



Empowering Voices: Transition Planning Implications for Students Using AAC, Families, and Service Providers

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Gratitude to Our Partners

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We would like to gratefully acknowledge our partners and participants for their time, insights, and commitment to this work. Their willingness to share their perspectives made this study possible.

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Our Team



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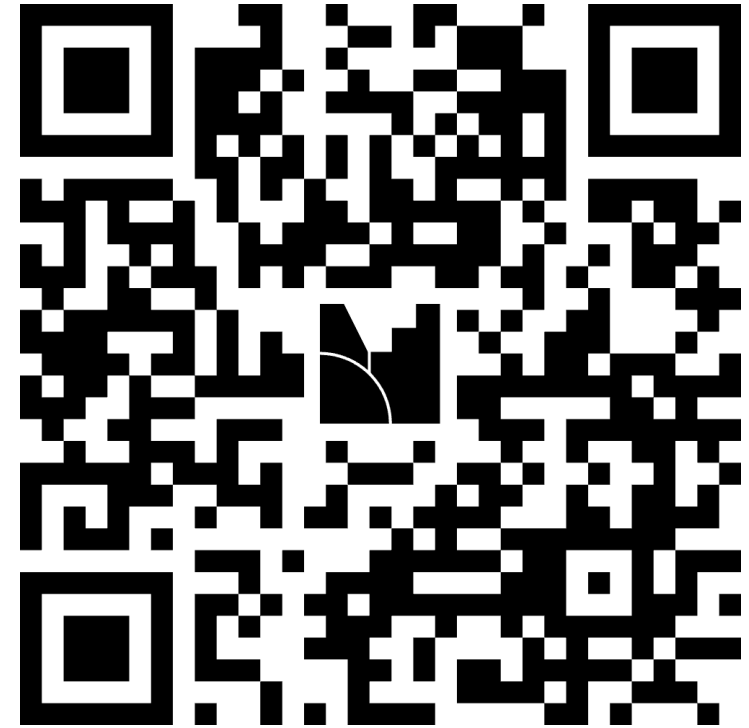
Hannah Foley, BA
Self-advocate,
AAC Specialist,
and Independent
Consultant



Who are you?



Please share your role using
the QR code:



Today's Objectives

We will:

- 1. Describe the transition planning experiences** of students who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) and their transition teams.
- 2. Identify key strategies for implementing best practices** in transition alongside students with disabilities who use AAC.



Today's Objectives

We encourage you to:

1. Ask questions throughout
2. Share your perspectives and experiences
3. Identify ways in which these findings might be helpful in informing your own practice.



What is your connection to transition-aged students who use AAC?



Please share with the attendees near you!

And now, a show of hands.

Do you...

- Lead or collaborate to support transition planning?
- Deliver transition services?
- Work with students who use AAC?
- Conduct research or policy work?
- Sit here still wondering what AAC is?



Our Study Rationale

Why did we
decide to do this
study?



Why is it important to understand transition planning experiences for students who use AAC and their teams?

- Students who are nonspeaking or have limited verbal speech seek safe, supportive environments, relationships, health access, and belonging
- Access to AAC + inclusive transition planning → fosters self-advocacy & meaningful participation
- Post-school outcomes remain poor (<5% employed)
- Barriers include limited AAC access, low expectations, weak transition programs to support needs, and poor skill transfer
- Students need explicit support in goal setting, self-determination, and access to assistive technology



Why is it important to understand transition planning experiences for students who use AAC and their teams?



- Since 1990, IDEA has mandated transition services for students with disabilities
- Self-determination strongly predicts adult success
- Transition teams play central roles, but face barriers:
 - Special Educators: Limited knowledge about AAC
 - SLPs: Often lack transition knowledge
 - Families: Desire stronger involvement, AAC integration, and training
- Evidence-based practices (e.g., CTE, early work experiences, student-directed IEPs) are rarely studied with AAC users
- Need for research centering AAC users' voices to guide effective transition practices



Our Research Questions



1. How do students who use AAC, their parents, and their educational service providers describe their involvement in transition planning?
2. What services, supports, and considerations do these individuals find to be pertinent for their involvement in transition planning?



Participants?

Who participated
in this study?



How did we recruit participants?

- Professional Networks and Social Media
- Interest Survey
- Zoom or Phone Screening



Who participated?

Leo

20-year-old, male,
autism, IDD, speech
language
impairment

Parent

Teacher

SLP

Theo

24-year-old, male,
IDD, and speech
language impairment

Parent

Teacher

SLP

Bryan

19-year-old, male,
autism, IDD, OHI,
orthopedic
impairment

Parent

SLP



Data Collection

How did we collect data to address our research questions?



How did we collect data?



- Semi-structured interviews



1. Tell us about how you communicate.



Data Analysis

How did we make sense of our data?



How did we analyze data?



Within-Case Data Analysis

- Started with our initial explanatory statement
- Revisited each case, and applied second-level codes
- Compared to the initial statement, making edits specific to each case

Initial Theoretical Explanatory Statement	<p>Students with disabilities who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) benefit from tailored supports to participate fully in transition planning. This includes meaningful assessment, setting postschool goals, and choosing services that reflect their aspirations. Meanwhile, educational service providers may need training to deliver effective instruction and support. Special educators play a key role in guiding student- and family-directed planning, while speech-language pathologists (SLPs) help establish consistent communication methods that promote self-determination. Parents are also essential partners in transition planning, but they may need guidance on AAC, transition processes, and adult services. As students enter postschool environments, new communication partners will also require support to sustain their success. Empowering students throughout this process strengthens their ability to thrive beyond school.</p>		
Within-Case Explanatory Statements	<p><u>Leo's Transition Case:</u> Leo (Youth), Stella (Parent), Natalie (SPED Educator), Ana (SLP)</p>	<p><u>Theo's Transition Case:</u> Theo (Youth), Ted (Parent), Tony (SPED Educator), Agnes (SLP)</p>	<p><u>Bryan's Transition Case:</u> Bryan (Youth), Deedee (Parent), Penelope (SLP)</p>
	<p>While revising each within-case explanatory statement, we made the following intermediate edits:</p>		
	<p>Emphasized Leo's need for tailored AAC supports for his participation in transition planning, added training for Natalie (educator) and Ana (SLP) with time for collaboration, included clear communication between Stella (parent), Natalie, and Ana, and emphasized more explicit efforts to involve Stella and connect her and Leo to postsecondary transition resources and service providers.</p>	<p>Highlighted clear examples of transition services, clarified Tony (educator) and Agnes's (SLP) roles, and included meaningful support of Theo's involvement, self-advocacy, and communication. Emphasized Agnes's contributions, included real-life stories for Ted (parent) and Theo, and highlighted the importance of identifying new communication partners during transition.</p>	<p>Supported meaningful involvement of Bryan in transition planning, ensured Bryan's AAC access to the IEP process, and defined the roles of the special educator and Penelope (SLP). Highlighted real-life postschool examples for Bryan and Deedee (parent) and the importance of new communication partners.</p>
Cross-Case Assertion	<p>Students with disabilities who use AAC need tailored supports to engage meaningfully in all parts of transition planning—such as adapted assessments, setting interest-aligned postschool goals, and selecting inclusive services. Supporting their involvement may include teaching IEP components, building AAC proficiency, and using creative strategies (e.g., pre-programmed devices, practice presentations) to enable active participation in meetings. Educational service providers require training and resources to meet these students' needs. Special educators and speech-language pathologists play key roles—facilitating family-driven planning, building consistent communication systems, and collaborating through shared goals, adapted assessments, and community-based support. Schools should also engage parents meaningfully, drawing on their knowledge of the student and offering guidance on AAC and transition services, including examples of adult AAC users in postsecondary settings. As students transition, they encounter new communication partners (e.g., employers, peers) and benefit from opportunities and space to self-advocate, with or without parent involvement.</p>		

Cross-Case Data Analysis

- Next, we reviewed and compared the individual theoretical explanatory statements
- Made changes to our explanatory statement and developed a cross-case assertion

Initial Theoretical Explanatory Statement	<p>Students with disabilities who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) benefit from tailored supports to participate fully in transition planning. This includes meaningful assessment, setting postschool goals, and choosing services that reflect their aspirations. Meanwhile, educational service providers may need training to deliver effective instruction and support. Special educators play a key role in guiding student- and family-directed planning, while speech-language pathologists (SLPs) help establish consistent communication methods that promote self-determination. Parents are also essential partners in transition planning, but they may need guidance on AAC, transition processes, and adult services. As students enter postschool environments, new communication partners will also require support to sustain their success. Empowering students throughout this process strengthens their ability to thrive beyond school.</p>		
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Findings

What did our data “say?”
What does it mean?





