

Challenging Transition:
A Singapore Case Study of a Cultural Concept

By

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Abstract

The transition from child to adult is a process that has been widely theorized across different countries and in many different domains in academia. Youth transition, as it is known in developmental research, is a time when individual identity is developing and choices regarding future careers are an important part of that process. In many developed countries, it is also a period of time when many youths leave formal education and become disengaged from further education, training, and employment. Students with dis/abilities have been identified as a critical segment of the youth population who are not engaged in education, training, or employment. Therefore transition is increasingly becoming an important political, economic, and educational issue. Within the domain of special education, Western philosophies of adulthood have dominated the discourse around transition, focusing on independent living and self-determination of individuals. The literature review of the topics in this area indicated a need to have a socio-cultural-historical understanding and approach to transition.

This study sought to understand the important experiences and resources for students with dis/abilities in Singapore, who were transiting between formal educational settings into vocational educational settings. This research took a socio-cultural-historical perspective on the observed phenomena of transition. The experiences of the study participants were contextualized within the specific cultural milieu that exists in Singapore. Thus the study embedded transition planning and support activities for students with dis/abilities leaving secondary school within the current social, cultural, and historical context that is idiosyncratic to Singapore.

The individual student with dis/abilities was considered to be in a transitional phase, moving from adolescence into adult roles. Their individual development was mediated by their cultural and social experiences—both in and out of school contexts—as well as the tools that

were offered to them in these contexts. A developmental analysis of the individual cultural background and experiences helped to explain how they identified, as well as described their goals and aspirations.

The research strategy was to use ethnographic and phenomenological methods to understand the experiences of three student participants. A series of interviews were conducted with the students, their families, and their teachers. This included studying each student's biography, examining the relationships between family and school life, the interactions that students had with family and school that influenced the way they saw themselves, their identities, and the actions that they took. In order to understand the school environment, context, and culture, the school leaders were interviewed and ethnographic observations were conducted..

The findings showed that the families emphasized the roles that allowed them to protect their child, teach them about life, and offer a range of resources and experiences to support their child. The students with dis/abilities illustrated a range of different experiences in their journey to become an adult. The experiences that were most important to them were categorized into three areas: (a) their ability to have a choice in their vocational studies; (b) their work and volunteer experiences; (c) their plans for moving ahead in their journey. Schools reportedly developed and implemented inclusive strategies to support students with dis/abilities. However, by contextualizing school practices into the cultural understandings of society, the study found that schools continued to emphasize and perpetuate society's ableist attitudes. In summary, the experiences of the students with dis/abilities as they transitioned to a vocational educational setting, and embarked on their journey to being an adult, were greatly influenced by both their families and their experiences in school. The discussion includes the need to focus on student

voice in order to understand the implications for families and schools seeking to improve the experiences of students with dis/abilities.

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solī Deo honor et gloria

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Chapter 1: Background & Context

On September 25, 2015, countries in the United Nations adopted a set of 17 goals to “end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all” (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). One of the core elements driving the 17 goals is social inclusion, which creates greater opportunities for all people and reduces inequalities. Of the 17 goals, two of them are directly related to this study—Goal 4: Quality Education, which addresses the need for secondary, technical, vocational, and tertiary education in addition to primary education; and Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. Goals 4 and 8 support the notion that quality education leading to decent employment is one of the main tools for scaling development at a global level; and explore the links between quality education, the ability to find decent work, and employment’s contribution to economic growth. Both goals include the need to create equal opportunities for all with a focus on people of different genders and abilities. More specifically, the goals call for a substantial reduction of the proportion of youth who are unemployed or not currently in an education or training program.

Both developing and developed countries contain high proportions of youth who are neither employed nor in higher education or career development programs. In the United States (U.S.), 15% of the total youth population fell into this category in 2001 (Hair, Moore, Ling, McPhee-Baker, & Brown, 2009); in the United Kingdom (U.K.), 10.3% of youths were unemployed in 2008 (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Coles, Godfrey, Keung, Parrot, & Bradshaw, 2010; Yates, Harris, Sabates, & Staff, 2011); and overall in Europe, 22% of youths were unemployed in 2012 (Durnescu, 2014; Salvatore, 2012). Different terms have been coined to describe this heterogeneous group of youths: “disconnected youths” in the U.S. (Hair et al., 2009), “young people not in education, employment and training” (NEET) in the U.K. (Bynner & Parsons, 2002), and “disaffected youths” in the European Union (E.U.) (Durnescu, 2014).

Milestones for youths moving from adolescence to adulthood typically include employment or further training or education because as youths come of age, families, communities, and governments expect youth to become both materially and financially independent. Governments are concerned with the high numbers of youths who are unemployed or not seeking further training or education because human capital is not fully utilized or developed. The lack of accumulation of human capital leads to poor employment outcomes, dangerous lifestyles, and potential mental and physical health problems (Salvatore, 2012; Sandefur, Eggerling-Boeck, & Park, 2008), all of which have societal and economic consequences. Unemployed youths tend to have lower participation rates in civic society (Sandefur et al., 2008; Villano & Bertocchi, 2014), and require increased government spending (Salvatore, 2012). Research funds support the identification of unemployed or underemployed youth in order to encourage them to seek employment, or to continue with their education and training.

Specific populations have been identified as particularly vulnerable to becoming disconnected (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Hair and colleagues (2009) reported that vulnerable populations include low-income groups, racial minorities, children in foster/state care, and those previously in special education with identified dis/abilities. In general, these populations also have lower odds in achieving conventional milestones that reflect a successful transition between adolescence and adulthood, (i.e., completing school, leaving home, beginning one's career, marrying and becoming a parent) (Furstenberg Jr., Rumbaut, & Settersten Jr., 2008; Janus, 2009). Although specific transition programs have been developed to support the unique needs of these vulnerable populations (Foster & Gifford, 2008), a higher percentage of "disconnected" youths persists. Youth with dis/abilities have consistently been found to be

significantly under-employed and are less likely to attend any sort of post-secondary education institution (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). In the U.S., data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students-2, a 10-year study started in 2001, showed that only 57% of youths from special education had full-time employment three to five years after graduating from high school, compared to 69% of the general population of youths (Levine & Wagner, 2005), a finding that is consistent with other developed countries. For example, in the U.K., one in five individuals with dis/abilities is considered NEET, and in Australia, individuals with dis/abilities are also recognized as disadvantaged, where individuals with dis/abilities were three times less likely to find full-time employment (Winn & Hay, 2009). Osgood et al. (2010) argue that participating in state-run services that addressed the student's needs actually constrained the student's access to opportunities that might be available to youths not in state-run services.

Education policies seek to improve opportunities for students with dis/abilities to continue in post-secondary training and employment settings, including transition planning and support for students as early as age 14 in U.S. high schools (IDEA, 2004) and in Year 9 (age 13–14) in the U.K. (Department for Education (DFE), 2015b). The purpose of early transition planning and support is to begin appropriate vocational education in early adolescence, as well as to provide experiences that will support independent living, community participation, and future employment (DFE, 2015b; Foster & Gifford, 2008; IDEA, 2004). Transition support is particularly important for students with dis/abilities as it also prepares them to succeed in inclusive settings. Youth transition into adulthood has become increasingly protracted and fragmented. Youth achieve adult milestones at a later age than the previous generation, and an increasing diversity of possible pathways and trajectories is emerging. Students with dis/abilities

may find this trend particularly beneficial, enabling them to leverage extended timelines and increased opportunities to obtain additional educational certification (IDEA, 2004). Because obtaining higher educational qualification enhances the prospects of a more successful career and more stable unions (Furstenberg, 2010), students with dis/abilities will have a higher chance of successfully achieving the milestones that indicate a successful transition to adulthood.

Despite constant pressure from global, regional, and local governance structures for all youth to be in employment, education, or training, little discussion has taken place within these structures on the appropriateness of this expectation. Employment expectations do not take into account sociology and developmental psychology research regarding youth development and the variety of cultural expectations for adulthood. National policies and guidelines for students with dis/abilities persistently use a single definition of adulthood that revolves around financial and residential independence. Research studies focus primarily on the effectiveness of strategies and processes that emphasize individual behavioral outcomes that lead to future education or employment (e.g., Mazzotti, Rowe, Cameto, Test, & Morningstar, 2013; Test, Fowler et al., 2009). The use of a unitary definition of adulthood, particularly one that emphasizes individual behavior and characteristics, neglects the influence and impact of the individual's family and community. The definition of "adulthood" varies among different cultural, racial/ethnic, and linguistic groups. Development of policy and practice guidelines has primarily been based on research studies of school-based transition for students with dis/ability. Therefore the expectation for all youths to be constructively occupied, as defined by many national governments (e.g., U.S., U.K., Australia, Europe), may not be equally valued in all cultures (Foster & Gifford, 2008). For example, the U.K. has started to recognize that cultural differences may need to be acknowledged when applying government guidelines to support students with dis/abilities during

times of transition (DFE, 2015a). Recent research in the U.S. questions the appropriateness of applying a single definition of “transition outcomes” to populations from different cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds (Banks, 2014; Greene, 2014).

Comparative research that examines youth transition to adulthood from a life course perspective strongly emphasizes that different norms exist. In Europe, distinctions are made between Western and Eastern Europe (Roberts, Pollock, Rustamova, Mammadova, & Tholend, 2009), and Northern and Southern Europe (Holdsworth, 2000). Further research conducted across the E.U. recognizes that not only different cultures, but also different institutional structures influence youth transitions (Serracant, 2012; Stauber & Walther, 2006). The differences that distinguish cultures include the timing of events and emphases on particular milestones. For example, not all cultures expect a youth to move away from the family. In Mediterranean European cultures, youths choose to stay with their families for long periods of time, sometimes never moving away to set up independent households (Serracant, 2012). This observation is repeated in other European countries, particularly in Eastern Europe, although there is a greater variability among their youth (Roberts et al., 2009). Staying with their families reflects a desire to take care of one’s family, coupled with additional social and financial benefits for the youth (Roberts et al., 2009; Serracant, 2012).

Even taking into account the diverse experiences of youths from different national and racial backgrounds, the experiences of youths at the intersections of other demographic variables—such as poverty—within vulnerable populations—such as those with dis/abilities—are not well understood (Hair et al., 2009; Osgood et al., 2010). A few examples of theories and research are available on the experiences of youths with dis/abilities who may also be from other vulnerable groups. Some research shows that despite the awareness of youths’ intersectional

identities, uncovering and addressing areas that affect their development remains a challenge, due to the hidden nature of structural inequities. As a result, youths with dis/abilities are especially disadvantaged and oppressed, particularly those who are already part of vulnerable populations (Furlong, Biggart, & Cartmel, 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to consider not only cultural differences (Syed & Mitchell, 2013) such as race/ethnicity and language, but also the traditional differences that are linked to political economy and social policies, such as race and class differences (Casal, Garcia, Merino, & Quesada, 2006; Serracant, 2012), in the lives of youths with dis/abilities. Their transition needs to be anchored within their life course, while also recognizing the influence of their social, cultural, and historical contexts (Myklebust, 2002). This dissertation study aims to uncover such issues in relation to a pivotal point in the life of a student with dis/ability—the point of transition where they leave compulsory or national schooling and take bold steps towards adulthood.

Problem Statement

Singapore is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world and is defined by its multiracial and multicultural society (Lian, 2016). Singapore is also multi-lingual, professing Malay (Bahasa Malayu) as its national language, but also recognizing three additional official languages: English, Chinese (Mandarin), and Tamil. The relatively young nation celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2015 but has already achieved developed nation status, according to the United Nations Development Programme. The International Monetary Fund considers Singapore an advanced country and the World Bank defines it as a high-income country (Nielsen, 2011). To support these accomplishments, Singapore's government developed its own brand of liberal democracy—driven by capitalist forces—and is highly committed to the social welfare of its people, due to its communitarian leanings (Chua, 2010). As such, education has purposefully

been used as a tool to deal with many aspects of the unknown, including the issue of globalization. In his book *Tactical Globalization*, Koh (2010) describes how the government uses a variety of tactics within its education system in order to develop citizens for the future, resulting in hegemonic practices in Singapore's schools. Hegemonic practices are a reflection of the dominant discourse representing the beliefs, perceptions, and values of the privileged culture in a society. The dominant discourse and practices are cultural norms, although the population consists of diverse groups of people. Hegemony is a form of oppression and domination of one group over others. In Singapore, the dominant discourse in education revolves around the principle of meritocracy, which overrides all other criticisms related to inequality and disadvantage across schools (Koh, 2014). Under the meritocratic system, academic performance is rewarded based on the objective measure of the performance. The measures used in Singapore are the national exams: the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), the General Certificate of Education Normal (GCE N) (Normal / Academic), General Certificate of Education Ordinary (GCE O) Level exams, and the General Certificate of Education (GCE A) Level exams or the International Baccalaureate exams. The students' performance in these exams is used to sort students into various courses, and also determine which schools they can enter. Families with abundant resources support their children from an early age with exposure to reading, learning through play, and other forms of enrichment. Singapore has been borrowing and modifying best practices from other countries aimed at addressing inequality and integrating the practices into the meritocratic system, in a bid to address the criticism regarding the unfair advantage of these highly resourced students.

The primary interest of this study is how students with dis/abilities transition between secondary school and vocational college in Singapore, taking into account the unique nature of

the Singaporean education system, and to explore the ways in which the students' experiences might be similar to or different from students in other developed countries. When Singapore was planning specific policy for developing transition planning and support, comparisons were also made with other countries, and recommendations were made based on research from other developed countries (Steering Committee on the Enabling Masterplan, 2012). As recent sociological and educational research in Singapore suggests (Chua, 2010; Koh, 2010; Lim, 2014), borrowing different practices from other developed nations carries with it not only the originating nation's discourse but also risks creating or supporting an existing hegemonic discourse within Singapore (Koh, 2010). As transition planning and support gathers more interest in Singapore as a way to increase the retention of youths in either education or in the workplace (3rd Enabling Masterplan Steering Committee, 2016), it is critical to question the fundamental beliefs that uphold current conceptions of transition support and planning. A school-based transition framework should consider the characteristics of how local youths transition to adulthood and the local definitions and characteristics of adulthood, and be consistent with developmental research. In this study, transition is considered a cultural concept, needing further questioning regarding whom it benefits, who is involved, and what is being valued. Understanding the concept of transition is an important step in ensuring that transition planning and support for students with dis/abilities is suitable and relevant for individuals, rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all approach.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study is to understand how students with dis/abilities, their families, and schools enact the process of transition planning and support, and the mediating tools that are used in the process. This study will examine whether the commonly quoted pillars of adulthood,

i.e., completing school, leaving home, beginning a career, marrying, and becoming a parent, (Furstenberg et al., 2008) are equally valued by the different racial/ethnic and religious groups present in Singapore's multicultural society. The study aims to explore differences and similarities within and between groups and how they influence the way transition is understood and enacted in Singapore for students with dis/abilities who identify with specific racial/ethnic and/or religious backgrounds. The study will also examine the effect of current school policies on the experience of students with dis/abilities and compare those effects with the impact families have on their children, during the students' transition into adulthood. The school's ability to simultaneously address issues of oppression and inclusion for students with dis/abilities, while their primary goal is to prepare students for vocational studies, will be questioned. The practices of the school determine whether youths with dis/abilities can be fully included without stigma in society (Farrell & Ainscow, 2002). Therefore, an important part of this study is to uncover if and how the school system is driven by hegemonic and colonizing discourses that seek to manage students with dis/abilities.

This study is directly related to strategic directions stated in the recently released 3rd Enabling Masterplan for 2017–2022: “Strategic Direction 4 – Improved access to enhanced pathways for employment and lifelong learning opportunities” (3rd Enabling Masterplan Steering Committee, 2016, p. 52). The study will be of interest to those who are involved in the current policy initiatives that support students with dis/abilities in mainstream schools. The study's audience includes families, schools, and other professionals supporting and preparing youths with dis/abilities to take on adult responsibilities and enhance their chances in the open job market. First, the study may benefit parents as they grapple with their aspirations for their children as adulthood approaches. The study results may offer families insights to help them

negotiate this developmental stage and facilitate more effective partnerships with the social institutions that support youth transition to adulthood. Second, school leaders may develop a deeper awareness of the goals, both intended and unintended, that could be achieved through providing post-secondary school-based transition within Singapore's multicultural landscape. As the study examines transition from multiple perspectives, the school's role and contribution to transition can be more clearly described and defined in relation to societal and family needs. As a result, schools can develop more appropriate transition planning and support. Third, the study will help professionals working with students and schools to develop culturally appropriate and responsive transition plans that support the student's holistic development, and the inclusion of the student in society. Finally, this study also illustrates the use of a new lens, foregrounding the social, cultural, and historical differences of human experience, to help policymakers understand the local context before appropriating concepts and interventions from foreign contexts.

Theoretical Orientation

This research takes a socio-cultural-historical perspective (Cole, 1995) on the observable phenomenon of youth transition. It seeks to draw on sociocultural theories of development and education, as well as cultural-historical perspectives on human activity and mental functioning (Wertsch, 1991, 1993). This study uses as its starting point Vygotskian sociocultural ideas of individual development and human action. Vygotsky describes individual development not as a process that is internal to self, but one based on cultural and social experiences. Therefore, human action is not purely driven by intention and beliefs, but is also mediated by systems of artifacts within society, particularly tools (i.e., technical tools that act on the world) and signs (i.e., psychological tools that act on the mind) developed by the individual to influence or guide action. Tools and signs represent the social resources that are used in individual development.

They are individually internalized based on one's past experiences. The process of internalization "transforms the process itself and changes its structures and functions" (Vygotsky, 1981, p.163). Once these social resources (i.e., both tools and signs) have been internalized, they can be used in situations and contexts different from the original ones. Wertsch (1998) extends the notion of internalization by defining it as two distinct processes: internalization as mastery (i.e., knowing how to use a tool/sign) and internalization as appropriation (i.e., using a tool/sign as part of a discourse). Therefore internalization is a developmental process, influenced by the cultural background of the individual.

The cultural background of the individual can be analyzed developmentally on four levels: (a) the phylogenetic—the use of tools; (b) the cultural-historical—the influence of particular cultures; (c) the ontogenetic—the individual characteristics; and (d) the microgenetic—the interactions between individuals and their different settings (Wertsch, 1998). The relationship between individual development and human action is an interaction of the four levels over time, and hence an analysis of the cultural background of an individual's development should also include a historical examination.

Besides understanding that an individual is situated within a cultural context, this study also assumes that all human action exists interdependently and is mutually constituted with its environment and context (Shweder, 1990), and thus all action is necessarily social. Using an interdisciplinary lens allows the socio-cultural-historical underpinnings of a phenomena to be more apparent. In different disciplines, particular elements are emphasized and referred to using different terms: Bourdieu calls this cultural background the "habitus" and makes a distinction between one's individual habitus, which is formed by individual dispositions shaped by one's past experiences in particular structures, and the class habitus, the socio-cultural context based

on socialized norms or tendencies derived from shared understanding (King, 2000). Wertsch (1991, 1993) uses the term “milieu” to describe the specific cultural, historical, and institutional factors that the human action is situated within. Collins (2013) summarizes it simply as “social and individual cognitive processes are mutually constitutive and interdependent” (p. 3). These theories based on the socio-cultural-historical perspective emphasize the individual, one’s activity and the tools that mediate it, and the influence of the cultural background on individual development. These concepts form the structure on which the rest of the conceptual framework is built.

Conceptual Framework

This study applies a socio-cultural-historical perspective to conceptualize transition as a cultural concept. It embeds transition planning and support activities for students with dis/abilities leaving secondary school, within the social, cultural, and historical context of their families and the school. This concept is then extended to Singapore and situated within its idiosyncratic social, cultural, and historical background.

As a cultural concept, the experience of transition is described from different angles as an individual interacts within specific social structures while simultaneously influenced by their socially defined rules, as well as changing them by their presence in that structure. One facet of transition is that of a “figured world” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), broadly defined as “socially produced, culturally constituted activities” (pp. 40–41). Urrieta (2007) relates that the figured world is a concept that foregrounds activities that are carried out by an individual in relation to other characters in the figured world. The figured world represents social processes that use historical understandings as well as current narratives to help organize them. Therefore which narratives are used to organize the figured world depends on the power balance

that exists within the interactions between the individual and the other characters (Hatt, 2007). Although individuals have agency and are part of the activities that happen within the figured world, they are also constrained by the rules that are made by others with more power (Urrieta, 2007). These narratives provide the backdrop on which actions of the characters and the interactions between those in the figured world can be interpreted (Urrieta, 2007).

Transition as a figured world is regulated and defined by specific processes and constructs governed by schools (i.e., the school leaders) which in turn is influenced by government policy decided by the dominant group in society. The school, as both a social and government institution, represents the dominant view in society, and thus produces practices that reify the dominant understandings of transition and influence the way youth understand their roles in society, and the range of actions that are possible within it (Hatt, 2007). These practices within the school may be performed by the school leaders and the teachers and may also involve peers and the parents. Therefore, transition, within the context of the school, becomes a place where students with dis/abilities, in their interaction with school-based activities and people in the school, come to understand, produce, and perform new identities that influence their development from an adolescent to an adult.

In contrast to the figured world of transition governed by the dominant discourse in the school is the “intentional world” (Shweder, 1990, p. 1), which represents the beliefs and views of transition held by families, interacting mutually with the external environment. Each racial/ethnic and cultural group will have their own intentional world that may conflict with the dominant view represented by the figured world, particularly when they have different expectations for their child (Harry, 2008; Smith & Routel, 2009). In this study, families are also recognized to maintain “funds of knowledge” (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 25) that are

reflective of their race/ethnicity and culture, as well as their social capital, including class-based resources. “Funds of knowledge” refer to the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills typically associated with household and individual functioning. This often includes networks of knowledge gleaned from the community. Based on their knowledge and expectations for their child with dis/ability, families leverage their funds of knowledge to achieve their goals for their child within their intentional world.

The individual student with dis/ability is considered to be in a transitional phase, moving from adolescence into adulthood, and moving across the boundaries of the figured world and the intentional world (Rubin, 2007). Their individual development is mediated by their cultural and social experiences, both in-school and out-of-school contexts, as well as the tools that are offered to them from these contexts. When comparing in-school and out-of school contexts, the difference in attitudes and beliefs regarding youth transition to adulthood and their varying ability to conduct certain activities leads to divergence between what families and schools do in the pursuit of each of their identified transition goals. This disparity results in contradictory transition activities. Each context will also provide different mediational tools that are taught to the student (Wertsch, 1991), although the tools from different contexts may not be internalized to the same extent (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981; Wertsch, 1998). When school and family transition goals and activities are aligned, internalization takes place with greater ease (Trainor, 2008), and thus the individual is in a stronger position to cope with the transition from secondary school to post-secondary settings.

A developmental analysis of the individual’s cultural background and experiences helps to explain how they define their identity, and describe their goals and aspirations. Transition should not be understood as a list of legally required school-based processes that address future

planning for students with dis/abilities, but as a learning space that is both culturally and socially constructed, coinciding with the developmental process of becoming an adult. Transition thus becomes an opportunity for students with dis/abilities to acquire emotional, social, and intellectual tools they need for adulthood and inclusion in their communities. Their experiences, both in and out of school, play a part in guiding their thinking to identify strengths and weaknesses, as well as how they can be translated into youths' goals and aspirations (Banks, 2014; McCall, 2015).

As transition can be seen as a cultural phenomena resulting from multiple actors and contexts working alongside each other, a syncretic approach is necessary to ensure that each are given the appropriate attention (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2000). Therefore, as described earlier, multiple theories from the socio-cultural-historical traditions have been combined to contribute to the development of the conceptual framework. Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation showing the interactions between the individual and the figured and intentional worlds that they reside in, representing the school and the family's contributions to the development of their identity. It also shows the key influence within each of these worlds. The arrows indicate that these worlds and the individual mutually constitute and contribute to the experienced phenomena of transition.

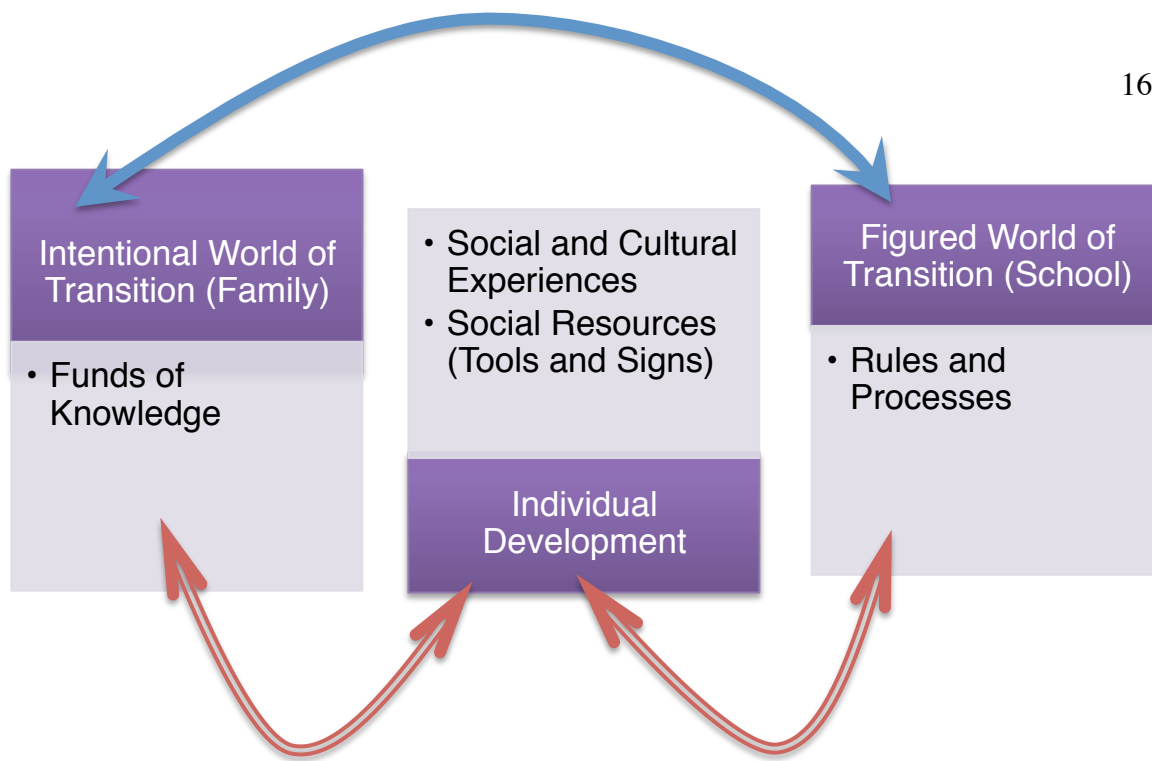


Figure 1. Diagram of conceptual framework.

Research Questions

This study is guided by an overall research question: How is transition for students with dis/abilities enacted by themselves, their families, and their schools? This direction of inquiry is further divided into three additional research questions. Each of them represents the key actors in the figured world of transition in secondary schools: the student, the family, and the school. The questions also identify the specific area of interest, as represented in the conceptual framework, as the key factors that facilitate and obstruct the individual agency and activity in transition. The research questions are:

Research Question 1: In what ways does the student with dis/ability construct his/her transition needs?

Research Question 2: How are the family's cultural values and beliefs about transition goals and needs for their child with dis/ability enacted in school and at home?

Research Question 3: How does the school's expectations for the student with dis/ability mediate the ways the school provides transition support for that student?

Definition of Terms

Culture – In this study, following socio-cultural traditions, culture breaks away from its meaning as a fixed categorical property of individuals (e.g., ethnicity), and is instead a “constellation of community practices” (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002). Thus culture is defined as “a patterned configuration of routine, value-laden ways of doing things that make sense as they occur together in the somewhat ordered flux of a community’s ways of living” (p. 216).

Dis/ability – Dis/ability is an identity marker that is socially constructed by the interaction between an individual and the environment (Collins, 2013), and indicates that there is a norm that is associated with ability. Therefore in this study, dis/ability with the virgule between “s” and “a” distinguishes the social construction of dis/ability from its medical construct. The medical construct of dis/ability considers it a personal condition that needs to be corrected or cured (Reid & Knight, 2006). The social construction takes into account that an individual with dis/abilities may have real impairments that affect daily living, influenced by the context in which they live (Nichols, 2017).

Race/Ethnicity – Race is considered a socially constructed system of power that confers dominance upon the majority and marginalization upon the minority (Barr & Low, 2005; Moore, 2000). In a race-based society like Singapore, where race is part of one’s national identity, the majority race is able to produce policies and determine the direction of society and political development. They control the narratives that are prevalent in the mainstream media and society. These policies tend to benefit the majority race and marginalize the needs of the minority race, thus reifying existing hierarchies of power (Chua, 2003). Ethnicity corresponds to the cultural history, beliefs, and practices of a relatively well-defined group that shares a similar background. In Singapore, the lines between race and ethnicity are blurred (Lian, 2016), making it difficult to

discriminate between the two. Hence this study uses the hybrid term “race/ethnicity” to acknowledge that the terms are distinct but it is not really possible to separate research findings by race and ethnicity (Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

Secondary Education – In Singapore, secondary education refers to the levels Secondary 1, up to Secondary 5. Typically students in secondary education will range between 13–18, after which they age out of the system. In this study, the students were all situated in the Normal (Technical) course, which goes up to Secondary 4 (Ministry of Education (MOE) Singapore, 2016).

Special Educational Needs / Special Needs (SEN) – These two terms are used interchangeably in this study by the study participants. Within the Singapore context, a student is defined to have a SEN when they have a dis/ability or condition, as diagnosed by a medical professional or a psychologist, and shows significant difficulties in school as a result of it (MOE Singapore, 2011). Participants’ use of the term indicates that individuals with dis/abilities have real needs that impact their daily lives, and does not indicate that they believe their needs to be special or different in value from the needs of other individuals (Sutton, 2016). SEN is used in this study only when participants use the term.

Student/Youth with dis/ability – The research will focus on students between the ages of 15–17, and they will be referred to as youths or students in this study. They will be students identified as having a medical condition and/or developmental dis/ability, supported by formal documentation recognized by the school.

Transition – Transition is the process by which students with dis/abilities are provided with school-based support and services to help them after secondary school graduation to enter and be successful in post-secondary education or work settings.

Youth Transition – Youth transition is the period of time during which a youth takes steps towards milestones associated with adulthood. This typically includes moving out of school and into work settings, as well as finding a partner and settling down (Furlong et al., 2006).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Youth has been restructured in the last quarter of a century, it is the vulnerable who have suffered the most in coping with the transitions associated with these changes. (Coles, 1995, p. 25)

In this chapter I present an overview of the literature related to the conceptual framework described in Chapter 1 (See Figure 1 for diagram). I review the existing literature on transition, drawing attention to the historical and contemporary conceptualizations of transition, as well as families' perspectives and students' lived experiences.

Approach to Literature Review

Framing this literature review with my conceptual framework allows me to make an argument for the importance of this topic and that the methods that I propose to study it are appropriate and meaningful (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). Using this conceptual framework helps me to locate and contextualize the literature that I find within explicit frames of reference. It allows me to review literature with a dual intention: to relate findings to each other, and to identify disconfirming evidence that helps shed light on the limitations of the current conceptions and research related to transition. Based on my conceptual framework, four questions guided my literature review:

1. What laws and policies do governments use to guide schools' implementation of transition planning and support activities for students with and without dis/abilities?
2. With regards to students with dis/ability, how do schools enact the laws and policies of transition, and how do they compare with the family's understanding of: (a) the goals and outcomes of transition; (b) the approach used in conducting transition planning and support activities; and (c) the schools' ability to collaborate with the family to support the student?

3. What is known about how students with dis/ability from culturally diverse backgrounds experience transition, and how they negotiate their school and family experiences?
4. What is known about the context and experiences of students in Singapore who are tracked into a lower ability curriculum? What other identity markers affect their schooling experience?

Method

I now present the methodology for selecting the articles used in this review, enabling readers to make a judgment of the quality of the review findings. The literature selected to answer the guiding questions were drawn from a range of sources, including policy documents, empirical research studies, meta-analysis, and research-based position papers. Articles were sourced across various disciplines, including medicine, psychology, therapy services, and special education. To make sense of the diverse documents, I used a method suitable for working with qualitative research and quantitative research, as well as non-research documents. I wanted to draw out and critique the concepts present in the literature. My intention suited an interpretive style of review. Unlike other systematic reviews, the product was not intended to be a systematic review or aggregation of the data, but “its aim is to offer a theoretically sound and useful account that is demonstrably grounded in the evidence” (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006, p. 10). I found that Dixon-Woods and her colleagues’ method of “Critical Interpretive Synthesis” was most suitable for the purpose of the review. It was developed based on the methods of meta-ethnography and qualitative meta-analysis. As the method “demands constant reflexivity” (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006, p. 10), I reflexively describe my methods according to the steps described by them, in order to show transparency and comprehensiveness of the review (Green & Skukauskaitė, 2008).

Formulating the review question. The guiding questions I used for my review were not hypothesis-driven, but described a broad range of experiences. This allowed me to include a wide range of documents, as long as they were relevant to the goals of this review and contributed to the approach described earlier. Searches were thus not limited to articles that specifically answered the guiding questions, but included any article that might provide important insight or information related to the guiding questions.

Searching and sampling the literature. I started with the conventional method of systematically reviewing search results from electronic bibliographic databases. Based on the second and third guiding questions, I used a combination of search terms such as “transition,” “post secondary,” “disability,” “culture,” “multicultural,” “diverse,” “youth,” “families” and “voice.” I used the University of Kansas’ library search engine, Proquest’s research library, PsychLit, and ERIC as the primary databases for this search, focusing on the years from 2004–2016. I chose 2004 as it refers to the last reauthorization of the U.S. law, the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (2004). However, the search yielded over 6,000 possible relevant articles. Therefore I used a sampling frame to reduce the number of documents that needed to be reviewed. Initially, I used purposive sampling to select literature reviews, position papers, or meta-analysis that were clearly related to transition. They were used as the base article and I conducted forward searches to identify more recent research in each of the particular areas. I then reviewed the references used in key articles to find relevant articles, books, or other literature. In particular, I looked for key milestone articles that have contributed to the field, and qualitative research that delved into the lived experiences of participants (Greenhalgh, Robert, Macfarlane, Bate, Kyriakidou, & Peacock, 2005). I then used theoretical sampling to add to and elaborate on the analysis, based on selected themes that I had identified as most relevant to this study.

Inclusion criteria include transition research focused on understanding diverse needs of cultural groups, or where particular results or conclusions referenced diverse cultural groups. As I prioritized selecting empirical studies aligned to a socio-cultural-historical approach to understanding transition, I also focused on locating qualitative studies of lived experiences of students and families from diverse cultural groups. These methods were based on the meta-narrative approach, designed to support the review of heterogeneous documents and research traditions (Greenhalgh et al., 2005). For this review, I report on a total of 73 documents selected from a total of 180 documents that were read in full.

For the first guiding question, I applied a specific sampling frame after conducting an initial search. In the initial search, I utilized Google Scholar, using a combination of search terms, including “transition”, “disability”, “special (educational) needs”, and “post secondary” to find reports and research articles. I did not use the library databases for this search because I wanted to find articles from around the world, and Google was better able to fulfill the task. I included documents if they addressed transition issues and/or issues regarding students with dis/ability from diverse cultures/countries. After this initial search, I applied a specific sampling frame, focusing on three countries that showcased educational systems from different backgrounds and related to Singapore, albeit in different ways. The American system was chosen because the majority of research that is reviewed and used in policy making in Singapore comes from the U.S. Various universities in the U.S. have also served as consultants in many areas of education, including social-emotional learning and special education. The British system was chosen due to its historical connection to Singapore; Singapore’s current system was built upon the inherited British system implemented during colonial times (i.e., after World War II until independence from the British in 1963). In addition, British universities have also acted as important

consultants in the work of educational (school) psychologists in the Singapore's Ministry of Education. Finally, Finland represents a country with a strong welfare ethic, and is similar in performance to Singapore based on international benchmarking assessments (OECD, 2016).

I conducted a Google search to look for policies specific to these three countries. I also searched for policy guidelines from government websites if they did not appear in the searches. Policy papers, reports, and country descriptions published by the government or by non-governmental organizations were included, as were research papers that looked at local government and school implementation of the policies. As I was interested in current development in those countries, I only included policy documents from the past five years. A total of 37 policy papers and reports and research articles were selected for their direct relevance to the topic on transition and/or diverse students, out of 73 documents that were initially selected and read in full.

Lastly, I searched for articles written on Singapore's educational system with specific focus on students with lower ability. An initial search was done using the same databases as before to look for publications in different disciplines, such as sociology, and curriculum to review current research. I conducted forward and backward searches, including a review of the references from key papers, to find a number of papers that covered political, historical, and cultural dimensions of education for students with lower ability. A total of 34 documents were read in full and four articles were selected due to their relevance to the Normal (Technical) course and/or to the education for students with dis/abilities.

In summary, I surfaced 6,235 documents from the initial search. During the selection process, 287 documents were read in full. A total of 92 peer-reviewed articles, 15 policy documents and reports, and 7 book chapters were used for this review. Due to the wide range of

documents selected for review, it was difficult to apply any specific quality indicators to signal the quality of the document. One risk in discounting some studies due to methodological problems is that they may still have something important to contribute. Therefore none of the studies reviewed were excluded, and any issues within an included paper were critiqued within the analysis in order to avoid that particular error.

Data extraction and conducting an interpretive synthesis. Using a critical interpretive synthesis approach, the output of the review is to have a synthesizing argument (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006), that provides a way to understand a phenomenon. This is aligned with my conceptual framework for understanding transition of students with dis/abilities. The guiding questions allowed me to identify key themes and concepts that, upon further iterative review, guided the further extraction and interpretation of the reviewed documents, and finally leading to the sections represented in this review. Dixon-Woods and colleagues (2006) also suggested rooting the synthesizing argument in the critique of existing evidence, which I have also done, by presenting alternative perspectives within each section.

Guide to the Literature Review

This section aims to show how the conceptual framework has been useful in forming the flow and sequence of this literature review. The first section of this review relates the experiences of the three selected countries in transition for students with dis/abilities. Recognizing transition as a cultural phenomenon is the first step to defining transition as a figured world (Holland et al., 1998). As a figured world, transition can be understood as a socially organized and reproduced process, and the context in which institutional discourses are enacted in activities that happen in a particular time and place (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2007). For each country, transition as a figured world is related to how schools enact transition.

As the students with dis/ability interact with the people that make up the figured world—i.e., the school leaders, teachers, and students—these social encounters influence the notions of transition embedded within the individuals and the official stance of the school mutually. Thus, in the first part of this chapter, I review the figured world of transition, i.e., “the practices, discourses, categories and interactions” (Rubin, 2007, p. 218) involving students with dis/abilities. For each country, I start with a brief overview of the laws and policies that guide the recognition and support for the transition of students with dis/abilities into adult life. Based on this background and context, the figured world is then foregrounded through a review of school policies and practices that influence the actual experience of students in schools. These regulations, policies, and practices represent the dominant discourse and perspective that guide school leaders and their practices, and influence teachers’ viewpoint of their role in transition. At the end of this section, the outcomes of these figured worlds as regulated by schools are interrogated using research that illustrates the inadequacies of these figured worlds of transition in addressing the needs of students with dis/abilities within their own countries. The argument is also extended to include the experiences of other countries who do not have as developed educational systems, and, due to their differences in socio-cultural-historical context, will have difficulties relating to and accepting the figured worlds of transition that are derived from countries rooted in the traditions of a Western Civilization.

For any youth, transition bridges the worlds of school and community membership, and thus any discussion of this topic will consist of multiple perspectives including but not limited to the institutional discourse of transition. In other words, the figured world exists alongside the cultural discourse of transition, i.e., the intentional world. The co-existence of these two discourses in the lived experiences of youth in transition influence and shape the youth’s

development. Therefore, in the second section of this chapter, I critique the literature that relates to the enactment of transition through a socio-cultural-historical lens. As both the figured and intentional worlds of transition exist in the same political and social climate of the country, the goals of transition in the two worlds may not necessarily be distinct and separate, but often share converging views. Depending on the cultural perspective of different families, there will understandably be variation in how much each family values particular goals or activities intended to support each student's development. It is particularly difficult for students with dis/abilities to tread between these different worlds as they develop and learn tools in this transitional period. Their experiences are also influenced by the alignment of the two worlds, and thus the connections between the school context and the family context are critical to each student's development. Therefore, in the second section, I will focus on three areas where the differences between the two worlds are most distinct: (a) transition goals and outcomes; (b) transition planning and activities; and (c) school-family collaborations. Within each section, I will describe how the schools discharge their responsibilities in these areas, and then critique their actions based on the perspectives gleaned from families' experiences in the intentional world.

In the third section of the literature review, I identify literature that describes a socio-cultural-historical view of the transition experience for students with dis/abilities. I will cover critical factors that came up repeatedly in the literature, such as the importance of family, cultural, and social networks, and the influence of K–12 schooling experiences will be covered. Where available, I will also review the literature related to important identity markers such as gender.

In conclusion, I review the socio-cultural-historical context for this study. Besides describing the pressures that affect the educational system in Singapore, I will also review recent research on the group of students that this study will focus on: students in Singapore whose schools may classify them as having lower ability than their peers, and are therefore channeled into the lowest academic course in Secondary School. This includes students with and without dis/abilities.

Transition for Students with Dis/abilities

Transition support for youth with dis/abilities has been a relevant topic of discussion across different countries because policy makers have identified this youth segment as a vulnerable population, with difficulties in either societal participation (Afflerbach & Garabagiu, 2006), or in achieving milestones, such as completing school, leaving home, beginning a career, marrying, or becoming a parent (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Furstenberg et al., 2008; Janus, 2009). In keeping with the socio-cultural-historical perspective, this section of the review aims to uncover how different countries have developed policies to provide additional support for youth with dis/abilities, situated within general policies for all youth. As the problem of disengaged youth seems to affect developed countries more than developing countries, I selected three developed countries with different historical backgrounds and political structures: the U.S., England, and Finland. I contrast the figured worlds of the three countries with research that interrogates their intended outcomes, and extend the argument by reviewing the needs of other less developed countries whose struggles with providing inclusive education are related to how they view transition for their youths with dis/abilities. Reviewing the research from other countries allowed me to explore how the idea of transition has been taken up in different countries, including nations that do not have a shared Western civilization history.

The American Experience

In the U.S., recent research and policy agendas have resulted in new ways of describing skills and competencies required to be successful as adults, either in career or college settings. Nagaoka and colleagues (2015) defined a developmental framework for describing the foundations for young adult success. They described a developmental approach to the learning of four foundational components: (a) knowledge and skills; (b) mindsets; (c) values; and (d) self-regulation, supported by the child's agency, identity, and competencies. Nagaoka and colleagues (2015) define success based on education and employment outcomes, as well as the ability to have healthy relationships and a meaningful place within a community, and contribute to a larger good. Nagaoka and colleagues (2015) state that while the developmental experiences needed to build these components and facilitators are not restricted to specific settings, they focus on school, home, and other organized activities in their report. This implies an emphasis on both the home and the school as important settings in promoting success for youths. However, the relationship between home and school is not clearly defined. Instead, schools can continue to consider, co-opt, and subsume the families' wishes with what the school considers as ideal, without truly respecting the family's own desired pathways and family circumstance. Nagaoka and colleagues (2015) also split the developmental stages based on the schooling stages of preschool, elementary school, middle grades, high school, and post-secondary, and not on culturally defined stages of development. Although using schooling stages ensures all students have opportunities to live these developmental experiences, schooling stages inadvertently creates boundaries where the experiences are restricted to the educational setting, rather than what the individual student needs for their developmental journey.

In order to align educational standards with college and career readiness skills, states adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2011, designed to ensure high standards in schools so that “all students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life upon graduation from high school” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017). The development of the College and Career Readiness standards by the Common Core State Standards Initiative allows schools across the country to have similarly high standards for all their students, including students with dis/abilities. The schools are able to use the College and Career Readiness anchor standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics to support all students’ learning, including those with dis/abilities, to ensure successful post-school outcomes.

In 1990, transition planning and its associated practices and activities were mandated as part of each student with dis/ability’s individual education plan (IEP). According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), part of the secondary school agenda should include preparing students for different types of post-secondary contexts, and providing a range of transition practices that are coordinated, supported, personalized, and delivered across school and community settings. An ever-growing research base has identified effective transition practices and services for students (e.g., Mazzotti et al., 2013) and has been made available for schools to use as they improve their practices. The expectation is that students with dis/abilities will gain sufficient skills and knowledge to allow them successful continuation in post-secondary education or employment (Morningstar, Bassett, Kochhar-Bryant, Cashman, & Wehmeyer, 2012). Therefore, since the inclusion of transition into IDEA in 1990, there has been an increasing expectation for youths both with and without dis/abilities to be able to access post-secondary education and be competitive in the job market.

The law uses relatively vague terms to mandate that individuals with dis/abilities should “meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations that have been established for all children and be prepared to lead productive and independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible” (IDEA, 2004). Aligned to the charge that individuals with dis/abilities should “meet... the challenging expectations that have been established for all children” (IDEA, 2004), the resources currently being developed to support students with dis/abilities moving from a secondary to a post-secondary setting are based on initiatives that address the same transition for all students (Morningstar et al., 2012). However, these resources continue to emphasize the functional perspective of transition encoded in the law. Schools have interpreted “productive and independent” to mean improving access to vocational education and training and opportunities for career counseling and career development activities, connecting school-based learning to work-based learning and achieving academic standards. In addition, the lack of fidelity in the implementation process in schools with regards to the elements of transition within the IDEA also affects the efficacy of transition planning and support in school (Landmark & Zhang, 2012; Powers et al., 2005). Despite including transition in IDEA for the past 25 years, the issues it was supposed to address—disproportional graduation and employment rates—although improved, are still a concern (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Wagner, Newman, & Levine, 2005).

The first critique of transition in the U.S. was presented in an international review conducted in 2011 of the U.S. and five other European countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Ireland, and Norway). Researchers noted that despite close links between special education in schools and the focus on education and training to encourage students to upgrade themselves, the United States still lacked an integrated transition system to link students to adult

services, and schools to the workplace and other post-secondary educational settings. The obstacles to providing equitable access to post-secondary settings for students with dis/abilities included discontinuities and disruptions by moving between different resources and services, and the lack of alignment between student skillsets and eligibility requirements for education and workplace settings (OECD, 2011). One of the ways to address the mismatch between student skillsets and access to further education or the workplace is to ensure that the College and Career Readiness standards are used intentionally with students with dis/abilities. One such resource is the expansion of the College and Career Readiness standards into a framework, which has been used to support the teaching of students with dis/abilities such that both academic and non-academic factors can be included to maximize success for students with dis/abilities (Morningstar, Lombardi, Fowler, & Test, 2017). The use of such a framework would support the individualization process to meet individual needs as legislated in the IDEA (IDEA, 2004).

Existing research on transition provides another critique of how societies and school systems view and implement transition. The focus of the research so far has been based on an incomplete understanding of transition. Haber and colleagues (2016) showed that much of the research on transition focused on specific characteristics of training and employment as the criteria for success. Few studies looked at independent living and productivity outcomes. The vagueness in independent living definitions made obtaining comparable results across studies difficult. Haber and colleagues (2016) concluded, “existing correlational studies provide meaningful guidance on prediction of postsecondary education and employment, but no reliable findings for other outcomes” (Haber et al., 2016, p. 149). Therefore, despite the fact that the U.S. has conducted more transition research than other countries, definitive results are minimal. There is also a lack of evidence connecting the current legal framework to successful school

transition programs for students with dis/abilities (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Current efforts are directed towards only two out of the four stated goals in IDEA (2004)—independent living and economic self-sufficiency—and little attention is given to equality of opportunity or full participation. Although schools have a great deal of transition guidance available to them, the experiences of students with dis/abilities do not seem to match up to the level espoused in IDEA (2004).

