was guided by the following broad research question: What factors are characteristic of employment specialists who achieve successful transition outcomes with Latino/a youth with disabilities participating in a multi-site vocational intervention? In addition, the following associated sub-questions are investigated:

1. Which specific characteristics and perceptions of employment representatives are associated with successful job attainment for urban youth with disabilities?
2. What competencies of employment representatives are associated with successful job attainment for urban Latino/a youth with disabilities?
3. What job development strategies are associated with successful job attainment for urban adults with disabilities?

This study followed a general inductive reasoning method supported by Thomas (2003, 2006). This method involves interpretation of staff-related factors that may influence successful outcomes of school-to-work transitions for Latino/a youth with disabilities. The inductive reasoning approach is open-ended and exploratory, and seeks to reveal patterns in the data that may lead to general conclusions. Interviews, conducted in depth, were the primary method for data collection.

This chapter presents the research design, including the rationale for using qualitative methods and for choosing a general inductive reasoning approach. It also

describes the methods, criteria for selecting the research sites and respondents, and the processes for data collection and analysis. I conclude this chapter with the process by which I addressed ethical considerations in maintaining confidentiality, protecting participants' anonymity and establishing trustworthiness.

Design of the Study

In order to explore staff-related factors influencing employment outcomes on urban Latino/a youth with disabilities, I chose a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research approach provided an opportunity to discover meaningful patterns of information that address the research questions. Moreover, a qualitative approach provides a process of examining and interpreting data “in order to obtain meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 1). According to Creswell (2009), a study deserves a qualitative approach “when a concept or phenomena needs to be understood because little research has been done on it” (p.18). I determined that qualitative research methods were most appropriate for exploring and describing the characteristics, strategies and competencies of ERs when working with Latino/a youth – an area that has not been previously studied.

Several researchers have described a wide range of underlying assumptions and procedures associated with analyzing qualitative data (Berg, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Thomas, 2003). Some of the most common approaches or traditions associated with qualitative analysis are grounded theory, phenomenology, case study, discourse analysis, and ethnography. Thomas (2003, 2006) suggested an elaborated account of a commonly used and straightforward systematic procedure for qualitative data analysis called a general inductive approach. The use of a general inductive approach is common in

grounded theory studies, discourse analysis, and phenomenology. The main purpose of a general inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant, themes inherent in the raw data without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies. The purposes underlying the development of the general inductive approach are:

- (a) To condense extensive and varied raw data into a brief, summary format; (b) to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary derived from the raw data and to ensure that these links are transparent; and (c) to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the text data (Thomas, 2006, p. 283).

The trustworthiness of the data can be assessed using similar techniques used with other types of data analysis. For the purpose of this study, a general inductive reasoning approach provided a basis for developing a conceptual model linking the research objectives to the study's findings. The methodology incorporated structured in-depth interviews as a primary method of data collection. The purpose of in-depth interviewing is to explore general topics in order to reveal or uncover the participants' perceptions or views related to the topic (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Site Selection

I used a purposeful convenience sampling strategy to select the research sites. Convenience sampling has been described most simply as one that saves time, money, and effort (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and is based on availability of the site and responders. The Bridges School- to-Work program sites were selected as the research site based on the availability of the program and the willingness of staff to participate. The Executive Director of the Marriott Foundation, which operates Bridges, offered full

support in making the connections to the sites and was instrumental in helping with the recruitment of interviewees.

The Bridges program was the focus of the study for several reasons. First, Bridges is recognized nationally as an exemplary intervention model program; second, the location of the Bridges program in urban inner cities has allowed the program to focus its work on ethnic minority participants (Fabian et al., 1998), and third the program serves about 1,000 youth per year and almost 90% of those who successfully complete the program also receive an offer for ongoing employment. According to Fabian (2007), 85% of youth in the Bridges program secure a job and 67% have successful outcomes. The ERs who provide direct transition services and interventions to the urban youth participating in the program play a critical role in helping the youth achieve these outcomes; therefore these professionals were deemed the most suitable candidates for this study.

Sample Selection

The participants were selected using criterion-sampling strategies. Criterion sampling allows the researcher to select respondents that meet pre-determined parameters. It facilitates quality assurance during the interpretation of results (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This sampling technique provides a way to select participants from which one can obtain information related to the purpose of the study. Participants were chosen to ensure the following criteria:

1. Each selected ER had a caseload that included Latino/a youth.
2. Each ER had archival data on the Latino/a youth they served.
3. The final pool of ERs was ethnically diverse.

The sample consisted of 15 ERs from six Bridges program sites. I conducted interviews with all 15 participants, five males and 10 females. Participants were working for Bridges prior to 2010. The years of experience ranged from a maximum of thirteen to a minimum of two: 67% of them had been working there between 2 and 8 years. Only one ER had been working there thirteen years. Participants were aged 22 years to 34 years ($n=3$); 35 years to 44 years ($n=10$) and 45 years to 54 years ($n=2$). The ethnic background of the participants included six who were White, four who identified themselves as Latino/a; three who were African American, and two who were Asian American/Pacific Islander. All participants had a college degree, and a variety of majors were represented (i.e. Education, Social and Behavioral Science, Business, and Art & Humanities).

Participant Recruitment

As in all research using human subjects, ethical considerations are no less critical in qualitative research. Berg (2007) suggests that ethical considerations are generic, such as informed consent and protecting participants' anonymity, as well as situation specific. Prior to interaction with subjects and to ensure that participants in this study were protected, informed about all potential risk, and moreover informed that their participation was voluntary, I followed the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures. An IRB approval of the protocol (10-0686) was granted and the written and stamped consent document was sent to all ERs who participated in the study (Appendix B). The consent information was discussed with and signed by each ER prior to the start of the interviews; a copy was also provided to them. Berg (2007) emphasized the importance of providing participants with a high degree of

confidentiality. In this study, confidentiality was maintained by not including participants' real names, not linking them to specific sites, or adding identifying information in the research records.

Participants were recruited using e-mails (Appendix B) and phone calls from key staff at the national office of the Marriott Foundation. The Executive Director of the Foundation assisted in recruitment by sending an e-mail invitation to each of the site directors informing them about the study and asking them to encourage staff to participate. The e-mail invitation included the consent form, a description of the study, and contact information should the staff member agree to participate in the interview. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval letter from the University of Maryland was also included. In addition to the electronic information, The Foundation's Executive Director personally called each of the seven directors and ERs with substantial tenure at Bridges in order to provide them additional details of the study and encourage staff to volunteer. The e-mail and consent form emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary. In all, 57 Bridges School-to-Work ERs who provided direct transition services to youth with disabilities received an e-mail invitation to the study. Of the 57 ERs invited to participate in the study, 20 volunteered and were interviewed. Of the 20 ERs interviewed, 15 met the sample selection criteria. ERs with few or no Latino/a youth in their caseloads were not included in the sample.

Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) systematically documented the degree of data saturation and variability over the course of thematic analysis using 60 in-depth interviews regarding data saturation in qualitative research. Findings revealed that

saturation occurred within the first 12 interviews. In addition, basic elements for meta-themes were present as early as the first six interviews and variability was also similar.

Although there is no guarantee that a similar degree of “saturation” will occur in the present sample, Patton (2002) suggested that, “the validity, meaningfulness, and insight generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than sample size” (p.245). If the present sample provides sufficient “saturation” and if Patton is correct, the 12 sampled cases should be sufficient for my qualitative investigation.

Data Collection

For this study, data were gathered from two key sources: (a) a structured interview protocol and (b) the Bridges national database that allowed for the retrieval and analysis of case-specific data for each of the participating interviewees. The interviews involve a number of predetermined questions and topics (Berg, 2007). These questions are asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order.

Interviews. The interview protocol was developed in several stages. First, I reviewed the literature on transition for youth with disabilities and cultural competencies of transition staff. Second, I generated an initial set of interview questions relevant to the empirical literature reviewed in Chapter 2. These questions were presented to the faculty members who serve as the dissertation advisory committee. The members of the dissertation committee guided me in refining the questions; they recommended questions for me to add to the protocol, based on my research focus and objective of the study. Five pilot interviews were conducted with a group of recently hired ERs from the Bridges program, to obtain feedback on clarity, language, comprehension, and length of the

interview. Feedback from these pilot interviews suggested that questions could be reordered in a way that followed a more logical sequence and flowed better conversationally. Experts at TransCen reviewed the final draft interview protocol and a few other changes were made. I added probes and follow-up questions in order to generate more open-ended discussion.

The final interview protocol consisted of three sections with questions developed consistent with the studies reviewed in Chapter 2. The first section included a demographic questionnaire and requested staff background information such as gender, age, race, number of years working with Bridges, education level, college major, and ability to speak Spanish. The second section included six structured questions on the ERs' perceived cultural competencies related to their work experience with Latino/a youth with disabilities. Some questions were related to ERs' training and their perceived level of cultural competencies in their position. They were asked to rate and describe their ability to relate to and communicate with Latino/a youth and their families, particularly those who do not speak English, and the types of services they provided to Latino /a youth and families. The third section included 10 open-ended questions that examined ERs' perceptions of their experience working with Latino/a youth and families, the types of strategies they use when working with Latino/a youth and families, and personal qualities and skills they need in order to be successful with this population. The interview protocol is included as Appendix C.

Each interview started with an informal and friendly conversation, followed by an overview of the study. In addition, probes were provided to follow up and ask participants to explain or elaborate on their ideas (Creswell, 2009). Interviews were

conducted at the TransCen office in Maryland during the months of December 2011 and January 2012. All interviews were conducted by telephone and were audio recorded with participants' permission. Another research member of TransCen participated in the interviews; both researchers asked questions and took extensive notes during each interview. At the end of each interview we discussed our notes and preliminary impressions and developed a list of the emerging themes.

A standard procedure was used to complete all the interviews and to provide participants with the opportunity to converse about their own perspectives and qualities as well as the strategies they use to help Latino/a youth transition to employment and successful outcomes (job retention). The interviews were sufficiently comprehensive to obtain views and opinions from all the participants related to the research questions. Participants were given assurance that all identifying information would be removed from the transcripts to maintain confidentiality. Interviews lasted between forty-five and sixty-five minutes. The respondents received a thank you card acknowledging their time and contribution to the study. They also received a \$15 gift card as a token of appreciation.

All the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed. Two undergraduate students were recruited; one from the Disability Support Services office at the University of Maryland, College Park and another from Brown University to assist with transcriptions. A research member from TransCen and I also transcribed some of the participant interviews. Participants were given the option to receive a written summary of the interviews by e-mail so they could confirm the accuracy of their information. A doctoral student collaborated with the researcher to verify the transcripts for accuracy.

To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts. This included participants' names and program sites.

National Bridges database. The Marriott Foundation provided the researcher with access to the Bridges database, which included, at the time of data collection, electronic files of a diverse sample of approximately 17,911 urban youth with disabilities. The database includes information for all seven urban Bridges sites located across the country: Washington, DC, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles and San Francisco. The ERs in each Bridges site are responsible for entering data electronically. Data are then aggregated nationally by The Marriott Foundation headquarters office staff in Bethesda, MD. The Foundation's administrative office granted the research team access to the database. Special identification numbers were created to maintain youth anonymity while allowing the research team to link youth to ERs who worked with them, after receiving the ERs consent form.

The Bridges' database includes both quantitative and qualitative information for all participants. Youth with disabilities in the Bridges database are between the ages of 16 and 22 years (Fabian, 2007). Data also included information on youth participants' demographic characteristics, goals, previous vocational experiences, interests and career goals, and post school outcomes, including job placement, retention, and advancement.

After completing all the interviews, the Marriott Bridges' data were analyzed to:

- (a) confirm that each of the study participants had caseloads that included Latino/a youth;
- (b) calculate their overall placement success rate (number placed in jobs divided by number on their caseloads at enrollment); and
- (c) calculate placement success rates for their Latino/a students. These individual outcome data were matched to each of the

employer representatives that were interviewed. Based on this preliminary analysis, from the 20 interviews, five of the interviewees were removed from the qualitative analyses either because their caseloads indicated insufficient numbers of Latino/a youth, or they had been hired too recently for student outcomes to be included in the database.

The final sample consisted of 15 ERs who served a total of 1,045 Bridges youth between 2004 and 2010. The overall success rate for all youth in their caseload was 83%. From 1,045 youth on the ER's caseloads, 213 (20%) were Latino/a youth. The ERs overall success rate for the Latino/a youth only was 85% (181). The final qualitative analysis was subsequently conducted for these 15 ERs. ERs with no Latino/a youth in their caseloads were not included in the sample.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a process to analytically bring order, structure, and interpretation to qualitative data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Through analyzing qualitative data, one can preserve chronological flow, assess local causality, and derive fruitful explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data were analyzed considering Thomas's (2003) methods for data analysis, which are very similar to Miles and Huberman's (1994) steps of data reduction, data displays and conclusion drawing/verification. The analytic steps underlying a general inductive approach is guided by the discovering of patterns, themes, or categories in the raw data (Thomas, 2006) as well as the objectives guiding the study.

The first steps in data analysis involved transcribing the audio recordings of all interviews. Once all the data were transcribed, I checked the transcripts against the audiotapes for accuracy of the transcription. I read through all the data to get a sense of

the information as a whole and to obtain a general impression of each participant's responses. Nvivo 9 (Edhlund, 2011) qualitative data analysis software was then used to organize and code the data efficiently and concisely. Using inductive coding, I searched for substantive patterns in the data and developed coding categories for these patterns prior to data interpretation. According to Merriam (1998), a good code classification is one that reflects the purpose of the research and is exhaustive, has mutually exclusive categories, sensitizing, and conceptually congruent. After reviewing the raw data repeatedly, a list of broad and descriptive themes or categories emerged. Each of these phrases, ideas, or units of information were labeled. Since my research study was specifically related to participants' characteristics, competencies, and strategies with the Latino/a youth in their caseload, I created a summary of themes and categories from all participants' responses containing specific information on these topics. I then identified text segments that contained meaningful units and created a label, or code, for each new category into which the text segment could be assigned. Additional text segments were added to the relevant category. When new codes emerged, they were coded and compared/contrasted with existing codes to filter out redundancies and maintain the integrity of the key themes.

In this thematic and pattern analysis, raw data were analyzed by identifying and compiling components of personal attributes, competencies, and strategies. The focus of the analysis was to group pieces of data/text together considering possible meanings so that themes or patterns were formulated. The nodes (themes or categories) that emerged were linked to others subcategories using hierarchy of categories in order to create seven to nine core categories.

A matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994) table was also created using the raw data to compare the themes that emerged across participant responses. The columns included a code label with a description of the code, theme examples and sample responses from different participants. This style of data organization provided a structure to compare data within and across cases. Table 3.3 illustrates examples of organizing the raw data by using code labels and descriptions to assist with the cross-case analysis and identification of themes.