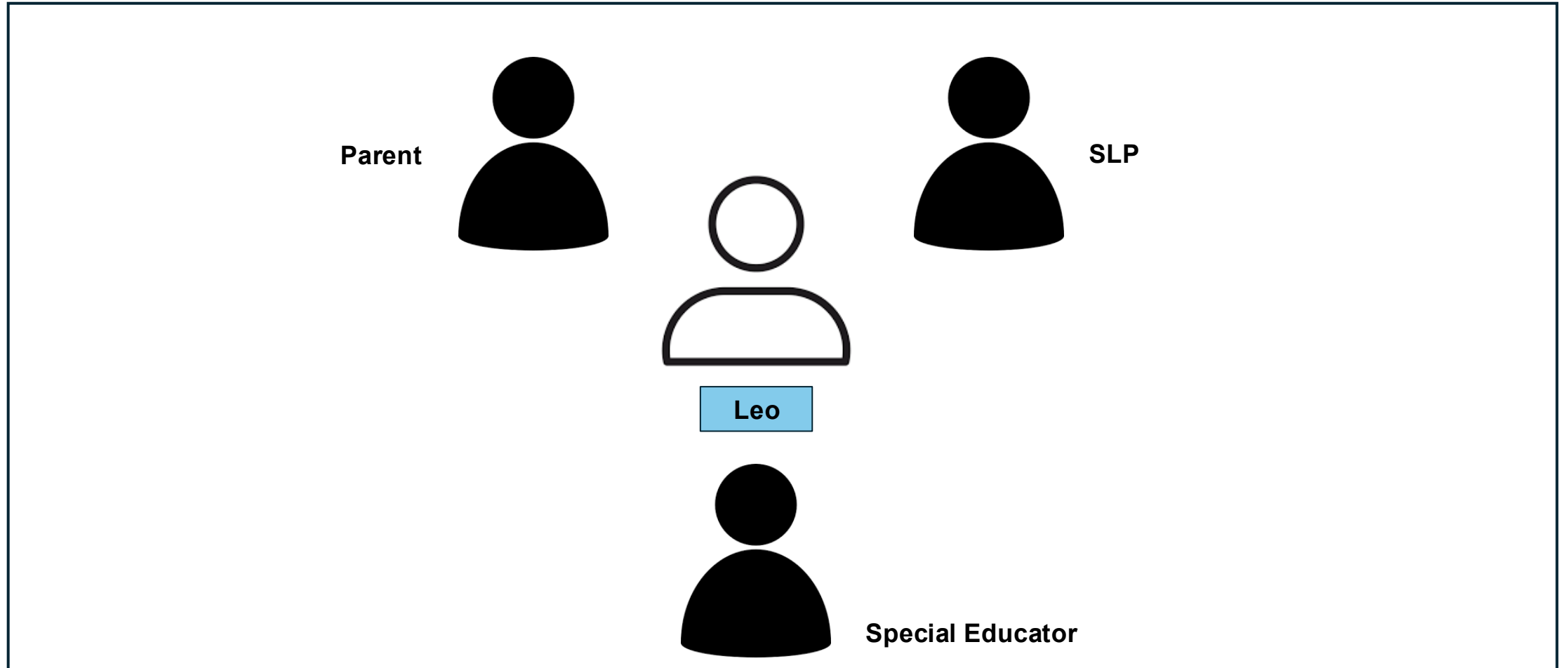
Research Question 1: How do students who use AAC, their parents, and their educational service providers describe their involvement in transition planning?