The English Experience

In England, the academic route for youth leaving compulsory education is fairly well established. Based on results from their final year examinations, students interested in the academic route seek entrance to their university of choice. However, youth who are unable to access the universities for any reason may seek training to obtain vocational and technical qualifications, or access other services that offer work-based learning and/or adult and community learning (OFSTED, 2011). The most recent OFSTED inspection (2011) of post-16 services for students with learning difficulties and dis/abilities found that not all programs effectively enabled students to enter more competitive employment, or progress in independent living and community engagement. However, technical education in England is shifting its focus to youths who are not following an academic route, which will likely improve opportunities for students with dis/abilities.

The goal of this newly structured vocational system is to enable all students to access “a lifetime of sustained skilled employment” (DFE, 2016a, p. 7) and meet the economic needs of the country. The planning process gave due consideration to the impact of the new vocational system on youths with dis/abilities (DFE, 2016b). The Department for Education (DFE) recognized that there would be an over-representation of those with special educational needs

and disabilities (SEND) in vocational education and also in the transition year (the year after secondary school graduation), where students take a flexible and tailored approach to help build on their prior attainment and their aspirations. DFE designed vocational routes to be accessible and inclusive, with accommodations made for those with SEND. Existing support structures for students with SEND extend until the student reaches 25 years of age (DFE, 2015b). To align with the existing standard, the provisions of the newly designed system are also extended to age 25 for students with SEND in all educational settings to ensure they are supported into further and higher education.

English legislation recommends the use of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans as the vehicle for a successful transition to adulthood in England (Hatton & Glover, 2015). However, the percentage of students with EHC plans does not include all students with SEND. For example, in 2015, 15.4% of the student population was identified as SEND, but only 2.8% of students with SEND, or less than 20% of all SEND students, had EHCs (DFE, 2015c). In other words, the majority of youths with SEND will not receive compulsory transition planning and support, although they can continue to access independent career guidance (DFE, 2015a) in school as well as be eligible for support services for youths with dis/abilities. In addition, for those with EHC plans who do receive individualized services, transition support services were provided based on available services, contingent on the needs of the system, without consideration of students' self-identified and genuine needs (Clegg, Murphy, Almack, & Harvey, 2008).

As a result of new legal frameworks introduced in the U.K., local authorities have been commissioned to integrate support services for youths with dis/abilities across education, health, and care departments (Preparing for Adulthood Programme, 2013). The goals of these recent

policy reforms contribute to four outcomes identified by young people with dis/abilities: (a) paid employment, including self-employment; (b) good health; (c) independent living, including having choice and control over their own lives, with good support and housing options; and (d) community inclusion, including having friends and making relationships that matter, and participating in the community (Preparing for Adulthood Programme (PAP), 2013).

The policy shifts in vocational education, and in the integration of services for youths with dis/abilities, represent an effort to create cultural change by replacing the medical model of dis/ability with the social model of dis/ability. This cultural change is a necessary component for effective delivery of the reforms when it works in tandem with legal and systemic changes (PAP, 2013). The overall shift in language and direction indicates policy makers are responding to the voices and needs of young people with dis/abilities to become active citizens in their society, leading to a re-conceptualization of the transition goals and the way transition should take place. The shift also emphasizes the changing culture of inter-agency collaboration to ensure that transition planning and services become more individualized and person-centered. Many of these policy reforms are being rolled out and implemented slowly, and it will be some time before the real impact of these reforms on the lived experiences of youths, particularly those with SEND or from diverse cultural groups, can be evaluated. However, these reforms are a step in the right direction as they strive to establish specific working principles and strategies with the flexibility to meet individual needs and aspirations.

The Finnish Experience

In Finland, the first main transition for youths happens when they complete nine years of compulsory education. At this stage, most youths enter upper-secondary schools, either on the academic track or the vocational track (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). Students

with mild to moderate dis/abilities are supported during their compulsory education, typically in general education classrooms with additional support, or in special classes in the general education school. The focus of special education is to support students with dis/abilities in reaching the goals of compulsory education and also to prevent students from dropping out of education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004; Kirjavainen, Pulkkinen, & Jahnukainen, 2016). The Finnish National Board of Education's recent review of the curriculum is a reflection of their long-term commitment to improve the learning and development for all children (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, n.d.), built on their historically universal approaches to education where even the building of social capital is a formal objective of formal education (Sabel, Saxenian, Miettinen, Kristensen, & Hautamäki, 2010; Stauber & Walther, 2006). Finland's core curriculum focuses on competencies emphasized across all subject areas, including: (a) taking care of oneself; (b) managing daily life; (c) multi-literacy; (d) information and communications technology (ICT) competence; (e) working life competence and entrepreneurship; and (f) participation, involvement, and building a sustainable future (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). These competencies apply equally to all students, regardless of whether they receive special education services. Finland's general and vocational education systems are integrated and focus on the ability of individuals to choose their life course; i.e., between the academic and vocational tracks, a strategy employed to ensure individual motivation in the chosen pathway (Stauber & Walther, 2006). Differentiation takes place through the provision of tailored resources and support for individual students to cope with their studies.

Although Finland does not have specific policies related to support for students transitioning into upper secondary education, the core curriculum states clearly that goals for all

students include independent daily life skills, employment, and participation in the community. For students in special education entering upper secondary education, these goals are addressed either through intensified or individualized programming and reviewed annually at the least (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, n.d.; Sabel et al., 2010). In the spirit of inclusive education, youth with dis/abilities in Finland also have access to the typical range of employment services provided to the general population, such as vocational guidance and career planning. For youths who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma, certain programs, such as “My Own Career Classes,” allow them alternative ways to complete compulsory education (Aaltonen, 2013). Other programs prevent students with special education services from dropping out of the educational system after compulsory education, including the traditional out-of-school programs that maintain close ties with compulsory education (Jahnukainen, 2001). Another program, which provides students with an additional year in compulsory education, reported positive outcomes for students in terms of continuing education and finding future employment (Jahnukainen, 2001). Therefore, the Finnish principle of increasing social capital for all youths through the twin arms of policy reform and pedagogical intervention (Stauber & Walther, 2006) serves as the basis for approaches used to support students with dis/abilities, while supporting their inclusion in general education settings. Even though Finland still has Special Schools for students with specific dis/abilities or for those with the most profound needs, those schools follow the national curriculum, and teachers are allowed to modify or individualize the curriculum to meet the needs of each individual (Sabel et al., 2010).

Despite an inclusive policy and teachers who provide individual pedagogical intervention as a means to support and provide individualized attention to student needs, students with

learning difficulties continue to show differential outcomes compared to the general population (Kirjavainen et al., 2016). Research in Finland consistently shows that students that have received special education services are more likely to enter the vocational track in upper secondary education, and also have more difficulties finding employment (Kirjavainen et al., 2016). Dropout rates from upper secondary education were also higher if students had academic learning difficulties, including both reading and mathematical difficulties (Hakkarainen, Holopainen, & Savolainen, 2015). Structural influences also affect the pathways of students with dis/abilities, such as career counselors who encourage those with learning difficulties to follow routes where special support can be provided, while also emphasizing the importance of choice (Brunila et al., 2011). Brunila and colleagues (2011) have described the shifts in Finnish policies as “leaving behind the authentic modernist welfare learner to create a flexible, responsive, and responsible learner, worker, and citizen” (p. 321). In spite of the rhetoric that guides inclusive practices in Finland, the market forces that support the policy making has devalued students with dis/abilities, making it difficult for them to achieve transition outcomes successfully.

Summary

The experiences of these three selected countries illustrate that even with different histories and approaches to ease the transition experience for youth with dis/abilities, there is relatively little difference in their approach to understand the issues of transition, particularly when balanced with the need to align the employment aspirations of individuals with the needs of the economy. In addition, despite efforts to improve transition outcomes in the past three decades, students with dis/abilities continue to show significantly unequal outcomes when compared to their peers without dis/abilities.

Although the review shows that the three countries have general frameworks for inclusion and transition that apply to all students, they also recognize the importance of having an individualized approach to meet individual students' transition needs. This individualization process is essential for students with dis/abilities (e.g., DFE, 2016b; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, n.d.; Morningstar et al., 2017). While legislation and education policies have made significant improvements over time to protect the rights of youth with dis/abilities, the laws should clearly undergo continual review and be holistically integrated with the needs of youth with dis/abilities. For example, although the recent proposed policy changes in England seem to include the experiences and learning from other countries to develop inclusive vocational routes, the local authorities are the ones who will eventually decide which specific vocational routes students will have, depending on the local economy. The local authorities may well ignore individual aspirations, restricting the right of individuals with dis/ability to exercise agency, thus impacting youths' learning experiences. To address such situations, supportive local policies and services must be developed to guide and improve the experience of youths with dis/abilities in their local setting as they transit to adulthood (Osgood et al., 2010). The youth themselves should be consulted and included in planning these opportunities and services (PAP, 2013).

Within these government policies, the stated aim and the most commonly reported outcome is one of constructive activity, either in education or in the workplace. The policies thus maintain the importance of employment, education, and training in evaluating the outcomes of transition. This line of thinking is supported by research in the U.K., which showed lifetime financial benefits for all youths productively engaged in education or employment (Coles et al., 2010). These countries also emphasize the importance of schools as the site to learn skills that

will ensure social inclusion and independence for youth with dis/abilities (Afflerbach & Garabagiu, 2006; Ebersold, 2012; Ferguson, 2008). However, recent research in each of the countries shows that although these transition processes may support students with dis/abilities, they are not immune to structural inequities in the system, including gender, linguistic and racial/ethnic differences (Baer, Daviso III, Queen, & Flexer, 2011; Brunila et al., 2011; Trainor, Murray, & Kim, 2016). In addition, by institutionalizing specific transition pathways, an increased risk of social exclusion mirrors the experience of students due to their gender, social, or racial/ethnic differences (Stauber & Walther, 2006). Therefore, it is also important to extend this discussion to places where the transition pathways are distinctively different from the ones typically portrayed by countries that are highly developed, Western influenced, maintaining information economies, and relatively secular.

Interrogating the Outcomes: Including Developing Countries

Despite recognition that the transition to adulthood is a process that exists in all cultures, the Western indicators of success are not as meaningful in developing countries such as Cambodia, which has an agrarian economy, and where even teachers need to work the fields to supplement their income (Kalyanpur, 2011). In rural areas, young students work their parent's fields. These students do not see the importance of increasing their education experiences when they observe their teacher working in the field. In urban areas, increased access to higher forms of education created an educated generation, but not always corresponding job opportunities (Kalyanpur, 2011). Clearly, the understanding of transition and the needs of youth in this context cannot be based on Western ideals, but will require an in-depth understanding of the needs of both the country and the families. An over-emphasis on international benchmarks put up by international development agencies (IDAs) or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) without

due consideration to the current situation and the socio-cultural-historical context of the country may lead to spending too much effort and too many resources without real meaningful change in the lives of vulnerable populations (Kalyanpur, 2014). The existence of social hierarchies and the importance of connections in modern day Cambodia continue to perpetuate top-down policy making and implementation (Kalyanpur, 2011), with very little community engagement. A similar pattern was observed in other low-income countries like Lesotho (Urwick & Elliott, 2010). In order to meet the development goals of universal primary education, Lesotho spent most of its efforts supporting other vulnerable populations, such as orphans and single-parent families, neglecting students with dis/abilities. Lesotho also did not have sufficient financial support to ensure that teachers were being adequately trained and prepared to support students with dis/abilities in their classrooms; resources were primarily channeled to fulfill the goal of universal primary education. The reliance on community-based rehabilitation, where families and local communities play supporting roles, did not produce any results when resources such as assistive technology are not available. In secondary schools, the increasing number of HIV-positive students is of greater concern than students with dis/abilities. In order to prioritize support for students with dis/abilities within the country's education agenda, it is necessary to develop a broad and deep understanding of the context in which the country operates. The uncritical transfer of Western educational policy and practice to low-income countries has often met with poor reception and faced resistance and non-compliance from the teachers and parents (Le Fanu, 2013). The overly dogmatic Western ideals, when applied to non-Western or low-income countries, become an obstacle to providing specific support relevant to the needs of the students in those countries.

Low-income developing countries and developed Western nations differ distinctly in their educational issues. Developing countries are figuring out how to provide basic and inclusive quality primary education. Medical epidemics, natural disasters, and political instability can also unpredictably impact students, causing schools to focus on other vulnerable populations and draw resources away from students with dis/abilities. In contrast, the developed nations are concerned whether youths are contributing to the national economy, or building up their own capital through further education. Thus, the solutions to the issue of youth transition and the support for students with dis/abilities clearly cannot be the same across countries.

Notwithstanding, some strategies and guiding principles work across different settings. For example, supporting youths with dis/abilities is often related to enhancing relationships and increasing community involvement (Osgood et al., 2010).

Policy and practice development needs to go beyond idealistic principles to be pragmatic and strategic as well. While most countries generally commit to addressing the needs of all students, it is also crucial that students with dis/abilities receive supports that address their specific needs. In addition, deeply embedded societal oppressions that affect students of different gender, socio-economic background, race/ethnicity and linguistic background should also be identified and reviewed so that efforts can be made to resist unhelpful discourses that restrict opportunities for youths. In order for transition as a concept to be equally meaningful in multiple countries and settings, it needs to be re-conceptualized as a cultural space, shaped by multiple socio-cultural-historical influences, as well as individual identity and agency.

Transition through a Socio-Cultural-Historical Lens: Negotiating the Figured and the Intentional Worlds

In the U.S., the call to review the specific needs of culturally diverse families in the area of transition was summarized by Trainor and colleagues in 2008, using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of ecological development to characterize and classify the studies. They share their concerns regarding the existing research literature:

We are concerned that the existing transition literature does not adequately address sociocultural influences on access, opportunities, or outcomes, nor does it comprehensively address interactions among people, groups, and institutions. This lack of attention results in persistent marginalization of culturally diverse and low-income youths with dis/abilities. (Trainor, Lindstrom, Simon-Burroughs, Martin, & Sorrells, 2008, p. 57)

In this section, I describe in more detail the “socially produced, culturally constituted activities” (Holland et al., 1998, pp. 40–41), which are part of the figured world of transition, developed by schools to fulfill policy mandates. These activities are a reflexive human response to the idealized world of policy in which people appear to be cogs in a world dedicated to economic development. In this process, individuals follow a set script for transition as determined by the majority group in society. What schools choose to implement is often influenced by existing literature that provides evidence for best practice in the field as well as guides to make best practice more culturally responsive and relevant. Next I contrast this figured world with the intentional worlds (Shweder, 1990), which are represented by the cultural discourse of different families. I describe how transition may or may not meet the needs of students with dis/abilities and their families who come from different cultural, racial/ethnic, and

linguistic groups. This period of transition planning and implementation offers an important example of how dominant cultural norms and perspectives intrude on the values, beliefs, and cultural practices of families who identify and adopt the cultural practices of their countries of origin, the indigenous and/or historical perspectives of their communities, and their own experiences in society. I will then proceed to review how social, cultural, or historical factors influence the enactment of transition for students with dis/abilities; these are primarily based on work done in the U.S.

In the rest of this section, I describe the ways these two worlds interact in the areas of: (a) Transition Goals and Outcomes; (b) Transition Planning and Activities; and (c) School-Family Collaborations. These represent the areas in which families in the reviewed studies say they experience the most difficulties when they are involved with the school during the transition process.

Transition Goals and Outcomes

For students with dis/abilities in the U.S., the goals of transition are stated for them in the laws and policies of their country. IDEA (2004) defines transition services as a “results-oriented process” to “facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.” Others have argued that transition should also include quality of life indicators (Halpern, 1993; 1994) that comprise physical and material well-being, performance of adult roles, and personal fulfillment. Self-determination is another outcome of transition in all versions of IDEA since 1990 (Wood, Fowler, Uphold, & Test, 2005; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000). According to IDEA (2004), this transition process should begin no later than age 16, and

a statement of the transition services that addresses “training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills” has to be written into the student’s IEP. In summary, transition for students with dis/abilities, as described in IDEA, focuses on an individual’s ideal outcome, engagement in meaningful work, independent living, and ability to maintain a high quality of life, supported by non-academic outcomes such as self-determination skills (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenbark, & Little, 2015).

Perspectives from Intentional Worlds. The aims of transition listed above are all positive and reasonable outcomes in the context of youth transitions in developed countries. However, for students with dis/abilities and their families, the order of importance of each of these elements may not follow the same developmental process as other youths. In fact, it is a fallacy to think that all of these outcomes have a specific linear order or will all happen together to mark the end of transition. Research on youth transitions has shown that trajectories of youths moving towards adulthood have become increasingly fragmented and non-linear (Stauber & Walther, 2006); youths are also taking a longer time to reach most of the milestones before assuming adulthood (Casal et al., 2006). Using a cultural model of transition helps to define what constitutes a normal transition and the variations in time and degree of change associated with different individuals (Rueda, Monzo, Shapiro, Gomez, & Blacher, 2005).

In their focus groups with Latina mothers of young adults with severe dis/abilities, Rueda and colleagues (2005) found that the mothers held a different model of transition—one focused on the importance of family and home, rather than individualism and independence. The mothers were more concerned about appropriate social behavior and adaptation, and viewed life skills, rather than independent living and productive employment, as goals. The mothers tended to contextualize transition for their child as a home-centered process where the child could be

sheltered and cared for by family members until they came of age, defined by the developmental milestone of leaving home, an act typically associated with marriage. Despite the increasing experiences provided by the school, leaving home and getting married is not accompanied by a shift in the youth's role within the family. The mothers saw themselves as the final decision maker with regards to the needs and plans related to transition, even after seeking the young person's opinion. Hence, assisted living or independent living goals were inconsistent with the mother's cultural beliefs regarding adulthood and independent living arrangements. This is an example where the mothers' intentional world of transition conflicts with the figured world, and thus they are dissatisfied when they interact with the school and professionals in the figured world.

Additional research focused on other Latino families made similar conclusions regarding the importance of reviewing the cultural appropriateness of core concepts such as independent living and self-determination (Blue-Banning, Turnbull, & Pereira, 2002; Povernmire-Kirk, Lindstrom, & Bullis, 2010). Blue-Banning and colleagues (2002) conducted focus groups with Latino parents of children with different developmental dis/abilities (e.g., autism, learning dis/abilities, emotional disorder, intellectual dis/abilities) across a wide age range (i.e., 8–22 years), representing a range of needs from mild to severe. Povernmire-Kirk and colleagues (2010) interviewed ten Latino families in focus groups where most of the families had children aged 14 to 18, and were either in high school or no longer in school. Based on their findings, both research teams recommended that schools working with minority groups recognize that parents are likely to have a diverse range of hopes and expectations for their child in the areas of future living, employment, and leisure activities. The parents' preferences are influenced by their

personal beliefs and level of adherence to their cultural traditions, as well as their acceptance of Euro-American norms.

The importance of cultural traditions was also echoed in the work of Geenen and her colleagues (2001; 2003; 2005). Her survey of 308 African-American, Hispanic-American, Native-American and European-American parents led her to conclude: “How one defines ‘successful adulthood,’ the end goal of transition planning, is determined by culture-specific values and expectations about many important issues, such as work, community integration, role expectations, and social functioning” (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2005, p. 266). Researchers also found that all the transition professionals in their studies agreed with the important elements of transition, (i.e., to talk to child about life after high school and teach them how to care for their dis/ability), but that parents of diverse cultural groups did not consistently agree on the priority of these elements of transition. For example, only those of European-American heritage ranked “Finding recreation opportunities” as the top priority. Parents generally placed a greater emphasis on culture and interdependence and did not concur with the professionals’ point of view. The differences within families from a particular cultural group would also differ based on their personal experiences, such as their awareness of the dominant discourse in society, their own familial aspirations, their personal economic and life circumstances, and their religious or humanistic values. In addition, the research found that parents were not always consistent in living out their beliefs. When parents reported involvement in their child’s transition, the activities parents spent time on were not always the same as their top-ranked priorities, due to the limitations of their abilities, financial and time constraints.

These results strengthen earlier research showing that parents’ visions for their child with dis/abilities are “a complex weave of cultural status, socio-economic status and family

constellation” (Harry, 1998, p. 56). In her research with seven families over four years, Harry (1998) noted that the factors that influenced parents’ views included: family attitudes towards sibling responsibility for their sibling with dis/ability, families’ resources, and structure and level of acculturation to mainstream American values. For example, when a family expects their children to stay at home until they are married, then the family expects the same from their child with dis/ability (Harry, 1998). Historically, in most European and North American cultures, adulthood is more egocentric, emphasizing personal independence and achievement. In non-Western cultures, the definition of adulthood is more socio-centric, with a stronger emphasis on social connections (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1993; Harry, 2002). To understand the differences between families’ goals and mainstream views, it is important to understand the family’s culture, not just their race/ethnicity (Black, Mrasek, & Ballinger, 2003). It is also critical to recognize that families carry with them personal funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) that they use as tools and resources as they work towards their personal goals for their child. These child-rearing practices are handed down over generations, and different cultural groups may emphasize and value different ways of teaching and learning, creating constellations of community practices (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002) that can be drawn upon to help their child transition to adulthood. The intersectional pressures of being both disabled and from a non-majority cultural group should also be recognized (Geenen, Powers, Lopez-Vasquez, & Bersani, 2003; Wilder, Jackson, & Smith, 2001).

Consequently, schools need to be culturally responsive by listening to parents, respecting the cultural beliefs and practices that are already in the home context, and responding to the family’s needs by suggesting goals that are more aligned to individual families’ goals. For example, schools could consider using goals that include living independently but without the

expectation of living alone, and working with parents to address skills that contribute to the healthy development of the youth's self-identity and self-esteem. Increasing dialogue with parents regarding the different concepts will help parents be more aware of the work schools are doing, encourage parents to support the schools' strategies, and also create meaningful involvement opportunities across settings to help the student develop their own goals and aspirations for their future. The next section will consider how schools plan these opportunities for their students with dis/abilities when emphasizing a school-based transition.

Transition Planning and Activities

Policy often drives the planning and implementation of transition activities in school, and the selection of activities is frequently informed by what empirical research has identified as best practice, contingent on the results it produces, i.e., whether it is able to help students achieve the desired transition outcomes as defined in the law: involvement in post-secondary education or employment. A number of recent research synthesis and studies have helpfully consolidated some of this research (Cobb & Alwell, 2009; Cobb, Lehmann, Newman-Gonchar, & Alwell, 2009; Kim & Morningstar, 2005; Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010; Test, Fowler et al., 2009; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009; Trainor et al., 2008).

The taxonomy for transition programming is frequently used to categorize best practices (Kohler, 1996; Kohler, Gothberg, Fowler, & Coyle, 2016). It consists of five practice categories: (a) student focused planning (i.e., IEP development, planning strategies, and student participation); (b) student development (i.e., assessment, academic skills, life, social and emotional skills, employment and occupational skills, student supports, and instructional context); (c) family involvement (i.e., involvement, empowerment, and preparation of family members); (d) interagency collaboration, (i.e., collaborative framework and service delivery);

and (e) program structure, (i.e., program characteristics, program evaluation, strategic planning, policies and procedures, resource development and allocation, and school climate). Based on these five categories, it is possible to implement transition-focused education for all (Kohler et al., 2016), while also providing the individualization essential to post-school success by developing specific interventions and services within each of the practice areas to meet individual student needs (Kohler & Field, 2003). A systematic review on transition planning / coordinating interventions found that of the five categories, student-focused planning and student development were efficacious for achieving transition outcomes, particularly the student's ability to participate in planning for their own future after school (Cobb & Alwell, 2009). Cobb and Alwell (2009) reported themes that showed teachers and peers lacked respect and understanding of the views and needs of the student with dis/ability. Cobb and Alwell (2009) recommend that IEP meetings incorporate ways to hear the student's voice and deliberate effort be made to value their contribution, and more time be given to transition meetings beyond annual review meetings. They also recommend that explicit career planning and development skills extend beyond high school and emphasize the importance of family involvement in transition planning and intervention. In addition, they felt that the treatment of students with dis/abilities in school could be addressed with more inclusive educational settings and the use of social supports for students with dis/abilities. Using a meta-synthesis of qualitative studies, Cobb and Alwell (2009) concluded that the studies provide evidence of family influence on "career aspirations, values and day-to-day support and practical living arrangements" (p. 78). One of the studies they reviewed was Morningstar (1997), who showed that over half of her participants indicated that the family had influence over the choice of the student's career or were instrumental in helping

the student find a job. Therefore it is clear that the family's involvement, although not identified as efficacious, is an essential part of a student's experience of transition.

Test, Fowler and colleagues (2009) also systematically reviewed secondary transition literature up until 2008 and selected 63 studies that met the criteria of high or acceptable quality according to quality indicator checklists designed for group or single-subject intervention studies, comprehensive literature review, or meta-analysis. They then used these studies to contribute to the evidence base for secondary transition practices. Test, Fowler and colleagues (2009) identified 32 evidence-based practices with levels of evidence ranging from potential to strong level of evidence. The majority of the practices deemed to be evidence-based were in the category of student development (Kohler, 1996), with teaching life skills and purchasing skills achieving a strong level of evidence and other skills, such as social skills, cooking, banking, functional literacy, numeracy skills, and employment skills, achieving moderate level of evidence. In the category of student-focused planning, the researchers identified self-directed IEPs, involving students in IEP meetings, and self-advocacy strategy as practices with moderate level of evidence. In terms of program structure, providing community-based instruction and extending services beyond secondary school had a moderate level of evidence supporting its effectiveness. Only one practice, family training on transition issues, was identified for the category of family involvement, and none were identified for interagency collaboration. The results were repeated when the review was updated in 2011 (Mazzotti et al., 2013). The review itself did not provide details of the identified studies; therefore, there is no indication if these practices may have differential effects for different populations.

In their review of evidence-based predictors of post-school success for students with dis/abilities, Test, Mazzotti, and colleagues (2009) listed predictors with a moderate level of

evidence: being included in a general education classroom, having paid employment/work experience, having high self-care/independent living skills, participating in a transition program, vocational education, and work study. Evidence-based school outcomes centered on family involvement and interagency collaboration as predictors only achieved a potential level of evidence. An update of this review also showed that most of the evidence-based predictors predicted employment outcomes, while few of them supported independent living outcomes (Mazzotti et al., 2013). Haber and colleagues' (2016) meta-analysis of an expanded group of studies addressed a weakness in the Test, Mazzotti, and colleagues (2009) review. Through the use of meta-analysis and moderator analysis, Haber and colleagues (2016) were able to tease out what works, when, for whom, and with whom (i.e., the strength and the generalizability of results). They also used two sets of in-school predictors, one based on Test, Mazzotti, et al. (2009) and the other on Kohler's taxonomy (1996, 2016). In contrast to the earlier review, they found larger effect sizes for multi-stakeholder collaboration, as compared to the Student Development and Program Structure categories, even with fewer studies available. They were also able to identify areas moderated by gender (e.g., female gender was associated with stronger effects for Student Development) as well as ethnicity (e.g., Hispanic/Latino ethnicity was associated with stronger effects for Student Development). However, these results need to be viewed in the context of other research to understand the full influence of these demographic markers. In their review, Haber and colleagues (2016) called for additional meta-analyses to be conducted to strengthen existing reviews so that the appropriateness of interventions for specific post-school outcomes and/or particular student populations can be more clearly assessed.

Additional recent reviews of best practices in transition include an extension of Kohler's (1993) review of substantiated and implied practice. Landmark and colleagues (2010) included

the original set of studies and updated it with 18 new ones. When they ranked the practices by the number of documents that supported the practices empirically, they identified family involvement as the third most substantiated practice, behind work experience and employment preparation. The least substantiated was community or agency collaboration, a new addition not considered substantiated practice in 1993.

Limitations in defining evidence-based practices. The descriptions of these evidence-based practices, while substantiated by research, do not present sufficient contextual information and details regarding the impact of facilitators or obstacles on effective implementation. Past research did not discuss system issues and paid insufficient attention to the idiosyncrasies related to implementation. Trainor and colleagues (2008) describe these factors as belonging to the exosystem, or system issues that affect students, such as levels of funding, time and resource allocated to the implementation of transition, and other education policies that may or may not focus on transition. Since students from culturally diverse groups are most likely to suffer from differential opportunities and outcomes, the lack of research showing the impact of policy on different subgroups of students with dis/abilities is troubling. Trainor and colleagues (2008) also recognized the impact of national trends on policy implementation, including economic issues—globalization and immigration issues arising from economic and social considerations. Underlying societal values and beliefs that influence the interactions and relationships between groups of people in society also affect how they implement and practice policy. The review concludes that there is ample research to show that intercultural differences influence both transition processes as well as outcomes. Although the current educational system in the U.S. values a particular set of outcomes, culturally diverse families may or may not value the same set

of outcomes. This divergence necessitates an expanded view of transition as well as flexibility in defining transition outcomes to include outcomes that diverse families value for their children.

Most of the syntheses of good transition practices, in their use of evidences to support the practice, are rarely differentiated by severity of dis/ability or by participant demographics. They did not provide information regarding the participants represented by the studies, and so the findings may not be generalizable across the population of students with dis/ability. In particular, some studies were based on participant studies of students with moderate to severe dis/abilities, and thus will not be generalizable to the larger population of students with mild dis/abilities. In addition, the majority of the studies reviewed did not report on the ethnicity of the students, and/or disaggregate reporting of the data, particularly when they were conducting experimental or quasi-experimental research (e.g., Cobb & Alwell, 2009). Where studies did report on the race/ethnicity of the participants, most of them were white, and minority groups were poorly represented (Haber et al., 2016). Therefore, most of the evidence-based practices lacked specificity in recognizing differential effects as a result of race/ethnicity. Most studies tended to recognize diversity as an explanation of the varying levels of outcomes observed when implementing best practice. In short, these evidence-based practices for transition did not account for different views of transition from diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic groups, and assumed that all conclusions would be generalizable. Landmark and colleagues (2010) recognized the need for supportive family involvement of students from diverse backgrounds. They posited that the different points of view that diverse families have will influence their level of school involvement and their methods used to promote transition for their child. With the exception of Landmark and colleagues (2010) and Haber and colleagues (2016), ignoring the role of diversity in almost all of the meta-analyses and literature reviews is surprising, especially

in light of the position paper by the Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT), which addressed the importance of student's diversity and cultural responsiveness to the different needs of cultural groups and communities (Trainor et al., 2008).

The needs of individuals and their families depend on their expectations for the kind of life they want to lead, their idea of how society should be, and how they plan to contribute to their personal success and/or the economic success of the country. To borrow Ferguson and Ferguson's (1996) idea, communicating the things that gives one the sense of reaching adulthood requires careful listening and the anticipation that expressing adulthood will take many forms. In their example of a young adult with severe developmental dis/abilities, Ferguson and Ferguson identified three ways of defining adulthood: (a) a personal meaning, symbolic of personal choice; (b) a cultural meaning, symbolic of citizenship; and (c) a familial meaning, symbolic of a re-balancing of responsibilities between family and the young adult. Each of these meanings was encapsulated in a particular choice or activity either exerted by the young person, or in discussion and negotiation with his extended family which included his personal care agent that would help to translate his needs and communicate it to his parents. Acknowledging that adulthood looks and feels different for students with different capabilities, schools need to work closely with families and the student to set goals and define support strategies. This principle can also be applied to understanding and supporting other diverse populations where the first step for schools is to allow families and their children to communicate their definition of what it means for the youth to attain adulthood, and plan support based on those goals.

Regardless of legislation and practice guidelines that indicate the need for schools to work with families and agencies, the paucity of research studies in this area may be reflective of the high level of difficulty for schools to do so, or perhaps their lack of willingness to work with

others. Although interagency collaboration has been linked to positive post-school outcomes (Haber et al., 2016; Landmark et al., 2010), little experimental research or evidence base exists for practices in this area (Mazzotti et al., 2013). The representativeness of available studies is of concern as there are very few such research studies from the past ten years. The majority of interagency collaboration and parent involvement research studies represented in the reviews were conducted in the 1990s (e.g., Landmark et al., 2010; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009). Based on the larger effect sizes for inter-agency collaboration, Haber and colleagues (2016) recommend that more should be done in this area as collaboration may potentially have a greater effect on post-school outcomes than individual student development strategies, even as additional research will be needed to address school and community barriers, and differential impact across and within cultural groups.

In addition, the research base for selected predictors and practices was based on single studies conducted in the 1990s; for example, parental involvement as a predictor of post-school outcomes (Fourqurean, Meisgeier, Swank, & Williams, 1991) and the practice of family training on transition issues (Boone, 1992), was represented by only one research study each. The social context of these studies exemplifies the old paradigm of family involvement (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002), which sets up families to be deficient, in need of remediation and subjugated to the power of the school professionals in decision making. Turnbull and Turnbull (2002) propose a new paradigm for family research, one in which the relationship between school and families moves beyond collaboration to empower families and improve their quality of life through the participation and synergy between families, schools and other community members.

Although the field of family research points to a different way of understanding and addressing the needs of diverse families and students, schools may not be aware of these

practices and are more likely to use peer-reviewed articles describing promising practices and descriptions of culturally responsive programs. For example, Cote and her colleagues (2012) provide a four-step approach: (a) enrich families' lives; (b) demonstrate cultural competence; (c) support family values; and (d) promote a family-centered approach. In this ordinal sequence, the assumption is still that schools know better than families, hence the implied need to enrich the families' lives and demonstrate cultural competence by being aware of cultural differences, but still using school-identified goals rather than family goals to develop transition activities for families to complete at home. School professionals do not seem to be aware of different dimensions of culture and that different families would have varying degrees of integration and acculturation with the American mainstream culture, or that families from different cultural, racial/ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds may hold different values from those generally associated with U.S. society (Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2009). This reflects a superficial effort towards being culturally responsive instead of working from a family-driven approach at the onset. It is not surprising that researchers interested in transition experiences of different cultural, racial/ethnic, and linguistic groups criticize accepted practices of transition (Leake, Black, & Roberts, 2004). Even when modified to be culturally responsive, these practices are based on research and conceptual ideas rooted in the experiences of a predominantly white and middle-class majority (Harry, 2008; Smith & Routel, 2010), and their recommendations are not disaggregated by demographic background such as gender or race/ethnicity.

In summary, conclusions drawn from the literature review or meta-analysis of experimental research are based on generally accepted goals and beliefs of the white and middle-class population. This forms the dominant narratives in schools as they plan and support the transition goals for students with dis/abilities. Schools depend on reviews of evidence-based

research to help them decide what they should use in their efforts to improve their transition planning process (Wilder et al., 2001). However, the lack of strong research evidence in particular areas such as parent involvement and interagency collaboration do not encourage teachers and schools to work more collaboratively and effectively with families and outside agencies. Trainor and colleagues (2008) profess that at the microsystem level, the studies seem to indicate positive influence of parent involvement and self-determination strategies in school, but no empirical guidance was available on how to carry those strategies out in a culturally responsive manner. The paucity of research of different cultural and racial/ethnic groups, and their expectations and experiences of transition, limits schools' and researchers' ability to make culturally responsive adjustments to their programs (Trainor, 2002; Wilder et al., 2001).

Perspectives from Intentional Worlds. Geenan and colleagues' (2001; 2003; 2005) work reflects the importance of the family's contribution to transition, the quality of their involvement and the time they spend on it. Geenan and colleagues observed that parents from non-European-American families spent more time conducting transition activities for their child, and also provided a more diverse range of activities. For instance, families from non-European-American backgrounds spent more time teaching their children about their culture, and supported their children to take on roles within their family. The families' expectations varied by their child's level of dis/ability, as well as by other variables such as gender, age, and birth order.

Black and colleagues (2003) use the distinction between individual and collective values to characterize the differences, and emphasize the need to become more culturally responsive to these values so that transition activities can best match the student's personal and family values. Individualism focuses on independent enterprise and personal accomplishment, typically emphasized by the school system. Collectivism, on the other hand, focuses on group success and

interdependence of the family members; thus the value of the individual is determined by the value of their contribution to the family. This is played out in the social activities within the family, with extended family and with those outside family boundaries. A combination of cultural and personal preference results in unique family-based patterns of interactions (Harry, 1998). The effects of globalization and acculturation to Western ideals and beliefs would also have some bearing on the experiences of diverse families as they navigate a cultural context different from the one they grew up with.

These research studies and theoretical discussions reflect culturally based attitudes, beliefs, and meanings of transition that influence parents' involvement with the child in the transition process, both within the family and in conjunction with the school or other professionals. Hence meaningful communication between the school, family, and the community is crucial to transition planning, starting with contributions from the family and the student from the very beginning. Person- and family-centered planning processes are two examples of processes that centralize the student and/or their family (e.g., Callicott, 2003; Kim & Turnbull, 2004; Trainor, 2007). Turnbull and Turnbull (2002) goes a step further to say that to value the needs of the family, the emphasis must rest on family empowerment and quality of life, and value an outcome of a synergistic decision-making process between school, family, and the community in order to be truly culturally responsive. The next section will focus on how schools and families view school-family collaborations and what the research says about how to improve them.

School-Family Collaborations

Published transition research recommends the following to schools and educators to improve school-family collaboration

- Increase positive communication between parent and educator/other professionals (Geenen et al., 2005; Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2009);
- Provide information on school-based transition planning, including information on supports, services, and community resources (Geenen et al., 2005; Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2009; Kim & Morningstar, 2005);
- Use parental advocates, informal cultural networks, and cultural liaisons, including translation and interpretation services where necessary (Geenen et al., 2005; Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2009; Kim & Morningstar, 2005; Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2010);
- Provide increased emotional support for parents by networking families and linking them to community resources, for example, to address issues of citizenship (Geenen et al., 2005; Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2009; Kim & Morningstar, 2005; Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2010);
- Provide increased flexibility in meeting formats (Geenen et al., 2005; Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2009);
- Support family values and community inter-dependence (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2010);
- Work on family-based individual transition goals (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2010);
- Use family-centered approaches and collaborative techniques to engage families (Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2009).

Although researchers position these practices as good or best practice to engage with families from culturally diverse groups, implementing them requires new models of professional behavior and collaboration that encourage and support parent empowerment (Geenen et al., 2005). Hence, it is necessary to question the underlying principles of such practices. One such

principle is the intention to “normalize” the experience of families from diverse cultural groups. This positions families as “Others” who require some form of remediation so that they can be more involved in school and become useful partners in working with schools (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002). Deeply rooted beliefs regarding successful adulthood or good parent involvement often drives schools’ and teachers’ attempts to reach out to diverse families, rather than the families’ own points of view. Trainor and colleagues (2008) described family-school interactions at the mesosystem level and showed that interactions may be limited or unpleasant due to differences in beliefs regarding teacher expertise and authority, the value of education (formal and informal), and dis/ability. Even when conducted in a well-intended and respectful manner, families do not interpret culturally responsive practices based on dominant perspectives the same way schools do. Families have their unique cultural lens founded largely on their own historical background and cultural beliefs. Schools and teachers who embark on a transition path with their students based on their own understanding will continue to press forward with their own ideology, and such actions will exclude alternative frames and possibilities related to the experiences of the minority population. The list of recommendations above try to provide the “normal” experience of schooling and education defined by the dominant culture and those who hold similar values and beliefs as those outside of the dominant group. However, in this “normalization” process, it is important to recognize whose version of “normal” is valued (Harry, Rueda, & Kalyanpur, 1999). In the normalization movement, valuing the “devalued” or “deviant” segment of society would require a definition of what is “typical” of a particular culture (Wolfensberger, Nirje, Olshansky, Perske, & Roos, 1972). This assumes that the culture in each country or society is monolithic and everyone is in agreement of what is normal. Therefore normalizing those who are different becomes a matter of providing supports so that they can be

assimilated and have a valued role in society, but without changing existing negative attitudes or systems of oppression. However, the valued role is not determined by those who are different, but is determined by those who have the power to decide. Therefore normalization of those who are different is based on the dominant culture and the professionals who maintain and uphold the definitions by which people are considered to be different (Culham & Nind, 2003). Most of the best practices listed seek to extend existing notions of parent involvement based on the experiences of white, middle-class families, to families from diverse cultural groups by finding additional methods to supplement existing ones (e.g., more flexible meeting times and venues), and developing new opportunities for involvement based on the existing standard options for family involvement in school (e.g., join a parent support group as a way of providing parent training). Another way those hegemonic practices are reproduced, even when being culturally responsive, is to use superficial ways of understanding cultural diversity to implement practices (Wilder et al., 2001). For example, providing families with standard information about the school system and services using multiple languages, but without individualization and consideration of their needs (Barton, Drake, Perez, Louis, & George, 2004) is an example of being family-centered, but not responsive to actual family needs (i.e., to be family-driven). Therefore parental involvement policies meant to empower parents may inadvertently create tropes describing parents from culturally diverse groups as deficient.

Therefore, to be more culturally responsive, Trainor and colleagues (2008) recommended a number of guidelines for educators to follow when planning transition for students with dis/abilities from diverse backgrounds: (a) to consider students' culture and community in transition planning and services delivery; (b) to develop a more sophisticated understanding of school, family, and community issues; (c) to include both school- and community-based

interventions; and (d) to include self-determination skill instruction and enhanced opportunities for its practice. The ability to do these well and in culturally responsive ways require schools and educators to be culturally competent (Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2009; Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2010). For example, when promoting self-determined behaviors, one should be aware of the multiple and different ways that self-determination is conceptualized across diverse cultural groups (Leake & Boone, 2007; Shogren, 2011; Zhang & Benz, 2006; Zhang, Landmark, Grenweige, & Montoya, 2010). However, intra-group variability is as much a reality as inter-group variability, hence the need to individualize when reaching out to different families and meeting their needs (Leake & Boone, 2007; Rueda et al., 2005; Smith & Routel, 2010). Cultural reciprocity is a recommended characteristic for schools to develop to help them work with families effectively. Reciprocity should, in theory, offer schools and families equal interactional power, which demonstrates that each perspective is equally valued and assumes equal capability to contribute (Greene, 2014).

Schools can build connections and emphasize the families' natural support structures in the community. When families feel alone and unsupported, they are less empowered and have less knowledge about their own role in supporting their children. When a parent's daily interactions with his or her child overshadow the importance of planning ahead for the child's future, natural supports can help both parent and child with the needs of the present as well as the future. Having suitable mentors from the community for both families and students increases post-school outcomes. These supports can be used across settings (Leake, Burgstahler, & Izzo, 2011; Wilder et al., 2001). Unfortunately very little empirical research exists to inform schools how to develop inter-agency collaboration and take advantage of other community supports that are beneficial for families from diverse cultural groups. This is reflected in a review of IEPs,

where less than half of the IEPs reviewed had inter-agency collaboration written into them for transition purposes (Landmark & Zhang, 2012) and a review of evidence-based practices has not surfaced any suggestions specifically for improving collaboration with external organizations (Mazzotti et al., 2013).

Perspectives from Intentional Worlds. The act of valuing the dominant perspective tends to ignore the unique resources, repertoires of practice, and funds of knowledge that families from diverse racial/ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups already have (Barton et al., 2004; Ferguson, 2002). Thus, it is important that the parents' point of view be the starting point when encouraging parents from diverse cultures to be more involved in the planning of their child's transition. For example, some parents may feel more comfortable with home-based activities that further their goals compared to school-based goals or activities (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001; Landmark, Zhang, & Montoya, 2007; Trainor, 2005). Families may have unique ways of being involved with their child, and these should be valued and promoted by school personnel and other professionals. Families consistently placed high importance in the teaching of family and cultural values (Geenen et al., 2001, 2003; Landmark et al., 2007).

The way families interact with schools depends on various factors, including how families view their role in school (Boone, 1992), their previous experiences with schools (Graff & Vazquez, 2014), and how much respect and regard they accord to educators (Kim, Lee, & Morningstar, 2007). Promoting equal relationships (Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2009) between school and families in the process of transition planning is thus an important principle in being culturally responsive. Using their research of science education in urban schools as the basis, Barton et al. (2004) used a combination of cultural historical activity theory and critical race theory to describe parental engagement as a mediator between capital and space. Parental

engagement is the use and sharing of capital, and the ability to express ideas and values in different spaces. Trainor (2010) describes parent advocacy as an ability to use social and cultural capital in exchange for power in the process of working with schools. However, depending on parent advocacy and relying on parents to be the initiators of engagement with the school rewards only those with capital and penalizes those without such resources, and thus does not contribute to systemic change. For example, despite being heavily involved in advocacy, Hispanic mothers shared that they did not feel that they were treated as true partners with school personnel (Shogren, 2012). Perhaps the school personnel see the parents as having a deficit in their contribution and participation in their children's education (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002). Alternatively, because the parents may be unfamiliar with the American education system and the norms of parent involvement, the school personnel chooses not to recognize or see value in the parents' expert knowledge of their child and of their cultural context (Graff & Vazquez, 2014). In order to create truly collaborative relationships, schools need to learn to recognize and value the funds of knowledge that families have about their own child, their family practices, skills, interests, culture, and the community in which they live (González et al., 2005). These funds of knowledge are the repositories of skills and knowledge that families transmit generationally based on their cultural backgrounds and traditions.

Perhaps one way to improve parent and school collaboration in transition is to look at evolving descriptions of parental involvement in other areas of education. Based on work done within a K–12 context, a framework for defining parent involvement should include elements of both parental voice and participation (McKenna & Millen, 2013). A decolonization perspective to look at equity issues in school shows a need for educators and schools to recognize that education policies are driven by dominant groups and create restrictions on non-dominant groups

(Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernández, 2013). From an empowerment viewpoint within urban education, Graff & Vazquez (2014) argue that using family resistance as a tool can help schools reconsider their own points of view and provide insight into a differing point of view. The acts of family resistance seen by schools range from subtle to overt behaviors that go against expected norms, and could be analyzed as a valid form of communication so that it can be “considered, discussed, and acted upon” (Graff & Vazquez, 2014, p. 90).

School personnel should also see the families as having potential to be transformative. Ferguson (2002) describes two frames that can be used to understand families: (a) families as adaptive and evolving units; and (b) families as supported with internal and external supports. Together with families’ funds of knowledge, schools need to acknowledge that families with youth with dis/abilities are not necessarily more deficient, but may have adapted good coping strategies to respond to the needs of their youth. The families are evolving in their relationship with their child in the same way all families evolve over time, dependent on family circumstance. The recursive nature of this process allows families to build tools while continually adapting and evolving in the way they support their child with dis/ability. If schools acknowledge that families have the ability to transform their own situations, this would allow schools to participate and synergize with families and their communities to meet the needs of the youths (Ferguson, 2002; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002).

Schools need to recognize structural and institutional constraints that affect families and students at the intersections of race, class, immigration, and dis/ability as a powerful influence on the ability of parents to engage with schools (Ferguson, 2002). Baquedano-López and colleagues (2013) pointed out that decolonizing practices will require schools to point out and end all forms of epistemic, psychological, and physical violence as experienced through silencing, linguistic,

segregation, tracking, and the dehumanizing effects of the stunted academic potentials of youth of color. Instead of placing blind trust in unilateral policy, decolonizing existing practices needs to identify and address deeply seated inequities that require social change (Baquedano-López et al., 2013, p. 169).

Graff and Valzquez (2014) emphasize the need for equal and fair opportunities for families to work with schools as colleagues, to take part in family-driven discussions, and to be part of a process that generates new knowledge in the school to improve school practices. However, students' educational experiences are just as likely as families to be shaped by the intersections of different equity issues (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Therefore, the next section will review existing literature that describes the lived experiences of the youths.

The Lived Experiences of Transition through a Socio-Cultural-Historical Lens

The recognition that youths have intersecting and fluid identities contributes to the development of more responsive programs that do not inadvertently perpetuate or reproduce existing systems of oppression and exclusion (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Therefore this section will review research studies focused on the lived experiences of young people with dis/abilities across different cultures and countries, primarily from the past decade.