Table 3.3

Matrix Table for Data Organization

Label and Description	Categories/Themes/ Findings From Raw Data	Examples
<p>Personal Attributes/Beliefs A set of prominent attributes or personal traits that contribute to providing effective transition services to Latino/a youth with disabilities</p>	<p>High level of Commitment (with the job and the youth) – Highly responsible, strong work ethics, passion, lead by example, efficient, accountable and maintain accurate records to support youth success). ER’s personal ownership of success of program/youth/outcomes, going above and beyond, proud of program and role. Instilling-Hope- By instilling hope, participants’ encouraged the student to have high aspirations, showed youth their capabilities, dealt with families to change their attitudes, and also acted to obtain employers’ commitment to working with and supporting the youth. Entrepreneur Skills Set – Major characteristics of entrepreneurs include: innovative skills, motivator, result-oriented (setting goals and targets and getting pleasure from achieving them), risk taker, and individual with a total commitment (hard work, energy and determination) Business minded & sales person</p>	<p>“Job seemed interesting and meaningful, wanted to feel I was doing something that made a difference. I feel I’m making a difference in youth life, a job with social purpose.”</p> <p>“I set my expectations pretty high for them. Don’t dumb things down. Give them a feeling of wanting to achieve. They work hard to maintain their jobs. I motivate them by holding them to a high standard.’</p> <p>We’re employer-focused in that we want to meet employers’ needs – however once I know the student’s strengths and interests I can go to specific employers with this information, networking, keeping long-term relationships.</p>
<p>Competencies ERs knowledge, skills, awareness and ability to relate, and communicate effectively with Latino/a youth and their families. (Considering culture, ethnicity, language, or other salient variables)</p>	<p>Culturally Minded-Ability to be responsive to the unique cultural, ethnic, or linguistic characteristics of Latino youth and families) Knowledge about family value (e.g. religious and implications with employment). Perceived the youth as capable to succeed-high expectation. Awareness of youth Needs and Challenges- Attend to status and specific needs of the youth: holistic understanding of the youth- systemic, socio/cultural, financial, and personal factors that significantly contribute to students with</p>	<p>“In order to be sensitive to various issues related to culture; what there is religion, traditions, or just how to approach them and language. It’s important to be able to talk to all youth with respect and not alienate any single one particular group.”</p> <p>“It helps a lot that I speak a little Spanish. I can have pretty good conversations with families about work schedules, job matches, and work locations. I can ask if they help with transportation. I can communicate a lot and for parents who do not speak English they appreciate that.”</p>

Label and Description	Categories/Themes/ Findings From Raw Data	Examples
<p>Strategies/ Interventions Employer representatives' approaches and interventions to assist youth with disabilities secure and retain successful employment outcomes.</p>	<p>disabilities' lower participation in employment or barrier to be successful (Ex. Variables mentioned in the literature review).</p> <p>Networking –Collaborate, negotiate and develop connections with a group of employers to support and meet the students needs, serve as liaison-connecting them to other agencies, employers, and resources)</p> <p>Relationship building -Ability to work in collaboration and develop relationship with different stakeholders (i.e. co-workers, youth, families, business, schools and other organizations)</p> <p>Teamwork-Teamwork involves the ability to collaborate and work efficiently as a team.</p> <p>On-going support-Follow-up services to the youth and employer. For example regular contact through phone calls, employment site visit, with the youth and employer in order to reinforce and stabilize job placement.</p> <p>Family Systems Focus –Reach out to the families; involve them in the transition process, sharing information and power.</p>	<p>My relationships with employers is critical because I want them to know that I have a really qualify candidate, so customer service is critical for me. Make sure it's a good job match; job match is critical for me.</p> <p>They have said it's because we are very attentive to their [employers needs] needs. I'm always available, day, night or weekend. Does a lot of job coaching. Lots of interaction with the employers.</p> <p>Take each other's youth's on interviews, etc. We cover each other on various tasks. Teamwork is critical. "We will go out and job develops together.</p> <p>In this site is required to do a home visits, even if not required I would still do it. After the second meeting with the student, I arrange a time to meet with the parents; I've already called them before the open house to set up an initial rapport with them. After home visit, figure out parent's personality; and sometimes I will stop by again to see them, I often make monthly phone calls to them to give them an update on how their student is doing; I'm straightforward and honest with them; keep them informed."</p>

According to Thomas (2006), the outcome from an inductive approach is the development of categories into a model that summarizes the raw data and conveys key themes and processes. The categories resulting from the coding are the core of inductive analysis and have five key features:

1. Category label: a word or short phrase used to refer to the category.
2. Description of category: a description of the meaning of the category, including key characteristic, scope and limitations.
3. Text or data associated with the category: examples of text coded into the categories that illustrate meanings, associations, and perspectives associated with the categories.
4. Links: each category may have links or relationships with other categories. Links are likely to be based on commonalities in meaning between categories or assume causal relationship.
5. Type of model in which the category is embedded: the category system may be subsequently incorporated in a model, theory or framework.

Such frameworks may include an open network (no hierarchy or sequence), a temporal sequence (e.g., movement over time), and a causal network (one category cause changes in another). To be consistent with the inductive process, such models or framework represent an end point of the inductive analysis. It is also possible that a category may not be embedded in any model or framework (Thomas, 2006 p. 356).

Several strategies were used to assure that the ideas participants communicated were accurately captured. Consistency check strategies were performed (Thomas, 2003). Another coder took each of my category descriptions and sought out text belonging to

that particular category. I also used an external auditor who was not familiar with the project to review the preliminary findings and interpretations. I also had discussions with other researchers on the process of the study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations as recommended by Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2002). Self-reflection about possible bias was also evaluated to help me pursue an open and honest discussion of findings. In Chapter 4, the findings and highlights of common themes that emerged from the analyses are presented.

Chapter 4 Findings

This exploratory qualitative study provides a contextualized understanding of staff-related factors influencing successful job placement for Latino/a youth with disabilities participating in the Bridges School-to-Work program. In this chapter, I present the findings and highlight common themes that emerged from the analyses. In order to report the findings and understand what factors are characteristic of ERs who achieve successful transition outcomes with Latino/a youth with disabilities, we must first understand their role and responsibilities in providing services. ERs' main responsibility is to assist youth with disabilities to obtain and retain employment. They also are responsible for providing pre-employment training, developing appropriate employment opportunities, assisting with job searches and interviewing techniques, and teaching job retention skills to youth ages 17 to 21. The position requires that all ERs have a college degree as well as training and/or experience in job development, business experience, or school-to-work transition for students with disabilities.

The sample for this study included 15 ERs (10 females, 5 males) from the Bridges School-to-Work program. Most of the participants were racial/ethnic minorities. The participants self-identified their racial or ethnic backgrounds as: White (n=6), Latino/a (n=4), African American (n=3), and Asian American/Pacific Islander (n=2). Regarding their post-secondary education, one ER had an associate's degree and was pursuing a bachelor's degree, 9 had a bachelor's degrees, and 5 had master's degrees in fields of study that include education, social sciences, business and humanities.

In addition, participants in the sample represented six of the seven national Bridges sites. The names of the Bridges sites were not included in this section to protect

participants' anonymity. The 15 participants in the sample were distributed by site as follows: 4 (26%) ERs were from Bridges site 2; 4(26%) were from Bridges site 6, 1(7%) was from Bridges site 1, 3(20%) were from Bridges site 3, and 1(7%) was from Bridges site 4. Bridges site 7 was not included because no ERs from that site were selected to participate in the interview. Descriptive data on participants is displayed in Table 4.1. Names listed are pseudo names.

Table 4.1

Participant Profiles and Sites Listed by Race/Ethnicity and Gender

Name	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Age Range	Bridges Site	Highest Degree Attained	College Major
Ryan	Male	African American	45-54	Site 2	BA	Social & Behavioral Science Education
Vanessa	Female	African American	35-44	Site 2	MA	Humanities
Janise	Female	African American	22-35	Site 3	MA	Humanities
Robin	Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	35-44	Site 6	BA	Social & Behavioral Science
June	Female	Asian/Pacific Islander	35-44	Site 6	BA	Social and Behavioral Science
Tony	Male	Latino/a	45-44	Site 5	BA	Business
Isabel	Female	Latino/a	22-34	Site 3	BA	Business
Alba	Female	Latino/a	35-44	Site 2	BA	Social & Behavioral Science
Sofia	Female	Latino/a	22-34	Site 6	BA	Business
Matthew	Male	White	35-44	Site 6	BA	Humanities
Billy	Male	White	35-44	Site 3	BA	Education
Randall	Male	White	35-44	Site 1	MA	Social & Behavioral Science
Abigail	Female	White	35-44	Site 4	BA	Business
Autumn	Female	White	35-44	Site 5	MA	Education
Karen	Female	White	35-44	Site 2	MA	Social and Behavioral Science

Participants in the study had an overall success rate of 83% with all youth in their caseloads. The total average of youth who secure employment in Bridges program had previously been reported at 68% (Fabian, 2007). Given that the literature suggests that Latino youth have lower employment rates compared to other non-Latino youth, surprisingly, there was no distinction between the success rates of these ERs for all youth

versus Latino youth. Participants' overall success rate for Latino/a youth was 85%. While an invitation to participate in the study was sent to all ERs, as can be seen by the placement success rate of participants, no "low performing" staff volunteered to participate in this study. Therefore, this chapter highlights staff characteristics/attributions, competencies/skills, and strategies used by successful ERs and may suggest some "best practices." Table 4.2 lists employment outcomes for all youth and for Latino/a youth served by the ERs.

Table 4.2

Employment Outcomes by All Youth and Latino/a Youth in participating ER Caseloads

	All Youth		Latino/a Youth	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Job	863	83	181	85
No Job	182	17	32	15
Total	1045	100	213	100

The purpose of this study was to identify ER practices that lead to successful employment outcomes for Latino youth. Perhaps due to commonalities in strategies for all youth with disabilities, at times, the ERs noted that effective strategies for Latino youth also were effective ones for all youth. At other times, however, ERs noted specific competencies or skills important in working with Latino youth. Therefore, I included both strategies used for the entire youth population participating in the Bridges Program and those specific to working with Latino youth. In the findings, whenever factors are reported that are important to Latino youth I make that distinction, otherwise the characteristics/competencies/strategies described as important by the ERs relate to effective engagement for all youth.

The remainder of the chapter describes the major themes that emerged from participants' perceptions related to characteristics, competencies, and strategies influencing their performance. I organized the findings around three essential domains: (1) personal attributes/beliefs, (2) competencies, and (3) strategies. These domain areas align with the limited available literature on job development/transition personnel (see Chapter 2), as significant factors in terms of staff training and selection criteria. In addition, I identified nine core categories that accurately signified staff related factors influencing successful employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. These categories are labeled:

1. high level of commitment,
2. instilling-hope,
3. entrepreneur skills set,
4. culturally minded (skills and knowledge),
5. awareness of youth needs and challenges,
6. networking & relationship building,
7. teamwork,
8. on-going support, and
9. family systems focus.

All nine categories that emerged from the data are described in detail and separated under the three domains. In the following sections, I describe ERs' insights regarding each domain and category.

Personal Attributes/Belief Domain

The personal attributes/beliefs domain refers to prominent personal qualities, attitudes, and actions that make ERs effective in their job. This domain consists of three core themes/categories: (a) high level of commitment, (b) instilling-hope, and (c) entrepreneurial skill set. Participants' self-reported attributes/beliefs related to success in their job as ERs included a strong work ethic, which they described as being responsible, persistent, efficient, accountable, passionate, and detail-oriented. As employer representatives, they wear multiple hats. Aspects of their job require them to be organized record keepers and maintain accurate records to support youth success. At other times, they have to be counselors and instill hope. Still, ERs did not only work with youth, their job also required them to be business oriented and “sell” students' capabilities to employers. If ERs were strong in some of these skill areas, but not others, they might not have been so successful. For example, an ER who successfully encourages students to have high aspirations, but was unable to locate and effectively engage with an employer to hire this youth may have had limited success. In the following section, I describe three core categories that emerge in this domain: high level of commitment, instilling hope, and entrepreneurial skill.

High Level of Commitment

The ERs expressed a high level of commitment to their jobs. Part of their expressed commitment came from a desire, love, and passion to work with youth with disabilities. This commitment to working with youth increased their job-related sense of efficacy, which motivated them to go above and beyond to support the youth and achieve excellence.

Most participants indicated that they enjoyed their job, had passion for the mission of the organization, and felt proud of the work they did. Several participants stated that the job attracted them because they “love working with youth” and particularly with this population. The words of one expressed the sentiment of many “My passion for the youth is what drives me” [Tony].

One participant mentioned that the employer representative job seemed interesting and meaningful. He described the desire to feel that he was doing something that made a difference and had social purpose [Matthew]. Similarly, another participant expressed her passion for the job by stating she wanted to “make an impact” [Alba]. All other participants shared related sentiments regarding a high level of commitment for doing their job and also a passion for working with the youth. This high level of commitment to the job was manifested by participants’ willingness to establish bonds with students and to work overtime to complete all the tasks required of them.

As part of participants’ high level of commitment to the youths’ success, they tried to develop supportive relationships with them. One participant noted that she would attend job fairs with students to illustrate her commitment to the youth.

If a student has to go to a job fair and we have to stand in line for hours, I’ll stand in line with them and say, ‘Hey, I’m in this with you. If you have to stand in line, I’m going to stand in line with you...’ and for those students that I do those kinds of things for, I see that they’re more successful. They’re more willing to do whatever it takes to get the job and then to stay on the job. [Janise]

This participant stated that by providing this type of support and commitment to the youth, they were also more successful in their jobs. Other participants expressed similar

stories of establishing bonds with youth and their families. One participant told a story about one of his Latino youth who became ill and was hospitalized.

I went to the hospital to visit and joke around with him. All his family was there. It was a very personal interaction. They seemed to appreciate that I took the time to go there, help to build trust. It's important to show you care. I talk to parents when things are going well, when they're not going well – even when things are not directly related to the job. [Tony]

These bonds with the youth reflect participants' high level of commitment to the youth, which may lead to improved outcomes for the youth. As one participant reported, "I follow up with everything I tell the kids, I form a pretty good bond with the kids so that they know it's not another bureaucratic arm reaching in that's going to say a lot of things and they aren't going to see them anymore." [Ryan]

In addition, participants reported having high standards for their own work. As one participant noted, "respect, persistence, and dedication" were key to her success. All participants stated that their job requires them to be very organized. Also, most of them stated they were willing to work extra hours in order to achieve work demands. As two of the participants indicated:

What I do is I work a lot of evening at home, like putting in things into the database so I can spend more time during the day for job developing and going to the schools. Anything that I can't do in the evening I make sure that I can take care of during the day time or I'll make a little list of students that are going to hit 90 days or 180 days. Make sure I check on those students. I make a list of who do I need to go to. So I really work off a list to make sure that everything gets done. And so for the things that I can take care of in the evening online with the computer with the database or helping a student with an application, I do those at home at night. [Janise]

I think I'm very passionate about what I do. That's what makes the job what it is for me. I don't mind doing it 7 days a week. Students can contact me anytime. Being very aware of needs. Proud of the work I do. If you're not flexible and creative, this is not the job for you [Autumn]

Instilling Hope

In the multiple roles held by the ERs, one important role was that of counselor, and many of the ERs revealed that a major aspect of being a counselor was instilling hope in the youth with whom they worked. By instilling hope, participants' encouraged the student to have high aspirations and to focus on their strengths. This approach was also apparent in how they tried to improve family attitudes regarding the potential of these youth to succeed. Many of the ERs indicated that instilling hope in these youth was a way to enhance their self-esteem and self-efficacy.