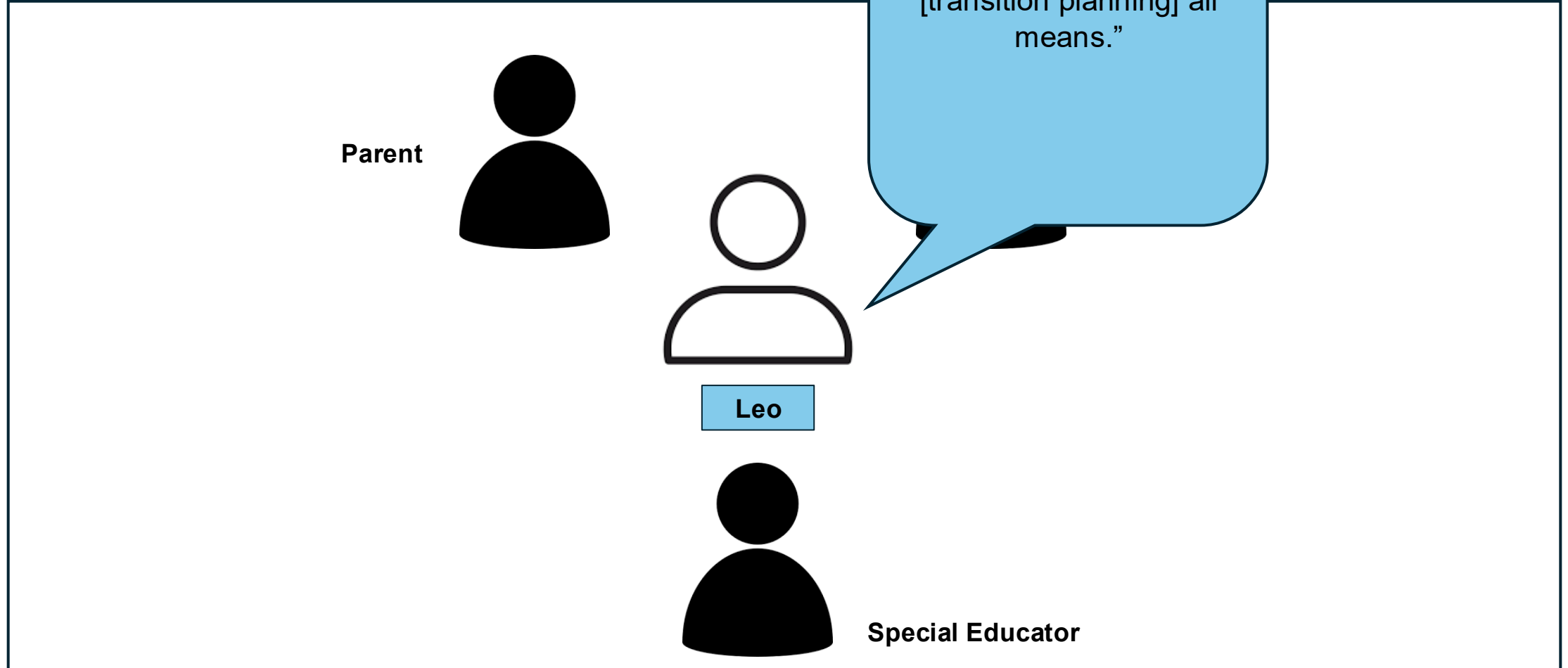
Within-Case Analysis



RQ1: Leo's Case



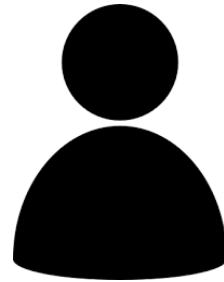
RQ1: Leo's Case



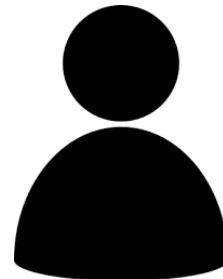
RQ1: Leo's Case



Parent



Leo



Special Educator

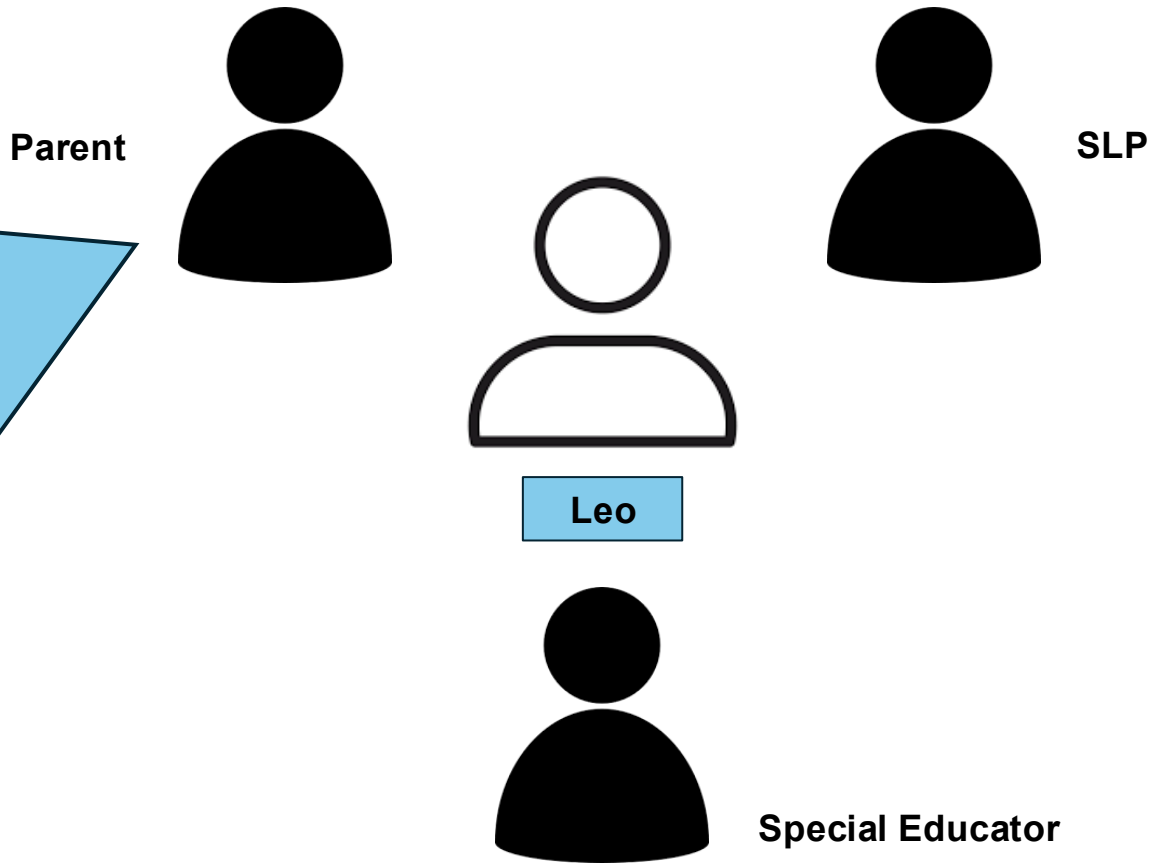
"Leo pretty much said that it's hard for him to understand all the pieces in the meeting, you know? It's actually difficult for most parents to understand all the different things they discuss in the meeting, so I wish there was a way that maybe they could break it down and make it more simple for Leo to understand.. and [for him] to have more involvement." -Leo's Mother



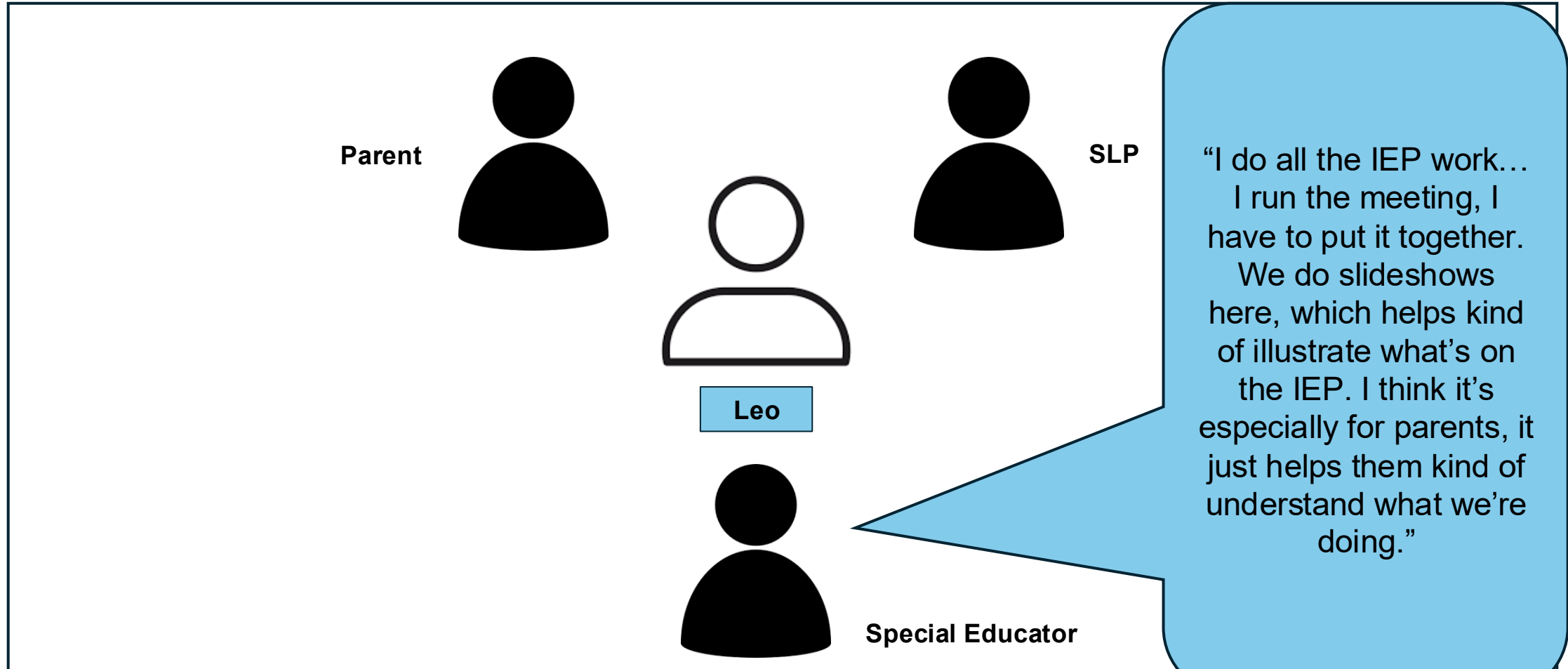
Leo's Case



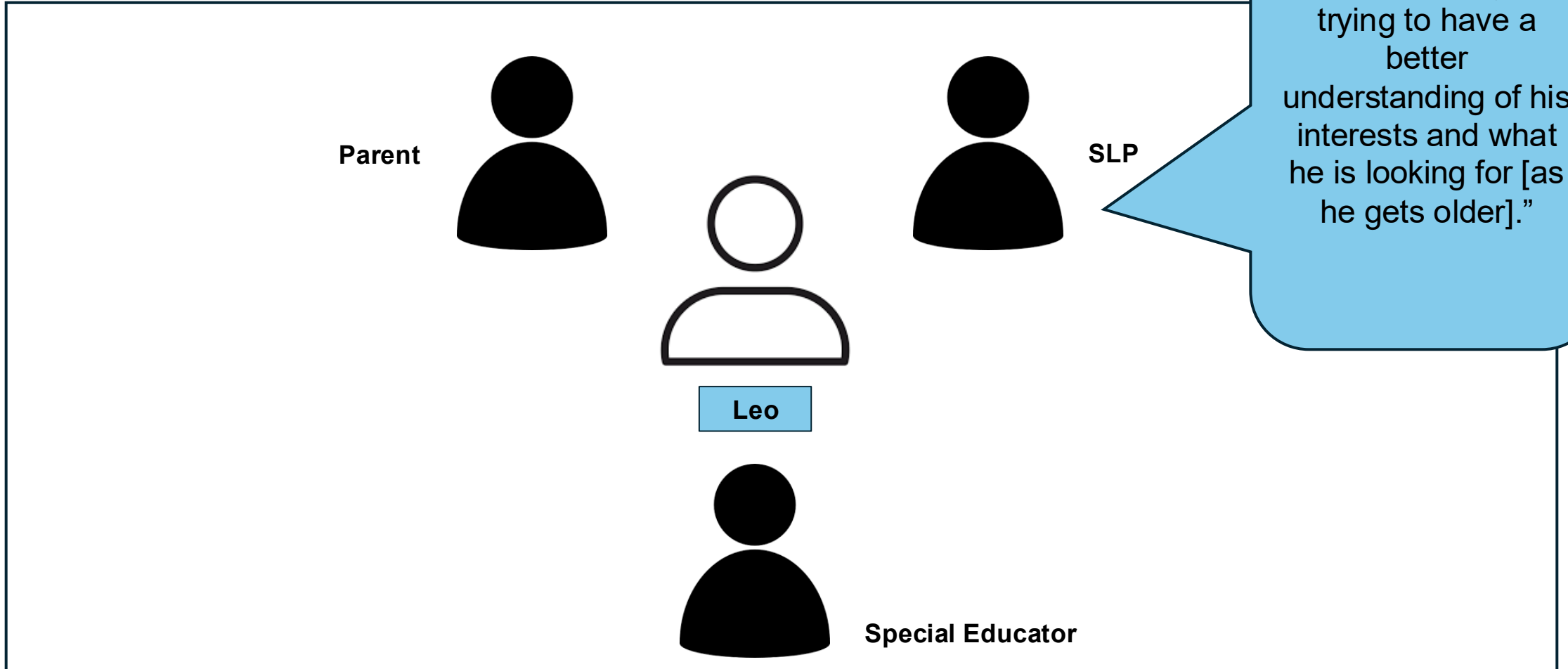
“It’s an overwhelming task because there are so many different places that are adult day programs. And I’m not sure if there’s any like autism specific, or if it is all different disabilities... it’s overwhelming because I haven’t gotten a list from the school. If they could help provide a list or even take us parents... that would be really helpful.”