However, while researchers may specifically choose student participants from across culturally diverse populations in their research, the results may only yield subtle differences (Trainor, 2005) or they may aggregate youths' experiences in their reporting (Hogansen, Powers, Geenen, Gil-Kashiwabara, & Powers, 2008; McCall, 2015).

Family, Cultural, and Social Networks

Based on research with Navajo youths, young people were found to value their relationships with both their families and their teachers in schools (Wilder et al., 2001). Similar

trends were observed in research focused on other cultural groups. Trainor's (2005) research on self-determination practices of male youths with learning dis/abilities observed that African-American and Hispanic-American students were more likely to mention their interactions with family members in solving problems, and to maintain control of academic situations. Banks' (2014) case studies of three male African-American youths in college also indicated the importance of cultural and social networks, including support from similar peers, the community, and mentors.

In the U.K., research on the experiences of students with specific language impairments (SLI) who left school between one and five years prior to the research (Carroll & Dockrell, 2010; 2012) showed that roughly 50% of their study participants sought a personal advisor and nationally available resources to find opportunities for employment and further education. However, the researchers also noted that opportunities were often serendipitous, informal networks and connections that proved important in finding employment. Over 80% of the students mentioned that parents were their main support for transition. This finding was also repeated in focused interviews with students (Carroll & Dockrell, 2012). Students who described themselves as self-advocates and self-determined shared how their dis/ability had been a challenge during transition and noted that their parents were their greatest enablers. Professionals, while helpful, sometimes also created barriers to further opportunities. Although in Carroll and Dockrell's research (2010, 2012) female students were identified as a possible vulnerable population, there was no mention of the cultural or racial identity of the participants and the role cultural diversity might play in the pathways and outcomes of transition.

At the same time, the students reported that they felt they had insufficient information. Wilder and colleagues (2001) reported that the youth had a limited idea of the opportunities and

the possible career and educational pathways available to them, and faced anxiety regarding their possible futures. The lack of information regarding opportunities in college could also affect their academic performance (Black, 2014).

Wilder and colleagues (2001) recommended community role models as mentors, and relying on both family and friends during transition. The social networks gained from this process can also be an important source of employment opportunities. The cultural and social networks act as social support groups, while also serving as ways for youth to gain the necessary knowledge and information to help them make informed choices. Furthermore, youths can be a participant in these networks, particularly in school-based transition planning processes such as the IEP meetings. Trainor and colleagues (2013) concluded that there is a need to better understand how social capital acquired by youth with dis/abilities can help to improve post-school outcomes, thereby facilitating more culturally responsive approaches to transition.

K–12 Schooling Experiences

Yamamoto and Black (2015) studied the experiences of Native Hawaiian (NH) high school students studying in a Hawaiian-focused charter school. They posit that this led to less conflict between school and home environments as both the home and school communities fully embraced the collectivist NH culture, and thus there would be less conflict between the values of the home, student and the school compared to what the literature commonly reported (e.g., Trainor et al., 2008). Based on the interviews with students, they found that the students reflected the NH culture and portrayed interdependence and the importance of family in their decision making process, which contrasted with the individualist view observed in the highly formalized IEP meetings of the U.S. educational system. Yamamoto and Black (2015) also found that due to the small size of the school and its inclusive setting, transition processes were not well-defined or

focused to support students' transition goals. The actual transition meetings in schools were primarily professionals talking about the student, and rarely included input from parents and students. Most of the students had vocational goals planned around their families' needs and the role of economics seemed to play a major role in their decision-making. Although the eventual post-school outcome is unknown, the researchers emphasized the need for a more culturally responsive transition protocol, particularly with regards to the IEP meeting, that would be able to better engage families and students from diverse backgrounds.

In her research on self-determination practices of male youths with learning dis/abilities, Trainor (2005) found that school culture variables, rather than race/ethnicity, heavily influenced the students' ability to show self-determined behaviors. Across all major cultural groups in the U.S., (i.e., African-American, European-American and Hispanic-American), students valued the ability to practice self-determination in the context of the home, and highlighted the importance of emotional support. When comparing ethnic groups across populations, Trainor (2005) observed that African- and Hispanic-American students reported more instances of interactions during meetings between teachers and their parents compared to European-American students.

McCall (2015) used maximum variation sampling to select his study participants, who represented different gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status as well as type of dis/ability. He found that formal coordinated transition supports were only present for one of the youth with a low-incidence, sensory dis/ability (i.e., blindness). Informal transition supports, including family involvement and expectations, were important for the youths. McCall (2015) also found that opportunities the study participants had to self-advocate or be self-determined in high school were significant experiences for them. He concluded that K–12 schooling experiences were important in shaping students' transition goals, and collaborative relationships

outside of the school were similarly noteworthy. In his research, he did not deliberately focus on students from culturally diverse groups.

In other studies, student participants did not perceive teachers as key figures in their transition plan or activities, and found that teachers or the school administration often made it difficult for them to achieve their transition goals (Trainor, 2005). Some African- and Hispanic-American students were exempted from standardized tests that would have allowed them access to college, and they were more likely enroll in vocational courses (Trainor, 2005). Banks (2014) also highlighted the importance of high school experiences and their influence on post-school outcomes.

Gender Issues

Hogansen and colleagues (2008) held focus group interviews with women with a range of dis/abilities, as well as parents and related professionals. Researchers found parents and professionals did not always agree with the young women's transition goals, and often pointed out that the young person's goals were unrealistic. Researchers also found that the women's goals depended on their interactions with mentors, peers, parents, and teachers, as well as exposure to different careers. Female youth also reported that they felt they were treated differently than males because the women tended to be better behaved and thus had less attention from teachers, implying that they were shortchanged educationally. The youths' views of their dis/ability were also an important influence on their self-esteem, directly impacting their ability to achieve their future goals. Hogansen and colleagues (2008) were able to consider the needs of females from culturally diverse groups separately and concluded that bias and discrimination resulting from cultural or race/ethnicity further erodes youths' self-esteem and confidence. The young women were also pathologized for the way they envisioned the goals and roles as part of

their family or community. Subsequent research on young women with dis/abilities supports these conclusions; however most studies did not look for specific issues faced by young women from diverse cultural groups, or the impact of intersectional identities (e.g., Lindstrom, Harwick, Poppen, and Doren, 2012). Schools should thus also pay attention to gender and cultural contexts to provide meaningful transition supports, recognizing that young women from minority cultural groups experience three dimensions of minority status: gender, race/ethnicity, and dis/ability.

Summary

The small number of studies looking specifically at transition experiences of students from diverse cultural groups from the point of view of the student's own lived experiences indicates that more must be done in this area of work. The studies reviewed in this section show that there are multiple minoritized groups that have differential experiences, and underscore the fact that the multiple identity markers these youths carry with them affect them in unique ways. Most studies indicate that there are cultural differences in students' experiences, although some of this might be subtle and easily lost in studies that aim at generalizing transition experiences. Despite this limitation, parents clearly play an important role in the transition process for young people. As youths move out of secondary school and into the larger world of post-secondary education and employment, salient features of the transition include their educational experiences and the challenges faced due to their dis/ability.

Singapore: A Liminal Space for Inclusive Practices

Singapore is a unique place to consider the experiences of youth with dis/abilities transitioning from secondary to post-secondary settings, setting them on a path that leads to adulthood. First, Singapore is a relatively young developed country that just celebrated its 50th year of independence in 2015. Second, although it has a segregated school system, almost all

students with mild needs are integrated within the general education school (Poon, Musti-Ra, & Wettasinghe, 2013). Third, recent school reforms have created specialized schools to equalize learning opportunities across the wide range of student abilities (Teng, Wang, & Chiam, 2014). Hence, in this liminal space of a young nation, the introduction of specialized schools means there is room for change due to the current lack of concrete policies on transition. Understanding the socio-cultural-historical context in which the school is embedded and applying transition as a cultural concept into this space make overcoming existing structural and cultural obstacles possible by offering a leverage point for the development of truly culturally responsive policies to emerge.

My research focused on a group of students in the Normal (Technical) course, i.e., students who are in the lowest academic course in secondary school. Within this group of students, anecdotal evidence suggests that a large proportion of students have dis/abilities, including those yet to be diagnosed. No public research is available on students with dis/abilities taking the Normal (Technical) course. Therefore, this section will focus on the characteristics of the broader specific population of students, (i.e., students in the Normal (Technical) course), how they are socially constructed, and their transition needs.

Background

Singapore is a multiethnic and multilingual country, which in its last census had a population of 5.08 million (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011). Of the citizens and permanent residents, 74% are Chinese, 13% Malay, 9% Indians, and 4% others (including Arabs, Caucasians, and Eurasians). Prior to its independence, Singapore's educational system has traditionally been and continues to be a segregated system for general education and special education (MOE Singapore, 2014). General education is governed by the Ministry of Education

(MOE), comprising of up to 12 years of primary and secondary education, culminating in either the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education at the Ordinary, Normal (Academic) or Normal (Technical) Level. Within the general education schools, children with mild dis/abilities are typically registered in a general education primary school and remain in the general education school system until they graduate, provided they pass the Primary School Leaving Examinations. At secondary school, the children are tracked into classes that allow them access to curriculum that prepares them for examinations at the end of their secondary schooling career at one of the following levels: Ordinary, Normal (Academic) or Normal (Technical) Level. Children with mild dis/abilities are represented at all levels. Singapore addresses the needs of different gender, abilities, class, and racial/ethnic and cultural groups using a single metric, meritocracy, and considers its policies to be gender-, ability-, class-, and color-blind (Teh, 2014). Education policies are developed based on principles of “equalizing education opportunities” (Teh, 2014, p. 80) to provide equal treatment to all students based on their school performance (i.e., merit) regardless of background factors (e.g., race/ethnicity, socio-economic background), rather than equal educational opportunities. However, in doing so, government policies have inadvertently continued to reinforce any oppressions caused by colonial racialization that already existed (Goh, 2008; Patel, 2016), as well as existing gender stereotypes and class divisions.

Students in the Normal (Technical) (NT) Course

Each year, approximately 15% of primary school graduates enter secondary school and the NT course. The NT course was founded on the need for education to equip students with the necessary skills and attitudes to enable them to contribute to the nation’s economy. Accordingly, the NT course set out to prepare students for a technically oriented vocational post-secondary education at one of the three vocational college campuses (Teng et al., 2014). Research on this

student population shows a low expectation for NT students to do well academically as they are able to proceed to a vocational college regardless of their examination results at the end of secondary school (Ho, 2012). In addition, the curriculum was designed to be more practical, thus NT students were not able to take academic subjects such as geography or history. Instead, NT students take social studies, a subject that combines content from various humanities subjects. This creates an opportunity gap, comparable to the disproportional representation of students with learning dis/abilities in the U.S. taking high school graduation courses rather than courses that prepare them for college (Shifrer, Callahan, & Muller, 2013).

There is also evidence of parallels with the U.S. where students in a lower track are disproportionately represented by those with identified dis/abilities, from minority racial/ethnic groups, and whose families are of lower socio-economic status (Sullivan & Artiles, 2011; Werblow, Urick, & Duesbery, 2013). Albright (2006) reported on the demographics of NT students in his paper. Males consistently outnumber females in the NT course by a ratio of approximately 6:4. The majority of students also come from families of low socio-economic status where English is not commonly spoken, resulting in weak English language and literacy skills (Ismail & Tan, 2006). The multiracial composition of the NT stream is also skewed. The percentage of Indians in the NT stream did not fluctuate significantly over a five-year period (2000–2005), but the number of Malays increased at least 10% during this period. Within the same period, the percentage of Chinese students decreased by 15%. This reflects the accepted fact that Malay students have historically underachieved in Singapore (Rahim, 2000).

The qualitative research on NT students shows a wide range of abilities. However, none of the studies mention if any of the students they were observing had dis/abilities, or considered the intersectional influence of the multiple identity markers the students have in relation to

dis/ability. Due to the demographics of the population, the focus has mainly been on the impact of race/ethnicity, language, and socio-economic status. None of the research reviewed considered the views of the family, and only one considered the student's view of their own learning (Ho, 2012). Ho's (2012) research with successful young people who had been in the NT course showed that the societal stereotype is flawed. All of her participants had finished college, and one of them was pursuing doctoral studies. Each of the four students reported that their families' involvement in their educational journey was pivotal—their families supported them financially, spiritually, and through home-based teaching of values and belief systems. Although success stories of NT students are often highlighted in the local media, these stories are often the exceptional cases. NT students who have gone on to excel academically had to actively overcome social pressures and challenge stereotypes, making a deliberate choice to define their own identity positively (Ho, 2012). Therefore Ho (2012) advocates for a tri-partite working relationship between school, home, and student. While the stories are encouraging, the main narrative focuses on the hard work necessary to achieve results. In a meritocratic system like Singapore, the performance and results are lauded, often at the expense of the person's actual development. Schools therefore need to broaden their perspective regarding their role in developing students so that their needs as young adults can be better identified and supported, with input from the families. This reflects a need for schools to engage in cultural reciprocity to have a more holistic understanding of their students (Harry et al., 1999).

Teaching and Learning Environment

When Singapore implemented the NT curriculum in 1994, it seemed that the learning environment was designed to meet the needs of the typical societal stereotype of an NT student who was a slow learner, lazy, illiterate, and without hope for educational advancement (Ho,

2012). An ethnographic study reported by Ismail & Tan (2006) indicated low student motivation and engagement in the classroom, and the pedagogic practices employed were often limited to reproductive transmission of knowledge with highly prescriptive tasks. Teachers generally used strategies based on what they believed the students should be primed to learn. Most of the time, there was no pre-assessment or progress monitoring of specific skills to support the teachers' work. Students were expected to be passive learners and conform to the system set up for them (Ismail & Tan, 2005).

In 2004, Singapore's Ministry of Education (MOE) conducted a review of the NT curriculum and made recommendations for revising the curriculum and teaching practices. The aim was to motivate students to learn, keep them in school, and improve their ability to access both academic and vocational pathways after secondary school. More practice-oriented approaches included curricular links to daily life applications, introduction to the use of IT, the ability to take elective modules that allowed students to explore their career interests, and more student-centered activities in class (Albright, 2006). The review also allowed for the implementation of alternative pathways that provided opportunities for lateral transfers to more academic courses, such as the Normal (Academic) course, as well as the option to take specific subjects based on the more difficult, Normal (Academic) curriculum.

Subsequently, in 2014, Singapore's MOE set up a new Educational Support Branch (ESUB) "to help teachers identify, adapt, and share teaching strategies to cater to the needs of this group of students, including using specific pedagogical strategies that help build the learners' self-belief and self-esteem" (MOE Singapore, 2014). ESUB piloted innovative ways to teach, and shared their findings at the Teachers' Conference (Singapore) in 2016 (Toh, Lim, Tan, & Choong, 2016). ESUB noted that it was important to first understand the students: "We have to

be aware of these students in terms of their learning attitude, learning capacity and classroom behavior.” ESUB also generalized that NT students have short attention spans and the inability to absorb information quickly. They piloted a new program called the Structured Teaching Programme and reported impact on “learning, engagement, and relationship with their peers and teachers” because the students were able to experience a positive learning experience. Based on the work of Fisher (2008) on the Gradual Release of Responsibility model, the program structured lessons so that the responsibility of learning moved from the teacher, who modeled and provided guided instruction, to the individual engaged in productive group work, and finally individual work. While this is an example of quality instruction, the voices, interests, and strengths of the students are conspicuously absent in the planning and implementation of the NT curriculum. The teaching and learning in an NT classroom remains a primarily teacher-driven activity, with teacher-selected materials and content. Although such strategies aid the learning of content knowledge, they do not develop higher-level skills, but manage the limitations that the students bring with them. Therefore, the learning environment is still designed around the trope of the lazy and poorly behaved NT student, rather than around their strengths.

The Way Forward

The introduction of specialized schools for NT students created more resources and opportunities for the students to gain vocational and work experience, thereby improving in their academic learning and developing their self-esteem. It has also paved the way to a more inclusive and accepting environment. Choosing the specialized school is akin to the Finnish example of choosing between an academic or a vocational pathway. One might surmise, based from the research in Finland (Brunila et al., 2011), that students who choose to go to a specialized school either tend to have very specific plans for themselves, or they have been

advised to do so. Just like in Finland, both pathways allow access to college, if one has the ability. For students with dis/ability, access to vocational college in Singapore is already pre-determined, although entering a course of choice requires specific achievement. Therefore, a successful transition process needs to ensure that students have the opportunities to uncover interests that will help them remain meaningfully engaged in a vocation, while developing skills that will support them to become independent and accomplished adults in the future. The students' level of success depends on the tools they gain from school and their home, together with the acceptance of their goals by their school and family. Understanding how the school and home can create a supportive environment is crucial to helping students who are disadvantaged in multiple ways so they can make the most of their post-secondary experience as they transit out of secondary school, building on prior experiences as they journey towards adulthood. The lack of published research in the area of transition in Singapore's context creates an opportune time for me to propose and conduct this study.

Summary

The uniqueness of Singapore as a country and a system, as well as its relatively young age, sets it up as a liminal space to consider how transition is currently enacted, and how changes in the education system influence the value and importance of transition for students with dis/abilities. The timing is right to study how inclusive practices have been introduced into the system, and their impact on students. The process of understanding the impact of current practices needs to start with an appreciation of the lived experiences of students who are in it, then positioning those experiences within the context of the education system's evolution, and subsequently in society at large. Although the family is not to be forgotten, as Ho (2012) says:

“The factors that support or hinder educationally disadvantaged students in Asian contexts may perhaps be more complex, variable and go beyond the aspects of home factors (p. 112)”.

Conclusion

This literature review has examined the various levels within a system that influence the lived experience of students with dis/ability in transition planning and support activities. The limitations of current research can be attributed to the paucity of empirical research, both within the United States and internationally. Research that focuses on students’ self-reported experiences was limited to the student’s individual interpretation, and the results were not contextualized in the district and school transition policies, nor was their family context taken into consideration (Banks, 2014; McCall, 2014; Trainor, 2005). Many researchers focused on only one area of identity (i.e., dis/ability or gender or race), and did not extend the discussion to include intersectional identities that may also include other demographic factors such as socio-economic status and immigration status (e.g., Banks, 2014; Blue-Banning et al., 2002; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Hogansen et al., 2008). In addition, the previous educational experiences of students and their influence on transition were also not discussed. When post-secondary youths were the focus of study, most of the emphasis was on their experience in high school (Banks, 2014), and few probed their experiences in elementary or middle school that might have influenced their educational journey (McCall, 2014).

Contextualizing the student experience requires understanding the relationship between families and schools. Parents and schools do not always agree on the same goals or understand the main concepts of transition in the same way. In the literature, the goals and ideals of self-determination and adulthood often differ across different racial/ethnic and cultural groups. The different worldviews of understanding transition results in conflict between schools and families,

particularly those from minority cultural groups. The struggle with family involvement occurs when there is disparity between the values of the dominant group and that of minority groups. The same conflicts are also reflected in the lived experiences of youths from diverse cultural backgrounds and identities. Recent research has extended the focus on family involvement as building cultural and social capital, and the importance of capital in parent advocacy (Trainor, 2010) to include the development of cultural and social capital for students in the transition process (Banks, 2014).

This dissertation aims to build on these existing research strands. The study uses a socio-cultural-historical conceptual framework to consider the different levels of interaction between the educational institution represented by the school, the family, and the student, as well as its impact on transition planning and activities as experienced by the student. The concept of tools includes resources, and is not limited to social and cultural capital. A key part of the study aims to map out the acquisition of tools within learning experiences in and out of school, influencing outcomes for students with dis/abilities in Singapore as they move from secondary school into post-secondary settings. The details of the study are provided in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I present an overview of the procedures used in the identification of participants as well as the processes used to collect, compile, and analyze the data. I show the influence of my theoretical and conceptual framework on my methodological choices and my own position in relationship to the questions and choices made in the study's design, implementation, and analysis.

The overall purpose of this study was to understand how students with dis/abilities, their families, and their school enact the process of transition planning and support, and what mediators influence the process. This empirical study was set in Singapore, where transition planning and provision of services for students with dis/abilities was considered good practice but due to the lack of official regulations and legislation, was also optional for students moving on to post-secondary settings. The study explored and characterized more fully the transition needs of students with dis/abilities in mainstream schools in Singapore and critically reviewed the different discourses present in families and schools around transition goals, planning, and support. Interrogating the current system and its assumptions is important for the development of a more robust transition system in secondary schools. More robust systems can lead to positive outcomes for students with dis/abilities who seek post-secondary opportunities. These systems can strengthen outcomes that respect not just students' personal identities but also their families' cultural expectations.

Research Questions

This study was guided by socio-cultural-historical theories that view the individual in context (e.g., Holland et al., 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006; Shweder, 1990), where both interact with each other and are thus mutually constituted. The conceptual framework presented earlier recognizes that individual development is based on

personal goals and aspirations, developed from cultural and social experiences, and draws on social resources such as tools and signs that mediate human action. Exploring multiple actors and contexts required a syncretic approach (Gutiérrez & Stone, 2000), where multiple theories from the socio-cultural-historical traditions were combined to contribute to the development of the conceptual framework.

The study focused on the different actors in the phenomenon of transition; hence the overall research question was, “How is transition for students with dis/abilities enacted by themselves, their families, and their schools?” I developed a series of three research questions to further define the focus of inquiry for each of the actors:

1. In what ways does the student with dis/ability construct his/her transition needs?
2. How are the family’s cultural values and beliefs about transition goals and needs for their child with dis/ability enacted in school and at home?
3. What role does the school’s expectations for the student with dis/ability play in mediating the ways the school provides transition support for that student?

The design of this study assumed that as students with dis/abilities develop and internalize tools learned in different settings, they would use these tools to mediate their behavior in different contexts. In addition, the contexts shift as a result of what the student is doing with their tools. Students are reflexively influenced by their interactions within each context. In order to understand the relationship between the development of the individual and their action, a developmental analysis of the context as the cultural background was necessary (Wertsch, 1991).

A developmental analysis started with understanding the characteristics of the student, their use of tools, the student’s interactions within different settings, and the influence of their cultural context (Wertsch, 1991). This study focused on two particular settings and their culture:

the school and the home. Therefore each student's experience of transition was different and depended on their interpretation of the lived experience, including their past and current experiences in school and at home (Denzin, 2001), mediated by tools and interactions situated within the school and the family. A student's lived experience determined how students defined and interpreted their own transition needs. Thus the research design was meant to draw out the developmental process of the student, the layers of interactions students had with their different settings, the culturally defined interactional patterns that were linked to institutional norms and cultural values in these settings, and the role of tools in these interactions.

Strategy of Inquiry

The Phenomenological Method

The strategy of inquiry refers to the skills, assumptions, and practices employed in the design of the research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The strategy reflected the study's operationalization of the theoretical orientation and the conceptual framework. The inquiry strategy also connected the methodological techniques that were used to put the research into motion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I primarily used a phenomenological approach in this study. It allowed me to focus on a specific phenomenon: the process and experience of transition planning and support for individual students with dis/abilities (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenological approach focused on the lived experience of the individuals, and assumed a number of elements consistent with the conceptual framework for this study: (a) questioned a certain way of being in the world; (b) allowed for an infinite possible number of ways that the world can be experienced; and (c) focused on conscious experiences (van Manen, 1990). Using phenomenology in this study allowed me to understand these constructs from the perspective of the students with dis/abilities: (a) what happened in the transition process from secondary to post-secondary

settings; (b) how the students experienced the process; and (c) what contexts or situations have influenced or affected their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Recent iterations of phenomenology go beyond the conventional summary of experiences gathered from different participants. Phenomenology allowed for both the description of the idiographic as well as the general (Finlay, 2009). The idiographic perspective was important because the participants' individual pathways were as important as their general experiences. The individual perspective also helped to distinguish between different areas of intervention when discussing the implications of the study. Phenomenology also allowed for a dual focus on both description and interpretation as its goals (Finlay, 2009; van Manen, 1990). This dual focus supported the different stages of analysis and allowed for a broader and more expansive way to address the research questions. The idiographic description and analysis of individual students combined with the cross-analysis of the different cases to create the sense of the general was key in creating a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the transition process. This idiographic strategy made the students' own sense-making of their experiences and the factors and tools that influenced them more explicit and available to others. The phenomenological approach also supported the stronger element of interpretation necessary when using multiple techniques to elicit students' expressions of their own experiences (van Manen, 1990).

Data Collection Techniques

Methodological pluralism. Based on Denzin and Lincoln's (2011) list of research strategies, this study was primarily based on phenomenological and ethnographic techniques, while also borrowing methods from life history research. A range of methodological techniques was used to address the multiple layers of interactions. These research techniques explored the importance of different actors within the different settings and contexts in varied and meaningful

ways (Katsiaficas, Futch, Fine, & Sirin, 2011). Methodological pluralism allowed me to combine different techniques derived from different approaches. Katsiaficas and colleagues (2011) described methodological pluralism “as a strategy of data collection and analysis to document how change and discontinuity, braided with a desire for narrative coherence and consistency, shape the stories young people tell about themselves, over time and space” (p. 120). This study relied on a combination of techniques that included observations, interviews, and participant-produced pictures, photographs, and text, in order to understand the participants’ experiences. Using these data collection techniques allowed for the collection and exploration of materials that produced a more complex narrative about the phenomena. As a result, I gathered rich detail regarding different contexts, and the interactions between contexts and participants. I detail the different approaches used in the subsequent paragraphs.

Drawing on ethnographic techniques. The use of ethnographic techniques aided in the description and interpretation of shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, interactions, and language of a group of people (Creswell, 2013). This was particularly important in the exploration of the school as a representation of the dominant culture. Ethnographic techniques helped to clarify the role of the school leaders in the transition process. For instance, through interviews, observations, and the analysis of school policies, a picture emerged that detailed how school leaders saw their roles, described their particular beliefs about transition, and linked their actions to the influences of their knowledge and belief systems. The decisions they made formed the institutional culture of the school, and the selective transference of tools to the students. Conducting participant observation in the school and in the classrooms, I was able to immerse myself in the school’s day-to-day activity, observing different classes and lessons throughout the week and informally interviewing teachers where possible. These observations

helped me when conducting interviews with school staff and leaders, as I was able to use the observations as prompts to obtain personal perceptions from the different school personnel and to conduct member checks on my interpretations of daily events.

Using a critical approach to ethnography allowed the research to respond to the systems of power, prestige, privilege, and authority (Creswell, 2013) that differentially affect those who were seen as different, whether in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, class, or ability (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013; Harris, 1993). The critical aspect of this study sought to speak out against issues of inequality, oppression, and hegemony. As a participant observer and an interviewer, I used dialogue and discussion to explore the school personnel's awareness and understanding of the role and influence they have on the experience of transition for students with dis/abilities (Erickson, 2006). My goal was to support the teachers in their development and review of transition processes in the school (Charmaz, 2006). The ability to have multiple discussions with selected teachers over time created a dialogic spiral as each of us increased in our understanding of how transition worked in the lives of students with dis/abilities in their school (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014). The dialogic spiral allowed each of us to bring our own knowledge about the issue, listening and questioning each other with mutual trust and respect, as we came to new awareness of the situation through the dialogic process. The critical approach aimed to empower the actors in transition with knowledge and awareness, allowing hegemonic discourses to be challenged, and dealt with concerns regarding power and control.

Choosing to do humanizing research. As part of the commitment to develop a humanizing approach to research (Paris, 2011), the research design and methodological techniques were selected to capture the participants' voices, emotions, and actions (Denzin, 2001), as well as the factors and tools that influenced them. Locating the study within a single

school allowed me to become more familiar with the school environment and the teachers, and to earn the trust of both the school leaders and staff. Spending time learning their practices and constraints, and talking about their experiences of teaching students allowed me to take a posture of doing “side-by-side” research (Erickson, 2006). Side-by-side research contrasts with conventional research where the researcher was seen to either study up or study down, emphasizing the imbalance in power and privilege between the researcher and the subject. The study reflects side-by-side research when I: (a) worked alongside the school as they grappled with teaching and supporting their diversity of students; (b) acted as a listening ear and discussed options with families as they guided their child during the transition period; and (c) functioned as a sounding board for the students as they considered the aspirations they had for their future. The school staff, families, and students all became participants in the research, rather than subjects. Although I was acutely aware that I could not totally remove the researcher-participant power differential, I tried to minimize it by being respectful of the families’ points of view while recognizing that I inhabited different social and cultural worlds than the families who agreed to participate in this study (Paris, 2011). The school was learning from their experience with their first graduating cohort of students, and I was learning right along with them. I shared my insights to be helpful as school staff considered their ongoing improvements. During my interviews with the school staff, where possible, I also offered observations that addressed the concerns that they had regarding their students. The families saw me as an ally as they guided their child during the transitional period between graduating from secondary school and entering vocational college. The family interviews allowed me to share information that I had gained about their child in previous conversations, and I spent time checking in with the family regarding their experiences in this transitional period. Although I did not directly influence any of the decisions regarding

placement, I provided emotional support. I also shared information regarding support services at the vocational college. It seemed to help parents feel safer and more secure that there would be services available to meet the needs of their children. During the course of the study, I sought to be approachable to both families and teachers, and respectfully contributed where possible. Therefore, I was able to contribute in ways that were meaningful to the participants, and approached research as a humanizing endeavor (Charmaz, 2006; Erickson, 2006; Green, 2014).

The methodological techniques used in this study were selected to foreground the voice of the student participant. Although the research questions focused on different actors (i.e., family members, school staff), the focus of the study, or the unit of concern, was the student with dis/ability (McDermott et al., 2006). This included studying the biography of each of the students; examining the inter-relationships that existed between family and school life; and the interactions that they had with family and school that influenced the way they saw themselves, their identities, and their actions. Alternative techniques of data collection, such as education journey mapping, allowed the research to foreground the student's voice and allowed for the subsequent exploration of their emotions and actions as an integrated experience, captured simultaneously within a spatial dimension (Annamma, 2017). This study valued the voices of the student participants and focused on issues that were important to them, as surfaced by their education journey maps, their developing awareness of their transition needs, and the ways they were being supported in this process. Reflexive photography techniques as a secondary activity allowed the students to be the drivers in this process, as they focused and pointed out the elements that were important to them in their relationships at home and in the community (Lapenta, 2011). The importance of these student voices included the ability to surface both their interaction with dominant discourses and their ability to develop alternative storylines (McCall, 2015). Student

experiences were also important to the development and implementation of future practices that were more readily usable and applicable (Cook, Cook, & Landrum, 2013). The photo-elicitation technique, i.e., using the photographs taken by the students as a mediating tool in the parent interviews, allowed for multiple interpretations of the same photo, allowing families to talk about and interpret the meanings of these photographs with me (Lapenta, 2011). The photographs also acted as triggers to elicit responses from families about their beliefs in transition (Harper, 2002) and to explicate their funds of knowledge that would have otherwise been too complex to explore (Pink, 2006).

Research Design

The study was designed to answer three key research questions, structured loosely to three phases of data collection and analysis (see Figure 2). Although the order of the research questions indicated that the unit of concern in the study was the individual in the context of their environment, the phases illustrated the process of entering the school as a research site by spending time at the site to understand it, and gaining the teachers' trust before engaging them as participants (Green, 2014) and facilitators in engaging families and students.

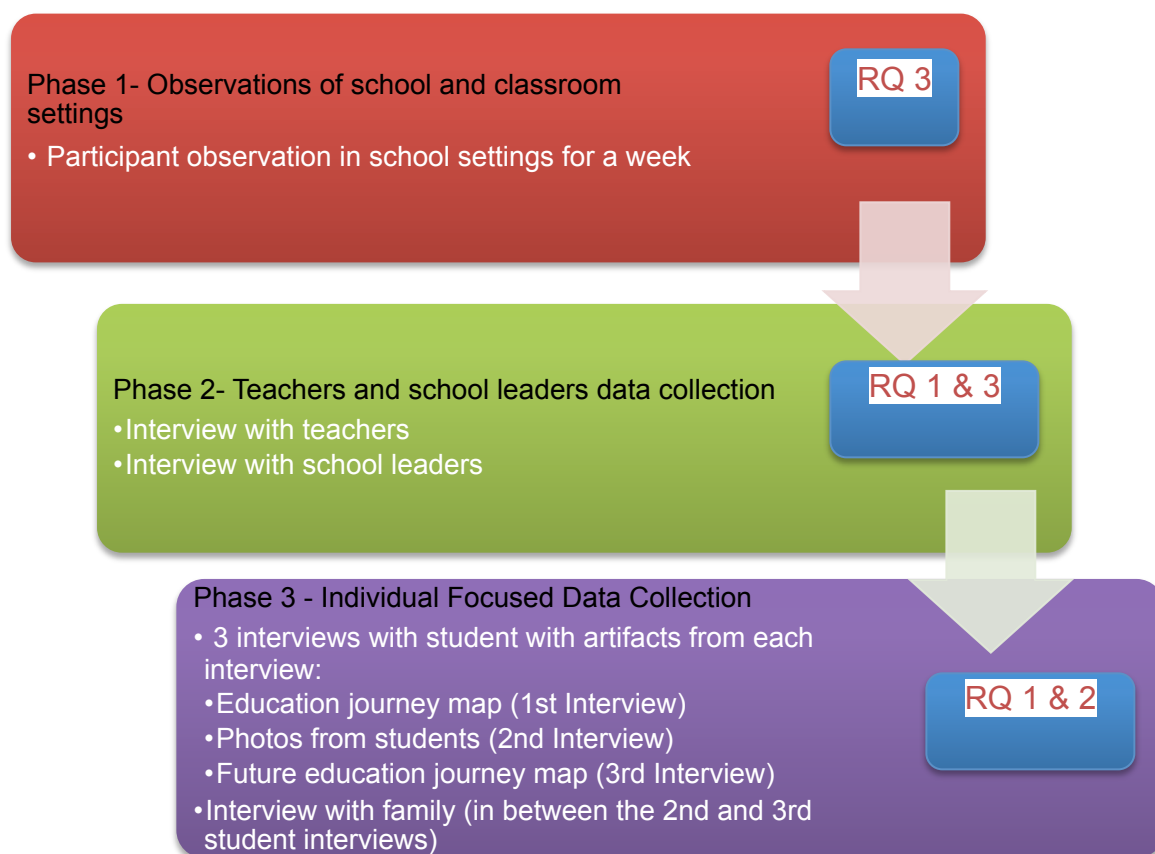


Figure 2. Research design: Phases of data collection.

Research Question 1

Research question one was related to the student's experience. The primary data source was the interviews with each of the focal students. Some phenomenology researchers recommended at least three to four individuals (Creswell, 2013; Finlay, 2009), and for this study although I tried to recruit four participants, only three agreed to participate. The data collection process was organized around a series of three interviews, each with a specific focus (Atkinson, 2002; Seidman, 2013). Through a mapping process, the first interview elicited the student's life history and events related to their educational journey, allowing students to carve out their own narratives and identify key events in their life that they felt were critical moments in their development (Annamma, 2017). The interview ended with instructions to the students to take

pictures that represented how activities outside of school supported them to become adults. In the second interview, we discussed specific events in the student's education journey, especially where a transition or a change in educational setting had taken place. This allowed me to gather details in order to provide a rich description of their experience (Seidman, 2013). In this interview, students also had the opportunity to share their photographs and the meaning behind them (Harper, 2002; Pink, 2006) based on the prompt given in the first interview. At this point, I also obtained permission to share the photographs with their families. In the third interview, the students continued their educational journey map, envisioning their future beyond secondary school (Futch & Fine, 2014). I used their future maps as a platform for a discussion regarding their transition needs and the desired supports to help them achieve their goals. The interviews were conducted over a period of four months, during Phase 3 of the study.

I also interviewed their teachers regarding the students' behavior in school; this information acted as a secondary data source for this question. The teachers' reports provided additional information regarding the students' development over time in the school, as well as concrete examples of their difficulties and interactions with others in school. This helped to provide a different perspective to how the students' needs were enacted in the school context, as observed by the teacher in their daily school routine and interactions.

Research Question 2

The second research question focused on the family's perspective. The primary data sources were the interviews with each student's parents. The interview focused on the family's experiences of supporting their child's education, as well as the values and beliefs that guided their actions. The photographs taken by their child were used to open up the interview and allowed the parents to present their subjective interpretations and descriptions of the meanings

the images invoked in them, thus allowing perspectives, meanings and interpretations to surface, especially ones that the student did not talk about (Lapenta, 2011; Schwartz, 1989). The photographs also acted as a mediating tool to help parents broaden their understanding of their own funds of knowledge and recognize the impact on their child. Individual student interviews were used as secondary data sources, providing specific examples of how students interacted with their parents, and their reactions and responses to the parent's actions.

Research Question 3

The primary data source for uncovering the school's perspective regarding transition planning and support was interviews with the school leaders (administrators). The secondary data source was interviews with the classroom teachers who worked with the students on a daily basis. While the school leaders espoused a certain vision for the school, the teachers did not always have the same vision, or sometimes their practices did not always reflect the vision. Classroom observations were a tertiary data source as they revealed the extent of whether similar beliefs were enacted across different teachers, and whether the teachers' expectations of the students in the classroom reflected the vision of the school. The observations also highlighted if teachers were able to recognize their role in addressing transition needs and how and/or if transition needs were addressed in the classroom.

In the rest of the chapter, I provide specific details regarding the site and participant selection, my reflexivity statement as a researcher, and describe the methodological techniques and the data analysis procedures.

Site and Participant Selection

In this section, I describe specific details regarding the selection and recruitment of the school, the student participants and their families, school staff, and ministry personnel. The

students were selected as the main actors in transition, the school personnel as part of the figured world, and the families representing the intentional world (Shweder, 1990) and the funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) in their culture and community.

School selection. This study was conducted in Zenith Secondary School (pseudonym), a specialized secondary school in Singapore. It offered only one of the regular academic tracks available in Singapore's secondary schools: the Normal (Technical) (NT) Curriculum. Students with the weakest academic results, as defined as their performance on the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) taken at the end of Primary 6, were limited to the NT track when they entered secondary school. Therefore, the NT track enrolled a large percentage of students with dis/abilities as they were more likely to struggle with academic learning compared to their typically developing peers. Hence, as the least academically challenging track, the NT track attracted a higher number of students with dis/abilities (Humphrey, Wigelsworth, Barlow, & Squires, 2013). Zenith took in students who were typically some of the weakest performers in the PSLE, i.e., scoring below 100. In Zenith's first year, it enrolled the student with the lowest PSLE score (i.e., 80). During the period of this study, school leaders reported that as many as 40% of their student cohorts had identified dis/abilities. The school offered an integrated vocational curriculum that allowed the students to begin working towards the technical knowledge and skills that would help them jump start their education at a vocational college after graduation with a basic vocational certification.

The school was the first of its kind in Singapore. Its first cohort graduated at the end of 2016. Members of the first graduating class transferred into vocational colleges in January 2017. This occasion offered an opportunity to study the graduates and their post-graduation experiences. When students like these graduates attended schools that offer multiple tracks, they

were stigmatized with labels such as “low achieving” (Law, 2013) and “low ability” (Ong & Dimmock, 2013). They were often the most marginalized student body. Forming a school with only one track was seen as a way to increase their ability to “develop and rise to their potential” (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2012) and reduce the impact of stigmatization and marginalization inherent in low ability tracks (Van Houtte, Demanet, & Stevens, 2012). However, research in other settings showed that there would always be a population of students seen as outcast, or in the margins (Allan, 2006). It is likely that in a single-track school, students with dis/abilities would experience life on the margins.

In order to gain access to the school, I requested permission from the Singapore Ministry of Education to collect data in the school (see approval letter in Appendix A). I received a letter of recommendation from my previous work supervisors in order to conduct my research in the school. I also sent my recruitment letter to the school leaders (see Appendix B) before meeting them. An initial meeting in the school setting with the principal and his key school personnel occurred before a formal agreement was made for me to start my research in the school.

One of the teachers was assigned to be my coordinator for the study. She helped me reach out to parents and seek their interest and permission to include their child in the study. She also helped me approach teachers and connected me with suitable teachers to interview. I worked with her to decide which classes to observe while I was in the school. School leaders prepared their teachers for my presence and work there by introducing me during a staff meeting, sharing with teachers that I was conducting research in the school, and introducing me directly to key personnel in the school who had roles related to transition. The leaders also made sure that I was informed of all upcoming activities in the school and welcomed me to join them.

Student selection. The participants for the study were selected from the school's first cohort of students, who would transition from secondary school to vocational college during the course of the study. Unfortunately, during my observation in the school, this cohort of students was not in the classrooms I observed because they were taking examinations. However, as I spent some of my time in the canteen during and after school hours, the students saw me around the school, and did not find me an entirely strange person when I met them at their homes for their interviews.

As the selection of students was going to be small, I used purposive sampling to maximize variation (Patton, 2002) in the sample. Therefore an initial group of students was selected by the school to represent the most diverse experiences across multiple categories, including dis/ability type, gender, race/ethnic, and socio-economic status. Out of the four students that were identified by the school, three of them participated in this study. Despite multiple nominations by the school for the fourth student, they had difficulties obtaining parent consent for the study due to difficulties in contacting parents. The school stipulated that they would contact the families directly, and only with the school's permission, or if the parents had additional questions for me, could I contact the families directly. Therefore after the school had reached out to the parents, I contacted each family separately and arranged to talk to them about the research. All of them agreed to participate during my initial meeting with them, during which they signed the informed consent form (see Appendix C), and filled in a family information sheet (see Appendix D).

Name of Participant (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Age	Dis/ability / Medical Condition	Level of Needs	Race/Ethnicity	Religion	Socio-Economic Status
Julie	Female	16	Developmental Dis/ability	Middle	Chinese	Christian	Middle
Thivya	Female	16	Dyslexia & Scoliosis	Low	Indian	Christian	Low
Tom	Male	16	External Hydrocephalus with mild to moderate hearing loss and severe speech-sound and fluency disorder	High	Chinese	Buddhist	Low

Table 1: Demographics and characteristics of student participants.

The characteristics of the three students are described in Table 1. They represented a range of genders (i.e., male, female), races/ethnicity (i.e., Chinese, Indian), religions (i.e., Christianity, Buddhism), socio-economic status (i.e., low, middle), dis/abilities and level of need (i.e., low, middle, high) that mirrored the Singapore and school population. However, there was a gap in representation from the Malay (13.4% of the population), Muslim (14.1% of the population), and Hindu (5.1% of the population) populations (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011). I determined the family's socio-economic status by the housing type that the family was in when I visited them (i.e., public housing versus private housing), as well as the parents' educational level (i.e., whether they completed at least 6 years of formal education). At least one

of Thiyva's and Tom's parents did not complete formal education, or did not hold down a stable job. In addition, they lived in public housing. The parents supplied the students' genders, ages, and race/ethnicity. The school provided dis/ability information. Additional details came from reports from medical professionals that parents had given to the school. Compared to dyslexia, the dis/abilities represented were not as prevalent in schools (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2011). Despite that, the three students represented a range of capability. Discussions with teachers determined the students' levels of needs. The amount of effort that teachers offered in order to support each student's learning was another indication of the difficulties that students with dis/abilities faced in school.

I asked the students in the study to provide their own pseudonyms in order to foster a greater sense of participation for them. This section briefly introduces the student participants, their backgrounds, and their reasons for choosing Zenith Secondary School for the secondary school education, and a little about my interactions with them. I go into further detail about their lived experiences in my analysis.

Julie. Julie came from a family comprising of her parents, her older sister, and their dog. She studied at an all-girls Catholic-based primary school. Her parents were pleasantly surprised that she passed the PSLE. Choosing to go to Zenith Secondary School was a bold move for her and her parents as it was a relatively unknown school, and her parents had concerns about her safety. She could be shy when meeting new people, but she warmed up readily to me and was happy to talk about anything I asked. She was open about speaking about her dis/ability, although her parents had warned me not to bring it up in front of her. All of the interviews were conducted in the study room in the family's apartment, as determined by her parents.

Thivya. Thivya lived with her parents, an older sister, and a younger brother. She was the only person with a diagnosed dis/ability in the family. She had dyslexia as well as a medical condition (scoliosis) that affected her physical body strength. She studied in an all-girls Christian-based primary school, and her mother chose to send Thivya to Zenith Secondary. Thivya was described to me as a girl who was shy, quiet, and did not talk much. Although this was true, she was also forthright in her answers and, when probed, provided more information. All of the interviews were conducted at the dining table in the family's apartment, as determined by her mother. Sometimes she felt a bit awkward as her siblings, family, or family friends were sitting nearby in the living area.

Tom. Tom was the only child, and lived with his parents. He studied in a neighborhood primary school. Initially his father did not want him to go to Zenith Secondary, but continue at a neighborhood secondary school. Tom had a lot of difficulties in school, and his father quit his job when Tom started preschool, to take care of Tom and be available when the school needed help with Tom. Tom was chatty and had no problems talking to me, although I did find him difficult to understand due to his speech difficulties. During the interviews, he used a mixture of English and Mandarin when he spoke and we decided that he would speak in any language that was comfortable for him. Therefore most of his interviews were conducted in Mandarin. Our first interview was held in school the second one at the ground floor of his apartment, and the third one in the study room in his family's apartment. He chose these locations, and he was comfortable in each different setting.

Family participation. The students' parents were invited to participate in the interviews. All interviews were conducted with both parents present. The interview with Tom's parents was conducted in Mandarin, without a need for a translator, as I am fluent in Mandarin. The other two

interviews were conducted in English, although sometimes the parents lapsed into their home language and one of the parents translated for me if I was not familiar with the language. With two of the families, it was clear that one was the dominant spokesperson for the two parents. During these situations, I tried to purposely engage the other parent, addressing them specifically when asking subsequent questions, in order to give them the opportunity to express their views first. Having both parents present also meant that occasionally additional tensions within the family surfaced when the parents had conflicting views. In these situations, I would encourage both parents to offer their viewpoints.

School personnel selection. Interviews were conducted with individuals that played a specific role in the school: (a) teacher, (b) school leader, (c) school counselor, and (d) teacher with specific management roles. Teachers were selected based on their familiarity with the focal students and their area of teaching, i.e., academic or vocational. A summary of the school personnel who were interviewed to provide perspectives on the student participant is represented in Table 2. Personnel played a good mix of roles in the school: Subject Head for Communications, Senior Teacher for Learning Needs, Head of Department for Retail Studies, and Level Head for Communications. I interviewed eight teachers in total. I also interviewed three school leaders: the principal; the vice-principal in charge of academic studies, who was also responsible for students with special needs; and the vice-principal in charge of vocational studies, who was also in charge of student well being. Zenith had four full-time counselors, allocated to a level each. At the time of my interview, one of them was on maternity leave. As the counselors were each responsible for different school-based intervention programs, I decided to conduct a focus group interview in order to consolidate their experiences as well as to note if working with different cohorts affected how they worked. I also interviewed additional teachers

who were in charge of specific areas in the school. One of the additional teachers that I interviewed who did not teach any of the students in the study was the Head of Department for Character and Citizenship Education. I approached teachers and school leaders individually to gauge their interest in being interviewed, and then set a date and time for the interview. All of the interviews took place in the school at a time that was convenient for the participants; I also asked them to choose their preferred place in the school. I opened each interview by obtaining informed consent (see Appendix E), then followed up with short demographic questions. To maintain confidentiality, I will not present individual information about the school leaders and staff as they would immediately be recognizable by readers who are knowledgeable about the school. Demographically, there was representation across genders, i.e., male (61.5%) and female (38.5%) and all main race/ethnic groups in Singapore, i.e., Chinese (61.5%), Indian (23.1%), and Malay (15.4%).

Student	Form Teacher	Academic Teacher	Vocational Teacher
Julie	Staff #5	Staff #2, #6, #13	Staff #4
Thivya	Staff #12	Staff #5, #7	Staff #12
Tom	Staff #5	Staff #6	Staff #4

Table 2. Teacher interviewed distributed by student.