ERs helped students establish goals that were attainable, but also not set too low. In the case of Latino/a youth, several of the participants noted the importance of increasing the expectations of these youth regarding their vocational success. For example, two of the participants noted that Latino/a youth are "super humble" and therefore, are more willing to accept any job:

The majority of my case loads always say, 'I want to work anywhere', and I always try to make sure that they understand that working anywhere could be cleaning up toilets only or picking up garbage, and once I go very specific then they say, 'no', they start talking about the different things that they like and start thinking about the different options out there. I always encourage them to want better. [Sofia]

Sometimes they say I want whatever. I don't care. I encourage them to raise their expectations. In fact, some of my participants make more money than their parents. [Isabel]

Participants considered themselves to be able to improve the youth's life; they motivate the youth and support them to increase their self-esteem and efficacy. The following quotes further illustrate how ERs instill hope:

I give them a feeling of wanting to achieve. They work hard to maintain their jobs. I motivate them by holding them to a high standard. [Tony]

Most of the youth [Latino/a] are bi-lingual and that's actually a huge asset for them. Once they realize it is an asset when I point it out to them and we can put it in their resume that they are bilingual it changed their perspective on the fact that they have this awesome quality. [Karen]

ERs also expressed the importance of encouraging parents to have high expectations.

Many of the participants indicated that parents often have low expectations of students.

As one ER noted, "Some [parents] think their kid is dumb. We find their strengths and try to communicate that to the families." [Billy] Another ER described a similar experience:

I worked with a student who told me his father told him he's dumb. He can't do this, can't use public transportation. My role was to help the parents see he was more capable than they were giving him credit for. [Isabel]

ERs extended their efforts to improve expectations of youth to the employers with whom they sought jobs for them. As one ER reported,

When I meet with employers: I make sure they believe in the capabilities of youth regardless of disabilities. I set high expectations. [Tony]

Teaching employers that these are youth with capabilities, they are diamonds in the rough. Coal to diamond [Billy]

Extensive research indicates that high expectations can exert a powerful influence on outcomes for youth with disabilities (Ochs & Roessler, 2004; Panagos & DuBois,

1999), and that, conversely low staff or parental expectations can limit their chances for attaining successful outcomes (Ochs & Roessler; Panagos & DuBois). Therefore, the ability of Bridges staff to instill hope and improve youth's expectations regarding their vocational potential may be a key attribute of successful efforts to assist these youth to secure and maintain jobs.

Entrepreneurial Skills

The third personal characteristic or attribute emerging from data analyses is described as having entrepreneurial skills. Entrepreneurship is considered a key element for successful outcomes in any business. The major characteristics of entrepreneurs include: innovative skills, motivator, results-oriented, risk taker, and commitment to the work (Di-Masi, 2010). For Burke (2006, p. 14) entrepreneurship is “a management technique or approach, which actively encourages creative ideas, and searches for marketable opportunities to set up new ventures, solve problems, or more generally, look for ways of improving our way of life.” Bolton and Thompson (2005, p. 13) indicate that “an entrepreneur is someone who knows the right people, can pick a good team, act quickly and make it all happen.”

As one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Bridges Program is its emphasis on establishing relationships with the local business communities (Luecking, 2008), it is not surprising that many ERs identify themselves as "business-minded" individuals, able to, as one ER put it, "speak the employer's language." (Abigail). Another important aspect of having entrepreneurial skills as a transition staff member is being able to rapidly assess an employer's needs, and deliver good "customer service" (Luecking) in order to engage local businesses and establish positive working relationships. Bridges staff sees

themselves as consultants to employers with whom they work, learning about their specific operations and needs, and then “finding the perfect candidate to fill the position.” Kondo (2010) described this role as social entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurs focus on solving or addressing social problems in a participatory way, and they are aware that the business relationships need to be based on mutual respect (Kondo). As a couple of participants described:

We’re employer-focused in that we want to meet employers’ needs – however once I know the student’s strengths and interests I can go to specific employers with this information, networking, keeping long-term relationships. [Autumn]

Very numbers driven person, the sales-y part. Can talk to people very easily. I am very passionate about getting people to work. When I talk to employers I only talk about candidates I’m really excited about.... I’m there to serve them, customer service is very important, listen to what they want and provide what they need. Show an interest in them. Personalize the employers – many become good professional friends. [Robin].

Several of the participants also noted how they were able to switch between the different worlds of working with employers, schools, and students:

A strength of mine is I can walk in the worlds of our two major customers: can walk in participant’s neighborhoods, then sell the VP of HR on the program to employers. [Billy]

Some ERS are strong in sales or strong on the school side.... I have the ability to develop new employers – speak employer’s language. [Abigail]

Another personal characteristic of entrepreneurial skills is the ability to maintain a dynamic balance between the needs and desires of employers and those of the youth they represent. In this sense, the participants described their job development activities as not

only finding a good employee to address a business need, but also finding work that is interesting for the student. As one ER stated:

I target employers who have jobs I know these youth can do. Want to set youth up to succeed, networking; cold calling; prior relationships that have been established. Follow student's interest and go searching. [Tony]

Another entrepreneurial skill reflected in these ERs' description of their work is a results-oriented orientation. Participants characterized this part of their job as having sales skills by being able to translate the abilities of these youth into values for the employer in order to achieve a "sale." As one participant described it:

I tell them we have students we've trained; who have work readiness skills; these youth come with supports many of your (current) employees don't have. This will hopefully lead to longevity on the job. [June]

Summary

Participants in this study described having a high level of commitment, instilling hope and being entrepreneurial as important attributes that help them achieve success in their jobs. ERs demonstrated they had dual obligations. Part of their responsibilities included acting as a counselor to students; the other aspect of their work meant they had to act as the employers'/business representatives. These dual obligations also suggests they have to both advocate and support youth – one set of clients, while ensuring they adequately supply and meet the needs of employers – a second set of clients. As they described, these participants' attributes/beliefs supported the work they did with all youth. While the intent of this study was to determine attributes/beliefs that were specific to the success of Latino youth, the ERs struggled to identify personal attributes/beliefs that were specific to Latino students. While the ERs could not identify many personal

attributes/beliefs specific to working with Latino youth, several did describe particular competencies used in their work with Latino youth, which will be discussed in the following section.

Competencies Domain

The competencies domain refers to an ER's capacity to apply knowledge and skills in an effective manner to different situations in order to support successful employment of Latino/a youth with disabilities. In addition, it refers to ERs' awareness of specific needs and challenges of the youth, and their family experiences. Knowledge and skills were related to youth and families' culture, language, or other salient variables. This domain includes two main categories: (a) culturally minded (including skills and knowledge) and (b) awareness of youth needs and challenges. Because several of the questions in the interview specifically addressed cultural competencies for working with Latino youth, Table 4.3 summarizes ER responses related to years of work experience, ability to speak Spanish, multicultural training, and cross-cultural experiences. Interestingly, all 15 of the study participants reported having cross-cultural experiences, and the majority (9) had received some type of multicultural competency training, the majority of the staff participating in the study reported an ability to speak some Spanish, three of them fluently and eight (8) reported that they knew a little Spanish.

Table 4.3

Participants Attributes Listed by Spanish Language

Participant Name	Years of Experience	Spanish Language (Some Spanish)	Cross-cultural Experiences	Competencies/ Training
Sofia**	3	Yes*	Yes	No
Isabel**	2	Yes*	Yes	Yes
Tony**	2	Yes*	Yes	Yes
Alba	13	Yes	Yes	No
Matthew	11	Yes	Yes	No
Randall	3	Yes	Yes	Yes
Billy	11	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ryan	8	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vanessa**	11	Yes	Yes	No
Robin	3	Yes	Yes	Yes
Abigail**	8	Yes	Yes	Yes
Autumn	6	No	Yes	No
Janise**	3	No	Yes	No
Karen**	4	No	Yes	Yes
June**	8	No	Yes	Yes

*ERs who speak Spanish fluently

**Highest placement rate with Latino/a youth

Culturally Minded (Skills and Knowledge)

This category describes ERs' ability to be responsive to the cultural, ethnic, or linguistic characteristics of Latino youth and families. Most participants noted the importance of both being sensitive when approaching Latino families and being respectful of different perspectives. Moreover, most of their responses indicated unique considerations when working with Latino youth and families. Participants demonstrated awareness of Latino family values, language barriers and the importance of spirituality and religious beliefs.

Cultural Awareness. Most ERs were aware of the need to be culturally sensitive, and expressed this in a few ways. For example, one participant stated that she is very sensitive and aware of the Latino youth and families' values and how important respect is in their culture. Several other participants expressed similar beliefs related to the importance of being culturally sensitive and recognizing the values and traditions of Latino families. For example:

When I work with Hispanic families.... you need to be aware and be sensitive. Respect families and keeping what the student told you in mind. [Ines]

Other participants reported similar perspectives on the importance of being aware and sensitive to Latino/a youth and families' values and culture as expressed in the quotes below:

In order to be sensitive to various issues related to culture like religion, traditions, and language. It's important to be able to talk to all youth with respect and not alienate them.... When I visit a family I present information in Spanish. [Tony]

Definitely understanding their culture. That's very important; you have to understand their culture. [June]

Several participants were also aware of the importance of religious beliefs for Latino families and how these beliefs could impact some aspects of employment. Several quotes from participants exemplify this awareness:

Religion is very important for them, most of the students I meet are predominantly Catholic, working on Sunday in the morning is hard, because they have to go to church, so I have to talk to the parents and explain that there will be times they can miss or I see if they can go to the church early in the morning or if they can go to Saturday night at 8 o'clock mass. I have to give them alternatives, they are very traditional, and so I really have to respect that. I think employers

understand that, but they want to make sure they have other available times.
[June].

If they are religious, you are going to...you know to see [Pictures/Images] of the virgin Mary, you need to know what their parents do, usually their parents are very hard working and have a strong work ethic; know about their community and what they're involve in, I think is very important. [Karen]

Because we want to make sure we respect each individual's beliefs, because it's not only the students, but it comes with the parents as well, and since I communicate with the parents, then I want to make sure I respect their beliefs. I've had students from different background, and some students can't work a certain day because its mandatory religion for them, so I have to make sure I understand that, I'm aware of that, so that way I can also introduce that to the managers. [Sofia]

Many participants were also aware of gender socialization differences when working with Latino male and female youth. ERs indicated these differences often reflected varying family expectations for males versus females. One ER indicated that compared to other ethnic groups, the relationship between Latino males and their mothers was strong, and she stated that she really needs to get in with the moms – then I'm in there for sure.” [Karen] Most ERs acknowledged that Latino parents were more protective of their children, particularly young women, when compared to other racial/ethnic groups.

Never thought of it. But don't think there is any real difference [between Latino males and females] except for the female students; I need to do a home face-to-face visit if you want the parents to let them participate in the program. Parents [Latino parents] are very protective. From my own family experience this is true. Parents want to know how late will they be working. They want to know you before you work with them. [Tony]

There so many different cultural things, for example a lot of my Latina's students, the parents are so incredible over-protective of them; its also very gender, so you know, you have to know how to relate to them, must be able to talk to the parents in a certain way and consider their personal belief systems. [Robin]

Some ERs indicated that Latino parents' overprotection was sometimes related to concerns about the neighborhood safety and youth's working schedule and having to take public transportation late at night. According to some ERs parental overprotection sometimes caused insecurity in the youth, making it difficult for her to become more independent. Most ERs agreed that Latino parents tend to be more over protective with females:

For example, they will have to ask their parents if they are allowed to work a certain distance from home before applying for a job. Although I come from a Hispanic background and understand this dynamic, it is still a challenge we have to face in order to fully transition the student and help them achieve independence. [Isabel]

Several participants indirectly mentioned the "familismo" values of Latino/a youth and families in terms of the tremendous amount of support Latino/a youth receives from family members, and how Latino family sees the transition process as a family affair. *Familismo* is a strong value for Latino families (Arredondo, 2002), in general referring to the strong family orientation, and the stress on interdependence and cooperation among family members. Family values and interdependence are reflected in this quotation:

I think that the biggest challenge for them, which is both a strength and a weakness for them in my mind, I think that their families are so important to them, that sometimes, their families in the strength side are going to provide them

with tremendous amount of support and encouragement – but in the flipside a lot of our students help pay for their families bills, and then they aren't able to help themselves, you know we need to respect their values and their families values, but if the student cannot help themselves then they cannot support their families, so that's something we try to help them see it from a different perspective.

[Karen]

Cross cultural Communication. Another important component of cultural competence is being able to communicate effectively with and support (Leake & Black, 2005) Latino/a youth and families who have limited English proficiency. Most ERs mentioned that the majority of the youth in their caseload were bilingual; but most of the Latino parents did not speak English. This language barrier was a greater challenge for ERs when working with Latino families. Most ERs indicated that in order to support youth and families who speak mostly Spanish they used a number of strategies, including:

- assign participants to ERs that speak Spanish
- provide translation services (some co-workers who are fluent in Spanish and mostly the bilingual Latino/a youth)
- provide materials in Spanish (some sites had materials translated into Spanish) and,
- place the participants in jobs than can accommodate their language skills.

One participant indicated: “If parents don't speak English, I find Spanish-speaking colleagues.” [June] Eleven of the ERs in this study indicated they were able to speak some Spanish (See Table 4.3), three of them fluently. Most participants who were not fluent indicated a desire to communicate better, and noted that even with their limited

language skills, most Latino parents were grateful for their efforts to try to speak their language. They acknowledged that their efforts to use some Spanish with family members created a better atmosphere by communicating respect:

It helps a lot that I speak a little Spanish. I can have pretty good conversations with families, about work schedules, job matches, and work locations. I can ask if they can help with transportation. I can communicate a lot and for parents who do not speak English they appreciate that. [Matthew]

Some ERs relied on the youth, a family member or co-worker to translate for them. One participant expressed that she was able to relate well with Latino families even when she relied on her student to translate for her:

I felt that I was able to relate to Latino families....one of my student that I work with I also work with her brother and I went to their house....because there were language barrier from their parents, one sibling translated for me.

Another participant provided an example of a Latino family who did not speak English and how she approached the situation:

Mom didn't speak English; she would pass the phone to the kid. So, I made a home visit, so she could have a face with a voice. The young man was very successful in a long-term job. I showed I was there to support their child. My relationship with them is important. [Autumn]

Overall, participants indicated that they were able to relate and communicate with Latino/a youth and families. Most felt they were able to listen to them with respect and demonstrated that they were genuine, the key to establishing a good relationship. As one noted,

Speaking Spanish would be helpful, especially to bridge the communication gap, but I haven't personally had a challenge in this regard. You need to be responsive and definitely put yourself out there, be approachable. [Ryan]

ERs were asked about their perception regarding the influence of their own race/ethnicity on youth outcomes. Regardless of their ethnicity, the participants agreed that their own race/ethnicity had little appreciable bearing on the successful outcomes of the participants they served who were of a different ethnicity. However, six of the participants agreed that ERs race/ethnicity could have a positive influence in youth and family relationships, especially if the ERs are able to speak the language fluently. They did acknowledge that their colleagues who spoke Spanish were able to establish better rapport with their youth and families more easily.

I would be lying if I didn't think that having a Latino ER that spoke Spanish wouldn't be able to help them better and have a better relationship with the family or kid. [Ryan]

I think so, I do. Sometimes maybe it doesn't matter, but I think 90% of the time it does [having a Latino counselor]. There are a lot of youth out there that, I think it's the way society has made it all evolve, where you see a successful Latino counselor and you feel like oh that's going to be a role model, that's where you gear it to. I feel that there's more of a connection when they know "she's a Latina, she has my background." Other counselors in the office, they have other students coming in and I think when they see me they communicate with me like they know me better and I think it has to do with that. I think it has to deal with the fact that they know that I'm from a Latina background and there may be a little bit more of a connection there. There's perhaps more trust. [Sofia]

Another said “It has to have some influence if it helps the family to be more comfortable, but overall I think I can be effective with all the youth on my caseload regardless that I’m ethnically different from them.”