RQ1: Leo's Case



RQ1: Leo's Case



RQ1: Leo's Case



Participant Involvement in Transition Planning Activities

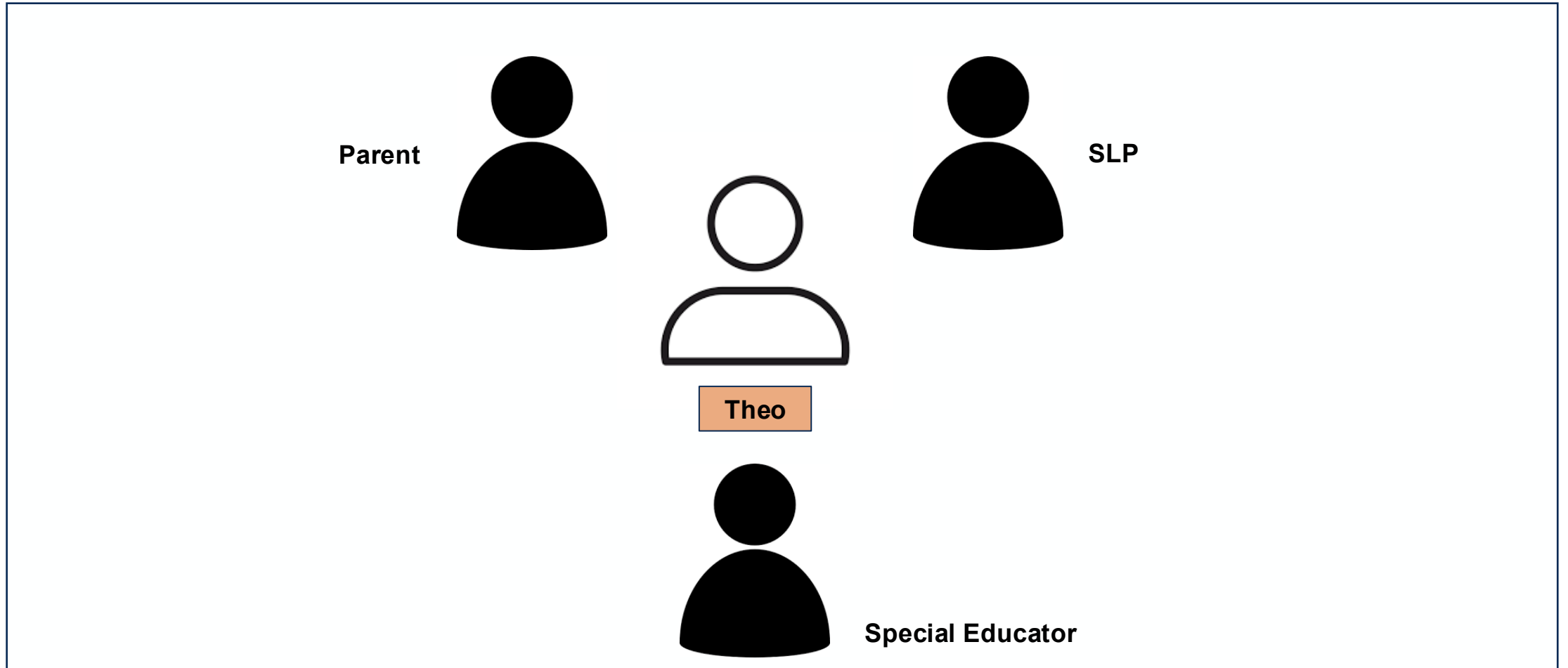


Leo

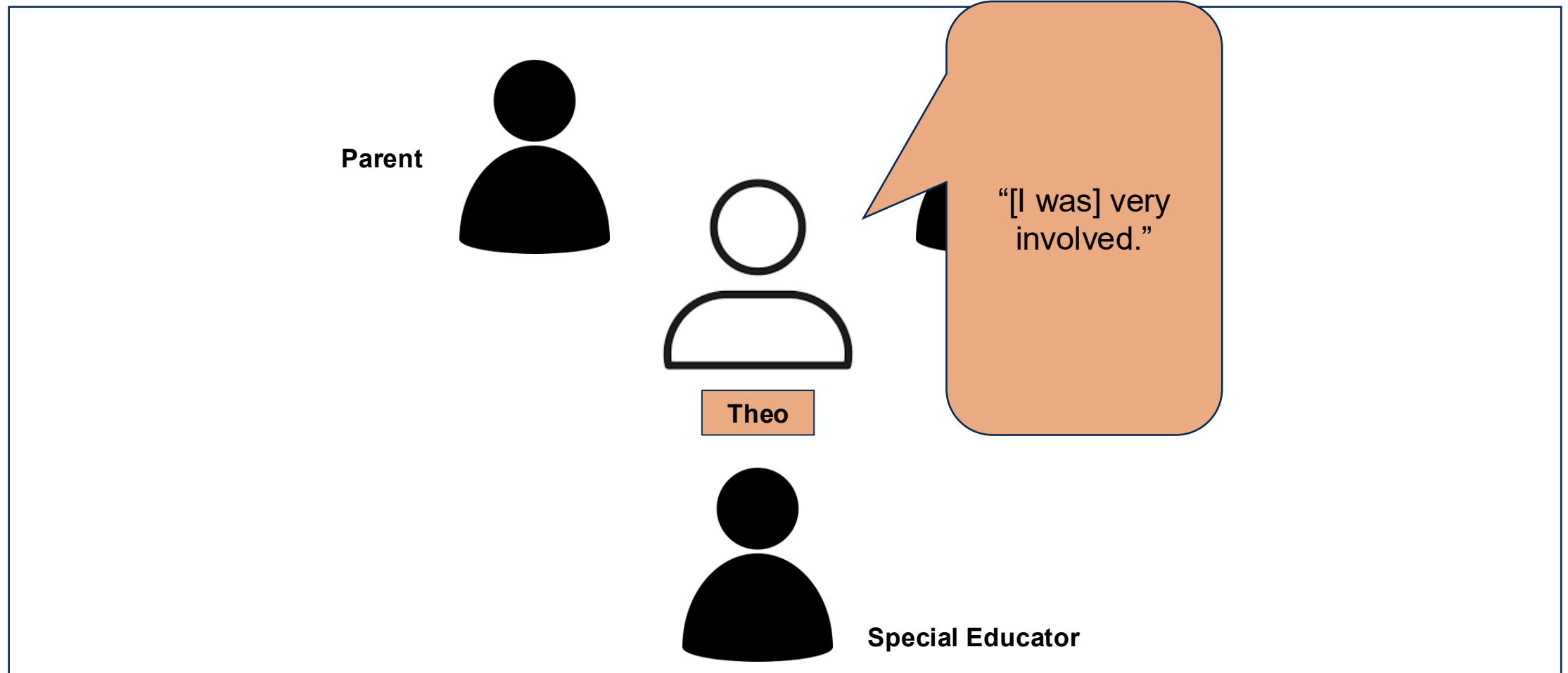
Youth	Parent	Speech Language Pathologist	Special Educator	Involvement in Transition Planning
				Leo's Case
●	●	●	●	Discuss Student Goals
●	○	○	●	Participate in Or Support Transition Assessments
○	●	●	●	Attend Transition Planning or IEP Meeting
○	○	○	●	Supporting Determination of Transition Services
○	○	○	●	Selecting Classes for Course of Study
○	●	●	●	Identifying Annual IEP Transition Goals
○	●	●	●	Overall Involvement in Transition Planning