Researcher Reflexivity Statement

Researchers do not enter a research site without pre-conceived ideas or foreknowledge (Fersch, 2013). As I worked to see the world through the experiences of the research participants, I recognized my own subjectivity, and tried to maintain an open attitude throughout the study. According to Finlay (2009), “Researchers’ subjectivity should, therefore, be placed in the foreground so as to begin the process of separating out what belongs to the researcher rather than

the researched” (p. 12). In this section I explain how my identity and background influenced the ways I conducted the research and its subsequent analysis. In particular, I focus on the ways that my background affected my access to the research site and participants, my ability to participate constructively with the participants, and the ways that I represent myself in this study.

Access

As a former educational (school) psychologist from the Ministry of Education, I previously worked with secondary schools to help them develop transition planning and support processes for their student with dis/abilities. I worked with Zenith Secondary School in the same capacity: created workshops for teachers on providing in-class support for students with dis/ability, held discussions with school leaders, and conducted classroom observations. Because of my background, I was able to offer my expertise to the school during the time of the study. My past experience assured the schools and the Ministry that I was diligent in my reporting and mindful in maintaining confidentiality of the school and the participants.

During the week I conducted school observations, I helped school personnel calm one of the students who had difficulties managing his emotions. Due to my successful interactions, school personnel became more at ease with me as they realized that I was not just a spectator-researcher, but was willing to help them within my area of expertise. The school felt that I was able to understand their struggles and contexts in supporting students with dis/ability. This allowed me to gain their trust and they were more open in sharing their concerns and their plans regarding what the school was doing to support students with dis/ability.

As a researcher who works with and in schools, I am unable to control certain elements of the research, such as the selection of students and the ability to approach parents directly. As a result, I was unable to gain direct access to parents, particularly parents who did not have close

relations to the school or who did not see a need to interact with the school. This is likely why I could not find and invite a Malay family to participate. The Malay population was hard to reach, and those in the lower income brackets, in particular, were reticent. As a result, a more personal introduction and a longer time of acquaintance were necessary to gain their trust.

I made a personal visit to speak with parents who were interested but uncertain. During the initial meeting with the parents, I was open about my background and my passion for creating greater opportunities for students with dis/ability. Being open about my intentions helped me gain the parents' trust as they saw their participation in the study as an avenue for their voices to be heard, and for greater systemic awareness and changes to take place in the education system (Wong, Poon, Kaur, & Ng, 2015).

Participation

On a personal level, I carried obvious identity markers of being female (least favored in patriarchal cultures), Chinese (the majority ethnic group), highly educated as a professional (position of respect and sometimes, deference) and middle-class (financially privileged). These attributes inevitably restricted my access and knowledge of those who are not like me. In my interactions with students, families, and school staff, it was important for me to be mindful of cultural norms and be respectful of how others might view me through their own cultural lens. Besides the professional self, I also shared a sense of personal self for participants to recognize me and thus be more open to share readily about their own selves. The identities that I foreground with each participant differed, which helped me to make connections with different participants. I typically foregrounded three main identities: a student, a teacher, and a parent.

Being highly privileged within the current system, I had to be mindful of not acting like an expert, but to be humble and honor other peoples' lives and decisions (Paris, 2011). To make

these power hierarchies visible, I decided to foreground the voices of the students, allowing their perspectives to be the focal point, using educational journey mapping as a tool (Taylor & Robinson, 2009). Educational journey mapping allowed individuals to present their narratives, in the context of their school and out-of school experiences (Annamma, 2017; Katsiaficas et al., 2011). The students identified the resources that contributed to their decisions and actions, and presented them across time. To connect with the students, I also represented my school experiences in the educational journey mapping process while they did theirs. For each of the different students, I focused on different elements of my life. I tended to focus on areas their parents had already described as difficult or of concern. I also shared my educational journey map before they shared theirs, allowing them to make connections with parts of my life that mirrored their experiences. Sharing my personal experiences with them also helped them to be comfortable with the process and to engage in critical thinking as we sought to understand each other through the process (Annamma, 2017; Paris, 2011).

To help families and students feel comfortable and relaxed, I scheduled and conducted interviews at the families' convenience and preferred location (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). I was respectful and tried to accommodate their requests, as it was an essential ingredient to obtain their trust and acceptance.

During the participant observation phase, I made myself available to all teachers who were interested in my research or in transition. After each interview with the school personnel, I addressed their concerns and where possible, provided additional resources in the areas they expressed interest in. During the interview I also actively pointed out the importance of certain activities that they conducted for all students with regards to students with dis/abilities, and the specific transition need it addressed. In this way the interview became a shared activity for

understanding transition, and an opportunity to engage with teachers by sharing with them practical ways to engage students or to see transition in a culturally responsive way.

Representation

While my prior experiences with the school and in the education system benefitted my research, they also worked against me as I gathered and analyzed data. For example, I was in danger of making assumptions based on my previous knowledge regarding how certain policies should be implemented, or what accountability measures were in place. I tried to be alert and differentiate my personal experiences and knowledge with what was gathered directly from the participants. During interviews, I refrained from judging what the school was currently doing or not doing. Having interacted with the school when it first opened, I was aware that my previous experiences with the school might not be true of the school in its current state. Therefore it was important that I represented the school fairly and foregrounded the school's and teachers' strengths, while at the same time ensuring that the structural and institutional supports and constraints were also uncovered and discussed (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013).

When interacting with the families and students, I saw my role in the study as one of a listener and sense-maker who sought to generate understanding that would lead to larger systemic changes (Dumas & Anderson, 2014). On the other hand, I was also realistic in portraying my actual lack of real power and ability to make changes at school level and/or national level, other than creating a greater sense of awareness regarding transition needs and generating topics for discussion to influence the school's or Ministry's direction for the future.

Methodological Techniques

The methodological techniques I present in this section include the interviews conducted with participants as the primary data source, followed by the use of participant observation to collect tertiary data.

Interview with Students

The student interviews drew out their life story, as well as their aspirations for the future and how to get there. Therefore the interview protocols were developed partially from life story interview techniques (Atkinson, 2002) and phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 2013). I also supplemented the protocols with mapping techniques (Futch & Fine, 2014) and a photo-elicitation interview (Lapenta, 2011). Each one of the students' three interviews was focused on a different aspect of the participant's experience: (a) focused life history and educational journey mapping; (b) details related to the experience of primary to secondary school transition and photo-elicitation interview of out-of-school settings; and (c) reflection on the upcoming transition from secondary to post-secondary settings and what it meant to them and their future. Focusing on life stories positioned individuals to see their whole life so far, and to make links and connections between their experiences that they had not previously considered (Atkinson, 2002). Life story interviews also focused on the influence of cultural values and traditions on development across the life cycle, analogous to the theoretical framing presented earlier on the need to explore the cultural impact on individual development (Wertsch, 1991).

The first interview elicited the life history and events experienced by the student related to their educational journey, including where they went to school, how they felt about their schools, and the influential figures in that experience. A mapping process helped reveal this information (Annamma, 2017; Futch & Fine, 2014), allowing students to carve their own

narratives and identify key events in their life that they felt were critical moments in their development. The goal of the first interview was to elicit narratives based on the students' own conception of self, in their own visual representation and words. Using standard verbal interviews, the responses to specific questions reflected the students' "resolved and coherent narrative" (Sirin & Fine, 2008). However, they were unlikely to have had the opportunity to process related events or make connections between them in relation to transition. Thus the interview process was centered on the students' educational journey map (Annamma, 2013), and the map was used as a mediational tool across the three interviews. As a mediational method, mapping invited respondents to: (a) narrate and represent their varied relationships to place, people, and time; (b) visualize the tensions of agency and structure; and (c) document shifts, contradictions, continuities, and ruptures within self over time and space (Futch & Fine, 2014). The maps also acted as an analytic tool as it "sits in the conversation" (Futch & Fine, 2014, p. 55), particularly in the second interview where it was not used directly, but as a discursive tool to further the interpretation and understanding of both the maps and the interviews.

The mapping exercise created a representation of the past, present, and by the third interview, a tentative future for each student. Mapping allowed students to indicate the key events in their lives, and the associated feelings, thoughts, and people—such as their parents, siblings, friends, or teachers—who supported or influenced their educational journey in either positive or negative ways. Salient events and factors were brought forward intentionally by students, rather than being prompted by specific questions developed by the researcher (Futch & Fine, 2014). We were privileged with the students' own interpretations, which allowed for deeper conversations with the student across the interviews, as the maps gave access to the students' inner thought processes and experiences. Thus, the use of the maps within the interview

process created an “inherently narrative and dialogical approach” (Futch & Fine, 2014, p. 46) that privileged the student’s thought processes and experiences, and created opportunities for deep conversation between the researcher and the student. The educational journey map acted as a mediational tool for students to reflect on how they negotiated education and schools as a social space, their interactions and relationships, and how they viewed themselves as a student and emerging adult. The use of the maps during the interviews was consistent with the phenomenological interview approach as both centered the participant’s experience and narrative, and the importance of context in making meaning of the participant’s experience (Seidman, 2013). In addition, the map was a mediating tool in the creation of a safe space for students to be critical about the influence of other people on their personal sense of self as they reflected on past experiences, and made previously unseen connections to build a greater sense of identity and a purpose in life (Meyer & Land, 2006). This safe and liminal space recognized the student as an individual and valued their evolving self-identity. The interview space itself carried no judgment, but sought to understand and create dialogue for the student that introduced a new way for them to view themselves and their experiences (Meyer & Land, 2006; Taylor & Robinson, 2009). This acknowledged the idiosyncratic ways in which individual students experienced transition processes, influenced by their own identity markers (e.g., race/ethnicity, culture, gender, dis/ability label) (Annamma, Connor et al., 2013; Lorde, 1984) that followed the same narrative as those provided by their teachers and/or families (Carr-Fanning, McGuckin, & Shevlin, 2013; Gee, Loewenthal, & Cayne, 2013; Taylor & Robinson, 2009).

Although I used prompts for the mapping exercise, each of the students understood the prompt differently. I also put up the prompts as a visual reminder for them to refer to during the process, which might also have influenced their thinking process. For instance, Tom started off

with just one big picture about his current experience. I asked him to continue with smaller ones that also included his previous experiences. After he protested that he was not good at drawing, I reassured him that he can use anything to communicate, and did not have to use pictures. In the end he wrote down a couple of sentences and linked them with lines. Julie used the prompts like questions and made lists that answered each prompt. Thivya created a storyboard with bullet points of her experience in primary and secondary school.

At the end of the first interview, I gave the students a reflexive photography assignment: I asked them to take photographs of events or places that were meaningful to them and represented the contribution of the home and the community to their development towards adulthood (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). Tom and Julie chose to use their own mobile phones to take pictures. They were told to select five to ten photographs, and to share them with me during the second interview (Pink, 2006). Thivya was homebound due to her medical condition during the period of time before the second interview; therefore, instead of using photographs, I gave her time to brainstorm and write about/draw specific incidences that were meaningful to her.

The first section of the second interview was the photo-elicitation interview with the student's own photographs or drawings. This process allowed the student to take control of the sharing, and emphasized the collaborative nature of the sense-making process in the study (Harper, 2002; Lapenta, 2011; Pink, 2006; Schwartz, 1989). Students were asked to share the photographs and their meanings with me. At the end of the interview, I sought to share the photographs and their meanings in the upcoming interview with their parents. Although none of the students had shared the photos with their parents prior to my interviews, they all agreed that I could do so. The photos were then downloaded into password-protected folders on my laptop. In Thivya's case, I kept the paper copies of her drawings and shared them with her parents later.

In the second part of the second interview, narratives and storytelling approaches were used to elicit details of individual events described in the educational journey maps to obtain a description of social reality that existed for the student (Seidman, 2013). This process built on the high level of engagement already started with the photographs. Using the map as a prompt helped the students to maintain a “life-as-a-whole” perspective (Atkinson, 2002) and tools learnt in previous contexts were maintained and given meaning across experiences. This process also helped me to understand the relationships between school, family, and significant others, as well as with the student and their social identities in different contexts through the discursive units present in their life story, whether presented verbally or through their education journey map (Atkinson, 2002; Wertz, 2005). The second interview gave me the opportunity to ask for clarification from certain areas in the first interview when needed. It also allowed me to ask about certain events that should be common across all students, but were not mentioned in the first interview, or were not depicted on the educational journey map. This was also an opportunity for me to member-check some of my early analysis regarding the themes and understanding of their experiences.

The third interview mirrored the first interview. After reflecting on the outcome and responses I received during the first interview, I simplified the prompts I had developed earlier, and did not use a visual reminder in the third interview. Although I brought out the original map, I gave the students a separate piece of paper to draw their future map. I did this because often no more space was left on the initial education journey map, and I also wanted to give the students a sense that the future held opportunities for them that did not have to be restricted by their previous experiences. The students were then asked about their desired goals, the reasons for

choosing those goals, what supports they needed, and what supports they gained from school and home that would help them reach their goals.

Using a narrative format to elicit the students' experiences provided a way to understand their past, present, and future more fully, as students made sense of their experience together with the interviewer, who then gains an insider's understanding (Paris, 2011). Across all three interviews, and particularly in the last one, the students: (a) gained a different perspective about their experiences and found linkages in their experiences that they may not have otherwise noticed; (b) acquired greater self-knowledge and a stronger and enhanced self-image and self-esteem as the interview process validated their personal experience; and (c) obtained a clearer perspective of what they would want in the future through the process of fleshing out their past and present experiences (Atkinson, 2002). The interview sequence created a dialogic space that allowed the students to articulate and co-create a future influenced by the interview process (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014). For details on interview guide, refer to Appendix F.

Interview with Parents

I conducted the interviews with the parents of the students with dis/ability as a semi-structured interview with a photo-elicitation component. In general, I modeled the interview after a conversation (Kvale, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2011) using an interview guide with follow-up questions developed to structure the conversation mediated by the photographs (Lapenta, 2011; Seidman, 2013). The subsequent follow-up interview questions focused on the parents' aspirations for their child, what they have done to help their child transit out of the national school system, and how they worked with the school.

The photo-elicitation component helped me to develop a level of rapport and trust with the parents (Collier & Collier, 1986), and encouraged the parents to share rich and meaningful

information during the interview. I opened each interview by sharing their child's photographs with the parents, which allowed them to engage with me from the beginning, collaboratively interpreting the photographs and exploring the meaning and the representation conveyed by the photographs. Using photographs at the beginning of the interview helped to break down the typical interview structure and added additional communicative elements to the interview to emulate the conversational aspect that allowed for the greatest engagement by the parent (Lapenta, 2011). This conversational approach to interviewing broke down the power differential between me, the researcher as an expert, and the parent (Kvale, 2008). The use of photo-elicitation in the interview supported this partnership approach, allowing for the development of a non-linear path that allowed for a non-directive nature of questioning (Lapenta, 2011). Photo-elicitation allowed the interviewer to maintain the use of an interview guide, while allowing the parent to prioritize interpretation, leading to new insights and knowledge (Lapenta, 2011). The researcher then takes the position of a learner and interested listener, putting the parent at ease during the interview process. This was also a humanizing position as both the families and I explored the issue together, in search of "understanding and voice" (Paris, 2011).

The polysemic (i.e., ambiguous) (Harper, 2002, p. 15) quality of the photographs created the possibility for the content to be interpreted differently by the parent compared to how the student described it earlier. The interpretation of the photographs were colored by each person's identity and knowledge of the situation, and allowed for active engagement with the parent on their values and the meanings of the activities selected by their child to be most meaningful to him/her (Lapenta, 2011). Thus the photographs had two relevant sets of interpretations: (a) the student's realistic reconstruction of the event; and (b) their parents' projective interpretation (Collier & Collier, 1986). The photographs represented the tangible and intangible aspects of

family and community life for the students with dis/ability (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). For details on interview guide refer to Appendix G.

Interview with School Leaders, Teachers, and Other Staff

The interview with school leaders, teachers, and counselor were differentiated based on the role they played in the planning and provision of transition support for the student with dis/ability. I used a semi-structured interview approach (Kvale, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2011) for the interviews, and I focused on eliciting transition goals for students with dis/abilities, the type of support that was provided, and what was realistically achieved by individuals in school or as a school team. The school leader interview also focused on the systemic approach to support for students with dis/abilities, particularly what resources were available, and what they viewed as the school's role in transition. For details on interview guide refer to Appendices H and I.

Participant Observation

I used participant observation to orientate myself to the context of the classroom and out-of-classroom activities for students in Zenith Secondary School. Observation also occasionally allowed me glimpses of informal interactions between the student participants and teachers and friends outside of the classroom. Participant observation in this study is defined as “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991), allowing the researcher to learn by observing the interactions and context experienced by the student that can be used to triangulate with the information obtained through the interviews. Being part of the school for a period of time supported and fostered genuine relationships and partnerships and enhanced the quality of the information shared with me during informal discussions and formal interviews. Participant observation also provided opportunities for me to have informal discussions with teachers, and I also consulted with families or students on request, thus resulting in participant observation that

was contextually stylized and improvised (Green, 2013). Opportunities to address teachers' and families' questions or needs were unexpected and required me to respond in ways that I could not predict and was occasionally unprepared for. This was consistent with the research aim, which was not to study people from a top-down perspective, but to study with them, in a side-by-side manner (Erikson, 2006); thus their actions influenced my actions.

I primarily used ethnographic field notes as my main technique of data reduction (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Sanjek, 2014). During classroom observations, I jotted down notes either during or after the observation that were converted into field notes and condensed through the use of a protocol (see Appendix J). Conducting participant observation in a natural and realistic way meant that it was not possible to capture second to second interactions and dialogue on paper all the time (Green, 2014; Sanjek, 2014). Engaging in legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to understand the participants' reality and to know when participation required flexibility affected how I took notes. Sometimes I would jot down notes only after the observation, particularly if the students were getting too curious about what I was writing or if I was distracting them. Not jotting notes all the time also opened up space for the students to approach me and talk to me about what I was doing in their classroom. Sharing the purpose of my research allowed them to voice how they felt the school was helping them meet their transition goals. In consolidating the information onto the protocol, I captured date, time, location, and activities as well as the interactions within the classroom setting. I focused on primarily three forms of interactions: (a) general teacher-classroom interactions that created a classroom culture; (b) specific teacher-student interactions that were related to preparing students for the future; and (c) interactions involving student(s) with dis/ability with their teacher and peers. I also included my personal reflections, questions, and evolving interpretations of

observed practices in my field notes, based on my conceptual framework and theoretical framing. When I was able to talk with the teachers in the classrooms I observed, I also reflected what they shared with me regarding their approach and attitudes towards inclusive practices for both lower-performing students as well as students with dis/ability (Emerson et al., 2011; Green, 2014; Sanjek, 2014). These early observations helped me to understand the school context better and as a tertiary data source, provided instances of classroom and school-based experiences that happened on a daily basis for students at Zenith. The observations also enabled me to develop additional questions for school leaders, to understand how they empowered and deployed their teachers in the school, and guided the framing of the interview questions in the interview guide.

Data Analysis

In this study, I collected various types of data; a summary is presented in the table below and represents the data used in the analysis process.

Study Participants	Interviews	Educational Journey Maps	Photographs	Observations	Field notes
Students	9	6	11		9
Families	3				6
School Leaders	3				3
Counselors/Teachers	12				12
School Context				7 days	7

Table 3. Summary of data collected

Prior to data analysis, I transcribed all of the interview recordings. Interviews conducted in Mandarin were translated concurrently as they were transcribed. Interview transcripts were transcribed in way that respects the individual’s cultural and linguistic background, retaining their original grammar structure, vocabulary, and emphasis, e.g., the use of the Singlish “lah,” as

these were important in my interpretation of the text (Kvale, 2008; Ochs, 1979). These emphases were removed in the reporting stage for the ease of reading, although grammatical structures were not edited. For data analysis, all the transcripts, photographs, and educational journey maps were downloaded into *Dedoose*, a web-based qualitative analysis software, where I coded the transcripts.

Data analysis and interpretation was designed as an iterative process within the data collection process (see Fig. 2). This allowed me to explore insights in a timely manner (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Gibbs, 2008) as initial data analysis and interpretation can inform future data collection. Initial data analysis allowed me to identify gaps and questions that I could go back and address in subsequent interviews (Koro-Ljungberg, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). For example, I noticed that although Julie and Thivya had talked extensively about their co-curricular activity in school, Tom did not. Therefore I was able to go back in a subsequent interview with Tom, to ask him specifically about his co-curricular activities, which turned out to be an important piece of information about his school experience. I also used the results from the initial coding process in interviews with participants as a form of member-checking, and to generate deeper understanding of participants' perspectives and interpretative frames of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, Carspecken, 1996). During teacher interviews, teachers sometimes mentioned specific observations they made about the student population. I was able to bring this observation to the school leaders to get their opinions on it and to get additional information on the policies that drove school processes. One such example was the idea that students with dis/abilities needed more support than was possible in other co-curricular activities, and thus needed to be placed in an environment that was more suitable for them. Conducting this level of analysis simultaneously with data collection allowed gaps in the data to be identified and

emerging ideas to be explored further as subsequent data collection was used to locate and gather the necessary data to either fill in gaps in participants' narratives, clarify an idea, or invite participation from additional participants that emerged as key in the inquiry (Koro-Ljungberg, 2012). More details on member-checking with participants are provided in the trustworthiness section below.

During the data collection phase, I used different types of summarization techniques and memos to support data analysis and interpretation. Field notes captured every research activity conducted in school and with the participants, and was integrated with observer comments for each activity (Sanjek, 2014). Different types of researcher memos were used to capture initial thoughts and questions; reflect on fieldwork technique and research strategies after each participant observation session and interview; and reflect identified themes for individual students as well as across students (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Emerson et al., 2011). The researcher memos helped me to conduct the analysis process as an ongoing and iterative process as I gathered data (Charmaz, 2014).

Analysis of Student Cases

I analyzed the collected data using both inductive and deductive techniques (Erikson, 2004; Gibbs, 2008; Saldaña, 2012). Data reduction and coding based on deductive (etic) techniques made use of the existing literature to make sense of what was observed, as well as “sensitizing concepts” (Charmaz, 2006) identified in the conceptual framework (Finlay, 2009). Sensitizing concepts were carried into the research setting to help me make sense of what was happening, and were also used to organize the data during data analysis. Inductive (emic) techniques and coding reflected how the participant made sense of the phenomena, and was inferred directly from the data collected (Harris, 1976). In this study, emic approaches were used

to surface unique features of the experience of each of the students, while etic approaches were used to help focus on particular features across all three students, and investigated the match of the data with existing theories and frameworks. The analysis across student experiences resulted in more generalizable conclusions (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2014), and arrived at the essence of the experience (Finlay, 2009; Wertz, 2005; van Manen, 1990). As a result, distinct differences and similarities across the students and with the existing literature surfaced through these two complementary processes (Finlay, 2009; Wertz, 2005).

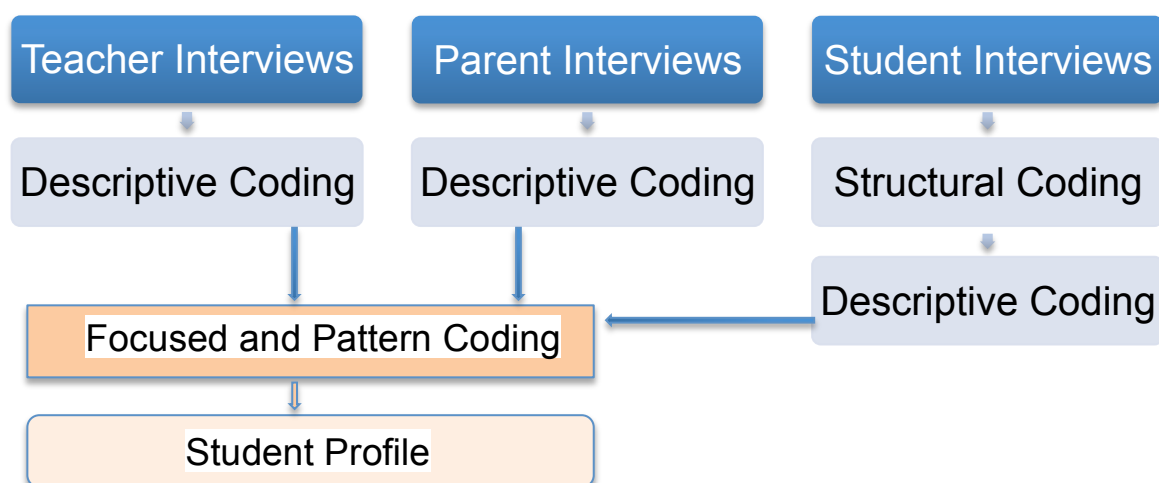


Figure 3: *Data analysis procedure for student case*

The data that related specifically to each focal student—individual interviews, parent interviews, and extracts of teacher interviews—were coded together within one coding tree. The analysis of the student interviews started with deductive structural coding (Saldaña, 2012) coding incident-to-incident (Charmaz, 2006), where an incident could be a specific lesson or episode in the student’s life. In this first round of initial coding, life events and incidents were coded. The

density of each of these codes indicated the importance of these events, and comparing across cases allowed similar patterns to surface and helped to identify gaps and/or discontinuities across experiences. This provided a holistic overview of the life events and interactions covered in the interviews.

Then there was a second round of initial coding, also using a combination of coding techniques. First, line-by-line coding was done inductively, where each line of the transcript was named and coded (Gibbs, 2008). The codes reflected the issues that made a difference or were pertinent to the participant (Charmaz, 2006). Second, the students' description and sense-making of their educational journey maps and their photographs, as captured in the interview transcripts, were coded deductively, with a specific focus on identifying tools that helped to develop specific skills or their identity as a emerging adult (Futch & Fine, 2014). Third, specific codes were used deductively to reflect intersectional oppressions, particularly around dis/ability and race, in order to reveal hidden societal tensions that might exist (Alim & Reyes, 2011). This combination of techniques helped to identify implicit concerns as well as explicit statements, and allowed me to look at nuances in the data and reduced the imposition of preconceived ideas (Charmaz, 2006). This generally produced low-level, primarily objective codes, with some interpretation (Carspecken, 1996). The low-level codes were then used to generate ideas from the data to produce high-level codes such as theoretical codes and themes during focused coding (Carspecken, 1996; Charmaz, 2006).

The parent and teacher interviews were first analyzed inductively using a combination of descriptive, process, and concept coding, marking what was interesting using a variety of codes; for example, setting and context, definition of situation, perspectives held by participants, participants' ways of thinking about people and objects, process, activity, event, strategy,

relationship and social structure, emotion, narrative, and method codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Pugh, 2013; Seidman, 2013). This was followed by deductive coding, based on themes and concepts from the literature review in Chapter Two.

All of the initial descriptive codes from parents, teachers, and students were all combined within each case. In the third round of coding, theoretical codes and themes were then developed through focused and pattern coding for each case, describing all the theoretical directions indicated by the data (Carspecken, 1996; Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2012). Focused coding was used to categorize all the data completely; it supported the development and finalization of axial codes, in order to sort, synthesize, and organize large amounts of data by reassembling them in new ways, gleaned new insights by linking categories into concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This was an iterative process as I first established the within-case codes, followed by revising and consolidating codes across the cases by taking the most salient codes and applying them across all the data captured within each case (Charmaz, 2006), before identifying and refining themes across the cases. The codes were constructed from the data but captured the researcher's view of what was significant and what we thought was happening. This involved identifying similar themes as well as different themes that were unique to each student's experience.

As part of the iterative process, a profile of each student was created as an analytic tool (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Seidman, 2013), based on the students' interview responses and triangulated with teacher and parent responses to develop a rich, accurate, and complete textual account of the phenomenon as experienced by the study participants (Moustakas, 1994). Profiles presented each participant in context, clarified their intentions, and conveyed a sense of process and time (Seidman, 2013). This was done separately for each of the three students and then compared to elicit similar patterns and processes, followed by a review of dissimilar events or

things that were left out to generate further insights (Sirin & Fine, 2007; Futch & Fine, 2014).

This additional layer of analysis served as a critical tool to interpret other secondary and tertiary data sources and allowed contradictions to be sought out (Ruglis, 2011).

Analysis of Interview Transcripts from School Leaders, Teachers and Other Staff

The interviews with teachers, counselors, and school leaders were analyzed using descriptive coding, followed by the development of axial codes and themes (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Saldaña, 2012). Line-by-line coding was used (Gibbs, 2008) to generate low-level codes that were then used to create conceptual themes and categories, to describe the “conditions, causes, and consequences of a process” (Charmaz, 2006). These themes were then used to identify corresponding and contradictory examples when integrated with the lived experiences of the students. In critical ethnography, the integration of these different cultural sites, and their coordination with the action of the different actors, is called system integration (Carspecken, 1996). The school embodied macro systems of cultural norms, values, and assumptions in the educational policies of the school. The themes related to the school as an institutional body were identified when individual students’ experience were distilled, by looking at key experiences and the density of practices and experiences (Finlay, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005), developed by integrating idiographic descriptions of action and anchoring them within the context of the study, the cultural community of the school (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). These themes pointed out similarities of the experience, while still recognizing the differences that depended on individual circumstance and experience. A comparative strategy, “tracing the source of small difference to external forces,” was also used as an integrative approach to causally connect the cases, and not just reducing them to instances of a general law (Burawoy, 1991).

Analysis of Field Notes

Playing the role of tertiary data sources, the field notes were used as a way to triangulate the findings from primary data sources (Emerson et al., 2011; Sanjek, 2014). They were not coded, but were used as a source to look for confirming and disconfirming evidence.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the data is critical to making convincing research statements at the end of the study. I used multiple strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011): (a) triangulation; (b) seeking disconfirming evidence; and (c) member checking.

One of the strategies I used to increase the trustworthiness of the data collected with its interpretations was to use triangulation. There were multiple triangulation protocols used in this study: (a) data source triangulation; (b) methodological triangulation; (c) theory triangulation; and (d) investigator triangulation (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Both data source triangulation and methodological triangulation were built into the research design, where each research question had both primary and secondary data sources, using different methodological techniques of inquiry and analysis (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The use of visual modes as well as verbal modes during the interview created opportunities for triangulation. Investigator triangulation was used to see if other researchers would support the original interpretation while theory triangulation represented different theoretical perspectives (Patton, 2002). Both theory and investigator triangulation were integrated into this study by using specialization meetings within the department and peer debriefings as a platform where data was presented and alternative interpretations were discussed with various faculty and doctoral peers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Both methods of triangulation allowed for multiple theoretical perspectives from

different individuals to be shared, checking against researcher bias (Merriam, 2009). Coding trees were shared during peer debriefings, while the student profile was shared during department meetings. The feedback received during these meetings helped to refine the code tree as well as the writing of the student profile. Regular meetings with my advisor were also critical during the refinement and selection of themes.

Another strategy I used was to look for disconfirming evidence for major assertions (Burawoy, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rapley, 2008). Negative cases were sought during data analysis and rival explanations were addressed in the analysis by either expanding code definitions or developing new codes. After deriving the themes in the findings, I also reviewed secondary and tertiary data sources to uncover possible disconfirming evidence to present and explain in the findings.

Member-checking processes were also used iteratively in the data collection process with participants to help triangulate my observations and interpretations (Maxwell, 2005). I conducted member-checking processes during interviews with school leaders, to member-check interpretations about the context, issues brought up by teachers, and themes from the initial data analysis. Salient points from earlier interviews with the students were summarized and shared with the students, thus also prompting the students to provide additional details. Initial ideas from the first round of student interview analyses were shared during the parent interview, and specific situations brought up by the student that described the family were also shared, in order to obtain alternative perspectives on the same situation or event. Therefore initial themes and findings were member-checked with the actual participant during interviews, as well as across study participants. I did not show participants the transcripts of the interviews (Creswell, 2013).

After data analysis, the initial write-ups were read by people external to the study, but were similar in their membership to the study participants. I chose three individuals from the education sector to read and comment on early drafts of the findings on the school and the individual student profiles. These individuals were selected because they were familiar with the Singapore education system, and their roles were similar to participants in the study, i.e., they were school leaders, teachers in secondary schools, teachers in the NT course, and/or parents of students with dis/abilities. They concurred with most of the findings, although one of them felt that the conclusions about professionals working with families were a little harsh as their voices were not represented in this study.

I arranged to share the study results with the participants, but due to their schedules, they wanted to meet only at the end of the calendar year. Therefore I plan to describe their reactions and possible disagreements with the current interpretations at a future time. Although I was unable to conduct a member check with the actual participants of this study, I believe that it does not affect the trustworthiness of the study. Conducting member checks also has its risks. I predict that member-checking with the school leaders and management will produce conflicting interpretations because each professional would have different agendas and perceptions of their behaviors and decision-making processes (Angen, 2000). In my interviews with the school leaders, I noted that they strove to be seen as doing the right thing and were extremely defensive about their chosen approach. Therefore it is also likely that they may remember the stories that they told differently, or may ask for them to be removed. Therefore the participants themselves may not be the best candidates to check the data and decide on accurate analysis and interpretation (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In contrast, families and students are more likely to be

positive in order to behave like good research participants. Although they may struggle with the abstractions of their experiences, they are likely to agree in order to be amicable.

Despite the possible difficulties with using member-checking processes to promote the validity of the study, I remain open to alternative and more expansive explanations of my data that might arise when I share my research findings with my participants. I believe that the trustworthiness of the study can be validated by having done the study well, based on efforts that are worthy of trust, and that I have written the study up convincingly. The aim is to seek validation, rather than validity (Angen, 2000; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013).

Conclusion

The methodology in this study was driven by the phenomenological approach, and used multiple techniques and modes to uncover the complexity of relationships and interactions that exist within the habitus of the school (Erickson, 2004; Gutiérrez & Stone, 2000). Using a socio-cultural-historical perspective, positioning the individual within the larger habitus of the school required the connection of the individual experiences to the larger cultural influences and dispositions in the school and in their family, where both the individual and their context are mutually constituting (Adams, 2012; Shweder, 1990). The socio-cultural-historical perspective also forced a critical look at the influences of cultural and institutional forces that play a role in creating school systems that influence students' experiences. The result was an in-depth qualitative study that yielded a large data set that required multiple iterations of analysis to refine and create connections between the multiple cases as well as the multiple settings and layers of interactions. In the following chapter, I present selected themes from the perspective of the different actors in this study.

Chapter 4: Students Transiting Through a Cultural Milieu that Defines their Choices

This study focused on the transition experiences of three students who were negotiating their passage to adulthood with their families, teachers, and significant others, such as friends and adult mentors. The study captured the thoughts and experiences of the three students, Julie, Thivya, and Tom, and the many different adults that influenced their lives. This phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013) encompassed both the students' lived experiences (van Manen, 1990) and their cultural milieus or contexts (Carspecken, 1996).

Their cultural milieus included the different cultures of the school and the family. The school represents the figured world of transition designed around rules and systems (Holland et al., 1998) that are socially, historically, and culturally influenced to achieve the goals of the dominant culture. The cultural milieu is juxtaposed with the family, and they operate side-by-side with the figured world, representing the intentional world of transition (Shweder, 1990), characterized by specific acts and activities that the family purposefully chose to achieve certain goals, mutually constituted with their cultural past and experience, and collectively described as their funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005). The confluence of the figured and intentional worlds is where the students, using the different tools acquired (or learned) within those worlds, seek adulthood, leave behind the roles of childhood, and discover independent lives for themselves.

During the analysis, the initial rounds of descriptive and structural coding resulted in mainly descriptive codes that described the students' experiences and the related parent and teacher activities. The conceptual framework was used during the subsequent cycle of coding, i.e., within the focused coding process (Charmaz, 2006) to provide a focus for the development of emergent categories, and during pattern coding (Saldaña, 2012) to help in the development of themes or metaphors to explain the experiences and relationships of the student participants.

The school leaders and teachers interviewed in this study were characters in the figured world of transition as they interpreted the demands of the education system, and created and implemented the school systems, rules, and processes that supported the learning for the students (e.g., Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011). Their interviews were descriptively coded and then themed (Kvale, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The themes and categories derived from the school leader interviews were compared with those derived from the teachers so that the patterns that emerged from the school could be viewed from multiple perspectives. This triangulation strategy allowed for non-exemplars to be revealed, and used to either strengthen or redefine existing themes or discard a theme.

The rest of this chapter focuses on sharing the findings of the study from three perspectives: the student, their families, and the school and how the socio-cultural context mediates their experiences regarding transition for students with dis/abilities graduating from secondary school (Wertsch, 1991). I start with the families' understandings of their responsibilities, followed by students' experiences, and conclude with the school's position as the institution, in the context of transition.

The three perspectives allowed me to focus on different arenas in which consequential interactions occur, constructing the context using multiple perspectives to deepen understanding of how students experienced their own transitions to adulthood. Weaving the three perspectives also made visible the variety of ways in which the socio-cultural context related to the actions of the different individuals in this study (Denzin, 2001), thus influencing the way that the students learn and develop (Collins, 2013; Shweder, 1990; Wertsch, 1991, 1993). Because students in context mutually constitute the meaning and purpose of transition, it had implications for future educators and parents who wanted to improve the lived experiences and outcomes for future

students. In Chapter Five, I explore the implications for schools and families so that students with dis/abilities are supported and given opportunities that offer them a genuine experience of being valued, accepted by the people around them, and viewed as assets and contributors towards the nation's prosperity and progress.

The Family and their Responsibilities

All parents are the same, they want their child to be independent, and whatever they want, we will give. (Tom Father, Parent Interview)

Tom's father summarized the goal of parenting that all three sets of parents reiterated at some point during my interviews with them. All three families wanted their children to be independent beings in the future. Parents also saw themselves providing for their children while their children learn to become independent. Tom's mother discerned that at this point in Tom's life, he had very little clarity about what he wanted to do and he may not know much about what it took to be independent yet. So her role continued to be one of a provider, a teacher, and a coach to understand life. "He has no choice now... but you still have to teach him.... He learns that it is not a simple thing to live" (Tom Mother, Parent Interview).

Julie's father identifies himself as a protector, "I will continue to protect her ... other than that, slowly we have to let go to make her to be very independent... Our simple hope is that she can be independent and happy." (Julie Father, Parent Interview). Here, he included another element, protection. Thivya's father also echoed this sentiment, "We must take care of her..." (Thivya Father, Parent Interview). Thivya's mother realized that her interaction and relationship with Thivya shifted as Thivya grew older and faced different challenges. "I think being a friend is more important now" (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). Julie's mother described how she balanced her role of protecting and teaching independence: "I really got to let go. Trust that she

can handle things on her own ... even though we are doing it for her in the background” (Julie Mother, Parent Interview).

These parents have identified particular roles and responsibilities in supporting their children in this period of transition to adulthood. Parent roles included protecting, teaching, and serving as sources for resources/tools. However, the ways in which different sets of parents viewed their responsibilities and acted out their roles were also co-constructed based on each family’s own funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005). These funds of knowledge included a range of cultural practices and resources: (a) the families’ personal life experiences; (b) religious beliefs; (c) socio-economic resources; and (d) support from their community and friends. In subsequent sections I describe the inter-relatedness between the socio-cultural-historical context and families’ roles and responsibilities to provide a cultural backdrop to the lived experiences of the students.

To Protect: Planning for the Long-Term

Being protective of their children is to be expected of parents when their children are diagnosed with dis/abilities or have developmental dis/abilities (Rueda et al., 2005). Keeping the child at home would ensure their safety and protection, but they would not learn or experience much about the outside world, or what independence would be like. Therefore, one of the parents’ main struggles would be to balance the need to protect their child with the ways they can devolve their responsibilities in order to build up their child’s knowledge of the world, and their children’s ability to be independent.

I met Julie’s parents before they gave consent for me to work with Julie. They insisted on speaking to me first, and they were very protective about my interactions with her. They determined the time and place for our interviews, and asked me to not use the words

“dis/abilities” or “special needs” when interviewing her (Fieldnotes_Julie_Parent Meeting). They were protective of her identity as a person, as well as her identity in this study.

Protecting their child from how she might be seen by others seemed to be particularly important for Julie’s parents. Initially, Julie’s father thought that vocational college was for those who had failed their exams, and had to reconcile that, in Julie’s case, she had to do sufficiently well to have the opportunity to go to vocational college. “Honestly it’s a very humbling experience ... I thought if she failed then (she would) go to vocational college. Not if she does well she may go (to) vocational college ... It’s that drastic” (Julie Father, Parent Interview). Their social circle consisted of highly educated people who reinforced his previous view: “Going to vocational college... people have this look, ‘So happy about going to vocational college? ... Sometimes I share, she’s in N (i.e., normal) level.... To them they know only O (i.e., ordinary) level...” (Julie Mother, Parent Interview). Considering vocational college as a place that Julie had to work hard to deserve her place there was a critical shift in the parents’ perception, in contrast to their peers’ impression that vocational college was a place for failures.

Julie’s father was also protective of her in the school context. Both parents spent a great deal of time and effort connecting with teachers in both Julie’s secondary school and vocational college in order to make sure that she was safe in school, particularly from bullies. Julie’s parents described themselves as well known by the school personnel and were viewed as troublemakers: “Whenever there are some complaints, some kids are especially naughty, you tell them, they will take immediate action. That is important for Julie” (Julie Father, Parent interview). “They will take action, because you will make noise” (Julie Mother, Parent Interview). Before Julie joined the vocational college, her parents had already spoken with the head of the department for Julie’s course, her teacher, and the career counselor at the college. Julie’s parents felt empowered to go

into the school or college and seek an audience with the person in charge. Julie's father described what happened when he went to the vocational college: "And I even talked to the career counselor, and got the career counselor to get the HOD (Head of Department) down" and at the secondary school, "If it's bullying, I'll work with Mr. E. If it's regarding subject matter like Mathematics, then it'll be the Math teacher ... I wanted to see the principal, but in the end I talked to the vice-principal" (Julie Father, Parent Interview).

Their own successful and advanced educational accomplishments made it easier for Julie's parents to communicate effectively with the school regarding their concerns. They also leveraged their knowledge of the organizational hierarchy in the school and college to talk to people in authority. The parents joined the school's parent support group in order to learn more about the school, as well as to make themselves known to school personnel. "We want to be involved and it's good exposure to us" (Julie Father, Parent Interview).

Julie's parents were also worried about her learning to be independent and doing things by herself, such as using public transport:

Just that we are worried that there are nasty people around. That's the part I'm more worried, I think travelling she's fine. But of course, in the morning, when trains get too crowded, I prefer to send her. Maybe I should stop sheltering her. (Julie Father, Parent Interview)

When Julie entered vocational college, her mother could not stop worrying, "Once she got into vocational college I was like worried the whole day. ... What kind of people will she meet? ... I don't know ... let her do on her own or make sure that she does not get hurt..." (Julie Mother, Parent Interview)

Julie's parents slowly opened up during the interview to talk more frankly about their concerns and what they had been doing for her. It seemed that the conversation allowed them to reflect on their participation. Slowly, they seemed to realize that they might be doing too much for her. They began to wonder if they might need to allow her more space to discover and experience the world for herself. In a recent incident where Julie lost her wallet at the vocational college, her parents did not scold her, but helped her to deal with the implications:

So Papa quickly bought all the uniform from the vocational college, everything. So for my case I just say you have to be careful. ... It's common, everyone can just lose their wallet. I don't want to make it like something that is so big, she feels so stressed about it.
(Julie Mother, Parent Interview)

When Julie's wallet went missing, her father worked with the college to review the tapes from the college's security cameras to see if they could find the culprit. The parents used prior knowledge about the college's security cameras to suggest to school personnel that the video footage from the cameras would help uncover what happened to Julie's lost wallet. Other parents who were less aware or less tech-savvy might not have realized that this was an option. Although Julie's parents felt that they needed to provide Julie with more opportunities to learn independence, they still worked behind the scenes to support positive outcomes. They realized that they needed to become less obviously involved, so that Julie could learn to be more self-determined. "Sometimes I think we got involved too much to the extent that we impede her development" (Julie Father, Parent Interview).

Thivya's mother knew that her role needed to change, and that she needed to be more of a friend and support, rather than an overprotective parent. This seemed to be a recent shift in her thinking. Her interview revealed that she had always been protective of Thivya, although she

demonstrated it differently than Julie's parents. When Thivya was not well treated in Primary School, her mother went to school and demanded changes, "Some teachers – I have to speak personally to them. I have to set things right with the teacher" (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). When Thivya started secondary school, her mother also worried about Thivya's vocational lessons in Secondary One. "I told him my daughter cannot do it, the bicycle was too big for her. So I was very worried. I told the teacher my daughter is not going to do all this, she's very ladylike compared to the others" (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). She also shared how she kept tabs on Thivya:

We had friends who were there (in Zenith Secondary) – parents. And once in a while we drop by. You know on Facebook, the children are very transparent with me, I can see through them. I know who are (their) friends are. I think this is most important. So I know her friends are okay ... We will ask them to come over, see who they are, that kind of thing. (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview)

The parents used their social connections including those with parents of other students to keep tabs on Thivya. Social media such as Facebook offered an alternative option for learning more about Thivya and her relationships with her friends. By inviting friends over to the family's house, Thivya's parents got to know the friends that Thivya interacted with in school. Thivya's father stated that they would do the same at the vocational college. Knowing Thivya's friends was a way of keeping her safe.

Another way that Thivya's parents protected her was by mapping her future plans. After primary school, Thivya's mother told Thivya that she would like her to go to Zenith. "I don't want her to stress, because I know her strengths, and it is not really in academic." (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). When I asked Thivya whether she chose to go to Zenith, she said,

“No, my mother. She said go to Zenith and I said OK” (Thivya Interview 1). Thivya’s mother also made the school change Thivya’s co-curricular activity. “For school, she was in gardening, I wrote in to opt her out. Because physically she has strain, then they put her in the library” (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). Most recently, she told Thivya not to go into the nursing course at the vocational college:

She wanted to become a nurse, but then I did not encourage, because I know she will fail the medical test. Because if she has sclerosis, they will not take her. ... So I didn’t allow her, because of her physical condition, I have to think about the long-run. (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview)

Thivya’s mother was very aware of the working conditions for nurses because she worked in a hospital setting. She was very mindful of Thivya’s physical condition. Thivya is now settled into a course of study that her mother thinks is appropriate for her, Info-Communication. Thivya’s mother has planned what Thivya could do in the future. “I told her it was a good thing ... just go for your lessons, learn the basics and then when you go do an advanced vocational course, you can choose childcare or child psychology” (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). Acknowledging that Thivya was becoming a young adult, Thivya’s mother recognized the need to move into the background, offering support and help when needed. Thivya’s parents used a different tactic to make sure that Thivya progressed towards her educational goals. They wanted their children to work towards a university degree, therefore they have, as a joke, told them, “You can never get married until you finish your degree” (Thivya mother, Parent Interview). Thivya’s parents were not as highly educated as Julie’s parents. Their aspirations for their children included a university degree, which was recognized in Singapore as a mark of achievement. Because Thivya’s parents had to work hard and to make their own way in life, they saw university degrees as a way to

jumpstart their children's careers and earning ability. "We just put an expectation, you do this you get this – you don't do that, you can do it the harder way" (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). They also proactively considered what would be helpful for their children, "If you look at the papers, they always ask for Mandarin speaking. So I think that's one concern. ... They will be able to get jobs, but I think learning Mandarin will be an advantage" (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). Thivya's parents focused on their children's preparation to enter prosperous and respectable professions. Thus, the parents constrained their children's activities and prioritized achieving their adult work milestones to ensure prosperity and independence over marriage and personal life choices. Although they spoke about marriage jokingly, they refused to entertain boyfriends or girlfriends at their house before their children get their degrees. They saw degrees as the pathway to managerial or supervisory jobs rather than subservient roles. The parents said to their children, "You finish your degree. If not, you'll be taking instruction. The Dad always says 'You want to be somewhere, you better be the person that leads'" (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview).