Cross-Cultural Training and Life Experiences. Some research suggests that cultural life experiences, such as foreign travel, international work, personal cross-cultural relationships, and foreign exchange programs, can influence individual’s views related to cultural issues or ethnic minorities in general (Sodowsky, Kuo-Jackson, & Corey, 1998). All of the participants in this study indicated that they had at least two or more cross-cultural life experiences, most mentioning friendships with culturally diverse people and international travel. One of the ERs [Matthew] described work in his family business (vineyard) where most workers were Mexican as one of his most influential cross-cultural experiences, as helping out in the business provides the opportunity to work with Spanish speaking employees and learn Spanish.

Beyond these cross-cultural life experiences, the majority of the ERs (9) indicated having some type of training related to cultural competencies or diversity issues. Six of the ERs stated they had no training on cultural competencies (two Latinas, two African Americans, two White). It is important to mention that three of the four ethnic minority ERs without cultural competence training had achieved the highest placement rate with the Latino/a youth.

Even those ERs who had previous training felt they could benefit from additional workshops in order to increase their knowledge and skills in this area. One participant reported that she is sensitive to family needs and believed she has been effective in working with Latino youth. Still, she reported that sometimes she has unfamiliar or

unexpected situations that arise for which she recognized that additional training would be beneficial:

You know, being sensitive to what that family needs, I feel that I've been doing ok so far. Sometimes you come in contact with situations, I don't know really about that' or maybe that's where a little bit of more training could come in for that particular culture that you're not familiar with. [Janise]

Many of the ERs felt their personal background (which was sometimes similar to many of the youths' backgrounds) combined with their level of education provided a real advantage in supporting the youth in attaining successful outcomes:

Being a minority helps, I can empathize with them [minority youth] seeing myself as...I was brought up with a single mother and four kids, on welfare, with no high school education. [Tony].

Me having grown up in similar environments, I can relate to the kids, I feel very comfortable going into the neighbors, going into the schools, I think that's another advantage that not all ERs have. [Ryan]

I came from a dysfunctional family and I relate to the struggle of these youth, can empathize and hopefully make a difference. [Randall]

These ERs felt a connection to the youth. Although Randall and Ryan were not Latino, they seem to share similar experiences, such as growing up in poverty, which is a circumstance of many of the urban inner-city Bridges' youth. This shared background may be one reason why they were sensitive and aware of the youth needs and challenges.

Awareness of Youth Needs and Challenges

This category refers to participant's ability to attend to the specific needs of the youth and their families. The ERs were aware of the systemic, socio/cultural, financial, and personal context in which most of these youth live, and how these issues (reviewed in

chapter 2) present barriers to employment success. All ERs were aware of the need to assess each youth's circumstances to ensure an understanding of the challenges that may affect employment outcomes.

This awareness of youths' needs and challenges was important to ERs' successful performance. As stated by one participant [Randall], to be able to succeed with the youth you need to have: "Empathy and also understand the needs of the youth, what they are going through in their life." ERs reported that many of the youth, both Latino and non-Latino shared similar needs and challenges. Still, ERs reported some factors affecting mainly the Latino/a youth and their families.

Most participants stated that almost all youth in their caseload experienced hard life situations resulting from a multitude of factors. One of the main challenges that all participants stated was not related to disability, but rather to their youths' socio-economic situation. For example:

Disability is probably eclipsed by several social issues and at-risk factors and those include having no one working in the household; neighborhoods in distress, violence, everybody having someone witnessing or experiencing a shooting.
[Autumn]

We have kids who basically run the household, they are the closest thing to a responsible adult in the household, a myriad of economic issues, no money, lack of food, lack of clothes, gang influences inside the house, drug influences inside the house, those are just some of the challenges, there are very few challenges that I don't encounter. [Ryan]

These participants were also aware of a myriad of other factors influencing employment success for these youth, for example, lack of work experience, poverty, age, severity of disability, fear of losing SSI benefits and unsafe neighborhoods making it

difficult to leave the house and go to work. Regarding this last factor, several ERs reported that perhaps the unsafe neighborhoods contributed to many parents being overly protective. They also considered that parents' over-protectiveness affects youth successful outcomes. For example, some parents didn't want their son or daughters working in certain areas or hours. One participant mentioned that some parents, including Latino parents, were overly concerned about youth safety:

Parents are sometimes I think overly concerned about safety; they are over-protective, that again case by case.... Usually warranted, but sometimes parents can undermine a student's confidence by saying you can't be out after dark at all. I understand that might be a worry for some kids, some youth got lost easily. But for most, they are allowed to go downtown for fun – but not to work, have to point this out to family. [Matthew]

There are a lot of parents (general) who are over-protective and sabotage the students' job. [Sofia]

They also mentioned many families had drug problems, and some of the youth were homeless. Examples of participants' awareness of the context of these youths' lives:

Many youth are homeless, parents kicked them out – no place to live; drug involvement; those who decide not to go to school; arrested for robbery; drug possession; pregnancy. One kid who had a mental disability – mother would cash his SSI check and go buy crack with it. We had to get his primary care giver changed. It was a major bureaucratic challenge. There is also lack of documentation (birth certificate and SS card). Have to chase down the information. [Tony]

A lot of times our students are required to provide childcare for younger sibling – that's a common one [particularly Latino/a youth], interfere with work. [Matthew]

Many participants indicated experiencing difficulties with youth who received SSI, as families relied on these benefits for their own economic well-being. As one ER stated:

My most significant challenge would be for those students that receive SSI income, is explaining to the family because some of my students, their family just refuses to let them work and they're good candidate for employment but they refuse to let the student work because they don't want that student to lose that income. [Janise]

In addition, several ERs noticed that many Latino/a youth who wanted to work were not U.S. citizens, and were subsequently not eligible to enroll in the Bridges Program. Several participants commented on the challenges these undocumented youth face in trying to get a job, and some ERs spoke about how difficult it was for them to deny services to these youth who could otherwise benefit from the program. For example:

Outside of the immigrant issue, that could be difficult and I have invested a lot of time, they don't have the paperwork, and that's a challenge. Because I feel like at that point I have committed and now I'm one more person that can't help them. That could be upsetting and disappointing. [Alba]

Some don't even know if they're documented or not. That's why we ask for it [paper work] early in the process. [June]

The participants mentioned they provided undocumented youth with referrals to other agencies or organizations. "We provide those youth who aren't documented, to community resources/information. For example, free legal service for immigration. We refer them for services. Give them basic information."

Related to the socio-economic status, several participants commented on how they sometimes buy youth clothes for their interviews because they did not have appropriate clothes and their families were not able to provide them. As Randall stated,

We buy our students interview clothes. Families are having financial issues, especially now in the recession.

Another ER brought up the sensitive issue of offering financial assistance:

Kids don't have interview clothes or don't have money to purchase/buy shoes or uniform pants. That's kinda a difficult conversation to have with parent or family because they feel embarrassed if they financially can't support their young adult but it always work out well and they are always thankful. [Alba]

Summary

Cultural sensitivity and competence, together with awareness of the context in which these youth live were important competencies emerging from this analysis. Most participants mentioned the importance of being culturally competent, being sensitive to issues of language, religion and cultural values as critical skills in their success with the Latino/a youth. Because more than half of the Bridges employer representatives interviewed in this study were also from ethnic minority backgrounds (four were Latino), they had an empathy and understanding not only of cultural values and beliefs, but also the larger context in which these youth lived, and the many challenges they encountered in getting and keeping a job. By understanding and addressing these issues directly, the ERs in this study were able to develop interventions to more effectively address some of these challenges. Interventions and strategies are discussed in the next section.

Strategies Domain

The strategies domain refers to a method or intervention plan developed by the employer representatives (ERs) to "set the stage" for assisting these youth to obtain and secure quality jobs in the community. ERs identified several strategies as key in their successful performance with the youth with disabilities and Latino/a youth in their caseload. This domain includes the following core themes/categories and sub-categories

- networking
 - relationship building
- teamwork
- on-going support, and
- family systems focus (involving the families/home visit).

Networking and Relationship Building

Making connections with employers is considered by all participants as the most critical part of their job. ERs collaborate, negotiate, and develop connections with several employers to assist these youth to secure a job. Networking provides the ERs with additional contacts and opens the doors to other jobs and more opportunities for the youth. An important outcome of networking activities is having the skills required to build effective relationships with employers, such as: understanding the business culture, working collaboratively with employers, and listening and addressing employer concerns.

In terms of understanding the business culture, one participant stated:

We are a resource for employers (employer driven) getting the employer to see me as a valuable asset. Having them call me is ideal. Letting them know this is what we can do for you. Providing follow up to employer to ensure service after the sale. [Billy]

One of my strategies that I have been using last three years...well every year is different. I like to go from the standpoint of the student – we’re employer-focused in that we want to meet employers’ needs – however once I know the student’s strengths and interests I can go to specific employers with this information, Networking, Keeping long-term relationships going. [Autumn]

Businesses are viewed as critical customers in the Bridges program, and it is one of the features that makes it unique among vocational service provider agencies for youth and adults with disabilities (Fabian, Luecking & Tilson, 2004). Not only are employer representatives trained to deliver quality customer services, but also to implement their youth interventions from a business perspective, as these comments indicate:

I have a sales background. Did a lot of cold calls. Like going door to door. Going in and meeting managers. I maintain a list of everyone I meet. I go in every week, very persistent in follow up. If a student does something wrong, I’m right there. The employer knows I have a good heart for the student, and that I’m also meeting the employer’s needs. [Abigail]

I approach each employer differently, depending on type of company and what the individual contacts are like. Upbeat contact –I try to match their energy, I tend to be very straightforward, I have become less reticent to mention the disability piece. I found that many employers are interested in helping people with disabilities. Employers want to know I care about what I do. I’m inviting them to be part of something “cool” I really believe that is something cool and I have to communicate that. [Matthew]

Relationship Building. Building relationships with local employers is an important strategy for job developers (Hagner et al., 2002). In addition, the ERs in the Bridges study are aware of the need to build and sustain positive working relationships with all stakeholders involved in the transition process: youth, family members, school

personnel, and employers. All participants in the study acknowledge the importance of communication and relationship building with stakeholders to achieve success. As one ER indicated, relationship building applies "to youth and their families,"

My relationship with them is important. Parents are always welcome. I give them my cell phone number. [Autum]

And good relationships are also important with employers:

My relationship with employers is critical because I want them to know that I have a really qualified candidate, so customer service is critical for me. Make sure it's a good job match, which is critical for me. [Karen]

I make sure I follow up with them [Employers] to build the relationship for the future. [Isabel]

Building a relationship with them [employer] that's important and a relationship their families and school staff everyone that's connected to that kid. [Sofia]

Teamwork

Effective transition services also rely on collaboration among the multiple stakeholders involved (CITE). Several ERs considered the importance of teamwork and collaboration as necessary for success. In particular, ERs considered that teamwork with each other helps them deal with their multiple responsibilities and provides support to achieve their goals. ERs provided several examples of how they work in collaboration and the types of activities in which they collaborate. For example, most ERs noted that they work together in teams when job developing and when visiting employers, and families.

We take each other's youth's on interviews, etc. We cover each other on various tasks. Teamwork is critical. [Billy]

One participant provided an example of collaboration with school personal and families:

I tell the kids that if I find a job the first thing I'm going to do is contact their teacher. The teacher knows them way better than me, years compared to a month. I ask them if the student can handle the job, are they mature enough, are they responsible enough to handle school and work. Then she'll let me know yes or no, or she might refer someone else, or ask her which of the students are best for the position, they'll let me know, then I'll call the parents or guardian before I even tell the students. I tell them the hours and ask if they can get there. [Ryan]

On-Going Support

A key element of transition programs for youth with disabilities is providing ongoing support (Balzacar et. al, 2007; Fabian et al., 2003) after the individual has secured a job. In the Bridges Program, ongoing support includes follow-up services to the youth and employer through phone calls, employment site visits, and other efforts to "check in".

There are a number of strategies ERs use to assist youth to retain their current jobs, and to equip them with the skills to find new ones, such as teaching them job search skills, resume preparation, job interviewing, and self-advocacy. During the ongoing support phase, some ERs reported that they called the youth everyday, accompanied them to the orientation, check on transportation, and support them while they acquire new job skills. As one ER said:

I talk to them every day, I go to the orientation with them; understand the policies of the company, really understand all aspects of the job. I do the job with them until we both learn it. I try to find other supports for them. [Vanessa]

Most of the ERs recognized the intensive support needs these youth might have, particularly during the beginning phases of the job. One participant described her strategy to support a female youth in her job:

I have a student who was a little nervous to start working. And so, I picked her up and took her to work like the first two weeks of work just to make sure she was comfortable. When she got in the car I said, “How did it go? What are some of the challenges?” She was able to express to me a little bit about what was going on and then I spoke to the employer and the employer said, “Well maybe she needed some help with something they were training on.” So I helped her with that and so as she got more comfortable with the position, she started to do better. So that’s one of the students that I knew needed additional assistance with me checking in with her a lot more frequently than some of my other students.

[Janise]

Family Systems Focus

Most ERs considered that in order to help Latino/a youth and all youth with disabilities to obtain and retain successful employment, it is imperative to work closely with families. Latino families in particular see the transition from high school to employment as a family matter. As indicated by Isabel, it’s important to invite the parents to be part of the process. Isabel stated that: “I invite the parents to sit in on the discussion, particularly Spanish parents, because it’s a family affair. I make sure the family understands my role.” [Isabel]. Other participants share the importance of working with the family system and involve them in the process:

If we took time to develop support systems [Latino Families] we’d be more successful. [Vanessa]

I love going and talking with the families before the youth starts a job so I can be sure to have their cooperation and support. Most families want to see their students succeed. It's wonderful to have the family support. [Tony]

We used to involve the families a lot. Involve them at intake – but at the end of the day we expect the youth to take an active role. [Robin]

Many ERs agreed that involving the families and moreover doing a home visit is a key strategy particularly for Latino/a youth success. While most ERs indicated that it was important to call the family in order to keep them informed, it was more important to put a “face on a voice” especially for Latino parents. One ER suggested that if “you want to be successful with the Latino youth, you need to do a home visit.” A home visit was considered by some ERs as the most effective strategy with Latino families. It was a way to connect and share power with the family and a way to help ERs improve their performance with these youth.

They want to know you [Latino parents]. They need to know you'll be more effective if you meet the parents in person. [Tony]

Other than home visit, I also do frequent check in with families (every Friday). Wanted to see if the student is doing well... anything going on. Usually just a few minutes unless there is a particular issue. I print out job leads and share them with parents. I encourage families to review job leads together. I use parents as a resource; problem solve. [Vanessa]

Again, that is case-by-case basis. I don't as a rule do home visit, I do home visits as needed. I have a young man with non-English speaking parents but he just spoke English....So I just decide to have a meeting with his sister, but I have students who are very independent. [Autumn]

Most of the respondents cited the importance of meeting the family as a way to connect with and to understand their values and traditions. As one participant stated: “you [ER] need to do a home visit with Latino families, to see what they value because usually it’s all around their house.” [Karen] Several other participants shared this belief and considered that doing a home visit with Latino families and all other families helped them be more successful with the youth.