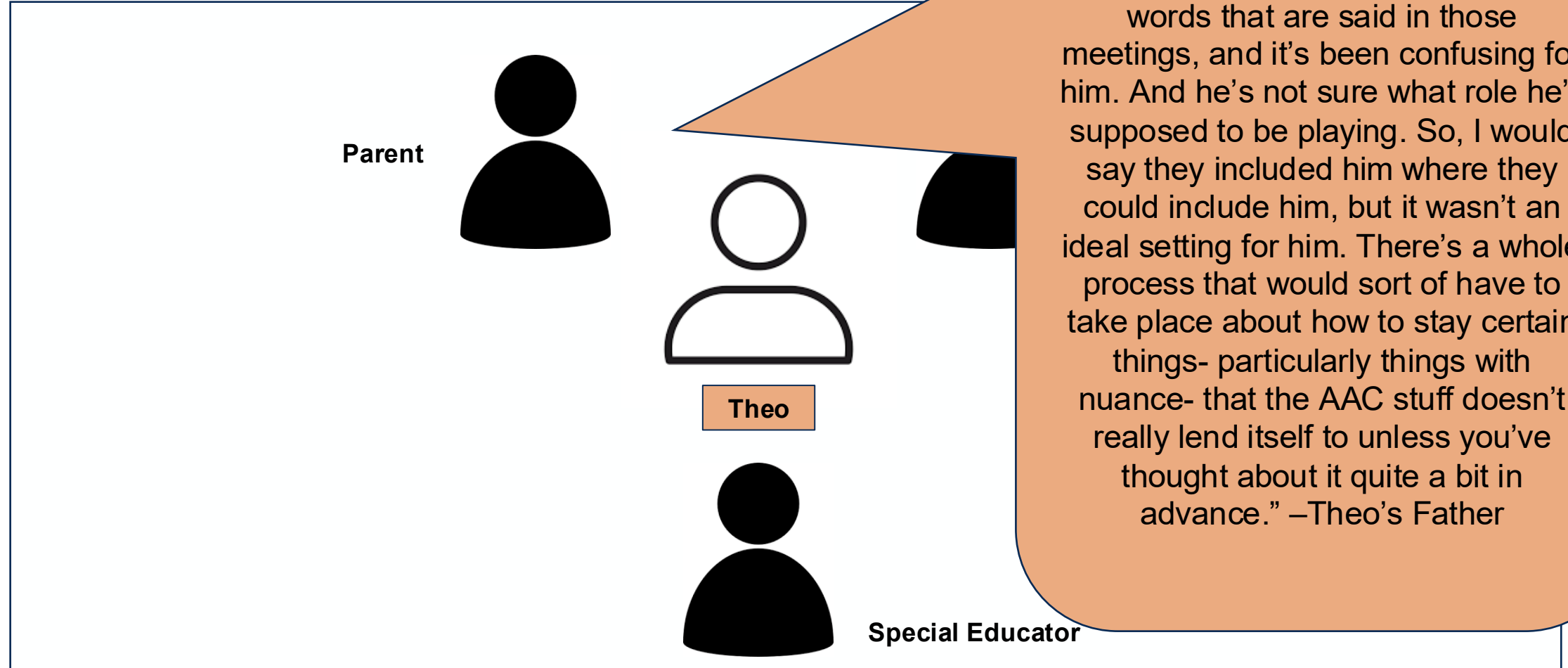
RQ1: Theo's Case



RQ1: Theo's Case



RQ1: Theo's Case



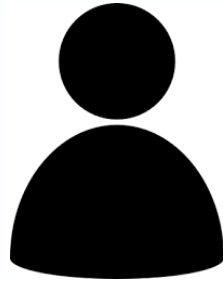
“When we switch our focus to the IEP meeting, that’s about a million words that are said in those meetings, and it’s been confusing for him. And he’s not sure what role he’s supposed to be playing. So, I would say they included him where they could include him, but it wasn’t an ideal setting for him. There’s a whole process that would sort of have to take place about how to stay certain things- particularly things with nuance- that the AAC stuff doesn’t really lend itself to unless you’ve thought about it quite a bit in advance.” –Theo’s Father



o's Case

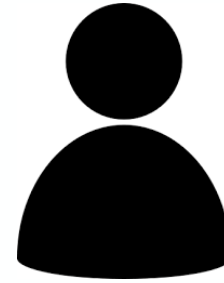
“When we heard about what other people were doing, it was always in a generic sense. But as far as seeing real life examples of what people [who use AAC] actually did would be really useful for us...would it absolutely kill us to have somebody come back and talk to use about what their experience was?”