Tom's father recognized the importance of keeping communication channels open between child and parent. "The most important thing now is to communicate with him" (Tom Father, Parent Interview). Tom's father was protective of Tom and yet also wished that Tom could be more self-determined and advocate for himself. For example, when Tom wanted to find vacation work, his father was unwilling to let him work. "Then he wondered if he could work in McDonald's, but I didn't want that" (Tom Father, Parent Interview). Tom shared that it was because his father did not want him to work the night shift that was being offered because then he would be home too late. Tom's father reaction to this situation differed from his previous behaviors because he had always been supportive of Tom going out to experience life the same

way as everyone else would. “Initially he wasn’t selected by the school to work. But he was interested, so he just walked in and applied. I just let him try, don’t let him be disappointed” (Tom Father, Parent Interview). Tom’s father also wanted Tom to be responsible when an incident happened between Tom and his schoolmate:

Usually the teacher will come and look for me and tell me about the incident. But this is a problem. You (i.e., Tom) can’t always come looking for me. You have to settle things on your own ... Don’t fight or argue with this person or that person. You have to learn to tell the teacher. If you didn’t do anything wrong, what do you have to be fearful about? (Tom Father, Parent Interview).

Tom’s father was very aware that Tom needed to be more independent and not depend on his father to solve problems. Towards the end of the interview, Tom’s father reflected that he might have been overprotective:

Perhaps I was too protective, if I can block, then no one would be able to bully him. Then the other students wouldn’t dare to bully him. In secondary school, some students will come to tell me about who is bullying my son. And then I will go or the school personnel will go to catch the culprit. So I’ve been overly protective. (Tom Father, Parent Interview)

Tom’s father had quit his job to spend time accompanying Tom in school throughout his schooling years, and had therefore always been around when Tom needed help. Tom’s mother recognized that as a problem, although in other areas: “Because when he was young, we figured that using knives was dangerous, so we didn’t let him use a knife. So now that he is older, he doesn’t know how to do anything” (Tom Mother, Parent Interview). Tom’s mother recognized that as things change over time, Tom should be learning many new things. “So he’s learning slowly, but while he is learning, he feels very stressed by it. Especially, when things are totally

different from what he is used to” (Tom Mother, Parent Interview). She was aware of the level of stress that it caused him, which was one of the reasons why she choose to allow Tom to move on to vocational college rather than to a special school—an entirely new environment and geographically further away, making it more difficult for his parents to get there quickly, should he need help. His mother’s sense that he would need help at the vocational college within the first week was accurate:

On the first day at the vocational college, they said let him go on his own. But he wasn’t familiar (with where to go in the college). Luckily I took him, even I didn’t know where to go. So the first day I took him, on the second day I let him go on his own. (Tom Mother, Parent Interview)

His father was also called into action. “At the vocational college, they called to say they cannot find him, I rushed down to the vocational college to look for him” (Tom Father, Parent Interview). His father went to the vocational college, which was near his workplace, and located Tom, who did not want go for his swimming lesson. Tom’s father met Tom’s swimming teacher, who he recognized as one of his friends from his time in the National Service, and asked the teacher to take care of his son. Tom’s father also met Tom’s ex-primary schoolmate, who offered to let him know if Tom was facing any issues in school. Although Tom’s father was no longer with him in the vocational college, as he was in the Primary and Secondary School, he still managed to find people in the college who could help by being his “eyes,” and that meant keeping Tom safe. Starting at the vocational college was a big step for Tom, as he started to be more independent and self-reliant.

Protecting their children was a big responsibility for the parents, and involved making sure that their children made the right educational and career decisions, keeping track of their

children's friends, and structuring some sort of a support network. Where necessary or convenient, one of the parents stopped working in order to support their child with dis/ability. Julie's mother was a stay-at-home mother until Julie was in Secondary School. For over seven years, Tom's father did not work outside the home, accompanying Tom to Kindergarten and beyond, to make sure that he was included in the school. Sometimes parents feared that the school would reject their child, either due to academic or behavioral difficulties. Historically, this had been the case, and schools still encouraged students to leave school if they could more suitably (from the school's perspective) be placed in a special education school. The Compulsory Education Act in Singapore came into effect in 2003; four years before the students in this study joined the Education System in Primary 1. Since Tom was not officially diagnosed with any intellectual dis/ability, the school had to continue to keep him enrolled.

Without a doubt, these parents did whatever they could to ensure that their child was able to achieve as much as possible. Ultimately the parents made their choices based on what they thought were best for their children. Each family decided on different strategies and focused on slightly different areas of concern. These choices were driven primarily by what the families experienced in their lives, their perceptions regarding what was important for their children to achieve, and their own position in society. Tom's father focused on his attitude and abilities to work independently so that he persevered in difficult work situations. Thivya's parents focused on the need to obtain paper qualifications. Julie's father focused on possible areas of work that fit Julie's interest and abilities.

These youths were fortunate to have supportive families that spent time and effort to meet their needs. Their parents used a variety of methods to motivate them in their academic studies, and to support their learning of vocations and choice of suitable careers. Julie's family was better

educated and of higher socio-economic status; therefore, they had to adjust their expectations the most, but were able to tap into their own academic knowledge to coach Julie, and provided her with additional experiences outside of school. When hiring tutors for Julie, her parents searched for someone who had more experience working with students with dis/abilities and knew enough of the education system and supports available to help guide both Julie and her parents. Tom and Thivya's families were able to get additional tutoring for their children too, but their tutors were generalists targeted at helping the students with their homework rather than teaching them specific skills. Tom and Thivya's families had to rely on their own knowledge of the education system to guide their children's decisions. The parents' own experiences were limited or from a different time and they had to seek help from others such as their personal friends or directly from the schools. Sometimes the parents' concern and guidance limited their children's opportunities to try something different, develop new skills and/or deepen their personal interests. Thivya's experience was the most obvious, where her mother disagreed and blocked her from pursuing her interest in nursing. Tom's parents were concerned about his lack of direction, but were not able to provide opportunities to help him develop his interests. They also did not support his desire to be a monk. Julie's father, while supportive, guided her towards what he thought was better for her, perhaps to widen her perspectives, rather than to allowing her to focus on what she had already identified as an area of interest. These observations are developed further in the next section in which I explore the families' repertoire of practice and its impact on how they influence and teach their children about life.

To Teach about Life: Using Families' Repertoire of Practice

In order to support the holistic development of their children, parents not only focused on academic results and qualifications but were also concerned about their children's futures and

abilities to be independent and responsible adults. This included their children's attitudes, behaviors, knowledge of the world, abilities to look after themselves independently, and be self-sufficient. Parents identified their children's needs and found ways to support, teach, and provide relevant resources to help them develop and mature. This section covers the different resources that families tapped on to help them, and how the resources contribute to the youth's experiences in learning to be an adult.

Families sharing their funds of knowledge. Children learn from their parents through common family activities and interactions (González et al., 2005), including practices and knowledge learned over generations that helped households and individuals function successfully. One specific fund of knowledge strongly emphasized by parents and the students in this study was religion. In Singapore, religious harmony was just as important as racial harmony. The Singapore Prime Minister described Singapore as “a rare and precious example of a multi-racial, multi-lingual, and multi-religious society where people live harmoniously together” (Lee, 2017). This statement revealed the important role that religion and race played in society, as well in Singaporean families. This was especially true for Tom and Thivya, whose parents both held strong religious beliefs, i.e., Tom's parents were Buddhists and Thivya's parents were Christians. Tom and Thivya were taught and participated in family religious practices from a young age.

Julie and her mother and sister were Christians while her father tended towards atheism. Their family only started joining the church community when the two sisters were of school-going age. Therefore the sharing of religious beliefs and practices were less of an emphasis in Julie's family. However, she was active in the church community and her mother supported her in the growth of her faith:

Even in church she's doing ushering, it's another skill. She has to talk to people. She might also need to say prayers in front of her other friends. I'm learning too. So I find that she's learning too ... maybe next year we need her to join church camp, in some way. (Julie Mother, Parent Interview)

These church activities not only built up Julie's religious faith, but her mother also saw it as a way for Julie to build her confidence to talk to others and to improve her social skills. Julie's mother saw herself as a learner in the faith, and together with Julie, they both learned to become more confident in their faith. Julie's mother would also like Julie to join the larger church community at the church camp. Julie's faith was an important part of her life and her best friend was also from church. Julie would like to be more mature in her faith, and be baptized in the near future. "This is important is because ... I'm Christian so I have to get baptized" (Julie Interview 2).

In contrast to Julie, Thivya's parents were both dedicated Christians and their family life revolved around themselves and the church. "Just church and us. That's all – and school" (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). Therefore the ways that Thivya's parents taught and supported their children were based on Christian teachings and the Bible. Thivya's family was Indian Christian. Although most Indians were typically of the Hindu or Muslim faith, Thivya's grandmother converted to Christianity from Hinduism after she was released from demon possession, and the whole family came to the Christian faith (Personal Conversation, Thivya's Grandmother). In their parenting, Thivya's parents used their faith as a teaching tool, as well as a way to bind the family together.

Father: I want her to be very good and follow the Bible. So the Bible say to love. So ... to love. Teach all the things Jesus do, to love each other.

...

Mother: So anything they do, do this, this is what the Bible says, and then it's between them and God. I think building a relationship between them and God is quite important. ...So our base foundation is that we serve the Lord together. (Thivya Parents, Parent Interview)

In their flat, they had a poster with a Bible verse in Tamil (Fieldnotes_Thivya_Parent Meeting). This acted as a constant reminder to the family regarding the importance of their faith. As the family believed that the church was also family, the interactions with people in church became part of the family's interactions and teaching.

In church they have a youth lesson, where sometimes it's a parent who tell the children and sometimes the leaders also come in to talk. It's like we tell them to clean up their room "clean up, clean up, clean up,". Then we take picture and send to their leader, they quickly clean up, that kind of thing. I think it's also the youth group that they go to get the preaching. (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview)

Thivya observed church members doing volunteer work in the community; just like her family, the church also modeled adult responsibilities for Thivya. "She also see church members do the same thing ... that's the idea of how a person should be" (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview).

The church as a community was closely intertwined with Thivya's family life; besides weekly services, Thivya also attended "cell group with the whole family" (Thivya Interview 1). Her grandmother's testimony about her own transformation inspired Thivya and she had her own testimony about her faith when she had her own difficulties. "First doctor said that I cannot grow taller. Then my mother went to pray, and then I grow taller" (Thivya Interview 2). Therefore one

thing she learned from the family and from her own experience was to depend on her faith when she was faced with an obstacle.

Tom had also learned ways of coping through religious and cultural practices in the home: My family worships Buddha. So I ask him to help me. Did you see the altar at my house? That is Goddess of Mercy. I feel very blessed when I recite her mantra. Then she can help me with the things that I need. Like for my schoolwork. So after I recite her mantra, I have a sense that I'm more powerful. (Tom Interview 2)

Just like in Thivya's house, Tom's house had a constant reminder of his family's religious beliefs. From a young age, his father would take him to the temple or to religious classes, "Previously I learned the 'Guidelines for being a good person', I also took him to learn" (Tom Father, Parent Interview). Tom: "When I was 3. My dad took me" (Tom Interview 2). Although Tom stopped attending these classes, he continued to visit the temple regularly. He addressed one of the monks at the temple he frequents as his "godfather," and sought advice from him regularly. "I go and learn about Dharma. I would go everyday. When I was in school, I would go 3 times a week. He (i.e., Tom's godfather) has a Buddha there – and I want to ask for peace and health" (Tom Interview 2). Tom internalized the practices and beliefs that his parents had taught him from a young age, and developed his own faith and religious activity.

As reflected by the families in this study, religion did not just teach faith, but often taught appropriate and acceptable behavior. For example Thivya's family used the Christian Bible and Tom's family had Buddhist scriptures and writings, such as the "Guidelines for being a good person" to guide their parenting. Religious faith also created communities of people that supported the families and the student. These adults and peers not only modeled behaviors in the

place of worship, but also supported the parents in teaching skills that would be helpful for the students as they learned how to be an adult.

Parents identified and purposefully taught children skills such as housework, financial matters, and other skills that were critical for living independently. While parents continued to be the main care providers for their children at this stage of their lives, during the interviews, they shared that they were aware that that the children themselves would need to learn these skills, which would require explicit teaching and scaffolding from the parents.

Tom, for example, had difficulties with money.

Mother: He has no concept of money. But now he is slowly getting it. Yesterday he asked me about getting money from an ATM. I told him that not everybody can just get money from the ATM. You need to have money in your account first.

Father: When he sees me buy things I use a card.

Mother: So he must be thinking where is the money. So we have to explain it to him.

(Tom Parents, Parent Interview)

Although Tom's father took Tom out to observe what he did, some things required direct teaching, which he did not always provide. Tom's readiness to learn these skills was also a factor. His father said, "His response is, that it (i.e., learning skills for independent living) is troublesome" (Tom Father, Parent Interview). The previous excerpt related an incident before he was at the vocational college, but he was now more ready to learn these skills, although his parents also admitted that they needed to do a better job teaching him.

Julie was starting to help with more housework at home. She washed the dishes and helped her mother fold the clothes. Her mother also shared that Julie was taking on more initiative to be responsible. "Like she can get lunch and, she will remind us we have to buy this,

we have to pay this, things like that” (Julie Mother, Parent Interview). Julie was also fairly proud that she had a role to play in the home: “So I’m the technician in the house...” (Julie Interview 2). She shared during the interview about her younger cousin, who allowed her to carry him, “Shows that he respects me” (Julie Interview 2). Julie’s mother shared, “I can tell that she thought it was important that she was taking care of him, and protecting him, from the sound of the firecracker... Because usually we always take care of him, so she wants to do something like that. ... She likes to be able to contribute as well” (Julie Mother, Parent Interview). It was important for Julie to be seen as respected and responsible. She learned by observing what the other adults did, and then repeated it. Her parents may not have directly told her what she should be learning or what she should do, but her interactions with others outside of her immediate family, taught her to internalize and repeat what she saw other adults do. Julie’s parents did not realize how important these experiences were to Julie until I shared the photograph of her carrying her cousin. “We know that she enjoy, but didn’t know that she enjoyed so much actually” (Julie Mother, Parent Interview). By talking about her photos, her parents not only recognized what was important to Julie, but also the extended family’s contribution to her well being.

The families used what they knew to help their children learn independence. In this way, the students learned the families’ values, and also learned the associated knowledge and skills that led to a well-functioning life. These areas of knowledge seemed to be similar for the students, but specific application will be different because of the families’ different cultures. Each parent’s personal experience growing up influenced and drove how they related to their children and what advice they shared.

Families using their personal experiences. The parents' personal histories were evident when they shared their experience and what they have learned with their children. Tom's father, for example, often shared advice based on his and his siblings' experiences:

Don't be like me and your uncle, we didn't get to study much. We had come out and help with the family, so that others could go to school. Your grandmother had to bring up many children, we couldn't all depend on her. (Tom Father, Parent Interview)

Because Tom's father did not have much education, he often gave Tom advice based on his own experience. Tom's father tried to motivate Tom the same way that he himself feels motivated. "Although I only studied till primary 6, but now I study everything. ... My thinking is that if I'm interested in something I will focus my energies on doing it" (Tom Father, Parent Interview). He used himself as a role model for his son, but he did not consider that his son's needs might be very different from his own. He was not able to study beyond Primary School and came out to work to as an apprentice. "Last time, when I was an apprentice, I was also scolded, you need to treasure" (Tom Father, Parent Interview). He suffered but persevered, depended on his own hard work, and turned the negative experiences into something positive.

One of Tom's career options was to follow in his father's footsteps. "My dad has always liked to cook chicken rice. When he had a shop to sell chicken rice. I would like to learn how to cook chicken rice, like him" (Tom Interview 2). His father was agreeable, and tried to school Tom in the different skills that he would need. "He says he wants to take over my stall. So I tell him, if he wants to do that, then he needs to learn the skills, firstly, learn to buy vegetables, know the pricing..." (Tom Father, Parent Interview). Instead of being motivated, Tom felt intimidated by what he did not know, "He said – I need to learn food preparation first. Then if I do it, I'll be slow. Before I go and help, I'll have to ask myself if I can cook. If I can't cook, then how can I

help?” (Tom Interview 1). Tom’s lack of confidence and high levels of anxiety made it difficult for him to deal with negative situations. Therefore, while he regarded his father as a role model, he found it difficult to do things the way his father wanted him to. Tom’s father used his own experiences as the main source of knowledge in his interactions with Tom, but he did not always match it to meet Tom’s needs.

Tom’s mother taught him how to deal with specific issues, and gave him advice on how to solve problems. “Tomorrow he has a presentation. He is lazy – well, not really. He doesn’t think it is necessary to practice” (Tom Mother, Parent Interview). Her experience taught her that one had to practice in order to improve. When I observed her interaction with Tom, she mentioned “practice” as a solution to most of his academic problems. When Tom’s parents commented about Tom’s work experience, Tom’s mother focused her attention on the areas where Tom had difficulties while his father reflected on the positive side of the experience, and compared it to how things could be worse. The differences in which they addressed Tom’s challenges are likely due to their different work experiences. Tom’s mother had a full-time job, and she worked with computers. She was also more task-focused. Tom’s father, because he had less formal education and ran his own food stall, addressed Tom’s challenges by using his life experiences to illustrate and teach Tom. Although their methods were different, the main goals of both parents were the same. “Our main goals are really for him to be able to live independently and look after himself” (Tom Mother, Parent Interview).

Thivya’s mother had a permanent salaried job as an administrative assistant, while her father’s work was contract based. The positions they held meant that they had to do their work according to their superiors’ instructions, which influenced how they taught their children about the importance of education, “Finish your degree ... if not, you’ll be taking instruction. So the

Dad always says: You want to be somewhere, you better be the person that leads” (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). Therefore their own work experience led to their goals for their own children, to strive for a degree before going out into the workplace. Thivya’s interest in becoming a nurse was not a random one, but was inspired by her mother. “My mother ... because she is working at a hospital. I would like to also work in the hospital, as a doctor or nurse” (Thivya Interview 3). Unexpectedly, the very person she wanted to emulate was also the person who did not encourage her to pursue her dream, but encouraged her to reconsider her options. “And she love children ... I was a childcare teacher last time for 5-6 years. So I say why don’t you become a childcare teacher, at least it’s better...because patients are very demanding in nursing. I don’t mind them being a nurse – seriously, but her physical condition, she cannot” (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). Thivya’s mother used her own knowledge of her daughter and personal experience as a childcare teacher to suggest alternative career pathways. In this way, she used herself as a role model for her daughter. However, because she was limited by her own experiences, she was only able to suggest careers that she understood or knew about when advising Thivya on career choices. Thus Thivya’s mother’s suggestions were limited by her own experiences and knowledge.

The students’ interactions with their families were important spaces where they learned different things: ways of coping, life skills, work skills, and confidence in themselves to become contributing adults in the future. Parents were not always aware of the ways they or the family contributed to their child’s development. When a parent was identified as the children’s role model, they became someone that the child would like to emulate, but they also became a source of motivation. However, as role models, these parents were limited by their own experiences to help their children. They grew up in a totally different cultural background where life was much

“harder” (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview), their families were less well off, children were less educated and they could not depend on others and had to depend on themselves for survival. The parents were hopeful that their children would do better and have more opportunities, but may not have the information to guide them. In order to help their children reach these goals, parents would use the resources available to them to support their children. This included their own circle of friends and family, as well as outside help from other professionals and from their children’s school. When they recognized their own limitations, they sought experiences for their children, outside of the home and the school to support their children’s development.

To Source for Resources and Tools

Typically, parents do not initially have any experience bringing up children with dis/abilities. These parents were now faced with decisions for their children that they did not have to make for themselves. Thus the parents in this study accepted that one of their responsibilities was to seek help external to the family and to seek advice from other people who worked with their children. One of the things parents did was to curate the out-of-school experiences that allowed their children to extend their knowledge of the world. In addition, parents sought support and information as they made decisions about their children. In most cases, the parent’s first point of contact regarding their children’s dis/abilities was with the medical or allied health professions. For learning difficulties, parents would also have seen a psychologist. Later on, when the children reached school-going age, the parents learned how to work with schools.

Curating out-of-school experiences. Using his own experiences as a guide, Tom’s father showed and taught Tom what life was about. “To bring him to see things ... They are things that I did when I was young, and it is still present, I can teach you about things, how to

wear your clothes properly, how to take care of oneself ... And I don't like to force people. If you listen and can learn, then that's good. One day, when you encounter it, then you will realize that it is all part and parcel of life" (Tom Father, Parent Interview). Tom talked about his experiences observing the real world. Tom used observations of retail outlets in malls to decide if retail was a suitable job for him. During the interview, Tom showed me pictures of things that interested him. For example, he was fascinated by the decorations in different shopping centers, and had ideas on how to improve them. His parents seemed surprised when I shared this with them; they did not make the connection between the things he was seeing outside, and the fact that he enjoyed decorating their home during festive occasions. Other ways that Tom's father curated Tom's experiences was to encourage him to do what everyone else does, which helped Tom try out experiences that his peers were also experiencing. One good example was his efforts to find vacation work.

When Tom did not secure a vacation job through the school in Secondary Two, his father encouraged him go for walk-in interviews on his own. "So I thought instead of having you (i.e., Tom) be disappointed, we can just walk-in and apply. Because everyone else is working, so you should also go and work". Tom's father addressed the problem by normalizing the situation, and supporting his son in doing what everyone else did. Tom's father had to fend for himself from a young age, learning early to depend on himself, and to create his own solutions. "I don't get much resources from school. I just depend on my own experience, whatever I've learned from my life, I will teach him..." (Tom Father, Parent Interview). When Tom did not get a vacation job in Secondary 4, they sought out vacation jobs independently from the school:

The teachers did not allocate him a place to work. So we told him to try NTUC (supermarket), and we filled in the form. ... Then he wondered if he could work in

McDonald's, but I didn't want. Then I said, why not at subway, and he didn't want. ... I found him a place to work at the bookshop. I talked to the boss at the bookshop, I said, you know my son, can he come and help at the bookshop and he said okay. (Tom's Father, Parent Interview)

Tom's father encouraged him to find work in different locations, however Tom was not successful in finding a permanent place to work that satisfied his father. Although the bookshop owner agreed to have Tom help him without pay, school personnel did not allow this arrangement, because the bookshop was located at a school. Tom's father preferred for Tom to work regular hours, not night shifts, which is one reason Tom was not allowed to work at McDonald's. Although Tom's father would like Tom to have experiences that will help him find jobs in future, he was also protective of Tom, and controlled the vacation jobs that Tom could take up. Tom's father was limited by his own work schedule, working at his food stall in the daytime, and spending the rest of his time preparing food for the next day. He would bring Tom around with him while he prepared, and showed Tom what he was doing, using real places to teach him or advise him on certain life skills. Otherwise, Tom would typically stay at home by himself or visit the temple. Tom's father used his own connections to find Tom something to do during the vacation, but the school did not support that plan, making it difficult for him to utilize the resources that he did have to help Tom.

In addition to work opportunities, Tom's parents were also interested in finding volunteering opportunities. "To show him that he is very fortunate. Usually you wouldn't realize that there are others who are less fortunate than you. You can't experience it" (Tom's Mother, Parent Interview). "I want him to do some volunteer work, then he can see how others' lives are like, as compared to his own. ... When you volunteer, and use a skill, then you might become

interested in it” (Tom Father, Parent Interview). Tom’s parents thought that volunteering would show Tom that there were others who had greater needs than him, and he would be motivated to overcome his own difficulties. They also felt that volunteering would allow him to use skills he could develop over time. His parents were concerned about developing his knowledge about the world and his own interests. They also wanted to show him what life was all about, and not to focus on the obstacles faced in life. During the interview, they shared that they did not know where to find these opportunities, and also had limited time to seek them out. After the interview, I was able to direct them to websites so that they could start their search.

Julie’s parents also used volunteering as a tool to find experiences that would be beneficial for Julie. They considered the skills she would learn in a new setting compared with the benefits of continuing an existing experience. In this excerpt, her mother talks about the benefits of Julie’s continued volunteer work at the public library:

Should let her continue there. It will give her something to do in the weekend, it’s just 3-4 hours. Actually she has the opportunity to meet other people there too ... and the environment is quite safe. (Julie Mother, Parent Interview)

Julie’s parents liked the library because it was a safe environment, and it allowed her to meet and socialize with others. Her parents were concerned about her social skills, so volunteering at the library met an important goal that the curated experiences addressed. The choice of volunteering in the library was likely related to Julie’s co-curricular activity (CCA) in school, as well as her father’s interest in library work. Julie’s parents were also keen to allow her to explore as many things as possible in typical settings. The excerpt below shows why they were not keen to let her volunteer at the horse stables after she completed her work attachment there:

We would, (Mother interrupts: She made a few friends.) ... some of those friends are also special needs. Of course she will be very comfortable going back there. ...we wanted her to experience other different experiences, so we thought maybe sending her back to the same place was not a good idea. (Julie Father, Parent Interview).

The high level of thoughtfulness that Julie's parents displayed in planning her experiences helped them align the experiences with her interests as well as influence Julie in subtle directions, without forcing her to consider their suggestions. Her parents' ability to find these experiences were contingent on having the time to source for places, and knowing where to find them. The parents needed to have time to take her to the different places, typically on weekends when they were not working and when she was not in school.

Thivya's mother felt it was important for Thivya to develop skills over seeking experiences:

We wanted her to learn something else. For Thivya she wanted to learn lots of things. I still prefer the thing where she don't have to strain herself. So I gave her vocal lessons, she finish till intermediate... She can sing very well, she has a good voice, but she's very shy. So what she's in, she's interested since very young. Even before primary school I already put her there. Everything is given to them, it's just whether they want to use it (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview)

Thivya's mother wanted her children to learn a different set of skills from the ones learned in school. The rest of Thivya's siblings learned a musical instrument and played them in church. Thivya's mother thought that singing suited Thivya and provided her with lessons. She did not know how it would benefit Thivya, and allowed Thivya decide how she would like to use her talent. It might have been difficult for Thivya's parents to send her for additional music lessons

outside of school. They had to stop the intervention lessons for dyslexia after a few years due to the cost of lessons. It was interesting that Thivya's parents emphasized and valued a non-academic skill that was not directly beneficial to her in school or at the workplace. Thivya's mother's emphasis on learning a skill could be related to the fact that she herself had a non-academic skill that she used in her spare time, which allowed her to share the outcome with others, i.e., Thivya's mother herself baked and decorated cakes for others from home.

Curating the experiences of their children was one of the roles that parents played. The examples above illustrated experiences that were aimed at building awareness of a particular vocation, and developing important skills and knowledge about life. Even while curating experiences, the parents often based their decisions on their own experiences or interests. Therefore the parent's own life experiences and histories continued to play a role in their children's lives.

Working with professionals. Parents worked with medical or educational professionals for diagnostic assessments to ascertain their child's needs. Parents also sought advice and suggestions on how to better support their children. All three sets of parents mentioned a distinct experience with a professional, although they were from different times of the child's life.

Julie's mother described her experience with professionals when Julie was first suspected to have developmental issues:

For us we don't know. Then we just go to the Child Development Unit. Then they say let's try physio, try OT (occupational therapy), then go for all the assessments. I look at it, so poor thing, everything cannot, IQ... they ask — are you sure, what happened to you during your pregnancy, was she premature, what did I eat? I keep asking is there anything

I did that caused it. You feel the guilt, did I do something wrong. Is it the genes? She did some test before, but the support is not very good. (Julie Mother, Parent Interview)

Instead of being supportive, the professionals asked questions that made Julie's parents feel guilty about Julie's dis/ability. The professionals provided Julie with the interventions they had available, i.e., all types of therapy, and they also conducted assessments, but they were unable to provide a definitive diagnosis. Julie's father did not feel like he received any guidance or help from them. "Even like today, going to the Child Development Unit to get the letter, I still haven't got my question answered: 'What actually happened and what can I do?'" (Julie Father, Parent Interview). Seeing the professionals gave them access to documentation, "the letter" that allowed them to apply and receive accommodations for examinations, and for exemption from Chinese examinations for Julie, but they still felt poorly supported in terms what they could do as parents. The professionals did what they thought was best for the child, but did not consider the needs of the parents. They did not provide information that the parents felt were relevant and helpful for them. Julie's father was not satisfied with the way the professionals worked. "It's like you request, then we grant you. But ... if there is advice that they can give you, then that's even better" (Julie Father, Parent Interview).

Thivya's parents had a slightly different issue. They were given advice they did not find useful:

When she was in Primary 1, she went to this psychologist at the Dyslexia Association, and the school gave her the option, that she don't have to take Tamil. She can go and sit for the classes, but she don't have to do the exam because it's too much for her, which I didn't agree. Before I say that she cannot cope, I want her to try first. The psychologist also came and spoke to me, she said, "Don't have to stress the child if MOE (Ministry of

Education) is giving this”. I said “No, anything that she cannot do, I want her to try. If she really cannot, then I know she cannot. Without trying I’m not going to help her.... But I remember when she went for the Tamil exam, the marks she got for it in her first exam, she got 80 over marks, where the normal children who do not have dyslexia had lower marks than her. So I said, “go for it.” Until she finished Sec 4, she has not repeated, she passed. Thank God for that. (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview)

Although students with dyslexia could apply for exemption from their Mother Tongue Exams, it was not always necessary. Thivya’s mother tongue was Tamil, the family speaks it at home and with the extended family. The language was an important part of a family culture and thus not learning it in school impacted interaction within the family, as well as inhibited the transmission of cultural beliefs and practices through language. Thivya’s mother believed that Thivya should try the subject first, and if she had difficulties, then she would consider dropping the subject. This would be an expected course of action for a parent who saw their role as protecting their child from failure and stress. In this case, Thivya’s mother felt that she did the right thing and was vindicated, because Thivya passed her Tamil every year, from primary through secondary school.

Because Thivya had been diagnosed with dyslexia the professionals who diagnosed Thivya and described her difficulties made a simple decision to recommend support that was available, without considering Thivya’s actual situation and context. They did not, prior to making their recommendations, ascertain her strengths or her family’s attitude towards her learning. As the professionals did not seek the parents’ views before making the suggestion, the recommended action went against what the parents thought would be helpful for their daughter. Both the school and the professionals recommended the same accommodation, and it required a

very strong objection from Thivya's mother for her views to be acknowledged. The school wanted to reduce the stress for the child, but in reality, the school also preferred to have one less student that may require more effort from the school staff to help her do well. In a meritocratic system like Singapore, dropping a subject in favor of having more time to study and possibly improve in the other subjects was an acceptable argument for many students with dis/abilities who already faced difficulties with learning literacy and numeracy skills in English. The high-stakes Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) that determined which academic course and which secondary school each student would be eligible to enter, made it paramount for schools to ensure that their students focused on doing the best they can for the core subjects of English, Math, and Science. Parents who wanted their children to do well overly focused on the children's academic results and pushed them to work harder. In this stressful educational environment, it would be easy for parents to go along with the school's suggestions. Parents with a clear sense of what they wanted for their children and what their children were capable of had to combat the overwhelming need to be "kiasu" (i.e., a grasping, selfish attitude due to the fear of losing out), a driving force of many parents in Singapore today.

Tom was on long-term follow-up with his doctor. He had multiple physical conditions that affected his learning. His parents sought help to decide Tom's future educational placement towards the end of his secondary school career.

So before we sent him to the vocational college, we went to the hospital for assessment, and they were going to refer him to another special school for those with lower IQ. ...

We did think that he might learn more things there but the journey will be very long. So now he's getting used to going to school on his own, but if anything happens over there, I would not be able to travel so far. At least at the vocational college, he would be nearer,

and as parents, we would be able to help. Over there, school starts at 9 am, and it would take him at least 2 hours to get there. He would be very stressed by the time he came home. And it is another new environment; he has never been there. (Tom Mother, Parent Interview)

The professionals based their recommendations for Tom to go to a special school with vocational training instead of a mainstream vocational college, primarily due to his low IQ scores and his low adaptive skills. They overlooked the fact that Tom spent four years preparing for entry into vocational college, and that he was eligible for a course there, even if it was the three-year instead of the two-year course. They also did not listen to the parent's concerns for Tom at this point in his journey, and seemed to only provide a professional opinion, without helping parents consider the options, or what would be best within the family's own constraints. The professional did not have a full understanding of Tom's current context and the family's situation. Tom's mother was concerned that the special school required a lot of travelling time and was further away from the parent's workplace, making it harder for them to go to the school if their presence was necessary. Therefore the recommended educational placement, although made with the best intentions, was not a feasible one for the parents, and was a step backwards for Tom in terms of his level of inclusion into society. The medical professionals in this case might be estranged from the reality of schooling and current educational opportunities. Neither were they aware of the parent's constraints or considerations, nor the impact of his schooling experience. The medical professionals also did not seek the school's recommendations. The lack of a multi-stakeholder approach in this process severely obstructed the parents' ability to make the best decisions for Tom, as they had to piece together the information from different sources without support to come to a decision.

Although the role of the professionals includes supporting parents and giving appropriate and useful advice, this was not possible if they neglect to hear the voice of the parents, and to shape their recommendations accordingly. While professionals should not necessarily do whatever the parents wanted, they should still consider each case in context and provide feasible options to help parents achieve their goals. Without understanding the parent's point of view, professionals end up ignoring the parents' concerns or suggest actions that conflicted with parents' expectations and ideals for their children. The professional voice often drowned and silenced the parents' voices, and thus the parents' voice was often not heard or taken seriously. Regardless of the family's social-economic status or cultural beliefs, the professional voice seemed to take precedence over all other funds of knowledge the family had.

Working with the school. Besides the medical professionals, the parents' main resource for information and support was the school. The students also spent a great deal of their time in school. In Zenith Secondary, students spent at least a third of the day, five days a week, in school. Parents were welcome in the school and recognized as stakeholders. "The school always has an open policy with the parents" (Vocational Teacher, Teacher Interview). The school allowed parents to approach teachers and school leaders privately on the school site.

Julie's parents found that they were able to work with individual teachers as well as the counselor. "Mine will be the counselor. The lady – she will look for me. She will share with me. For the past few years" (Julie Mother, Parent Interview). The counselor worked directly with Julie's mother regarding concerns about Julie's lack of social awareness, but this was only for a short period of time, after which the counselor provided short updates about how Julie was doing in school. Julie's parents also actively sought information from the school and used the information to prepare Julie. Julie could see that the school and her parents were aligned in their

thinking and responded as if they were all nagging at her. “All the same! That’s why I keep hearing the same old thing, that’s why I’m like ‘ok, ok, ok’” (Julie Interview 3). Most importantly, hearing the same messages reinforced by both school personnel and parents helped her to be confident about her plans, and helped her set goals towards achieving them.

Because Tom’s father was constantly in Tom’s school, the teachers would approach him every time Tom had issues. According to the parents, the teachers tended to push the responsibility of educating and addressing Tom’s issues in school to the father:

Mother: The teachers complained a lot, and helped less. Like they will tell you all about your child, but they didn’t really help or advice us on how to help him.

Father: Actually my feeling is that the teachers pass the buck to me. They will say – oh your son doesn’t know these things, you need to teach. It feels like I’m the one doing the teaching and not them. My sense is that every little thing they will come and bother me.

(Tom Parents, Parent Interview)

Instead of working with the student and collaborating with the parents to deal with issues, the teachers saw Tom’s father as a resource and did not take the initiative or responsibility to teach and work with Tom directly. “I have to do the teaching. Usually the teacher will come and look for me. And tell me about the incident. But this is a problem. You can’t always come looking for me. ... They always come and tell me the problem, and then leave me to tell him” (Tom Father, Parent Interview). Often, these problems were due to Tom’s social difficulties with his friends, thus the teachers did not see it within their influence to teach these skills. Although the school taught competencies, skills, and knowledge that were tested in exams, Tom’s father felt that the teachers also needed to help their students develop as a person:

Because as part of life, you must learn to persevere and take challenges ... they use the record to show the school that they've (i.e., the teachers) done what is required of them. ... So he hasn't really developed as a person, that he really understands something.

(Tom Father, Parent Interview)

Despite the school's efforts to prepare their students for vocational college, Tom's father felt frustrated that Tom was still directionless, and that the secondary school should have done better to help students plan ahead. "So in Zenith they should learn about what they can do in the future. But he still doesn't know" (Tom Father, Parent Interview).

Tom's father's relationship with the school was also complicated by the fact that he operated a food stall in the school canteen. Not only did he have a business relationship with the school, but his daily presence in the school meant that he was easily accessible to the school staff. "With Tom particularly, if anything I find not right, or anything I need to fine out, it's like a next door neighbor, I just go over and say, what's wrong" (Vocational Teacher (Tom), Teacher Interview). In order not to jeopardize his business relationship with the school, Tom's father was not able to voice his disagreements with the school. He was aware of the power differential between himself and the school personnel. In describing one particular episode with the school, Tom's father clearly described that the relationship between the school and the parents was based on an unequal balance of power:

When I talk to the people inside (i.e., the school office), I say that although you have power, you also have brains, even if I'm poorly educated, but I can talk reason with you. Why must you raise your voice at the child? You should take care and concern. If you have any issue, come and talk to me. Why must you make the child cry and cower, if it

was your child, would you do the same thing? I am very angry, but I kept all this in my heart. If I said it out I would end up arguing with them. (Tom Father, Parent Interview)

Although Tom's father arranged for him to work in the school bookshop for experience, the school refused to allow this arrangement. In addition, their management of the situation incensed the father—they scolded Tom and did not work with the parents to resolve the issue amicably. This illustrated an unspoken power dynamic between the school personnel and the parents, as well as the school's limited ability to work with parents. Despite Tom's father's contribution to the school as a parent volunteer as well as a service provider, the school did not appreciate or sympathize with the family's needs. This incident emphasized that the school lacked consideration of the constraints and issues that families faced.

Despite these negative interactions, Tom's parents were grateful that the school supported parents by providing advice to help them understand the educational system, particularly the administrative procedures for enrolling in vocational school. When Tom was not posted into a suitable course, the parents had to start the appeal process:

So when he was posted to the 2-year mechatronics course, I went back to school and I asked the school vice-principal. He said that it was by computer selection. It was our first time, so we didn't know. And I also didn't study at the vocational college before" (Tom's Father, Parent Interview).

One of the things that the school had consistently done for all the parents was to inform them about the educational system and to show them the future pathways for their children. "They (i.e., the parent briefings) were especially for where your child should go and what they should apply when they go to vocational college" (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). The vocational college also provided materials for parents, so that they would know about the courses

available. “Maybe because it’s our first child, so we went to the school to ask the vice-principal. They did give us a booklet with the information. So most of the time we depended on ourselves” (Tom Mother, Parent Interview). This helped parents know what was coming up for their child, what type of decisions they had to make, and what information they needed to prepare their children for a vocational education setting. The parents then primarily depended on themselves to decide what to do next, although when they had issues such as an unfavorable course posting, they were able to approach the school for help.

Besides getting information from the parent briefings, Thivya’s parents did not communicate much with the school. They believed that it was unnecessary to meet with the school, and that the school would contact them personally if they had issues with their children. Therefore, compared to Julie and Tom, Thivya’s parents had relatively fewer interactions with the school. They attended only one of the regularly scheduled meet-the-teacher sessions at the school. Teachers organized meet-the-teacher sessions for parents on a regular basis, to update parents on their child’s progress, but Thivya’s parents felt they were not necessary beyond the first one. “We always go for parent teacher meeting in Primary 1 and Secondary 1. Then none of it I will go, because I say, if the teachers have any complaints, they will not wait, they will call me” (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). Eventually, when Thivya was in Secondary 4, the teacher did call. “The teacher called me to complain that she is too vain. What do you expect from a 16 year old...?” (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). The issue in school was that Thivya broke the school rules by dressing inappropriately, i.e., she wore jewelry that was not acceptable in school. However, the way the teacher presented the issue was evaluative and judgmental in nature. She thought that Thivya was too vain and as a result, was dressing inappropriately in school. The mother did not think this was a worthy complaint and attributed it to Thivya growing

up. Being vain, or being concerned about looks, was a developmental issue and thus acceptable for a 16-year-old adolescent. Due to the difference between the school's and the parent's perceptions of the issue, this complaint did not lead to any consequences for Thivya at home. The definition of "vain" was also dependent on cultural definitions. The Indian culture used many more accessories in their dressing than the Chinese culture, which might be the reason for the difference in opinion of what "vain" meant. In addition, because the teacher decided to use an evaluative tone and chose words that were judgmental when sharing the issue with the parent, the actual problem was not raised or addressed, i.e., that Thivya broke school rules. From Thivya's perspective, the term "vain" meant that she was being judged. She defined being vain as, "Dressing differently in school and act like they (i.e., the student peers) are the prettiest person" (Thivya Interview 3). Because Thivya was not intentionally doing that, she felt that the term "vain" was not a good description of her. When there were conflicting understandings between the school and the home about a particular issue the student had, if teachers act in a judgmental manner sometimes the real issue may not be addressed and as a result the student will not learn anything through the process. In this case, Thivya did not learn that it was important to differentiate between appropriate dressing for different occasions and settings. This would have been an appropriate learning point for the teacher to bring up.

Although Thivya's parents did not go down to see the teachers often, they did try to engage the school in thinking about future skills that their children might need to help them gain employment. They suggested:

For her (Thivya) to have Mandarin. Because majority is Mandarin speaking, so just for verbal ... when they go to work, Mandarin is very important. I prefer that they have extra

lessons. At least when they leave secondary school, they can converse in Mandarin.

(Thivya Mother, Parent Interview)

They brought up a pertinent point that often jobs would require applicants to speak Mandarin, since the majority of Singapore's population was ethnically Chinese. Unfortunately the school was unable to accede to her request and did not provide an explanation for it, even after multiple requests.

The parents in the study accepted that they were powerless in the school, and therefore, the school may choose not to accede to their request, explore their suggestions, or work with them regarding specific student issues. They had no choice and no real alternative if they wanted their child to continue in the school. The school's authority over the parents meant that the school's goals guided what they choose to do with parents. However, the school did benefit the parents in specific areas such as providing information, advice, and guidance regarding academic or vocational matters.

Summary

Families' roles and responsibilities circumscribed their intentional world. Their responsibilities and roles determined how they advocated and supported their children during their transition to adulthood. Understanding families as transformative (Ferguson, 2002) linked together three roles: (a) to protect; (b) to teach about life; and (c) to source for resources and tools. Ferguson (2002) advocated seeing families as: (a) adaptive and evolving, and (b) empowered through internal and external supports. The parents' protective roles illustrated how parents evolved over time by changing their strategies, and balancing a protective role with a teaching role to ensure they met their children's changing needs. Their teaching role required the use of internal resources, i.e., their fiscal, social/emotional, intellectual, physical, and social

capital, to provide the appropriate resources and guidance to their child. They also sourced and curated experiences and sought out external resources and tools that allowed them to extend their support for their children.

The families in this study seemed to most readily embrace the protector role. They also recognized the need to teach family values and life skills. Their interactions with professionals and schools supported them in the areas that they feel most unsure about. The importance of being the protector, with the family as the core of the students' life, was reflected in other studies that emphasized the importance of the family and the home environment (Rueda et al., 2005). It was also a role that was more attuned to collectivism, focused on the inter-dependence of the family. The type of skills emphasized by the parents in Singapore, i.e., social skills and life skills, were also found in the study conducted by Rueda and colleagues (2005). The main difference between this study and their study was that the parents in Singapore also valued independence and productive employment equally. This is likely because Rueda and colleagues worked with students with severe dis/abilities, while in this study, the students had mild to moderate dis/abilities. Therefore there was a higher expectation that the students should work towards being independent and productive. The parents' high expectations were supported in part by the students' inclusion in a mainstream secondary school, and thus opened up the pathway that allowed the student access into a vocational college. Singapore, being open to the effects of globalization and acculturation, also internalized the so-called Western values of independence and individual achievement. Therefore, institutions such as schools became sites in which students were geared towards academic and vocational performance. The school goal of achieving academic excellence came at the expense of other important life skills. Besides academic and career goals, parents also valued and emphasized their child's ability to socialize

and be independent. Families' own experiences with learning and working influenced their beliefs about what would help their child get the most out of life. This resonates with Povernmire-Kirk and colleagues (2010), who found that the Latino parents they interviewed held expectations and goals for their child that were influenced by their personal beliefs and their cultural traditions (Povernmire-Kirk et al., 2010). The parents also used specific funds of knowledge that were most important to their family to teach and support their children, particularly in religious beliefs and life skills. Funds of knowledge that households would have were "essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133). Therefore, these would have been particularly important for students who were transiting into adulthood.

The relationship that parents had with the professionals and the school should be an important facilitator for supporting students in transition. However, like studies from the U.S. (e.g., Geenen et al., 2005), where culturally diverse families tended to disagree with professionals regarding the priority of transition goals, the current study found that the focus on interdependence was de-emphasized. Families in this study placed less value on individual academic performance than on family functioning and individual well-being. Barton and colleagues (2004) described parental engagement as the use and sharing of capital, and the ability to express ideas and values in different spaces. Although this definition of parental engagement seemed to be met by what the school was doing, parents did not feel that they could be, or were, equal partners. This finding echoes that of Shogren (2012). Differences in socio-economic status and educational levels between families and school personnel destabilized idealized, equal partnerships.

Socio-historical-cultural contexts influenced and affected each family's methods for meeting their responsibilities and addressing their children's needs. The same socio-historical-cultural context played a part in the students' own lived experience. The next section will explore how each student's educational journey through this context shaped his or her experience in different ways.

The Lived Experiences of the Students—Figuring Out a Career Pathway

They say you go to vocational college, if your GPA is higher, you can go either poly or do an advanced vocational certification ... After go to poly, I want to go to work, but I like to do those kind of work, like zoo, animals, all those. I like doing those. (Julie Interview 3)

Try to find another way. Find something else that would suit me ... I would tell them what is good about the course, after finding more about it. (Thivya Interview 3)

Computer work is very tough.... I'm still thinking... I'm still trying to adapt and I'm still learning. (Tom Interview 3)

Although each of the students was at the same step in their educational journey, each individual experience of finding a career pathway was unique and distinct. The quotes above provide a glimpse of what it was like for the students as they were discovering a career pathway that would fit with their needs and their identities. I use three metaphors to describe each of these experiences: a) competing in a triathlon; b) engaging in a tug-of-war; and c) performing a juggling act. First I will describe the metaphors and which student they represent, and then using different junctures of their educational journey, I will show how each student experienced the process, and what made the process different for each student.

Competing in a triathlon is a fairly structured process with different elements: running, swimming, and cycling. This represented the different stages and skills that a student learned, as s/he moved towards their final goal, i.e., a suitable career. The people that help a triathlon athlete are typically their coaches and mentors, as well as people who might motivate and support them towards a similar end. Therefore, the people in the student's life would have similar goals and expectations, although each of them played a different role or taught a different skill. Julie's experience was therefore like competing in a triathlon, where she followed a clear and pre-determined process that she believed would guide her towards her desired goal.

Engaging in a tug-of-war represents a conflict between different interested parties. The student receiving advice from different people in his/her life was torn between his/her own interests and desires, wanting to please others, or obedience to others' wishes, such as their parents. Thivya's experience looked like a tug-of-war, where past and current choices were not always made of her own volition, but determined by the others around her. Therefore the people around her sometimes distracted her from her own interests and thus "won" the tug-of-war. Other times they won the tug of war by force; she gave up, and let others, such as her mother, make decisions for her. But over time, she became more determined to make her own choices in the future, despite possible objections.

Performing a juggling act alludes to the need to maintain different ideas, bearing in mind all the advice that one might get from different people, and being unable to settle down and commit to a fixed idea. Everything is in flux, in motion, and without certainty. At any time, the things being juggled could be different, or the number of things might change. Tom's experience felt like a juggling act, with uncertainty about what might happen, and about what he really wanted to do. The juggling that Tom did in his mind was a result of his continual wondering of

all the different possibilities and choices that were possible. The people around him offered ideas, which he included in his juggling act, but he was also reluctant to lose ideas. As he feared losing any possibilities, he was unable to decide which ones he wanted to keep. But the same people supporting him were also the ones waiting for him to decide and finish his act. Tom's indecisiveness made it difficult for him to decide when to stop juggling, and which items he should keep.