Even if they’re 18, I want the parents [all parents] to know me. A home visit is critical. I explain the program in detail and explain my role. People are receptive to meeting me at their home. [Abigail]

“In this site, it is required to do a home visits, even if not required I would still do it. After the second meeting with the student, I arrange a time to meet with the parents; I’ve already called them before the open house to set up an initial rapport with them. After the home visit, figure out parent’s personality have; and sometimes I will stop by again to see them, I often make monthly phone calls to them to give them an update on how their student is doing; I m straightforward and honest with them; keep them informed.” [Karen]

ERs recognized the importance of establishing trust/respect and providing honest and genuine feedback in order to build a relationship with youth and their families. One participant reported how important it is to establish trust and respect with the Latino families, in particular with the youth mom when working with Latino males.

I make sure that I have that relationship with their mom [Latina mom] and make sure I know their family. Making sure I always talk about things that are going on in their lives so that they know I am listening to what they are saying, and that I’ve built that respect with them. [Karen]

Hagner et al. (2002) highlighted the importance of working with families throughout the employment process and developing skills to involve and include them as

part of the employment team. One participant noted that: “I often make monthly phone calls to them to give them an update on how their student is doing.” Hagner et al. noted that transition staff need to address family concerns and keep them informed of the progress and issues. Reflecting this issue, one participant stated:

My approach this year was a little bit different than what I’ve done when I first started. I work more with the family, especially if the family is concerned about the student working. I recently met with a mom and dad of one of my students that works, they were a little concerned about the young lady riding public transportation and the type of work that she was going to get. I arranged a meeting with her father, her mom, the student and the teacher and we all sat down and talked about it and I realized that approach was very helpful, especially for parents that are involved in the student’s life so that they know Bridges is coming in. Like they can actually put a face to a name. I feel like they, you know, they call me more often now. [Abigail]

Of the 15 participants interviewed, only four mentioned not having a great deal of interaction with the families or doing a home visit; however, they did mention contacting the family several times and meeting with the parents sometimes in school if necessary.

We don’t have a great deal of interaction. At least I have one phone call with all families. I try to teach the youth to be independent. I always send postcard with my contact information and invite them to contact me if they have a question or concern. There are some issues that will require more conversation with families – usually around schedule – working late or in certain neighborhoods [Matthew]

I don’t do a lot of the families. I meet with the kids in schools I let them know if the parents have questions to contact me, unless I’m struggling with a student, there’s not a lot of interaction for me. [Randall]

My one area of weakness, I haven’t engaged the families a lot [Billy]

I call the home... many phone calls. Call them at times convenient for them. We have an open house and I invited them or if there's an IEP meeting I meet a parent at the school. No home visits are allowed. [June]

Overall, most participants reached out to families and considered it essential to involve them in the transition process. They indicated that working with families and doing home visits were very important as ways to connect specially with Latino parents.

Summary

All participants felt that their personal attributes and strategies used with all youth served them well in meeting the needs of the Latino/a youth. Participants did identify a number of competencies for working with Latino/a youth and families. Some of these competencies were related to awareness of Latino family values and beliefs. All participants also were aware of the myriad of challenges and barriers the youth experience. Most participants reported that being able to speak at least some Spanish, and making home visits as a way to understand and connect with the Latino youth and their families were culturally relevant strategies. Most of the ERs indicated that a combination of friendly and genuine demeanor together with having the youth translate for them, made them feel quite confident in their ability to communicate with the Latino families.

Overall, the majority of respondents felt the program adequately meets the needs of the Latino youth. However, most felt that having more readily available translation services, additional cultural awareness, and learning some Spanish would certainly enhance their services. One ER felt it important that there be more outreach to Latino populations. "Some schools in our district have larger numbers [of Latino youth] but we don't recruit there." Another participant suggested that it would be helpful to have more materials in Spanish. The majority of the ERs had some type of training from college,

conferences, and workshops related to cultural competencies or diversity issues. Many of them noted that on their own they attended seminars, training, or conferences related to cultural/diversity issues. They felt they could benefit, in terms of increasing their knowledge and skills, from more training or workshops on the topic of competencies of culturally sensitive individualization services and supports.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study sought to explore staff-related factors contributing to successful job placement for Latino/a youth with disabilities. Participants included 15 employer representatives who provided direct transition services to urban youth with disabilities participating in the Bridges School-to-Work program. Interviews were conducted with each of the employer representatives (ERs). Using a general inductive approach, I identified nine key themes/categories divided into three core domains: personal attributes/beliefs, competencies, and strategies. The goal of the study was to develop a conceptual model to capture the essence of the core categories as viewed by participants, and link the categories to the research goal. This model is depicted in Figure 5.1. It is based on the analyses of participants' self-reported attributes, competencies and strategies that most strongly influence employment outcomes for Latino/a youth.

Discussion of the study's findings is organized in the following manner. First, I discuss the conceptual model (Figure 5.1). Then each of the three research questions is discussed, incorporating findings from each of the relevant domains and categories. Finally, limitations of the current study are addressed along with implications for future research and practice.

A Conceptual Model: ERs performance with Latino/a Youth.

Thomas (2006) suggests that a model emerging from a study's findings should include an open network (no hierarchy or sequence), a temporal sequence (e.g., movement over time), and a causal network (one category causing change in another). Thomas noted that to be consistent with the inductive process, such models represent an end point of the inductive analysis. The conceptual model presented in Figure 5.1 is

intended to capture the study's findings regarding factors related to ERs that are associated with positive employment outcomes for Latino/a youth with disabilities. The model includes an open network and stresses the dual-role of ERs in working with both the youth and the employer.

The Marriott Foundation Bridges program is illustrated at the top of the model. The program embodies its philosophy and culture, the program policy and norms, and strategic planning and values. At the next level, ERs working in the program are represented. The organization plays an important role in recruiting and training ERs. The ERs, in turn, have the dual-role of working with employers and the Latino/a youth, which is represented by the circle emanating from the ERs to the employers and youth at the bottom of the model. The arrow from employers to ERs and the Bridges program indicates how employer feedback, both implicit and explicit, influences ER strategies and program goals. At the center of the model are the important ER attributes; competencies, and strategies (delineated in nine essential categories that emerged from the participant interviews) that influence their job performance. The community and the schools that refer the youth are also represented in this model, as ERs rely on community resources, and work collaboratively with school personnel to identify youth. The family systems focus is also included at the center of the model and indicates that ERs cannot understand and support the youth unless they first understand family culture and values. The conceptual model is based on the findings emerging from the study. The next section discusses the broad study findings and their relationship to each of the research questions.

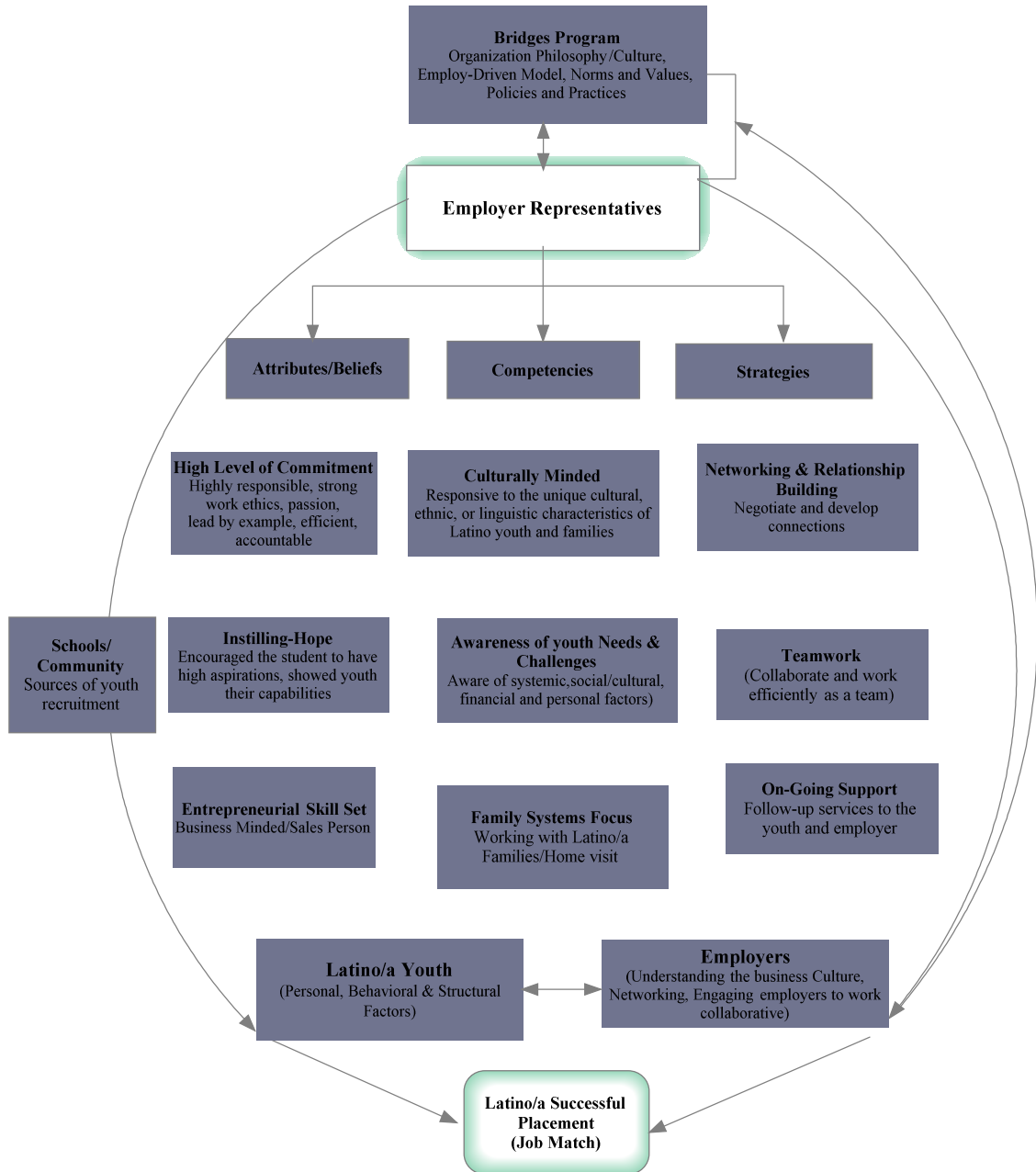


Figure 5.1 Model of Success: Attributes, Competencies, and Strategies of Employer Representatives that Influence Employment Outcomes for Latino/a Youth with Disabilities

Research Question One

Which specific characteristics and perceptions of employment representatives are associated with successful job attainment for urban youth with disabilities?

I identified the major staff personal attributes influencing employment outcomes for youth with disabilities as reported by employment representatives (ERs). These included: (a) high level of commitment; (b) instilling-hope; and (c) an entrepreneurial skill set.

Findings from a qualitative study conducted by Aubry et al. (2005) of mental health staff characteristics and attributes showed that personal attributes were identified as necessary, but perhaps not sufficient conditions for performing the job effectively. Several of the key personal qualities they identified were similar to those found in this study, such as having an optimistic and accepting attitude, and being sincere, reliable, flexible and cooperative.

In the present study, these same personal attributes were included in broader categories, such as demonstrating a high level of commitment to the job (described in many cases as having a passion for it), demonstrating a hope-instilling attitude toward youth and families (being optimistic), and being genuine in terms of Bridges staff acknowledging the similarities between their own life experiences and those of the youth they served. The high level of commitment of participants was also consistent with a strong work ethic that included being highly responsible and accountable.

The personal attribute that I described as "hope instilling" goes beyond optimism. Luecking et al. (1994) suggested that positive staff attitudes and beliefs related to the

individual's capacity are important in encouraging change. Moreover, they suggested that staff might influence the beliefs and subsequent performance of individuals with disabilities through the "verbal and non-verbal messages they convey" (p. 87). Similarly, Hogasen, Powers, Geenen, Gil-Kashiwasbara, and Powers (2008) in a study of factors contributing to successful goal attainment for young women with disabilities found that the young women emphasized the importance of others believing in and supporting them in attaining their goals. Moreover, they found that support from others was a booster against negative perceptions and expectations related to young women gender and/or disability. In a related study, Taylor-Ritzler et al., (2010) interviewed twenty-one vocational rehabilitation counselors to identify challenges and effective strategies to engage ethnic minority consumers in the rehabilitation process. Counselors indicated that consumers' lack of efficacy regarding their capacity to succeed was one major challenge to engaging them in the VR process. In my study, Bridges ER staff articulated the relationship between their hope-instilling behaviors and improving the self-efficacy of the youth with whom they worked. Moreover, there is a critical relationship between believing in the capacity of these youth and being able to "sell" this capacity to employers (Luecking et al., 2004). Overall, participants were hard-pressed to identify attributes specific to working with Latino/a youth that were any different from those needed to work with non-Latino/a youth. Most participants reported that the Latino/a youth on their caseloads experienced similar challenges as other youth in the program.

Research Question Two

What competencies of employment representatives are associated with successful job attainment for urban Latino/a youth with disabilities?

Being *culturally minded* implies that ERs provided services and supports in ways that are appropriate and sensitive to the cultural needs and expectations of Latino/a youth and their families. In addition, ERs' *awareness of Latino/a youth's needs and challenges* is associated with successful job attainment. Understanding the culture and the relationship to the surrounding environment of young adults with disabilities is an important competency for ERs. According to Kim and Morningstar (2005) to provide culturally appropriate transition services that are meaningful to students and their families, professionals have to involve parents as partners in transition planning and decision-making.

Findings in the present study suggest that the ERs approached Latino/a youth with disabilities and their families with sensitivity and understanding. Participants reported a need to be *culturally minded* and indicated that cultural variables including familial supports, language, spirituality and religious beliefs, gender socialization, and immigration status were important considerations in improving post-school outcomes for Latino/a youth. Cultural competence among these staff was essential given the context of the Bridges program operating in inner city areas, and the majority minority representation of the youth who are served.

Researchers have suggested that understanding Latino youth's cultural background and perspectives (i.e. Latino subgroup, acculturation level, language, and parental education and income) is key for achieving successful outcomes (Harry, 2008;

Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). For example, ERs reported they observed different levels of acculturation related to language proficiency of the youth and their parents. The majority of the parents found the English language a barrier while most of the youth were bilingual. Being aware of the difference in acculturation patterns between youth and their parents is an important element in cultural competence for the ERs.

Santiago-Rivera et al. (2002) reported that cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills were fundamental competencies to work effectively with Latino clients. They pointed to specific competencies such as: understand concepts and terms such as *personalismo* (fidelity to a persona), *familismo*, *respeto*, *dignidad and orgullo* and their meaning for relationship building with clients of Latino heritage. Specifically, these authors indicated that competent staff should: recognize the role of spirituality and formalized religion, understand level of acculturation, migration issues, gender role socialization, and language proficiency, and understand the heterogeneity of perspectives among Latino/a youth and families.

Latino cultural variables have the potential to influence employment outcome for Latino youth with disabilities. In this study, ERs agreed that cultural awareness and competence contributed to their success. Other researchers have identified some of the cultural issues that affect successful transition of this population, including acculturation levels, religious beliefs, and language (Geenen et al., 2003; Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; Salas-Provance, Erickson, & Reed, 2002; Velcoff et al., 2010; Meier-Kronick, 1995). Taylor-Ritzler et al., (2010) found that cultural mistrust was also a challenge in obtaining employment for consumer in the VR system. Cultural mistrust and parental

overprotection were also reported by some of the participants in this study as having a negative impact on employment outcomes particularly for Latina female with disabilities. According to Meier-Kronick, the concept of *marianismo* in Latino families might be related to parents' overprotection of Latina female with disabilities. *Marianismo* alludes to the traditional Catholic worship of the Virgin Mary and to the archetype of the ideal woman and mother. She also noted that transition professions should give a major consideration to Latino family beliefs in protecting and caring for the youth with disabilities within the home.