Parent



Theo

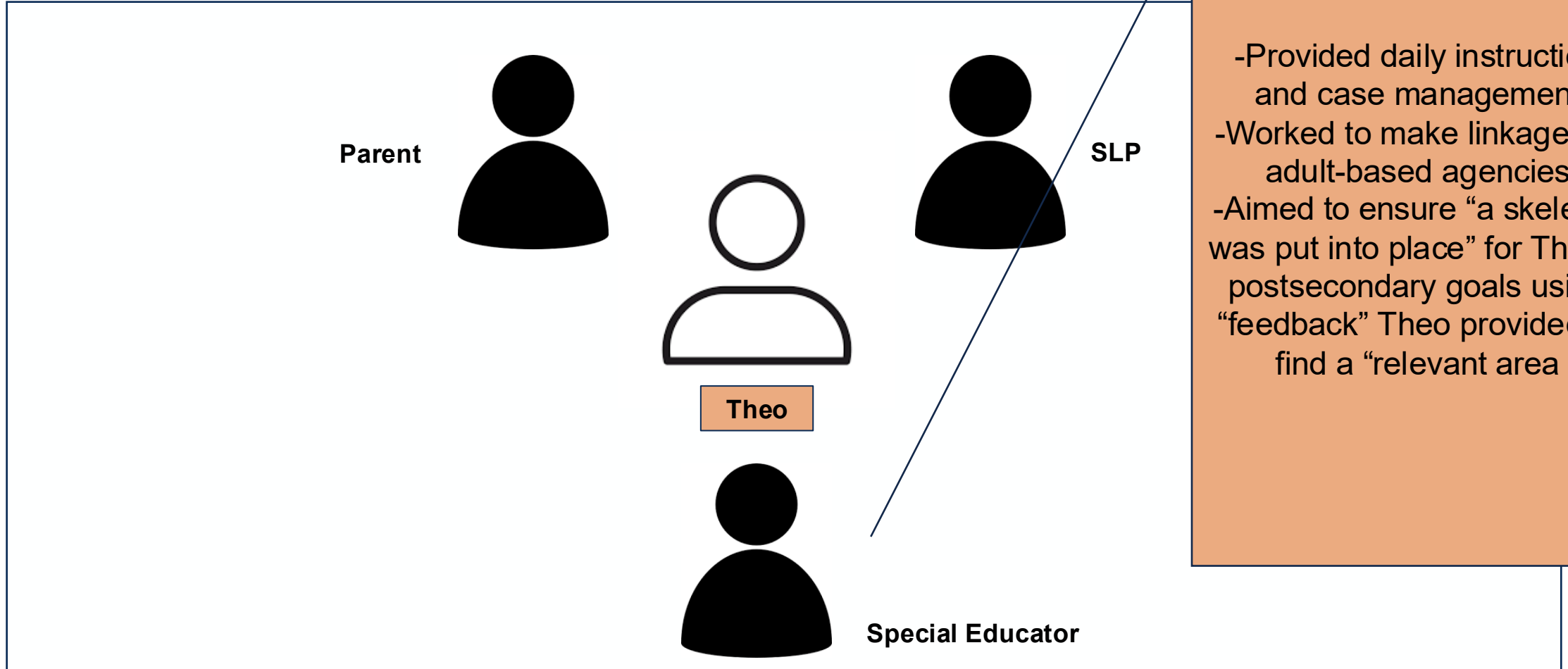
SLP



Special Educator



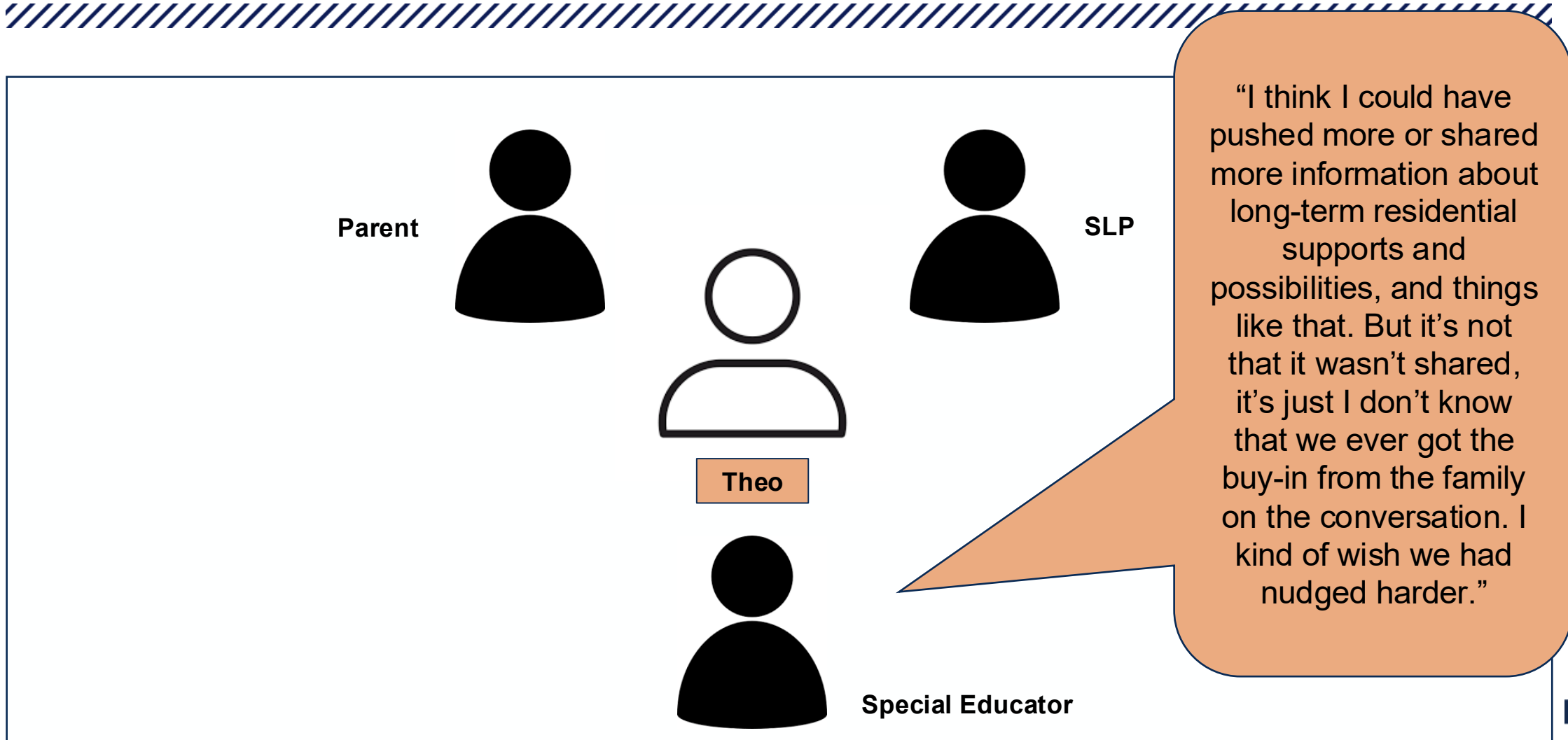
RQ1: Theo's Case



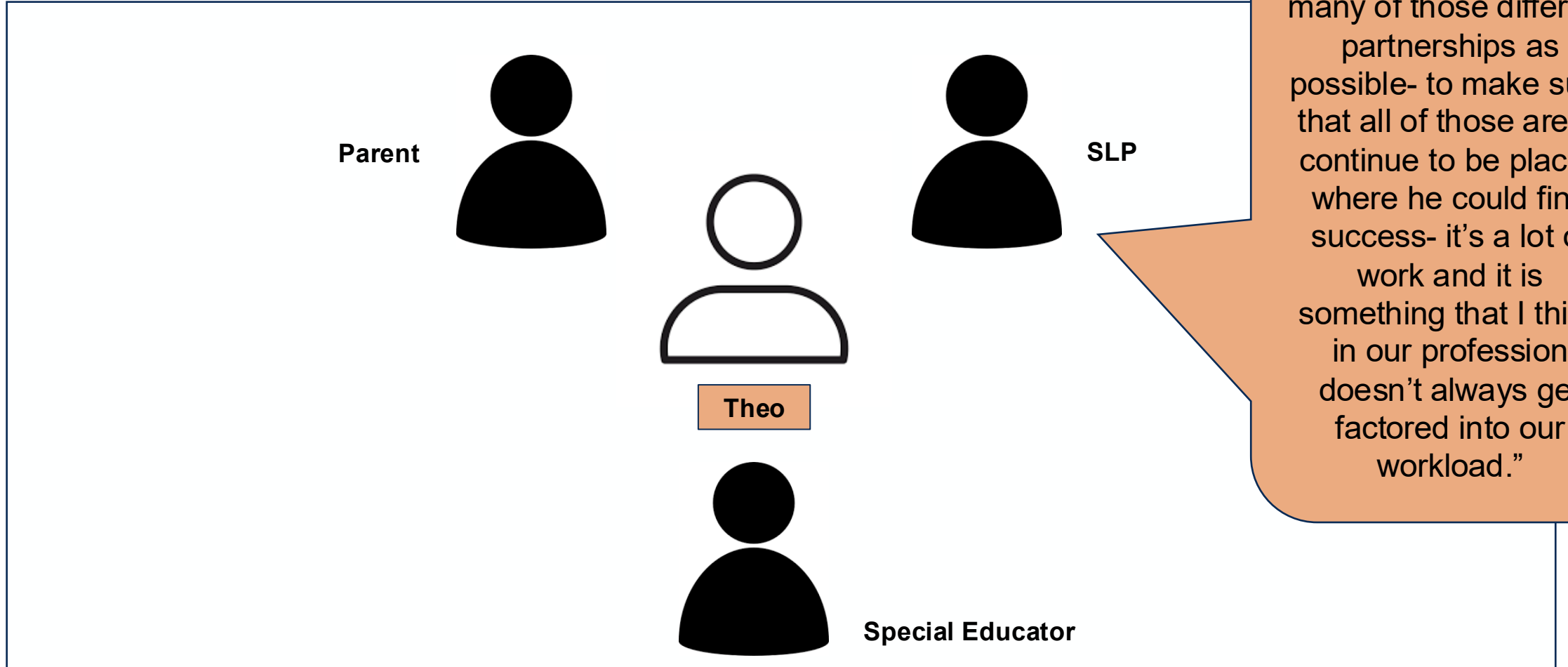
- Provided daily instruction and case management
- Worked to make linkages to adult-based agencies
- Aimed to ensure “a skeleton was put into place” for Theo’s postsecondary goals using “feedback” Theo provided to find a “relevant area



RQ1: Theo's Case



RQ1: Theo's Case



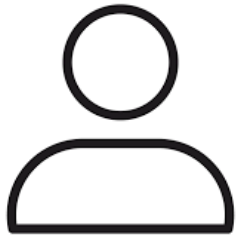
“Our workload is not reflective of the setting...Trying to touch base with as many of those different partnerships as possible- to make sure that all of those areas continue to be places where he could find success- it’s a lot of work and it is something that I think in our profession doesn’t always get factored into our workload.”