These metaphors indicate that the process is still ongoing. In the rest of this section, I will take a look at each student's past experiences and describe how these metaphors represent the experience and how it will continue to influence the process in the future. I have selected two areas in the students' educational journey that had a strong impact on each of their decision-making process regarding their future vocations: (a) their selection of vocational studies; and (b) their work and volunteering experiences. I will then extend the metaphor into how they have planned to continue their journey towards a career that fits their identity and their interests.

Selection of Vocational Studies in Secondary School and Vocational College

Thivya studied Mechanical Studies at Zenith Secondary School, but she did not enjoy it and was a mediocre student, and identified it as her worst experience in school. "Mechanical lesson. Fix and theory. Difficult to understand" (Interview 2). Her vocational teacher summarized her performance: "She didn't really do well, but she was able to pass. Average" (Vocational Teacher (Thivya), Teacher Interview). Thivya admitted sheepishly that she selected Mechanical Studies as her vocational subject at the end of Secondary Two because her friend wanted to do Mechanical Studies and Thivya wanted to be with her friend. In this tug-of-war, although Thivya made her own choice, it was misguided, and strongly influenced by her friend. At this point in secondary school, Thivya was a follower, and depended on her friends to guide

her through school. Her friends were her constant support throughout primary school when she started facing academic difficulties. “Some didn’t care, some were there by my side. They stayed and taught me slowly” (Thivya Interview 1). She continued to depend on her friends in Secondary School. “Some are the same as me, some are better. They both help me and we have fun” (Thivya Interview 1). Thus in her initial vocational studies, Thivya prioritized her social support network over learning a vocational skill that she was more interested in.

Learning from her experience in secondary school, Thivya did not choose Info-Communications at the vocational college based on any of her friends’ influence. However, once again, for Thivya, the course that she started at the vocational college, Info-Communications, was not her preferred choice. She had initially selected, “Business, Forestry and then Beauty Awareness” (Thivya Interview 2). But even these were not her first choice. Her mother explains why Nursing, which was Thivya’s initial preference, was not listed:

She wanted to become a nurse, but then I did not encourage, because I know she will fail the medical test, because if she has sclerosis, they will not take her ... So I didn’t allow her, because of her physical condition, I have to think about the long-run. ... I first choose things that she could just sit down. Not to strain herself ... So now she got a good one, but I don’t think she’s so much interested ... I think physically I always find a way she don’t strain herself. (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview)

Thivya’s mother decided that Thivya’s medical condition and health issues were the most important considerations in deciding which course to take in vocational college. Thivya did not feel that she was able to go against her mother’s wishes, so she had decided to just “leave it” (Thivya Interview 3). However, when probed during the interview, she admitted that she still wanted to pursue nursing in the future (Thivya Interview 2). I asked her how she would work

past possible obstacles. She said, “ I would find a way” (Thivya Interview 2). She was confident that her dream was possible, despite not having any concrete ideas.

Thivya’s mother also shared with me the advice that she gave to Thivya: “I told her it was a good thing, she just need to sit down and do. You learn computer is very basic. Just go for your lessons, learn the basics and then when you go to do your advanced vocation certification, you can choose childcare or child psychology” (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). Thivya’s mother realized that the current course that Thivya was enrolled in was not ideal, and was not of interest to Thivya. However, Thivya’s mother had other considerations in mind, namely Thivya’s physical condition and medical issues, and helped Thivya consider other possibilities. She understood that in the future Thivya might choose other career pathways, and she supported it, even though in her mind, she already had a preferred career that she thought would be suitable for Thivya, i.e., a childcare-related career. Interestingly, Thivya did not mention childcare as an option during my interview with her. She seemed to leave the option open, as her criteria for a career was a fairly broad one, i.e., “helping people” (Thivya Interview 3). These convictions, if strengthened, would contribute to her ability to pull her own weight in decision-making situations, and finally win the tug-of-war between herself and the people that were important to her.

Tom’s conflicting thoughts about doing Retail Studies in Secondary School were due to his early career interest to be a monk. “I wanted to become a monk” (Tom Interview 1). The reason for setting aside his earlier career goal was a thoughtful one. It was also related to his religious beliefs, just like his desire to be a monk. “My teacher, the monk, tells me to help people. So that’s why I choose to do retail” (Tom Interview 1). Now that he had started learning a vocational skill, he shifted his focus to doing retail work. “Retail. It’s easier. When I go to a

shopping center, I go and observe. I tell myself I want to learn this (i.e., retail)” (Tom Interview 1). Although he changed his career goal when he started learning retail, his motivations were still related to his religious beliefs and he did not give up his desire to be a monk completely (Figure 4). Using the juggling metaphor, his desire to be a monk had been thrown in the air, and it remained an option. At this point, Tom decided that being a monk would be his backup plan. “Maybe I want to be a monk. This one (i.e., to be a monk) is if I have no future. When no one wants me to work for them” (Tom Interview 3).

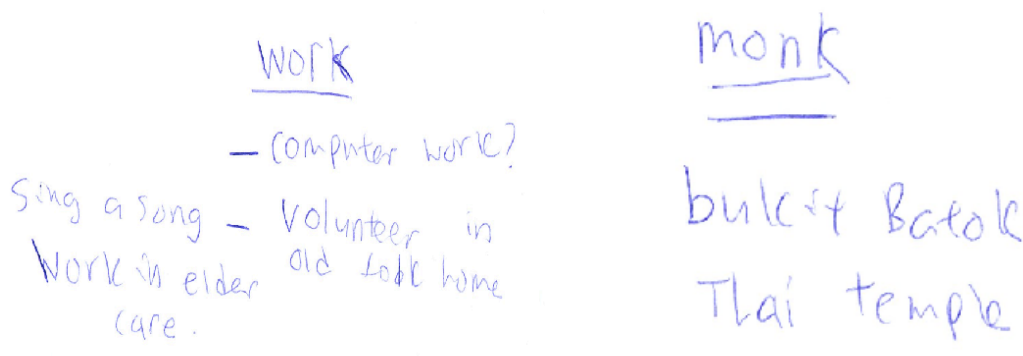


Figure 4. Extract from Tom’s Future Educational Journey Map.

Although he had seemed certain about his direction to work towards retail and was happy to be enrolled in the three-year course in retail at his vocational college, his mother was not convinced that he understood what that meant in the long-term:

With regards to retail he’s thinking that he can just pack products and so on. But I tell him that if that’s what you are doing, then you will be taking instruction from someone else. If you want to do better work, then you have to be the one instructing others.

Because of his hands and he has a bit of a curved spine and cannot move things. So perhaps he can be in management where he can instruct others to do things. ... He is unable to work with machines. And then his math is not very good. So he thinks that

retail is suitable for him. Perhaps he has been inculcated to believe that. ... Maybe not really an interest, but when you talk to him about it, he will say that it's something perhaps he can try. (Tom Mother, Parent Interview)

In this excerpt, his mother suggested that he had been inculcated to believe that he was suitable for a retail position, possibly meaning that the school convinced him that doing retail was something good for him. Therefore Tom's mother was not convinced that retail was Tom's interest area. She thought that it was a possibility that Tom should consider, because Tom had not expressed real interest in any specific career, other than what he was learning in school, and what he watched his father do. Tom was still in the process of considering possible careers, and had not fully committed to any one path. He was juggling his options.

Julie's choice to do Retail Studies was not something she felt conflicted about. She was just worried whether she could do it well. "So when I join retail in secondary school, I was glad, because I thought retail will be very very hard, because I thought it will be a very hard topic. But it turns out that it was not very very hard" (Julie Interview 3). She was also aware that it was something that needed to happen, so that going to vocational college would be easier. "They trying to teach us, so that when we are in vocational college, we won't be so lost and everything. We know a bit about retail, and everything" (Julie Interview 3). Just like competing in a triathlon completing one part gets athletes closer to the next, as long as they keep moving. Some skills might help athletes get through the next part, but not everything would be the same.

Getting into the Retail course at the vocational college was not a simple process for Julie. Despite meeting the entry criteria, she was posted to a Mechanical course. The choice of retail as a vocational pathway was so defined that her parents were prepared to enroll her in the three-year retail course if she was posted to a non-retail course. Her parents put in an appeal request for a

transfer to the Retail course, and eventually, the vocational college placed her in the two-year Retail course. Her parents put in a lot of effort towards her appeal as her father felt that it gave her the best chance of moving ahead academically:

Father: I want her to do her advanced vocational certification, and then poly, if can.

That's why we think retail she has a good chance. At least she has a chance. ...

Mother: So we tell her this is your goal now, you need to study hard, do your work.

(Parent Interview)

Although it felt like a natural progression for Julie, and she was happy to be doing retail, she did not make the decisions herself. She worked through them and tried to do well. Her parents, although initially guided by the secondary school when Julie was placed in the retail course in Zenith, worked behind the scenes, thinking about which career pathway would be most suitable for her to continue her educational journey. They were instrumental in supporting Julie in the retail career pathway, and in making sure she was able to access the Retail course at the vocational college. Just like an athlete, she was mentored and coached by her teachers in school, and also guided by her parents. Her main role was to take others' advice and do her best. She could see how each stage of learning led to the next. She was aware of her parents' goals and expectations for her and willingly followed them. Julie herself was happy to continue doing Retail, "because I've been studying retail for the past 2 years already. So I want to continue" (Julie Interview 2). "That means I know what the standard is like, if not if I do other jobs, I would get very lost" (Julie Interview 3). Once she started her Retail course at the vocational college, Julie echoed her initial assumptions regarding how doing Retail in vocational college was similar and yet different from secondary school. "Like when I went to vocational college, I get to learn a different skill, like retail selling, that is new to me, because I never learn before.

Customer service is not new to me, but different in syllabus from what I thought. ... This is also the first time I do a reply letter, and an enquiry letter. It is different from secondary” (Julie Interview 3). For Julie, moving on to vocational college was a natural progression just like a triathlon with three stages: swimming, cycling, running, which mirrored the rest of her educational journey, i.e., vocational course, advanced vocational course, and a diploma at a polytechnic. Each stage was a unique experience, but also required generalized training. Each stage also had a specific end point, similar to what Julie said she felt most comfortable with, i.e., knowing the standard.

The way the students chose their vocational course in secondary school and in the vocational college was a reflection of their process in finding and developing a career pathway for themselves. Each of their experiences was different, as represented by the three different metaphors. Besides the choice of the vocational course, their work and volunteering experiences were also instrumental in helping them learn and be aware of different career opportunities. What they did with this experience is shared in this next part. Again, we can see how the metaphor for each student repeats itself in this new learning process.

Work and Volunteering Experiences

Work experience is an important way for youths to experience the working life and is an evidence-based practice for successful post-school outcomes (e.g., Landmark et al., 2010; Test, Mazzotti et al. 2009) in the United States. Therefore, it was critical for the youths to complete a one-month long Industry Experiential Program (IEP) at the end of Secondary Three.

Although Thivya was in the Mechanical course, she worked as a housekeeper in a hotel for her work attachment under the IEP. Thivya once again struggled with her attachment experience, just like she struggled in Mechanical studies. She did not enjoy housekeeping, even

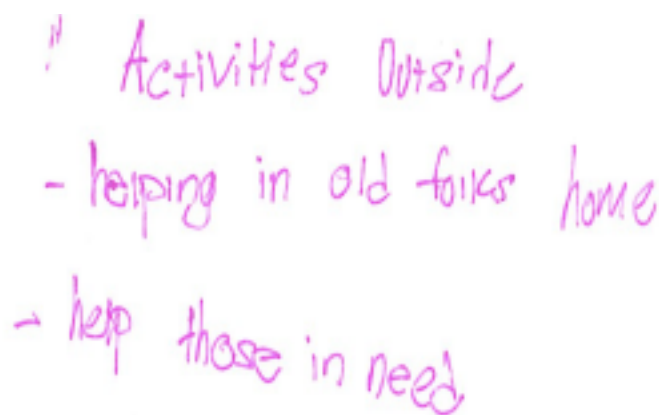
though, as part of the service/hospitality industry, it was more aligned to her career goal of being able to “help others.” However, it was not what she envisioned helping others was like. “I was doing housekeeping. Clean the windows, wiping glasses. I didn’t like the cleaning” (Thivya Interview 3). She may not have enjoyed housekeeping because it was not something that she had to do for herself at home, nor could she see how it impacted or improved the lives of other people. All she understood from her experience was that the work was hard, and most people were not even appreciative. Her mother reflected this: “She was working in a hotel, she knows what a difficult life it is. That was good ... till now, I tell her, you’re the only baby in the house. Need to do everything for her,” (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). In this case, the experience motivated Thivya to study harder, so that she could choose something for herself in the future that would be more aligned to her interests. Losing the tug-of-war early on in her educational journey convinced her of what she would like to do and the importance of being persistent when faced with difficulties, so that she could finally choose something for herself that would meet her career objectives.

In addition to work attachments, other opportunities for Thivya to learn about other careers came from other types of life experiences. Thivya’s mother identified early life experiences with the family that might have supported Thivya’s interest in helping others.

I think it might be from young. The both of us usually would help people. A lot of distressed people would come to us, for counseling and all that. When they were young, we would bring them out – sometimes strangers that we come across, we will get their address, we will get permission to go to their house, sometimes we’ll buy things and visit with the children. (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview)

School experiences also reinforced Thivya's interest in helping others. She mentioned it as part of her journal she completed during Interview 2 (Figure 5):

This was in an old folks' home. I went to the old folks' home to help in Sec 3 and Sec 4. They need help. People leave them there. So we go to make them happy. I went with the school. I lift them up from the wheelchair and play games with them, entertain them...
(Thivya Interview 2).



! Activities Outside
- helping in old folks home
- help those in need

Figure 5. Extract from Tevya's Journal.

Her mother used a different school experience to illustrate an alternative option for Thivya to "help others": "She went to Vietnam. Actually I didn't want her to go because I'm afraid she might have to do physical things. But she said that she wanted to go. When she came back she kept saying what a pity, how poor the children there. ... It was a good experience" (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). Thivya's response to this school-organized overseas trip to do volunteer work might have been one of the reasons Thivya's mother seemed to think that childcare would be a good future career choice for Thivya. In this tug-of-war, Thivya actually won, and was able to go on the school trip despite her parent's initial concerns. The trip allowed her to do something she was interested in, and although Thivya did not once mention this experience to me during our time together, the trip clearly helped her see that she had other

career options if she wanted to help people and could not do nursing. When it was time to choose which area she would like to study for her advanced vocational course or at the polytechnic, she would find herself in another tug-of-war deciding between her mother's recommendation and her own area of interest.

Tom completed his IEP at a sandwich shop. Although it was relevant to his interests, he was not very skilled in completing his jobs. "So I just try to do it. ... I went to get the tuna, but I wasn't good at kneading it. So I got scolded by the boss. He asked me to do it better. ... They didn't treat me well because I couldn't finish my jobs" (Tom Interview 1). Unlike other students who struggled to complete their IEP, Tom did not quit, and completed his one-month attachment. Despite the difficult experience, he still considered working in the food industry a possibility; this was not his first experience working at a food outlet. "He worked at McDonald's...they let him work 6 hours a day, and he has company at work. But he has a lot of complaints. He got scolded, he was unhappy" (Tom Father, Parent Interview). Tom did not enjoy working at McDonald's either, and grumbled when he went home, but he persevered in his job despite the negative experience. During my interviews with him, Tom shared that he was looking for a vacation job, and had gone back to McDonald's to apply for one. "I'm thinking I should go to McDonald's to work. So I applied to the one at YT, and then they asked what timing I can work" (Tom Interview 2). Although Tom refused to go back to work at the sandwich shop, Tom considered going back to places where he could work in despite not fully enjoying his earlier experience. These work experiences were also not the most ideal; because they did not further his existing interests, and instead made him consider different careers. His father pointed out what he thinks was Tom's problem: "Sometimes I take him to see something, and then he changes his mind" (Tom Father, Parent Interview).

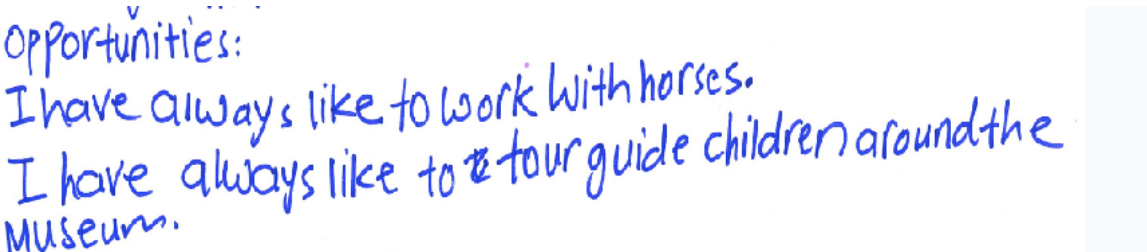
When asked about what he enjoyed doing and what type of work he was interested in, he said, “I like to meet people – and then I won’t be alone” (Tom Interview 2); “Because I can see people. I can talk to them” (Tom interview 3). He recounted an experience when he was volunteering at an old folk’s home:

I’ve been to the old folks home. And then they talk to me. Because they say I’m a good person. They say that I should go and help people, as it will benefit me. Benefits like I can go and talk to them and I will have people to talk to. I look after them. (Tom Interview 3)

Due to his lack of clear direction, Tom ended up undecided about his possible career options. The more possibilities he entertained, the more he had to juggle, making it more difficult stay on track.

Of the three youths, Julie had the best IEP experience; she was given the opportunity to work at a stable that provided equine therapy to children with dis/abilities. She enjoyed working with the animals. “I really love working with horses a lot, because they are so cute” (Julie Interview 1). Although her experiences with animals were not related to her studies in retail, she was keen to find a place where she could merge her interests. “After go to poly, I want to go to work, but I like to do those kind of work, like zoo, animals, all those. I like doing those” (Julie Interview 3). The year after her IEP, she volunteered as a tour guide for school children at the Turtle and Tortoise Museum. Her experience as a tour guide required her to learn about the animals, how to take care of them, and to share what she knew with others. “Everything. ... I like the animals and I like the fact that I get to guide the children around. Both. Because I’ve always wanted to be a tour guide. This is a really good opportunity for me.” She did not see these different experiences as conflicting goals, but rather a process that extended her knowledge and

experience of the working world. “It’s a new opportunity for me. It’s going to be a new experience, work experience, how it is going to be like ...” (Julie Interview 1). The consistency of Julie’s experiences with her volunteer work and during her IEP (Figure 6) clarified her career goals. These opportunities were like training for a triathlon, i.e., they were not directly related, but they provided generalized knowledge and experience to support Julie’s journey forward. These experiences built on each other in a sequential manner, and contributed to the cohesiveness of her learning,



opportunities:
I have always like to work with horses.
I have always like to be tour guide children around the
museum.

Figure 6. Extract from Julie’s Educational Journey Map.

The interactions that each student had while deciding on relevant vocational courses and their work or volunteer experiences in the larger community resulted in different learning experiences, and a different level of confidence in their decision-making process for their futures. The different interactions each student had also meant that each of them would have different questions about their future, and the process to get those answers would be different. As they planned ahead, each of them utilized different strategies and resources to make a decision regarding their next steps in their educational and vocational pathways.

Planning Ahead

Due to their different social-historical-cultural contexts and their family cultures, the students proposed the use of different methods to help them plan and decide on their future

careers. These strategies helped them to be more prepared as they continued to learn about the world around them and find their places in society.

In planning ahead, Julie listed skills that she thought she would need as she moved ahead in her career, based on one of the prompts in the Future Educational Journey Mapping activity.

(Figure 7).

- Learn how to do ~~custo~~ Software Applications.
- Learn more about retail selling.
- Learn more about letter writing.
- Learn more about customer service.
- Get along well with
Learn new skills
When outside work
like how to fold clothes
neatly.
- ~~like~~ Learn how to be ~~presentable~~.

Figure 7. Extract from Julie's Future Educational Journey Map.

One of the things that I was not expecting to see on Julie's list was to learn how to fold clothes neatly when she started to do "outside work," which probably referred to working in the open job market. Folding clothes was not related to either her previous retail studies or to the modules that she was currently doing. When I asked her about it, all she said about it was that she thought it was an important skill for work as well as for her personal growth. Her intentions for learning that skill were not clear until the data analysis process, when I linked what her father said regarding working with the school staff with what Julie had shared. Her father said that they spoke to the vocational college when they were in the appeal process to help Julie enroll in the

Retail Course. “In fact we spoke to the Head of Department and all that. She said she (Julie) could work at the zoo for some form of attachment. Then I ask about *Uniqlo*, because that seem to be a more forgiving environment” (Julie Father, Parent Interview). Her father knew what her interests were and was willing to extend her experiences in that area, but he was also concerned about the work environment, and preferred a more comfortable work environment for his daughter. Subsequently, the parents probably discussed working in *Uniqlo* specifically with Julie because in my third interview with her, she included the skill in her Future Educational Journey Map and during the interview she specifically mentioned it as a place that she might work. She also related how learning the skill would benefit her personally:

Because customer might want their clothes to be folded. Because when you work in *Uniqlo*, all those, you have to fold the clothes, iron the clothes.... also personal: my mum folds the clothes, and even though I fold, I fold them not very good. (Julie Interview 3).

Thus her parents clearly influenced her experiences, as well as facilitated her thinking about the type of skills she might need. In this way, her parents played a role similar to a coach or a mentor who helped and supported her, and planned ahead for the athlete to ensure continuous improvement, focusing on training specific skill areas that would help her achieve her future goals.

Looking ahead, Julie saw herself branching slightly away from retail in the future if she joined the polytechnic. “Then I want to go to poly. In poly I want to do something that is different from retail, little bit different, like hospitality” (Julie Interview 3). She’s still keeping to a related line of work, a service industry, but in a different setting, e.g., hotels, events. This aligned with her interest in being a tour guide in Singapore and her experience guiding while volunteering at the Tortoise and Turtle Museum. Although this was not something that her

parents considered for her, Julie may be able to start making decisions for herself, based on her own interests, by the time a decision needs to be made.

Julie's parents guided her experience figuring out her career pathway. Their willingness to support her interests, coupled with the way that she linked her work experiences with her personal identity, meant that what they have done for her so far allowed her to keep moving forward in a single direction. Like being in a triathlon with specific transition points, Julie was guided down a route that allowed her to meet specific goals, and with each goal reached, although she might change the activity, she continued moving forward towards her final career choice. Although this endpoint was still uncertain to Julie, she knew that she would get there in time, with the support of her family, teachers, and even her future colleagues.

Thivya knew that she wanted to find a career that involved "helping people" (Thivya Interview 3), and reiterated it multiple times in the interview process. "Helping others is the most important thing...Because when we grow up, helping others, is what you need" (Thivya Interview 2). However, unlike Julie, her experiences were more convenient than purposeful. Thus Thivya surprised me when she shared that she had a plan: "To help others outside. Like finding those in need to help" (Thivya Interview 1) and "Find out more about the other courses. Search and ask people around, like teachers and friends" (Thivya Interview 3). She was keen to look for opportunities, rather than for opportunities to come to her. She was finding her own way. In Thivya's experience, a number of decisions had been strongly guided and influenced by her mother. Although childcare as a career might be something that she considers in the future, and her mother had dismissed her dream to be a nurse, Thivya did not give up on her dream to become a nurse and wants to pursue it in the future if possible (Thivya Interview 3). She did not want or need her mother to make decisions for her. As reflected in the first extract from Thivya

in this chapter, she was becoming aware that she needed to take responsibility and prepared herself to achieve her goals. She wanted her family to be part of her decision-making process, but not the ones making the decision. She recognized that she might need to find out about alternative career options and convince her parents in a different way.

Although Thivya was unable to pursue her real interest, nursing, her long-term goal as described in her Future Educational Journey Map (Figure 8) was to go “all the way to university, before finding work”(Thivya Interview 2), which aligned with her parents’ expectations, “I just want her to finish her vocational studies, then go to poly, then go and take a degree. I will stop there, and she can continue” (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview).

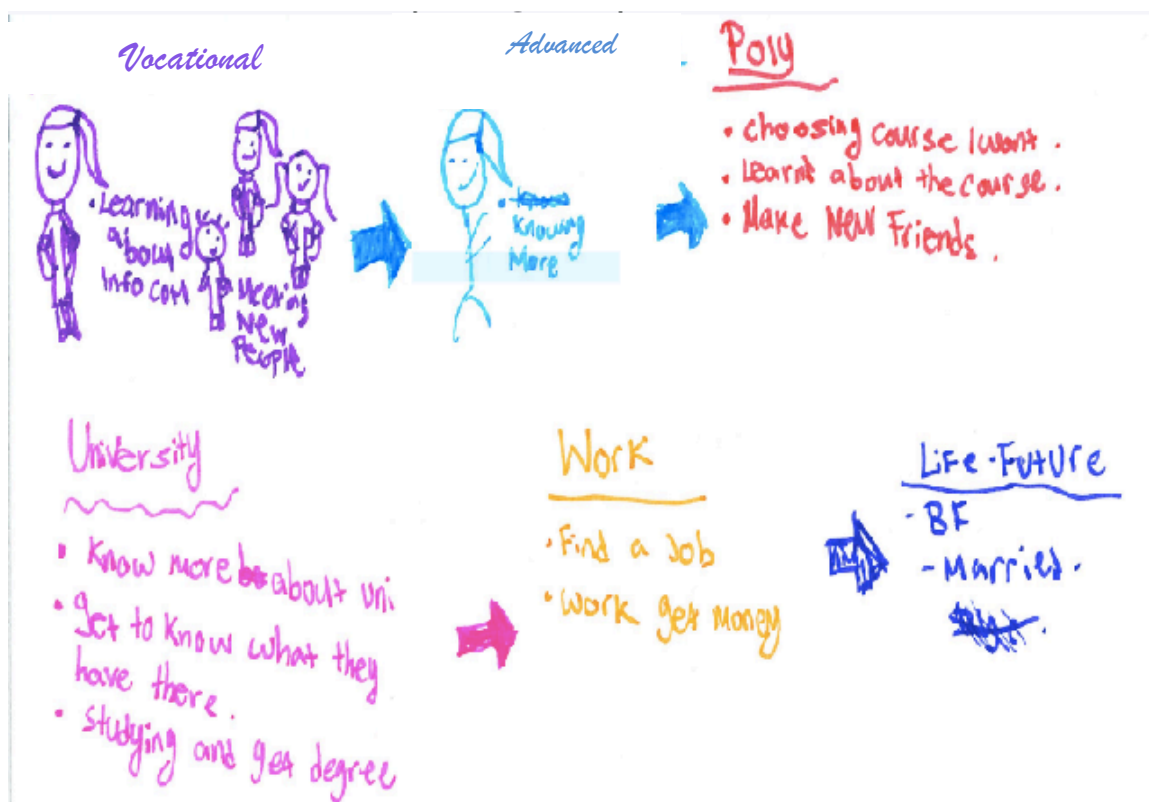


Figure 5. Thivya's Future Educational Journey Map.

Thivya acknowledged that polytechnic would be the most likely setting for her to choose a course of her own interest. Therefore, there was still time for her to figure out which career path she wanted to take. At every point of transition to a different academic setting or qualification, she would have the opportunity to re-evaluate her options and choose a course of study that could bring her closer to her desired outcome.

Learning from her experience in secondary school, Thivya realized that she did not have to follow her friends in their career pathways, and concluded that her friends could be supportive of her choices instead, “They (i.e., Thivya’s friends) tell me to go for what I want. They will support me by telling me to do what I want” (Thivya Interview 3). Even then, she continued to be aware that her friends might still affect her future choices.

TIY: So what else do you think will make it difficult for you to achieve your goals?

Thivya: Maybe friends. They might ask to work together, and ask me to go with them.

TIY: And what would your response be?

Thivya: I want what I want. (Thivya Interview 3)

Through her experiences, Thivya learned to define her interests and to be confident in her choices. So when Thivya is able to choose a course that she wants when she enters polytechnic, she can finally be the deciding factor in this tug-of-war where she takes into account her desire to be with her friends, her wishes of her family, and her own interests. While her mother wanted to ensure Thivya’s career choice would be suitable for her physical condition, Thivya did not seem as concerned as her mother about the constraints that her physical condition might impose on possible careers. Just like her experience with dyslexia, where Thivya chose not to use her dyslexia as an excuse or a reason to do less work or to explain away her performance, she preferred to look beyond her physical difficulties, and aimed to overcome them through her own

effort. “I don’t think she gave in to her Dyslexia because she never said it to anyone” (English Teacher (Thivya), Teacher Interview). So in this tug-of-war, Thivya was not only looking to win, but also to have her decisions fully accepted and supported by her family and friends.

Tom, unlike Thivya, was painfully aware of his physical limitations as well as his learning difficulties to the point where he became very anxious about their impact on his learning and his career choices. Throughout the three interviews, Tom would mention things that he would like to do, but he would also list a reason for why he might not do it after all. “Retail is better. For food, I’ll have to learn how to cook. I will need to have the hygiene certificate. So I can’t help my dad” (Tom Interview 1); “To be a monk, need to shave your head (i.e., go through tonsure). I need to be vegetarian. I need to suffer. A monk only eats one meal. So I ask myself, would I be able to take the suffering?” (Tom Interview 1). As most Singaporean male citizens are required to do compulsory National Service (i.e., compulsory enlistment into the armed forces), Tom was also wary about this phase of his life, “Army very difficult... You know my hand cannot move...” (Tom Interview 3).

I conducted the first two interviews with Tom before he started at the vocational college on his retail course, and conducted the third one after. He changed his mind about possible career choices during this period of time (Figure 4). In the first two interviews, he focused on retail and helping his father. By the third interview, he started to come up with new career options. At the start of his course, Tom’s teachers talked to the students about what to expect over the next three years, and this might have prompted Tom to start thinking about his current path and other options. His father shared what his vocational college teachers told Tom:

The vocational college teachers did say to him: ‘Now you’re not a boy, now you’re a young guy... so everything you have to take care yourself’. ... He is more pressured now.

The teacher has prepared them that they have to work eight hours in their last year. ...

Yes, he is no longer a small child. (Tom Father, Parent Interview).

Starting in vocational college made Tom pay serious attention to his plans for the future. Both his parents and his teachers focused on his need to be more independent and resilient. In this instance, Tom's juggling act became more complicated. He had fewer choices before, but then he started thinking of other things that he might be interested in and might want to do. New areas of learning also made him think that he could do different types of work. He was no longer presented with just one option, but many. Tom's father gave him advice on how to deal with his uncertainty:

You need to have the intention to learn. Not fear the suffering ... So we cannot just not do anything and wander aimlessly. Everyone needs a goal I think that if your current responsibility is to study well, then study hard, and then next time when you work it would be less difficult, you would at least have a certificate. Then depending on your interest – then work in that direction. (Tom Father, Parent Interview)

Tom's father, knowing that Tom was still uncertain, encouraged him to work hard at his current course and obtain certification so that it would be easier for him to find work. When he found a specific interest, he could move forward in that direction.

When Tom was in secondary school, his teacher identified areas of strength that Tom could work on: "He probably shines in certain areas like talking to customers, or he can communicate or make informal conversation. I think that will be a good strength of his." (Vocational Teacher (Tom), Teacher Interview). However, Tom's mother dismissed the teacher's suggestion that Tom would be suitable for a customer service position, "The teacher shared with them, whether they want to work in customer service. And he knows he doesn't

“speak well, so that would be difficult. So he prefers not to have to talk, just do the work ...” (Tom Mother, Parent Interview). Tom’s mother’s conclusion about Tom seemed to be in conflict with what Tom described he would like to do, i.e., to meet and talk with others. Therefore Tom was not only juggling possible options, but also conflicting perspectives from others around him. Therefore, he was really juggling three sets of things: a) career options; b) his own perspective; and c) other’s perspective of his strengths and weaknesses.

Tom’s lack of self-confidence was the main obstacle that seemed to prevent Tom from deciding or making a decision about his career path. Tom also learned through experiences in other areas of his life that he needed to depend on himself and he applied it to his vocation decision-making process. When I asked him how he would make decisions, he said that he would have to do it himself or that he was still thinking. His perception that he had to make his career decisions on his own, coupled with his own lack of confidence, resulted in his sense of fear when faced with something unknown to him, such as pursuing a diploma after he obtained his vocational certifications. “I don’t think I want to do poly. It will be too difficult” (Tom Interview 3). His teacher noticed it too:

For him even though like you know when he made a wrong mistake he felt really bad about it, nobody in the class laughed at him but he still feels that " I should have done better" and whack his head a bit. I think that’s a slight barrier for him, but definitely he will try to change. (English Teacher (Tom), Teacher Interview)

His mother also reported that he felt stressed and had insomnia:

At this age many children start to get depression when you are always facing stress. He will be scared until he cannot sleep at night. So I tell him, even if you stay up you can’t solve anything, so why not you just go to sleep. (Tom Mother, Parent Interview)

However, Tom took the decision-making role very seriously, and was aware that he had to decide for himself: “This one have to depend on myself. My own thing” (Tom Interview 3).

Being a monk was still very important to Tom, but it had certainly shifted in its level of importance, and he realized that it might not be the first thing that he did. The process of finding an appropriate career would require more time for Tom to consider what he wanted, and where his interests lay. At this point, he was still in the process of discovering what he would be interested in and be good at. Although his parents were trying very hard to be supportive, Tom saw this decision as something that he had to do alone. Like a juggler keeping all his items in motion by catching and throwing them, he was unable to hold on to any particular idea for long, and was also unable to give any of them up entirely. Therefore while Tom considered his future career options seriously, the stress of figuring it out, coupled with the stress of working through his current Retail course, contributed to the difficulty and complexity of his juggling act.

Summary

Three metaphors described each of the students’ lived experience in finding a suitable career. The metaphors represented the degree of choice each student had in making their own decisions and the opportunities for each student to voice their thoughts and opinions. Because the dynamics within each situation were different, the degree to which individual choice was possible and whether students’ voices were heard varied from student to student. These interactions were important as they offered the opportunity to try out new ideas that influenced student identity development.

Julie’s parents gently mediated and guided her choices regarding her areas of interests and her career development. As accommodating as she was with others’ suggestions, Julie was also very clear about what she was interested in, and had no problems voicing them out when

given the opportunity. Her experiences helped her to slowly become more confident in herself and developed her desire to mature and be more responsible and independent. Her experience illustrated the process of “connected learning” (Ito et al., 2013) where out-of-school learning supported her academic learning in school and resulted in overcoming adversity. The dominant role that her parents played in curating her experiences was not unusual; Carroll & Dockrell’s (2012) study showed that parents are often their children’s greatest enablers. Thivya’s experience was one of struggling to find opportunities to sound out her voice and make her own choices. Her experience mirrored some of the stories presented by Hogansen and colleagues (2008), where the parents of young people felt that their children’s goals were unrealistic. However, Thivya tried to overcome such objections by learning to be independent, using different ways to express her individuality, and gathering sufficient information to help her convince her parents of her point of view. Tom was indecisive and unable to make clear choices of his own. Although he had a voice, he was not confident about what he should voice out, and often the obstacles seemed too daunting for him to overcome. Therefore he struggled with knowing what he wanted. His lack of clarity made it difficult for others, like his parents, to help and support him. His experiences were similar to the experiences of the students in Wilder and colleagues’ (2010) study, who felt that they did not have sufficient information, and were thus anxious about their futures. Not having enough information about how to cope with one’s dis/ability, or how their dis/ability influenced their learning, also affected academic performance (Black, 2014). Comparing the lived experiences of the three students in this study with other similar studies helped to get a sense of how similar or different the students’ experiences were and contributed to existing knowledge base of how students experienced transition.

Understanding their lived experiences also helps us to identify the “funds of identity” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) that made the lived experience of each of the students different and unique within an objective situation, or a figured world such as transition. Esteban-Guitart & Moll (2014) defined “funds of identity” as “historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for a person’s self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding” (p. 31). Therefore the funds of identity that can be identified across the three students included: parents, friends, teachers, significant others such as extended family members or religious figures, religious places of worship, work and volunteer experiences, and travelling to other countries. These funds of identity were represented in this study’s conceptual framework as: a) social resources and b) social and cultural experiences. In the literature review, people and experiences were identified as important elements in the lives of the students. In particular, the family and the community were highly valued (e.g., Carroll & Dockrell, 2012; McCall, 2015; Wilder et al., 2001; Yamamoto & Black, 2015). Some of the student’s funds of identity could be directly traced back to the funds of knowledge from the family, which became internalized and used by the student to define and describe themselves. Therefore each of the activities that were described in this section contributed to the students’ experience as well as converted or transformed various “funds of knowledge” into the students’ “funds of identity.” Thus the student developed their identity, and built self-awareness and self-consciousness, upon these resources.

Schools were places of learning, where students’ school experiences contributed to the dynamic composite of learning who they were and who they were becoming (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Therefore the school’s role was critical, as it contributed to new funds of identity for the student. It was also a place where invisible funds of identity such as hegemonic social

values functioned, of which the students might be unaware (Esteban-Guitart & Ratner, 2011).

The next section looks at the school's contribution to developing their students' funds of identity, particularly for their students with dis/abilities.

The School and Inclusive Practices

Zenith Secondary School defined its uniqueness as a school by its ability to be inclusive. It tailored learning for students who might have difficulties staying engaged in a regular secondary school. Students with dis/abilities benefited from this approach. Many of them, thanks to their families' support and the increased support in primary school, managed to pass the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), and instead of repeating Primary 6 for a second or third time, found themselves eligible for secondary school. Zenith Secondary School included students with dis/abilities in all school activities as part of their inclusion agenda. This section begins by presenting the ways in which Zenith Secondary School supported their students with dis/abilities and prepared them for future vocational studies. I describe the following school policies: (a) having the same goals and opportunities for everyone; (b) addressing the specific needs of each student; (c) identifying individual needs; (d) creating relationships with students and their families; and (e) working with student peer groups to support students with dis/abilities. I reveal how these five strategies reinforced the institutional effects of segregation and categorization and impacted the school experience of students with dis/abilities. I conclude this section with some hope for the future, as the school continued to build on what they achieved, and worked to overturn some of the unintended consequences.

Enforcing the Same Goals and Providing the Same Opportunities for Everyone

I think ... they must see that the next best destination after Zenith must be the vocational college... in Zenith, they will transform and realize that actually they can study...(School Leader)

We don't dumb down standards because of special needs. We want to treat these students as normal students and we want to the kids to know that they won't get any additional special considerations so the students know that: 'I can be part of this whole inclusive environment'. (School Leader)

Inclusion of all students meant that the school had the same goals for everyone, and provided everyone with equal opportunity to attend additional school programs. It also meant that the needs of students with identified dis/abilities were re-evaluated according to the school's priorities and available supports. For example, the school considered the ability to communicate well with others as an important goal for all students. The school provided specific support for additional learning and practice for students with dis/abilities prior to their IEPs (Industrial Experiential Program) and who needed to learn how to answer questions in a job interview, greet customers, and take orders (Teacher #5). This practice identified and evaluated important needs. The school worked with external agencies to provide specific programs, such as animal therapy, for students who had self-regulation issues. School counselors designed in-house programs to provide for specific needs, e.g., anger management issues (School Counselors). Students with dis/abilities may experience shifts in support needs, depending on their context. However, if the school's priorities and access to resources directed their assessments, it may mean that some students did not receive early identification of their support needs and/or remained without vital support for individual needs.

Students with dis/abilities were fully included in the academic and vocational instruction in the school. They studied the same subjects in the same classrooms as their peers and had equal access to school-based activities that were conducted for all students, whether for enrichment or for remedial purposes. Non-academic needs were addressed by the school's Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) program. The CCE program included Educational and Career Guidance (ECG) for the students. These programs were compulsory and included in the students' regular schedule. In addition, ECG was integrated into subject areas and addressed specifically in vocational lessons as well. Specific student needs were usually identified by the form teacher, and incorporated in the teaching of CCE and ECG lessons. This was aligned to the school's intention of making things inclusive, so that the students were not pulled out from classrooms for non-school related interventions. "I think generally ... in order to support their learning, it has to be customized in the classroom, the differentiation really has to be in the classroom" (Teacher #7). But while the teachers recognized the need for differentiation, it conflicted with the overall school ethos of being inclusive. "I will customize a little bit. But I cannot give too much leeway to them. They might think I'm practicing double-standards" (Teacher #11). Thus it was unlikely that differentiation for the students with dis/abilities was effective in the classroom, and any type of accommodation the teacher offered might be perceived as unfair. It was unclear whether teachers believed that differentiation was unfair or whether students in the classrooms claimed that they received unequal treatment. There was little discussion of the difference between equal treatment versus equitable treatment, and the purpose of each.

Thivya, for example, could have benefitted from a deeper understanding of her needs, and a more holistic view of her difficulties as well as her strengths. When her teachers were interviewed, none of them shared with me how they helped Thivya identify a suitable career

pathway. Thivya herself only mentioned the activities that were conducted for the whole cohort of students: “The talks in school, the events. Like when the people from the vocational college came to the school to talk, and set up a booth for every course” (Thivya Interview 3). Although these events were helpful, the school did not have processes to review her specific career considerations that included both her chronic medical condition as well as her learning dis/ability. Working with students whose experiences and knowledge base might be under-developed required a more individualized review of their needs. It required school personnel to expand their notions of what criteria a student like Thivya might have for determining appropriate careers, and to know the physical, intellectual, and personal challenges a career pathway might present over a 20-year span. In order for this to work, however, teachers would need to make the effort to know their students’ histories, capacities, and life circumstances, and to provide additional guidance that accounted for individual needs. Instead, teachers seemed to take the position that the value of a vocational education would apply equally across their population of students, with no personalized implications. “It’s all right not to get your choice, it’s just a stepping stone, to upgrade yourself. There is always room for advancement. Info-communications is good for her. She doesn’t like her hands to get oily. So computer work is more suitable for her” (Staff #12). Both academic and vocational teachers in the school believed in the school’s narrative and culture regarding the inclusiveness of the school culture and the suitability of vocational studies for students with dis/abilities. Therefore the teachers were socialized into the school’s notion that treating all students in a uniform manner was treating students equitably and acted as a proxy for equality and inclusion. Thivya was likely overlooked because her needs were considered mild, and she appeared to be coping well in Zenith. Therefore her teachers did not realize that she had an identified dis/ability or that she might have additional needs, and thus would have benefited

from additional help and support in identifying and thinking about suitable careers. Thivya herself mentioned that she would eventually need to find out more about other possible careers.

While the school's academic and non-academic programs were sufficient for most students to find and develop their interests and/or to develop relevant skills to cope in future educational settings, the programs may not have been sufficient for students with dis/abilities who were coping well in Zenith, but either developed needs over the course of their four years there, or had additional needs that might be relevant in a different work or educational setting. Therefore, the amount of career guidance provided might need to be more individualized, and to take into account not just the current level of need, but also the level of need that might manifest itself in future contexts. Students with dis/abilities were likely to have more difficulties changing and switching between career paths as they took more time to learn the necessary knowledge and skills for each type of career. Therefore, without adequate guidance, they would be disadvantaged, as they would take longer to secure relevant jobs and develop a career.

Tom would also have benefited from additional support with career awareness and planning. His parents were clearly disappointed and indicated that the school could have done more. "Like how to give him ideas, or to talk about how you should prepare for the career you want. I don't think the school have such form of guidance" (Tom Mother, Parent Interview). Tom himself did not seem to have been impacted by the school's efforts to provide guidance on educational and career options. He would have benefitted from more individualized support and guidance to pursue more information or experiences that would reveal the fit of different careers to Tom's ambitions, capacities, and interests.

Without individualization and specific, personal goals for students with dis/abilities, students had insufficient guidance to enable them to reach the desired goals for all students. The

high expectations that the school and teachers had for the students would be unrealistic and unachievable if the school insisted that the students were able to reach the goals but without ensuring that the students had the skills and knowledge to do so. Thus the design of the school's curriculum impeded the students' progress towards achieving long-term success. The school's focus on short-term goals reinforced the societal notions that if people with dis/abilities had learned to cope, then they could be considered cured or would not require additional assistance. Unlike a medical model in which an ailment is diagnosed, treated, and cured, a dis/ability is more likely to have lifelong consequences which varied in different contexts. Thus, access to powerful pedagogies, technology, and carefully paced learning sequences specifically tailored to individual needs could produce successful outcomes for students' with dis/abilities to be successfully included in different contexts.

Experiencing dis/ability was not a static and consistent experience across individuals, but was something that changed over time, socially constructed based on each individual's situation and environment. Therefore a change in setting from secondary school to vocational college should trigger a review of student needs, so that appropriate support can be provided for the upcoming change in situation and environment. For Thivya, a review conducted at the end of Secondary 2 would have been helpful, so that the school could review her choice of vocational studies with her and her family so they could understand the best fit for her. Placing her in Mechanical studies would then have been a calculated move, rather an assumption about Thivya's true preference. Perhaps she would have ended up in Mechanical studies anyway, but this additional guidance process would have made her Mechanical studies teacher more aware of her needs, and given the teacher a clearer idea of how to help Thivya from the very beginning. Due to the lack of specific processes within the school to seek out the potential difficulties that

students may experience, Thivya's needs remained hidden from the school. Therefore she did not receive specific support that would have helped her to understand her areas of strength, discover her needs, and identify the accommodations that would have helped her overcome the difficulties she might face in the future.

The school perceived students whose needs were more obvious as problems to be solved. Therefore those students were more likely to receive more direct forms of support. The next section describes the strategies used by the school to place these forms of direct support within their inclusive culture.

Meeting the Perceived Needs of Students with Dis/abilities by “Channeling”

...because the special educational needs student will need a longer runway to rebuild themselves, build their confidence and their ability, ... So I think the school must always think for them as the value proposition first, what is best for them, but the point is that to be able to do very well or just average depends on how much effort they put in, and also how much gap they need to close before they can reach that competency level. (School Leader)

In Secondary One and Two, all students in Zenith did compulsory vocational taster modules to try out and select from four vocational studies options to specialize in when they entered Secondary Three and Four. At the end of Secondary Four, if they met all the competencies required, they obtained a vocational skills certificate. Although all students indicated their preference of vocational study, school leaders had the final say in making executive decisions regarding where the students eventually ended up. As a standard process, all students were allocated to a specific vocation based on a combination of factors, i.e., their preference and their likelihood of doing well. “I rather not look at it as SEN, but rather more of a

holistic kind of student wellbeing ... So that's why when I ... allocate my vocational places to my students, I consciously don't use the meritocratic approach but rather give every student at least their second choice approach" (School Leader). Instead of a purely meritocratic approach, the school used an inclusive approach that gave every student the opportunity to get one of their preferred choices. The school recognized that students who were able to work on something they were interested in were more likely to be motivated to do well. However, as a parallel process, students that the school considered to have dis/abilities that were harder to manage in other vocational studies, e.g., for safety reasons, were channeled into Retail Studies:

Typically only those with chronic SEN (special educational needs), there's also not much of a choice, you'll be channeled to retail, because mechanical and facility have safety issues. Hospitality is a popular course, so those with higher academic ability normally will converge into hospitality. (School Leader)

This dual system had good intentions that benefitted the majority of the students. However, it did not have equitable outcomes for students who did not make a good choice in their selection, or if they had severe needs but did not like retail. Both Julie and Tom were channeled to Retail Studies, but were generally satisfied with the course of study, and both were able to successfully obtain their vocational skills certification. The value proposition, as mentioned by the school, worked out well for them. They or their parents were unlikely to be interested in Mechanical or Facilities Studies, but the students' possible exclusion from Hospitality Studies due to their lower achievement and/or lower possibility of good results made it more difficult for them to pursue a different career pathway other than Retail in the future.