A related area that emerged from the analyses was ER awareness that Latino/a youth with disabilities and ethnic minority youth in general are likely to face greater challenges than their peers without disabilities as they transition from high school to employment. Some additional challenges reported by the ERs included family language barriers, the limited exposure of youth to occupational choices, parental expectations for their children and others. These results are consistent with several studies discussed in the literature review, which suggested that ethnic minority, and Latino/a youth with disabilities encounter additional challenges during their transition to adult life than their peers without disabilities (Fabian, 2007; Gil-Kashiwabara, Hogansen, Geenen, Power, & Power, 2007; Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; Taylor-Ritzler et al., 2010). Researchers have suggested that transition staff must consider how these additional challenges influence successful post school outcomes for these youth (Geenen et al. 2003; Black & Leak, 2005; Hasnain & Balcazar; Velcoff et al. 2010).

Although it is clear that most of the ERs participating in this study exhibited cultural competence and, most of them acknowledged the importance of training they had

received to improve their competencies in this area, several noted the need for additional training. Some researchers suggests that there is a need for additional training on cultural competencies and that one of the major challenges in providing adequate transition services is the preparation of qualified transition personnel working with ethnic minorities (Blalock et al., 2003; Harry, 2000). Inadequate cultural competence may at least partially explain the dismal post school outcomes for ethnic minority youth described in chapter one.

Research Question Three

What job development strategies are associated with successful job attainment for urban adults with disabilities?

All participants in this study considered networking with employers as the most fundamental strategy to create a system of contacts and expand job opportunities for youth with disabilities and Latino/a youth. The category of networking is consistent with the outreach category found by Whitley et al. (2010) study. Specifically, Whitley and colleagues found that a desirable competency of supported employment specialists was a strong commitment toward community and employment networking to identify job leads and establish employer relationships. Findings from Whitley et al. study also suggested that staff with a business background were more efficient at outreach and networking.

Another important job development strategy is relationship building. Stakeholder relationship building strategies have been found to positively impact post-school outcomes (Carter et. al. 2009). Several other studies have examined staff performance and found that the ability to interact positively with stakeholders, particularly the youth, families and employers, was crucial for effective staff performance (Aubry et al. 2005;

Coursey et al. 2000; Hanger et al. 2002). Teamwork and collaboration were also identified by participants in this study as important strategies for success, a finding consistent with the literature in transition (Carter et al., 2009; Leake & Black, 2005; Unger et al., 1998).

Adopting a family systems strategy was another important strategy that influenced the ERs' performance particularly with Latino/a youth. In this regard, most ERs recognized the importance to work closely and involve the Latino families. A family systems focus strategy when working with Latino/a youth has shown to improve post school outcomes. Previous studies have found that parental involvement is an important factor in promoting the successful transition of youth with disabilities into adulthood (Geenen, Powers, Lopez-Vazquez, 2001; Harry, 2008; Schalock et al., 1986). Moreover, Schalock et al., (1986) found that youth with leaning or developmental disabilities whose parents were actively involve in transition programming were more successful in employment outcomes, worked more hours and received higher salaries than youth whose parents had little involvement.

Geenen et al., (2001) examined the roles that parents across different ethnic groups played in transition planning. They found differences between Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) parents and European-American parents. Culturally linguistically diverse parents placed more importance than European-American parents on talking to their children about transition, helping their children prepare for postsecondary education, teaching their children to care about their disability, and teaching their children about the family's culture. The findings indicated that CLD parents described themselves as active and involved in the transition process. Indeed, the

level of participation reported by CLD parents surpassed that of European-American parents.

As stated by Harry (2008), a clear understanding of parents' views should be an integral aspect of professional preparation and professional practice. Most of the ERs in this study indicated that involving participants' families and doing home visits provided them a more comprehensive view of the family, their culture and values and also knowledge of possible factors affecting employment. Home visits with Latino families could also be viewed as a culturally relevant strategy and a sign of respect and inclusion. Therefore, this family-systems approach can be considered a culturally relevant strategy for Latino families and provides a comprehensive approach related to the value of *familismo*.

Summary

ERs in this study had highly successful job placement rates for all youth with disabilities on their caseloads, including Latino/a youth. Findings suggest that ERs' personal attributes benefit and meet the needs of all youth including the Latino youth. A number of unique competencies from the ERs in this study suggest that transition staff working with Latino/a youth must have an understanding of youth and families' cultural variables, they must be sensitive to language barriers and aware of the unique needs and challenges these youth encounter. Given the importance of family in Latino culture, findings from this study suggests that it is essential to employ a family systems approach as a culturally appropriate strategy in order to successfully provide responsive transition services to Latino/a youth with disabilities. In addition, home visits, especially with Latino families might be considered as a culturally appropriate strategy. Other staff

strategies, particularly networking and building relationships for job development are consistent with best practices in the field. Although these are not unique to a Latino caseload, they have a significant impact in supporting Latino/a youth with disabilities and all other youth with disabilities in securing a job. ERs work as intermediaries between the employer and the youth, therefore, they make the connections and place the youth in the job. Many Latino/a youth with disabilities may not have the access to social networks, or the communication or social skills to independently navigate those networks (Lueking, et al., 2004).

Limitations

The current study had several limitations. First, it relied on self-reports of ERs personal experiences, which I used to construct the study's findings. Therefore, these findings are based on my interpretations, and might be influenced by the literature reviewed as well as my own personal biases. A second limitation of this qualitative study could be that participants' responses were influenced and altered to some degree because the researcher who conducted the interviews with me was well known within the national Bridges program, had worked with several of the staff, and provided training. His previous relationship with some of the ERs could also have been helpful in developing a relationship necessary to conduct the telephone interviews. Another limitation in this study was related to the sample of participants: I only interviewed ERs from the Bridges program, not youth or their families.

Another sampling limitation was the low response rate. Of a total of 56 ERs who were invited to participate, only 20 responded to the email invitation and I was only able to analyze the information for 15 of them. Furthermore, I come to a number of findings

that approximates my number of research subjects. Accordingly, these will require verification in future research using different methods.

Also, only five of the six Bridges sites participated. I also interviewed four ERs from two sites and only one ER in two other Bridges sites. It would have been more effective to have an equal number of participants per site. Therefore, the data I analyzed may not be representative of the larger population of ERs in the program.

Another limitation in this study was related to the process of collecting the data. Data were collected through phone interviews. The disadvantage of phone interviews is the inability to develop a face-to-face relationship with participants, the inability to read visual cues, and the limited time to build trust with interviewees. Interviewing participants face-to-face and developing greater trust may have facilitated a fuller and more honest self-representation. In addition, the length of the interview was approximately one hour, which is considered long for a phone interview and could have caused some participants to become fatigued.

Another limitation is related to the number of Latino/a youth in participants' caseload. While some ERs had 40 Latino/a youth, others had only two. This situation limited the possibility to determine which ERs achieve "high success rate" or "low success rate" with the Latino/a youth. Therefore, it was necessary to look at the total average success rate for all ER placements of Latino/a youth. A study including a larger number of ERs with similar and high numbers of Latino youth in their caseloads may provide more useful information regarding low and high performance rates. Finally, my study intended to explore attributes, competencies, and strategies from ERs who provide direct transition services to Latino/a youth. Because all of the ERs were successful I have

no way of knowing whether the self-reported characteristics distinguish successful from unsuccessful ERs. I cannot guarantee that the self-identified attributes, competencies, and strategies are, in fact, the specific factors influencing outcomes.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this study offer implications for the transition field and transition staff working with ethnic minority youth with disabilities and Latino/a youth in particular. A collection of self-reported attributes, competencies, and strategies from a group of successful ERs achieving high performance placement rates with youth with disabilities including Latino/a youth may serve as best practices in order to develop transition staff professional standards. Professional standards for ERs are needed and might assist transition programs, transition professionals, and managers/supervisors as they develop transition interventions, hire staff and provide services to youth with disabilities and Latino/a youth in particular. Three specific recommendations follow:

Recommendation 1: Additional Training and Development

Latino/a youth with disabilities opportunities and success in employment are highly dependent on staff training, preparation, and competencies. Therefore, further training might be helpful to assist staff working with ethnic minority youth with disabilities and Latino/a youth. In particular, transition interventions programs should provide their staff with training in multicultural competencies in order to help them understand the cultural context of the Latino/a youth and their families. By providing the staff with cultural competencies training and workshops, ERs will be more effective in providing services and strategies that are culturally appropriate and sensitive to the needs and expectations of the Latino/a youth and their families. In addition, ERs should receive

training related to job development strategies that are culturally responsive according to Latino/a youth needs and challenges. Moreover, taking in consideration the ERs dual-role of working with the youth and the employer, additional training related to marketing strategies to help the ERs network and build relationships with employers should be considered. Training programs may consider suggesting that future professional staff take elective courses or training in this area. Additional training in this area might also enhance ERs skills, knowledge, and efficacy in their dual-role of supporting youth with disabilities and facilitating employer needs. Additional training might also help the ERs in networking and building relationship with the Latino community, particularly with employers who will benefit from having bilingual youth working for them.

In order to disseminate and implement these practices and better contribute to the transition field, especially in the school systems without a program like Bridges, the inter disciplinary transition council and other transition professionals might consider to provide workshops and in-service training and informed IEP teams in order to support youth with disabilities achieve successful transition.

Recommendation 2: Hiring of Transition Staff

ERs who provide transition services to Latino/a youth with disabilities play a significant role in supporting the youth to achieve their goals and post-school success, and the personal attributes and skills they bring to the job are important considerations. In particular, ERs' attributes (high level of commitment, instilling hope and entrepreneurial skill set) should be considered in the hiring and orientation of new staff members in transition programs. While transition program employers and managers may be challenged to identify some of these less obvious attributes (i.e., high level of

commitment), hiring practices can be developed that might tap into some of these attributes. For example, the executive director of the Marriott Foundation that administers the Bridges program requires local site managers to implement different role plays and open-ended tasks in the hiring process. One of these is asking applicants to develop an "elevator pitch" pretending that they have one minute or less to persuade a potential employer on the elevator of the benefits and value of hiring Bridges youth. Other creative approaches include having job applicants introduce a youth with a disability to an employer, where attention is paid to strength-based as opposed to deficit language in the introduction. In addition, they can also provide new staff with training and workshops that focuses on the importance of positive beliefs, and link ER beliefs regarding the capacity of these youth to improving self-efficacy of the youth they are serving.

Recommendation 3: Provide additional resources and encourage the family systems approach

Latino parents can be a valuable resource in helping transition staff and ERs understand, identify, and support transition outcomes that are valuable within a family's culture. ERs or transition staff might consider the strong family orientation as a rich support and intervention network to help Latino/a youth with disabilities. In particular, transition staff should establish a partnership with Latino parents and build trusting relationship with them as a way to help the parents being more engaged and also cope with the over protectiveness with the Latina youth. Another way to help the parents overcome their fear and over protectiveness with the Latina youth is by providing the parents and the Latina youth with workshops or testimonies of other Latina youth

successfully placed in employment. Another recommendation might consider team Latino parents with other parents who have experience similar situations and experiences to support them and the youth.

Latino family play an important role in supporting and motivating their son/daughters with disabilities in developing future goals including employment, therefore, it is important that transition programs seek solutions and provide Latino parents with resources to the language barrier that many of them encounter. For example, additional translation services can improve the communication gap between Latino parents and transitions staff. Additional resources to support Latino parents with limited English proficiency can include: hiring additional staff who speak Spanish, assigning youth to ERs who speak their language, translating all documents into Spanish, providing the staff with Spanish language classes. Staff can also empower parents by referring them to community resources, and encouraging their participation (as appropriate) in the development of the youth's transition plan. Particularly after the youth has secured a job and exited the Bridges program, families will be increasingly important in terms of providing supports, problem solving, and referring their youth to other community services as needed.

Finally, most ERs from Bridges program recognized the importance of home visits when working with Latino youth in the program. While this is not a policy of the Bridges program, transition programs managers and directors should help their staff to identify the benefits of meeting with the families in their homes as a means of engaging them in the transition process. Connecting with Latino families through a home visit

requires that transition staff and parents try to know and understand the culture of each other and learn the youth experience in the home.

Implications for Future Research

The limited number of studies on transition staff characteristics makes this area rich for future research. This study revealed a need for a better understanding of staff-related factors influencing employment outcomes for Latino youth with disabilities. The study also provides a conceptual model describing the study's findings on the characteristics, competencies, and strategies of ERs that influence their performance and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. Future research is needed to better understand these factors and how they influence employment outcomes for Latino/a youth. Because this study only examined the perspective of ERs, other perspectives, including those of program administrators, families, and the youth themselves, might be examined in future research.

Future research could further explore staff characteristic, competencies, and strategies by interviewing all ERs in the Bridges School-to-Work program and comparing the findings of high and low performers. In order to verify my findings others studies might conduct (a) descriptive research using questionnaires and larger samples, and (b) experiments in which agencies attempt to implement the findings from this study related to the transition from high school to employment for students with disabilities.

The role of co-workers and the level of collaboration among staff may be a significant factor influencing staff performance and may form another area worthy of study. Future qualitative study using in-depth interviews with the Latino/a youth who achieve successful outcomes and their families could investigate their perspectives in

order to have a bigger picture of how youth and families perceive staff attributes, competencies, and strategies.

Counselor-client race was found to be a significant variable in explaining client outcomes in a study conducted by Matrone and Leahy (2005). These researchers suggested that qualitative research studies, specifically individual interviews, are an appropriate method to explore the perception of cultural competencies. Therefore, future research might look at race/ethnicity, language and religious belief as significant variables for Latino/a youth and the relationship of these variables to employment outcomes. Finally, further research is needed to explore the experience of Latino/a youth with disabilities and their families served by various other transition programs and their service providers.

Bridges program staff serves predominantly low-income ethnic minority youth with disabilities and findings from previous Bridges studies suggest that the program is consistently achieving positive outcomes with the majority of youth in the program. However, Latino/a youth was one sub-group that achieved the lowest employment success in a study conducted by Fabian (2007). Findings from this current study suggest that ERs who achieve success with all youth also have successful outcomes with Latino/a youth. These findings indicate that the best staff are providing effective services no matter the specific nature of the disability, or the ethnicity/background of the client with whom they work. While Bridges students, by and large, represent a successful "subgroup" of youth with disabilities, given that they have persisted in secondary school and express a desire to work, it is clear that, at least for this sample, personal

characteristics, competencies and strategies contribute to exceeding the overall Bridges job placement rate.

Appendix A Informed Consent

Project Title: Predictors of Employment Success for Urban Latino/a youth with Disabilities Participating in the Marriott Foundation's Bridges School to Work Program

This is a research project being conducted by Omayra Muñoz-Lorenzo at the University of Maryland, College Park. You are invited to participate in this research project because you are an employer representative working with Bridges school-to-work program. The purpose of this study is to investigate factors influencing employment outcomes for Latino/a youth with disabilities from the employer representative perspective. Although your participation in this study will not benefit you personally, the researchers hope that this information can be used to help improve transition-related services and promote employment success for students with disabilities. Your participation in this study is understood to be completely voluntary and you can exit the survey at anytime without penalty.

The first part of the survey contains a demographic questionnaire, which will allow you to provide information about your background. The demographic questionnaire will only take 5 minutes to complete. You will be asked to disclose your name on the survey with the only purpose of contacting you if you agree to participate and complete a phone interview with the researcher. Once you submit your signed consented form and responses to the demographic questionnaire you will be contacted to complete the telephone or in-person interview.