RQ1: Theo's Case



Participant Involvement in Transition Planning Activities

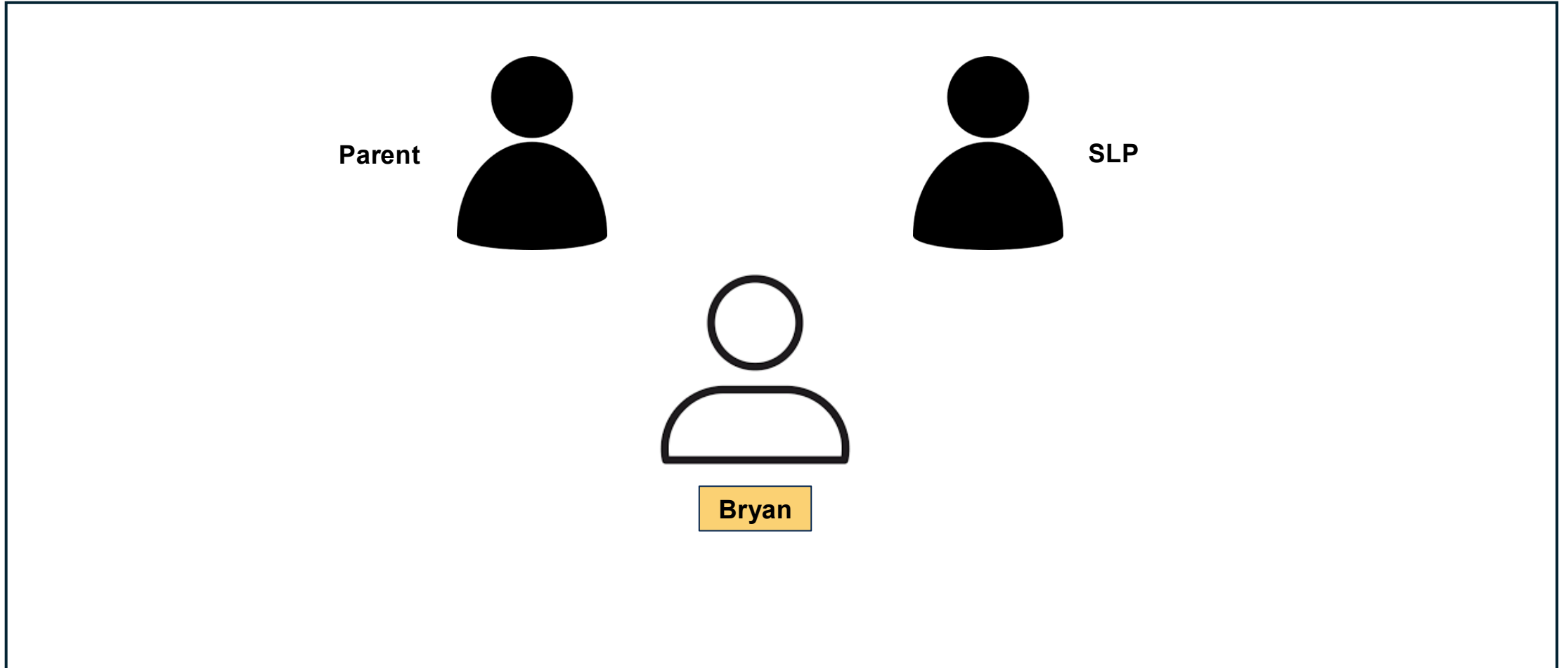


Theo

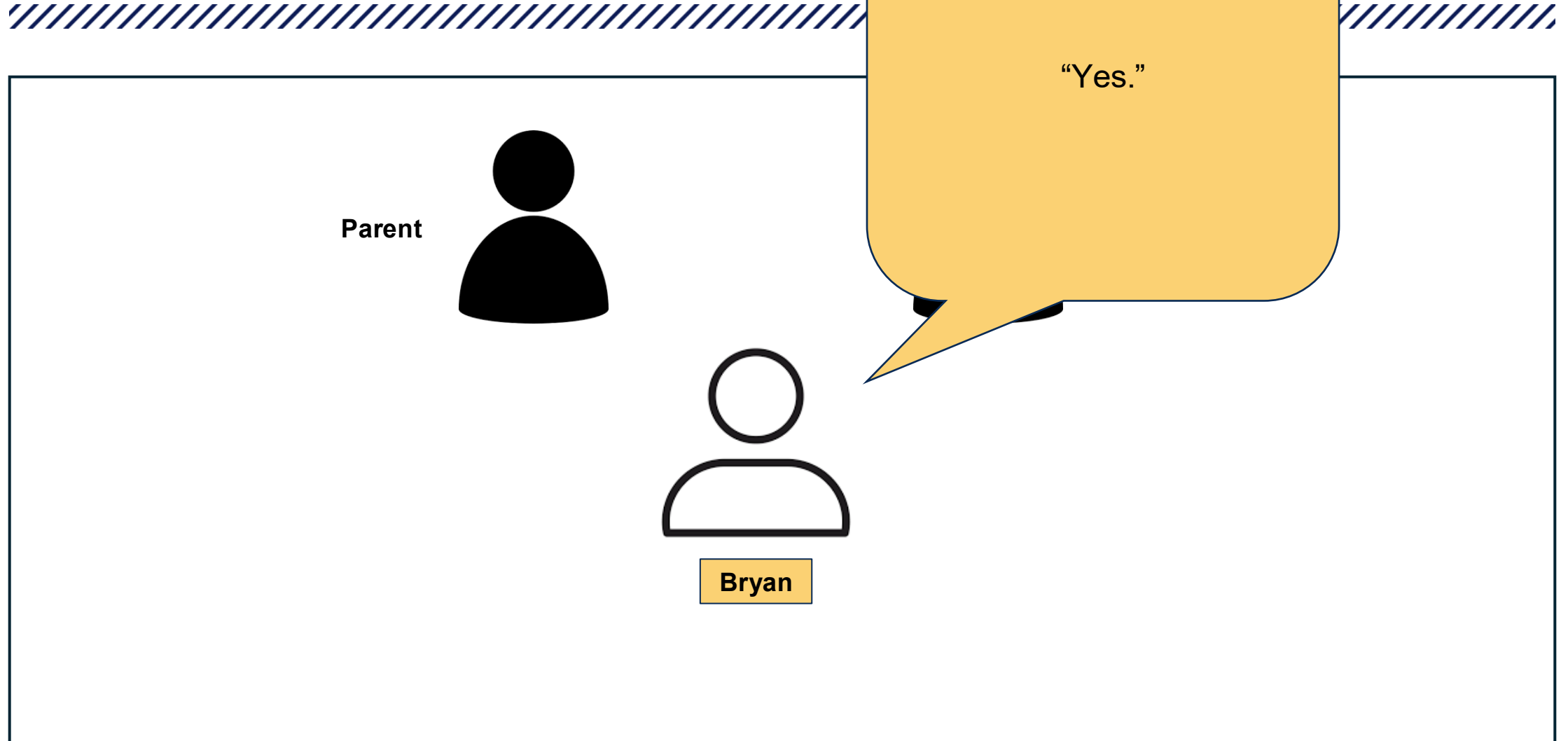
Youth	Parent	Speech Language Pathologist	Special Educator	Involvement in Transition Planning
				Theo's Case
●	●	●	●	Discuss Student Goals
●	●	○	●	Participate in Or Support Transition Assessments
●	●	●	●	Attend Transition Planning or IEP Meeting
●	●	●	●	Supporting Determination of Transition Services
●	●	○	●	Selecting Classes for Course of Study
○	○	●	●	Identifying Annual IEP Transition Goals
●	●	●	●	Overall Involvement in Transition Planning



RQ1: Bryan's Case

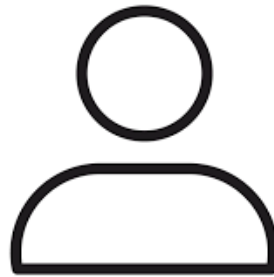
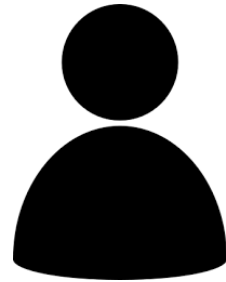


RQ1: Bryan's Case



RQ1: Bryan's Case

Parent



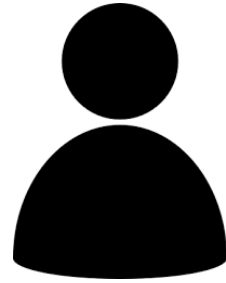
Bryan

"He's definitely included [in the transition planning] and that is so beautiful. You know... it's not the adults talking about him."
- Bryan's Mother

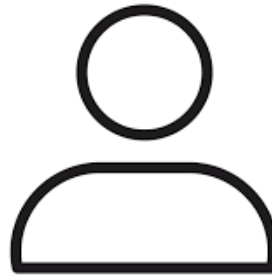
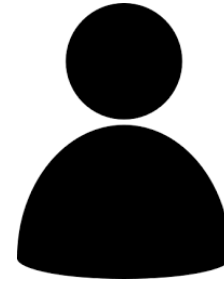
n's Case

“I think the teacher is showing parents, the school district, the community that our students with- this is separate from AAC in some ways- that our students with the highest support needs are very capable of having a job, going to college, whatever it is. And we need visuals of what that looks like...the students need to see it.”