The school's beliefs about how to best support a student with dis/ability without specifically understanding or recognizing the strengths of the student put the students at risk of

starting down a career path that may not interest them in the long term. Julie's interest was not specifically in retail, and she was already thinking of doing hospitality courses in the future. "In Poly, I want to do something different from retail, little bit different, like hospitality," (Julie Interview 3). Tom, on the other hand, found ways to convince himself that what he was familiar with might be the best place for him, even if he had no real interest in it. "Retail. It's easier. ... I tell myself I want to learn this (i.e., retail)" (Tom Interview 1). An additional downside for Tom was that his classmates became an obstacle for him because he did not get along with them. "They don't treat me fairly" (Tom Interview 2). Thus he did not receive good peer support, and had difficulties making friends that could support him in the long term. Therefore the students' placement in Retail Studies, despite its short-term benefits, did have a long-term impact on their career choices. While it seemed as if students with dis/abilities might have more difficulties with academic achievement, the solution should not be to place them in pre-determined vocations prematurely, but to offer a more thoughtful and purposeful choice by aligning their strengths and interests to their vocational studies. The school's system of allocating students to a vocation also resulted in segregating those with more severe needs and poorer performance into Retail Studies, setting up a hierarchy of vocational courses. The general student population had less interaction with the students with dis/abilities, thus excluding them further and compounding their difficulties in making supportive and caring friends who could help them in school, and could also become their long-term friends.

While it was arguably more efficient for schools to sort students into specific vocational electives by academic performance, one might argue that in other non-examinable areas, it was possible to achieve a higher level of inclusion, for example, in the school's co-curricular activity (CCA) program. The CCA was a compulsory part of the school program, integrated into the

school's weekly schedule. Coincidentally, all three youths interviewed were in the Library Club for at least two years at Zenith Secondary School. None of them chose to be in the Library Club when they first joined the school because it was only started after the first six months of the school year. They had all joined a different CCA when they first entered the school and joined the Library Club under different circumstances:

- Tom: During the CCA, they tell me I cannot be in the pop band anymore. (Tom Interview 3)
- Thivya: Because I couldn't do the service club, I couldn't do the work there. It was too physical.

TIY: So why library?

Thivya: No choice. Can only join what is left. (Thivya Interview 1)

- TIY: Do you wish you had stayed in media club?

Julie: Yes, but my teacher wanted me to do library, so I did library. (Julie Interview 3)

None of these were entirely positive experiences for the youths; they were asked to leave a CCA that they were interested in, told that they were not good enough for a different CCA, and given no choice at all. In fact, the Library Club was Thivya's third CCA. She had quit the Pop Band at the end of Secondary 1 because she did not enjoy learning the drum, and her teachers placed her in the Service Club. Her mother then requested a change at the end of Secondary 2, because the Service Club required Thivya to do physical labor, which was not beneficial for her physical condition. When asked about the Library Club, a school leader explained their rationale for having a Library Club:

This is one area perhaps we don't have sufficient clarity, partly also because we do not want to treat them differently from the rest. ... So for our students with more severe SEN,

they will ordinarily not be in a sports or performing arts that require team training and team performance, but more in clubs where quite a number of them are in, (like the library club. That's when the goals that the teacher set are for everybody. (For example:) "All of you have to be responsible for certain section of the library"; "All of you have to do some reading or do some community service outside school", so everybody is more part of a whole body rather than one CCA with two different groups and roles, than you create a segmentation which makes the other group feel like they are of lower ability... if I put them there, then they might just be treated like outcasts by their teammates who are very serious about training. (School Leader)

The school leader's concern was accurately reflected in Tom's predicament in the Pop Band. Tom was not doing well in the Pop Band, and due to his difficulties learning the instrument, he was bullied into leaving the CCA. "I was sad...because they don't like me. They said bad things about me" (Tom Interview 3). Although he did not share any possible issues that he faced in the Library Club, he also did not share the activities he engaged in or his impression of the library club. The experience of Thivya and Julie were more intrusive; they were not given the opportunity to stay in their existing CCA or to find a CCA that was more aligned with their interest, and to be included in that setting. Julie, in particular, was purposefully segregated and put with others based on her perceived need. Both girls reconciled with this situation by finding something in the CCA that interested or benefited them. "I always arrange books and arrange CDs.... I get to scan books. My favorite is scanning books... I manage to put up some posters. We also make nice things, make things pretty... I also make bookmarks for my teachers..." (Julie Interview 2); "We had activities... went to the old folks' home once...finding interest in reading" (Thivya Interview 1). Although this showed that they viewed their experience

positively, and were resilient in this time of conflict, it also meant that they felt disempowered. I was surprised when Thivya shared a number of suggestions to improve the Library Club: “Watch movies, and discuss about it. ... Plan to make library funnier (i.e., more fun) for the readers. Want to go on stage to tell about the Library Club” (Thivya Interview 1). Unfortunately she did not have the opportunity to share her suggestions with her teachers in charge of the library club when she was there. This pointed to the school’s wasted opportunities to fully engage students, when the library club was perceived as just a solution to provide a safe place for students to be successful. This was another example of the school sorting their students based on their perceived needs and providing a safer place for the students, as well as for the teachers teaching them. Giving the students a safer place to exist did not provide equitable opportunities for learning and engagement for these students, nor did it foster a greater level of inclusion for them. Most revealing was what the youths shared when I asked them what CCAs they were considering joining in the vocational college. It was no coincidence that all of them had joined or were planning to join a CCA in the vocational college that was most like their initial CCA at Zenith. Julie joined photography. “I joined a new CCA. Photography. I learn many new things about photography. I use the camera that my parents got me when I first joined the Media Club in secondary school” (Julie Interview 3). Tom and Thivya, however, both wanted to play an instrument. Tom was considering drums in the pop band, and Thivya was considering learning a new instrument.

Although their initial interest was not cultivated in secondary school, they gained a second chance and opportunity to continue with their areas of interest at their vocational college. Perhaps a message for the secondary school is that it may be less important for the youths to do something they were good at than what they were interested in. Therefore the school should

provide them with experiences to help them discern their interests. The role of a peer group cannot be underestimated for avoiding the worst-case scenario that Tom experienced. How the peer group responded to students with dis/abilities and how the school developed those relationships will be covered later.

Although Zenith only accepted students from one academic course, further segmentation and segregation of the population occurred when educational opportunities were not equitably allocated or when the development of the youth was seen as less important than containing them in a safe environment. It mirrored the issues of other secondary schools where the students in the lowest academic course were often ostracized and school leaders paid less attention to them. It also mirrored society where the weakest and most disadvantaged were often restricted in the range of opportunities available to them. Despite the school's efforts to develop an inclusive environment for students with dis/abilities, often the student's specific needs were overlooked. It was not that the school did not identify the needs of their students, but the question was whose needs were prioritized and identified, and what tools were used to aid the identification.

Identifying School-Related Needs

- The intervention (is) to see what the school needs to do now that the child is in our school, how do we look out for triggers that may cause the child to melt down or cause the child to lose confidence, and also know what are the opportunities that will bring out the best in this particular child with special needs. (School Leader)
- Attendance, and of course your first assessment result, your attentiveness in class or the number of behavioural issues you manifest. Because they have 4 years with us, you just need 1 term or 1 semester and you can already spot some early trend. (School Leader)

- And we have the other part where we have kids who are technically not diagnosed, but the school performance, the behavior manifestations, may not be very much different from someone who's officially diagnosed... (School Leader)

Zenith Secondary took in students as long as they have passed the PSLE, regardless of any identified dis/ability. "When we get students to apply we don't have a cell asking the students to declare their special needs as that is completely inconsequential and irrelevant" (School Leader). By being needs-blind, the school exercises inclusiveness by not excluding any deserving student a place in the school. The school has already accepted students that are of a particular profile, i.e., the below average performer and the disadvantaged. According to the school leaders, the student population of Zenith was fairly unique. It had a significantly larger population of students who had identified dis/abilities: "...here we have high SEN percentage..." (School Leader). As a school, they had identified student issues that were most common across the student population and used whole-school strategies to address them. For example, they aimed to improve the students' ability to communicate with confidence:

As a general school approach, communication opportunities are plentiful during English lesson. In fact, as a conscious approach, everyone will be given a chance to speak up in front of the class, so some of the kids, over 4 years, with very low confidence to speak, we have managed to turn them around." (School Leader)

Therefore based on an analysis of the school structure, school leaders' understanding of an inclusive school culture included providing a dual academic and vocational program that was engaging and relevant to all, as well as smaller class sizes and increased teacher-student interaction and relationship-building opportunities to get to know and understand each student.

Besides their whole-school approaches, the school also provided “interventions” for students who had difficulties managing and regulating their emotions and behaviors:

The intervention programs we have: the (therapy) dog, Telly; the ADHD Program; ...anger management, time-out program (i.e., program for students at-risk of dropping out of school). All these are our transitional programs to condition the children, so they can be better prepared (for) post-secondary (settings)...” (School Leader)

These interventions were not restricted to students with dis/abilities, but were open to students who had difficulties managing in school, as identified by the school, and thus required direct intervention. These were typically programs for groups of students, and managed either by external personnel or the school counselors.

To manage the students’ day-to-day behavior, the school identified triggers for individual students in order to avoid student meltdowns. “We look out for triggers that may cause the child to meltdown or cause the child to lose confidence, and also know what are the opportunities that will bring out the best in this particular child with special needs” (School Leader). However, the school did not have a systematic way of identifying them, other than holding transition meetings with parents to find out how best to support their child. These transition meetings were conducted in the first half of their first year in Zenith. During these meetings, the school would learn more about the student, about their difficulties and also their strengths. Thivya’s mother recalled filling in a form to inform the school, “In the beginning they had a form, I wrote in and spoke to the teacher, to have more patience with her.” (Thivya Mother, Parent Interview). This form was given out to all the students, and not just to students with dis/abilities. Therefore it was a very rough gauge of the needs of the students, from their parents’ point of view. These interventions for specific issues and for the daily interactions with the student with dis/abilities

pinpoint deficits that the student had, and the school's aims were to change the deficits or to manage them. The school located the point of difficulty within the child and not in their environment. Therefore there was a lack of specific approaches that helped students learn in the classroom, and addressed their difficulties within the classroom environment.

Other proxy indicators used by the school to identify other areas of needs included: the student's attendance in school, attentiveness in class, assessment results, and behavioral issues, and not just a student's identified dis/ability. The school was mindful that there were other students with similar patterns of behavior and learning that might not have an identified dis/ability. Therefore they collected information from all students. They acknowledged that it was not the dis/ability label that defined the needs or behavior of the student but it was important to understand situations that created issues for each individual and how the school could help address the causes:

But certainly you can actually realize that while the students come with so-called labels of special education needs, it's really about understanding what is behind it, and then what are things that in this school that you plan out will be able to help them settle in very nicely. (School Leader)

This was the reasoning the school used to distribute their resources across students that have similar needs, rather than just to students with an identified dis/ability.

The needs that seemed to be important for the school to address were the ones that affected educational performance; for example, whether the student needed access arrangements when taking their examinations. Although access arrangements required a student to be diagnosed with a dis/ability, the school reviewed all their students to see who needed access arrangements, especially extra time for an exam. The first step in this process was to remove the

accommodations from students with dis/abilities who entered the school based on exam results obtained with these same accommodations:

When they come in at Sec 1, they will all do exams in a normalized condition, no additional time will be given. Our rationale for that is, we want the kid to try to cope with the standard timings, and then we do that for 2 years. (School Leader)

The school spent two years observing the students before deciding which students would benefit from extra time. The main consideration for the school was whether the students would benefit from the extra time in a tangible way, i.e., substantial increase in grades. To make this determination, the school spent a lot of time and effort deciding whether a student needed extra time:

The (Special Educational Needs [SEN]) committee members' main role is doing lesson observation, to determine AA (Access Arrangement), so when the English and math teachers surface names, the initial list is quite big. The SEN committee, ..., we will schedule to move in, we will observe these kids, we map it against their exam marks, so we have a very good spread (of information) before we make a decision. (School Leader)

The school investigated whether these students had a prior diagnosis, and if not, they would either obtain the parents' support in sending the student for a diagnostic evaluation or parents' permission for the school to send the student for the evaluation. The family would have the choice of whether they wanted their children to receive access arrangements, but the student would not get a chance to voice their opinion. The decisions were made bilaterally, between the school and the family, without including the student.

It was unfortunate that the process of applying for access arrangements from the Exam Board required the student to have an identified dis/ability. The school was forced to send

students for evaluations, just so that appropriate support could be given. This experience created a false divide between the students whom the school decided should receive access arrangements, and the students who did not receive access arrangements, although the latter could have benefited from it as well (albeit in a lesser degree). Julie reported that her classmates felt jealous that she received extra time and was able to do her exams in a smaller, quieter location. “They ask: ‘Julie, can you take me to NUH (i.e., National University Hospital). I also want extra time” (Julie Interview 1). Her peers saw access arrangements as a benefit, but they did not understand that having a dis/ability label or being seen as different also resulted in discrimination and segregation. For example, students who received access arrangements had their exam certificates annotated to say that they received access arrangements. Others who were unaware of the nature of access arrangements might devalue the results obtained by the student with dis/ability. This was less likely to happen across educational institutions, but might have consequences in the working world.

The policy of being needs-blind until there was evidence or a need was flagged was in conflict with the school’s intention to be inclusive, because until they could be observed to have a need based on the school’s method of identification, students’ needs were not supported or helped, and they were not successfully included. In addition, students without an official diagnosis were not able to access specific programs or interventions. Naturally the school was mindful of their limited resources and ability to provide individual interventions, “The reason is because the numbers that go for these programs are small, and we have more than enough SEN kids already. We have to wean off the less chronic cases, so to give the opportunity to the most needy” (School Leader). However, it was unclear how the school defined the “most needy”—and in what area of need. Although the school used certain indicators, they did not assess the needs

of the students holistically, nor did they use clear benchmarks to decide if any student might be at risk for specific issues. If a student had academic difficulties, they were often dealt with within the school using in-school programs, helmed by individual teachers. To address behavioural issues, the school first identified a specific program to address a specific issue that had obvious consequences and was easily observed in school; for example, they identified frequent absenteeism, or anger management issues as key areas for intervention. After they have identified an area of concern and either sourced for an external provider or developed a program in-house, they selected students who might be best suited for the program. Programs were not developed based on an understanding of an overall understanding of the individual needs of their students.

Based on the experiences of the youths in this study, being identified with a dis/ability did not guarantee any support, nor were their individual needs addressed. All of them did benefit from whole-school or whole-class approaches to build confidence and communication skills, as well as academic remediation for specific subjects. However, none of the youths in this study received any additional intervention from the school, likely because they did not have attendance issues nor did they cause major disciplinary problems, and were easily managed. Only Julie received exemption from Mother Tongue exams, while Tom and Thivya took and passed their mother tongue exams without additional support. Julie was also the only one that had extra time to complete her exams, and was able to do her exams in a separate room. Because Tom had speech articulation issues, his accommodation was that his examiners adjusted their approach for his oral exams. Julie also received some counseling support at the beginning of her time at Zenith. She needed help with understanding social norms and cues, such as being aware of being too physically close to others and not respecting her peers' privacy. Although there were

concerns about her social skills and her lack of close friends, she did not receive any additional intervention or support to help her either develop better social skills or to help her identify a network of friends. None of the students in this study received any additional career guidance, nor did they receive additional support for emotional or mental health issues. Although Tom had issues with his self-confidence and had high levels of anxiety, he was not referred for counseling or for external intervention. It seemed that the school felt that his difficulties were more due to his poor communication skills, and encouraged his father to teach him how to manage his relationships with others.

By not addressing their specific needs, the school unintentionally made it more difficult for the students to be successful and transition smoothly into the next phase of education. When asked specifically about transition planning and transition needs, the focus was on students that faced the most difficulties:

Those with special needs, very severe special needs, we need very deliberate facilitation, like the case of student A., who we needed to connect directly with a special school for vocational studies. For those with severe special needs we need to do more personalized facilitation because without which there's no way the main program can help him, so I'll say that is the transition support that we give to the students. (School Leader)

Here the strategy to sort by needs was, once again, the prevalent concept, using academic ability and performance and behavioural issues to determine the suitability of placement without considering the student's strengths, needs, and interests. Thus the school was limited in its ability to change individual lives by its own needs-blindness and policy to provide everyone an equal chance, focusing on only specific indicators and outcome measures as well as a narrow view of the competencies that students with dis/abilities might need for the long term. The school's focus

on academic and vocational performance determined the issues that were identified for whole-school support, as well as for individual intervention. As such, they were not able to address the long-term and developmental needs of students with dis/abilities that would support their success in new educational settings, and also in their future role in society. At the time of the interviews, the school had no specific intervention available that directly addressed the developmental or transition needs for students with dis/abilities, to help them develop skills that helped them to be more successful in their next educational setting, or to help them mature as a young adult.

Perhaps the school was unsure of which transition needs to focus on. “There’s always a need to transit but the thing is: What is the pace?” (School Leader). They were also unclear which transition goals would be relevant for their students. Without specific direction regarding how to identify and support transition needs, the school would reinforce what parents feared and society accepted through its systems and processes, i.e., that young people with dis/abilities would have difficulties becoming accomplished citizens, but could be sufficiently trained to do work that no one else wants to do. Parents wanting their children to achieve more with their lives would be interested in working with the school to ensure that their children were able to access the opportunities available. Because parents are the most constant presence in their children’s lives, the school should prioritize what parents do for their children, thus identifying the areas in which the school and the family could work collaboratively. Hence we will discuss in the next part how the school worked, or did not work, with families.

Working with the Students, Not the Parents

- I wouldn’t want to use the word “exclusion”; “prioritize” is still reasonable because who is my customer? It’s the student first ... then if really is parenting issue, then of

course we will invest in the parent, but if it is the child itself, misbehaving and not responsible, then addressing the parent can only do so much. (School Leader).

- The parents, while they are in this situation where they have to manage the SEN kid for the rest of their lives, are they in a position to leverage on teachable moments, to help these kids learn, get conditioned socially, probably not... (School Leader)

It was clear from these two excerpts that the school did not think very highly of the majority of their students' parents. The school also saw its role as educating the student; working with parents was secondary and only if the parents were the ones that needed help or if they were the problem. The school looked down on parents that were not teaching their children socially acceptable behaviors, and took it upon themselves to educate the student instead. "But we as teachers ... we have that advantage where we are put in platforms where we can alter behavior, where we can modify some of their thinking, where we can shape some of their actions" (School Leader). The school "prioritized" their time, by working directly with the student, but did not want to be seen as "excluding" the parents. The school's preference to work directly with the students, and their ineffective way of partnering with families, stemmed from their view of parents and families. Parents were not seen as equal partners. As presented in the first section of this chapter, Tom's parents felt like a dumping ground when the school decided they did not have the resources to work with the child. Julie's parents felt like they were troublemakers and Thivya's parents just stayed away from the school. With such a negative view of parents, and a bullying attitude towards parents, it was not surprising that parents did not feel that the school had provided much to them or their children, in terms of helping their children mature into adults. Although the school's inclusive approach also extended to parents (i.e., open door policy for parents), their belief of what parents could and should do did not give parents the opportunities

to work with the school as equal partners and contributors to their children's development and education.

When parents were left out from the education process, the youth that ultimately faced the consequences, as illustrated by Tom's parents experience with the school. They felt left out of the discussion, and were unaware of their role when applying to the vocational college. Thus Tom felt that neither the school nor his parents were helpful in guiding him. Although his parents could have done a better job providing career guidance, the school also did not do their role well to educate and support parents whose children may need more help to discover his/her interests and strengths. Both the school and his family failed to include Tom's voice in their thinking about his future, and if his opinions were sought, both the school and his parents might have had more opportunities to guide and support his deliberations about his future. Julie's case would be a good example of how even the simplest of partnerships between school and family supported the youth's development. Although in her case, her parents did most of the initiating and used the school to their advantage to learn more about the system and the possible opportunities, the alignment of what the school was sharing with the students and the parent's reinforcement of similar ideas at home helped Julie to have a clear sense of where she was going in her career and in her educational journey. When deciding on their careers, students often listened and followed their parent's wishes, as illustrated by Thivya's experience. There was a lack of useful information for Thivya regarding her career choices from the school. Therefore, if the school worked with the parents as equal partners, the youth would gain more knowledge about the system and about themselves, and developed ways to be self-determined and responsible for themselves.

The school's choice of working primarily with students with regards to behavioural issues also extended to other areas of the student's life, such as their career choices and other life skills. Although the school's culture of inclusion included the parents, the parents were not made to feel welcomed or that they had an equal voice in the school. Working with parents specifically with the intention to educate parents silenced the parent's voices that may have shed light on unique family situations, opportunities, and obstacles otherwise unknown to the school. Although the school conducted home visits at least once in the student's first year at the school, it did not mean that there was a genuine exchange and learning with the family. The most important goal of the teacher's visit was to fill out a profile form, and this form determined what information was collected. However, it was not possible to understand families' socio-cultural context by filling in a form. The school did not recognize the families' funds of knowledge, and tended to characterize families based on stereotypes and tropes. This had the unintended consequence of reducing the positive impact that families could have on their children as they journeyed closely together. Even though the school aimed to be inclusive towards parents, and accepted them in the school, their attitude towards parents did not allow them to work collaboratively with parents. Thus this became a disadvantage for the students, and for students with dis/abilities in particular.

The other significant people in the student's lives were their friends in school. In a truly inclusive setting, students with dis/abilities should feel safe and empowered to make friends. The next part looks at how the school engaged the peers in developing an inclusive culture.

Teaching Peers Tolerance and not Understanding

- We also want them to recognize special populations, and I think in Zenith because they see it every day. I would say the kids have really good tolerance levels ... they

don't feel that they have the right to mock others or call others names. So we have sort of discovered this equalizing effect, they are by and large more receptive of those with conditions. (School Leader)

- I think we have conditioned our, these peers of our special needs students in such a way that they somehow see them as normalized, they accepted them as part of Zenith. (Teacher #3)
- To so-called educate the rest of the class, how to handle these students. ... Teachers are also doing trial and error methods to see what works, what doesn't work. ... So within the class they come up with their own strategies to cope with the class dynamic... reminding the students to also be respectful and not treat these students in a disrespectful way is very important. (Teacher #5)

Zenith Secondary School was structured to be inclusive and to create a safe environment for all students, especially those with dis/abilities. Everyone there was considered equal as they were all in the Normal (Technical) course, although there were a large number of students with dis/abilities in Zenith. Most of them had hidden dis/abilities such as dyslexia or ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), and they would not be obviously different from those who had difficulties reading or those with behavioural problems. For the three youths in this study, Thivya's dis/ability was not obvious, even to the teachers, while Julie and Tom, because of their physical features and odd social behaviors, were seen to be different. Therefore socially, Thivya had less difficulty in school than either Tom or Julie. But all three of them emphasized the importance of having friends and being with friends. Often, the nature of their school experience was determined by how easy it was for them to make friends. Tom described his experience of starting in vocational college:

They care about me, and take care of me. They encourage me to do better. I can talk to my classmates more. When I was in Zenith, people didn't care about me. I feel very happy now, because I have a partner to do work. (Tom Interview 3)

The school engaged the peers to create an inclusive environment; however, their approach was to help them tolerate difference, rather than to accept difference. The peers still ended up "othering" the students who were seen to be different and who needed special help to cope in school. The teachers saw their role as conditioning the other students to be tolerant, rather than encouraging a change in attitude towards others who were different. Students were usually not told that the students with dis/abilities had any specific diagnostic label, but their teachers would use statements such as, "so and so kid has a higher need than others, and all of us are going to help him or her succeed" (School Leader). In some cases, teachers appointed particular peers as "buddies" who, instead of being a friend to the student with dis/ability, became a mini-teacher who provided advice and told them what was wrong with their behavior, and even helped other teachers manage their interactions with the student.

What some of the teachers used to do is to give them buddies, 1-2 buddies. That really helps these kids, to the extent that even if they are in different classes, when they see this person, they will go and advise that person or talk to them or discipline them. ... It needs to be someone who can work with that person, is patient with that person. They don't need to understand the condition, what works or what doesn't work. (Teacher #5)

Even with the buddy, the expectation was not that the student would learn to interact with their peers, or that that he/she would find real friends. The expectation here was that the buddy, along with the rest of the class would be able to take care of their classmate, like a "baby-sitter." These strategies of conditioning the class or assigning a buddy were not likely to help the student with

dis/abilities to have a more positive peer experience, or to help them mature and learn better social or life skills. It also did not teach peers how to understand or learn about the person and to see them as somebody they could interact with and get to know better. Often the peers had negative experiences with the student with dis/ability and while their teachers taught them to “suspend judgment” (Teacher #3), the peers chose not to show any interest or care and concern for the student with dis/ability (Fieldnotes_Observations_Day2).

As an indication of the outcomes of current school’s efforts, Julie only had one good friend, and Tom did not have classmates that he wanted to spend time with. Therefore, while the school had already started the work of building an inclusive school community for students with dis/abilities, there was more to do as their current efforts stopped short of creating a fully inclusive, understanding, and accepting peer culture for students with dis/abilities. The peers were invited to support the student with dis/abilities without encouraging them to reflect on their own personal experiences and privileges. They were unable to consider how similar the classmate they were helping was to them, and to see the classmate with dis/abilities as a unique individual and person, and not just someone whose behaviors they were forced to tolerate. They were not taught to question what it meant to be “normal,” and how to include rather than exclude more people in that definition of “normal.” Ironically, according to the way students were sorted in secondary schools, students who were the weakest academically and are in the lowest academic course are in the “Normal” course. All of the students in Zenith were in the “Normal” (Technical) course, which is the lower sub-category within the “Normal” course. So while there should be no difference among the students because everyone was equally “normal,” there was an automatic response for students to gravitate towards people who were like them, or people who had the same interests or experiences, and to make a distinction between “us” and

“them/others.” Therefore, the school would need to change the mindsets of the peers, and not just their behaviors, in order to create an inclusive culture for all students. While the current situation could be described as a lot better than the experiences of students who were in other secondary schools in even more segregated environments, it should not be left that way. It was important that the school continued to work on areas that were not ideal. Therefore, looking at what the school was doing about its current situation would show if the school understood that inclusion was a process and not just an outcome.

An Ongoing Cycle: Resisting the Easy Way Out

Something that we deliberately did this year: ... at the N levels result release, we will invite a couple of schools and I think about 8 schools came from different faculties, and the lecturers were actually present in the hall... But again, I realised this, while we set up the platform, how many families actually latched on and used them? I would say, the numbers could be more. ... there are many things that we planned, but there is a need to make the parents, we need to rope the parents in such a way that they will go and use these people who have high level of expertise. (School Leader)

This excerpt showed some of the reflective thinking that the school leaders and the teachers did during their interview. These were ideas that they were thinking about and I was privileged that they chose to share it with me. There were things that they knew they wanted to change. Working with parents and how school could become more useful for parents were suggestions that both school leaders and teachers said they wanted to work on. Parent engagement was currently seen as using parents as sources of information about their child, or to ensure that parents were aware of what was happening in school and was available when the school needed help. A new way to understand parent engagement was to seek out families' funds

of knowledge and their needs, and to understand their goals for their children. The school would then be able to truly understand parents, without using stereotypes, and work with them to collaboratively support their children towards some of the goals, “If there’s a chance to really meet them and talk to them, that will help a lot of, and how it shapes the thinking towards them. Because I still believe information gathering is important, and we don’t hear the first-hand information from them” (Teacher #3).

Understanding the parent’s concerns about transition, and then hearing the voices of the student, enabled the school to work together with the whole family to help address issues that were of concern for the future:

We have a SEN kid who likes tourism a lot, so the father and mother started engagement with us: “He keeps saying he wants to go tourism. But while he can speak well, he sometimes can tangent off, he may not look at the person face to face, sometimes he may ask questions that are not related to the job, so do you think he can go into this area?” So the parents are very proactive, they are already thinking about careers, not just the vocational course: “So if he is so interested in tourism and travel, even if he qualifies for the course, should I be converging him on some other courses? Will he be able to work as a tour agent or as a tour guide?” (School Leader)

In this anecdote, parents were already thinking ahead for their child. Just like the parents in this study, they were protective and worried about the long term. They were also seeking advice and trusted the school to help them. So the school supported both the parents and their son. “My colleague was working closely with that family and I was also working closely with that boy” (School Leader). Different people were working with the family: first, one of the school leaders worked with the parents, probably to allay their concerns by providing information about

vocational course and the possible careers; and second, another school leader worked with the boy to help him understand the range of choices that he was able to make, and the flexibility that was afforded to him, should he change his mind, or if he chooses a different interest in the future. “So I prepared him to a certain extent until he became open enough and he was able to say ‘Yes, if I come across other jobs, definitely I will not say no to it’” (School Leader). This example of working with the family, as well as preparing the child, was done collaboratively with the parent, based on the parent’s concerns.

Through the anecdote, the school was slowly starting to understand and embrace, that an important role of the school was to do more to help the students with dis/abilities transit better into vocational colleges and to work environments:

Transition in terms of, we providing information or evidences ... for the transition to the respective vocational colleges ... we probably have the capacity to do it, and we are already making an initial step, as we settle our first cohort and certainly, the full score of students going there, there will be interest on how they are doing. So we will be monitoring, we will be engaging, and maybe finding small steps to see how best to understand what kind of issue they face there, to facilitate the transition. (School Leader)

It is likely that over time, these processes, as demonstrated and modeled by the school leaders, will slowly become part of the school system of supporting students with dis/abilities in transition:

This is a new school, so I take it as a personal interest to do a lot of this, but we must then translate all these into work flow, into SOP (standard operating procedure) so that over the longer term it will be sustained, but of course the key people who drive this, as in any other MOE (Ministry of Education) school, I think would be the subgroup of ECG

(Educational and Career Guidance) in the CCE (Character and Citizenship Education) committee. (School Leader)

When I talked with the teacher involved with CCE, he also reiterated that they were making changes and improving ECG for all students. This would be a timely reminder to concurrently review how the needs of students with dis/abilities could be addressed with whole school approaches, as well as identifying areas where they might require more support. It would also open up ways in which the school could work with families to ensure that there was an agreement on which career or transition goals were important.

Another area in which the willingness to resist stagnation and to continue to improve was in the area of the Industrial Experiential Program, in particular for students, such as those with dis/abilities, who might be unable to cope with work attachment in the open market:

Because the system gives us the leeway to omit some things out of the IEP, so we can run a school-based program for them and they still fulfill the hours. So we realized that while that is the easy way out, we can easily do that, but we still feel that we want to challenge ourselves, we want to push boundaries and try to give these kids a placement. (School Leader)

At the time of the study, the school had already made changes to the IEP, by adding teacher-mentors for students, creating avenues for reflection by the students regarding their experience, and providing pre-IEP training support for students to clearly give them skills to be successful:

The preparation that we need to do in school can be intense, before we send them out. We scaffold and bring them through ... So got to explicitly teach and coach, so our SEN teachers do that coaching. And because we have that retail café, we actually do real authentic practice here. (School Leader)

Teachers with the interest and knowledge regarding supporting students with dis/abilities were brought together only in the past year before this study to form a SEN committee. As mentioned earlier, their first task was to deal with access arrangements. They also provided professional development for their colleagues, and worked directly with groups of students in their classes. Therefore, the team did not have the chance to review or screen their students to identify areas of need that required more explicit support. One of the teachers on the team recognized the limitations of their current support systems and provisions and discussed the need for individualized attention during the interview.

That's why the camps and all that comes in, to work together as a class. We have group work and things like that. However sometimes – it's not explicit – so probably what we can do for these kids is to have some program which are very explicit. Especially for SEN kids, the main threat that actually makes them is the social interaction. Be it Julie, be it Thivya, or Tom, the common thread that connects them, is the social interaction. So maybe that is something that we can look to for future batches, to teach them a bit more on how to interact with people, how to make friends. (Teacher #5)

The teacher was mindful to look beyond the diagnosis and labels to consider what was difficult for the students and what hindered their access to opportunities, whether the difficulties were social or academic. She then tried to figure out what needs the school could help address and what skills could be taught, so that the school could support the students' development. Another anecdote from a school leader also reinforced the important role that the school could play to help support student development:

So the question is about what happens to him (i.e., A.) after Zenith, and how do we help him get to where he needs to be as he leaves the school. He loves to bond with S. (a

classmate) ... so if any teacher wants anything to be communicated to A. quickly, S. will come in as the middle person, and when S. tells him, he will get it done, for S. So again, we are also wondering, we want to expand his world-view of being regulated enough to comply to different humans other than S., because working world how? We are starting to tell the mother this that while you are at Zenith because it's the environment that may not be a typical representation of the accurate outside world, so when he goes to vocational college, (with a) more diverse range of students, will he cope, will people be more tolerant? (School Leader)

They were becoming more aware of the school's role to prepare students transiting out of Zenith, and were prepared to inform and work with parents to support the students. This anecdote might not have happened if classrooms and student groupings were not inclusive to start with, and the school had not noted the small successes the student with dis/abilities had gained in these settings. Thus, the school learned that they may sometimes have to lead, help the parents understand the transition needs of the students with dis/abilities, and work with the parents to explore opportunities and options that will benefit the students. As the school continued their work with many different types of students with dis/abilities, they would also learn that each student had different needs. While putting all students with dis/abilities in one class or one CCA might be safe for them in the long term, they might not have the skills to cope in the outside world. The school needed to reflect and build on the successes they achieved with students with dis/abilities who experienced inclusive experiences in the school. School leaders would constantly have to build on the school's own strengths and successes and support their teachers to create truly inclusive learning communities in order to avoid falling into the trap of reproducing the inequalities that exist in society. While school leaders and their middle managers

might be aligned in their perspectives, and flexible enough to be constantly learning how to achieve greater goals for the students, it was only when every teacher in the classroom experienced and learned for themselves that real change could take root and permanently shift the school away from the hegemonic discourses that existed outside of it.

Summary

The methods the school employs to prepare all students for the future creates the terrain within which families and students with dis/abilities worked. Despite the school's initial intention to be inclusive, their structures, processes, and individual work with students and families continued to transmit the values and the attitudes of existing institutions and society. Although they used a different language to justify their actions—the language of protection and support—the experience ended up reinforcing segregation and exclusion of students with dis/abilities from the rest of the school community. The school unintentionally restricted the growth and development of the youths and thus constrained the youths' experiences. The students did not experience equal opportunities or have the same social interactions as others in the school. Yamamoto and Black (2015) found that schools favored an individualist view, as compared to the collectivist view more commonly reflected by families. Yamamoto and Black (2015) also identified the role of economics as an important deciding factor when schools select transition goals to work on with the students. The lack of family input in the decision-making process was also an issue. The school played an important role in providing the relevant experiences for students with dis/abilities, particularly opportunities for them to be self-advocates or self-determined (McCall, 2015). In this study, there were more incidences where the students felt disempowered, rather than empowered, to make choices. It appeared that the school culture was a key factor in the student's ability to make self-determined choices.

By trying to be inclusive towards all students, the school neglected important social or life skills that students needed as they matured to become adults. This was particularly important for students with dis/abilities, who had more severe needs, less self-confidence, and greater difficulties learning social norms. The school focused on what was most important to its institutional outcomes instead of working to meet the long-term needs of the students with dis/abilities, which would have helped them be more effective with their learning, develop skills that would benefit them in their future career pathways, and be an included, contributing member to society. The conflict between the institutional goals and the needs of students with dis/abilities was mediated by the school's perception of what inclusion is as well as how dis/ability is manifested. Although the goal of inclusion of all students was at the foreground of the school, existing school systems and processes did not liberate the students from the institutionalized oppression that existed in other schools and settings, but continued to promulgate them.

The school as a site for learning skills for employment and social inclusion is well documented (Afflerbach & Garabagiu, 2006; Ebersold, 2012; Ferguson, 2008). Most countries had set up specific guidelines for transition and inclusion. Singapore has very few guidelines for either. Therefore as a school, Zenith Secondary had to design their own inclusion frameworks and transition guidelines to support their students. The school applied much of what they learned from working in other educational settings into their planning and implementation process. Despite their commitment to create an inclusive environment, the use of methods derived from their previous experiences was steeped in the socio-cultural-historical of those environments. Based on existing processes, they were not able to provide more individualized supports using their current resources. As reflected in the literature review, this individualization process was necessary for students with dis/abilities (e.g., DFE, 2016b; European Agency for Special Needs

and Inclusive Education, n.d.; Morningstar et al., 2017). With the graduation of their first cohort of students, Zenith was in a better position to improve their current systems and processes. They recognized that their students with dis/abilities had specific needs that required additional support in order for them to be more successful post-graduation.

Thus the school, in their initial planning stages, designed a system that required students with dis/abilities to meet certain rules and behave in predictable ways in order to gain access to all the opportunities that the school offered. These structural inequities were caused by the school's need to fulfill their stated goals and objectives, as they did not take student's needs into consideration (Clegg et al., 2008). Despite this bleak picture, it was heartening that the school made it a priority to reflect on their current experiences and outcomes, and was constantly finding ways to improve the lives of their students. Thus it is with great hope that future students with dis/abilities in the school could have a much improved and equitable experience. At the end of their school experience, they would echo with greater certainty what student participants said about their experience at Zenith:

- I went to see other schools, but their environments were very messy. So I come here, I can have peace (Tom Interview 1).
- Even though I'm leaving this school, I'll be going to vocational college. But I'll surely miss the school (Julie Interview 2).
- Everyone there is equal. (Thivya Interview 3).

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this dissertation study was to uncover the experiences of students with dis/abilities traversing from the secondary school to the vocational college. Using a socio-cultural-historical approach in this study allowed me to explore transition beyond its formal school-based process, designed to help students venture further into education or job settings. I examined transition as a multi-faceted process that included moving from an academic to a vocational setting, but also involved learning skills that assisted development into adulthood. I explored how youth find purposeful careers, and craft independent identities. Transition is not a private process, but is impacted by social experiences in the home as well as in the school. Transition is complicated by its inter-connectedness to other people and the inherent power dynamics that exist within homes, schools, and communities. Transition is mutually constituted by the environment and its actors, resulting in unique experiences for different students.

To help untangle some of this complexity, I started with three research questions that linked individual experiences to existing systems and structures. The research questions were addressed through the analysis and presentation of findings in Chapter Four. In this chapter, I aim to provide a deeper understanding of the context in which transition takes place, by identifying two myths (Loh, Thum, & Chia, 2017), meritocracy and independence, that influence the Singapore education system. These myths impact transition for students with dis/abilities. In critiquing the current system, this commentary may offer constructive ideas for schools and families that can inform the ongoing work to improve inclusive experiences to enhance students' opportunities for improving their quality of life in independent living and working. I review some limitations of this study, and the implications for future research.

The Myth of Meritocracy

Meritocracy and Multiracialism

Meritocracy has always been Singapore's approach to tackling unjust inequality such as "inherited wealth, educational advantages, nepotism and discrimination against other groups" (Moore, 2000, p. 339). Meritocracy supposedly allowed individuals to start on a level playing field, measuring ability and merit by performance. Moore (2000) argued that meritocracy in this form created a paradox in a multiracial setting, particularly when the results did not reflect equality of results across income groups and racial/ethnic groups. The meritocratic system favored those from the relatively better-resourced higher income groups, and racial/ethnic groups that placed a stronger emphasis on academic performance. Hence, the economic hierarchy, based on race/ethnicity typically characterized by the Chinese at the top, followed by the Indians and then the Malays, was also reflected in educational performance (Moore, 2000), thus reinforcing racial/ethnic stereotypes.

The stereotypes of Malays as lazy and unambitious (Moore, 2000) compared to the other racial/ethnic groups were also likely to have influenced identification rates of students with dis/abilities. The common narrative for the Malay population was that their laziness and lack of achievement could be attributed to their culture (Dhamani, 2008; Lian, 2016; Rahim, 1998), hence teachers were less likely to refer Malay students for evaluations. As the Malay population also tended to be a lower-income group (Dhamani, 2008), parents themselves would have fewer resources, both in terms of finances and time, to seek medical or psychological assessment and interventions for their child. Culturally, Malays were also least likely to provide experiences to help their child with school-based learning, as the majority of Malay parents were less likely to be highly educated. Once Malay students were referred for psycho-educational evaluation, they

were likely to perform poorly during the evaluation and be eligible for special schools, rather than continuing in mainstream schools. The referral and evaluation process became a mechanism for schools to transfer out students who were difficult to teach (Hong, 2014).

Meritocracy and Institutional Ableism

Institutional ableism thrives in an environment driven by the principle of meritocracy where large amounts of benefits are accrued for good academic performance. Students with greater ability benefitted because they were provided with more opportunities and resources (Hehir, 2002). Starting from a young age, children who experienced the cumulative effect of exposure to different forms of play, language use, and high expectations were more likely to do well in academic settings, as seen by schools tracking and channeling students to specific educational pathways based on academic performance. In schools with multiple academic tracks, the students in the lowest academic tracks often had the least exposure and fewer opportunities compared to those in the higher academic tracks. In addition, research indicated that students identified as having a learning dis/ability were more likely to be affected by school-level processes that restricted their access to learning opportunities as compared to their unidentified peers who performed at a similar level (Shifrer et al., 2013). Teachers were more likely to be biased and put in more effort to teach students who were capable but might live in situations where they had difficulties performing, as compared to students identified to have a disability that affected their learning.

Institutional ableism is also clearly seen by the dual system of special and mainstream schools in Singapore, which originated during colonial times. Special schools were traditionally set up by non-governmental welfare organizations, supported by government funds (Poon et al., 2013). Mainstream schools are entirely run by the Ministry of Education, which sends a clear

signal that Education is a tool for economic means, i.e., to develop the economy of Singapore (Tan, 2007), and thus education selectively favors those that would be able to contribute the most to the economy.

Although both the economic and education hierarchies were racially and dis/ability biased, they were generally accepted as the norm and were not questioned either by schools or by the general population because the hierarchies maintained a predictable order. Those who were privileged supported the status quo and would not challenge it, due to the benefits that they received (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011; Moore, 2000). In doing so, they separated themselves from those who were lower performing and were seen as weaker or poorer, thus legitimizing a Darwinian rat race. By ignoring the historical and institutional causes that affected performance, the government used meritocracy to segment racial and ethnic differences (Rahim, 1998), as well as aid and abet the segregation between special and mainstream schools. Hence meritocracy maintained the unequal distribution of race/ethnicity within the education system, did not support inclusive practices, and negatively impacted the experience of students with dis/abilities.

Linking the Findings

Starting a school like Zenith seemed like a counter-intuitive move that deliberately channeled more resources in terms of number of teachers, smaller class sizes, increased hours in school, and innovative programs to deliberately improve learning opportunities and experiences for students who were the weakest students academically, likely to be from the lowest social-economic class, and potentially identified with learning dis/abilities, i.e., students who traditionally are marginalized in multi-track secondary schools. However, if these efforts were able to increase the number of students who move on to post-secondary education, and reduce

drop out rates, then the school would have successfully increased the potential pool of skilled workers within the economy.

Although the results from the first batch of students from Zenith were favorable and met the school leaders' expectations, racism and/or ableism still existed in the system. Even within inclusive settings, it was possible to continue marginalizing populations that did not meet the expected norms for behavior and/or for learning.

Zenith Secondary was made up of an overwhelming majority of Malays—a natural result of being a school that takes in students who are eligible for the Normal Technical course, though the school had fewer Malays with dis/abilities. When the students were in Secondary Three and selected one vocational course to specialize in, the racial distribution changed. Retail Studies in the past two years were made up of a majority of Chinese students (Staff #4). While the school would not be able to do anything about the population of students that they took in, they were in control of how the students were distributed across the four vocational courses. When they decided to put the majority of the students with dis/ability into Retail Studies because their behaviors and learning ability were not representative of the norms in the other vocational studies, the school, however unintentionally, effectively segregated the students by ability as well as by race/ethnicity. Because the majority of students with dis/abilities were Chinese, Retail Studies became overwhelmingly Chinese. This reflected the intersectional influences of race and ability when schools used particular norms to make judgments and decisions about placements and opportunities (Annamma, Boelé, Moore, & Klingner, 2013). Although the relation between race and ability in Singapore was not the main area of study, it was an important point to recognize, particularly for schools so that they can better understand the implications of their school policies.

Zenith Secondary's effort to be inclusive towards students with dis/abilities was strongly tied to meritocracy, where the belief was that if they could be procedurally fair, it would be possible to guarantee equality of results (Moore, 2000). Zenith, being a specialized school designed to provide more resources for learning and emotional support, i.e., counseling services and increased experiences for their students, may have erroneously concluded that with these resources, students with dis/abilities would be adequately provided for as the supports required to meet their need were already built into existing school processes (School Leader). The school believed they were treating students with dis/abilities fairly, because every student was treated as equal and provided with equal opportunities. Therefore, it would have been unfair and unnecessary to provide additional individualized attention to the needs of students with dis/abilities if their condition did not warrant it (Staff #13). Therefore, students were rewarded for being "without dis/ability" based on their academic and vocational performance, and their ability to be "normalized" within the current school setting (Staff #7, #14). However, students with dis/ability behaving no different or almost indistinguishably from those without did not equate to them not needing additional support (Annamma, 2015). For example, although her teachers did not regard Thivya as having a dis/ability, she did have specific needs that could have been better addressed, such as her low level of self-confidence, her knowledge of appropriate careers, and the need for more individualized career guidance.

Although the activities designed by the school were for all students, and students with dis/abilities were included in these activities, the students may not always fit in well, and thus ended up being marginalized. This was clearly illustrated when specific decisions were made as a result of students with dis/abilities not fitting in right with existing systems and processes, e.g., being asked to leave a CCA of their choice in order to be placed in one that was deemed more

suitable, or placed in a vocational course for safety reasons. This type of decision-making recreates the levels of hierarchy that existed in other mainstream schools, creating a different tier of students who then became marginalized. In Zenith's case, those with moderate to severe special educational needs were the most marginalized and had the most restrictions placed on their participation in school in order to protect those who were seen to be more able to gain and maximize the benefits from their increased opportunities and resources.

It was clear that Zenith struggled with how to help students with dis/abilities without stigmatizing them, a struggle that Minow (1990) described as “the dilemma of difference” (p. 20). When the school treated the students equally, teachers became insensitive towards the difficulties faced by students with dis/abilities, and without good support, these areas of difficulties often became the cause for continued stigmatization, and prevented them from developing healthy social relationships with their peers. When the school stepped in to provide additional support, the methods they employed end up marginalizing the students even further.

The Myth of Independence

Independence and Differentiated Deservedness

Differentiated deservedness is a principle at play in Singapore's social welfare and familial policies, based on the individual needing to perform within the narrow and specific ways defined by policymakers before support is given out (Teo, 2016). This perpetuates the myth that Singaporeans need to be “independent,” as the government does not provide welfare for those who do not individually seek to help themselves—a neo-liberal idea that is widely accepted and used within Singapore's governing bodies, including schools. Schools that worked on the basis that students needed to show commitment and ability before they deserved additional support from the school reflects the principle of differentiated deservedness.

The school takes on the role of a gatekeeper, restricting the opportunities and resources available to students with dis/abilities. Therefore being identified with a disability was insufficient; students had to take on attitudes and present behaviors to prove that they were deserving of support. This was the school's approach in helping students gain skills that would help them to be more independent in the future, weaned of the supports that they were previously receiving in primary school. This would help the students be more "normal" (Thivya Interview 1), and be more readily accepted by their peers.

Independence and Transition

The need for the student to perform in certain ways emphasized the goal of schools to encourage students to be independent and self-reliant, while overlooking the collective approach necessary to support a student with dis/abilities. It over-emphasized the student's contribution to their own performance and development, without recognizing the work and the efforts of the people supporting the student. In particular, it has forgotten that many families use their social connections and own prior experiences, i.e., funds of knowledge, to provide what is necessary for the holistic development of their child.