The interview will include questions regarding your experiences, perceptions and interventions with Latino/a youth with disabilities transitioning from high school to employment. Your contribution would be of great significance in understanding what works better for Latino/a youth and their families. If I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible.

There are no known risks from participating in this study; however, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742; irb@deans.umd.edu; (301) 405-0678. This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. Please continue and begin the demographic survey if the following statements are true:

The study has been explained to you;
Your questions have been answered; and
You freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.

I Agree **I Disagree**

Appendix B Research E-mail Announcement

From: Director of Bridges program

Subject: Participate in study

Dear Employer Representatives,

This message has been forwarded by the Bridges Director to solicit your participation in a study being conducted by Omayra Munoz at the University of Maryland, College Park. The overall aim of this study is to examine personal, programmatic, and environmental factors of employment outcomes for Latino/a youth with disabilities participating in Bridges school-to-work program and how your interventions prepared them for successful employment outcomes. Although your participation in this study will not benefit you personally, the researcher, Ms. Munoz, hopes that this information can be used to help improve transition-related services and promote employment success for youth with disabilities.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your responses to these survey items will not affect your position at Bridges program. Should you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and participate in an in-depth interview with the researchers which take approximately 45 minutes or less to complete. The researcher will contact you to provide more details.

All responses collected in this study will be completely confidential. Thank you in advance for your time and for sharing your thoughts and experiences to benefit other transition staff, especially youth with disabilities, in achieving a successful employment outcome. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by email at omunoz@umd.edu or by phone at (301) 646-3559. You may also contact my dissertation chair at University of Maryland, Dr. Ellen Fabian by email at efabian@umd.edu or by phone (301) 405-2872.

Omayra Munoz
Doctoral Candidate
Counselor Education
University of Maryland, College Park
omunoz@umd.edu

Appendix C Staff Interview Protocol

Interviewee Code Number: _____ **Date:** _____ **Site:** _____

Introduction: Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview. The purpose of this study is to explore staff-related factors contributing to successful job placement and high retention rates of youth with disabilities participating in the Bridges School-to-Work program. Your answers will be kept confidential and your name will not be disclosed. The information will only be used in aggregate form to analyze the data in relationship to factors influencing employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.

Section A: The following section asks some demographic information.

1. When did you begin working with Bridges? (Month/Year) _____
2. What is your age?
 - a. 21 and Under
 - b. 22 to 34
 - c. 35 to 44
 - d. 45 to 54
 - e. 55 to 64
 - f. 65 and Over
3. Gender: _____ Male _____ Female
4. Do you speak Spanish? _____ Yes _____ No
5. What race category(s) best describe you? _____
 - a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - b. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - c. African American/Black
 - d. Latino/a/Hispanic
 - e. White/Caucasian
 - f. Mixed Race
 - g. Other (please explain) _____
6. What is your highest level of education? _____
7. If you obtained a college degree, what was your major? _____
 - a. Social and Behavioral Science
 - b. Education
 - c. Math, Engineering and Science

- d. Business
- e. Other (please specify)_____

Section B: The following section asks about training and skills relate to cultural competencies/ diversity issues:

1. Have you had any training or workshops on multicultural competencies/diversity issues? If yes, please describe:_____
2. From your perspective, why it is important for people in the transition field to be culturally competent?
3. Have you ever had any of the following life experiences?
 - a. Foreign travel
 - b. International work (such a Peace Corps)
 - c. Personal cross-cultural relationships (e.g., friendships)
 - d. School foreign exchange program
4. What resources are available in Bridges to support youth and families who speak only Spanish? _____
5. How would you rate your ability to relate and communicate with Latino/a Spanish speaking youth and their families? Can you please describe?

Section C: The following section asks about your experience working with Latino/a youth and their families and type of interventions you consider useful for their success.

1. When working with Latino/a youth, what do you consider to be the main factors associated with student success in gaining employment? What factors do you think hinder their success or make it harder for Latino/a youth to succeed?

{Probe: Have you found a difference between what Latino youth need in order to succeed on a job – compared to non-Latino youth? If yes, please describe: }
2. When working with Latino/a youth with disabilities, how do you engage and involve the family the process?
3. Have you found any differences in working with Latino males versus working with females?

{Probe: Are there gender socialization roles within the Latino/a youth families, can you please describe }

4. What aspects of helping Latino youth present the greatest challenges to you personally?
5. What personal qualities and skills an employer representative must have in order to achieve successful outcomes with Latino/a youth?
6. In your view, does the race/ethnicity of an employer representative influence the employment outcomes for the youth?
7. Do you have any stories where you implemented a strategy that contributed to the success of a Latino/a youth?
8. Once the youth have been hired, what do you do to support their successful retention? {what Interventions, or job development strategies }
9. Can you think of any changes within the program that would enhance the employment outcomes for Latino/a youth?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY!

Appendix D Categories or Themes That Emerged From the ER's Interviews

Person Factors	Behavioral Factors	Environmental or Structural Factors	Attributes/Beliefs of ERs	Strategies /ER Interventions/	Competencies: Cultural Awareness, Skills and Knowledge of Latino
Competencies: Awareness of youth needs and challenges (Attend to status and Specific Needs of the Youth: View individuals holistically)			“Entrepreneurial Skill Set” High Level of Commitment, Instilling Hope	Networking, Teamwork, Systemic focus, On-going support	Culturally Minded (Skills, and Knowledge of family values and culture)
Type of Disability (Severe disabilities)	Prior vocational experience	Lack of exposure/less access to broader world	High value and proud of their job and role (View of their role and level of satisfaction with their job) (e.g. rewarding position, love the job)	Home visits	Knowledge about family value (e.g. religious and implications with employment)
Gender Issues: Males vs. Females (Gender socialization in Latino/a families)	Most youth lack knowledge of what their strengths are, they are not clear about goals	Limited community and school resources	Belief in making the life of the youth better. Enhancing/enriching their lives –Self-efficacy-ER’s belief about their ability and capacity to accomplish a task)	Give assignments/ Job search activities and goal setting exercise, Provide job description to help them with realistic goals	Manage to work well with linguistic difference- (Little Spanish) Provide information in the appropriate language
SSI (Family fear to lose benefits for the youth) Age (Level of maturity of the youth and employment for underage youth)		Limited or unreliable transportation Neighborhood (high poverty and safety issues)	Not having preconceived notions, seeing youth as unique individuals- Value Independence and promote empowerment (motivate the youth to take greater risk)	Take youth with them when job developing Provide incentives/rewards for improvement	Value independence (No necessary a Latino value) Need for training and workshops in diversity issues
Self-efficacy (Self-esteem, Social Skills) Low expectation for themselves		Unrealistic Goals, no goals identified	High expectations of the youth	Group sessions and one-on-one intervention	Getting rid of their own bias (“Biases will negatively influence your effectiveness with the youth”)
Work-habits and		School setting	Perceived the youth as capable	Bridges Guidebook (job	Aware and sensible to the

ethics		to succeed-high expectation	search activities)	parents language barriers
Strengths and weakness	Language Barrier; lack of translation resources	Genuineness, being honest with sensitivity	Job Readiness, Career Plan	Recognize parents as main source of support
Lack of empowerment and independence		Trustworthiness (building trust) –following through on commitments	Conduct joint activities with teachers – (team teaching; one-on-one activities that reinforce classroom instruction	Communicate effectively with the parents about challenges and successes of the youth
Desire and motivation		Felt connected to the youth b/c of their personal background, e.g., poverty, disability) Strong personal commitment to excellence/accountable for outcomes Passionate and Competitive	Use mostly students or other colleges to translate Liaison (Connecting them to other agencies and resources) Weekly phone calls to youth and parents Follow-up in employment	Treat students and parents with respect Provide a welcoming and supportive environment Observed the economic and social needs of the youth Take action to support the social or economic needs of the youth
		Leading by example; being a good role model; mentor and teacher Business-minded	Visits to employment site	
	Going “above and beyond”	Participate in IEP meeting/ School parents meetings Recruitment at school with liaison. Assessment questionnaire	Involve parents in decisions related to work schedule and hours. Obtain information about parents role and language spoken at home	

Value-Interagency collaboration	Refers youth who applied to the program and are not eligible to outside agencies for help	Some ER's recognized that additional training and workshop relate to cultural and diversity issues would be beneficial in their positions.
Perception of Parents: Over-protective parents Parents fear for youth safety	Classroom presentation Get feedback from teacher/ attendance records	
Parents lack of education and employment	Selective Process-The main strategy of the ER's is being selective with the youth they register into Bridges Weekly job clubs, Interview guide Work in collaboration with others ER to get Job leads, Networking	

References

- Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, (2011). Rehabilitation research and training center on disability statistics and demographics. Retrieved from <http://www.aapd.com/resources/publications/disability-compendium-2011.pdf>
- Arredondo, P. (2002). Counseling individuals from specialized, marginalized and underserved groups. In P. Pedersen, J. G. Draguns, W. J. Lonner, & J. E. Trimble (Eds.), *Counseling across cultures* (5th ed.) (Pp. 233-250). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Aubry, T. D., Flynn, R. J., Gerber, G., & Dostaler, T. (2005). Identifying the core competencies of community support providers working with people with psychiatric disabilities. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 28, 346-353.
- Belting, H., Jaime C., Timmons, J. C., & Butterworth, J. (2009). Gender differences in employment outcomes of individuals with developmental disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 31, 29–38. doi: 10.3233/JR-2009-0469 IONS
- Benz, M. R., Lindstrom, L. E., & Yovanoff, P. (2000). Improving graduation and employment outcomes of students with disabilities: Predictive factors and student perspectives. *Exceptional Children*, 66, 509-529.
- Benz, M. R., Yovanoff, P., & Doren, B. (1997). School-to-work components that predict postschool success for students with and without disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 63, 151-165.
- Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. California State University, Long Beach: Pearson Education.

- Berry, G. H. (2000). The Supplemental Security Income program and employment for youth with disabilities: An analysis of the national health interview survey on disability. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 15*, 176-181.
- Blackorby, J., & Wagner, M., (1996). Longitudinal post-school outcomes of youth with disabilities: Finding from the national transition study. *Exceptional Children, 62*, 399-413.
- Blalock, G., Kochhar-Bryant, C. A., Test, D. W., Kohler, P., White, W., Lehmann, J., Bassett, D., & Patton, J. (2003). The need for comprehensive personnel in transition and career development: A position statement of the division on career development and transition. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 26*, 207-223.
- Blue-Banning, M., Turnbull, A. P., & Pereira, L. (2002). Hispanic youth/young adults with disabilities: Parents' visions for the future. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 27*, 204-219.
- Bridges From School-to-Work Program Website. What we do. Retrieved from <http://www.bridgestowork.org/>
- Bolton, B., & Thompson, J. (2005). *Entrepreneurs: Talent, temperament, technique*. (2nd) ed. Burlington: Elsevier.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011). Person with disability: Labor force characteristics summary. United States Department of Labor, USED-11-0921, Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm>
- Burgstahler, S. (2001). A collaborative model to promote career success for students with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, 16*, 209-215.

- Burkhauser, R. V., & Daly, M. (2010). *The return to work from children leaving the SSI-Disabled Children Program*, Working Paper, Social Security Administration.
- Burke, R. (2006). *Entrepreneur's toolkit*. London: Burke Publishing.
- Cameto, R., Marder, C., Wagner, M., & Cardoso, D. (2003). *Youth employment, NLTS-2 Data Brief: A report of the National Longitudinal Transition Study -2 SRI International*, 2, Retrieved from <http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp>
- Carter, E.W., Austin, D., & Trainor, A. A. (2011). Predictors of post-school employment outcomes for young adults with severe disabilities. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 20, 1-14. Doi:10.1177/1044207311414680
- Carter, E. W., Ditchman, N., Sun, Y., Trainor, A. A., Swedeen, S., & Owns, L. (2010). Summer employment and community experience of transition-age youth with severe disabilities. *Journal of Exceptional Children*, 76, 194-212.
- Christle, C. A., Jolivette, K., & Nelson, C. M. (2007). School characteristics related to high school dropout rates. *Remedial and Special Education*, 28, 325-36. doi: 10.1177/074193250702800660201.
- Cooney, B. F., (2002). Exploring perspectives on transition of youth with disabilities: Voices of young adults, parents, and professionals. *Mental Retardation*, 40, 425-435.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Coursey, R.D., Curtis, L., Marsh, D. T., Campbell, J., Harding, C., Spaniol, L., Lucksted, A., McKenna, J., Kelley, M., Paulson, R., & Zahniser, J. (2000). Competencies for direct service staff members who work with adults with severe mental illness:

- Specific knowledge, attitudes, skills, and bibliography. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 23, 378-391.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California, Sage Publications, Inc.
- Davies, P., Rupp, K., & Wittenburg, D. (2009). A life-cycle perspective on the transition to adulthood among children with disabilities receiving supplemental security income payments. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 30, 133-151. doi:10:3233/JVR-2009-0459
- Debring, C. E., Ormer, E.A., Schutt, R., Krebs, C., Losardo, M., Boyd, C., Penk, W., Rosenhek, R. (2004). Clients goals for participating in VHA vocational rehabilitation distribution and rehabilitation to outcome. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 47,162-172.
- Di-Masi, P. (2010). *Defining entrepreneurship*. In Financing microenterprises: Theory and practice. The Global Development Research Center. Retrieve from: <http://www.gdrc.org/icm/micro/micro.html>
- Donovan, M., & Tilson, G. (1998). The Marriott Foundation...from school to work program—A framework for successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 10, 15-21.
- Doren, B., & Benz, M. R. (1998). Employment inequality revisited: Predictors of better employment outcomes for young women with disabilities in transition. *The Journal of Special Education*, 31, 425-442.
- Edhlund, B. M. (2011). *Nvivo 9 Essentials: Your guide to the world's most powerful data analysis software*. CITY QSR International.

- Emerson, E. Shahtahmasebi, S., Lancaster, G., & Berridge, D. (2010). Poverty transition among families with child with intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 35*, 224-234. doi:10.3109/13668250.2010.518562
- Erickson, W. Lee, C., & Von Schrader, S. (2010). *2008 Disability status report: The United States*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/disabilitystatistics/StatusReports/2008>
- Fabian, E. S. (2007). Urban youth with disabilities: Factors affecting transition employment. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, 50*, 130-138.
- Fabian, E. S., Lent, R.W., & Willis, S. P., (1998). Predicting work transition outcomes for students with disabilities: Implications for counselors. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 76*, 311-316.
- Fabian, E. S., Luecking, R. G., & Tilson, G. P. (1995). Employer and rehabilitation personnel perspective on hiring persons with disabilities: Implications for job development, *Journal of Rehabilitation, 42-49*.
- Ferguson, P. & Blumberg, R. (2006). Transition Services for youth with disabilities. National Institute for Urban school improvement (NUI SI). Retrieved from <http://www.urbanschools.org/pdf/OP>
- Fowler, W. J., & Walberg, H. (1991). School size, characteristics and outcomes. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 13*, 189-202. doi: 10.3102/01623737013002189
- Fujiura, G. T., & Yamaki, K. (2000). Trends in the demography of childhood poverty and disability. *Exceptional Children, 66*, 187–199.