Parent



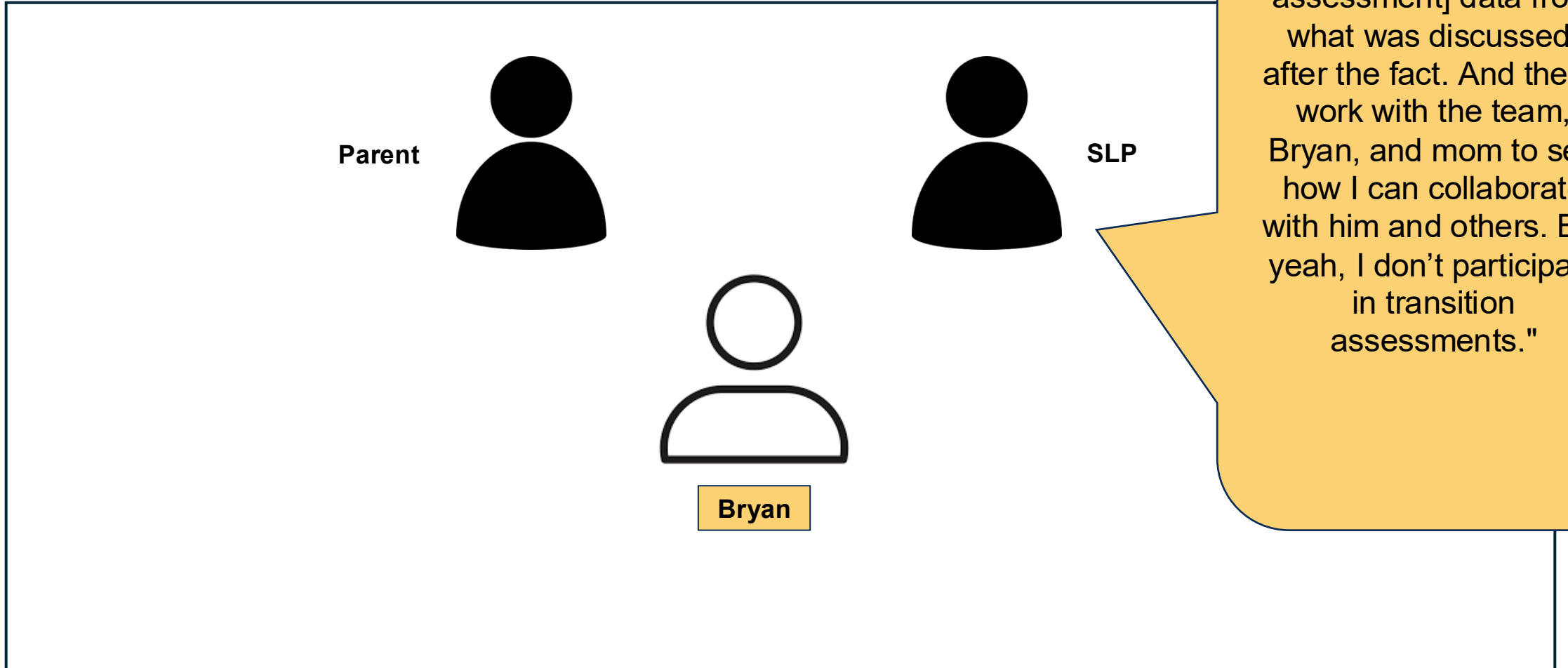
SLP



Bryan



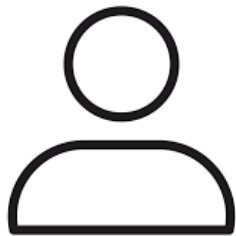
RQ1: Bryan's Case



RQ1: Bryan's Case



Participant Involvement in Transition Planning Activities



Bryan

Youth	Parent	Speech Language Pathologist	Special Educator	Involvement in Transition Planning
				Bryan's Case
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●	●	○		Participate in Or Support Transition Assessments
●	●	●		Attend Transition Planning or IEP Meeting
○	●	○		Supporting Determination of Transition Services
●	●	○		Selecting Classes for Course of Study
●	●	●		Identifying Annual IEP Transition Goals
●	●	●		<i>Overall Involvement in Transition Planning</i>



Cross-Case Analysis



Initial Theoretical Explanatory Statement	<p>Students with disabilities who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) benefit from tailored supports to participate fully in transition planning. This includes meaningful assessment, setting postschool goals, and choosing services that reflect their aspirations. Meanwhile, educational service providers may need training to deliver effective instruction and support. Special educators play a key role in guiding student- and family-directed planning, while speech-language pathologists (SLPs) help establish consistent communication methods that promote self-determination. Parents are also essential partners in transition planning, but they may need guidance on AAC, transition processes, and adult services. As students enter postschool environments, new communication partners will also require support to sustain their success. Empowering students throughout this process strengthens their ability to thrive beyond school.</p>		
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- Students with disabilities who use AAC need **tailored supports to engage meaningfully** in all parts of transition planning—such as adapted assessments, setting interest-aligned postschool goals, and selecting inclusive services.
- Supporting their involvement may include **teaching IEP components, building AAC proficiency, and using creative strategies** (e.g., pre-programmed devices, practice presentations) to enable active participation in meetings.
- Educational service **providers require training and resources** to meet these students' needs. Special educators and speech-language pathologists play key roles—facilitating family-driven planning, building consistent communication systems, and collaborating through shared goals, adapted assessments, and community-based support.
- Schools should also engage parents meaningfully, **drawing on their knowledge of the student and offering guidance on AAC and transition services**, including examples of adult AAC users in postsecondary settings.
- As students transition, they encounter new communication partners (e.g., employers, peers) and **benefit from opportunities and space to self-advocate**, with or without parent involvement.



*Research Question 2:
What services, supports, and considerations do these
individuals find to be pertinent for their involvement in
transition planning?*



RQ2: Services, Supports, and Considerations



Students



- Accessible assessments
- Meaningful opportunities to participate in goal planning and IEP meetings
- Inclusive Services
- Preparation for new communication partners

Families



- Training and resources related to AAC, transition planning, and adult services
- Examples of AAC users in postsecondary contexts

Special Educators



- Professional development and experience working with students who use AAC
- Facilitating student and family-directed planning
- Ability to co-deliver services

SLPs



- Ability to co-deliver services
- Knowledge of transition
- Flexibility to deliver services in the community



Implications



What does this mean for research,
practice, and policy?



How do these findings compare with your experiences related to transition planning for students who use AAC?

Please share with attendees near you.

Would anyone be willing to share?



Implications for Practice and Policy

Our findings suggest that...

- A strong need for **intentional and sustained collaboration** between special educators and SLPs during transition planning for students who use AAC
- **Increased accessibility** for students who use AAC during transition planning
 - Service providers need clearer guidance on adapting transition best practices for students who use AAC
- Policy guidance should **clarify expectations** for student involvement in transition planning AND **establish clearer standards** for involving students who use AAC and their families in these processes



Resources for Students, Families, and School Personnel



Video Resource: Student-Directed Transition Planning and Implications for Students Who Use AAC



- <https://vimeo.com/1104254265/7b2df958d8>



Resources for Students, Families, and School Personnel



- <https://tinyurl.com/bd5ru8wc>



Involving Students with AAC in IEP Meetings

- Digital portfolios and multimedia presentations
 - [Book Creator](#)
- Video-or audio-based storytelling
 - [Voki](#)
 - [WeVideo](#)
- Interactive profile or planning tools
 - All About Me Board
 - [Tobii Dynavox Pathways app](#)
 - Game-based expression
 - Create a “Dream Job World” in Minecraft
- Providing more accessible opportunities for students to prepare, practice, and express their goals and preferences can foster their ownership and voice in transition planning



Implications for Research

Our findings suggest that...

- Future research is needed to further understand the **in-school and post-school experiences** of transitioning individuals who use AAC
- We need to **better understand how evidence-based practices and predictors in transition can be implemented** successfully with students who use AAC or represent other low-incidence populations
- Future research on transition and special education should be done **in collaboration with individuals who use AAC**
 - Integral and equitable leaders to ensure their needs and priorities are effectively addressed (Blasko et al., 2025; Forber-Pratt, 2025)



Questions



Any other thoughts you'd like to share?



Research Opportunity!

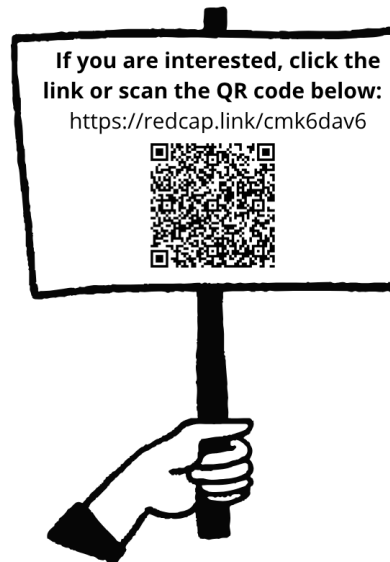
I SUPPORTS IN THE WORKPLACE

For Young Adults with Disabilities

What are your experiences?

Please consider participating in this study if...

- You are 18-22 years old, have a disability, and participate in a work-based learning experience in the community
- You are a coworker, supervisor or educational professional working with a young adult aged 18-22 with a disability who participates in a work-based learning experience in the community
- You are the parent of a young adult aged 18-22 with a disability who participates in a work-based learning experience in the community



What will you do?

- Participate in an interview via Zoom or in-person (60 mins)
- Participate in two workplace observations (youth)

Why Participate?

In appreciation of your time, you will receive up to \$20 and a free resource that will help you support students with extensive support needs in integrated employment settings.

The purpose of this research study is to better understand the natural supports in the workplaces of young adults with disabilities.

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Have questions or want more information? Contact our research team:

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