From a socio-cultural-historical perspective, transition recognizes that both families and schools play a part in the student's identity development (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). The student's agency and actions in different aspects of their lives indicates growth and development in their identity. Therefore, transition is a multi-faceted process that includes developing the student's ability to navigate multiple aspects of their lives, and not purely from the angle of becoming an independent person. The school held perspectives of students that resulted in the school being ineffective in addressing the needs of the student during transition. The school perceived their students as independent youths who were responsible for their own behaviors,

thus they could also change them if necessary. As the school's main aim was to work on what they were able to control and were responsible for, i.e., the student's educational achievement, they tended to ignore the underlying areas of difficulties that students had and were also unaware of the intersectional pressures faced by the students, which influenced the students' post-school outcomes such as their ability to stay engaged in their post-secondary studies, and their success in looking for jobs. By the time they entered vocational college, students were expected to be independently functioning individuals, just like everyone else. This continued the use of accepted norms to emphasize that expectations for students with dis/abilities was the same as those without. This was made very clear to Tom when he entered vocational college (Tom Interview 3).

However, this independence is a myth that is repeatedly reinforced to students because even when students eventually do become financially independent, it does not mean that they are independent of others. In some cultures, including Singapore, parents welcome their children to stay with them for as long as needed (Rueda et al., 2005). The extended family and immediate family played a significant part in the lives of all three participants in this study. Therefore, to focus on solely economic independence or academic success as a transition goal is a narrow view of transition that does not take into account the multi-dimensional identities of individuals, or acknowledge the connectedness of people.

Linking the Findings

Secondary schools and vocational colleges with a substantial number of students with dis/abilities is a fairly new phenomenon. Vocational colleges were converted from post-primary institutions to post-secondary institutions in 1992, providing vocational education aligned with the needs of the economy, thus ensuring that the skills learned in the vocational colleges would be in demand, so that individuals graduating from vocational college would be able to obtain

employment. In addition, compulsory education for students with dis/abilities was implemented in 2003, thus making it mandatory for individuals with mild dis/abilities to be educated in mainstream schools (MOE Singapore, 2017). Enhanced supports in schools (SSN) for students with dis/abilities were introduced in 2005 (Poon et al., 2013). With better support and additional manpower in primary schools, and better awareness and specialized training for teachers, students with dis/abilities achieved better results, resulting in more students with mild dis/abilities matriculating into secondary schools and post-secondary institutions. Therefore, substantial improvements in the system over the past 25 years have enabled students with dis/abilities to achieve much better educational outcomes. Julie's parents, for example, were prepared for her to fail her PSLE, and were pleasantly surprised when she passed.

Despite real and tangible improvements to the lives of students with dis/abilities, the educational system did not move fast enough to support their development into adulthood. Although Zenith was able to address educational and academic issues, they were not equipped to help students with dis/abilities transit smoothly into post-secondary settings. The Ministry of Education left it up to the schools to decide their own role and expected responsibilities in supporting students with dis/abilities. Therefore the support for students with dis/abilities regarding their transition needs did not always materialize or work out in practical terms in the school. In the spirit of differentiated deservedness, a number of reasons affected the level of support the students received: a) their lower academic performance meant that they were constrained with regards to their choice of vocational study; b) they were not provided with exam accommodations until the last two years of secondary school and it made significant impact on their results; c) they were generally left on their own to manage social situations, unless they were affecting other students; and d) they received the same range of supports that

was available to other students without dis/ability. Even when Julie thought that her teacher was making a special effort to help her, her teacher reiterated that she was just helping Julie the same way that she helped all her other students.

At Zenith Secondary, the student with dis/ability had to “perform” in certain ways before additional support was provided. Not only did they have to show that they had difficulties, they also had to show that they were deserving of the support, i.e., they had the attitudes and abilities to improve on their school performance (School Leader 10). Therefore, the school withholding supports such as exam accommodations in the form of extra time until the students were able to prove that they needed it (through their performance in schools and from teachers’ assessment of their attitudes and abilities), reflected how school made decisions to differentiate those who were deserving and those who were not.

Students needed to show that they were independently making improvements in their learning as a proxy indicator that the exam accommodations would make a difference in their results. This requirement disadvantages those who already found school difficult, and requiring a specific mode of behavior made it even more difficult for those who struggled to receive the appropriate help. Instead of being able to voice their needs of whether they would benefit from exam accommodations, students were being told whether they were given extra time or not. Not only did they have to perform in particular ways to get help, the students were also not given real opportunities to exercise self-determination and share their thoughts and understandings about their own needs.

This was also an example of the inequality of the experiences of students with dis/abilities and those without dis/abilities, and the role meritocracy played in this process. Schools recognized the dilemma that if they just provided individual supports for those who have

their needs already identified, they might forget or neglect the needs of those with similar issues, but without a diagnosis. So in order to make it fair for all, Zenith decided to level out the playing field by observing all the students for two years before providing specific exam accommodations that might be helpful for them. They failed to see that such a process punishes those who actually would benefit from the exam accommodations, showing a bias towards those who were more able. While trying to avoid one extreme, which was to provide everyone who had a label with exam accommodations without considering their individualized needs, the school swung the other way to provide accommodations only to the very few that they determined will benefit the most from it. Support was thus differentiated based on the school's own policy, based on the student's ability to perform in a certain way, but without consultation with the student.

At Zenith, their main contribution to developing the students' independence was to increase confidence and help students communicate with others, as NT students were at risk of losing or lacking these skills (Staff #5 & #6; School Leader). The ability to communicate effectively was a skill that would help them academically and in other areas of their lives (School Leader, Staff #2). Although the school acknowledged that students with dis/abilities might have weak communication skills too, they "normalize" their difficulties to be qualitatively the same as the rest of the student population. The school did not have ways to evaluate whether what they were implementing for all students was sufficient for students with dis/abilities to help them address issues that might be related to their dis/abilities. For example, Thivya benefited from specific in-class encouragement and her teacher observed that she had improved in her level of confidence and ability to communicate (Staff #5). This was additional support initiated by her teacher, and had the teacher not identified it as one of her goals for Thivya, Thivya might not have gotten that additional push that helped her to gain confidence in herself. Although Tom did

increase in self-confidence, he lacked strategies that helped him deal with his speech difficulties and difficulties with social interaction with his peers. Therefore, depending on the level of need, not all students with dis/abilities needed additional support. The teachers could address additional support when needed in the classroom, or families and/or external agencies might offer additional collaboration. Tom would have benefited if his speech therapist, via his parents, shared additional support strategies with his teachers.

Due to the way the school prioritized their resources, if the students' behavior was neither unusual nor disruptive enough to be of concern, they were considered to be coping well, and thus not require any additional support. The schools tended to refer unfamiliar matters not pertaining to academics back to the parents, opting for simple solutions such as providing tips to parents, or seeking the parent's (or parents') help to address the issues. For example, Tom's father's experience with the school was that the school asked him to deal with Tom's social difficulties (Tom Parent Interview), and did not help Tom to be more independent in solving his own social problems. If he had more counseling support in school, perhaps he might have had more help managing his anxiety.

From the school's perspective, the main focus of transition was pre-determined based on the educational landscape developed for Singaporeans to follow. Students in the NT course were channeled into the vocational colleges. Learning a skill provided at least a start where one could find a job and develop a career over time. If they wanted, and their results at the vocational college met the eligibility criteria, students could then continue to an advanced vocational certification, get a diploma from the polytechnic, and/or work their way from a degree to a doctorate at a university (MOE Singapore, 2016). Thus the schools had their goals set up for them—to ensure that as many students as possible were able to access vocational college after

the GCE Normal (Technical) Exams at the end of four years in secondary school. All of the students in the study understood the landscape, where they saw themselves within the landscape, and whether to strive for a degree (Thivya Interview 3) or to stop once they obtained an advanced vocational certificate (Tom Interview 3). Parents were also roped in to repeat the same messages to their child, as Zenith organized talks for parents, helping them to understand the new educational landscape that they themselves were unlikely to have grown up in, to inform them where their children are headed from the very first year in secondary school (Thivya Parents Interview). Although the educational system seemed to suggest that opportunities were not limited and avenues to college were open, the myth of independence shows itself because there is actually very little choice, particularly for students with dis/abilities, as the range of courses available to them was constrained by their weak academic performance.

Without support from their families, or if they were not able to obtain resources for additional academic support at home, students with dis/abilities would face additional struggles to find their place in society. And yet, they were told that they had to learn to be independent, which would then allow them to be “normal” (Thivya Interview 1). On the contrary, most “normal” students were not fully independent either. Most of them received support from their families and communities. In addition, students from affluent backgrounds had access to support from multiple places, as their parents were able to afford individualized support through private therapy, academic tuition, and/or enrichment lessons. The social and cultural capital available to affluent parents was likely to be more directly applicable to their children’s formal education, compared to parents from lower income groups. Although all parents were equally supportive of their children and wanted them to succeed, the resources from the parents of different income groups varied. Oddly enough, the parents who were able to afford resources or provide for their

children had lower expectations for their children's independence. Thus the intersectional identities of the students in the NT course played a huge role in the type of messaging they experienced as they transitioned towards adulthood, and moved into post-secondary settings.

In this study the families provided as much support as they could to their child with dis/ability, but they sometimes acted in the other extreme, overprotecting their child, especially in areas where they felt that there was a risk of physical and emotional injury (Julie Parent Interview; Tom Parent Interview). Not knowing what lay ahead for their child, parents tended to make decisions based on their own funds of knowledge, or seek help from others, such as parents who have older children (Thivya Parent Interview). Parents would try and find out more about the pathways ahead for their child. Without additional guidance given to parents and the student on future careers and the possibilities available, parents were left to make decisions based on outdated experiences or general knowledge and narratives put out by the media. These restricted their children's ability to make self-determined decisions. Their parents only knew what the school told them, and thus they were limited in their knowledge of how to help their child.

Parents would fall back on their own experiences to help them make decisions for their children. Tom's father's experience of depending on his own hard work from an early age to develop skills and grow his career gave him the expectation that Tom would also need to work hard to be independent. Thivya's mother's experiences in different job settings, and in observing other colleagues, supported her decision to discourage Thivya from considering a nursing career. Although the parents sought out professional help when the children were younger, i.e., from doctors in Tom's and Julie's cases, or from specific organizations, as in Thivya's case, they did not have the resources to help them with decisions related to transition. Julie's parents did not receive any in their last visit to the hospital, and Tom's parents decided that the recommendation

that they received was not suitable. The parents had hoped that the medical profession would be able to give them some advice on what to do next and how to further support their child, but medical professionals did not deliver on this expectation.

Parents were willing to work with schools to achieve their goals; however, schools did not see parents the same way. Schools were often unaware of the goals and intentions of the parents with regards to different areas of their children's development, and wrongly attributed the families' requests for help and support as the parents interfering and in conflict with the school (Charles, as cited in Jagdish, 2017). The school's indifference towards families emphasized the importance that schools placed on their own goals for their students, and their lack of interest and understanding regarding both the families' needs and their funds of knowledge that were potentially helpful in supporting students with dis/abilities, especially during transition. Parents with prior experience with disinterested schools would have learned that it was not beneficial for them to approach schools, and continued to be indifferent towards schools (Thivya Parent Interview). The parents' concerns and goals for their child were not shared with the school, and the parents did many things on their own. The parents in this study all wanted to obtain the appropriate information and resources that would help them make better decisions for their child, but they did not always approach the school. Although schools were in a position to support parents and partner with them, the current situation did not reflect that this was happening in a way that was beneficial to the holistic development of the students with dis/abilities.

Connecting the findings of this study with the unhelpful narratives that exist in society helps us understand how the lives of the students were intertwined with the socio-cultural-historical context that influenced both the school and family environments. It is also the basis on

which I identify the implications and suggest improvements that can be made to improve the experiences for students with dis/abilities transiting to adulthood.

Implications

This study made clear that the student voice should be the key determinant of change. The students interviewed in this study illustrated how the best of intentions can be thwarted in the actual lived experience. Although families and schools used the language of protection and support to justify their actions and decisions made on behalf of the students, the students themselves experienced segregation and marginalization. The students' voices represent the person-in-context, where the individual is embedded within social processes in society which influences and shapes the students' identity. The students' definitions of adulthood was sometimes in conflict with the definition used by their parents and the school. For example, Thivya and her mother disagreed on what her career goals should be and the way in which her goals could be achieved. Although Julie's father was mindful of Julie's interests and aspirations, he was also guiding her behind the scenes into different areas of work, based on his idea of what would be best for her. Instead of using the knowledge of their children's interests and passions to help support the development in those areas, the parents actively sought to influence their children in ways that they thought would help their children be more successful. This definition of success is guided by a meritocratic view, where the value of success is dependent on what society values, rather than using the quality of the individual's life as a gauge of success.

The need to listen to students' voices is particularly important in the process of understanding how they view their transition to adulthood, during which time the student grappled with multiple meanings of what it means to be independent (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1996). First, they made personal meaning of adulthood, symbolized by their ability to make

choices for themselves based on their priorities. Thivya's journey in finding her voice clearly illustrates this process. Students are also interested in a cultural meaning of adulthood, as they find a place for themselves within the larger society. Tom in particular grappled with this, as he was uncertain of his ability to find a career where he could be successful. The students also redefined their role in their families, as responsibilities were rebalanced between themselves and their parents. Julie and her parents are a good example of recognizing the need to continually negotiate their responsibilities, and their role and place in the family.

Focusing on the students' voices enables schools and families to work in tandem towards a common focus, reducing the possibility of conflict and divergence of views that would otherwise make it difficult for the students to create a more cohesive view of their identities (Ianni, as cited in Adams & Marshall, 1996).

Implications for Individuals with Dis/abilities

Students may not feel free to choose what happens in school, and hence families and the community need to understand the implications when students with dis/abilities are not fully supported in either the home or the school context. Students lack the social resources necessary for helping them become well-adjusted adults. Particularly in the area of transition, students with dis/abilities are more likely to have poorer outcomes and are disadvantaged when they are not provided access to resources that enable them to achieve better outcomes after secondary school. Students with dis/abilities require the resources to help them make decisions, and be connected to others who will provide the appropriate experiences and advice on how to plan ahead for their future, thus developing their funds of identity in the process. Therefore it is important for students with dis/abilities to be able to learn to: (a) overcome their difficulties; and (b) build up and develop new social and cultural capital (Trainor, 2008).

Schools and families should respect the opinions and choice of students with dis/abilities. It may seem that students are not being realistic in their choices or they may have difficulties deciding. If they are given the opportunities to have their voices heard, it may lead to more creative and innovative ways for their difficulties to be addressed. These situations should be used as opportunities to develop new systems of support, or new programs that would directly meet the specific needs of the students in the school. The spirit of being inclusive is not in the provision of an opportunity, but also in its outcomes, i.e., that it provides the equivalent amount of satisfaction, learning, and development compared to other students who do not have dis/abilities. The opportunity to voice and discuss the implications of their difficulties helps them to develop tools that they can also carry with them to other settings, and allow them to self-advocate and help others understand what their needs are and find appropriate ways to manage them, or to make them an insignificant part of their experience in that setting. For example, students with dis/abilities need to be given opportunities to try different types of careers and jobs. By taking part in internships and other opportunities to try out jobs and careers, they discover their strengths and interests that could then be developed into knowledge and skills that they can use in their future careers. Therefore, it would be useful to include students' area of interest during the decision-making process and planning for these experiences. This would help them gather a range of experiences to strengthen their areas of interest, help them find meaning in their work, and grow their motivation to persevere in their chosen careers.

Expecting students with dis/ability to be independent in all things only increases their level of stress and anxiety, as they are fully aware that they have shortcomings. Therefore, specific instruction in areas of difficulties will help students with dis/abilities pick up cultural capital. Giving them the appropriate scaffolds before they have to attempt something new in the

community will help them be included and independent. One method of scaffolding is to allow students with dis/abilities to make self-determined choices in the school. The school often makes decisions unilaterally or bilaterally with the consent of the parents. It is not usually done from a person-centered perspective where consensus can be built between all parties, i.e., the family, school, and the student, and everyone is given an opportunity to voice their concerns and preferences before a decision is made. Including everyone in the decision-making process will help to determine the best avenues of building resources and experiences, but also help the students to move beyond just doing what they have been told to do, to learning ways of communicating and negotiating in order to achieve their goals.

Schools should help students with dis/abilities develop their social capital and recognize ways in which they can seek help and connect with people that can help them to achieve their goals. Assisting the students in connecting with others who can help them gives students more confidence in what they are doing, and creates a positive cycle; as their well-being increases, so does their confidence. Connecting well with their peers is one way to build up social capital. Many of their peers are likely to follow them into vocational college as well as to potential places of work. Students with dis/abilities hope to have a level of relationship with peers whereby the peers are able to understand and support them. Knowing that they have supportive friends plays a key role in boosting their confidence and their ability to become more self-determined.

When students with dis/abilities have these enhanced experiences in school and at home, they build up their funds of identity and have a clearer direction of their life goals. They learn skills that enable them to be able to participate and contribute, and thus be more fully included into the fabric of our society.

Implications for Families

One of the key things I noticed about the families of children with dis/abilities is that the aspirations for their children were not very different from each other, regardless of race, religion, or the level of difficulties their child has; all of them wanted their child to be able to work towards a meaningful career, and to become an independent and useful adult citizen. As I noted earlier, sometimes families do not know the best way to do so, and often end up being over-protective and domineering in their opinions when supporting their child. Therefore parents need to: (a) know where to seek up-to-date information and advice; (b) be willing to look beyond their own experiences and find ways that can support their child's goals; and (c) be able to scaffold and support their child to be self-determined and to have the skills to be self-advocating.

In my discussions with the families, each of them reflected on the need to help their child be independent. While I argued earlier that being independent is a fallacy that neglects to consider the connectedness of the people around them, the way the parents conceptualize independence is to remove the supports or barriers that they had placed around their children to protect them when they were younger. Instead of being shielded from their difficulties, the students needed to learn ways to overcome them. Noting that my discussions with the parents was a catalyst for them to rethink the ways they had been supporting their child, it is important that families have somewhere to go and someone that can guide them along as their child grows and moves through different stages of their life journey. Families can seek help from professionals, or they can also find connections with other parents of youths with dis/abilities who may have gone through the same journey. Developing a parent support network might be possible at the school level, or it could be ground-up initiative from within the community. In the same way that a range of options should be offered to students learning about careers, parents

should also be provided with options that they could explore as they seek out information that would help them the most at different junctures of their child's life and educational journey. Often they seek help from their own company of friends, but those friends may not be able to provide appropriate and directly relevant help to parents. In places like New Zealand and the U.S., parent support networks and parent partnerships seek to connect parents, provide parents with information, and educate and empower parents to support their child's specific needs. In the U.K., the Social Mobility Board even recommends parenting interventions such as parenting programs, support, and services to be set up to support all parents (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Similar initiatives in Singapore would develop and grow the families' funds of knowledge so that they are better equipped to support their child. Through these interactions, parents can gain updated and current ways that society is already including adults with dis/abilities, as well as adopt skills to engage schools and other institutions in collaboratively supporting their child.

Implications for Schools

To help schools understand and address the issues of meritocracy that privileges the majority race/ethnic group and those with higher ability, I use Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) as a framework to show how race/ethnicity and ability are intersectional. Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) is: "a framework that theorizes about the ways in which race, racism, dis/ability and ableism are build into the procedures, discourses, and institutions of education" (Annamma, Connor et al., 2013, p. 7), and hence it will be a useful tool in helping schools address both facets meaningfully. Although the authors suggest seven tenets that make it meaningful, I will only dwell on those that are the most relevant for this study.

First, Tenet Five states the legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race/ethnicity that impact the student with dis/ability. Therefore in order to recognize that the way things are

conducted in schools need to change, schools and those that work in it must understand they are part of an institution that carries the hallmarks of histories. This includes being cognizant that Singapore's educational system has inherited the history and values of the colonial masters, and thus has continued the race-based policies and the focus on grooming those with high ability to be leaders, deigning the lower classes to low-paying jobs that support the needs of the upper class. Teachers are in positions of privilege in the country, and they need to recognize that they carry with them their experiences that define their privilege in relation to the students that they are teaching.

Tenet Three, in combination with Tenet One and Two, emphasizes the social constructions of race/ethnicity and ability, but also recognizes their impact on the lived experiences of students. In order to understand the intersectional influence of both race and dis/ability, it is necessary to consider students as having "multidimensional identities" (Annamma, Connor et al., 2013, p. 11), carrying the status accorded to them by virtue of their race/ethnicity and their ability, and not trying to judge them based on what the majority considers to be normal. While it is true that the school has no control over who applies for enrollment to the school due to the meritocratic system of allocating students to secondary schools, the school still has processes within its control that would benefit by foregrounding students who are traditionally neglected or segregated.

In order for schools to be fully accepting of their students with dis/abilities, and to recognize the difference in experiences due to race/ethnicity, some advantages may need to be sacrificed and resources may need to be re-distributed in order for there to be an equitable experience for every student. Creating awareness of new gains to be achieved (albeit intangible) is important in developing a more understanding community. This awareness is critical for

everyone in the school because the shifts that the school needs to make in order to address inequalities require making changes that will affect all students and not just a sub-population of students (Minow, 1990). The existing processes that affect all students should first be reviewed, and areas that are difficult for marginalized students need to be identified. Usually, at this stage, schools will start to think of solutions that would help these students cope with the difficulties better. However, the solutions that will impact the lives of marginalized students will require a broader reach that is not just focused on the student. When implementing or reviewing a process, schools should ask themselves who benefits from what, at what cost, and from whom (Teo, 2016). Therefore, developing an inclusive approach requires changing existing processes with the intention to reduce or remove the difficulties marginalized students face and developing new ones that will allow all students to have equitable experiences (Baquedano-López et al., 2013).

Tenet Four in DisCrit privileges the voices of the marginalized. This is particularly important for schools when they begin to build a community of teachers and peers that understand and accept the marginalized group of students. Inclusiveness does not come from sharing the same physical environment with those who are different, but from understanding and being part of their lives, appreciating their difficulties, and working together to address them. Students and staff in the school should be taught not to see others who are different from them as “students with special educational needs” or “students that have problems and need our help.” By categorizing students who are different from them, the rest of the school sees no need to make efforts to reach past these categories, to understand and appreciate the actual person. They need to see that the school consistently does not use “dis/ability,” “special needs,” “slow to learn” or “disinterested” to explain why students are excluded. Students who are not marginalized should also be given opportunities to hear the voices and stories of those who are marginalized.

These stories would help to shift people's understanding that differences shown by an individual are an outcome of how either their peers or the school, not the individual's behavior or actions, constructs difference. This can help develop solutions that become the responsibility of the people around the marginalized student (Minow, 1990). For example, schools can present stories, like the ones in this study, with teachers and students to help them understand their contributions to the outcomes for the students. Their personal identity in all its multi-dimensions is important to the student with dis/ability. Therefore, if their identities in their fullness are not valued in the school context, their self-esteem is affected, and so is their will to succeed. Instead of ignoring the differences among students, each student needs to learn to acknowledge the differences between themselves and others. It indicates an acceptance of difference, and this action negates differences, reframing them as a variation of experience so that differences do not become an obstacle to understanding and accepting those who are different. It is important that the whole school does not see difference as a categorical dimension but the result of social interactions, so that differences between people will not be seen as immutable, but something that can be improved. These relational insights (Minow, 1990) act as tools for improving social practices into the school because they recognize the mutual dependence that all humans have with each other.

Schools understandably operate under constraints of resources, whether financial or personnel, which affects decisions regarding the allocation of resources provided to students, and to which type of student. Without a specific plan to monitor or screen students for possible academic, emotional, behavioural, or social risk-areas, schools will find it difficult to make a clear plan for supporting the diverse needs of the students. With more clarity regarding the type of needs students have, secondary schools can be more strategic with the resources available to

them. When schools start to recognize that their resources include families and the community, schools can begin to work more collaboratively with them, and produce creative solutions from the bottom-up. This would require schools to see families and communities differently, and understand the transformative power of families. Schools need to be willing to listen and learn what families have to say, to empathize by working alongside them, and to support the needs of the students with dis/abilities (Ferguson, 2002; Graff & Vazquez, 2014; Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2009; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This qualitative study has been conducted to enable the development of many ideas, based on the rich details provided by the participants, their families, and the staff in the school. Although it covers a range of characteristics such as religion, race/ethnicity, and dis/ability, there are still gaps within that range that were not represented in this study. For example, the study might have focused on other areas if there were more participants, particularly from other racial/ethnic groups (e.g., the Malay population), and with different cultural and religious backgrounds (e.g., Hindu and Muslim background). It might also be interesting to see if recent immigrants to the country may bring a different perspective to how they experience transition, and if the differences in the socio-cultural-historical backgrounds of their families affect the relationship and understanding between the family and the school. Therefore the results of the study may not be directly applicable to specific individuals with dis/abilities, although they certainly have implications for the school, as well as for other professionals and institutions interested in supporting individuals with dis/abilities and/or their families.

One of the limitations of the research design was that during data collection, the amount of time I spend with each group of participants affected the trustworthiness of the data presented

in the findings. I spent the most amount of time with the students as I met with them multiple times compared to the parents and the school personnel. Therefore, data from the students, due to the larger number of data points, were more robust and the arguments based on their perspectives were more trustworthy. Comparatively, the interview data from the school personnel were less trustworthy than from the students, due to the limited interaction I had with the school. Therefore assertions made based on the school personnel interviews should be weighted lower than those based on student interviews. As my interaction with the families were limited to one interview, future research should be carried out, in order to substantiate the existing findings and to explore the assertions in greater detail.

As the primary and only researcher on this study, there may also have been individual bias in the things I understood and reported. Therefore it is critical that I incorporated multiple checks in the study to ensure that the conduct, and analysis of the study maintains its trustworthiness. One of the limitations of this study was that I could not find someone who was able to check through my codes with me, and to validate my approaches to coding. Although early coding trees were shared with my peers during debrief, we did not meet frequently enough and it did not continue past the initial stages of data analysis. In addition, I was unable to conduct member checks with the study participants after the write-up was finalized. Although I plan to share the findings with them in the near future, I am not confident how it will be received.

Future research would be enhanced with a more diverse team of researchers, as the dialogue and discussion between researchers from different socio-cultural-historical backgrounds would add to the richness of the interpretations and the developing of finer areas for intervention. School staff would also be a welcome addition to the team, as they would be able to validate the findings. In addition, staff participation will help the school develop critical perspectives that

could be helpful in reviewing existing processes and reconsidering the implications of school processes that are based on prevailing hegemonic discourses.

Although this study is set in Singapore, its implications draw on the experiences of other developed countries, and thus have the potential to inform the practices used in supporting transition for students with dis/abilities in other settings. The rich description provided in the analysis and presentation of findings help make connections between the contexts and experience of the students in this existing study with the situations faced by students in other settings.

Moving forward, two lines of research would be interesting to follow. One would be to expand this study by including students from other schools, as well as the upcoming cohorts of graduates. With a larger pool of participants, it would be possible to encourage greater representation of students across a range of demographic variables. By including other schools, researchers can compare the impact of different school cultures on the transition experience of students. This would help to confirm or disprove the importance of particular factors on the experience of transition for students, and help to provide more specific strategies for other mainstream schools that may want to improve their support for students with dis/abilities. Second, I would like to continue with the three participants in this study as they continue on their educational journeys. Their reflections on the process of transition across other settings would be a valuable resource for schools interested in understanding the long-term outcomes of their interventions, and their stories could also be shared with other parents seeking to learn from the experiences of those who have gone ahead of them.

In Closing

In this closing paragraph, I would like to reflect on my personal journey through this study on transition. As I personally transition back to being a professional working in the system,

intervening through conducting evaluations and developing policies, I feel that it is important to place my role within the stories of these participants. I may not be responsible for their diagnosis or the interventions that they received, but the role of the professional as described by the parents has not been a pleasant or an encouraging one. The impact of this study on my role as a professional is to ensure that I am able to share these findings with the schools and families that I consult with, to help them to seek better solutions for the youths who struggle in their transition to adulthood. The youths can become adults who believe they are equal to others around them and contribute meaningfully towards shaping their society. Therefore the end of this study is not a closed door, but an opening to other vistas that will allow the findings to breathe life and hope in building a more inclusive, accepting, and encouraging society.

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Appendix A: Approval Letter from Ministry of Education



1 North Buona Vista Drive
Singapore 138578
Robinson Road P.O. Box 748
Telephone : (65) 65722220
Facsimile : (65) 67755825
Website : www.moe.gov.sg
Email : contact@moe.gov.sg

Ministry of Education
SINGAPORE

EDUN N32-07-005

Request No.: RQ147-16(10)

5 October 2016

Ms Yu Ting Iris

Dear Ms Yu,

TRANSITION: A SINGAPOREAN CASE STUDY OF A CULTURAL CONCEPT

I refer to your application for approval to collect data from schools.

2. I am pleased to inform you that the Ministry has no objections to your request to conduct the research in **1 secondary school**, subjected to the following conditions:

- a) the approved research proposal is adhered to during the actual study in the school;
- b) the data collected is kept strictly confidential and used for the stated purpose only; and
- c) the findings are not published without written approval from the Ministry and a copy of the findings is shared with the Ministry upon request.

3. When conducting the data collection in the school, please ensure that the following are carried out:

- a) consent is obtained from the Principal for the study to be conducted in the school;
- b) written parental consent is obtained before conducting the study with the students;
- c) students and teachers are informed that participation in the study is voluntary and they do not need to provide any sensitive information (e.g. name and NRIC No.);
- d) participation by the school is duly recorded in Annex A; and
- e) the data collection in the school is completed within 6 months from the date of this letter.

4. Please show this letter and all the documents included in this mail package (i.e. the application form, research proposal and research instrument(s) marked as seen by MOE) to seek approval from the Principal and during the actual study.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Tan (Ms)
Lead Manager, Research Administration
Corporate Research Office
Research and Management Information Division
for Permanent Secretary (Education)

Note to Principal: Please refer to MOE notification PA/25/12 for the Guidelines on Data Collection from Schools.



Integrity, the Foundation • People, our Focus • Learning, our Passion • Excellence, our Pursuit

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear School Leaders:

Hello! I am Iris Yu, a doctoral candidate at the University of Kansas. I was previously working in the Psychological Services Branch at the Ministry of Education in Singapore as a senior specialist in educational psychology. I am currently working on my dissertation about the transition of students with special educational needs from secondary school to post-secondary settings.

Study Aim

To understand the needs and experiences of transition of the students with special educational needs, in the Normal (Technical) stream, using an ethnographic approach.

Study Process

WHEN & HOW:

- This study will take place from 2016 Term 4 to 2017 Term 1.
- I will be conducting observations of the students and teachers in their classrooms.
- Individual interviews will be conducted with students, their families, their teachers and allied educators supporting them, and school leaders.

WHO:

- 3-4 students from the graduating cohort of 2017 and their families
- teachers / allied educators working with the students; and
- school leaders, i.e. principal(s).

WHY:

- Participating student and families will be able to benefit from this process, as a time of reflection on their needs and goals for the transition of the student with SEN to a post-secondary setting. They will be able to recognise the resources that are available, as well as what additional resources they will seek to obtain. This will enable students to have a smoother transition, and be aware of the resources available to them.
- Participating teachers and allied educators will be able to benefit from discussions about transition as they clarify their role in transition for their students, as well as develop ideas on how to support their students, both with and without SEN as they move to post-secondary settings.
- The school will benefit from both the process of the research and the results, so that more systemic measures can be taken to support their students with and without SEN, and increase the students' likelihood of success in post-secondary settings.

Would you like to know more?

If you are interested in knowing more before you decide whether to participate, I am happy to speak with you. Please indicate your interest by emailing me at: iris_yu@ku.edu. I will

then set up a time to speak with you. Feel free also to email me with any additional questions, that will help you decide about your interest in participating.

Sincerely,
Iris Yu
University of Kansas

Appendix C: Letter of Consent – Family

The University of Kansas INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR FAMILIES AND STUDENTS AT RESEARCH SITES

The University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you and your child wish to participate in the research study.

<Name of School> has been providing targeted and specialised support for students with special educational needs in their school. As the students approach graduation, transition planning and support becomes an important part of ensuring that they are successful after graduation. I am interested in how transition is conducted by the school and supported by you and your child's friends.

This is a study about the student's experiences of transition planning and support. It will take place within from Term 4 2016 to Term 1 2017. Student participants will be invited to attend a series of three interviews, each not more than 2 hours long. They will also participate in an activity where they are given a question prompt, and they will be taking photos of their experiences of transition over a 3-4 week period. As the parent(s) or other main caregiver, you are also invited to participate in this study. An interview will be scheduled at your convenience. You will receive a token of appreciation in the form of a \$20 supermarket voucher, at the end of the interview. All interviews will be audio recorded, and transcribed by me. After the completion of the study, the recording will be deleted.

I do not anticipate any risks associated with your participation in this study. I will ask your child specifically for their assent before I proceed with the study. They may choose to withdraw anytime without penalty. The information you and your child share will be treated confidentially, and every effort will be made to protect you and your child's individual identity outside of the school. Your names will not be associated with any research reports or publications unless you give prior approval. All data, i.e. text and audio files collected during this study will not be labeled with identifying information and will be kept in secure, password protected computers and locked files. The information collected in this study will only be used by myself for the purposes of this study, and authorized officials at the University of Kansas that oversee research. However, absolute anonymity cannot be guaranteed because it is possible that readers of the report might recognize participants by virtue of their independent knowledge of the research site and/or participants. None of the visual files will be shown outside of your family without seeking additional approval from you.

The benefits of participating in this research study are many. You can use this opportunity to voice your opinions and concerns, and share your perspectives on practices in your school. This will help shape how your school continues to transform and develop a positive learning environment that promotes academic success among all students. You and your child's individual story is important to the collective effort of understanding and improving

transition support for children with special educational needs, and I am interested in hearing them.

Your involvement is strictly voluntary, and whether you and your child choose to participate or not will in no way affect your relationship with your school. You and your child are also free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you choose to withdraw, please notify me at iris_yu@ku.edu or 65- 96607643. Your participation is solicited, but is strictly voluntary. If you have concerns about participating in the study, please don't hesitate to ask questions and contact me by phone or email, or my advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Kozleski at ebk@ku.edu. Additional questions about your rights as a research participant can be directed to the KU Human Research Protection Program by calling +1 (785) 864-7429 or +1 (785) 864-7385; writing 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, KS 66045; or emailing irb@ku.edu.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. Please keep a copy of this letter and return only the signature page.

Sincerely,

Iris Yu
65-96607643 / iris_yu@ku.edu

The University of Kansas

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR FAMILIES AND STUDENTS

FAMILY / STUDENT PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION :

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study and the use and disclosure of information about me and my child for the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Rd., Lawrence, KS 66045-7563, or email irb@ku.edu. I have been informed that if I choose to sign, I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.

I agree to:

- take part in this study as a participant; and
- allow myself to be audio recorded.

AND

- allow my child to participate in the study; and
- allow them to be audio recorded.

Please cross out any of the above to limit your consent.

I further agree to the uses and disclosures of my information as described above. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old.

Print child's name for whom you are consenting

Print parent's name

Parent's signature & date

Appendix D: Family Information Sheet**Family Information Sheet**

Name: _____ Relationship to Student: _____

Name: _____ Relationship to Student: _____

Name: _____ Relationship to Student: _____

Name: _____ Relationship to Student: _____

Name: _____ Relationship to Student: _____

Student Name: _____ Student Age/DOB: _____

How long has he/she been at <name of school>? _____

Which family member is the student closest to? _____

Race/Ethnicity/Cultural Group: _____

Estimated household income: _____

Interview Preferences (Family)

Place/Address: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Language: _____

Participants: _____

Interview Preferences (Student)

Place/Address: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Does the student have easy access to a camera/phone camera? _____***Does a camera need to be provided for the photo activity? _____***

Appendix E: Letter of Consent – School Staff

The University of Kansas

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR SCHOOL STAFF AT RESEARCH SITES

The University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the research study.

<Name of School> has been providing targeted and specialised support for students with special educational needs in their school. As the students approach graduation, transition planning and support becomes an important part of ensuring that they are successful after graduation. I am interested in learning about how transition planning and support is being conducted in your school in the day-to-day life of the school as well as any targeted activities that will support graduating students.

This is a study about the student's experiences of transition planning and support. It will take place within from Term 4 2016 to Term 1 2017. I will also be interviewing school staff to understand the school's perspectives and experiences of providing transition support to graduating students. School staff participants will be invited to an interview session, not more than 2 hours long. All interviews will be audio recorded, and transcribed by me. After the completion of the study, the recording will be deleted.

I do not anticipate any risks associated with your participation in this study. The information you share and/or are reflected by other participants about you will be treated confidentially, and every effort will be made to protect your individual identity outside of the school. Your name will not be associated with any research reports or publications unless you give prior approval. All data, i.e. text, audio and visual files collected during this study will not be labeled with your identifying information and will be kept in secure, password protected computers and locked files. The information collected in this study will only be used by myself for the purposes of this study, and authorized officials at the University of Kansas that oversee research. However, absolute anonymity cannot be guaranteed because it is possible that readers of the report might recognize participants by virtue of their independent knowledge of the research site and/or participants.

The benefits of participating in this research study are many. You can use this opportunity to voice your concerns regarding transition of students with special educational needs in your school, including sharing your opinions and perspectives on practices in your school. This will help shape how your school continues to transform and develop a positive learning and working environment that promotes academic success among all students. Your individual story is important to the collective effort, and I am interested in hearing them.

Your involvement is strictly voluntary, and whether you choose to participate or not will in no way affect your relationship with your school. You are also free to withdraw at any time

without penalty. Should you choose to withdraw, please notify me at iris_yu@ku.edu or 65-96607643. Your participation is solicited, but is strictly voluntary. If you have concerns about participating in the study, please don't hesitate to ask questions and contact me by phone or email, or my advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Kozleski at ebk@ku.edu. Additional questions about your rights as a research participant can be directed to the KU Human Research Protection Program by calling +1 (785) 864-7429 or +1 (785) 864-7385; writing 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, KS 66045; or emailing irb@ku.edu.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. Please keep a copy of this letter and return only the signature page.

Sincerely,

Iris Yu
65-96607643 / iris_yu@ku.edu

The University of Kansas

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR SCHOOL STAFF AT RESEARCH SITES

STAFF PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study and the use and disclosure of information about me for the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045- 7563, email irb@ku.edu.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. I further agree to the uses and disclosures of my information as described above. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

Type/Print Participant's Name

Date

Participant's Signature

If you have any limitations to your consent, please clarify those by using the boxes below.

Please check this box if you consent to participate in this study but, if interviewed or attending focus group discussions, do **NOT** want your interviews audio recorded.

Appendix F: Interview Guide for Students

(Annamma, 2013; Atkinson, 2002; Futch & Fine, 2014; Seidman, 2013)

Interview 1: Reconstructing past experiences in school, in learning and transitioning between schools

Introduction

This is an interview about the story of your schooling and learning experiences. I am interested in hearing your story, including parts of the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. We will not do everything in one interview, but will split it across 3 sessions. The story is selective; it does not need to include everything that has ever happened to you. Instead, you may focus on a few key things in your life – a few key scenes, characters and ideas. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. Instead, your task is simply to tell me about some of the most important things that have happened during your education and how you imagine your life developing in the future. Everything you say is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. I think you will enjoy the interview. Do you have any questions?

Educational Journey Mapping

Before we talk about your experience in school, I would like you to do an activity with me. Map your education journey from when you started school to now. Focus on the time you moved from primary to secondary school. Include people, places, obstacles, and opportunities on the way. Draw your relationship with school. You can include what works for you and/or what doesn't. You can use different colors to show different feelings, use symbols like lines and arrows or words. These are just suggestions. Be as creative as you like and, if you don't want to draw you can make more of a flow-chart. Afterwards, you will get a chance to explain it to me.

(After 20 minutes) Can you tell me about your education journey and why you have chosen to include these events.

Example probes: What exactly happened? Where did it happen? About how old were you? Who was involved? What did you do? What were you thinking and feeling? What kind of meaning does this event have for you? How did you feel about it then, and how do you feel about it now? How are these events related to how you feel about yourself now?

Concrete details about self & formal learning in schools

- Relationship with past teachers & school personnel (e.g., para-educators, counselors, mentors)
- Relationship with peers in school in the past
- Academic history
 - What did you struggle with? What were you good at? What stream were you in? What were your grades like?
- Behavior / Discipline history
 - Did you ever get into trouble in school or out-of-school? When did it start? What kind of consequence did you receive? How did your parents react?
- Becoming identified and labeled with disability
 - Who first identified it? How did you feel? Where did you go? What type of support and help did you get?
- Transition from primary to secondary and other transitions

- School history – Names of school
 - How did you experience moving from primary to secondary school?
 - What helped you? Who made it easier?
 - What made it difficult?
- Demographics
 - Age, level, family structure, primary care-giver

Photo-elicitation Task

“I would like you to capture photographs of activities, people or products outside of school that you feel is meaningful to your journey to being an adult, and moving on to post-secondary settings. As you take the pictures, pretend that you are creating a documentary. Consider what photos would be appropriate or not be appropriate for public viewing. Feel free to capture as many photographs as you wish, but be prepared to share your top 10 choices at our next meeting. You can share them in a documentary style.”

Points to take note of:

- Be safely positioned when you take the photo. Do not endanger yourself.
- If the people in your photo object to the photo being taken, please respect their wishes.
- If possible, let your family and friends know that you are taking pictures for research purposes before the start of an activity.

Interview 2: Reflecting on Current Experiences in School and at Home

Using the photographs brought by the students

- Tell me why you picked this photograph?
- What is the importance of the person/thing/activity shown in the photograph?
- Where did this take place?
- Who was there?
- How often did this happen?
- What did you learn from this experience?

If parents were not specifically mentioned in the photos:

- Tell me a story about when your parents was involved in your learning in the past / at present.

Using the education journey map developed in the last interview as a prompt, the following narrative prompts are used to elicit concrete details that are listed below.

- Can you tell me a story that shows me what learning is like here (e.g., when you were in primary school), at this part of your journey? (*point at the appropriate section on the map for each prompt*) Repeat as necessary for different points.
- Can you tell me a story that shows me about what learning is like now?
- What story will you tell others about that show the best / the worst time you have in school.

Concrete details about learning in schools currently

- Relationship with current teachers / other school staff / mentors
- Relationship with peers
- Current academics
 - What is your favourite subject and why?
 - What do you find difficult?
 - What is your goal after you leave secondary school?
 - What are your grades like? Are they what you expect?
 - What support do you currently receive in school? Is this related to your disability / special educational needs?
- Current behavioral and discipline issues and events
 - How often do you get into trouble in school? What type of offences? What are the consequences?

Concrete details about learning at home

- Role and relationship with parents in the past
- Role and relationship with parents in the present
- How does the family engage with the community or extended family?
- What are your parents expectations of you? Are they currently satisfied with your performance or progress in school?
- How are your parents involved in school?
- In what ways are they engaged with your learning?

Obtaining Permission to Use the Photographs

Thank you for sharing your photographs with me, may I have your permission to show them to your parents when I meet with them. I will be asking them to interpret these photos, and to reflect on the meaning of these events. I may also share with them the descriptions that you shared with me earlier. You may tell me specifically what you would not like me to share, and select photos that you don't want to share. Will that be alright?

If consent is not given to share the photographs: An alternative would be for us to summarize the events that you have shared with me today, to share with your parents, so that they may reflect on whether these events have been useful for you. Would you like to work with me on the summary?

Interview 3: Connecting Past to Present and then the Future Through Reflection to Make Meaning

Extending the Educational Journey Map

Remember the map of your education journey that you drew the first time we met for an interview? Today we will be extending the maps that we drew. I would like you to extend your map to show where you would like to go after secondary school. Remember to include people, places, obstacles, and opportunities that you may encounter. Afterwards, you can explain it to me.

Attitude and opinions about role of school in transition

- Relationship with past and present teachers / other school personnel /mentors
 - How have they supported you to achieve your goal?
 - What do you think they are trying to teach you?
- Relationship with peers in school in the past and currently
 - How have they supported you to achieve your goal?
- Academic and behavioural/discipline history and experiences
 - How has being in secondary school prepared you for the future?
 - What impact would your grades have on your ability to achieve your goal?
 - Does having a disability / special educational need affect how you would reach your goal?
 - What about your behavior/discipline record?
- What are your goals? What would need to happen for you to accomplish those goals?

Attitude and opinions about role of family in transition

- Past and current parental teaching and relationship with parents
 - How would this contribute to your goals?
- Learning from others in the past and present
 - Who else in your extended family and community have been helpful?
 - How about other adults in your community?
 - How about other peers in your community?

Closing

How was the experience of being interviewed? Is there anything you wanted me to ask that I didn't? What would you like to ask me?

Appendix G: Interview Guide for Families

Photo-elicitation

I am going to show you pictures your child took in the past 3-4 weeks that represented events that they felt were meaningful to them as they grow into an adult, and consider post-secondary options. I would like you tell me what you think the pictures represent.

- What type of goals will be supported by this activity?
- Who do you think should be involved?
- What role should the school play, if any?
- Should this event happen more or less often?

Concrete details about the family, their expectations, and involvement with their child and the school

- *Demographics*
 - *Age of parent*
 - *Family structure*
 - *Amount of time spent with child each day / week*
- *What are your aspirations for your child?*
 - *Career aspirations?*
 - *Personal milestones?*
 - *Which are the most important?*
 - *What do you see your role as?*
 - *How different are these aspirations from the ones you have for your other children (if any)*
- *What are you doing to help your child achieve these goals?*
 - *What resources do you use?*
 - *Who else do you work with?*
 - *How much do you know about what happens after secondary school?*
 - *Where do you go for information?*
- *How do you work with the school to achieve these goals?*
 - *How do you feel about working with the school?*
 - *How does the school facilitate your involvement?*
 - *What do you think are ways the school is supporting you?*
 - *In what ways do you not feel supported?*
 - *Who do you work with the most in school? How would you describe the relationship with that person?*
 - *What do you wish would happen more?*

Appendix H: Interview Guide for Teachers / Staff

- History / Demographics
 - Age
 - Number of years in the school
 - Number of years teaching
 - Other roles / appointments in the school
- How important is what you teach, in terms of its utility in the student's future?
- What do you see as your role in preparing the student for future education and/or future employment?
 - What are the important transition goals for students with and without disabilities?
 - Why and how are they different?
 - What supports are they provided with? What else should they be provided with?
 - How is this done in the school?
 - Are there individual roles or group roles?
- What resources do you have to play your role well?
 - Support from school administrators
 - Support from other teachers
 - Support from other school staff
 - Written policies / Regulations
 - Professional development opportunities
 - Verbal instructions
 - External to school
- What prevents you from fulfilling your role?

Information about specific students

- What is your goal for the student? How do you decide? What is it based on?
- What are the facilitators and barriers for the student to achieve the goal?
- What are you doing about it?
- How do you work with their parents / families?

Appendix I: Interview Guide for School Leader

- History / Demographics
 - Age
 - Number of years in the school
 - Number of years teaching / as principal
 - Other roles / appointments
- What is the school approach for supporting students with disabilities in secondary school?
 - What resources are available?
 - What are the academic and non-academic goals for students with disabilities? Are they different from those without disabilities?
 - What are the current outcomes for students graduating out of secondary school? School-wide?
 - How are parents involved?
 - What activities are conducted?
 - Which school personnel are involved?
- What is the school approach for supporting *transition* for students with and without disabilities?
 - Why and how are they different for different students?
 - What resources are available?
 - How are parents involved?
 - How is culture or racial/ethnic differences taken into account?
 - What activities are conducted?
 - Which school personnel are involved?

Appendix J: Participant Observation Protocol

Participant Observation Daily Log

Date/ Time:

Brief Synopsis of Activities, Observations, Meetings <i>(Place/Time/Participants)</i>	Summary of Observation <i>(Notes of:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Interaction between participants</i> - <i>Use of mediating tools for transition</i> - <i>Places of tension)</i> 	Questions, Impressions, Hunches