- Garcia-Irriarte, E., Balcazar, F., & Taylor-Ritzer, T. (2007). Analysis of case managers' support of youth with disabilities transitioning from school to work. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 26*, 129-140.
- Geenen, S., Powers, L. Lopez-Vasquez, A. (2001). Multicultural aspects of parent involvement in transition planning. *Exceptional Children, 67*, 265-282.
- Geenen, S., Powers, L. E., Lopez-Vasquez, A., & Bersani, H. (2003). Understanding and promoting the transition of minority adolescents. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 26*, 27-46.
- Greene, G. (1996). Empowering culturally and linguistically diverse families in the transition planning process. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education, 19*, 26-30.
- Gil-Kashiwabara, E., Hogansen, J. M., Geenen, S., Powers, K., & Powers, L. E. (2007). Improving transition outcomes for marginalized youth. *Career Development for Exceptional Children, 3*, 80-91.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*, 59-82. Doi: 10.1177/1525822X05279903
- Hasazi, S.B., Furney, K.S., & DeStefano, L. (1999). Implementing the IDEA transition mandates. *Exceptional Children, 65*: 555-567.
- Hasnain, R., & Balcazar, F. (2009). Predicting community-versus facility-based employment for transition-age young adults with disabilities: The role of race, ethnicity, and supports systems. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 31*, 175-188.

- Hagner, D., & Lounsbury, D. (2008). Work-based learning: Developing work experience opportunities for transitioning students. In F. R. Rusch (Eds.), *Beyond high school: Preparing adolescents for tomorrow challenges* (pp. 202-221). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Haines, A. H., & Lynch, E.W., & Winton, P. J. (2000). Moving towards cross-cultural competence in lifelong personnel development: A review of the literature. (CLAS Technical Report No. 3). Champaign: University of Illinois at Urbana.
- Halpern, A. S. (1985). Transition: A look at the foundations. *Exceptional Children, 51*, 479-486.
- Halpern, A. S. (1993). Quality of life as conceptual framework for evaluating transition outcomes. *Exceptional Children, 59*, 486-498.
- Hanger, D., Noll, A., & Donovan, L.E. (2002). Identifying community employment program staff competencies: A critical incident approach. *Journal of Rehabilitation, 68*, 45-51.
- Harry, B. (2000). Trends and issues in serving culturally diverse families of children with disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education, 36*, 131-138.
- Harry, B. (2008). Collaboration with culturally and linguistically diverse families: Ideal versus reality. *Exceptional Children, 74*, 372-388.
- Heal, L. W., & Rusch, F. R. (1995). Predicting employment for students who leave special education high school programs. *Exceptional Children, 51*, 455-469
- Hemmeter, J., Kauff, J., & Wittenberg, D., (2009). Changing circumstances: Experiences of child SSI recipients before and after their age-18 redetermination for adults

benefits. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 30, 201-221. doi: 10:3233/JVR-2009-0462

Hogansen, J. M., Powers, K., Gil-Kashiwara & Powers, L. (2008). Transition goals of females with disabilities: Youth, parents and professionals. *Exceptional Children*, 74, 215-234.

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

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

Kim, K.H., & Morningstar, M. E. (2005). Transition planning involving culturally and linguistically diverse families. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 28, 92-103.

Kochhar-Bryant, C. A. (2009). Implementing interagency agreements for transition. In C. A. Kochhar-Bryant & G. Green (Eds), *Pathways to successful transition for youth with disabilities* (pp. 327-371). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Kochhar-Bryant, C. A. & Greene, G. (2009). *Pathways to successful transition for youth with disabilities*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Kohler, P. D. (1996). *Taxonomy for transition programming: Linking research and practice*. Champaign: Transition Research Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign.

Kohler, P. D. (1993). Best practices in transition: Substantiated or implied? *Career Development for Exceptional Individual*, 16, 107-121.

- Kondo, E. K. (2010): Entrepreneur with a social cause: A radical case from Japan, *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 31, 297-316
- Leake, D. & Black, R. (2005). *Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: Implications for transition personnel*. Essential tools: Improving secondary education and transition for youth with disabilities. National Center on Education and Transition (NCSET), University of Minnesota, MN, 60- 87.
- Lee, E.W., & Schrader, V. S. (2010). *2008 Disability status report: Rehabilitation research and training center on disability demographics and statistics*. Retrieved from <http://www.disabilitystatistics.org>
- Levinson, E. M., & Ohler, D. L. (1998). Transition from high school to college for students with learning disabilities: Needs, assessment, and services. *High School Journal*, 82, 62-69.
- Lichtenstein, D., Lindstrom, L., & Povenmire-Kirk, T. (2008). Promoting multicultural competence: Diversity training for transition professionals. *Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, 30, 3-15.
- Lindstrom, L., Paskey, J., Dickinson, J., Doren, C., Zane, C., & Johnson, P. (2007). Voices from the field: Recommended transition strategies for student and school staff. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, 29, 4-15.
- Lindstrom, L., & Benz, M. R. (2002). Phases of career development: Career studies of young women with learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 69, 67-83.
- Loprest, P. & Maag, E. (2007). The relationship between early disability onset and education and employment, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Vol. 26, 49-62.

- Loprest, P. J., & Wittenberg, D. C., (2007). Early transition of child SSI recipients: New evidence for the National Survey of Children and Families. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 18*, 176-186. doi: 10.1177/10442073070180030601
- Lucking, R. G., (2008). Emerging employer views of people with disabilities and the future of job development. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 29*, 3-13.
- Lucking, R. G., & Fabian, F. S. (2000). Paid internship and employment success for youth in transition. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 23*, 205-221.
- Lucking, R. G., Fabian, F. S., & Tilson, G. P. (1994). *Working relationships: Creating career opportunities for job seekers with disabilities through employer partnership*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, Co.
- Luft, P. (2008). Career theories for transition planning. In R. W. Flexer, R. M. Baer, P. Luft & T. J. Simmons (Eds.), *Transition planning for secondary students with disabilities* (pp. 83-100). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.
- Lysaght, R. M. & Alttschuld, J. W, (2000). Beyond initial certification: The assessment and maintenance of competencies in professions. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 23*, 95-113.
- Maldonado, M. M., (2009). Is their nature to do menial labour?: The racialization of Latino/a workers' by agricultural employer. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 32*, 1017-1036.

- Madaus, J. S., & Shaw, S. F. (2006). The impact of IDEA 2004 on transition to college for students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 21*, 273-281.
- Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities. (2005). Bridges from school-to-work (Forms and Files Manual). Bethesda, MD: Author.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G.B., (2006). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Martz, E., & Xu, Y. J. (2008). Person-related and services-related factors predicting employment of individuals with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 28*, 97-104.
- Matrone, K. F., & Leahy, M. J. (2005). The relationship between vocational rehabilitation client outcomes and rehabilitation counselor multicultural counseling competencies. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, 48*, 233-244.
- Meier-Kronick, Nancy (1993). Culture-specific variables that may affect employment outcomes for Mexican-American youth with disabilities [microform] / Nancy Meier-Kronick Distributed by ERIC Clearinghouse, [Washington, D.C.]:
<http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED372520>
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study application in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Morgan, R., Ames, H., Loosli, T., Feng, J., & Taylor, M. (1995). Training for support employment specialist and their supervisors: Identifying important training topics.

Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, 30, 299-307.

Morningstar, M. E., Turnbull, A. P., & Turnbull, H. R. (1995). What do students with disabilities tell us about the importance of family involvement in the transition from school to adult life? *Exceptional Children*, 62, 249-260.

Murnane, R. J. (2007). Improving the education of children living in poverty. *The Future of Children*, 17(2).

Murry, F. R., & Tood, M. A. (2010). Four strategies to create positive transition outcomes for students with emotional or behavioral disorders. *Transition of secondary students with emotional disabilities or behavioral disorders: Current approaches for positive outcomes* (2nd ed.). Cheney, Douglas (Ed.); pp. 119-142. Champaign, IL, US: Research Press, 2010. xiii, 450 pp.

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition. (2003). Youth employment. NCSET NLTS2 Data Brief, 2(2). Retrieved from www.ncset.org/publications/default.asp#nlts2

Newman, L., Wagner, M., Cameto, R., & Knokey, A. M. (2009). *The post-high school outcomes of youth with disabilities up to 4 years after high school. A report of findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) (NCSE 2009-3017)*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International. Retrieved from www.nlts2.org/reports/2009_04/nlts2_report_2009_04_complete.pdf

O'Connor, C., & DeLuca-Fernandez, S. (2011). Race, class and disproportionately: Reevaluating the relationship between poverty and special education placement. *Educational Researcher*, 35. doi: 10.3102/0013189x035006006

- Palmer, M. (2011). Disability and poverty: A conceptual review. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 21*, 1044-2073. doi: 10:1177/1044207310389333
- Panagos, R. I., & DuBois D. L. (1999). Career self-efficacy development and students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 14*, 25-34.
- Park, J., Turnbull, A. P., & Turnbull, H. R. (2002). Impacts of poverty on quality of life in families of children with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 68*, 151–170.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pew Hispanic Center. (2011). *Census 2010: 50 million Latinos/Hispanics accounts for more than half of nation's growth in the past decade*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/140.pdf>
- Phelps, L., A., & Hanley-Maxwell, C. (1997). School-to-work transitions for youth with disabilities: A review of outcomes and practices. *Review of Educational Research, 67*, 197-226.
- Povenmire-Kirk, T. C. (2008). *Youth transition program, Oregon: Serving diverse youth*. Eugene: Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Services.
- Povenmire-Kirk, T. C., Lindstrom, L., & Bullis, M. (2010). De la escuela a la vida adulta/From school to adult life: Transition needs for Latino youth with disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Children 33*, 41-51.
- Povenmire-Kirk, T. C. (2009). *Making way through the borderlands: Latino youth with disabilities in transition from school to adult life*. (Published Doctoral dissertation) Retrieved from

<http://proquest-.umi-.com/pqdweb-?did=1883679181-&sid=1-&Fmt=2-&clientId=41143-&RQT=309-&VName=PQD>

Powers, K., Hogansen, J., Geenen, S., Powers, L. E., & Gil-Kashiwabara, E. (2008).

Gender matters in transition to adulthood: A survey study of adolescents with disabilities and their families. *Psychology in the Schools, 45*, 349-364.

doi:10.1002/pits.20297

Rabren, K., Dunn, C., & Chambers, D. (2002). Predictors of post-high school

employment among young adults with disabilities. *Career Development Exceptional Individuals, 25*, 25-40.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, P. L. 93-112.

Salas-Provance, M. B., Erickson, J.G., & Reed, J. (2002). Disabilities as viewed by four

generations of one Hispanic family. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 77*, 151-162.

Schalock, R. L., Wolzen, B., Ross, I., Elliott, B., Werbel, G., & Peterson, K. (1986). Post-

secondary community placement of handicapped students: A five-year follow-up. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 9*, 295-303.

Schultz, P. F. (2002). Transition from secondary to postsecondary education for

students with disabilities: An exploration of the phenomenon. *Journal of College Reading and Learning, 33*, 46-61.

Santiago-Rivera, A., Arredondo, P. & Gallardo-Cooper, M. (2002). Counseling Latinos

and La Familia: A guide for practitioner. Thousands Oaks, Ca: Sage

Sitlington, P., & Frank, A. R. (1994). Rural vs. urban: Does it affect the transition of

individual with disabilities? *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 13*, 9-15.

- Sodowsky, G. R., Kuo-Jackson, P.Y., Richardson, M.F., & Corey, A.T. (1998). Correlates of self-reported competencies: Counselors multicultural social desirability, race, social inadequacy, locus of control, racial ideology, and multicultural training. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 45*, 256-264.
- Social Security Administration. (2007). SSI Annual Statistical Report. Publication No. 13-11827. Washington, DC: SSA (2008b). Retrieved from http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi_asr/2007/
- Southworth, S., & Mickelson, R. A. (2007). The interactive effects of race, gender and school composition on college track placement. *Social Forces, 86*, 497-523.
- Stapleton, D.C., O'Day, B. L., Livermore, G.A., & Imparato, A. J. (2006). Dismantling the poverty trap: Disability policy for the twenty-first century. *The Milkbank Quarterly, Vol. 84*, 701-732.
- Szymanski, E. M. (1994). Transition: Life span and life-space consideration for empowerment. *Exceptional Children, 60*, 402-210.
- Taylor-Ritzler, T., Balcazar, F. E., Suarez-Balcazar, Y. Kilbury, R., Alvarado, F., James M. (2010). Engaging ethnically diverse individuals with disabilities in the vocational rehabilitation system: Themes of empowerment and oppression. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 33*, 3-14. Doi: 10.3233/JVR-20100511
- Test, D. W., Fowler, C., Ritcher, S. M., White, J., Mazzoti, V. L., Walker, A., Kohler, P., & Kortening, L. (2009). Evidence-based practices in secondary transition. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 32*, 160-181. doi: 10:1177/0885728809346960

- Thomas, D. R. (2003). *A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis*.
Auckland, University of Auckland, New Zealand.
www.health.auckland.ac.nz/hrmas/resources/qualdatanalysis.html
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27, 237-246.
doi:10.1177/1098214005283748
- Unger, D. D., Parent, W., Gibson, K., Kane-Johnson, K., & Kregel, J. (1998). An analysis of the activities of employment specialist in a natural support approach to support employment, *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 13, 27-38.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2011). Overview of race and Hispanic origin: 2010. Census Briefs. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/dpl/2kh00.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Labor/ Bureau of Labor Statistic (2009). Employment Outlook, Report on the American Workforce. Washington, DC: Author.
- Velcoff, J., Hernandez, B., & Keys, C. (2010). Employment and vocational rehabilitation experience of Latinos with disabilities with differing patterns of acculturation. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 33, 51-64.
- Wagner, M. (1992). Being female-A secondary disability: Gender differences in the transition experiences of young people with disabilities. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.
- Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., & Levine, P. (2005). *Changes over time in the early post school outcomes of youth with disabilities: A report of findings from*

the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) and the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS-2). Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., Levine, P., & Garza, N. (2006). An overview of findings from Wave 2 of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). Menlo Park, CA: SRI International. Retrieved from www.nlts2.org/reports/2006_08/nlts2_report_2006_08_complete.pdf.

Waldan, H.B., & Perlman, S. P. (2010). Hispanic/Latino population social and health conditions: The setting for children and adults with disabilities. *American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry*. Retrieve from www.eparents.com

Wells, T., Sandefur, G., Hogan, D. P. (2003). What happen after high school years among young person with disabilities? *Social Forces*, 82, 803-832.

Wehman, P. (2006). *Life beyond the classroom: Transition strategies for young people with disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

Will, M. (1984). OSERS programming from transition of youth with disabilities: Bridges from school to working life. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and Rehabilitative Services.

Wills, J., & Mack, D. (2009). *Comprehensive career planning and its role in the competitive global economy*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership and HiTech Services. Retrieved from <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/node/552pdf>

- Wittenburg, D. C., & Maag, E. (2002). School to where? A literature review on economics of youth with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 17*, 265-280.
- Whitehead, D. (2003). *Rehabilitation counselors' perceived multicultural competence: Working with African American and other culturally diverse clients with severe mental illness*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Maryland, College Park. Retrieved from <http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/1903/81/1/dissertation.pdf>
- Whitfield, H. W., Venable, R., & Brousard, S. (2010). Are client-counselor ethnic/racial matches associated with successful rehabilitation outcomes? *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin, 53*, 96-105.
- Whitley, R. Kostick, M. K., and Bush, P. W. (2010). Desirable characteristics and competencies of supported employment specialists: An empirically grounded framework. *Administration Policy Mental Health, 37*, 509-519, doi: 10.1007/s10488-010-0297-9